

the pre-task and (2) a set of graded questions or instructions together with parallel questions to be used as needed. When implemented in the classroom, the plan results in a 'pedagogic dialogue'. Prabhu emphasises that the pre-task was not a 'demonstration' but 'a task in its own right'. It is clear from this account that the 'pre-task' serves as a mediational tool for the kind of 'instructional conversation' that sociocultural theorists advocate. The teacher, as an expert, uses the pre-task to scaffold learners' performance of the task with the expectancy that this 'other-regulation' facilitates the 'self-regulation' learners will need to perform the main task on their own.

Providing a model

An alternative is to ask the students to observe a model of how the task can be performed without requiring them to undertake a trial performance of the task (see Aston (1982) for an early example of such an approach). Minimally this involves presenting them with a text (oral or written) to demonstrate an 'ideal' performance of the task. Both Skehan (1996) and Willis (1996) suggest that simply 'observing' others perform a task can help reduce the cognitive load on the learner. However, the model can also be accompanied by activities designed to raise learners' consciousness about specific features of the task performance—for example, the strategies that can be employed to overcome communication problems, the conversational gambits for holding the floor during a discussion or the pragmalinguistic devices for performing key language functions. Such activities might require the learners to identify and analyze these features in the model texts. Alternatively, they might involve pre-training in the use of specific strategies. Nunan (1989) lists a number of learning strategies (e. g. 'Learning to live with uncertainty' and 'Learning to make intelligent guesses') that students can be taught to help them become 'adaptable, creative, inventive and above all independent' (p. 81) and thus more effective performers of a task.

However, the effectiveness of such training cannot be taken for granted. Lam and Wong (2000) report a study that investigated the effects of teaching students to seek and provide clarification when communication difficulties arose in class discussions. However, although this resulted in greater use of these strategies in a post-training discussion, the strategies were often not employed effectively (e. g. the students were unable to clarify something they had said) suggesting that pre-task training in the use of communication strategies may not be effective unless students also learn how to scaffold each other cooperatively when performing the task. There is also a danger in directing pre-task training based on a model at specific aspects of language or language use; learners may respond by treating the task they are subsequently asked