To Err is Human and to Learn is Divine: Using Mistakes as a Springboard for Teaching English

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Learning English as a foreign language plays a very important role in today's world. From a socioeconomic, political and cultural viewpoint, the English language has become the predominant means of communication in the current processes of economic, technological, scientific and cultural expansion.

Within the academic world, learning English enables students to access academic and scientific productions in English that they may encounter in their professional lives.

Learning English as a foreign language gives those who study it access to different aspects of the culture of the target language as well as the expression of their own culture in interaction with speakers of the foreign language.

English as a foreign language classes should allow students not only to learn the language as an object of study but also to have the opportunity to use it in specific communicative contexts. Students must be able to integrate the concepts they have built together with the teacher to develop effective communication skills.

The ultimate objective should be that students incorporate English language learning strategies that they can continue to use independently; that they develop the management of their learning processes so as to achieve a substantial improvement in their understanding and production of the English language, and that they revalue mistakes as a starting point for learning and improving their language skills in general.

In traditional language education, mistakes were discouraged because there was a long-held belief that if students made errors, these flawed instances of language production would quickly become a permanent part of the learners' speech repertoire (Richards, 2006). With the advent of the Communicative Approach, mistakes began to be accepted, and even celebrated, since they were considered an integral part of the learning process. However, many teachers still wince at their students' mistakes and do not see the potential they have for learning and teaching.

In this presentation, the focus will be mainly on how to treat phonological mistakes of Spanish speakers learning English as a foreign language, and to explore different ideas on how to make the most of those errors in the language classroom.

The following topics will be discussed:

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- English speaking models
- /b/, /d/, /g/ weakening
- weak and strong forms
- contractions
- rules and exceptions to the rules

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