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METHODS FOR DESIGNING TASKS FOR INDEPENDENT INQUIRY

Independent inquiry in language learning is not accidental; it depends on deliberate task architecture. Rather than planning primarily what to explain, the teacher designs conditions that enable learners to *discover* relationships in language through structured interaction with meaningful input (National Research Council, 2000; Ellis, 2003). In inquiry-oriented tasks, learners are not expected to produce "correct" forms immediately. Instead, they treat language as evidence: they examine examples, compare alternatives, and justify interpretations in order to infer how meaning is built (Bybee et al., 2006; Svalberg, 2007).

Well-designed inquiry tasks are driven by noticing, yet noticing rarely happens automatically. Task prompts therefore guide attention without explicitly naming the target feature, so learners can form hypotheses before formal clarification (Schmidt, 1990). For instance, learners might read brief narratives about past events and discuss which actions feel like background and which feel central, an indirect route to exploring how grammatical choices shape salience and meaning (Schmidt, 1990; Svalberg, 2007). Similarly, comparing multiple emails that request help using different expressions invites learners to reason about politeness and interpersonal distance, focusing on interpretation rather than error correction (Svalberg, 2007).

The quality of input is a key determinant of inquiry depth. Effective input provides variation, repeated opportunities to notice a pattern, and a context that makes differences meaningful (Ellis, 2003). For example, learners may analyze several online comments responding to the same situation and decide which sound more supportive and why thereby exploring stance and attitude as communicative choices (Svalberg, 2007).

Inquiry tasks also require scaffolding, but the support must preserve uncertainty rather than resolve it prematurely. Productive scaffolds help learners organize evidence (e.g., sorting examples as "more direct" vs. "more indirect") while leaving conclusions open for discussion and later consolidation (Hmelo-Silver et al., 2007). Designing such tasks is a matter of professional judgement: teachers anticipate likely learner interpretations, ensure there is sufficient evidence to sustain

inquiry, and avoid closing down exploration too early (National Research Council, 2000; Hmelo-Silver et al., 2007).

In language classrooms, inquiry typically follows recognizable pathways: grammar inquiry foregrounds form and meaning relationships, lexical inquiry targets nuance and choice, and functional inquiry treats language as social action in context (Ellis, 2003; Svalberg, 2007). Over time, consistent use of inquiry tasks helps learners trust their observations, tolerate ambiguity, and develop autonomy, key outcomes of language awareness-oriented pedagogy (Schmidt, 1990; Svalberg, 2007).

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