

The Past The Skill-Building Hypothesis Approaches to language teaching in the recent past have been based on 'skill-building', the hypothesis that we develop competence in language and literacy by first 'learning about' language, that is, consciously learning the rules, and by deliberately studying vocabulary. Skill-building cannot be the major means of producing competence in language and literacy. Nearly all texts in foreign language education are based on skill-building, with presentations of grammar and vocabulary followed by very short texts and exercises designed to help the student 'automatize' the rules. They assume that children must .

The Future The future of language education, in my view, will, I hope, include at least two steps forward: 1. The first sub-step in applying this aspect of the Comprehension Hypothesis is to simply make good reading material available, the establishment of super-libraries, filled with good books, magazines, and comics, with a selection wide enough to ensure that each student of English can read for pleasure in a variety of areas for hours at a time and for years, if desired. Funding for such an enterprise is modest, compared to the millions we are willing (and eager) to spend on computer technology, despite the fact that there is no solid evidence that computer-aided instruction helps language development (but see below). (A more subtle version of the Comprehensible Output Hypothesis maintains that the 'need' to use certain structures in production makes acquirers more sensitive to these structures when they occur in input.) I have presented arguments against the strong form of the Comprehensible Output Hypothesis . The teacher sets up a situation that students are likely to encounter in real life' According to this definition, the Communicative Approach is implicitly based on the Comprehensible Output Hypothesis the view that we acquire language when we try to produce it, fail to make ourselves understood, and keep trying until we achieve communicative success when we finally get it right. Briefly, instances of comprehensible output are too rare for it to make any substantial contribution to language competence and language acquisition is possible without output of any kind. Distinguishing between the Comprehension Hypothesis and the Communicative Approach . Those who get more comprehensible input in the form of reading do better on a variety of measures, a result that holds when other possible confounds are controlled. James Asher and Harris Winitz, among others, also hypothesized that comprehension is the mechanism underlying language acquisition in publications that predate mine. But there is no doubt that traditional methods involve more skill-building than those based on the Comprehension Hypothesis.) For beginning language teaching, methods based on the Comprehension Hypothesis, such as TPR, the Natural Approach, and Focal Skills have been shown to be more effective than traditional methods on tests of communication, and at least as effective on tests of 'skills' . The case for reading has been strengthened by a new wave of research from Asia, studies demonstrating the efficacy of in-school for elementary school children in Korea .

The Skill-Building Hypothesis is a delayed-gratification hypothesis.