



ENHANCING CLASSROOM INTERACTION CREATIVELY

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Abstract: *Creative language teaching that allows students to communicate freely enhances not only classroom interaction but also their interaction in the real world. Hence, this study examined the authentic classroom practices that encourage communication opportunities. Four classroom practices such as building prior knowledge, communitarian, multiple representations and protracted language events were observed, recorded and analyzed using weighted means, frequency counts, percentages, ranks and the Cochran Q-test. Findings revealed that building on prior knowledge and communitarian teachings were predominantly used followed by multiple representations and protracted language event, the least. The study showed that teachers use varied teaching practices to provide communication opportunities for students. The study recommends that: (1) the use of multiple representations and protracted language event should also be utilized by teachers to provide students with varied activities and to develop with confidence their communication skills; (2) Activities given to students should be more challenging to encourage them to ask questions that develop their critical thinking.*

Keywords: *classroom practices, communication opportunities, authentic materials*

INTRODUCTION

The role of the teacher in the classroom is to initiate interaction through strategies and behaviors in order to give students the best possible opportunities for learning the language. According to Lowman (1986), excellent teachers use verbal and non-verbal means to elicit and maintain attention, encourage communication and interaction and facilitate learning.

Garmston (1996) suggests that a teacher should have two kinds of voice – the personal and the teaching voice – in carrying out his tasks. A teacher makes use of his personal voice to let the students feel that they are important individuals who are appreciated, cared for and trusted. On the other hand, he makes use of his teaching voice to let the students know that they have to be serious and responsible in spending their time in their studies. Thus, he uses his two voices to effectively communicate what he means, and as a good teacher, he lets his



voice echo in the hearts of his students as he manages his classes and creates an enthusiastic and interesting atmosphere for learning.

The current trends in teaching English as a Second Language stress the importance of providing learners with opportunities for real and meaningful communication. This motivated the researcher to study the creative teaching practices that enhance classroom interaction in the Language Class.

Today, the current development in teaching English as a Second Language stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities for real and meaningful communication. Learners should be given the natural way to learn a language, which is to use it, not just study it. In other words, teachers should teach the language not by focusing on the language itself, but by using it to talk about other things, particularly in real life situations and for academic purposes. English teachers must fulfill what Kasper as cited by Cruz (2002) calls the main objective of teaching English as a second language. That is, students should be able to use the English language as a means of acquiring knowledge, in the process engaging in the active analysis, interpretation, critique and synthesis of information presented in English.

Further, language students are considered successful if they can communicate effectively in their second or foreign language, whereas two decades ago the accuracy of the language produced would most likely be the major criterion contributing to the judgment of a student's success or failure (Richards & Rodgers, 1987). These developments in language teaching - the promotion of "functional" or "communicative" ability have moved from the goal of accurate form toward a focus on fluency and communicative effectiveness.

This study will then inculcate in the minds of the language teachers that communication in the classroom should mirror the authentic communication that occurs in the real world. It should also encourage spontaneous use of language along with a relaxed classroom environment. This is because communication in language classes is an important link in the process of students' learning and thinking development. It provides a foundation for the development of other language skills. As students talk about themselves and their experiences, they are learning to organize their thinking and to focus their ideas (Lyle 1993). Concomitant to the development of the communication skills of the students inside the language class is the growth in their confidence when communicating in a wide variety of



social contexts to a wide variety of audiences. One of the most effective ways to facilitate oral communication is to take into account the background and everyday life experiences of the students.

This study will also shed light on the kind of teaching practices teachers will utilize to promote communication opportunities for students. In this context, teachers would be able to devise language activities to negotiate meaning with their students. Moreover, language teachers should take into account that learners learn in many ways and that the use of different teaching practices should be considered thus deviating from the traditional lecture method where the classroom setting is dominated by the teacher talk thereby depriving their students to use the second language.

FRAMEWORK

There are a number of theories and models for educational research on teaching practices to address effective and creative learning.

Teaching Practices/Strategies

Individual differences play an important role in learning. Hence, the kinds of teaching practices used in the classroom that accomplish both course content goals and active engagement on the part of students depend on the teacher.

Building prior knowledge

Building on prior knowledge is an overall approach to teaching in which teachers work to connect students' lives to school themes. Nearly every effective lesson design model suggests that one of the first tasks of the teacher in the instructional event is the activation of prior knowledge.

Activation of prior knowledge serves as an important tool for the construction of meaning. This background knowledge can also serve to help students interpret new cultural information or contrast that information with values and practices common to their own culture. It means that the teacher's teaching should mirror the cultural background of the students. Teachers must also understand what students already know so they may build on the knowledge students have.

Schema building is related to one's ability to interpret text meaningfully. Schemata are the fundamental elements upon which all information processing depends and Rumelhart (1977) calls them the building blocks of cognition.



Brown and Yule (1983) also point out that background knowledge can guide and influence the comprehension process. He added that comprehension outcome is based on the previous knowledge of similar texts. That is, if the reader regularly reads a newspaper and is aware of all the events and issues either locally, nationally or internationally, then comprehension would be easier.

Communitarian teaching

Communitarian teaching practice is the first teaching practice uncovered by the qualitative research synthesis which was related to, but extended well beyond, what is commonly known as cooperative learning or collaborative learning.

Communitarian teaching practice provides increased time for communication and promotes the give and take necessary for negotiating meaning. It also opens the door for the students to engage themselves in communicative activities. It enhances language learning even when no student in a group has strong proficiency in English because it improves not only the learners' language skills but also allows them an opportunity to share their cultural frame with other students (Télez, & Waxman, 2005).

One reason why communitarian teaching practice or cooperative learning provides increased time for communication and promotes the give and take necessary for negotiating meaning is that group members assume that they constantly assess their own speeches or actions in relation to that of their partners. This is because conversation is a collaborative enterprise that makes demands on both partners. Hence, negotiation and repair play a part in all interaction and are unique forms of language behavior involving non-native speakers.

Many experimental (and most often quantitative) studies have demonstrated the positive effects of cooperative learning among English Language Learners (ELLs) (Calderon, Hertz-Lazarowitz, & Slavin, 1998). They generally believed that interactional learning encouraged a strong form of social cooperation and discourse.

Moreover, according to Calderon, Hertz-Lazarowitz, & Slavin, (1998) cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning. Class members are organized into small groups after receiving instruction from the teacher. They work through the assignment until all group members successfully understand and complete it. Cooperative efforts result in participants striving for mutual benefit so that all group members gain from each other's efforts (Your success



benefits me and my success benefits you), recognizing that all group members share a common fate (We all sink or swim together here), knowing that one's performance is mutually caused by oneself and one's colleagues (We cannot do it without you), and feeling proud and jointly celebrating when a group member is recognized for achievement.

Cooperative Learning as it is associated to Communitarian teaching practice encourages teachers to spend less class time on 'chalk talk' and more time on student-centered activities which allow the students to take more control of their education. Indeed, recent researches have confirmed the value of small group activity in expanding students' exposure to a second language by providing more opportunities to practice the language naturally. Using English language to communicate for a common goal maximizes the amount of language practice for each student, thereby improving the amount and quality of participation in whole class activities.

Multiple representations

Multiple representations rely heavily on the use of graphic organizers, juxtaposed text and images, films and other multimedia equipment. English teachers who use multiple representations help the students to remember easily vocabulary when they have acquired it by figuring out its meaning when watching a video, seeing the teacher act out words, or matching new vocabulary with pictures or real objects set in a meaningful context.

The use of multiple representations can enhance what learners read by reading and interpreting visuals accurately, and by creating their own related visuals. Vacca and Vacca (1993) believe that when students learn how to use and construct graphic representations, they are in control of a study strategy that allows them to identify what parts of a text are important, how ideas and concepts are encountered, and where they can find specific information to support more important ideas. Learners need to see these relationships and learn how to link ideas. When students use graphics while studying a concept, they build these links.

Visuals provide a wealth of information that both reinforces and supplements text content. The ability to read, interpret, and construct graphic displays is of growing importance in an increasingly visual world as students interact more with computers and electronic texts which often rely heavily on graphic interfaces and graphic aids.



Since visuals are found frequently in all types of expository text materials, and since they provide an abundance of text-related information, the need for instructional activities that help students understand and use them seems clear.

Protracted language events

Protracted language events are strategies in which teachers work to maximize verbal activity. In other words, language can be learned through its use. That is, effective second language instruction must be built upon *lengthy* dialogues, referred to in this paper as protracted language events. This concept is similar to Gallimore and Goldenberg's (1992) instructional conversations in language learning class.

Role-playing and simulations in class can be an excellent way to engage students. A well-constructed role-playing or simulation exercise can emphasize the real world and require students to become deeply involved in a topic. This teaching strategy would make students learn best when they have ample opportunities to internalize meanings before they have to produce them.

This teaching strategy would make students learn best when they have ample opportunities to internalize meanings before they have to produce them. This is linked to the "comprehensible input," first used by Stephen Krashen (1985b). Krashen suggests that learners acquire language by understanding what they hear. They need many opportunities to match what they hear with visual cues (such as pictures, video, or teacher pantomime) or experiences (such as physical actions) so they can associate meanings with forms.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to determine the creative teaching practices that enhance classroom interaction in the language class at Benguet State University.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

English classes were observed to record and videotape class proceedings to determine the creativeness of classroom interaction. Four teaching practices from the meta-synthesis of Qualitative Research on Effective Teaching Practices for English Language Learners were observed in the English classes.



Locale and Time of the Study

This study was confined to Freshmen English classes at the Department of Humanities, College of Arts and Sciences, Benguet State University. Freshmen English classes came from the eight degree programs representing the eight colleges in the university: Bachelor of Science in Agriculture (CA), Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (CAS), Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Engineering (CEAT), Bachelor of Science in Forestry (COF), Bachelor of Science in Home Economics (CHET), Bachelor of Science in Nursing (CN), Bachelor in Secondary Education (CTE) and Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) who were enrolled during the school year 2010-2011 at Benguet State University, La Trinidad, Benguet Philippines.

Data Collection Instruments

Collections of data were both electronic and manual in nature (Bailey 2006). Manual data collection was in the form of classroom observation and a questionnaire. Electronic data collection, on the other hand, was done with videotape recorder.

Results of the classroom observation both manual and electronic were analyzed. This procedure involved identifying selected bits of data as belonging to a certain class or category of behaviors.

Treatment of Data

Data gathered were analyzed and cross-tabulated. Summary statistics like weighted means, frequency counts, percentages, ranks and Cochran Q-test were used to analyze the teaching practices that enhance classroom interaction used by the English teachers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Summary of Teaching Practices

Used by English Teachers

Table 1 shows the teaching practices the English teachers used in the language class. The table illustrates that building on prior knowledge and communitarian teaching practice were predominantly used followed by multiple representations. Protracted learning was the least teaching practice.

The findings reveal that building on prior knowledge is an overall approach to teaching in which teachers work to associate students' lives or experiences to school themes. In almost all lessons, the teachers involved prior knowledge of students before starting the lesson



proper and the importance of interaction between the students and the teachers and among the students themselves.

Building on prior knowledge is an approach to teaching where teachers work to connect students' lives to school themes. Nearly every effective lesson design model suggests that one of the first tasks of the teacher in the instructional event is the activation of prior knowledge. For one teacher, activating prior knowledge may be simply reminding students of what was covered in yesterday's lesson. For another, it means investigating the most sacred cultural values held by the students and creating lessons incorporating what she has learned. One more thing, it means teaching what one knows because one's cultural background mirrors the students'.

As regards the importance of students' experiences, one important approach that underpins communication opportunities in the classroom is the SHE-Approach or Significant Human Experience. This is centrally rooted in the Rogerian concepts of "learning to do" and "learning to learn". These concepts underlie adult learning interventions that use the cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills of the learner. In other words, they bring about learning experiences that go beyond learning targets. (Ora'a, 1995).

The SHE-Approach follows the view that one learns more meaningfully from his experience, that is, from his Significant Human Experience (SHE). It thus strongly advocates the theories of experiential learning, particularly the concepts of "learning to do" and "learning to learn" which offer a foundation for lifelong and self-directed learning (Ora-a, 1995).

Communitarian teaching which ranks first with prior knowledge is also a manner of instruction built around community while protracted language event is a strategy in which teachers work to maximize verbal activity. The use of multiple representations is a method designed to support language lessons with objects and indices.

Table 1. Teaching practices used by English teachers

Teaching Practices	n	Percent	Rank
Building on Prior Knowledge	18	100	1.5
Communitarian	18	100	1.5
Multiple Representations	15	83.3	3
Protracted Language	9	50.0	4
Qc = 19.059*		prob. = >0.01	
*significant			



Communitarian thought in education has its roots in John Dewey's vision of community as a society in which rational and democratic decision-making processes enables the pursuit of common goals (Dewey, 1961). They see open discourse as an essential feature of democracy. Further, communitarian ideals call for community norms and values that help open to public critiques. In essence, a communitarian belief in human societies suggests that open discourse leads to shared social values and free, unfettered social intercourse. The goals and interests of a communitarian society are not necessarily the development of language, but such social interactions cannot proceed without a heavy reliance on language. This strategy implies that students who are learning English should engage themselves in academic conversations with their peers because it is a fundamental tool for language learning. The teacher, on the other hand, should serve as a language model. It is important that the students understand the teacher's role in the classroom discourse as part of the community's discourse rather than the arbiter of accuracy in the language.

On the other hand, the use of multiple representations enhance what learners read by reading and interpreting visuals accurately, and by creating their own related visuals. Vacca and Vacca (1993) believe that when students learn how to use and construct graphic representations, they are in control of a study strategy that allows them to identify what parts of a text are important, how ideas and concepts are encountered, and where they can find specific information to support more important ideas.

Protracted Language Events, the least used teaching practice is also a tool through which students learn a language in protracted language events. This means that language instruction must be built upon lengthy dialogues. Role-playing and simulations in class can be an excellent way to engage students. A well-constructed role-playing or simulation exercise emphasizes the real world and require students to become deeply involved in a topic. This teaching strategy would make students learn best when they have ample opportunities to internalize meanings before they have to produce them. This is associated with the "comprehensible input," first used by Stephen Krashen (1985b). Krashen suggests that learners acquire language by understanding what they hear. They need opportunities to match what they hear with visual cues (such as pictures, video, or teacher pantomime) or experiences (such as physical actions) so they can associate meanings with forms.



Wells (1986) is among those who argue that protracted speech acts form the foundation upon which all academic learning is built. He suggests the “co-construction of meaning” between teacher and students must be at the center of all schooling endeavors. His research, among many others offers evidence that effective instruction among all learners begins with genuine discourse.

The use of protracted language events mirrors the essential features of first language development. Brown and Bellugi (1964), in their landmark research of children learning language, found an essential pattern to syntax and semantic speech when children are learning language with an adult (or more capable speaker).

Pilgreen and Krashen (1993) found that protracted language events with text alone encouraged increased English skills. After implementing a sustained silent reading program with secondary ELL, they found that students enjoyed books more, read more, and understood more of what they read. Even protracted language events when discussing mathematics appeared to advance English skills (Kaplan & Patino, 1996).

Statistically, the findings of the study reveal that there is a significant difference in the teaching practices the English teachers used. Hence, the hypothesis that there is a difference in the teaching practices the English teachers used is accepted.

The findings strengthen the role of the teachers in the classroom which is more facilitative than directive, allowing students a greater share of the conversational turns than a traditional Initiate – Respond – Evaluate (IRE) interaction pattern.

Further, these findings are in congruence with Widdowson (1978) who distinguishes between expression rules which govern the learner’s use of the language and are developed when the learner is engaged in communication and reference rules which represent the learner’s knowledge of the system of the second language and are learned in classroom situations where the focus is on correct form.

Brumfit (1984), on the other hand characterizes the distinction in terms of fluency, the ability to engage in natural language ‘use’ in meaningful situations, and accuracy, the demonstrated ‘usage’ of the second language. Brumfit suggests that fluency requires the use of expression rules and reliance on implicit knowledge, while accuracy requires the use of reference rules and reliance on explicit knowledge. His distinction is more useful to the classroom teacher as well as the curriculum planner because the mental set of the learner is



emphasized. That is, if the learner produces language naturally, without direction or intervention from the teacher, it is language 'use' aimed at fluency. If the learner produces language to display rule knowledge to the teacher, it is knowledge 'usage' that is aimed at accuracy. Hence, Brumfit contends that communicative language teaching must include classroom activities that are aimed at fluency.

CONCLUSION

In connection with the findings of this study, the following conclusions were formulated: Teachers use varied teaching practices to provide communication opportunities for students and teachers engage the students in class activities/discussion creatively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the researcher recommends that: Since building prior knowledge and communitarian teaching practices are commonly used by teachers, the use of multiple representations and protracted language learning should also be utilized by teachers thereby providing students with varied activities to develop with confidence their communication skills and activities/tasks given to the students should be more challenging to encourage students to ask questions that develop their critical thinking that will eventually enhance interaction with the teacher.

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