

2 ICLICE 2015 3 Samuel S. Poliden

Enhancing Classroom Interaction Creatively

S Samuel S. Poliden
Benguet State University, La Trinidad,
Benguet, Philippines
sampoliden@gmail.com

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 interaction, communication opportunities, authentic materials

Introduction

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.

Indeed, the natural way to learn a language is to use it, not just study it. In other words, English teachers 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. This is a simple fact that lies at the heart of the reform of English language teaching. 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.

Today, language students is 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 informal, unrehearsed 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).

It is subsequently important to provide opportunities for oral communication to continue to grow in the language class. Before students achieve proficiency in reading and writing, oral communication is one of the important means of learning and of acquiring knowledge. Throughout life, oral language skills remain essential for communication of ideas and intelligent conversation.

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.

Proficiency in oral communication is central to all learning, critically useful to the individual in all areas of life, and is a developmental process in which skills acquired early serve as a foundation for subsequent learning activities. The idea that communication could and should take place in the language class becomes more and more popular. With changes in practice come changes in roles and responsibilities. The role of the language teacher is no longer supposed to be that of the drill leader. Instead, the teacher is charged with providing language learners opportunities for communication, that is, opportunities to use the language in contexts other than memorized dialogues and pattern practices.

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 enhance/negotiate meaning with their students. Moreover, language teachers 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.

Results of this study will enlighten language teachers to treat errors with tact and understanding to avoid a stigmatic effect on the learners. Thus, it is important to know how linguistic errors be handled by language teachers as preferred by their students.

Findings of this study will help principals, head teachers, chairs of departments and administrators to evaluate language teachers on the variety of language practices they use in the classroom to create active participation in language class activities that would stimulate critical thinking thus creating opportunities for communication and interaction.

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.

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.

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 2011-2012 at the Benguet State University, La Trinidad, Benguet Philippines.

Data Collection Instruments

Classroom proceedings of the English teachers were observed and recorded to analyze classroom interaction.

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 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 practices 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.

Communitarian teaching 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

$Q_c = 19.059^*$

*significant

prob. = >0.01

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 English teachers adopted what is termed as communicative approach to English language teaching following the general trend in the field of second language teaching and learning, moving away from methods that emphasize the memorization of grammatical rules and extensive use of drills and pattern practice and toward methods which emphasize meaningful communication in the second language. Classroom activity is less teacher-dominated but more learner-centered.

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.

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.

Conclusions

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.

References

- Alexander, R. (2006). *Towards dialogic teaching: Rethinking classroom talk* (3rd ed.). Cambridge, UK: Dialogos.
- Brown, G. and G. Yule (1983). *Teaching the Spoken Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Calderon, M., R. Hertz-Lazarowitz and R. Slavin (1998). Effects of cooperative integrated reading and composition on students making the transition from Spanish to English reading. *Elementary School Journal*, 99(2).
- Cruz, I. (2002). *Philippine Star*. National Daily Newspaper.
- Gallimore, R., and C. N. Goldenberg (1992). Tracking the developmental path of teachers and learners: A Vygotskyan perspective. In F.K. Oser, A. Dick, & J-L. Patry (Eds.), *Effective and responsible teaching: The new synthesis*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Lyle, S. (1993). *An Investigation into Ways in Which Children Talk Themselves into Meaning*. Language and Education.
- Richards, J. C. and T. S. Rodgers (1987). *Through the looking glass: Trends and directions in language teaching*. RELC Journal.
- Rumelhart, D.E. (1977). *Towards an Interactive Model of Reading*. In Attention and Performance, S. Dionic (ed). Hillside, Erlbaum. Academic Press.
- Télez, K. and H. Waxman (2005). *A Meta-Synthesis of Qualitative Research on Effective Teaching Practices for English Language Learners* In J.M. Norris & L. Ortega (Eds.), *Synthesizing research on language learning and teaching*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing.

- Vacca, R.T., & J. L. Vacca (1993). Content area reading. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Widdowson, H. G. (1978). Teaching Language as Communication. London: Oxford University Press.