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Teaching portfolio : make it happen

A Compilation of Pedagogical Articles

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General introduction

In a factual description of my teaching accomplishments (25 years in teaching), cemented by relevant information, directed and gathered from real facts I observed on the field, I compiled these articles to show and support the thinking process which I have involved in this folder I entitled – My Teaching Portfolio‖. To render this technical term more understood, a teaching portfolio is actually a document that provides evidence of teaching from a variety of sources such as self-reflections, reports on teaching syllabi, and faculty development efforts. To compile a teaching portfolio, there must be some principles to take into account as the clarification of teaching responsibilities, a selection of items, and an inclusion of supporting data. Furthermore, the key components of a teaching portfolio reside in the statement of teaching philosophy (aim) and reflective practice (practice, reflection, feedback, remedy, and improvement). The purpose of my statement is to describe my general approach to teaching and learning and their changes in response to the changing conditions demonstrated by a diversity of factors and behaviors I witnessed in and out of the classroom. I also want through this portfolio to

show to a certain extent how the changes in teaching methods, course materials, syllabus, and in students can affect an individual teacher not only to reflect on his/her teaching process, but in order to develop the ability of self-assessment for more progress and improvements in developing appropriate goals of instruction, finding out more adequate teaching strategies which all will contribute in meeting the learners'and teachers'needs as well.

How to Capture Your Learners' Attention in Classroom

Abstract:

Because many teachers all over the world, at a given period of their teaching profession, present some symptoms of stress, routine, and disgust and because of the different generation learners they witness all along the displaying years that constitute their teaching experiences, and because of many other spin-heading factors included in the different teaching disciplines as psychology, sociology and other pedagogical ones, I sought that it would be better if any teacher shares some of his personal techniques to come up with the teaching pressures he daily encounters so as to render the teaching environment somehow agreeable and easy to deliver the needed knowledge to his learners whose number is quite considerable. For this, through this article, I am giving some recommendations for less stressful teachers and more responsible and active learners. The article is more a presentation of what I have experienced during my nearly twenty three years in teaching English as a foreign language in a secondary school (lycée) to a standard population that is proportioned in adolescence scale, sharing mostly the same cultural and social background.

Presentation

For more than twenty years as a teacher of English as a foreign language at a secondary school, in Béjaia, Algeria, teaching different proficiency levels and different streams, I have been looking for an ideal way to capture my learners' attention before the lesson starts, during the lesson and when the

lesson finishes because during each phase of teaching the learners adopt new behaviors and make a show of a strong desire to go out of the classroom. I thoroughly understand them because I have already been a learner and I share nearly the same feelings even if I have to draw a slight difference between the learners' gender. In saying this, I recognize that girls are more patient in classrooms than boys; this is, according to me another topic to debate later on. I said an ideal way to have your learners constantly on the line of sight, this may sound too exaggerated; nevertheless it all depends on the teacher to express the strategy that suits more his activities.

Furthermore, many linguists and educational psychologists drove our interest into varying the methods and approaches for an effective teaching/learning process to take place. I will simply argue that the actual need lies in the way both sides, the teachers and the learners, set any human relationship. This is not to claim that the humanistic approach or any other method have not been efficient but most importantly to contribute at least with the experiments I have had with my learners, noting that these learners are still in an age that requires more attention, care and understanding and at the same time, one has to know the different challenges we, as teachers, have to face; it is a critical situation for both parts.

Indeed, trying to find out the most adequate manner to motivate the learners to fully involve them in the learning process without any incidents may sound a little too ideal. In that sense, I have learned through my professional experience that the best way as well as the best method cannot be. In fact each method or each technique can reveal to be the best one only if it meets the learners'immediate needs. In addition to this, the teaching and learning processes are actually activities and tasks that are daily fulfilled. This means that each day's educational activities can be different from the ones done the day before since the learners' needs are constantly changing and that none can foresee what the future learner' needs can be like. This is why we cannot keep only one manner or one strategic technique as the ultimate one to present information and deliver the host of lessons we have to. It is, according to me, not a static situation but rather a dynamic one. This is why Therefore, efficiency and effectiveness will rely first on gathering data that reflect the actual needs of our learners and then after, proceed to a quick analysis, at this stage; we will be able to move gradually into meeting these needs.

I also would like to underlie a little more the importance of being an intentional teacher because I find that the adjective – intentional‖ carries more than one meaning.

It is true that this rests on the much known concept that a teacher must have some bulk of knowledge or content acquisition that the learner does not have. This refers evidently to the knowledge of how to transmit information and skills, the know-how to handle with patience and some sort of harmony the different arousing situations in the classroom, the adequate professional training and pedagogy. Moreover, the teacher must know how to make these instructions effective by motivating his learners so as to arouse their curiosity, adapt to their needs and present some useful feedbacks. Avoiding stiffness or rigidity and instating order and discipline are here the major principles for a good classroom management. Not to list them all, but the most important ones, there should be some sort of prior knowledge assessment and effectiveness in communicating ideas, taking into account the characteristics of the learners. These are obviously social, cultural, emotional and personality characteristics, because each of us, teachers or learners, grows in a particular social, cultural and historical context. Furthermore, and to focalize on these particular facts, it is indubitably true that we are born into a specific family, in a specific country and attend a specific school in a specific educational system as put by Sullivan, W. Patricia, 2002: 5:

> *When we acknowledge and appreciate the various backgrounds of our students, their multiple abilities, and differing perspectives on teaching and learning, we can achieve balance in our classes and increase our effectiveness as teachers.*

In order to set clear ideas about the many facts presented, it is worth noting that I am presenting here the teachers and the learners as whole members of the educational system, being simultaneously complementary and sharing the same expectations of the teaching/learning processes and outcomes. This may, in turn, take more of an educational psychology aspect than it is didactic because what I want to denote right here is how a teacher would use skillfully his art to include motivation into pedagogy in order to claim for pedagogy of motivation. This therefore, would lye on

solid foundations of comprehending situations not only as a linguist but purely as a teacher, a practitioner who is directly involved in the arena of noble objectives as well. The teacher must, as a matter of fact, define a policy whose target aim is to nurture the learners with sufficient and efficient information and arouse their desire and pleasure to listen, see, reflect, think, read, learn to say, discover and build their projects in order to innovate, communicate and most importantly to overcome problems during their learning process. This policy can be cemented by finding out the right way, tool and element to stimulate the learning process and the learners all together because the constraints inherent to the educational system presented in giving importance to three exogenous factors. First, the material conditions of the scholar organization which refer obviously to the availability and reliability of the different materials necessary for both the teachers and the learners to enable the teaching and learning processes to take place, from the most rudimentary materials as textbooks, pens, copybooks, chalk, blackboard, tables and chairs to the most modern ones as computers, the data show and so on. Second, the learners and the classroom setting which, according to T. Hutchinson et al. 1987: 53, responding to the needs of the learners and the learning environment is actually the soundest way towards an effective teaching and learning process since they put in that sense:

> *… It is an awareness of needs that characterizes the…… situation. But awareness is a matter of perception, and perception may vary according to one's standpoint.*

It is actually an important point to emphasize because, I strongly believe, if these needs are fully met, it will therefore be easy to add the necessary ingredients to accomplish these processes properly. Once more, providing satisfaction to the learners'needs and preparing a healthy environment where the teaching and the learning processes take place are actions that will pave the way to more assimilation, action, and communication. As Marjorie Rosenberg, 2004: 37 underlies it:

> *Our students deserve the best we can give them and that includes a relaxed, but energetic and lively atmosphere in the classroom, creating a community to which both learners and teachers are eager to belong.*

Is not it our objective? Because we want our teaching to be communicative, because we want our learners to be skilful communicators, we therefore have to set each element favorable for the success of the process in its appropriate place for more competencies and skillfulness. Jack C. Richards, 1998: xiv clearly puts it:

> *Such competencies, or skills, are often identified with procedural and managerial aspects of teaching, such as lesson planning, rules and routines for classroom management, strategies for setting up grouping and seating arrangements, way of opening and closing lessons, techniques for effective questioning, eliciting and giving feedback.*

This reflection drives me to the third principle which is the teacher because I am convinced that the teacher is the principle engine that sets any activity to happen. In saying this, I refer to the fact that it is the teacher who is able to engage not only in the mastery of rules of practice but in an exploration of the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and thinking that inform such practice as well. Marland, 1995: 131 declares:

> *… Rather, the classroom actions of the teachers are guided by internal frames of references which are deeply rooted in personal experiences especially in-school ones, and are based on interpretations of those experiences.*

Recommendations

For less stressed out teachers and more responsible learners, for more attractive teaching and learning environment, for a full learners' attention in the classroom, I suggest the following points to take into consideration:

1. 1. The existing syllabus

2. 2. The materials in use:
- the compatibility of the materials
- the materials developers
- the alternativity of the materials

3. 3. The teachers:
- The teacher's command of the target language

• The teacher's training, background, exposure to ideas concerning the nature of language and language learning/teaching experience

• The teacher's attitudes and training.

4. 4. The learners

5. 5. The resources based on key factors such as time availability, and equipment availability.

As far as the techniques I have adopted during my teaching practices, these can be summarized in a purely psychological aspect since as I have always said it: *a smile on the teacher's face is the rightist way to learners' sympathy and attention in the classroom and variety in classroom activities kills routine and annoyance.*

For this, I have set three action phase techniques:

1 – Before the class starts

• Wish a happy birthday to any of my learners born on the date mentioned on the blackboard, offering a sweet, a pen;

• Tell a joke to break the icy atmosphere

• Give the news (about the country, the world) or ask the learners to narrate some previous or past facts/events, using the language he/she feels at ease to do so; but encouraging more the use of the target language, even distorted, because the other learners are also called to take part in by correcting their classmate mistakes and errors;

• Tell them any anecdote that happened to me just before entering the classroom and vice versa.

2 – During the lesson

• Have a break and ask any question, not necessarily about the lesson;

• Find out some of element in the lesson that corresponds to the learners' culture and beliefs, compare and discuss these elements;

• Reveal some pedagogical secrets as future plans because the learners are so curious and inquisitive that they feel very close to the teacher if they come to know about the mark the teacher had during the inspector' visit for instance. This will foster their confidence and trust in the teacher and raise to a certain degree their self-esteem.

• Challenge the learners through drills competitions which will be rewarded by the highest mark, a congratulation certificate that will be auditioned to get a present at the end of the term if the total number equals ten.

3 – After the lesson finishes

• Take part in the learners' projects as an advisor, a counsellor;

• Ask the learners to summarize the lesson on the blackboard through a role taking;

• Ask for a future classroom supervisor that all the class will elect (this is normally done to play the role only for a week-time). The role consists of being the classmates spokesman/woman, manage and direct the activities, attributing roles for each individual learner;

• Ask questions about the learners' hobbies and have some fun in the classroom by inviting any individual to sing, draw or prepare something at home as a cake, an apparatus or something like this, that the learner will bring to the classroom the next time (of course this should be marked since it is included in the learners' syllabus: show and tell activities);

• Reveal some of my artistic sides as a singer, an actor or a photographer playing a role in a comedy for instance or showing some successful photos.

• During the examinations I am also used to giving sweets to my learners with some encouraging words. So, why not trying it?

Conclusion

Taking the teaching profession in an easy, friendly and funny way, safeguarding discipline and classroom management, refreshing information, self-continuing education and encouraging learners'autonomy and self-responsibility are here the most valid and reliable principles for a long and quiet teaching life, in addition to the techniques I have put at the disposal of my readers, whether they are neophyte teachers or experienced ones. I could have filled in pages and pages concerning teaching and its two side medal, but as it is said we really taste a dish when it is served little by little. To this article, some questions may open a further debate for future teachers as which phase techniques

sounds more feasible and fruitful to attract the learners'attention in the classroom? The debate goes on.

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(SMS/ MSN) Language Messages and Learning EFL Spelling and Meaning in Writing

Meaning in Writing

Abstract.

WYSIWYG, these are acronyms that usually refer to a complete, understandable and correct sentence meaning: What You See Is What You Get. How many non-experienced electronic readers and users could have deciphered these acronyms? I may say no one. If I have not written the key sentence, these acronyms may stand for meaningless letters. Deprived of the related knowledge, standing with a complete confused faced in front of such situations, are actually the real facts, I, as a teacher, encounter daily in my classrooms with my students. I would like to underlie that the situations I come each time across with my students are not related to the problem of using meaningful acronyms; on the contrary, these situations are related to the danger and difficulty these acronyms and mainly abbreviations my students use in a pal-mal way to produce any piece of writing. Furthermore, I also underlie the impact these critical situations have upon my students'spelling of the target language while writing. I felt, and this is the pure reality, that my students, mainly if they are asked to write, have adopted the strategy of laziness and quick time consuming; they cannot afford the necessary time to draft, revise and correct, and that they are already contaminated by a common malady: writing speedily and getting rid of any scholar task. This article is therefore, an observation of the aforementioned situations and a set of recommendations to use meaningfully abbreviations, because we actually write to address messages to different audiences.