Derek Jackson

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Teaching Philosophy

 World language education is a vital component of Michigan K12 education. Though considered an “elective” in most school districts, this graduation requirement course is an area where students can explore ideas beyond learning a language. My passion is teaching students to conceptualize and understand a community beyond their peers and families. Carefully constructed goals and objectives for students will provide opportunities for my students to engage in language learning while simultaneously reflecting on their learning preferences and the customs and cultures of the Spanish-speaking community. This classroom atmosphere will generate a positive learning environment where students can transform into lovers of language learning.

 My language learning background in high school and college is the foundation of my language teaching practices. In high school, my teacher used a teaching method similar to the Sheltered Immersion Observation Protocol (SIOP) where motivation, presentation, practice, application, review, assessment, and extension were the driving forces for language learning (Purgason, 2014, p. 364). She focused many lessons with a communicative approach placing focus in areas of her interests in values within the language. In undergraduate courses, my professors used a blend of content-based instruction (CBI) and communicative language teaching – especially in the upper-level courses. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) note that “[CBI] is an effective way of teaching…[and] provides[s] sustained motivation beyond intermediate levels of proficiency (p. 144). Through these teaching practices, my previous teachers assessed their students on all of the communicative modes: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Whether it was through traditional formative assessments or alternative assessments using technology, all the communicative modes were included in nearly every lesson plan and frequently referenced cultural norms based on the educators’ personal cultural experiences and expertise. These language teaching principles are the core of my personal teaching experiences as a novice teacher. The course readings and content solidified my choices in using these methods in the classroom, though I plan to continue to read more scholarly articles and studies to infuse other critical aspects that may be missed with these two pedagogical practices.

In my first few years of teaching, I focused my attention on vocabulary and grammar and mechanics acquisition through explicit language teaching. My role as a teacher was to be the provider of language instruction, and I missed opportunities for students to discover language through student-driven instruction. I tried using a form of the communicative language teaching in my upper-level classes as it was the most relevant teaching practice that I experienced. I used my personal experiences in Spanish-speaking countries to make the course material more relevant to students through anecdotal scenarios and prompts, but I lost student motivation throughout the year. I realize that I used too much of myself as the classroom leader, and I neglected to include student interests, needs, and individuality into my classroom lessons and content.

Reflecting on these previous teaching experiences, I feel as though blending a few teaching methods as well as incorporating other teaching features will provide for better language learning in my classroom. My objective for students is to become a lover of language learning through the incorporation of current events and personal interests fused with various technologies into carefully constructed lesson plans to engage students. The methods from which I draw my future classroom instruction include task-based instruction (TBI) and content-based instruction (CBI) while incorporating Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences, cooperative learning, and technology.

Task-based instruction is one area of my philosophy that has changed throughout the course of the MAFLT program. It was something that I knew existed, but I had never experienced it myself as a language learner or explored it as an educator. One aspect about TBI that I enjoy is that it “can be complemented by explicit instruction” as needed in the classroom (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 160). Giving students opportunities to learn content through tasks while having the option to give direct instruction and assistance allows for a shared responsibility for learning between teacher and student. Successful design of the tasks in my classroom would include collaboration between students, multiple ways to go about completing a task, and an option to include technology into the task completion in order to accommodate to the ever-changing technology-based world in which we continue to educate our students. These tasks will allow for students to use their personal strengths to show understanding of the material through the role in which they elect.

CBI lesson plans and units provide opportunities for students to learn Spanish with thematic units. These units can be part of a negotiated syllabus where student input is considered when designing classroom goals and objectives (Graves, 2014, p. 51). I typically use this kind of teaching with my upper-level students because their learning preferences and Spanish skills are developed enough to make concrete decisions about content and personal goals. Since the beginning of my time in the MAFLT program, I have explored CBI plans and units with my lower-level classes to see if intrinsic motivation increased due to their personal connections to the content. This is something that I plan to continue to work on throughout my career.

Gardner’s multiple intelligences and cooperative learning are two areas that I feel are my strongest areas of teaching Spanish. The multiple intelligences allow teachers to address the strengths of each student (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2014, p. 191). The musical/rhythmic, kinesthetic/body, and logical/mathematical categories are areas that I try to infuse into my lesson plans weekly to promote a wider variety of language learning success in my Spanish classroom. Consistently, I incorporate songs, physical gestures and pneumonic devices, and construct sentences using templates and formulas for my students to give them a variety of learning experiences along with visual aids and other external stimuli. Cooperative learning in my classroom is appropriate in the beginning levels of Spanish learning as students are formulating their foundations for the Spanish language. When students can learn from each other in smaller group settings, I can easily monitor learning and work with students independently as needed. Again, Larsen-Freemen and Anderson (2014) note that “cooperative learning complements methods [such as] task-based approach” (p. 190). While completing the tasks, students are required to communicate and work together in the language learning.

 I believe that my hands-on approach to learning Spanish through tasks and specific content with technology infusion will provide the best education for my students. Using student-focused lessons will provide for higher levels of motivation using the technology components infused into each unit. Keeping my students in mind while developing goals and objectives will provide for a unique learning environment where students can and will find success. My students know how passionate I am about learning language; they often match my enthusiasm in the classroom, because they know that I am determined to help students find success. It’s this success in my Spanish classroom that creates the spark to become a lover of language learning.

References

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