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Eng 731

Theory-Practice Links Paper

1. Overview of the lesson

The lesson I observed at USF focused on the development of listening skills for a

university lecture setting.   After beginning the class by small talk, the teacher (T)

played a recording of what would be a real life lecture; the students (Ss) listened to the

recording and discussed their understanding of the recording with their peers. Ss went

on to provide feedback on the information they heard by presenting in small groups.

The main objective of the lesson was to develop Ss' ability to listen to a university

lectures and the primary emphasis was on developing listening skills so students could

understand which information to listen for and expressing information reflecting the

proper comprehension of what is understood. Group activities incorporated into the

lesson also contribute to develop speaking skills.

2. Theory-Practice Links

Practice 1: T used a jazz chant as a warm up activity in efforts to get the students

stimulated and prepare them for the classroom lesson. As the students speak to the

rhythm of the jazz chant, which is not their usual speaking pace, they get used to the

sound patterns in English. At the same time, they are also acquiring an understanding of

the rhythm used in English.

Theory 1: The activity is not necessarily related to the target language, however it is a

good activity for the information and motivation phase of learning. Cookes and

Chaudron (2001) consider the warm phase as an opportunity to get the students

"stimulated, relaxed, motivated, attentive or otherwise engaged and ready for the

classroom lesson. As a result, it is ok that the warm up component is not related to the

target lesson. In addition, while leading students through the jazz chant, the instructor

takes into account elements "contributing to the acquisition of English intonation, rhythm, connected speech, and voice quality settings" (page 29).

Practice 2: Before playing the recording to the Ss, T made the purpose for listening to the recording clear in explicit words. First, T drew attention to the fact that Ss will need to become familiar with listening to real life lectures in University settings. T, then, stated that by listening to the recording and learning what the students should be specifically looking out for, Ss would be able to improve their own listening skills.

Theory 2: Ur (1984) refers to the desire to understand everything as one of the main the problems foreign language learners have. However, because the teacher was explicit, this practice allows Ss to "listen for a purpose and with certain expectations" (p. 9). Porter and Roberts (1987) validate this point and recognize the importance of practicing partial comprehension rather than complete comprehension in the classroom; good language learners "tolerate degrees of vagueness in our comprehension of text" (p. 182).

Since the students are beginner level English students, it is important that they understand it is not necessary to comprehend every single point made in the lecture. In addition, the teacher meets most of the criteria, which is set forth by Fields (2008) on what a strategy instructor needs to do. In this case, the instructor is effective at "establishing links between problems and their solutions in the form of strategies." (page 217). As a result, students are developing listening strategies.

Practice 3: The teacher also ensured group work took place in the lesson. In the group activities, Ss were asked to share their insights on what they understood and were encouraged to discuss their thoughts with peers. In one of the group activities, T assigned the role of a presenter to one student in each group. The presenter ensured that the opinions of all group members were expressed.

Theory 3: In addition to constructing listening activities around a task, listening for a purpose, and creating success oriented tasks, Brown (2007 points out having students

work together in groups "help to remove the threatening affective factors in the foreign language classroom, promote learner autonomy, and address individual differences" (page 51). As the teacher continued to provide students with information, which would help them, feel more comfortable with listening to a live lecture in a university classroom, the teacher "appealed to the students' genuine interest and made the activity relevant to their lives." (Page 51). Group work also gives students the opportunity for pushed output. Swain (2005) (as cited in Nation & Newton, 2009) indicates pushed output raises an awareness of the gap between the task and learner proficiency and moves speakers from a purely semantic decoding of the target language to a syntactic processing of it, thus promoting second language acquisition

*Practice 4:*Throughout the lesson T ensured all students felt successful by walking around the room and making sure that everyone in the group was participating and providing an answer for the questions posed, while encouraging students to listen for a purpose. In addition, after providing answers to their work, the students received

immediate feedback on the performance of their task. The feedback was always positive and it was evident the students felt good about their performance.

Theory 4: The practice of creating success-oriented tasks is an important component to ESL/EFL teaching. Ur (1984) points out the value of a success-oriented task, "Listening exercises are meant to train not to test; and the best practice is obtained by having the learners do the activity more or less successfully, not by having them fail" (page 27). In addition, by incorporating guided questions into the listening activities, the listening exercise is constructed around a task. Ur (1984) states, "Listening exercises are most effective if they are required to do something in response to what they hear that will demonstrate their understanding" (page 13). As a result, the students are also listening for a purpose and with the expectation of answering questions.

Practice 5: It is important to point out the teacher uses authentic listening material such as the radio broadcast as a language input model. This assists the students in sensitizing themselves to

the existence of the intonation and stress of the English language. Encouraging students to listen to radio broadcast as a language input and model also helps the students become accustomed to the various voices and accents of their professors, which they listen to when sitting in an actual lecture room in an American university.

Theory 5: Ur (1984) points out that "The English system of stress, intonation, and rhythm, though perhaps less obviously difficult than problems of the actual sounds, can interfere with the foreign learner's proper understanding of spoken English." (Page 13). She also states, "a recording may provide the students with some valuable exposure to native accents; their use also makes available a far greater range of language situations: different voices and accents, moods, registers, background effects " (page 25). As suggested by Ur, recordings should be used for definite purposes such as revealing the various types of discourse. In addition, because the material is authentic, the students seemed to be motivated because they found the listening assignment relevant to their everyday lives as foreign students in a University. Since the students felt like developing the listening skills to understand and take notes during a lecture is relevant, they were motivated to participate in the activity.

3. What I learned from the observation

It was very enlightening to do this observation. I learned a lot about the various components of listening and speaking while participating. The communicative framework, which the teacher laid out in the classroom to practice speaking as well as listening, was very effective. The students not only had an opportunity to listen to authentic material while practicing communicative activities in small groups. In addition, the input, which the teacher provided for the students, was also very effective. The activities raised the students' awareness about the specific skills they would need to develop to be effective listeners in a language classroom. Because the material was authentic enough, the students will be able to recognize how to work with this kind of material when they encounter it in a real life setting. In addition, the activities in the classroom produced an element of pragmatic competence. There was a point in the activity where the radio broadcast appeared to be an actual lecture. This exposure to a real life simulation really prepared the students for when they will be in a university lecture and need to take notes. In addition, they had the opportunity to learn vocabulary

related to the lecture. The approach towards "planned vocabulary teaching" was effective as students are given the opportunity to listen for specific words and examine their meaning in the context of the lecture. Finally, I also learned how important it is for students to take notes while listening. This instructor didn't integrate this element into her lesson plan. Despite the fact that the students were developing skills, this skill would have also benefited the students as they are developing a tool for listening in the future.   In the future speaking and listening classes I teach, I will be sure to introduce the use of authentic material and the elements of note taking as well as group presentations. By truly understanding the sensitive process of listening and speaking for ESL/EFL learners, it will also be important for me to incorporate some micro skills in lesson plans. Pragmatics will also be effective as it is important for students to grasp skills, which would occur in a real life setting. Finally, it will be important for me to remember the value of how a teacher sets the tone in a class with a warm up. A warm up helps the class feel at ease and ready to take risks at second language learning.

References

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