



UNIVERSITY OF WALES

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Assessment 2

Topic: Reflective Evaluation

Moodle: Community Engagement

BABM T1G1

Lecturer: Ms.Tanja Nathan

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Introduction

In this assignment I aim to explore issues relating to the Communicative Approach, which makes us consider language not only in terms of its structure (grammar and vocabulary), but also in terms of the communicative functions that it performs. I have chosen a unit from “A Complete Guide for Urdu Examinations” to see how effective that unit is in Urdu language teaching. I shall look not only at language forms, but also how it affects individuals when they want to communicate with each other. I will concentrate mainly on one chapter, which addresses the processes the learner goes through when learning their second language and how teachers support them and facilitate these processes. I shall review the materials observed and used in one curriculum unit which introduces learners to the concept of grammar and tenses.

In my review I shall discuss the modifications to the material that, in my opinion, will make it more accessible, interesting and relevant to the delivery of the National Curriculum, MFL teaching and learning strategies.

I shall make a lesson plan to show how I would extend a topic of the module to be appropriate to a “gifted and talented” group’ reflecting upon the rationale of this lesson plan.

I shall be considering how I would apply various strategies to cater for these students. I shall reflect upon and evaluate how this whole unit of work incorporates issues relating specifically to the teaching and learning of modern languages; including national curriculum requirements and how the unit delivers them. I will describe how the module and materials used in incorporate wider learning theories on teaching and learning, and what kind of opportunities they provide to address the challenges such as PLTS (personal learning and thinking skills) amongst others. I will also demonstrate the ways in which I would modify the materials used in school.

Analysis

My consideration of learning theories will be based on the following broad understanding of their main characteristics. The work of the behaviourist psychologist, Skinner, is associated with ‘conditioning through principles of stimulus and response’ and ‘the law of positive reinforcement’. The behaviourist approach to education might be what Alexander terms teaching as transmission: “primarily as a process of instructing children to absorb, replicate and apply basic information and skills.” While the following discussion will admit a place for such activities in learning process, the approach has limitations: “Direct instruction is best used for knowledge transmission, for showing, telling, modelling and demonstrating. It is never, on its own, sufficient to ensure deeper understanding, problem solving or creativity.

My focus is on the secondary curriculum for MFL and its implementation in Urdu language classes. I shall review unit 7 of a book titled “A Complete Guide for Urdu Examinations” by Zarina Khand, 3rd edition printed in 2003. This book is used to teach Years 9 & 10 classes in my placement school.

I shall focus mainly on one chapter from Unit 7 (Weather) as I have observed delivery of one lesson related to this unit. The unit concerned in this course book is essentially communicative in its approach in the activities it presents. All four of the national curriculum attainment targets of listening, speaking, reading and writing are covered in almost equal measure.

Learning a foreign language is a continuous and complicated process. The salient features of Piaget, for this assignment, are the notions of ‘child centred’ learning through individual experimentation, and the formation of what Vygotsky would term ‘spontaneous consents.’ Key processes are ‘assimilation’ – forming understanding or schemata of the outside world, and ‘accommodation’ -adapting “developing understanding and expectations to the realities and constraints of the social and physical world”. This author sees the ghost of Piaget’s notion of ‘staged development’ in the UK national curriculum, with its key stages and attainment levels.

I see Vygotsky as representing a more specific social constructivism, which emphasizes the socio-cultural nature of all learning and the role of ‘the more experienced other.’

Burner’s extension of social constructivism into modern languages again stresses the cultural nature of teaching and learning and develops the idea of the ‘spiral’ curriculum, where teaching, as it moves upward, constantly circles back to build upon previous understanding”.

Communicative language teaching (CLT), has been a dominant paradigm in recent decades. It involves the use of language for meaningful purposes, authentic materials, communication, independence and unpredictability, responsiveness to individual needs and interests, and the teacher’s role is that of facilitation rather than control. A communicative approach, however, can be seen to extend beyond the teaching and learning of languages, given the primacy of spoken language and ‘oracy’ in education.

Bigge and Shermis define something as ‘understood’ if a subject “sees how it can be used to fulfil some purpose or goal.”

Recent research by the GTCE found that “pupils suggested that their learning experiences could be enhanced if tasks were more closely aligned with the social worlds in which they lived both inside and outside the classroom.” I will attempt to consider the benefits to learning of communicative classroom language in general, and look for ways to apply this principle to meet individual students’ unique learning needs. The infinite complexity of human interrelationships and the particularity of dynamic situations cannot be fully captured by generalized understanding or a single theory of learning.

Classroom observation, is inevitably shaped by the particular purpose of the observations, and my student teacher’s lens will no doubt emphasize certain aspects of learning to the possible exclusion of others. For instance, the development of subject knowledge and ‘learning to do’ might tend to take precedence over ‘schooling’ in the sense of socialization and learning a certain way of being.

Drawing from these theories, both the text book and my lesson plan introduce new ideas, vocabulary and grammar in a communicative context first, and then asking pupils to construct their own work.

In the context of the chosen topic of 'Weather' it is my role as a teacher to guide and support pupils as they work through the Key Stage 3 curriculum. At level 3 they can use set phrases with only minor personal modification to talk about the familiar topic of weather in their country, and at a level 6 or above using descriptive language, a variety of structures and using different tenses.

To achieve this, the student needs the ability to use grammatically correct language, and this is a key component and an integral part of effective communication in any language. Students also need to understand the essence of a word, phrase, or passage sufficiently to get the right idea being expressed, and to build up vocabulary that they both understand and can use expressively. This would include use in written work and speaking and listening activities such as answering questions on passages that are presented to them either as written or spoken text. Whilst the textbook and the school's scheme of work do encourage progression by moving pupils to new and more complex activities, I feel that the 'writing frame' that I have devised for my class provides students with a clear structure to their work and also sets out a logical process, showing them how to set about the task constructively using the language knowledge that they have acquired. For a G&T class this would be extended e.g. by requiring use of different tenses, and therefore show a route to achieving the upper NC levels that they are capable of in this activity.

According to Gwen Goodhew in 'Meeting the needs of Gifted and Talented students' inclusion of activities to use and evaluate learning is an important part of catering for G&T pupils: 'Teachers should regularly check lesson and unit plans to make sure that there are plenty of activities that, as a matter of course, require pupils to apply, analyse, synthesize and evaluate their knowledge.' At the end of the unit and in my lesson plan pupils are required to

create their own piece of writing, using their own ideas, an example of Goodhew's principles in practice.

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Knowledge about language is hardly noticeable in this unit. I would introduce grammatical rules by using inductive and deductive approaches for example I would use the question and answer method in the inductive approach and use the simple grammar rules with examples in my deductive approach.

Knowledge of grammar is helpful especially in the case of Urdu as the verb agreement with gender and number of subjects is important. Acquiring knowledge of grammar may be very interesting for some.

Some people derive great pleasure from the learning and use of conscious rules, and I am one of them! "Mastering" the subjunctive in French was very satisfying for me, and I rekindle this sense of victory every time I plan and say sentences such as " Il faut que j'aille." It is sometimes hard for people like us to understand that this sort of pleasure activity is not real language acquisition Krashen.

For attainment targets, to achieve AT1 and AT2 I would include speaking and listening activities by using the question and answer method. To achieve AT3 & AT4 I would introduce texts such as stories. To cater for VAK learners, I would also introduce visually motivating activities, for example video, attaching the pictures with context/text.

I would also introduce potentially motivating activities such as re-assembling text and oral presentation through conversation and dialogue. I would also introduce the maps, producing and responding to different types of written activities in target language.

Conclusion

My critical study of the unit provided me with interesting insight into teaching and learning processes. In my view the unit as whole is not up to the standard of language teaching in modern times. The most neglected aspects of language teaching in the unit are: teacher / pupil interaction, interaction among the pupils, VAK learning and functional skills. The unit does not make the job of a teacher easy and it is left to the teacher's discretion to make it relevant and interesting for the pupils. I cannot visualize any independent effective learning from the unit.

It touches on to all the four skills but not sufficiently. Grammar plays a vital part for English speaking Urdu learners. I have provided a lesson plan with this assignment, which incorporates grammatical structures to improve pupils' understanding of different structures.

My study of the unit made me realise how important and relevant the guidelines provided by the National Curriculum and National Strategies are. It is the responsibility of the teachers to stay up to date with recent research and make the teaching material relevant to the needs of the learners.

