

Study Guide

Discussion: Moving from a Focus on Teaching to a Focus on Student Learning

Opening Question: (25 min.)

Goal – Reflect on what you have done this year in your classroom that was more effective in helping students learn.

Opening Activity: To help begin the discussion, do a Four-Corners activity. Think of some specific things you have done this year in your classroom that you feel was more effective in helping students learn to use their new language. Assign each corner of the room a topic: **Responsibility** (students' responsibility for learning); **Application** (students' applying what they have learned); **Motivation** (appealing to students' interests and increasing their engagement by choice of topics or design of activities); **Physical Factors** (from classroom arrangement, to use of technology, to authentic materials).

These topics, based on the 15 characteristics of effective language instruction examined in Study Guide #3, will help teachers begin to think of what they may have done to help make student learning more effective. After some individual think time, have teachers move to one corner and share ideas with others.

Have each corner report out 1-2 ideas they shared.

Connection with Session #3: (20 min.)

Session #3 focused on designing backwards, starting by envisioning the unit's assessments and then thinking backwards to the specific skills (language practice) and knowledge (culture, grammatical structures, and vocabulary) that students will need in order to be successful on those assessed performances. For those study group participants who tried to design a unit backwards using this model, ask them to report how it worked. Share your own thoughts. (This continues the review of the 15 characteristics of effective language instruction from session #3). A key question is what was different about the success of the unit: how did you use the textbook and other materials? How did you decide on daily class activities? How did you decide how much of the culture, grammatical structures, or vocabulary to teach – and if it would be for passive or active knowledge? How did you know that students would be ready for the final assessments of the unit?

Exploration of Today's Topic: (35 min.)

Goal – Describe specific ways to gauge student learning

Again, work in small groups. Each group takes one phase of a unit and describes specific ways that the teacher will know if students achieved the learning target (individually and/or as a group), that is, what activity or signal will tell the teacher that students "got it." The phases could be:

1. acquiring new knowledge (specific new cultural information, grammatical structures, and/or vocabulary)
2. practicing new structures (more controlled practice)
3. working with vocabulary, cultural information, or other content
4. moving toward open-ended, communicative use of language
5. applying language in new contexts

Share specific learning checks for each phase. Ask as an overarching question: what was your final benchmark in each phase? (Does knowing this help us determine when students have learned what they needed to learn? Is the learning target enduring and worthwhile, or just information to memorize?)

Application: (30 min.)

Goal – Use this understanding to identify specific strategies for having students take more responsibility for their learning in your language classroom.

After sharing the specific activities that teachers use to gauge student learning in each phase of a unit, discuss how to move in each phase toward less teacher-controlled use of language (less teacher control of what students will produce) and toward more student-responsibility for and control of their learning.

Helpful to frame this discussion is the following excerpt from *Teacher’s Handbook: Contextualized Language Instruction*, by Judith Shrum and Eileen Glisan (Heinle & Heinle, 2000):

Bipolar Terms for Testing

Natural-situational	Unnatural-contrived
Direct	Indirect
Integrative/Global	Discrete point

Discuss: How can we make sure that we are moving along this continuum in each phase of a unit and in our overall plan for assessment during a unit.

Follow-Up/Action Research:

Goal – Set a benchmark to focus next year’s teaching (what are we trying to get our students to do with the language?)