The Analysis of the Reading Lesson Conducted in Communicative Language Teaching Method

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Abstract: This reading lesson is based on communicative language teaching principles and students are engaged in a communication focused learning process through pre-reading activity, while reading activity and post-reading activity. Through students' exposure to these activities, students' reading for gist, reading for specific information and reading for detail skills could be greatly practiced.

Keywords: reading lesson; communicative language teaching

1. Introduction

This reading lesson is a communicative language teaching lesson aiming at the instruction of learners' "communicative competence", which emphasizes learners' use of language in different contexts for different purposes and the approaches towards different categories of texts, as well as the maintenance of effective communication despite of the limit of learners' language knowledge (Richards, 2006, p. 3) [4].

In particular, there are different types of "communicative syllabus" highlighted by Richards (2006) to support the communicative language teaching (p. 11) [4]. For the "skills-based syllabus", it is important for students to practice integrated skills during communicative language teaching, since such integrated skills are frequently used in real life (Richards, 2006, p. 11) [4]. Meanwhile, in terms of the "functional syllabus", it is also essential for learners to be aware of the specific language expression catering for the specific communication functions and appropriate integration of relevant language knowledge into various real-life situations (Richards, 2006, p. 11) [4]. In view of that, in communicative language teaching, a range of activities will be carried out to practice learners' use of language rather than simply "repetition and memorization" of the language itself (Richards, 2006, p.13) [4].

In this essay, at first, the rationale of my lesson plan will be presented. Then, based on my teaching practice, both the successful and unsuccessful parts of my teaching practice will be analyzed. In the end, the improvements of my less successful teaching practice will be illustrated in detail.

2. Rationale

In my reading lesson, pre-reading activity, while-reading activity and post-reading activity are carried out to engage students into the practice of reading skills including reading for gist, reading for specific information and reading for detail. First of all, at the pre-reading activity, my demonstration of a topic-related scenario and presentation of relevant pictures could stimulate students' background knowledge about the topic. Meanwhile, my choice of leading students to exchange their individual experience about the topic related questions could greatly arouse students' interest in the reading text and motivate them to predict the content of reading text.

According to Spratt, Pulverness and Williams (2011), prediction could provide us with clues to sort out the reading text, since it provides readers a chance to connect the relationship between the text topic and readers' knowledge about the world [5]. Meanwhile, as Harmer (2007) states, the moment readers commence predicting with clues, "expectations are set up and the active process of reading is ready to begin" (p. 102) [2]. My choice of leading students to exchange their personal experience about the topic could motivate students to actively response to the content of reading text. In particular, as Harmer (2007) highlights, the importance of readers' response to the reading content is readers' feeling about the topic [2]. Once readers are motivated to explore their feelings about the topic, their

engagement and interest towards the reading topic could be strengthened, and their focus on the language could be activated as well (Harmer, 2007) [2].

For the while-reading activity, I choose jigsaw reading activity to engage students in their reading process. At first, after dividing students into different groups by showing them different part of reading materials to students in different groups, discussion within each group will be carried out. After that, students will be regrouped again and work together with partners from other groups to exchange the information they have previously read and finally come up with a comprehensive understanding about the whole reading text. In light of the information gap appeared in jigsaw reading activity, it is essential for each group to apply "their language resources to communicate meaningfully", while exchanging information with students in other groups (Richards, 2006, p. 19) [4]. Meanwhile, since it is common for people to exchange information to acquire what they have not possessed in real life, the information gap could not only reflect authentic communication, but also become the essential component of communication in communicative language teaching (Richards, 2006) [4]. Furthermore, it will be beneficial for students to fill up such information gap, since students can also obtain other language knowledge including "vocabulary, grammar, and communication strategies" (Richards, 2006, p. 18) [4].

In addition, at the while reading stage, apart from information gap communication, students' knowledge of some reading skills, such as skimming, scanning and reading for detail can also be practiced and strengthened. According to Spratt, Pulverness and Williams (2011), these reading skills could guide readers to access to the reading text with different approaches in terms of different reading aims [5]. Once readers are equipped with appropriate reading skills, their reading comprehension process could be facilitated. As Spratt, Pulverness and Williams (2011) argues, it is not necessary to read through the whole passage if readers are looking for a specific piece of information [5]. Specifically, by adopting scanning skills, readers can quickly spot the specific information they are looking for through glancing over the whole passage. On the contrary, in terms of reading for the general idea, it is important for readers to adopt skimming skill instead of focusing too much on the specific detail in case of being stuck in the middle of reading (Harmer, 2007) [2].

For the post-reading activity, I choose to group students in pairs to discuss a text-related question and let students present their opinions. Through post-reading activity, students can utilize content information they have approached in reading text to strengthen their understanding about the text-related question. According to Spratt, Pulverness and Williams (2011), post-task activity could motivate students to recognize the relationship between the reading topic and their personal experience [5]. Moreover, students' presenting their opinions can provide them an opportunity to practice the language knowledge they have accessed during reading. At the end of this reading lesson, I choose to provide students with homework to let students practice their writing by utilizing the language knowledge, as well as the reading text information they have obtained from class into their writing task. In this situation, during this reading lesson, students can be exposed to a series of integrated skills. As Harmer (2007) highlights, as to guarantee students' utterly involvement in a multiple learning environment, it is necessary to practice students' integrated language skills [3].

Furthermore, in light of the principles of communicative language teaching, I choose to divide students into different groups to let them work together. Students working in pairs could lower learners' anxiety and ensure their learning in a learner-centered and supportive learning community (Harmer, 2007) [3]. Based on Richards' studies (2006), grouping students to work together could motivate students to learn the language expression used by others, and provide students a chance to practice their language fluency [4].

In addition, I choose to use authentic reading materials taken from newspaper. Based on communicative language teaching principles, since the knowledge learnt during class is prepared for later use in real world, "classroom activities should as far as possible mirror the real world and use real world or 'authentic' sources as the basis for classroom learning" (Richards, 2006, p. 20) [4]. Moreover, according to Clarke and Silberstein (1977) [1], it is beneficial to expose students to authentic materials, since the authentic materials can equip students with socio-cultural background knowledge, and as a result, students can be maximum involved in the real communication mode meeting students' learning needs.

3. Reflection

This reading lesson aims at practicing students' reading skills including reading for gist, reading for

specific information and reading for detail. In order to pursue this teaching goal, pre-reading activity, while-reading activity and post-reading activity are adopted to motivate students to work out these tasks related to the reading text by exchanging information with group members. At the following section, the less successful and successful parts of my teaching practice will be analyzed. Meanwhile, some necessary improvements on certain stages of my teaching practice will also be illustrated as well.

In terms of the less successful part of my teaching practice, after topic elicitation, I only introduce the key word and check students' pronunciation about the word, without any mentioning other potential words in the reading text. In consideration of the time limit and the discrepancy of students' vocabulary knowledge, it seems challenging for me to select the exact words meeting students' need. However, based on Harmer's studies (2007), some improvements could be made to change this situation by getting students to work in groups to come up with a word list altogether and access to the meaning of these words themselves [3].

At first, students create their own word list with unknown words from the reading text. Then they will be divided in groups to exchange their word list and come up with "a new joint list" after discussion with other students (Harmer, 2007, p. 287) [3]. In the end, students will altogether come up with a final word list by either referring to a dictionary or asking teachers for the meaning. In this way, as Harmer (2007) highlights, "'understanding every word' has been changed into a cooperative learning task in its own right" (p. 287) [3].

Apart from vocabulary instruction, my conducting the while-reading activity—jigsaw reading activity is not quite satisfactory. Although I separate students in different groups to read different parts selected from one reading text, the information gap is not quite clear. In addition, each time I interact with students to ask for their opinions on the text related questions and their discussions on the reading text, I fail to provide every student a chance to share their understanding about the reading text. During class, I only briefly mention the introduction part of the reading text rather than directly presenting the introduction part to students. Moreover, I fail to engage students to exchange their ideas on the introduction part of the reading text. As a result, after I give different reading materials to students in different groups, some of the students might not even be aware of the existence of information gap during their reading. They might not realize the information gap until they are regrouped by sharing the main idea of the reading passage they have previously read with their partners.

In view of that, next time conducting the jigsaw reading activity, I will clearly present the introduction part on the projector and set a question to motivate students prior to their approach to different parts of the reading passage. For my failure to provide each student a chance to speak up in class, it is mainly due to the time limit. Next time I will engage students into a range of multiple group activities. In this situation, students will be able to discuss their understanding about the reading passage by frequently talking with different partners. As a result, their chance to speak up in class could be increased to some extent. As Richards (2006) points out, integrating students in "pair and group activities" could provide them with greater chance to use the target language and improve their language fluency (p. 16) [4].

In terms of the satisfactory part of my teaching practice, first of all, my choice of the reading topic is quite interesting and closely related to students' real life. Therefore, students show great interest and focused attention in the pre-reading activity to share their personal experience about the topic. In view of that, the pre-reading activity greatly stimulates students' schema and actively motivates students to predict the reading text and as a result, the reading comprehension could be facilitated. As Harmer (2007) states, "prediction is a major factor in reading" (p. 101) [2].

In addition, in terms of my choice of critical reading materials, students' exposure to such reading materials provides them a chance to develop their "higher-order thinking skills", which is also referred to "critical and creative thinking" (Richards, 2006, p. 25) [4]. As Richards (2006) highlights, it is important for students to integrate their language knowledge into the development of their thinking ability when dealing with various real-life situations [4]. Meanwhile, my choice of practicing students' reading skills by engaging students into authentic reading materials could help students apply the appropriate reading skills they have practiced during class into real life situations. It is imperative to regard language knowledge as a means of communication tool, since "the purposes of reading should be the same in class as they are in real life" (Richards, 2006, p. 20) [4].

Furthermore, my engaging students into the reading lesson is quite effective through my clear concept checking questions, grouping students, as well as interaction with students to give them instant feedback during the while-reading activity. In particular, dividing students into different groups can greatly motivate students to engage in class, since each of them should be responsible to make a

contribution within a group. As Harmer (2007) argues, students working together in a group could build up "learner autonomy" to actively engage students in making their own decisions (p. 166) [2]. Meanwhile, my choice of giving students feedback is quite essential. According to Harmer (2007), it is important for teachers to ensure students' accurate understanding about the reading text, when students are working together to the reading tasks before their exchanging information in jigsaw reading activity [3].

4. Conclusions

Throughout this reading lesson, students are divided in groups to work out a range of activities by either group discussion or interaction with teacher. As a result, for one thing, students' learning anxiety could be greatly reduced and their learning process could become more effective and facilitated. For the other, students could be frequently engaged into a communicative interaction and their communicative competence will be developed. Furthermore, without teacher's direct imparting relevant language knowledge to students, the overall learning and teaching process is learner-centered. Though conducting a series of activities, students could be involved into the practice of integrated skills during the reading lesson.

For my teaching practice, there are both successful and unsuccessful aspects. In terms of the successful aspects, it is effective for me to arouse students' interests to the reading topic and stimulate students' background knowledge about the reading text. Meanwhile, my presentation of critical and authentic reading materials could equip students with critical thinking abilities. My engaging students into the reading lesson is quite effective through my clear concept checking questions, grouping students, as well as providing students with interactive feedback. For the unsuccessful aspects, I fail to give detailed instructions about some unknown words in the reading text. Furthermore, the information gap presented in the jigsaw reading activity is not clarified and students are not given enough chance to speak up in class. In view of these unsuccessful aspects, I have come up with some concrete approaches to improve such situations.

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