

Use of Postmethod Pedagogy in a Lesson Plan of College English Writing Course

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ABSTRACT. *The lesson plan designed for the college English writing course is theoretically based on the postmethod pedagogy, sociocultural theory, process-oriented models of L2 motivation, input hypothesis and knowledge about vocabulary and writing. In this paper, the author describes as much as detail as possible within the designed lesson plan: a) the stage of the lesson, b) the timing of each part of the lesson, c) teacher activity, d) student activity, e) skills practised, f) materials for each task/activity etc. The rationale of each choice the author has made is provided in the paper. An evaluation of the lesson plan (the strengths and weaknesses of the texts and activities, and of their appropriateness in the context in which they are used) is also given in the paper.*

KEYWORDS: *Postmethod, Lesson plan, College English writing*

1. Introduction

This lesson plan is based on the teaching context in a university of China where English writing course is provided for English majors who are 19 years old or so and their level range is from B1 to B2. It is a class that accommodates 60 students whose specific English learning fields are business and science and technology. They only have one writing session of 90 minutes for each week. This lesson is conducted in the coming end of this semester and through the previous study students have already attained the grammatical forms and sentence variety structures. What they need now is the strategies for independent free writing and vocabulary acquisition outside the classroom. Although there is much application of GT and input from extensive reading students have a relatively low-level mastery of writing skills. Apart from that, the amount of vocabulary they grasp does not increase to the required level.

This lesson plan consists of five major parts: 1). Review 2).Preparation for the writing process (vocabulary teaching and learning, extensive reading, instruction of expository writing.) 3).Prewriting 4). Writing (the first version followed by responding, revising and editing.) 5).Postwriting and homework. Process approach forms the whole picture of the plan and genre-based approach is embedded. Both

incidental and explicit learning of vocabulary are put forward. Reading as a supportive skill is provided.

The overall method that underpins this plan is postmethod. Richards and Rodgers summarise that none of the approaches such as CLT and TBL provides us a specific set of guidance for teaching a language. They are promoted as all-purpose solutions to teaching problems without taking the context into account. However, not all the classrooms practices tend to be the same. Application of these approaches occurs through people's flexible and possible interpretation. Thus these approaches allow for varying individual interpretation and application and of course it can be modified when time and context changes (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Richards and Rodgers propose that postmethod may not indicate the abandonment of method-based knowledge the teacher initially use but will lead to a modification of it as the teacher adjust it to the realities of his own classroom (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

2. Rationale

Kumarravadivelu says that practicality is one of the three dimensions in postmethod pedagogy. Abraham notes that if there is too little or no guidance in the early stages of writing, students will have no direction in writing and they would lose confidence and motivation (Abraham, 1987). Thus, the author will not choose TBL which puts the language focus as the last stage as the method. Since many writing conventions are unknown to students, in this lesson they relate to expository types of writing. Besides, their grasp of vocabulary usage is inadequate, and many vocabulary acquiring strategies are beyond their reach. Furthermore, Cook points out that the student-centered ways of CLT and TBL provide no techniques for demonstrating meaning at all (Cook, 2008). Because of their previous learning experience and sociocultural factors, they are likely to accept explicit teaching in this part. Though it may function to some extent in this context, for Sapargul and Sartor find that if students are not concerned with the mastery of speaking skills and are keen about intensive study and memorization of rules and vocabulary, they are readily to gain outcomes by this teacher-centred way; this way may stop students from learning independently and it may limit both T-S and S-S interaction, which may lead to the lack of students' spontaneous creativity. As a result, the teaching process is comparatively boring and demotivating (Sapargul and Sartor, 2010). Some student-centered approaches are required. By doing so, students are more engaged in and not treated as passive recipients of language learning. Ellis suggests that scaffolding can occur not only between learners and the experts, in this context, the teachers, but also between learners and learners and group collaboration (Ellis, 2003). Apart from that, Guk and Kellogg report within sociocultural theory that, "T-S mediation and S-S mediation create different ends of the same whole class ZPD, with T-S interaction relying on projection of word meanings and grammar structures from an adult, and S-S interaction relying on co-construction of discourse in whole utterance" (Guk and Kellogg, 2007). Therefore, student-centered pair work and group work are adopted in this lesson. According to Vygotsky, ZPD is the area

where a person's current mental state can be potentially mediated into higher order functions provided by scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978).

According to Richards and Renandya, "The skills involved in writing are highly complex. L2 writers have to pay attention to higher level skills of planning and organizing as well as lower level skills of spelling, punctuation, word choice, and so on" (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p.303). This writing lesson plan is based on process writing (as it is generally indicated in introductory part) which can fulfil these skills in different stages of the lesson. However, Richards & Renandya also conclude that an emphasis on a process approach often neglects the importance of practice in the types of writing connected with text features, written form and text organisation. Through genre-based approach, students can have a better understanding of type conventions which can make a piece of writing more appropriated to a particular communicative purpose (Richards & Renandya, 2002). As it is defined by Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill and Pincas, the nature of writing skill is both private and public so we intend to write for an audience (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill and Pincas, 2003). Genre as it is explained by Harmer that writers construct their writing so that people within that discourse community will instantly understand what kind of writing it is by referring to the register-the specific type of 'language' used (Harmer, 2004). According to what is mentioned above, this paper is finally conducted in an eclectic way-both process approach and genre-based approach. The whole lesson can be monitored along with the process-oriented model of motivation.

2.1 Review

Last week's lesson is about description of a person and students were assigned to write a composition about their idols. Through review of the core vocabulary, students' knowledge is reactivated and because this session's topic is about the secret of the success of something, the vocabulary which is used to describe a successful person can be employed in this session. Teachers' summarising errors made by students can act as a reminder for students' avoiding these problems. Abraham suggests that teachers can use errors as a learning device (Abraham, 1987).

2.2 Preparation

This part is mainly about vocabulary learning and discourse analysis about expository writing. According to Cook, "the message for language teaching is that vocabulary is everywhere. It connects to the systems of phonology and orthography through the actual forms of the words, to the systems of morphology and grammar through the ways that the word enters into grammatical structures and through grammatical changes to the word's form, and to the systems of meaning through its range of general and specific meanings and uses" (Cook, 2008, p.51). Thus, learners can acquire words according to Richards and Renandya by incidental learning (it is everywhere) through extensive learning; however, Nation believes that because of limitations in learners' vocabulary knowledge, they cannot benefit from incidental

vocabulary acquisition through reading; a systematic way is more efficient than the incidental one. This leads to an explicit instruction (Richards & Renandya, 2002; Nation, 2001). Grabe recommends that one way of direct instruction is through mapping- semantic mapping, word mapping and concept-of-definition mapping (Grabe, 2009). Cook concludes that strategies for acquiring new vocabulary are repetition and rote learning, organizing words in the mind which is associated with word maps and linking to existing knowledge which is to some extent about word groups but much to do with linking new information to old (Cook, 2008). Activities of the review part and the word map forming parts for vocabulary acquisition fit well with these strategies. Activities of reading for vocabulary accumulation and word meaning guessing correspond to Cook's strategies for understanding the meaning of words-guessing from the situation or context, deducing meaning from the word's form and relating it to cognates (Cook, 2008). Hence, these teaching activities implicitly demonstrate a variety of strategies for both independent and collaborative vocabulary learning.

Richards and Renandya propose that words' learning is a complex issue that requires not only the word itself but the range of information goes with it (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Therefore, it calls for some explicit specific teaching of the word knowledge apart from the translated meaning. The words are the most basic and frequently used ones. Since according to Cook's prototype theory, "words have whole meanings divided into basic level ('car'), subordinate level ('Ford') and superordinate level ('vehicle') The basic level of vocabulary is easier to use and to learn. On this foundation, learners learn basic-level terms before the other two" (Cook, 1996, p.53-55). Grabe suggests that teachers should identify the most frequent words in direct instruction so that students can acquire most frequently used words, key topical words and generally useful academic words (Grabe, 2009).

Reading materials as input according to Wu, must be interesting and relevant to learners and learning (Wu, 2010). Because students major in business English and science & technology English, they can feel associated with their practical needs. As it is suggested by Ellis, students need to have access to understandable input and a low affective filter that makes them open to the input (Ellis, 2003). Accordingly, students watch a video about Iphone5s to catch their attention and interest before they get involved in the article. Abraham also agrees that reading materials can provide models of the same kind of writing and they can be used as guidelines in both form and content (Abraham, 1987). The analysis of aspects of meaning-denotation, connotation and appropriateness conform to Cook's and Grabe's word knowledge conclusion and these together with analysis of the structure, style and purpose of the writing type conform to writing for a target audience proposed by Cook and Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill and Pincas (Cook, 2008; Grabe, 2009; Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill and Pincas, 2003). Tribble also notices that when people participate in different types of writing, they assume a wide range of social roles and Harmer thinks this is related to genre (Tribble, 1996; Harmer, 2007).

2.3 Prewriting

Richards and Renandya conclude that when people start to write they become anxious (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Through group brainstorming and presenting of ideas students can come up with more ideas for their writing. When teachers write students suggestions on the board, according to Wong, Kwok and Choi, students feel motivated because a sense of recognition is afforded by both the teacher and students (Wong, Kwok and Choi, 1995). By bearing in mind the WH-questions in rapid free writing students can find a clue in the way of ideas-collecting and can make the outline for the piece of writing. With the time-limited thinking, Richards and Renandya notice that students can promote their writing exam performance (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

2.4 Writing (Drafting)

Drafting is the first version of a piece of writing. During this part, according to Richards and Renandya, fluency rather than grammatical accuracy is prioritised. But they should have a conscious sense of audience and genre of writing (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Apart from that, the students are required to use the words that are taught in this session's vocabulary acquisition and genre parts, the act of writing itself, based on Harmer' view, gain the reinforcement of what they have studied (Harmer, 2007). Ur also recommends that writing activity be designed as both means and end which combines the original writing with the practice of other system and purposeful content (Ur, 1996). As for the responding, teachers can conduct this while students are writing, while peer-responding can be placed after they finish writing. Since Dembo finds "Courses with immediate feedback and the opportunity to revise make changes are viewed as more efficient than those where the only feedback came late"(Dembo, 2004, p.60). Peer-responding or peer-correction as it is proposed by Ur, can be time-saving especially we have large class and a critical reading for style, content and grammatical accuracy can be used as a learning activity, because students can learn from each other's errors and students receive input from their fellow classmates (Ur, 1996). As they are offered peer responding checklist, the cross-checking can be more reliable. Guk and Kellogg explore that learner-to-learner mediation is in important ways closer to 'internalization' (Guk & Kellogg, 2007). Swain suggested that learners can learn from their own output (the piece of writing) in numerous ways. Revising and editing are put into one activity. Based on the feedback in responding, students may find or be told as Ur says "writing is a messy business"(Ur, 1996, p.168). However, since teachers give students a rational order for refining, that is as Ur classifies, revising for the 'macro' (content, organization) and editing for 'micro' aspects (spelling, punctuation, etc), students may find the clear goal of each stage and make the process more organized (Ur, 1996). Apart from that, Richards and Renandya conclude that editing applied in this phrase can ensure that the free flow of ideas during drafting and revising are not disrupted (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

2.5 Post-Writing and Homework

This phrase happens when students complete the writing. When group members share with one and another their writings, when a representative shares with other groups through reading, the class practices as a whole help sustain the motivation for the next writing and help evaluate both the teacher's and students' performance of outcome attainment. Besides, students are exposed once again to the vocabulary and the expository type, the important knowledge of this session is reinforced and activated.

3. Evaluation

Authentic materials in this plan are used as input of reading for the productive writing. From this point, it can be evaluated by input hypothesis. Based on Wu's idea, three elements should be considered: 1. "Comprehensibility of the teaching materials", that is, teaching materials must be neither too easy nor too hard; However, the press review of Iphone 5S may be difficult because the terms may be too technical and there may be some unneeded vocabulary and complex sentence structure according to Maroko, that can make relatively low level students demotivated (Maroko, 2010). 2. "Significance of the teaching materials", that is, the topics of the teaching materials should be interesting and relevant to learners. In this plan they are provided for business and science and technology English majors. Obviously, they are relevant to both their academic and social needs. Besides, the text types are relevant to the lesson's content-expository writing and topic-related vocabulary. 3. "Arrangement and continuity of the teaching materials", that is, learners' language develops along the natural order. Once the current level is reached, there should be continuous input to keep the learner go on to the next stage. Teachers should design teaching materials step by step (i.e. grading from the simple to the difficult) However, the more difficult article of Iphone 5S is put before the easier LIDL one, it could cause some problems (Wu, 2010, p.138-9).

Some criticise postmethod and claim that teachers do not have criteria to follow and there may come many problems as for inexperienced teachers. Richards and Rodgers summarise some reference points and core principles that provide the source of instructional decisions (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Teaching in accordance with these principles is flexible but also standardised by postmethod. The teacher anticipates some potential problems brought about by different approaches and adopt an eclectic position. What is more, the teacher designs some activities to lessen the tension. The teacher can mediate a learning task for a single learner or a group of learners, who then mediate the task for their classmates in group-work (Guk and Kellogg, 2007). This can be supported by Harmer, he says when the class is big, and teachers can use group leaders to check whether or not his group members have understood and give feedback (Harmer, 2007). Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill and Pincas suggest these activities demand that the teacher goes round the groups supporting, and the teacher will take in written work to check. However, the notion should be made clear that the purpose these activities is to help students to write accurately and effectively, but not to test what they can do (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill and Pincas, 2003). But a problem

still exists. Since Ur finds that even though teachers are aware that content and organisation are important, in the immediate feedback they give in the class are mostly related to language forms like mistakes in spelling or grammar (Ur, 1996). To solve this problem, teachers ask students to hand in a neat final paper as homework so that they can diagnose comprehensively. Activity theory from sociocultural framework and the process-oriented model of motivation can be used to underpin his design of the lesson. Mitchell and Myles explain that activity is defined from sociocultural perspective in which collaborative interaction and assisted performance occur. The student has a goal (object) to motivate himself so that they take goal-oriented actions. The operational level of activity is the way an action is carried out and depends on the conditions under which actions are executed (Mitchell and Myles, 2004). Hence we can see that each activity has a goal to attain and motivation is dynamic and different stages have different objectives. Based on process approach, each stage has its own products. Interaction together with scaffolding should be highlighted to enhance operational level. Kucer and Silva conclude that teachers' behaviors and the materials they use are the primary mediational vehicles which are employed to support or scaffold the learner so that students' capabilities of the cognitive, linguistic and sociocultural dimensions are all improved. The teacher progressively lessens the support provided-deconstructs the scaffold and the student assumes more accountability (Kucer & Silva, 2006). Students finally become independent learners. This is the writing lesson's overall aim.

4. Conclusion

Multidimensions has been taken into consideration when the author designs each class activity. As Kucer and Silva discover that cognitive dimension is central in the multidimensional framework. The vocabulary acquisition activities are firstly about mapping which focuses primarily on meaning. In terms of the process of writing, the drafting prioritises fluency of meaning. In terms of linguistic factor, some words are analysed from semantic and pragmatic systems and expository structure is conveyed through genre-based approach. Through scaffolding, students can transform to a higher level and finally they become independent learners. As this lesson is near to the end of the semester, both vocabulary acquisition strategies and the process operation of writing are offered to students so that they can handle their own leaning in an efficient way.

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