Constructing the RAR English Teaching Model for Achieving Instructional Effectiveness

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Abstract: The purposes of this study are twofold: (1) to understand my students' previous English learning experiences, and (2) to examine whether the established RAR English teaching model can fulfill the instructional effectiveness in the empirical teaching settings. The action research method was adopted to fulfill the needs of this study. All of the 65 students from my English classes participated in this study, and data from the teacher's and students' reflective journals, classroom assignments, and students' interviews were collected and analyzed to accomplish this one-year research. According to the results of the findings, this model has been proved to obtain a promising instructional effectiveness, and English teachers may implement a successful teaching by adopting this instructional approach. Overall, the conclusion of the study are summarized as follows:

1. Three phases exist with my students' English learning experiences: (1) merry-go-round at the elementary school level, (2) back-to-the-grind at the junior and senior high school level, and (3) flying-over-the-sky, to-be/not-to-be, or crash-to-the-ground at the university level.
2. Lived experiences of the teacher can be utilized as the rationale for designing English teaching materials.
3. Assignments in the class provide students with hands-on English learning activities, and facilitate them to become active participants, rather than silent recipients.
4. Students are motivated to learn the contents by showing them photographs with the assistance of instructional technological equipment.
5. Students' reflective journals enable me to revise my teaching strategies and to achieve the "double-feedback" effect.
6. With the RAR English teaching model, the interaction between students and me is satisfactory, and students express positive attitudes toward English learning.

Keywords: RAR English teaching model, English teaching method, effective teaching, curriculum and instruction

Introduction

In terms of teaching, the traditional themes of the study is to ask "what to teach" and "how to teach." The first theme refers to the nature of curriculum, while the latter concerns about teaching aspects. As a matter of fact, the teaching process involves the transactions between the teacher and the students. The teacher is a message sender, while the students

serve the role as message receivers.   The result of teaching depends on three factors: (1) teacher, (2) teaching process, and (3) student's reaction.   Therefore, when the result is proved successfully, it is asserted that the connection among these three factors is manipulated efficiently.   In other words, the teaching effectiveness is accordingly achieved, and the educational productivity is satisfactorily enhanced.   Therefore, it has been a goal that teaching practitioners try to achieve in their instructional profession.

In order to achieve the expected teaching effectiveness, many teaching methods have been created for such a purpose.   From literature review, these teaching methods include "The Direct Method," "Total Physical Response, TPR," "The Audio-Lingual Method," etc. In response to the specific era of the time, these teaching methods have exerted definite influences on English learning.   However, as the time moves to 21st century, needs of learners and teaching environment are varied according to specific regions or ages of learners. Thus, it is an endless effort for English teachers to pursue ways of teaching to achieve the ideal instructional effectiveness.   Based on such a belief, the RAR (Rationale for the topic, Assignments in the class, Reflective journals) teaching method is constructed by this author for English teaching, and for achieving the expected effectiveness in the instructional career.

Therefore, the purposes of this study are twofold: (1) to understand my students' previous English learning experiences, and (2) to examine whether the established RAR English teaching model can fulfill the instructional effectiveness in the empirical teaching settings. To accomplish such purposes, elements of teaching-learning relationship, class management, and English teaching methods were explored to provide literature foundation for investigating the theme of instructional effectiveness.   Consequently, the related elements are listed in the following sections.

Literature Review

Based on above explanations, the aspects regarding instructional effectiveness are reviewed in the following sequence.

Teaching-Learning Relationship

In the discussion of teaching effectiveness, it is essential to examine the teaching-learning relationship in the class realities.   Since teaching is an interactive process that teachers create or adapt curriculum to carry out their instructional activities in expectation of the best learning outcomes, the transactional factors include selection of the materials, adoption of the teaching methods, and assessment of the learning results (Donmoyer, 2001; Robinson, 1998).   In other words, there is an important clue to reflect the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the teaching, and teaching-learning relationship can serve

as the hint for identifying the evidence.

Regarding the signs of an effective teaching-learning relationship, Levitt (2002) asserted that teachers might examine students' interests and involvement in the class to justify whether there was a worthwhile learning condition happening in the teaching process. Actually, serving as managers of the class activities, teachers could see if students were willingly devoting their time in the classroom assignments. Indicators could be always found from students' verbal and nonverbal signs of interests and attention (Hoxby, 2002; Marton & Booth, 1997; Roth, 2001).

To increase the students' learning motivation and interests, group work and collaborative assignments in the class not only provided students with a sense of community that supported one another, but also created good chances for practicing their language learning with peer classmates. Within such a working-together environment, students were apt to take their own responsibility and exerted more attentive input for the learning of the group (Dornyei, 2001; Dornyei & Murphey, 2003). Therefore, the review of collaborative assignments and teaching-learning relationship could offer teachers an opportunity to consider if the selected contexts were appropriate to meet the needs of students, and the sequence of teaching was suitably set to ensure an effective instructional practice.

Class Management

To cope with students' variability in learning, Goodlad (2004) proposed that teachers adopted alternatives to promote the teaching effectiveness in the class. Mastery learning was one of these choices. It emphasized a combination of large-group instruction and small-group peer tutoring. Tests were used just to identify students needing more time and those who could provide peer tutoring. Similar techniques have been employed in schools in England. Children at different ages were grouped heterogeneously with a common reading problem. The best reader in the group was expected to help the other members. Such approaches supported the mixed ability organization and resulted in cooperative learning among the group members.

Based on instructional techniques and curriculum adaptation, Riccio (2001) suggested some useful strategies: (1) teachers needed to adapt learning environments to meet the individual needs of each student, (2) special and compensatory education personnel should support teachers, and (3) students' individual differences and abilities should not be labeled into a categorical system such as high or low ability, but described in relation to instructional progress such as fast or slow learner.

In a form of teamwork, cooperative learning groups were heterogeneous groups of four or five students who worked together to master the lesson presented by the teacher.   Student activities might include discussing answers, teaching team members, or helping one another on information.   Since cooperative learning emphasized overall performance and rewarded students on the basis of teamwork, students of various abilities were motivated to share resources and had the best learning outcome (Harp, 1989).

With regard to learning effectiveness, the small heterogeneous ability group allowed some students to learn without the continuous presence of a teacher.   "Task-masters" was a design that appointed some students to serve as models in the heterogeneous group.   These "task-masters" provided explanation, managed the time for tasks, provided answers to questions, and checked answers of the group members.   Subsequently, student's interaction within the heterogeneous group was positive, and they were highly motivated to work together for a better academic achievement (Peterson, Wilkinson, Spinelli, & Swing, 1984).

In group-based mastery learning, Bloom (1976) provided a way of heterogeneous grouping for student learning.   As a whole class, students received lessons and took a formative test after a unit of learning was completed.   The detailed results of the test were reported to each student.   Then, those who passed the mastery criterion would do enrichment activities, whereas those who failed would be given additional time and help until they reached the mastery criterion of the question items.   Therefore, mastery learning employed group and individualized instruction to meet the needs of each student, and brought higher cognitive entry behaviors by giving students feedback and corrective instruction.

Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) was a model that Slavin (1996) proposed to reinforce classroom cooperative learning.   Students were grouped into heterogeneous teams, and took 15 minute quizzes after they studied with their team members.   The quiz scores were translated into team scores by a system called "achievement divisions."   The quiz scores of the highest six students in past performances were compared, and the top scores in this group earned eight points for his or her team, the second scorer earned six points, and so forth.   Then, the scores of next highest six students were compared with the same procedure.   By comparing the scores at the same level, students were encouraged to work together cooperatively, and earned more points for their teams.

Another effective classroom management was proposed by Aronson (2000) for his famous Jigsaw method.   In Jigsaw, students were assigned to small heterogeneous teams. Teaching materials were broken into as many sections as there were team members.   The students studied their sections with members of other teams who studied the same sections.

Then, they returned to their teams and taught their sections to the other team members. Finally, all team members were quizzed on the entire unit.   However, the quiz scores were recorded as individual grades only, not as a team score.   In this situation, the Jigsaw technique seemed to emphasize the task interdependence.   Every member of the team helped other members to learn one of the sections, and got help from other members as well.

Small-Group Teaching (Baker, 2001) was a model for classroom organization.   It required students to select the topics appointed by the teacher, discuss the procedure for fulfilling the task, and collect the data according to individual assignment.   The group was comprised of two to six members, and every member of the group must be accountable for the assigned duty.   Thus, this would cultivate a high degree of student autonomy and task interdependence.   Combining the game and instructional tournament into the student learning, Teams-Games-Tournament (TGT) presented a design that could promote the effectiveness of cooperative learning.   Slavin and Cooper (1999) indicated that four- to five-member student teams were the basic element of TGT.   The function of the team was to prepare its members to perform well in the tournament.   After the teacher presented the initial class, students were given materials similar to what would be included in the tournament.   Once a week, a tournament would be held to test how well students learned their materials.   For the tournament, students were assigned to "tournament tables," and competed as representatives of their teams.   As each student earned points at the tournament table, the score would be counted into an overall team scores.   Consequently, the TGT model promoted a cooperative interaction and rewarded interdependence among the team members.

In addition to Teams-Games-Tournament, a group of researchers (Cooper, Slavin, and Madden, 1998) on elementary education developed a cooperative learning approach to teach reading and writing.   The Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) program combined same-ability groups and mixed-ability teams to design the process of learning.   The teams were basically a mixed ability organization containing students from high-ability groups, mainstreamed special education, and remedial reading programs.   After a teacher introduced the story each day, students were given a series of activities to do in their teams, for example, partner reading, story related writing, word meaning, story retell, and spelling.   At the end of three class periods, students were given a test on the story, and the test scores were major components of students' weekly team scores.   A study evaluating the impact of the CIRC program, using analyses of variance and class means on the California Achievement Test, indicated a positive effect on student achievement.   CIRC classes gained significantly 30 to 36 percent of a grade equivalent more than control students in reading comprehension and reading vocabulary, 52 percent of a grade equivalent more than control in

language expression, and 72 percent of a grade equivalent more than control in spelling.

English Teaching Methods

In reviewing the history of English teaching, many teaching methods have been created to meet the needs of their times.   Before 20th century, the commonly used teaching approach was Grammar Translation Method that was a teacher-centered phenomenon with an emphasis on the translation between the mother language and the second language.   During 1900-1960, various teaching methods were invented such as The Direct Method, The Audiolingual Method.   These were recognized as conventional English teaching methods. As time moves on, some innovative teaching methods appeared to promote English teaching effectiveness.   These methods included Total Physical Response, Community Language Learning, Suggestopedia, etc.   After 1980s, several contemporary teaching methods have been introduced to increase the portfolios of English instruction.   These approaches contained Cooperative Language Teaching, Multiple Intelligences Approach, Task-based Language Teaching, Content-Based Language Instruction, etc.   Among the teaching methods, Total Physical Response and Task-Based Language Teaching are picked for review due to their applicable potential in the contemporary English instructional society.

Total Physical Response (TPR)

Regarding the acquisition of a language, Asher (1982) contended that babies learned their mother language through observation and spontaneous responses.   For example, when parents said, "look at Daddy," the baby would turn to the direction of the voice; as the Daddy said, "smile for Mommy," the baby began to smile.   Henceforth, there existed the dialogue between parents and the baby, and the baby always performed physical response to the parents' speaking.   The phenomenon from the baby's acquisition of the language could be generalized to the learning of a second language.

Following the theoretic foundation, Asher (1989) proposed the teaching activities of the total physical response in the class.   The teacher said the sequential commands first, and students listened to understand the commands for exerting physical responses.   The commands could be as easy as "point to the window," "look the tree," or contain a sequence of completing a task.   For example, a trip to the bank might include the following commands.

1. Go to the bank.
2. Open the door and go in.
3. Walk to the window.
4. Wait in line.
5. Move up again.

6. Go to the window.

7. Give a check to the teller.

8. Say, "Please cash this check for me."

9. Walk to the door.

10. Open the door and walk to your car.

During decades' practice of Total Physical Response, teachers asserted several advantages for such a teaching method: (1) TPR was helpful for the students who were low performers in academic aptitude, (2) it maintained short-term and long-term memory in the brain for language skills, and (3) it was an effective teaching method for children and adults. As a matter of fact, Total Physical Response was excellent to promote an active learning atmosphere and promoted the inner incentives for learning a second language (Hadley, 2001; Krashen, 1998).

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Traditionally English textbooks were grammatically emphasized with principles. However, as the trend of communicative English teaching appeared in the language programs, the task-based language teaching found its mainstream value in the field of English instruction.   The central philosophy of this method was the key concept of "task."   As the method earned more and more popularity among the English teachers, the interpretations of "task" became various with different proposals. For definition, this author adopted the following concept: "the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (task) in order to achieve an outcome" (Willis, 1996, p. 23).

Although the definition of task might not reach a consensus, a common agreement on the method proclaimed that the task-based language teaching should generate tasks as the central component in teaching activities, and curricula were designed as learner-centered. Regarding the TBLT, there was a three-phased process including pre-task, task cycle, and post-task.   The pre-task phase was to create learning motivation on the chosen topic, and prepared relative sentences for fulfilling the need of the task.   As to the task cycle, it referred to planning and report of the task by students who worked in pairs or groups.   The final phase in the framework analyzed the syntax, meaning, or function of the language which have been used during the task exercise.

The advantages of adopting the task-based language teaching might be narrated as follows (Rooney, 2000):

1. Allowed for a need's analysis so that the course content could be matched to identify

student needs.

2. Had been supported by a large body of empirical evidence. The empirical research findings recognized this classroom-centered language learning regarding materials design and methodology.

3. Allowed evaluation to be based primarily on task-based criterion-referenced testing. Students can now be evaluated on their ability to perform a task according to a certain criterion rather than on their ability to successfully complete a discrete-point test.

4. Allowed for form-focused instruction. There was now considerable evidence particularly from research studies which have compared naturalistic L2 learners to instructed L2 learners (English was not the native language learners) that form-focused instruction within a communicative context could be beneficial.

Summary

To sum up, every English teaching method has its advantages and disadvantages in the instructional reality. For English teaching practitioners, each method can be used as an available tool for English teaching.   However, there is not any one particular method that is perfect for a teacher, because English teaching does not merely rely on teaching methods. Rather, a successful English teaching depends on curriculum, student's needs, cooperative class management, and an effective teaching-learning relationship. Consequently, English teachers need to consider those factors and combine them into the instructional practice to fulfill a promising English teaching.

Method

At the university, I taught two classes of a selective English course for junior students. All of the 65 students from these classes participated in the study, and consent forms were given to them for agreement to join the research.   Among the 65 students, 51 were females while 14 males.   The RAR English teaching model was adopted for the instruction through two semesters.   During the teaching periods of the two semesters, I wrote reflective journals after each class, and asked students to write reflective journals concerning every taught unit. As the time went to the end of the semester, students were also requested to write their individual reflective journals to report their overall comments on this course in terms of their learning situation, curriculum design, teaching method, etc.   In addition, I interviewed 6 students to explore their opinions or comments on the RAR teaching model, and their individual English learning experiences.   The schedule was arranged that 3 students were interviewed in the middle and at the end of the first semester, while the other 3 students in the middle and at the end of the second semester.   I used the CENIX digital recorder VR-P280 to record the interviews and transcribed the contents for the analysis of the students' learning situation and teaching practice.

To assure the trustworthiness of the data analysis, I employed the strategy of prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, and member checking to achieve the requirements as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1990).   For the prolonged engagement, I taught the class as long as two semesters to earn enough length of time engaging in the field of the research. Regarding peer debriefing, main points of the reflective journals and interview transcriptions had been shown to my colleague who was a qualitative researcher for pursuing independent opinions and feedback.   Also, we discussed the interpretation of the data throughout the study.   In terms of member checking, the comments in the students' reflective journals were analyzed and recorded into files.   For some unclear ideas in the comments, I asked students to clarify the meaning of the comments after class or in the interview occasions.   Therefore, with above strategies, this study presented satisfactory trustworthiness for credible findings that reflected the opinions of the researched without biased preconceptions.

Discussion and Findings

In reference to the above literature, I presented the initiated RAR teaching model at below with examples to illustrate its designated elements.   Also, findings through the implementation of the RAR teaching model were denoted in the sections of example units and in the paragraphs of English learning in Taiwan.

English Learning in Taiwan

In order to know students' opinions about studying English, I interviewed 6 students to ask their past English learning experiences and encourage them to compare the English learning in my class with their past learning experiences at the elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school.   Some of the interview highlights were listed at below to reflect the English studying status in Taiwan:

- "In reviewing my English learning history, I like the time at the elementary school best.   I love to go to cram school for English class.   Teachers there are very nice, and teach many lovely English songs.   They are very kind and never scold us if we make mistakes in speaking English.   So, it is my sweet memory to study English in the cram school."
- "It is a happy time to learn English in the elementary school.   No grammar, just conversation, cartoon movies, play, and games.   It is great!"
- "I dislike the days in junior and senior high school, because there is English grammar and test every week.   It is so different from those English classes in the elementary school.   I hate the English test every week, and feel sad to be forced to memorize so many difficult vocabulary."

- "Why can't we just sing the song and play in the English class at the junior high school?   I feel that it becomes not interesting for learning that language."

- "My English teacher in the senior high school is humorous.   He emphasizes the accurate pronunciation of the K.K. phonetic symbols, and tries to promote our English learning interests by asking us to act out in the English drama.   The drama is fun, but I still have a hard time to get a good score in my English subject."

- "Before I take your class, I have not really studied English for two years at the university.   I think my English ability is leaving me every week.   But, my hope to learn English comes back as I learn English in your class.   I want to give myself a try to study English hard again, so that I may challenge the General English Proficiency Test."

- "I intend to study English with efforts, but I can't find a good friend who is serious to learn English as what I do.   It is sad to see some roommates who just forget English day by day."

- "We need more good English class in the university, because English becomes more and more important for international communication."

Based on students' interview comments, the English learning experiences are henceforth illustrated as a diagram at below.   The diagram consists of three phases of English learning in Taiwan: (1) merry-go-round, (2) back-to-the-grind, and (3) flying-over-the-sky, to-be/not-to-be, crash-to-the-ground.   To introduce this diagram, I assert that the first phase "merry-go-round" represents the English learning situation at the level of the elementary school; the second phase "back-to-the-grind" represents the time at the junior and senior high school; and the third phase "flying-over-the-sky, to-be/not-to-be, crash-to-the-ground" represents the university level.

For further explaining the meaning of the terms, I claim that students at the elementary school are learning their English happily by singing songs, playing games, or acting in the dramas.   They are as happy as riding in the merry-go-round.   At junior and senior high schools, students begin to suffer from difficult grammar, vocabulary, and examinations. They need to prepare for the strict English test every week.   The situation reminds me of the terrible experience in preparing for the Part A Qualifying Examination for Ph.D. at the University of Texas at Austin.   During that period of time, the Ph.D. graduate students called it a "grind", and studied hard together, took a coffee break, and then went back to the grind for the test.   Therefore, students of junior and senior high schools are in the same grind situation to prepare for the weekly tests.   Regarding students at the university, they are in a diversified status.   Some successful achievers continue to study English hard and enjoy

the pleasure of learning like flying over the sky, while some others may lose their learning interests and simply crash to the ground; between these two categories, a great number of students belong to the group of the to-be/not-to-be, and wonder if they should strive to be superior in English, or just give up learning English.
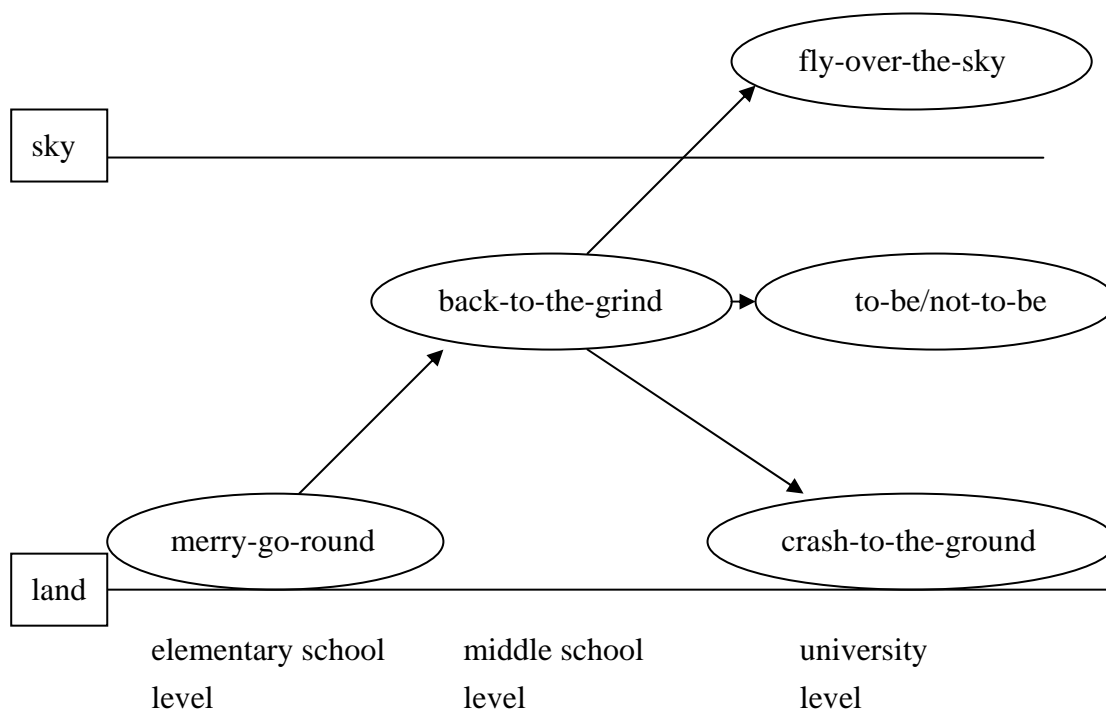

Figure: *Diagram of English learning experiences at various levels of schools*

Practice of RAR English Model

In the field of English teaching, there were a great number of teaching methods such as The Direct Method, Total Physical Response, etc.   Depending on individual instructional environment, one could be proved to be more suitable than the others.   The key point was to implement teaching methods and verified the effectiveness through empirical collection of the data.   Following the RAR principles, the example units of the English curriculum design were illustrated accordingly.

Example Unit One: Writing an English Prose
Rationale for the Topic

In the human beings' civilization, prose and poetry are the tools that people use to describe the happening events and to express spontaneous overflow of feelings.   Thus, the opportunity to expose oneself in the prose and poetry is helpful for the appreciation of the lived experiences.   As our living ecology is full of magic beauty of nature, it will be advantageous for students to observe the environment with which they are living and write down what they feel with a descriptive prose or poetry.   To promote students' such ability of

appreciation, they were requested to write a prose according to the picture taken from a tranquil moment of the scenery.

Assignments in the Class

As I traveled to explore the geographic cultures or natural ecology, I carried my classic 135 mm camera to take documentary photographs for my teaching portfolios.   Then, in the class assignments, I used overhead projector to show the photographs on the big projection screen in front of the classroom.   In such a technology-supported environment, students were required to write an English prose describing or narrating a tale about the illustrated image.   The title and the topic of the contents were not limited, so that creative imagination could be possible.   To provide a necessary assistance, I also wrote preliminary paragraphs with the title "A Spanish Garden" for students' reference.   At below, the picture had been shown to the students in the class with the title and example contents; then, students were requested to write a prose based on the image in the picture.

A Spanish Garden

I am a backpacker traveling alone in the countryside.   With the curious mind, I make an adventure through forest, lakes, and grasslands.   The view in my journey is painted with nature's beauty, while the road is extending peacefully to no end of the earth until I find this Spanish garden.

The garden is built with marble stones and a bronze bell is hung in the arch of the wall. It is mysteriously surrounded with bushes of wood and fallen leaves.   I am wondering why the Spanish garden is built here.   Were there Spaniards living in this place

hundred years ago?   Did the bell ring as people danced with colorful clothes?   What kind of romance has the gate witnessed?   I have questions as I come to this discovery, but I find no answer in the serenity of the vista.

Although I am touched with the beauty of the Spanish garden, I have to move and continue my travel.   Adieu, I am leaving you there, but I will remember you forever in my mind.

As students wrote their own title and contents, some impressive writing works were found in their assignments.

Writing Piece from S1

The Story of Don Quixote
    It is long long time ago,
    there is a knight, Don Quixote, in Spain who looks handsome.
    He likes to ride his horse in the countryside.
    He always has a dream to fight with enemy.
    So, he rides his horse and fights with the castle,
    He fails, but he continues to fight…
    It is a tragic story for Don Quixote, because he was in a time that a knight was not needed any more.

Writing Piece from S2

White Stone Wall
    The wall is beautifully built by the white stone.
    It looks clean and pure.
    It seems that there is a secret garden behind that wall, and a fair young lady lives in the garden.
    Someday, when the dream lover comes to visit her, she will appear in the gate and wear a flower on her hair.
    When they meet each other pleasantly in the white stone wall, the little wind is blowing….
    And the bell is clicking with merry tone on top of the wall.

Reflective Journal
    With pictures, students were attracted by the pleasing display of the images.   Such a

delighted emotion always helped to write an agreeable prose.   Further, because there was no designated topic about the picture, students were released from the limit of thought and free to write whatever touched their mind.   They might look at the same picture, but wrote down the contents extremely different.   For example, some students expressed their emotional sense on seeing the white stone wall, while some others were interested in Spanish culture.   Although the themes might be various in their writings, the purpose of writing a prose has been satisfactorily achieved.   As all the prose were finished, they were displayed in the classroom for classmates' reading.   This arrangement served as a function of the prose forum or literature banquet, and really enhanced the interest of students to appreciate the writing verses of their peers.

    Further to the learning activity, students were requested to write reflective journal to me, so that I might earn valuable feedback for improving the teaching practice in the future.   Likewise, there were some appealing opinions from students , and these comments were accordingly recorded as follows:

- "I am fascinated by the quiet view of the picture.   It looks exotic to me, because I never know what a Spanish garden may look alike until I see this picture."
- "Why is there a bell on the top of the wall?   We are curious to discuss about the function of the bell.   Is it for announcing the meal-ready message or for alert of the enemy appearance?   We have no definite answer in our discussion, but we feel fun in the process of argument about the function of the bell."
- "It looks a little bit lonely and sad in the picture.   I hope that the teacher may show us pictures with people and delightful scenes, so that we may be in better mood for learning."
- "I enjoy watching the picture on the big screen.   The words are large enough to read and the visual effect is wonderful with the overhead projector."
- "The wall made of rock is unusual.   I like the construction of the garden, specially the style of rock.   It makes me feel that we are entering a place of many hundred years ago."
- "I have watched Don Quixote and Zorro TV series, do the heroes live in this kind of place with stone wall and bell?"

    On the basis of above comments, students showed a great deal of appeal to view the picture.   The exotic atmosphere in the garden really raised their curiosity to learn other cultural contexts.   As the comment indicated the video experience associating with the Don Quixote and Zorro TV series, I collected the relative data and made supplementary explanations of the swordsman Don Diego's story in the Zorro series and the story of the

knight Don Quixote.   In addition, I recognized the voice in student's opinions, and responded in the next class that pictures with acting people in the scene would be selected for teaching in the coming units.   By giving immediate feedback to what students suggested in their feedback to the class, I found that students were satisfied with teacher's caring of their opinions and the function of asking students to write reflective journal did provide a positive "double-feedback" effects for promoting the efficacy of the teaching practice.

Example Unit Two: Guessing Multicultural Matters

Rationale for the Topic

   In our daily lives, events with significant meaning are happening in every second and may be recorded by picture.   Therefore, through the portraits of the human beings' activities, the chain stories can be interwoven into the heritage of culture in different societies.   To encourage students to learn English, I selected exclusive pictures that might represent cultural aspects of American society and made them become questions of the project.   As said: "One picture is worth ten thousand words," I earned expectations for the power of picture in this teaching unit.

Assignment in the Class

   In the class, I gave students questions with the picture, and explained the questions with necessary background information.   Then, students interactively responded with their tentative answers.   To increase the rate of the right guessing, students might generate all possible answers with their imaginations.   Since the more attempted reasons students prepared, the better chance that they might get the right answer.   Thus, I always gave students plenty of time for brainstorming, and encouraged them to write down everyone's idea even without the group's consensus.   Through the teaching process, the students' responses were accumulated and some of the interesting answers were recorded at below for reference:

   Question: When passing by a house, you may find the trees beside the house covered
             with a bunch of toilet paper.   Why?

Tentative answers from students:

1. Protecting the branch of the tree from winter coldness
2. Pretending that it was snowing.
3. Make a wish for marriage or birth of baby.
4. Symbol of peach.
5. The house owner was a toilet paper agent.
6. Welcome someone to come back, such as "tie a yellow ribbon around the old oak tree."
7. Help birds to make their nest.

Explanations:

White papering the house is a trick among young people when they celebrate a special event; for example, a victory at last night's high school's football game.   As a result, the football game members may make a get-together in the near-by area of the home of the quarterback or the hero of the game.   At night as the lights of the house are turned off, these young men begin to throw rolls of toilet paper around branches of the trees.   This becomes a kind of celebration or a memory of the happy time among the young in the U.S.   From the viewpoint of young people's culture, it is a little bit crazy, exciting, and fun.   However, from the parents' standpoint, this incident of white-papering may be regarded as a three-hour's cleaning up on the weekend, or even worse if the toilet paper is wetted by rain and stuck to the branches of the tree.

For students' assignment, they were required to prepare ten questions with pictures.   In a

class of six groups, a total of sixty questions might be presented for such purpose.   For the convenience of the procedure, an answer sheet with question number from item one to item sixty should be designed beforehand.   Thus, each group might write down their answers as the pictures of the questions were shown.   Occasionally the obstacle of explaining the questions in English occurred, students might be allowed to explain the special terms in Chinese, or gave hints for solutions to the questions.

This teaching unit with about 10 picture questions might continue for two weeks.   In the first week, I presented ten questions with pictures.   Questions were explained in English with background information such as when and where they were taken, or the special event that happened in a specific city.   After one question was explained, students were asked to write down the possible answers by discussion with their group members.   Since multiple answers were allowed, students were encouraged to brainstorm with their peers to get tentative answers as many as possible, so that the chance to get the right answer would be raised .   In the second week, students brought in their English-typed answer sheets, and checked the correct answers one after another with the picture explanations.   Then, all groups summed up their total scores by counting the correct answers, and the winners belonged to the top three groups who acquired the most number of right answers.   Because the winners were credited for their final grade of this English course, students made efforts in striking up every possible answer and translating it into English for their database.   Thus, students were motivated to look up English vocabulary, and interested in recording cultural phenomena by visual images.

Reflective Journal

When I presented the picture questions to the students, it was worthy to collect tentative answers from students.   After requiring them to write down the answers, I might encourage students to generate imaginative ideas.   Sometimes, these ideas were just amazingly popped out, and surprised me.   From such spontaneous communication between students and me, the difference of the culture awareness might be perceived.   Therefore, it was really recommended to record those tentative answers collected by students' discussion, rather than just check the correct answers.   In addition, the pictures taken by me, rather than pictures from books, made students feel close to the original photographer when asking questions about the pictures.   Therefore, I felt that it is a plus to earn picture-taking knowledge to produce persuasive photographs for the teaching practice.

Furthermore, students were asked to write feedback for this unit, and there were impressive comments from students such as the following:

- "It is fun and nervous when my group members discuss many answers and are unable to determine which one is correct."
- "I like the pictures because they make us feel curious about the American society."
- "My group members have a good time in discussing the possible answers of the picture questions.   Although we do not get good scores as I announces the correct answers, we still think the activity is good for brainstorming and relationship of each other."
- "We like the guessing picture program.   It is so interesting to know American cultures.   We like to suggest that next time we take our own pictures in Taiwan and ask classmates to guess the answer of the picture."
- "It sounds wonderful to travel to other country and take pictures to show people about the customs and cultures of that society.   We hope that we may have the luck to make this ideal come true."

Summary

   To sum up, students were usually used to the teacher-oriented lecture approach in the teaching routines.   However, the example teaching units offered students a lot of interpersonal communication with their classmates.   The class atmosphere became dynamic with students' discourses among themselves.   This also promoted the interaction between students and me.   From the pedagogical viewpoint, the upbeat learner's enthusiasm and the positive responding phenomenon of the class would always lead to an effective teaching (Exley & Dennick, 2004).   As the reactions from the students were so appealing, I proposed that students might prepare their own pictures about unique features of various counties in Taiwan and present in the next teaching unit to continue the cultural dissemination.

Conclusion and Suggestions

   After the research had been carried out for one year, several conclusion and suggestions are accordingly attained in the following sections.

Conclusion

   As a teacher, I intend to understand my students' English learning experiences and acquire instructional effectiveness in my teaching.   According to the process of the research, some conclusion are drawn at below:

   1. Three phases exist with my students' English learning experiences: (1) merry-go-round at the elementary school level, (2) back-to-the-grind at the junior

and senior high school level, and (3) flying-over-the-sky, to-be/not-to-be, or crash-to-the-ground at the university level.

2. Lived experiences of the teacher can be utilized as the rationale for designing English teaching materials.

3. Assignments in the class provide students with hands-on English learning activities, and facilitate them to become active participants, rather than silent recipients.

4. Students are motivated to learn the contents by showing them photographs with the assistance of instructional technological equipment.

5. Students' reflective journals enable me to revise my teaching strategies and to achieve the "double-feedback" effect.

6. With the RAR English teaching model, the interaction between students and me is satisfactory, and students express positive attitudes toward English learning.

Suggestions for English Teachers and Researchers

According to the process and findings of this empirical study, several suggestions are recommended at below for English teaching practitioners and researchers in the academic society.

1. The teacher should ensure that each student writes his/her reflective journal, so that the need of every student in such RAR English teaching environment can be taken care of.

2. After examining students' reflective journals, the teacher has to give timely responses to all of their comments, even some of the comments do not conform to the expectations of the teacher.

3. There should not have a time pressure regarding the progress of the teaching unit. If one week is not enough for students to complete the assignments or presentations of the designated unit, the teacher would rather give two weeks or even three weeks to complete the contents of the learning, rather than hurry up to quit the unit by interrupting students' group discussion or oral presentations.

4. For future study, the researcher may invite observers to sit in and write observation notes. Such data will enable additional triangulation effect with the teacher's fieldnotes, students' reflective journals, and interview transcriptions.

5. To increase the extent of the data collection, the questionnaire method may be adopted in the duplication of this research. Some dependent variables of the questionnaire can be derived from this study and develop the survey to acquire extensive data for justifying the instructional effectiveness of the RAR English teaching model qualitatively along with quantitative information.

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