

MOOC Shaping the Way We Teach English: Phase 2 Lesson Plan

Directions:

A. STUDENTS AND SETTING

Students: My students are international students (7 different nationalities) studying at a large U.S. public university. They're currently studying English full time, 15-20 hours per week. They're between 18 and 30. Most have studied English in their home countries for 5 years or more.

There are 19 students in the class, 7 from East Asia, 5 from the Middle East, 2 from Africa, 2 from S. America, and 1 European. We meet twice a week for 90 minutes; our term is 10 weeks long, so they have approximately 30 hours of instruction with me, and 150 hours of instruction altogether.

The focus of their English language program is "academic English", with a heavy emphasis on the skills needed to do well as a university student: listening and note taking, essay writing, research skills, textbook reading, and general study skills. My class is focused on academic reading and vocabulary skills.

The students are mature, willing (and required) to do 1-2 hours of homework a night. Over the course of the term they read 2-3 graded readers (20-40 pages each) on topics of their choice, they work with 2-3 chapters from academic textbooks, and they need to master the first half of the Academic Word List (approximately 35 words per week).

B. BACKGROUND:

This lesson comes at in the beginning of the term, usually at the start of week 2. The lesson is part of a larger unit (approx. 8 hours of class time) on "preferred learning styles" and academic success.

As a way of talking and reading about N. American higher education, I try to first learn what our students think about the roles of "teacher" and "student" (most of the students have been in the U.S. less than 3 months).

So, this lesson (below) focuses on qualities of an "ideal" language teacher. The lesson proposes 10 characteristics of an ideal teacher, and asks students to rank them according to importance.

To understand the "text", students have to first do a decoding exercise, which reinforces some of the work we've done in week 1 about guessing vocabulary in context. The "code exercise" is a way to get them to focus on both form and meaning. And to slow them down. I want their rankings to be thoughtful (even if some of the propositions are a bit silly).

There's also a sociocultural dimension to the lesson — this is the first time we'll focus on "consensus building" as both a goal for classroom behavior, and as an important rhetorical strategy for our pair and group work tasks. In the group discussions, there's no voting; students have to come to agreement on their group rankings; this "floods" the task with justifications, arguments, and other persuasive language.

C. LEARNING OBJECTIVES/EXPECTED RESULTS:

1) Students will be able to say (in discussion) and write about (in a short report) the qualities of a language teacher that matter most to themselves as individuals, and compare and contrast their feelings with those qualities identified by a partner, a small group, and the class as a whole.

2) To get to these higher order skills, they first work through a "decoding" exercise based on academic vocabulary they've been learning, and a ranking exercise based on personal feelings. Comparison and contrast, and persuasion and analysis follow.

3) Students will be able to justify and defend their rankings. Likewise, they'll be able (and willing) to modify their opinions should other arguments prove more persuasive.

D. MATERIALS AND SOURCES:

Materials: The “authentic materials” of this class is students’ beliefs and prior experiences with language teachers juxtaposed with what they know about us (we teach as a team of 5-6) after two weeks of classes. We use photos of ourselves, but no names. The worksheet (attached [here](#)) is key. It guides students from the individual activity (usually done as homework) through the next 3 phases. Ultimately have to come to consensus as a class about what they value in their teacher.

Sources: The idea for this is a relatively old one; I first learned about it in a teacher education course with Paul Nation (author of our “What is it?” article). It can be found in the book below. It has elements of “values clarification”, “prioritizing”, and, of course, a scaffolded set of tasks that get more complex as my students go from individual to small group to whole class. Nation calls this the “fishbowl” technique because at the end all of the students are surrounding a small group elected to reach consensus.

Nation, I.S.P and Newton, J. (2008). Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking. London: Routledge.
Coxhead, A. (2000). A New Academic Word List. TESOL Quarterly, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Summer, 2000), pp. 213-238 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3587951>

E. PROCEDURES / TIMING:

1. Teacher does/says . . .

Part I of the worksheet “incorporating values in the classroom: what makes a good language instructor?” is assigned for homework. It’s essential that students come to class having thought about these characteristics.

Students read the 10 statements, first decoding the missing word (like a Cloze ex). Then they rank the statements according to their own beliefs, with 1 = most important. There’s a bonus “quote” for those who like decoding. There’s also space to add their own characteristics.

Approximate time needed: 20-30 minutes (homework)

2. Teacher does/says . . .

Next day. Teacher does a quick check on the 10 characteristics and asks students if they had any questions about the words in code. Teacher is moving around the room to check on completion and comprehension.

Students do/say . . .

Several students can write the coded words on the blackboard and other will check their work.

Approximate time needed: 5-10 minutes

3. Teacher does/says . . .

Asks students to fill in “My Ranking” on Part II of the worksheet.

Students do/say . . .

Have to transfer information from longer sentences above to the shorter ones in this table. They also maybe seeing their rankings clearly for the first time.

Approximate time needed: 10 minutes

4. Teacher does/says . . .

Asks students to pair-up based on country of origin—they sit with someone from the same country and compare their rankings of the characteristics.

Students do/say . . .

Have to come up to agreement on the top 10 characteristics and record them in “My Language Group Ranking”

Approximate time needed: 10 minutes (once most pairs get the top 4, I move on)

5. Teacher does/says . . .

Asks students to form groups of 4 based on not sitting with someone from their country of origin. They compare their rankings of the characteristics.

Students do/say . . .

Have to come up to agreement on the top 10 characteristics and record them in “My Mixed Group Ranking”

Approximate time needed: 10 minutes (once most groups get the top 4, I move on)

6. Teacher does/says . . .

Homework. First pass at writing up the results of rankings.

Students do/say . . .

Write a paragraph saying why it was easy or difficult to reach consensus, first with a partner and then with a small group.

Approximate time needed: 30-60 minutes

7. Teacher does/says . . .

Next Day. Asks students to get into their small groups of 4, and share what they’ve written for homework. Also asks them to select a group representative for the “fishbowl”.

Students do/say . . .

Students discuss their different approaches to the same task.

Approximate time needed: 20 minutes

8. Teacher does/says . . .

Asks students to come to a class consensus on what they think the ideal teacher is..

Students do/say . . .

Students’s representative from 4-5 groups are seated in a circle with others seated around them. They have 20 minutes to come to agreement on the importance of the characteristics. Others can “substitute” for the group representative, or be asked by the teacher to substitute.

Approximate time needed: 20 minutes

F. Learner Feedback/Formative Assessment:

This lesson is one where the early tasks are designed to be self-checked or classroom checked for completion, use of strategies (e.g. guessing unknown words), and ability to justify choices.

Once we move into the pair and group work the scaffolding is fairly transparent: they essentially do the same task 3 times. Not only is the audience larger each time, but the fluency expectation goes up. To be able to represent his/her group accurately, the student had to have participated at a high level in each previous round.

G. Extended REFLECTION - Week 4:

This lesson or (set of lessons) tries to demonstrate (in a small way) the steps of making and defending a point of view, and, just as importantly, coming to group consensus around compelling ideas. This, of course, goes to the heart of “critical thinking”, something we try to practice in every class.

Students enjoy “discovering” that not everyone thinks alike (even if they’re from the same cultural background), that expectations about teachers aren’t universal, and that where opinions are concerned, others are often persuaded more by how you make your argument than the right or wrong of the idea. This is both a teaching technique and a method of assessment. The worksheet is both a way of “taking notes” but it’s also the basis for something that will be spoken and written about. Students should come to see how important their contribution to the group tasks is. They have to be able to convey their group’s message..

It differs from phase 1 mostly in the elaboration of setting and background. I’ve tried to give a more complete picture of who my students are and why this is relevant to them. I’ve also tried to make the worksheet clearer so that the ranking tasks are more self-evident.