

Effective Teaching Methods to Support Intended Learning Outcome

采取有效的教学方法 实现已定的教学目标

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Abstract: The questions about Chinese language teaching strategies and methodologies have been constantly discussed to fulfil students' needs and achieve the intended learning outcomes. This paper intends to examine and review some teaching methods based on the author's teaching experience. With pedagogical literatures as theoretical background and students' feedback as evidence, the author hopes that, such good practice could be of interests to other teachers, particularly those who would like to start the career in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. The author also would like to simulate attentions to the importance of focusing on the basic essentials, i.e. the fundamental elements to make teaching delivery successful, which, however, seems to have been side-lined in the studies and discussions in the area of teaching Chinese as foreign language.

Keywords: teaching methods, students' feedback, focusing on essentials

Introduction

One of the most difficult challenges in teaching Chinese as a foreign language is to find effective methods to engage students throughout the learning process to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Large and mixed-ability classes, little exposure to the target language after school, intensive syllabus, high expectation from the students, etc. will inevitably form obstacles to achieve the goal. Questions such as how to motivate students, how to keep students on track, how to create a lively, dynamic and productive atmosphere, how to facilitate students to have a positive learning experience, etc. have long been discussed and it seems that there is no one answer key to all these questions. With the examination of some teaching methods, relevant literatures and feedback, such questions raised above may, in one way or another, be addressed.

In the last few years, tremendous modifications of teaching-method narratives and practice have appeared due to the Covid-19 pandemic to accommodate the changes from face-to-face teaching to online teaching. However, I think that these changes reflected the differences in the forms of class delivering, rather than the contents, nor the ultimate learning goals. Traditional teaching methods and pedagogy still remain to be valuable resources for us to explore. Graham Stanley, a language educator, pointed out “The increase in the availability of technology has led to an explosion of interests in its use in the language classroom. Teachers can be seduced by the *wow factor* of new technology with pedagogy being pushed to the side lines” (Stanley, 2013:1). “Care has to be taken, therefore, to make use of what we have available only when it serves the language aims of the lesson, and to avoid any use of *technology for technology’s sake*” (ditto). Through the discussions below, the author would like to emphasize the importance of focusing on the essentials in the teaching delivery, which seems to have been given less attention, if not neglected, may be stimulated and revitalized.

1. Cooperative Language Learning

Cooperative learning (合作学习) is a group leaning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between leaners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others. It is the systematic and carefully planned use of group-based procedures in teaching as an alternative to teacher-fronted teaching (Richards and Rodgers, 2014: 277).

I had developed a Speaking Pack at elementary level (CEFR A1-A2) for a new component to enhance then an existing programme at SOAS. Whilst being an advocate of the main textbook *Colloquial Chinese* by Ping-Cheng Tung used by degree students for decades at SOAS, I, nevertheless, understood the learners’ perspective to request more trainings on speaking skills, particularly when the classes were mainly delivered in the grammar-translation approach. This reflects the point of view of Richards: “in order to address the deficiencies of earlier grammar-based syllabuses, new components need to be included in a communicative syllabus” (Richards, 2017: 59). The examples below intend to show how cooperative learning can be realized in classroom activities.

1.1 Information gap

Instruction: Students A and B have different information about the same student. Ask and answer questions in Chinese to complete the forms.

Form 1 (for student A)

First name	John
Family name	
Nationality	British
Age	
Hometown	London
Subject	
Languages	English, and a bit Chinese
Interests	
Brothers and sisters	Two elder sisters, one younger brother
Parents occupations	

Form 2 (for student B)

First name	
Family name	Smith
Nationality	
Age	19
Hometown	
Subject	Chinese language
Languages	
Interests	Music, reading, cooking
Brothers and sisters	
Parents occupations	Father university teacher, mother middle school teacher

This activity is to prompt students to ask questions in Chinese they have just learned (他叫什么名字? / 他姓什么? / 他是哪国人? / 他今年多大? / 他是什么地方人? / 他学什么? / 他会说什么话? / 他喜欢做什么? / 他有哥哥、姐姐、弟弟、妹妹吗? / 他父母做什么?) to motivate learners' learning in a problem-solving activity and engage them in a “meaningful communication” which is advocated in communicative language learning approach.

1.2 Quizzes

Instruction: Pair work. One asks the question, and the other tries to give the answer.

Student A	Student B
中国人平常用什么吃饭? (筷子)	
	西方人平常用什么吃饭? (刀叉)
人们做饭的屋子叫什么? (厨房)	
	教人们怎么做饭菜的书叫什么? (食谱)
很多人喝咖啡的时候, 杯子里除了 <u>放</u> 咖啡以外, 还 <u>放</u> 什么? (糖和牛奶)	
	中国人敬酒时常说哪两个字? (干杯)
糖醋鱼太甜了, 是什么 <u>放</u> 多了? (糖)	
	糖醋鱼太酸了, 是什么 <u>放</u> 多了? (醋)
这个东西不是木头做的。打一个汉字。(杯)	
	一个女人跟一个孩子。打一个汉字。(好)
我要吃饭。打一个汉字。(饿)	
	There is no smoke without fire. 打一个汉字。(烟)
能写字没有手, 能唱歌没有口, 能做数学没有头。打一种东西。(电脑, 手机)	

This activity is to practise vocabulary using words and grammar structures students have learned. It can also practise difficult words, for example, the verb “放”, to give exposures of how these words used in contexts. Students, in this case, can finally reply the stereotype question “How do you like your tea?” Students enjoy such activities. Their interests and confidence are reinforced through the problem-solving process.

1.3 Paraphrase

Instruction: Pair work. One read aloud the sentence and one give the English translation. Then jointly make a new sentence to express similar meaning using the given words in brackets.

- 1.3.1 电话铃响了, 他赶紧跑过去接电话。(一……就)
- 1.3.2 从伦敦到北京有多远? (离)
- 1.3.3 这本小说没有电影那么受欢迎。(不像)
- 1.3.4 中文难是难, 可是他还要学下去。(不论……)
- 1.3.5 现在东西一天比一天贵了。(越来越)
- 1.3.6 老师说得很清楚, 我们星期五要考试。(清清楚楚地)

This activity is to guide students to use the given expressions and also raise the awareness of flexibility in translation, which is important when students reach the stage of elementary level.

Feedback from a colleague about the Speaking Pack:

“We believe the exercises you produced will be a valuable asset to our BA students and would like to continue to use it where it is possible”.

Student Feedback:

“Pang Laoshi also includes other interesting exercises so that we are not just working through the book constantly”.

2. Audiolingual method

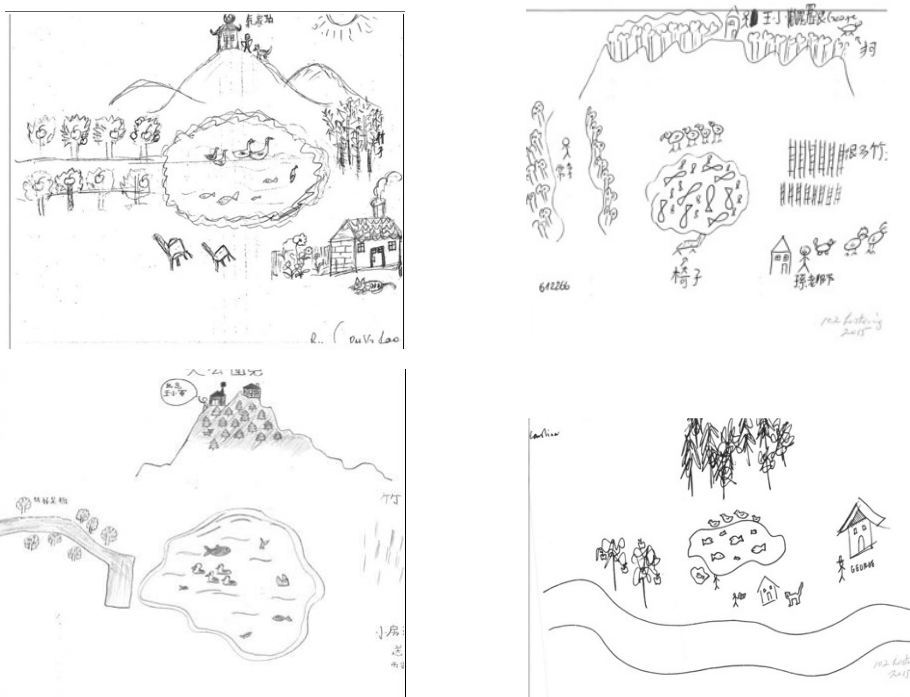
Audiolingual method (听说教学法) is a method of foreign language teaching which emphasizes the teaching of listening and speaking and “involved a systematic presentation of the structures of the L2 in the form of drills that the student had to repeat” (Yule, 2006: 165). It means that correct forms of sentence patterns would be given to students and the students would have to repeat it. The teacher would then continue by presenting new words for the students to replace other words from the same structure presented earlier on. There is no explicit grammar instruction: everything is simply memorized in form. “The idea is for the students to practice the particular construct until they can use it spontaneously. The lessons are built on static drills. This type of activity, for the foundation of language learning, is in direct opposition with communicative language teaching” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Audio-lingual_method).

To illustrate how to use the method, I wrote a description of the scenery in a park and made a recording, in which the relevant position words and sentence structures were used and many nouns they have learned were included such as *tree, flower, mountain, lake, road, house (café, and tea house)*, and animal-related vocabulary, such as *cat, dog, chicken, duck, fish* and, of course, *people*. I asked students to draw a picture while listening to the recording. By doing this, students have to listen to the sentence structures pertaining to location repeatedly as they drew the pictures, which in essence was an application of audiolingual method. The pictures students produced were fantastic, some are in 3 Ds! This shows that audiolingual method can be applied in an interesting way, instead of being “incredibly boring” (Yule, 2006:167) as some practitioners commented.

Eg: 湖里边儿有鱼, 湖后边儿, 也是湖的北边儿有山, …。

The benefit of this activity is multi-sided. It reinforced the vocabulary / sentence structures; it checked the effectiveness of teaching and learning through listening; it encouraged the engagement of students at various levels by giving the individual learner control over the pace and focus using “stop” / “repeat” functions and, thus, taking greater ownership of their learning; but ultimately it enabled students to achieve the intended learning outcome in an effective and interesting way.

Examples of the drawings:



Feedback from a staff of e-learning office:

“I use the session you did with the recorded description and the scanned drawings as an example of a relatively simple but innovative teaching technique using technology” .

3. TPR (Total Physical Response/ 肢体反应教学法)

TPR is a teaching method that goes outside mainstream applied linguistics for its theoretical basis. It attempts to teach language through physical activity. A method that is undemanding in terms of linguistic production and that involves game-like movements, reduces learner stress and creates a positive mood in the learners, which facilitates learning (Richards and Rodgers, 2014).

3.1 TPR used in classes

I embedded physical activities into the teaching of position words by asking students to stand up and stretch their arms and match the arm gestures to the chanting of the position words: *up-up & down-down; front-front & back-back; left-left & right-right; inside-inside & outside-outside;* and *middle*. During the lock-down period, this activity was performed in Zoom with unexpected good responses. Students were eager to participate and spoke out the words and a student with SIP (Study

Inclusion Plan) participated by typing out the words using Live Chat. The integration of visual, audio and kinaesthetic methods into one activity in teaching created a very positive atmosphere for learning.

Student Feedback:

“Lecturer demonstrates care and enthusiasm. She tries to help us learn through songs and physical activity to diversify learning methods” .

3.2 Lyrics-based activity for language learning

As Werner (2021) pointed out, lyrics-based activity for language learning “can be viewed as a valuable means in the foreign language classroom, even though they cannot serve as universal remedy, and are most effective when combined with other materials and activities” . I have written many pieces of lyrics for class activities. For example, the following *kuaibanr* (快板儿) is for students when they only learned four lessons from scratch:

我姓王，是老二，朋友都叫我王小二；
 我王小二，不普通，有个儿子叫王京；
 小王京，十三岁，英文、法文他都会；
 莫泊桑 (Mòpōsāng)，海明威 (Hǎimíngwēi)，他天天看书也不累；
 朋友都说王京好，我说：“哪儿啊？不行，不行”；
 他还有个小妹妹，小妹妹，叫小美；
 她今年只有十一岁，英文、法文、德文跟日文：小美妹妹她都会！

There are several points which, if briefly explained or emphasized, would be beneficial for learners in the long run. For example: “老大，老二，…” are used to indicate seniority for children in a family; “儿” is used as a noun (儿子) and as a retroflex final suffix (哪儿); the transliteration of names or proper nouns (莫泊桑，海明威); “妹 and 美” can be used as examples for homophones and tones practice; and the rhyme and rhythm in Chinese poem reading and writing, just to name a few.

3.3 Singing for language learning

There is growing evidence that singing can have positive effect on language learning, too. As noted by Ur and Wright (1992), singing can be used as a tool to “get the students into the right mood for learning and it is also an interesting way for language learning” (p. 10). I wrote Chinese lyrics to match the popular tune of “*Brother John*” . Attention was paid to use words that reflect students’

level so that they can understand the contents while singing. A student with SIP who usually remained quiet also volunteered to sing the solo in a Zoom class, a testimony to show “such a learning environment made students feel comfortable and confident” (Jarvela and Renninger, 2014: 668). Below are examples for illustration.

For students at beginner level (CEFR A1):

大红苹果，大红苹果；真好吃，真好吃；

吃了一个又一个，吃了一个又一个；还想吃，还想吃！

青岛啤酒，青岛啤酒；真好喝，真好喝；

喝了一杯又一杯，喝了一杯又一杯；还想喝，还想喝！

…，…

For students at elementary level (CEFR A2) or higher:

二〇二一，二〇二一；不容易，不容易；

常常洗手戴口罩，常常洗手戴口罩；不忘记，不忘记！

…，…

The benefits of such activities are: “to give a quick warm-up of the class; to provide a relief after a period of intense effort and concentration; to prepare a change of mood or topic; to round off the lesson with a smile” (Ur and Wright, 1992: x).

Student Feedback:

“Considering the difficult situation, we have been living for the past year (2020-2021), I have really appreciated the teacher’s ideas to sing during the lessons because it not only helped us practice the language but also put everyone in a better mood” ;

“I also feel like the class environment created by the teacher made the class enjoyable and I generally felt comfortable in class” .

“ … an impressive feat given the number of students. The ability for the lecturer to adapt to the current situation (Covid-19), keep the lesson fun and informative” .

4. Discovery method

Discovery Method (发现式教学法) is a method of teaching in which students are not directly presented with a target structure of rules. Instead, students are given content in which the target structure is used. Students then discover the grammatical rule or figure out the pattern for themselves. The teacher's role is to guide students to their own discovery, not to give students the information on the grammar rule (Susan Verner, [https:// busyteacher.org/20580-discovery-technique-teaching-grammar.html](https://busyteacher.org/20580-discovery-technique-teaching-grammar.html)). The rationale is “students who learn with the discovery technique tend to remember the rules of grammar better because they have played a part in discovering them” (ditto). I applied discovery method in the teaching of sentence structures. I would like to illustrate this by the following two examples.

4.1 “de” used in the attributive clause:

The attributive clauses in English are expressed in a very different structure in Chinese but with explicit rules to follow. I wrote Chinese sentences and paired them with the English equivalents for students to discover the rules, i.e. how nouns are modified by the clauses using “de” .

Instruction: Compare the English in A with the Chinese translation in B and work out how “de” is used to modify nouns and then complete the sentences by finding the logical matches in C to B.

A	B	C
people who would like to go to China	Eg: 想去中国的人 (1)	是一件红毛衣。()
students who learn Chinese	学中文的学生 (2)	一定都很忙,很累。()
people who smoke and drink every day	天天抽烟,喝酒的人 (3)	当然很好吃。()
the dishes that/which my mum cooks/ the dishes cooked by my mum	妈妈做的菜 (4)	身体一定不好。()
the fruit that/which I bought today	我今天买的水果 (5)	也是我喜欢听的音乐。()
the things that/which he gave me	他给我的东西 (6)	Eg: 都应该学点儿中文。(1)
the music that he likes listening to	他喜欢听的音乐 (7)	很好吃,也很便宜。()
the place where he often goes drinking	他常去喝酒的地方 (8)	都是很贵的地方。()

With this discovery method, students could “generate an infinite number of well-formed structures” (Yule, 2006: 165) and avoided “negative transfer” from L1 (ditto).

Classroom observations suggest that students can learn faster and are able to produce correct sen-

tences independently, because this method can make them aware of the syntactic structures in Chinese as against English or their native languages and be able to produce “infinitive” sentences correctly.

Student Feedback:

“She explained things well” ; “The structure of learning was easy to follow and always well explained” .

“Pang is a brilliant teacher who is very good at explaining all of the grammar points we needed to learn”.

4.2 “shi...de” used to express and emphasize past events:

Instruction: Compare the English in A with the Chinese in B and work out how “shi...de” is used to express events which happened in the past and then answer the questions.

A	B
What time did you have breakfast today?	今天你是几点吃早饭的?
How did you come to school today?	今天你是怎么来学校的?
Did you come here by bike?	你是骑自行车来(这儿)的吗?
Whom did you come to school with?	你是跟谁一起来的?
When did you start to learn Chinese?	你是什么时候开始学中文的?
Did you start to learn Chinese from childhood?	你是从小就开始学中文的吗?
How old were you when you started to learn Chinese?	你是从几岁开始学中文的?
Did you come to London two years ago?	你是前年来伦敦的吗?
Did you graduate from middle school last year?	你是去年中学毕业的吗?
Where did you go to middle school?	你是在哪儿(什么地方)上的中学?
Where did you buy this Chinese book?	你是在哪儿买的这本书?
Did you buy it from our school bookshop?	你是在学校书店买的吗?

Obviously, these sentences are used to highlight the circumstances of “shi...de” for past events and emphasize the key issues about *when*, *where*, *how* and *who* these events were related to. The positive results of this method support the view that “to engage the learners’ mind to figure out the meanings by themselves, identify the patterns and understand grammatical concepts, the learners will remember better and will be able to retain and use what they have learned” (Pang and Herd, 2021: x).

Student Feedback:

“The teacher was very engaging and informative. She explained things well and went through exercises well. She always gave helpful feedback and she highlighted anything important” .

5. Scaffolding method

The concept of scaffolding method (支架式教学法) arises from the study in the context of language development. Drawing on the metaphor of scaffolding in building construction to describe how learners can perform more complex tasks with the help and support of more knowledgeable people. The essence of the pedagogical logic of scaffolding is to enable learners to work on real-world tasks applying the knowledge and skills they have learned; and the teacher directs, hints or offers prompts that help the learners complete the tasks (Brian and Tabak, 2014: 44).

I applied scaffolding approach in the development of teaching materials for students at advanced level (CEFR C1-C2). Apart from the attention paid to linguistic aspects such as set phrases, idioms, figure of speech, lexical bundles, collocations, etc., the course material reflected Krashen's principle (Krashen, 1982: 21-24): "new input should be natural, communicative, and roughly-tuned" and selected authentic articles to reflect cotemporary topics" (ditto). Articles about "out sourcing (外包)", "digital media (数字媒体)", "the Belt and Road Initiative (一带一路倡议)", etc. were selected and with the support of vocabulary, exercises, background information, students were asked to write compositions discussing such questions as: 试讨论外包的利与弊 (The pros and cons of out sourcing); 纸质媒体是否会被数字媒体所取代? (Will traditional media be replaced by digital media?) 谈谈你对一带一路倡议的看法 (What is your point of view on the Belt and Road Initiative?). In answering such driving questions, students need to do further readings and, thus, the learning environment was extended beyond the confines of the classroom and with the support they have obtained through the process of learning, students could aim higher. Some students' writing on such topics demonstrated their critical thinking vis à vis these contemporary issues, which, in fact, is the fundamental goal for students of Chinese at the advanced level to achieve.

Feedback of this module in 2020 showed that what had been designed was appropriate:

"The vocabulary lists were suitable to the level. Sample sentences for grammar points in the book were useful. Varied and stimulating assessment methods" ;

"A very challenging module, ideal for 4th year students seeking to push their knowledge up a notch and learn a lot of the more academic and business language, which is extremely beneficial" .

Summary

In this article I reviewed some teaching methods and activities in my teaching practice, which, I would like to mention, also worked well during the “lock-down period” in online scenario. The positive feedback indicates that such methods contributed to the success of helping students to achieve the learning outcome, i.e. an implementation of the principle of “constructive alignment (成果导向教学法)” (Biggs, 2014). I, therefore, think it is never too much to emphasize that teachers should make conscious efforts in every step in the teaching process to ensure that the teaching delivery including teaching materials and assessments are aligned to the intended learning outcome, which, in turn, would guarantee students’ positive learning experience. The choice of teaching method depends on what fits the objectives of the classes. To achieve this, professional expertise, good craftsmanship and passion in the teaching are fundamental, which form the essential foundation upon which new technology can be employed.

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