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Are your students using their brains? : Making CLT activities meaningful to students

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# ARE YOUR STUDENTS USING THEIR BRAINS?

-MAKING CLT ACTIVITIES MEANINGFUL TO STUDENTS-

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# TYPICAL ENGLISH LESSON IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN JAPAN

T: Good morning, class. How are you?

Ss: Good morning, Ms. Hayashi. I'm fine.

Thank you, and you? (in chorus)

T: I'm good. What's the date today?

Ss: It's July 19. (in chorus)

T: What day of the week?

Ss: It's Friday.

T: OK. So how is the weather today?

Ss: It's sunny.

Mandatory “Course of Study” by the Ministry of Education

1990 Course of Study: communication: the buzz word for English education in Japan

Reinforced in 2000 and 2010 revision

“Foster communicative competence”

Teachers try to make their lessons communicative instead of traditional grammar-translation, but they have had very little training in CLT

As shown in the opening conversation between T and Ss, the number of meaningful and purposeful interactions is very few.

# TEXTBOOK FOR JHS 3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE



# MENTAL INTERACTION

1. Experience of having been to a place vs. browsing through travel guides
2. TV reporters reporting from the scene of an accident
3. Typhoon report on TV
2. Watching news on TV vs. movies

Simulated experience: mental action



Miyako Isld. Okinawa, Japan



# MEANINGFUL COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

How? How can student teachers put the theory they have studied into their practice?

How can student teachers create meaningful communicative activities that match intellectual and language proficiency levels of junior high school students?



# CONTEXT

- ◉ Teacher education course at U of M
  - Primary Education Major 75 Ss per grade
  - English Education Minors 5 Ss per grade
  - Secondary Education Major 60 Ss per grade
  - English Education Major 6 Ss per grade

## Compulsory Courses

- 1) **Study of TEFL I, II**
- 2) **Lesson Study in TEFL I,II**
- 3) **Teaching Practicum I, II, III**

## Elective Courses

- 1) Applied linguistics
- 2) Literature
- 3) Communication

# STUDY OF TEFL II

- ◉ Compulsory course for juniors
- ◉ Fall semester 2012
- ◉ One 90-minute class per week for 15 weeks
- ◉ No. of Ss 16

## Pedagogy I

ALM, TPR, SW, CLL, CLT (classic)

# COURSE OBJECTIVES AND AIMS

- ◉ By the end of this course, Ss will be able to
  1. articulate the basic principles underlying
    - 1) Content-Based Instruction (CBI)
    - 2) Task-Based Instruction (TBI)
  2. gain hands-on experience of meaningful CBI and TBI
  3. implement CBI and TBI principles in peer teaching lessons according to one's own understanding of the principles
  4. and reflect on peer teaching lessons

## Aim

Ss can create meaningful CBI and TBI activities in which junior high school students will use their brains.

## SOME PRINCIPLES OF CBI

- ⦿ People learn a language more successfully when they use the target language as a means of acquiring information, rather than as an end in itself.
- ⦿ CBI better reflects learner's needs for learning a second language
- ⦿ Content provides a coherent framework that can be used to link and develop all of the language skills.

(Richards 2006: 29)

## A DEFINITION OF TASK

“a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form”

(Nunan 2004: 4)

# THEORY INTO PRACTICE IN JAPANESE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

“The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”  
(Gestalt psychology)

Remembering principles does not lead to real  
understanding and implementation of CBI-TBI.

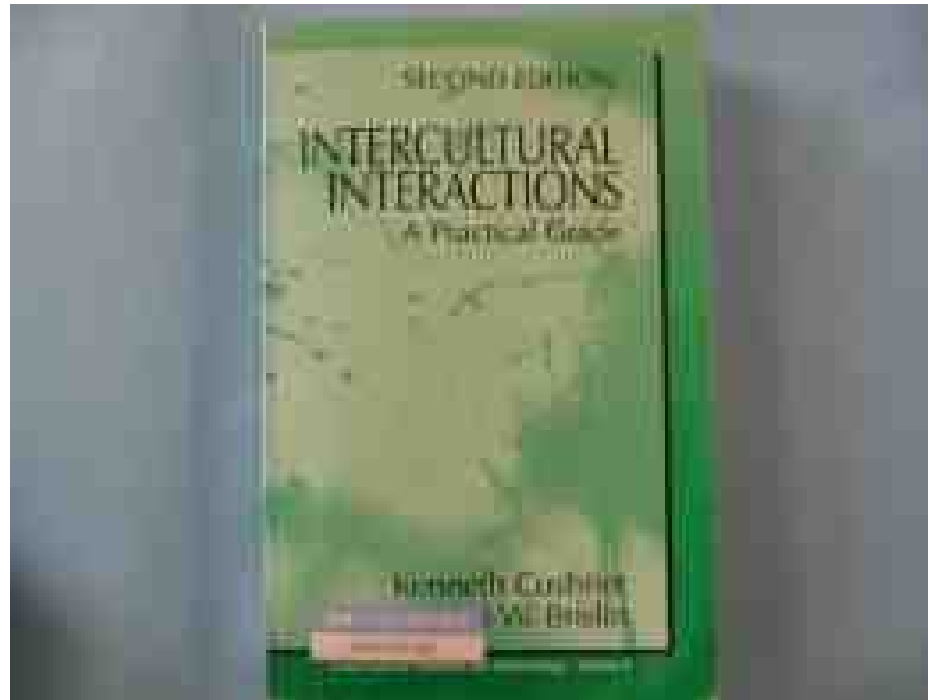
Meaning must be experienced to make it  
meaningful.

## SEMINAR IN TEFL II

- ◉ **Teacher educators and student teachers**
- ◉ Does a teacher educator's explanation of English language teaching methodologies lead to student teachers' understanding?
- ◉ Isn't what a teacher educator doing just reading a user's manual aloud?
- ◉ "Teacher educators can preach but they cannot teach what they preach."
- ◉ Student teachers will gain hands-on experiences in creating meaningful activities so that they can adopt CBI-TBI to make classroom activities truly meaningful for students.

# CBI PRINCIPLES

1. use the target language as a means of acquiring information (CBI)



1. Cuhner & Brislin 1996. *Intercultural Interactions*. CA: Sage



# TBI PRINCIPLES

1. use of existing language resources (TBI#1)
2. an outcome (TBI#2)
3. a focus on meaning (TBI#3)
4. use of communication strategies and interactional skills (TBI#4)

(Richards, J.C. 2006) retrieved on Jan. 15, 2012

<http://www.professorjackrichards.com/pdfs/communicative-language-teaching-today-v2.pdf>

# GETTING THE WHOLE PICTURE

- 1) Study a conflict in an intercultural interaction
- 2) Discuss the content in Lt
- 3) Produce a skit with a scenario

Assumptions:

Students experience construction of one's own understanding of CBI-TBI principles

# SAMPLE SCENARIO COMPOSED BY STUDENTS

- ⦿ Narrator : N            FA : Friend A
- ⦿ David : D              FB : Friend B
- ⦿ Chen L-men : C        FC : Friend C
- ⦿
- ⦿ N: He is David, an American university student studying Chinese in Taiwan. He is Chen Li-men, a young man from Taipei. They met at a local food stand.
- ⦿
- ⦿ D: Wow! There's a local food stand. Let's go.
- ⦿ C: Hi!
- ⦿ D: Hi!
- ⦿ C: Do you like Taiwanese food?
- ⦿ D: Yes, of course! This is very delicious, but smells very bad. Uh, I'm David. Can I ask your name?
- ⦿ C: My name is Chen Li-men. Spell is C H E N, L I M E N. Please call me Chen. I've lived in Taipei for twenty years.
- ⦿ D: Really? I've lived in this city for two years. And I want many many friends!
- ⦿ N: They got along with each other immediately.
- ⦿ D: By the way, I'm interested in the outdoors, for example, climbing, hiking and camping.
- ⦿ C: Great! Why don't you go hiking with me? If you agree with me, I'll plan everything.
- ⦿ D: That's a good idea! Thank you, Chen.
- ⦿ C: You're welcome. I'll call you after completing our plan

# STUDENTS PERFORMING A SKIT



## SS FEED BACK ON THE COURSE

- ◎ “By experiencing CBI and TBI, I think I will be able to use these approaches in the upcoming teaching practicum.”
- ◎ “This course was really hard for me, yet I feel I have gained a lot.”
- ◎ “ I was able to improve my English ability in this course while at the same time experiencing CBI and TBI.”

(student feedback on Jan. 11)

# KEY TO SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

- ◉ Teachers' awareness of what it means to be meaningful to Ss
- ◉ Simplistic "Mickey Mouse Club" communication activities will not lead to real learning.
- ◉ Ss must use their brains to learn to communicate by communicating.
- ◉ Student teachers' experience of creating meaningful task/activity will help them modify the textbook activities and make them meaningful to Ss.

# FUTURE OF ENGLISH EDUCATION IN JAPAN

- ◉ Foreign Language Activity in elementary schools: compulsory 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades
- ◉ More emphasis on communication in junior high schools
- ◉ Use of English as a means of instruction in high schools

# SS FEED BACK ON THE COURSE

- Questions in Student Feedback Questionnaire
- 1 Delivery
- 2 Passion
- 3 Teaching style: interactive
- 4 Encouraging Self-study
- 5 Use of syllabus
- 6 Difficulty
- 7 Stimulating
- 8 Easy-to-understand
- 9 My attitude toward this course
- 10 Being listened to
- 11 Satisfaction

Rated 4.8 out of 5 in FD feedback





Student teachers need to experience how to make activities meaningful and purposeful so that their Ss will have to use their brains in communicative activities.

