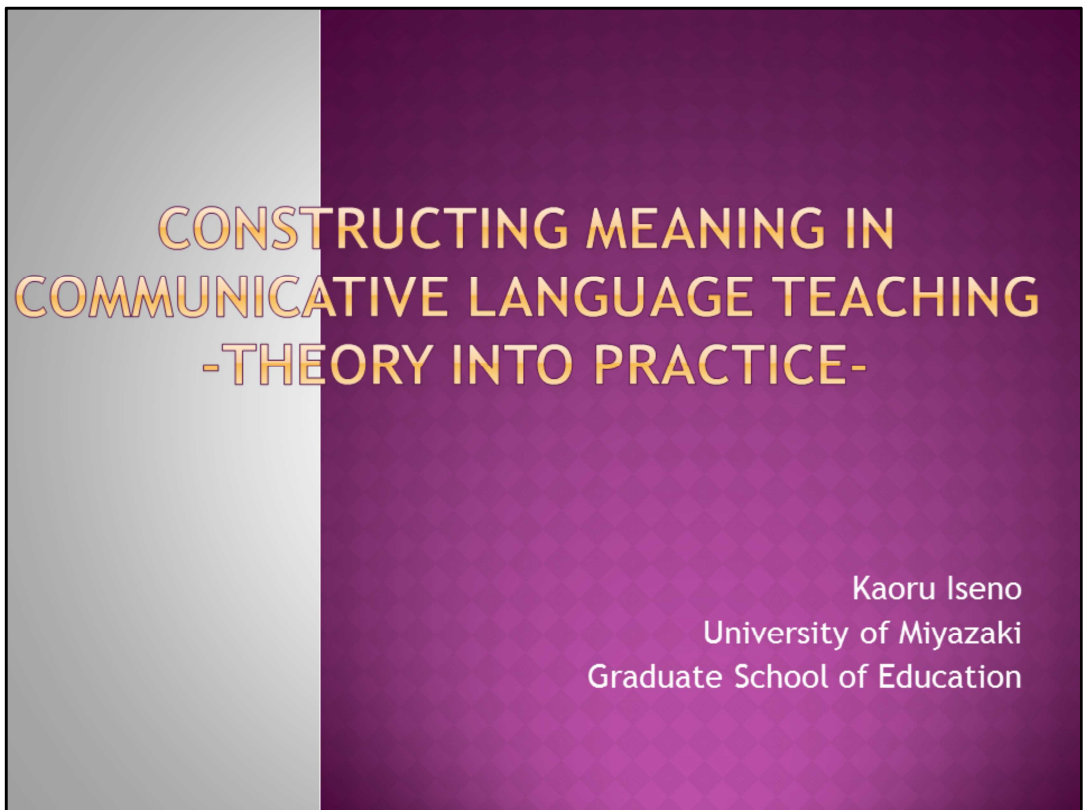




Constructing Meaning in Communicative
Language Teaching : Theory into Practice

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CONSTRUCTING MEANING IN
COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING
-THEORY INTO PRACTICE-

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CONTEXT

- ◉ Teacher education program at U of M
 - 1) Study of Teaching English as a Foreign Language I, II
 - 2) Pedagogy of TEFL I,II
 - 3) Seminar in TEFL I-IV
- ◉ Pedagogy of TEFL IV
- ◉ Elective
- ◉ Two credits
- ◉ One 90-minute class per week for 15 weeks
- ◉ No. of Ss: 8 (3 male, 5 female)

Good morning, every one. My name is Kaoru Iseno. I am a teacher educator at University of Miyazaki. Today, I would like to share my experience of helping student teachers put Communicative Language Teaching theories into practice by constructing their own meaning of CLT theories.

First, let me explain the teaching context. At University of Miyazaki, we offer 6 courses to English education majors: namely, Study of TEFL I, II and Pedagogy of TEFL I, II and Seminar in TEFL I-IV. Of these six courses, I teach Pedagogy of TEFL I, II and Seminar of TEFL III, IV.

Today I am going to report on the Seminar in TEFL IV course I taught in the fall semester in 2008 school year.

This is an elective course. The number of credits is two, and the class meets for ninety minutes per week for 15 weeks. The number of students is 8.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- ◉ 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 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

Prior to this course, all the students have completed Seminar in TEFL III course in which they learned and experienced Audio-Lingual Method, Total Physical Response, Silent Way, Community Language Learning, and classic Communicative Language Teaching techniques. In other words, they have briefly reviewed and explored the transitions in English language teaching methodologies by the time they take this course.

So, in this course, I set four learning objectives for Ss.

1. articulate the basic principles underlying
 - 1) Content-Based Instruction (CBI)
 - 2) Task-Based Instruction (TBI)
2. gain hands-on experience of 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

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)

We started out with learning CBI and TBI principles and definitions.

Here are some principles that underlie CBI taken from Richards 2006.
(Read the assumptions.)

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)

And here is a definition of classroom task from Nunan 2004.

THEORY INTO PRACTICE

How? How can students teachers put the theory they study into their practice?

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

Meaning must be experienced to make it meaningful.

And so goes on various definitions. The question is how to put these principles into practice. Simply remembering the principles does not lead to implementing them.

How can I help my students to grasp or feel the meaning of such principles and definitions?

The Gestalt psychologists say “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” This means that simply remembering principles does not lead to real understanding. Students must be able to see the whole picture in order to put CBI and TBI theories into practice.
In short, the meanings of theories must be experienced.



Let me explain this point by using traveling analogy.

Here is a photo, and I guess some of you may know where this is.

It is Higashi-Henna-Misaki in the Miyako Island. I have visited the light house at the tip of this peninsula with my students. Whenever I look at this photo, I can remember vividly that memorable trip I have taken with my students. I can remember the emerald green sea and cobalt blue sky. After six years, I can still feel it and see the whole picture .

For people who haven't been to this place, it's just another photo of a scenic spot. It is beautiful but that's all. Words can never convey how impressed I was when I was there.

1. Experience of having been to a place vs. Travel guides
2. TV reporters reporting from the scene of an accident
3. Typhoon report on TV

Simulated experience: realistic, meaningful

Teacher educators and student teachers

It's just like the difference between reading a travel guide and have an experience of visiting the place.

Here is another analogy.

Whenever a big accident happens, we see TV reporters reporting from the scene of an accident.

During the typhoon season, we often see TV reporters standing on the typhoon-hit spots, wet and drenched to the bone, and in a blowing gust, give live reports on TV. Surely, this makes the typhoon more realistic to viewers who may be sitting on a warm living room couch or sitting on a rug in front of a fire place.

In other words, they try to make the reports more meaningful to the viewers.

As I wrote in the presentation abstract, you cannot learn how to use a mobile phone by reading the manual, just as you cannot learn how to swim by reading a swimming instruction book.

Similarly, remembering CBI and TBI principles will not make the teacher capable of implementing them. Furthermore, no matter how much the teacher educator explains the theories, unless student teachers themselves grasp the whole picture, they won't be able to make meanings of what they learn. After all, you cannot convey the beauty of the coral sea by explaining.

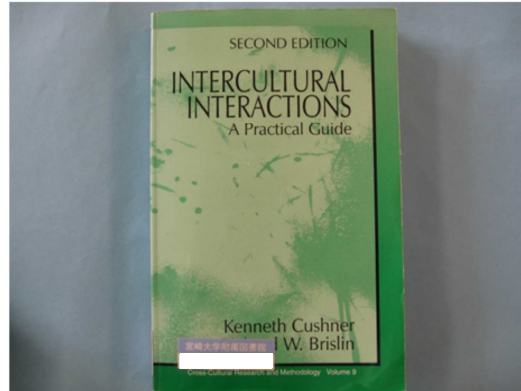
METHODOLOGY COURSE

- ◉ “Teacher educators can preach but they cannot teach what they preach.”

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? Can a teacher educator teach what they preach? This is the assumption on which I have structured Seminar in TEFL courses.

CBI PRINCIPLES

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



The answer I came up with is to have them experience CBI and TBI on their own. In other words, instead of browsing through travels guides, they must go to the place and see for themselves what it really looks like.

So, let me go back to CBI and TBI principles and show you how I structured Pedagogy IV course.

In order to help Ss experience the first CBI principle, I decided to use a textbook on intercultural interactions. This is based on my belief that a classroom is the place where learners bring with themselves their life stories and, in a broader sense, it is like a “salad bowl” where different personal cultures encounter and clash with each other. Therefore, teachers need to cultivate awareness in perceiving the differences learners bring to the classroom in order to teach well. This is the textbook I chose.

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)

In order to have my Ss experience TBI principles #1-#4, I decided to have my students make up a short skit out of the incidents or vignettes they studied as “content” and they are to present in pairs the intercultural incidents.

GETTING THE WHOLE PICTURE

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

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

This is the basic procedure I have adopted in Seminar if TEFL IV course.

After carefully reading the incident, Ss discuss the content in English and prepare a skit in which they convey what happened in the incident to peers. In this way, students gain a deeper understanding of the meanings behind the incident. In other words, they can feel what each character in the incident experienced.

Next, students make up a skit in their own English. This task will require them to write a scenario, prepare visuals, and practice in acting it out. In short, they will experience and feel the meaning of the incidents and convey it peers. Through this lesson structure, I hope student teachers will gain a hands-on experience of CBI and TBI.

Let me now show you the skits that students performed to present the intercultural incidents mentioned above.

First, a story of an American family in Belize, a small Central American country.

Second, a problem of English language in Brazil.

Third, an American working in Philippines and his business associate.

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

Finally, student feedback conducted by Faculty Development Committee shows that students rated this course with the average of 4.8 out of 5.

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.”

Some of the written feedback are:

“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.”

Thank you.