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DISCUSSION IN CHINESE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Discussion in Chinese Language Classroom

The article deals with discussions in foreign language classrooms. Educators in the field of teaching methodology are unanimous in their opinion that discussions are very helpful in classrooms where foreign languages are being taught. The advantages of using discussions in language classrooms are numerous. At the same time educators are aware of some disadvantages of a whole group or class discussion. The objective of this article is threefold, aiming to: (1) to provide an overview of classroom discussion as an approach to teaching (2) to outline instructional effects of discussion; (3) to offer approaches for holding discussions. There are different approaches for holding discussions. Some of them which are suitable for teachers of Chinese as a foreign language are described in the article. They are the following: using discussion in conjunction with other teaching models; recitations discussions; discovery or inquiry discussions; discussions to share experiences; small group discussion. Examples of topics for discussions which can be recommended for second, third, and fourth year university students who learn Chinese as a foreign language are given in the article.

Key words: discussion, teaching Chinese as a foreign language, Language classrooms.

With the rapid rise of China as a global economic powerhouse, there is an increasing interest around the world in the country and its language. As a consequence, TCFL – the Teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language – is a rapidly growing field and an increasing number of learners seek to master Chinese. It is important to note that in the educational literature Chinese is often mentioned as an international language. Rapid growth of learners of Chinese triggers a demand for more educators who are properly trained to teach the language in different regions of the world. There are many TCFL programs in the UK, the USA, Canada, and many other countries including Ukraine. The Master degree program at Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University, for example, aims to equip students with a

comprehensive theoretical grounding in Chinese linguistics and TCFL theory and methodology, as well as practical TCFL skills such as course and lesson planning, selection and development of teaching materials, effective language teaching strategies, classroom management, assessment etc. In the article we will look at how discussion as a particular teaching method can be used by university instructors of Chinese as a foreign language.

Discussions in foreign language classrooms have been used since the advent of audio-lingual method. Educators in the field of teaching methodology are unanimous in their opinion that discussions are very helpful in classrooms where foreign languages are being taught [1, 2, 3, 7, 8]. Discussions develop language skills, provide opportunities for students to think critically about the topics which they study and at the same time provide grounds for teachers to check students' understanding of assignments, and readings. Besides, effective class discussions create a community in which students are willing to share their ideas and to accept constructive criticism from their group mates.

The advantages of using discussions in language classrooms are numerous. Among them are the following: whole group discussions provide for greater interaction between teacher and students; instructors maintain a greater control over what is being taught because they are able to steer the discussion; teachers can check on what students are retaining through questions posed; students have a tendency to stay focused on the lesson because they might be called on to answer questions; students feel more comfortable asking and answering questions during whole group discussions.

At the same time educators are aware of some disadvantages of a whole group or class discussion [2, 4, 5, 7]. They are the following: whole group discussions require setting up and enforcing ground rules for students. If these rules are not enforced, there is a possibility that the discussion could quickly go off-topic. Students whose listening comprehension and speaking skills are weak will have trouble understanding what is being said and expressing their own thoughts and ideas.

Many scholars have studied the problem of effective classroom discussions. Among them are the following: Brown D. H., Good Th. I., Moore D. K., Omaggio H. A., Richard-Amato A. P., Wallace J. M., Yun Wei, and many other educators.

The objective of this article is threefold, aiming to: (1) to provide an overview of classroom discussion as an approach to teaching (2) to outline instructional effects of discussion; (3) to offer approaches for holding discussions.

Because classroom discussion is an important aspect of teaching Chinese as a foreign language it is difficult to examine it apart from all other executive and interactive functions of teaching. Nonetheless, we will try to provide an overview of classroom discussion as a distinct approach to teaching and will offer specific procedures for teachers to consider. First we will look at common ingredients of a discussion.

Any discussion can be perceived as an approach to teaching with three common ingredients:

- Both student and teacher talk are required.
- Students are expected to engage into dialogue and conversation on topics being taught and learned.
- Students and teachers are expected to practice and publicly display their productive, thinking, and communication skills.

Today discussion is the most preferred method employed by teachers who choose to reduce their own talk in order to involve more students in talking in the target language, in thinking processes and discovery. For many years, discussion was viewed solely as an alternative to lecture, and a lively debate existed among practicing teachers, as well as educational researchers, as to which was most effective. The contemporary view does not put discussion against other strategies or models of teaching but instead recognizes that (1) discussion is a strategy that does not necessarily stand alone but can be used with other models of teaching and in a variety of situations, and (2) the choices about when to use discussion depend on goals and objectives the teacher wants to accomplish.

Now we will look at the instructional effects of discussion. Discussions in Chinese language classroom are used by teachers to achieve at least three important instructional objectives.

1. To help students construct their own meaning in Chinese. Discussing a topic helps students develop their listening comprehension and speaking skills and increase their ability to think in the language they learn.

2. To promote student involvement and engagement. Research as well as common sense would argue that for true learning to take place students must take responsibility for their own learning and not depend solely on the teacher. Using discussion is one means of doing this. Discussion gives students public opportunities to express their own ideas.

3. To help students learn important communication skills. Because discussions are public, they provide means for the teacher to find out what language skills students possess and how they are processing the ideas and information being taught. Discussions thus provide social settings for teachers to help students learn important communication skills such as stating ideas clearly, listening to others, responding to others in appropriate ways, and asking good questions.

There are different approaches for holding discussions. Some of them which are suitable for teachers of Chinese as a foreign language are described below.

1. Using discussion in conjunction with other teaching models. All of the teaching models require discussion at some time during their execution. For instance, when using the presentation, we are aware of the importance of getting students to use new knowledge or skills as a way for the teacher to check for understanding as well as to extend student thinking. Cooperative learning requires students to verbally interact, although the emphasis is often on student-to-student exchange in small groups. Inquiry teaching requires constant exchange between teachers and learners in all phases of the lesson.

2. Recitations discussions. Many times teachers ask students to read about a particular topic. This reading may be as short as a paragraph or as long as a chapter of a book. It can cover a spate of topics, various literary forms such as newspaper

articles, plays, poems, short stories, novels, or pieces of humor. Teachers ask students to do this reading with a definite purpose in mind. Sometimes it is to learn important information about a topic; other times it is to become familiar with a particular author, a specific type of literature, or a point of view. Brief question-and-answer sessions (recitation discussions) over assigned reading materials can provide teachers with a means to check for student understanding as well as providing motivation for students to complete their reading assignments.

3. Discovery or inquiry discussions. Some discussions conducted by teachers are for the specific purpose of getting students to participate directly in the process of thinking and to be discoverers of their own ideas. Normally, this type of discussion is referred to as an inquiry or discovery lesson. Although a number of specific approaches have been developed, they all have a common format: the teacher gets the lesson started by presenting students with puzzling events or what has been called “mystery spots”. They refer to puzzling situations that are not immediately explainable, such as instances where social events confront wisdom, a person changes shapes of metal objects like spoons or forks by just looking at them, water appears not to freeze when the cold is intense, and the like. Because these situations are puzzling to students and create cognitive dissonance, they provide a natural motivation to think. When teachers are using this approach, they encourage students to generate hypotheses to explain the puzzling events, to ask questions, and to express ideas. In this type of discussion, teachers help students become conscious about their own Chinese language skills and thinking processes.

4. Discussions to share experiences. Often teachers hold discussions for the purpose of helping students develop shared meaning from common experiences or to confront one another with differences of opinion. Younger children may be asked to talk about what they learned from their visit to the museum, or the zoo, or the puppet theatre. Older students may be asked to talk about what they learned from Confucius quotations they read in Chinese, English or any other language. Important current events such as elections, summit meetings, earthquakes, or a natural disaster are often discussed in the classroom. Global issues and controversial topics can be also

discussed so that different points of view may be explored. This type of discussion aims at helping students form and express independent thought and opinions. Through dialogue about shared experience and argument about what these experiences mean, productive language skills are refined.

5. Small group discussion. The class is divided into small groups, with students assuming responsibility for the discussion. The structure of the learning environment surrounding small group discussion is incredibly important. As with cooperative learning and inquiry teaching, the environment for conducting small group discussions in the language classroom is characterized by open processes and active student roles. It also demands careful attention to the use of physical space. The teacher may provide varying degrees of structure and focus to a particular discussion, depending upon the nature of the class and the learning objectives.

Many school teachers and university instructors of Chinese as a foreign language can be heard complaining that their students “have nothing to say”. They complain, for example, that they have no opinions and are not prepared to discuss anything. Part of the problem here is the way which educators approach discussion as an activity. If students are asked to express themselves on a difficult topic in front of their group mates in Chinese language and without any warning, they may find themselves reluctant to do so. Of course, some discussions develop spontaneously during the course of a lesson. A student reacts to something that is said, another student joins in, and soon the whole class is involved. Such discussions are often the most successful sessions that the teacher and the class can have together. But such discussions are difficult to be planned.

Thus, discussion is an approach to teaching which consists of a goal-focused group conversation involving either groups of students or the whole class. In order to produce positive results for both learner and teacher, students are supposed to display interest in suggested discussion topics and discussions should be organized properly. The instructor should design pre instructional and post instructional tasks, choose the correct discussion patterns, and take into consideration the knowledge base on classroom discussion.

Below we give a few examples of topics for discussions which can be recommended for second, third, and fourth year university students who learn Chinese as a foreign language.

The role women play in society in China and Ukraine. Family relationships in China and Ukraine: the same or different? How people see in New Year in China and Ukraine. Successful people – what they do to be successful. Distant learning: pros and cons. Cultural stereotypes: are they positive or negative? Cultural stereotypes: are they helpful in communication with others? Cultural stereotypes: do we have to take them into account when we talk to people from other cultures? Culture shock: its symptoms. Culture shock is normal and most people experience it – do you agree with the statement? Culture shock: what do we have to know when we face it? Smoking and dangerous illnesses: the relationship between them. What does it mean to be a man of education?

In the article we have provided an overview of classroom discussion as an approach to teaching, outlined instructional effects of discussion, offered approaches for holding discussions and have given a few examples of topics for discussions.

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Федічева Н. В.

Дискусія на заняттях з китайської мови

В статті розглядається дискусія як підхід до навчання, що може використовуватися в процесі навчання китайської мови як іноземній. Педагоги в галузі методики викладання єдині в думці, що дискусії дуже ефективні в класах, де викладається іноземна мова. Дискусії розвивають мовні навички, надають можливість студентам думати критично про теми, які вони вивчають, і, в той же час, дають вчителям підстави для перевірки розуміння учнями завдань і текстів для читання. Ефективні дискусії у класі створюють атмосферу співпраці, в якій студенти діляться своїми ідеями і сприймають конструктивну критику своїх товаришів з групи. Надано огляд дискусії в аудиторії як окремого підходу до навчання і запропоновані конкретні моделі дискусій викладачам вишів та вчителям шкіл. Описується використання дискусії в поєднанні з іншими моделями навчання: короткі сесії у форматі питання-відповідь щодо матеріалів для читання; дискусія – відкриття або знахідка; обговорення з метою обміну досвідом; дискусія у малих групах. Наводяться приклади тем для дискусій, які можуть бути використані на заняттях зі студентами другого, третього і четвертого курсів, які вивчають китайську мову як іноземну.

Ключові слова: дискусія, обговорення, навчання китайської мови, мовні класи.

Федичева Н. В.

Дискусия на занятиях по китайскому языку

В статье рассматривается дискуссия в качестве подхода к обучению в процессе обучения китайскому языку как иностранному. Педагоги в области методики преподавания едины во мнении, что дискуссии очень эффективны в классах, где преподается иностранный язык. Дискуссии развивают навыки говорения, дают студентам возможность думать критически о темах, которые они изучают, и, в то же время, дают учителям основания для проверки понимания студентами задания и текстов для чтения. Эффективные дискуссии в аудитории создают атмосферу сотрудничества, в которой студенты делятся своими идеями и принимают конструктивную критику своих товарищей по группе. Дается обзор дискуссии в аудитории в качестве подхода к обучению и предложены конкретные модели дискуссий для преподавателей вузов и учителей школ. Описывается использование дискуссии в сочетании с другими моделями обучения: короткие сессии в формате вопрос-ответ; дискуссия – открытие или находка; дискуссия с целью обмена опытом; дискуссия в малых группах. Приводятся примеры тем для дискуссий, которые могут быть

использованы на занятиях со студентами второго, третьего и четвертого курсов обучения, изучающих китайский язык как иностранный.

Ключевые слова: дискуссия, обсуждение, обучение китайскому языку, языковые классы.

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