

The role of communication to enhance student access to language learning: A case report of TA training in Central Eurasian Studies

Beatrix Burghardt, Language Coordinator, Central Eurasian Studies, Indiana University Bloomington, ceuslc@indiana.edu. ISSOTL 2009.

Pre-semester TA orientation

Goal

prepare instructors for teaching
familiarize instructors with IU and department specific policies and requirements

Activities

information session (talking 'at')
micro-teaching/skill-building session
campus-wide workshops

(http://www.iub.edu/~teaching/ourservices/events_sem.php
and <http://teaching.iub.edu/events.php>)

Teaching, learning and values

Teaching as interaction
Establishing relations between teacher-student, student-student

Teaching and values
"The essence of language teaching, like the essence of all teaching, lies in values: That is, it is moral in nature."
Johnston, 2002

Teaching as a concern for others
Caring is "rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness"
Noddings, 1984



Reflections on TA preparation practices

Pre-semester orientation sessions in CEUS follow general pattern of activities .

Discussions among TA trainers suggest that "too often we may ask a program to 'DO A WORKSHOP' for us and it isn't what we expect..."
Valerie O'Loughlin, Health Sciences

Previous experience in CEUS has shown that

- learning a less commonly taught language by nature may present additional learning challenges for some students
- language instruction requires frequent and active interaction with the students , so instructors need to be able to 'notice'
- inherent to the intensity of the summer language program learning challenges may be highlighted that may otherwise remain unseen to regular instruction during the academic year
- certain challenges impact the classroom's daily life beyond the level of the individual learner
- interactive training tends to have more lasting effects in terms of application

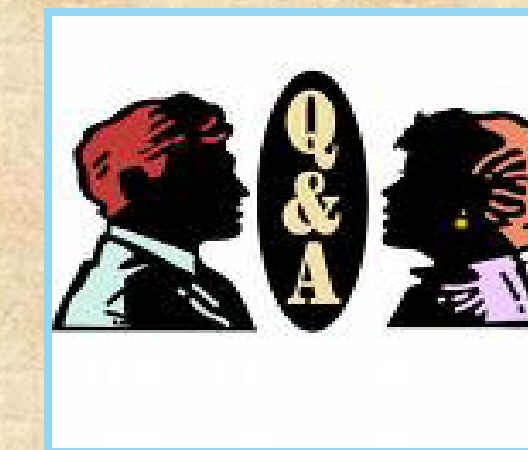
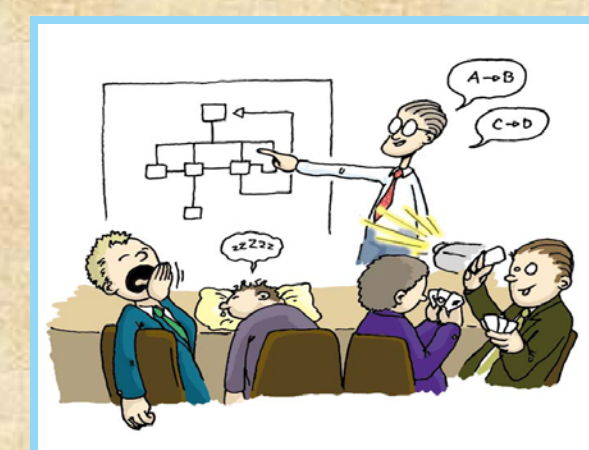
References:
Johnston, B. (2002). Values in English Language Teaching. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
Noddings, C. (1984). Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education. Berkeley: University of California Press.

The dilemma for the TA trainer:

How to increase the effectiveness of the presentation offered by IU's Office of Disabilities Services for Students (DSS) for purposes of TA training?

The solution: Tell me, show me, involve me ...

Change the information session to an interactive session.



Process

Steps

Find out what the basic workshop has to offer (content, format)
Identify discipline-specific, relevant aspects of requested workshop
Share the needs and specific traits of your department
Review previously known cases
Identify the issues and the solutions
Create questions that address the specific issues

Excerpt from CEUS-DSS correspondence

[T]he important aspects of our language program include the following:

The current pedagogical approach is the so-called communicative approach, so students need to be highly interactive, for example: (1) talk, (2) talk back to teacher and (3) talk to each other. The same 'exchange of messages' in written form is also expected. Students also keep journal. Any relevant experiences?

Many languages use non-Latin based scripts: Arabic and Cyrillic. Some use either one or the other, OR both. Any relevant experiences?

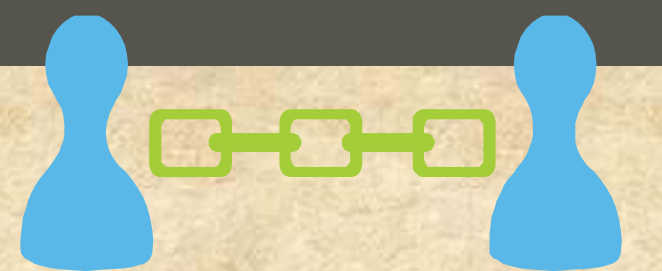
In addition, CEUS has hybrid distance language classes. What happens in distance interactive learning? How is it different?

In short, when do you start asking questions, what should make the teacher 'suspicious'?

How can we help our learners survive? What are the ideal circumstances to survive?

The language programs/curricula have to meet local and national standards as well as funding agency requirements. So, the teacher cannot slow down, for example. But what ELSE can we do to help the student – within the limitations?

Lessons learnt: building a partnership



Departmental level

- having a pre-established reporting chain between instructor and language coordinator is useful: information is centralized, easy to access, protects instructor and students.
- teachers respond better to interactive session
→ shows in increased sensitivity/responsiveness to student needs
- TA training sessions, such as DSS, are more beneficial if conducted *after* instructors have met the students.

Office of Disability Services for Students

"The CEUS department invited the Office of Disability Services for Students to make a presentation on the provision of disability services at IU. What began as a power point quickly became a lively conversation in which DSS learned a great deal about the teaching and the acquisition of another language. Our two departments have formed a mutually beneficial collaboration which, in its turn, has led to the creation of enriched learning experiences for students, the ultimate beneficiaries."
Martha Engstrom, Director, Disability Services for Students

Next steps in the language program

Create DSS session for students

- many students are not aware of DSS services
- students do not realize how learning difficulties in another disciplines may also impact their performance in the language class
- students may not realize that in an intensive language program previously unnoticed problems may surface

Maintain cooperation with DSS at department level

Continue providing specialized training for language instructors and invite other language departments



Feedback and the importance of sharing*

"...what I took away was the understanding that one could work with DSS to come up with discipline-specific programming (I never knew that!)"

Diane Reilly, Associate Professor, History of Art

"You provided us with a step-by-step guide to help all of us prepare workshops that best meet our needs. [...] From now on I will try to give as much explicit feedback and direction to a workshop presenter to ensure that we share the same idea of what the workshop should entail."

Valerie O'Loughlin, Associate Professor, Health Sciences

"... both parties can apparently feel good about the outcome of such negotiations. [...] I had decided not to ask DSS to return for AI training this year. Now I am rethinking the matter."

Al Ruesink, Professor, Biology

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