
Theory *into* PRACTICE

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Lecturing for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

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THEORY

Although lecturing provides “a strong factual and conceptual foundation” of course material for students (Lang, 2006), there are reasons why we should caution against traditional lecture-only or lecture-heavy class sessions.

Traditional lectures are problematic for many reasons, and they can be particularly problematic for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. Lectures aren’t great for learning, because comprehension instead occurs during application of concepts and problem solving (Lang, 2006), which are not often explored in lectures. Although traditional lectures rely heavily on listening comprehension, “research with ESL students has begun to show that Chinese students experience particular challenges in English academic listening” (Huang, 2006).

Traditional lectures are also typically context reduced. Cognitively demanding input that is contextually embedded, instead of reduced, is most likely to be comprehended by language learners (Cummins, 1981).

Huang (2006) found that CLDs need adequate academic skills, such as note taking, active listening, predicting, previewing, and language fluency among others to successfully comprehend lectures.

COGNITIVE LOAD

There are three kinds of cognitive load:

INTRINSIC

Generated by the inherent level of difficulty of a topic

EXTRANEOUS

Generated by the way information is presented to a learner

GERMANE

Generated by the process of creating schemas

When it comes to lectures and CLD students, language acquisition processes are compounded with content internalization, which creates a greater intrinsic cognitive load. Faculty can aid in lessening overall cognitive load by modifying lectures to reduce extraneous load and ensure equitable learning experiences for all students.

PRACTICE

There are a variety of ways that lectures can be approached, tweaked, and modified to better accommodate CLD students.

WORD CHOICE

Avoid wordiness when explaining complex concepts. Especially for introductory courses to a discipline, consider the students may be unfamiliar with field-specific jargon, and clearly explain terms if needed. Also take caution to avoid an over use of metaphors, as the meaning may not be clearly interpreted for all learners (Littlemore et al., 2011).

PROVIDE EXAMPLES

When discussing new, complex, or abstract concepts, providing examples can be a particularly helpful strategy. When choosing examples, ensure that they are culturally responsive for your group of students. To do this, you need to make sure you know who your students are, what backgrounds they come from, and their learning experiences. References to cultural or political events in United States history, for example, may not be relevant for all learners.

PACING & PAUSES

Additional time is required for language processing. Being conscious about pacing, if possible, can help students. Taking short pauses between topics or after slides can afford students time to finish note taking, reread material, or conceptualize questions they may have about material.

REPETITION

Lectures are often filled with innumerable statistics, figures, and concepts. Because of this, repeating key ideas and concepts will highlight importance can help students select and solidify important information. (Mihai and Purmensky, 2011)

VISUALS

Using a PowerPoint, Prezi or some other visual presentation format is especially helpful for CLD students. This allows students access to both verbal and written text, which increases learning. However, make sure that the visuals are not too text heavy. Embed charts, graphs, photos, and/or videos in lectures to provide multimodal input (Hung et al., 2018)

COMPREHENSION CHECKS

Ask students during a break or at the end of every class to summarize class discussion in one sentence. Quick formative assessments can gauge where students are in the process and can provide concrete applications for content.

LECTURE OUTLINES

A range of outline types, from skeleton to descriptive, can be beneficial for CLD students. Outlines distributed before lectures are most helpful and allow students to preview upcoming material and make broader connections about course material.

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