



THEORY INTO PRACTICE

THEORY CONTEXTUALIZING CONTENT FOR CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS

CHELSEA WALTER, PH.D., ESL SPECIALIST

According to Cummins (2000), “language and content will be acquired most successfully when students are challenged cognitively but provided with the contextual and linguistic supports of scaffolds for successful task completion” (71).

What does this mean for our culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms?

The experiences, materials, and assignments we use to engage with students should be cognitively demanding and context-embedded. Context is any associated information (verbal or nonverbal) that may aid in the understanding of a concept. Increasing context also increases motivation (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009; Xu & Cao, 2017).

Culturally responsive pedagogy assumes students’ cultural differences are strengths in a classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Range of Contextual Support and Degree of Cognitive Involvement in Communicative Activities, Cummins (1981)

COGNITIVELY UNDEMANDING (EASY)

- Sketching, drawing, singing, exercising
- Hands-on activities
- Responding to easy guidelines with illustrations
- One-on-one discussions
- Responding to an e-mail
- Responding to a message left on a table
- Responding to guidelines without the aid of illustrations
- Estimating the number of candles in a jar

CONTEXT-EMBEDDED (CLUES)

- Simulations, illustrations, and other how-to examples
- Lesson illustrated by video clip
- Science experiments
- Reading a map, following a route, reenacting historical events

CONTEXT-REDUCED (FEW CLUES)

- Completing standardized classroom assessments
- Reading a chapter in a textbook
- Writing an essay
- Deriving the square roots of numbers
- Learning from classroom instruction delivered via lecture format

COGNITIVELY DEMANDING (DIFFICULT)



PRACTICE:

INCREASING CONTEXT IN DISCUSSION

- Summarize a class discussion or presentation
- Invite all members to speak, within their ability level
- Allow students to first share and rehearse responses with a partner
- Draw students with less oral confidence by asking them to respond after they have heard a variety of responses
- Increase wait time (3-9 seconds)
- Do not interrupt a student's thought processes after asking an initial question by immediately posing another question
- Comprehension checks- ask them to rephrase instead of answering yes/no
- Easier content for less proficient learners is what's most familiar (community, interests, family)

INCREASING CONTEXT IN LECTURE

- Review or have students summarize past material before applying new material
- Provide a partially completed outline of lecture notes
- Write as legibly as possible and write material down
- Allow students to record lectures and class discussions (if suitable)
- Use concrete examples and relevant analogies
- Allow students to compare notes, debrief, ask/answer questions

INCREASING CONTEXT IN ASSIGNMENTS/FEEDBACK

- Feedback (specific and constructive, prompt, positive, personal)
- Alternatives to pen and paper tests (authentic performance tasks, portfolios, posters; real-life application)
- Well-constructed pen and paper tests (Range of Communicative Demands)
- Self-assessment (ongoing, not just at end; reflective)
- Provide students with a broader context (historical or global) with which to think about issues
- Paraphrase your understanding of their intent and ask if you're understanding correctly
- Provide suggestions for how to take the next step- further exploration, resources
- Focus on content over language (to an extent)

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