Ben Slavic iFLT Lesson Plans 7/17/12 – 7/19/12

At the iFLT conference we demonstrate comprehension based instruction by using classes of actual students. So the lesson plans offered below are intended to allow me to model the technical aspects of comprehension based instruction for about 20 different teachers per day over a 3 day period.

I compare my class to a train sitting in a train station waiting to go somewhere. Where will it go? How far will it go? Will it get to its final destination of fluency? If some of the passengers are unruly, how do I deal with them? How do I focus on them and still get the train going where it is headed, all the while powering my train with the most efficient fuel I can find?

These are all questions that my lesson plans address. As long as I speak the language in ways that are comprehensible and meaningful and interesting to my students, and as long as I maintain order in the train, I will be doing my job as train engineer.

I must keep in mind that my train will never even get close to its goal of fluency for my passengers. Even four years of comprehensible input instruction is barely a start – it takes thousands of hours of comprehensible input to acquire a language.

The voyage to fluency is really never over for a non-native speaker, and to think it can be accomplished in four years of high school instruction is folly.

Thus, I must not put undue stress on myself to accomplish that goal by focusing only on the passengers who learn really fast. By focusing only on those few passengers, I create many problems for myself and others during the voyage. We must have an orderly train.

It's a simple train. Seven cars only, including the engine. You're the engineer. The second car is for the passengers – your students. The other five cars are the coal cars – they contain the pedagogies, the fuel, that drive the train down the tracks.

But there's a problem! The coal cars are full of coal! Oh no, oh no! Coal is not a very efficient form of energy. Your task as the engineer is to dump the coal (grammar based teaching, reliance on the book and computer programs, which don't work) and replace it with solar power (comprehensible input) and take your students to the state of fluency that way, the new way.

We must fill the five cars with as much comprehensible input as possible in two hours and fifteen minutes. Each car contains a different kind of comprehensible input. During the school year, it would take months if not years to fill these cars. So we will just do our best in our iFLT sessions to fill each car with as much comprehensible input as we can during the time we have.

Teachers seem to enjoy stress. But we must drop from our psyches the idea that teaching means frenetically delivering lumps of coal to our children. The kids don't want instructional services that only make them feel stupid.

Students of languages already have proven fluency in one language. Some of ours students have fluency in two! They gained that fluency by hearing the language spoken in ways that made sense to them over years.  All students can learn a language.

The first car that we want to fill with comprehensible input is this one:

**Car 1 – The Pre-PQA Car** (35 min.)

1. **Circling with Sports Balls** cards. Personalizing and norming the class in terms of the Classroom Rules are the priorities here. Please find more information on this activity and all the activities below at www.benslavic.com by clicking on the resource page.

2. **Word Association**. I will choose a few words from the Word Wall and present them to the kids. I will ask the kids how we can remember what each word means by asking for a gesture or a sound cue, always asking the kids for their input, always listening to the kids.

3. The Word Association naturally leads into the **Word Chunk Team Activity**. This will be limited, obviously, to a) the words we TPR'd, b) the concept of "not" (the sound it makes in French), 3) maybe a few numbers, 4) the question words. I can only use whatever my students have acquired up to that point in any class.

4. **One Word Image** – just a few minutes on this. It can go an entire period. One Word Images are very useful in getting kids to buy into the game of comprehensible input.

Note: At the same time we will be filling the now empty coal cars with comprehensible input, we will be filling the passenger car with clear **Classroom Rules** by constantly referring to the Classroom Rules poster.  This use of the rules never stops all year. If the rules are put in place from Day 1 and enforced all year, we have much less issues with discipline in the passenger car. We still have to call parents, but the rules are where we start.

**Car 2 – The PQA Car** (15 min.)

I will choose an Anne Matava story, probably *Lazy* from her Vol. 2 collection of story scripts. In this method, we teach words or chunks of words via PQA and they form the rebar around which the concrete (the other words in the story) is formed. My target words are: *works, the boss yells, lazy.*

I will do one location per day so that all three groups of observing teachers can see how we build stories. Examples of stories are provided at the end of this text.

The first part of any PQA session is **establishing meaning/gesturing**. I will tell the kids what each target structure means in English and then I will ask

them to suggest gestures for the structures, much like we did with the Word Wall words. I say to them, in English, "Class, how can we remember that "aime" means "loves"? Then I shower them with praise when they provide some gesture for "loves" (the hands held across the chest with the head at an angle or whatever THEY want it to be) or "wants" (two flat hands rubbing together or whatever THEY suggest) and "hits" is one fist in the flat hand (or whatever THEY want to be as a gesture for that word).

The second part of PQA is the "**just talking to them**" part, which is intended to **set up some personalized information** that may or may not get into the awaiting story and to get **lots of repetitions** on the target structures so that the students can easily understand the story once we start it.

My mindset will be, "I am now going to get as many repetitions as I can on each of these three expressions before starting the story. I am not going to say a single thing that doesn't have one of the target structures in it. I will focus on the students and how wonderful they are, and how wonderful their cute answers are, even if I don't use them in the story and even if I don't really think that they or their ideas are very interesting.

If the kids just sit there and don't suggest anything (one version of hell), I will TELL them what is happening. I will just look at a kid with a mysterious look and you say, "Class, Anthony (look directly at Anthony) loves _____". Let the KIDS fill in that blank with their cute answers. Laughter will follow as you reject a few and finally accept one and Anthony was made to play along and didn't get away with being a dullard. However, I do not force Anthony to stand. I can force him into the flow of class, but I cannot force him to act.

I just go on like that for all three structures. Before doing that, of course, I can't forget to line up my **three target structure counters** and keep each one of them on their tasks of counting the structure that they have been assigned. They will do that on a little colored square of paper on which they write the structure they are counting and tally them using the four and across tic method and then they hand them to me at the end of class.

 (This counting structures thing is not just to let me know how many times I say a target structure – it has another benefit that, when I stop the class every now and then and look directly at one of the counters and ask him or her, "How am I doing?" "How many have I got?" in English, I cement the class together towards a common goal.  Now it's not just me who is trying to get lots of reps on targets, it's the whole class working together.)

When that dies down a little in a natural way we know that we are ready to start the story.

(Break – 5 min.)

**Car 3 – The Story Car** (25 min.)

If you can (it varies from story to story), use information that you got during the PQA to start the story. This morphing of information from PQA into the story doesn't happen very often, but when it does, it jacks the interest in the story way up.

Change only the underlined variables in the script. The target structures will never be underlined and should not be replaced with information from the class – they are what you are trying to teach. For example, if it turns out that, during the PQA, you replaced the fictitious Jillian with your own student Janet, you just call Janet up to the front of the room, saying something like, "O.K. we need an actor" and look expectantly with a smile at Janet, never forcing her to come up. Wait them out. At some point a kid will come up. In some classes of course, this is never a problem.

Once we have the actor up, we strictly follow rule #6 on the Classroom Rules poster (see www.benslavic.com/resources/posters). Also, I like to have a stool ready for the actor to sit on during the story. I place the stool a bit off to the side so I have room to move.

Note that stories differ from PQA in that we build a story from a script and in PQA we gather information in a random, free form questioning process. When building a story I have the script in my hand, looking at it whenever I need to.

I process the script sentence by sentence, replacing each variable as it comes up in linear fashion, not leaving the track that the script provides, changing the variables while keeping the non-variables the same as they are in the script.

I remember to go slowly with plenty of circling on each new sentence, because the kids have never heard the language before. As mentioned, I *replace only the variables in all stories*, keeping the structures in the story and, again, circling them aggressively because they are the real subject of the lesson. (The story is merely a delivery device for the structures.) So:

*Jillian loves Brad*

may, via the vehicle of Circling, become

*Janet loves Jordan* (these are kids in your class)

In the same way that I had three kids counting structures during the PQA, I now have **three kids doing jobs** for me in the story. I have a kid **write the story out** as it develops. I ask another kid to **write a short quiz** as the story is being created so that I can have it instantly ready for the quiz at the end of class (all questions must have yes/no answers – I use those little pink scantrons, thus saving me time in getting those numbers into the gradebook). I ask a third kid to **illustrate the story** as it unfolds to be projected out so that all can see it, as a visual guide for retells at the end of class.

 Car 4 – **Wrap Up/Assessment** (25 min.)

1. **discussion of what the artist has created**. I must allow time for the discussion of the artist's work – it's a big deal to the kids.

2. **quiz**.

3. **dictée**.

4. **self-reflection** on how we learned that day to align with the new ACTFL focus on the Three Modes of Communication and (finally!) away from the four skills. For that self-reflection piece I will refer to the **metacognition posters** on the wall.

Car 4 – **The Reading** (30 min.)

For these sessions, I will have asked one of the teachers to write the story out in French in a Word file. I would normally write it myself for class for the next day, but we need to model everything in one session in our workshop. Here is my reading plan – the bolded steps are the ones I do, the others are optional:

1. Write on the board, in L2: the title of the story, and the words who, where, what happens, what is the problem? Then tells the students very quickly, those things, in L2. (optional)

**\*2. Instructor reads aloud in L2 – this allows the student to make the necessary connection between the sound of the story with, now for the first time, what those sounds look like on paper.** (required) [credit: Diana Noonan]

3. Silent reading, decoding of the first page of the three page prepared text (usually a generic version of five classes' stories). (optional)

4. Pair work to translate. (optional) – [note: some classes can't handle steps 3 and 4 above and should not be allowed those options]

**\*5. Choral translation using laser pointer.** (required)

**\*6. Discussion of text in L2.** (required)

**\*7. Discussion of grammar in L1** (5 and 6 may interweave) (required)

8. French choral and individual work on accent – this can be a very special time as we finally are able to hear, after a year and a half of constant input and relatively little verbal output, how our students' brains have organized the language in the now emergent output. We notice how well they pronounce the language IF the output wasn't too early. (optional)

9. 5-minute write of the story, in which the students answer the questions: who, where, what happens, what is the problem. 5 minute write of the story, and he urges them to use the questions: who, where, what happens, what is the problem. (optional)

**\*10. Sacred reading of the text – after 4 class periods of either listening or reading input, the students know the material. So, to conclude, read it to them with meaning, dramatic tone, artistry, in a quiet, sacred kind of setting. One teacher read it with such drama that the kids told her she should have been an actress. I generally do this step without the text in front of the students. They are really pleased when they can understand it.** (highly recommended)

**\*11. Translation quiz – pick any paragraph from the reading and have the students translate it into English for a quick and easy grade.** (required)

**Conclusions:**

The observing teacher will see in each class various types of comprehension based activities that are primarily designed to personalize the class and set rules in place (that's the first car we will start to fill up with comprehensible input). Then we will start filling up the PQA car, and then fill up the story car, then the wrap up and assessment car, and finally we will move on to the reading car*. How much of which of these things happens depends on what emerges in class.

Note in the above plan that a lot of planning TPRS/CI classes has to do with going with the energy and trusting that good things will happen instead of investing in boredom - a set lesson plan. That is, we set up a framework (the empty train cars) for the CI to happen in but we don't plan the CI. When everything is planned out, the lesson is as coal. That is because when conversations are planned they are boring. When nothing is planned, and the cars are empty, we can collect gold. There is an interesting article on the Art of Conversation on my website on the resources page that may help the observer understand that it is only in free and random creation of language in a reciprocal and spontaneous way between actual human begins that language can be acquired.

Teaching in this way takes courage. Comprehension based classes are never mapped out for you except to provide you with empty cars to fill up with real stuff. It is better to have five empty cars to fill with comprehensible input at the start of class than five cars filled with coal. So what if it's scary? So what?

*Note most importantly that when our students do listening and reading in class, with very limited speaking and writing, they are doing input. This is comprehensible input. Forcing output is fast becoming a thing of the past. We let output in the form of speaking emerge from hundreds of hours of input in the form of listening and we let output in the form of writing emerge from hundreds of hours of input in the form of reading. That is the new way. It's also the natural way people gain fluency in a language.

**The Story Script:**

This is probably the story I will use for iFLT:

**Lazy**

*works*
*the boss yells*
*lazy*

Gabi works in Disney World. She drives the Monorail, but she sleeps all the time. The boss yells because Gabi is lazy. He says, "Gabi! You are lazy!" "So what?" says Gabi. The boss says, "You are fired!"

Now Gabi works at a recycling center.  She sleeps in the trash can.

The boss yells because Gabi is lazy.  He says, "Gabi!  You are lazy!"

"So what?" says Gabi.  The boss says, "You are fired!"

Now Gabi works in a zoo as an elbow surgeon.  She plays Frisbee with
the hippo.  The boss yells because Gabi is lazy.  He says, "Gabi!  You
are lazy!"  "So what?" says Gabi.  The boss says, "You are fired!"
The hippo licks the boss's ear.

Note:  The idea above is to establish what the person is supposed to be doing
for work, and what they are doing instead to make the boss mad.  Notice that
"So what?" is a variable.  Let the students determine the protagonist's saucy
retort.  Repetitive exclamations add life to a story.