

From Compliance to Understanding: Flexible Pedagogical Practices in Foreign Language Classrooms

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Abstract

In normal classroom settings, students are often able to perform academic work correctly but do not know how to explain the thinking that went behind it. Repeated observations of classroom interactions over time showed that finishing tasks often hid the fact that students did not have many chances to explain their thoughts, back up their choices, or think about what they understood from the very beginning of an activity to its final outcome. This repeated pattern made teachers wonder how classroom routines affect what counts as proof of learning. This study is based on a limited, classroom-oriented qualitative investigation conducted within an elementary school setting in Raleigh, North Carolina, USA. The study did not exclusively concentrate on students' performance; instead, it examined how various instructional choices affected students' ability and capacity to articulate their reasoning during content-specific lessons. In this context, instruction took place in a foreign language, which made opportunities for students to explain and justify their thinking particularly relevant. Using ideas from formative assessment and inclusive teaching (Black & Wiliam, 1998; CAST, 2018), classroom routines were slowly adjusted to give students more freedom in how they participated, showed what they understood, and explained, in their own words, the processes they developed. Data were collected through ongoing classroom observations, samples of student work, and teacher reflective notes gathered across multiple instructional cycles. Changes did not occur immediately; instead, they emerged gradually over time. Students began to offer longer explanations, participate more actively in discussions, and revisit their ideas after receiving feedback. These shifts suggested that the ways learning was being constructed and communicated in the classroom were beginning to change (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). These observations indicate that flexible pedagogical approaches can facilitate more meaningful demonstrations of learning by fostering opportunities for explanation, dialogue, and reflection. The study emphasizes the need to reevaluate classroom expectations in order to prioritize comprehension over mere task completion in the educational process.

Keywords: Foreign language teaching, Teaching and learning, Formative assessment, Student engagement, Classroom practice