

Sample 3 - Middle School Foreign Language

Claim: Teacher uses strategies that did not lead students to construct new and meaningful learning.

Connect: While the learning target for the class centered on student speaking (see 3.1), the teacher used an audio recording as a tool for students to listen to a variety of voices talking in Spanish about what they liked to do for the majority of the lesson (17 of 23 min). The expectation was that students would complete the task of filling out a worksheet based on the audio recording. After the first segment, the teacher put the correct responses on the board and asked how the students did (1 student responded “all right”) and what strategies they used (1 Ss “I just listened.”). Based on this response, the teacher stated, “You guys are doing great” and moved on to a harder listening task. Yet, 5 of 9 students needed to correct their work, 2 other students partially completed the task but did not correct their work. One student, when questioned by the observer, stated, “It was hard. It was too fast.” After the second task, 6/9 students did not fill out sheet completely. When students were asked to update their answers using the answer key on the board, 2 of 9 students added missing responses to their worksheet.

While using an audio recording is an effective strategy to expose students to a variety of voices and native speakers, the speed at which they spoke was too fast for students to construct new learning especially with new vocabulary. The teacher was aware of the speed prior to playing as he stated, it was to just “get the gist” and “I can’t stop the cd.” Because the pace of the audio was very fast and contained new vocabulary, students did not have time to engage meaningfully in the work before the next question was asked or before the task became harder. Further, because the teacher did not monitor student learning, he did not recognize existing student misunderstandings and that the pace of the class did not allow all students to analyze or construct new learning (See 3.8). Lastly, while having students identify strategies they used to complete a task would allow students to learn from their peers, the change to a more difficult task made trying these new strategies ineffective-(Unlike the first task where each sentence was repeated before moving on to the next question, the second task played the entire passage before repeating).

Action: Next time, consider pausing the audio after each question so that students have time to process what they have heard, locate the appropriate vocabulary on the resource list if needed, and record their response. Students would have the time to analyze what they have learned, and practice a new strategy for the next question (if their primary strategy was ineffective). Consider how you can increase opportunities for student-student discussion to promote higher level thinking aimed at constructing new knowledge. Instead of class based audio, consider running the audio for small groups, allowing each group to replay the audio as needed and then discuss their understanding. Or, can they practice sentences with each other and then listen to the more challenging CD? Sometimes face-to-face conversation is easier for new learners. This would not only allow students the opportunity to learn at their own pace but also to learn from each other.