**Teaching Strategies Brain storming**

**-------For 5th Grade Chinese Class**

**Part1:**

**Context**

Before starting my Master program here, I taught Chinese to 5th grade students in a public elementary school in Beijing. Although Chinese government had implemented Quality Education Policy which focuses on children’s all-around development for many years, teaching and learning activities in my school and many other schools in Beijing were still test-oriented at that time. Teachers strictly followed the teaching guidance provided by Textbook Compiling Committee, which led vapid and undiversified teaching and learning experience. Taking my experience as an example, each semester my students and I got a new textbook, in which there were about 32 articles. We went them through one by one following a rigid routine: from learning new characters to new words and phrases, from comprehending sentences to passages to whole article, from concluding the main idea of the article to understanding its theme to finally considering how to improve own behaviors in the real life (for instance, after studying an article about energy saving, students should think about and discuss how to save energy by themselves), from reading others’ writings to write down their own thoughts and feelings. It is undoubted that this learning procedure records with cognitive learning theories and can be easily conducted once teachers and students get used to it. However if a teacher adopts this teaching procedure and follow all way through, without creating motivational learning atmosphere and cooperative learning situations to boost creative and critical thinking among students, his/her class will become a horrible disaster.

**Brain storming**

As achieving more and more instructional strategies for thinking, motivation and collaboration in R546, I look back to my teaching experience. Although I tried hard to motivate my students within a test-driven and routine-dominated teaching background, I knew what I did were not enough. So I would like brainstorm more strategies:

* When introducing a new article, the teacher asks “Have you ever” questions or conduct Treasure Hunt to bring up student’s memories relating to the new article.
* The teacher asks “What-if” questions when discussing themes of articles with students, like asking “What if human and animals become enemies?”
* Use Six Thing Hats to find solutions for given issues discussed in articles.
* Use brain storming and webbing to help students find out proper materials and topics for their compositions.
* When writing compositions to describe a classmate or friend, do self-disclosure introductions and Accomplishment Hunt or play “Coat of Arms” in small groups to know each other better.
* Encourage metaphorical thinking when students create sentences or poems.
* Dress differently when learn relative knowledge, like the 56 ethnic groups of people in China.
* Ask a group of students who always work in a same team to do Community Building: create a webpage, on which build Chinese learning forum and demonstrate community awards.
* Use crossword puzzles to learn new phrases.
* Give Chinese-related IQ tests to students when they look tired or bored.
* Students play Talking String when making conclusion either for a class or an article.
* Use talking stick to stimulate more students talking in class.
* Take different roles to read or recite articles.
* Encourage students to join in creative writing after learn certain articles, for example write drama scripts, then based on their scripts organize Creative Dramatics.
* Learn new Chinese characters by using check board. Write down basic parts of Chinese characters in the first row and the first column of a table, and then match them to get new characters.
* After learning new words, students are divided into groups to take new words dictation competitions.
* When students finish reading an article, let them ask questions. Praise those who contribute most meaningful and innovative questions.
* The teacher always leaves Wait Time for students.
* Students assume the roles of the positive and negative to debate based on an arguable issue in articles, like “Shall we get money from parents for helping them do housework?”
* The teacher asks questions that have more than one answer.
* The teacher provides diagrams, pictures or video clips to main ideas to make confusions clear.
* The teacher always provides immediate feedback and includes positive comments before the negative ones.
* The teacher encourages students to set proximal and distal goals for their learning.
* The teacher gives poor performing students the role of expert.
* Using evaluation lines to let students evaluate each other’s homework based on several criteria set by the teacher.
* Review old knowledge or what taught in last class by using Fillips 66 method.

**Part 2**

**Brain storming table 1: Student’s table**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Instructional strategies | Strategy Category | Ability Improved | Role of the Teacher | Implementation Difficulty | Supplementary Memo |
| Dress differently when learn relative knowledge. | Motivation Creative T | It depends | Managing and feedback | +++++ | It may conflict with the school rule. |
| When introducing a new article, the teacher asks “Have you ever” questions or conduct Treasure Hunt to bring up student’s memories related to the new article. | Motivation | It depends | Questing | + | The teacher must ensure that students are sharing theme-relate stories. |
| Learn new Chinese characters by using check board. | Creative | Reading | Directly instructing | + | The teacher plays an important role in instruction and enlightening. |
| After learning new words, students are divided into groups to take new words dictation competitions. | Collaboration  Motivation | Reading | Managing and feedback | ++ | Small group with 3 to 4 students.  Capabilities should be balanced between groups. |
| Use crossword puzzles to learn new phrases. | Motivation | Reading | Directly instructing | + | The teacher should collect such materials in daily life. |
| Take different roles to read or recite articles. (role play) | Creative T  Motivation  Collaboration | reading | Managing and feedback | + | The teacher should provide instruction. |
| Students play Talking String when making conclusion either for a class or an article. | Motivation | Speaking | Managing and feedback | +++ | The teacher should adjust the length of the string based on learning contents.  Be safe! |
| When students finish reading an article, let them ask questions. Praise those who contribute most meaningful and innovative questions. | Motivation  Creative T | Speaking and thinking | Exploring  Managing and feedback | + | The correctness and fairness of teacher’s feedback are very important. |
| Use talking stick to stimulate more students talking in class. | Motivation | Speaking | Exploring  Managing and feedback | ++ | The teacher should be careful to not embarrass those shy students. |
| The teacher asks “What-if” questions when discussing themes of articles with students. | Creative T | Speaking | Questing  Exploring | + | Students can write down their opinions first. |
| Using Six Thing Hats to find solutions for given issues discussed in articles. | Creative T  Collaboration | Listening and Speaking | Managing and Feedback | +++++ | Taking roles to discuss certain issues maybe little hard for 5th grade students.  Provide time for students to prepare and give instructions. |
| Students assume the roles of the positive and negative to debate based on an arguable issue in articles. | Critical T | Listening speaking | Managing and feedback | ++++ | Set rules to control the class.  Provide time for students to prepare and give instructions. |
| Encourage metaphorical thinking when students create sentences or poems. | Creative t | writing | Cognitive task structuring  Articulating and dialoguing | ++ | The teacher should show passion and inspiration. |
| Using brain storming and webbing to help students find out proper materials and topics for their compositions. | Creative T | writing | Exploring  Managing and feedback | ++++ | The teacher should help students exclude irrelative and useless ideas and build relationship between useful ideas. |
| When writing compositions to describe a classmate or friend, do self-disclosure introductions and Accomplishment Hunt or play “Coat of Arms” in small groups to know each other better. | Motivation | Speaking and writing | Exploring  Managing and feedback | + | The teacher should help students gather useful information. |
| Encourage students to join in creative writing after learn certain articles, for example write drama scripts, then based on their scripts organize Creative Dramatics. | Creative T  Motivation  Collaboration | Speaking and  writing | Exploring  Managing and feedback | +++++ | Creative writing maybe difficult for this age group of students. The teacher should control the classroom during creative dramatics. |
| Using evaluation lines to let students evaluate each other’s homework based on several criteria set by the teacher. | Critical T  Motivation | It depends | Managing and feedback | ++ | The teacher should give final judgments and feedback. |
| Review old knowledge or what taught in last class by using Fillips 66 method. | Critical T  Collaboration | It depends | Managing and feedback | +++ | Teacher’s feedback and supplementation are important. Also need to control time and make sure group discussion is on digressing. |
| Ask a group of students who always work in a same team to do Community Building: create a webpage, on which build Chinese learning forum and demonstrate community awards. | Motivation | All-round | Directly instructing  Coaching managing and feedback | +++++ | Taking time. Group member should take term to update information. Need technical assistant from parents or other teachers. |

**Brain storming table 1: Teacher’s table**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Instructional strategies | Strategy Category | Ability Improved | Role of the Teacher | Implementation Difficulty | Supplementary Memo |
| The teacher always leaves Wait Time for students. | Motivation | It depends | Questing | + | Provide proper hints |
| Give Chinese-related IQ tests to students when they look tired or bored. | Motivation | It depends | Questing | ++ | The teacher should gather relative materials in daily life. |
| The teacher asks questions that have more than one answer. | Motivation and Creative T | It depends | Questing | ++ | Should be well prepared |
| The teacher provides diagrams, pictures or video clips to main ideas to make confusions clear. | Motivation and Critical T | It depends | Modeling  Cognitive Tasking structuring | ++ | Should be well prepared |
| The teacher always provides immediate feedback and includes positive comments before the negative ones. | Motivation | It depends | Managing and feedback | + | Need well organized schedule and efficiency |
| The teacher encourages students to set proximal and distal goals for their learning. | Motivation | It depends | Managing and feedback | ++ | Help students set appropriate goals |
| The teacher gives poor performing students the role of expert. | Motivation | It depends | Supporting and trusting | ++ | Find out the student’s strength and assign tasks based on this |

**Part 3:**

**Relfection**

I put my brain storming outcomes into two tables, student’s table and teacher’s table. The former consists of instructional strategies mainly implemented by students; the latter includes strategies conducted by teachers. However, even in strategies of table1, teachers play an indispensible role. Every strategy is designed, delivered and evaluated (giving feedback to students) by teachers. It is impossible for 5th grade students to create motivational and cooperative learning environment and improve creative and critical thinking abilities totally by themselves.

I organize the vertical items(the strategies) in table1 following the general timeline(routine) of a class, from the preparation of the lesson to carrying on each process till giving feedback to homework and building after-class group learning community. In both tables I analyze every instructional strategy in the following five aspects: “Strategy Category”, “Ability Improved”, and “Role of the Teacher”, “Implementation Difficulty and “Supplementary Memo”.

Column “Strategy Category” shows the overlapping between strategies of motivation, creative thinking, critical thinking and collaboration. For instance, “taking different roles to read or recite articles” as a cooperative activity can not only motivate students, but also improve their creative think ability. From my point of view, the more comprehensive strategies a teacher can generate or adopt in class, the more effective his/ her teaching will be.

In column “Ability Improved” I write down language abilities that can be achieved and enhanced through implementing certain instructional strategies. Those language abilities include listening, speaking, reading and writing. Table 1 tells me many strategies of motivation, creative and critical thinking and collaboration have multifunction: they improve several language abilities simultaneously. For example, team Community Building can improve students’ all-round language abilities. In table 2 and several blanks in table 1 I write down “It depends” since in these circumstances, the specific type of ability that can be improved depends on what kind of knowledge is teaching when the corresponding strategy is implemented.

The next column is “Role of the Teacher”. Although just now I said teacher is indispensible, from the above analysis we can see in collaboration, creative and critical thinking and motivation learning situations, the teacher moves aside from the center(or front) of the classroom and become the organizer, facilitator or feedback-provider.

In the last two columns I rate the difficulty of adopting a given strategy and write down the reasons for these rating. The age of my students, the possibility to control the class and the safety of carrying on certain activities are three factors that I usually take into my consideration. Teaching in China, I cannot ignore the big educational context of the country. Besides test-oriented and routine-dominated educational status quo, we have teacher-centered cultural tradition and one-child policy which promotes the safety of each student into a high attention level. It is important to let those young kids learn how to collaborate and how to think effectively with enthusiasm, but as teachers, we also need to follow rules before we can break them, respect our traditions and be responsible to our societies. So here I want to use a metaphor which is wildly used in poetic world we have to know how to dance and lead our students dance with fetters. Creative and critical thinking strategies, motivational techniques and cooperative learning methods are various styles of steps. The more steps we mastered, the more flexible we will be in this special dance.

I am not quite sure whether I will continue my old job in the future or not, but if I will the above process of brain storming and its outcomes will be of great practical value to me. Anyway, I have decided to give a Chinese version of this article to my colleagues in the elementary school to help them practice more dancing steps.