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Best Practices for Individual Tutorials

Quick Reference for Conducting Conversation Sessions

Language Use

Language of interchange is both English and the target language. The goal of the tutorial is to answer student questions and correct student errors. Use whichever language is best for clear, concise explanations. This will vary from student to student.

A good tutorial follows the following format:

- Begin with a warmup. Greet the student as s/he enters the room and make small talk to put the student at ease for a minute.
- Begin the tutorial by looking over the homework that the student has prepared. Remember that the student will leave the homework with you to be formally graded; you are looking over the homework with the student to identify problem areas in the student's comprehension of the material.
- Questions usually arise while perusing the homework, so a large portion of the tutorial may be spent with the homework on the table. Your answers may well lead to further questions.
- The homework or your explanations can also lead into cultural discussions. These will often take place in English. This interchange is most appropriate and will help the student use the target language correctly. Remember that you are the only person who can help the student understand traditions or cultural history that informs the target language. This is time well spent.
- If the student has no further questions and there is still time remaining in the tutorial, you can give the student further practice on the material covered for the week by creating drills (either vocabulary-based or structure-based drills).
- A conversation between the two of you is an excellent way to end the session. It allows you to determine what the student has been able to internalize that week and, because you are manipulating the conversation, you can make sure the student leaves the session on a positive note.

Difference Between a Class and a Tutorial

Remember that you are not teaching a class. You are responding to the student's questions and

making certain that the student has understood the concepts in the lesson. You do not lecture – you respond.

Video Examples of Best Practices for Tutorials

Remember to Focus on Student Needs

The key to a successful tutorial is focusing on what the student needs to learn instead of what the mentor wants to teach. The student establishes the direction of the session and the mentor has to be ready with whatever explanation is called for. The mentor also has to be able to read between the lines and understand the roots of a student's question whose answer may be based in grammatical concepts not covered by the actual lesson.

Be Prepared!

Preparation for the mentoring session involves complete preparation of the material the student has covered but it must go further as mentors need to consider what questions could evolve as a result of the material assigned. Unlike in the conversation session, the language of interchange can be the target language, English, or a mixture of both.

Warmup

The warm up begins the session. It gives the student a chance to quickly get settled and ready to work and breaks the ice and should not take more than a minute.

Warm-Up Example I (Swahili)

This Swahili mentor is going through a warm up with a beginning student. Note that the mentor waits for the student to think about her response.

Warm-Up Example II (Turkish)

Quick warm up with a Turkish I student.

Warm-Up Example III (Persian)

Here is an example of a quick warmup before the mentor and student proceed to checking homework.

Warm-Up Example IV (Swahili)

An intermediate Swahili warm up.

Going Over Homework

Going over the homework that the student has prepared to hand in is the first stage of the tutorial. While mentors will eventually retain the homework and correct it thoroughly, a quick perusal of the student's work for the week serves to bring any problems to the forefront immediately.

Going Over Homework Example I (Swahili)

In this Swahili tutorial, the mentor quickly peruses the homework, points out difficulties and gives pertinent explanations.

Going Over Homework Example II (Turkish)

This homework discussion is conducted in both Turkish and English.

Going Over Homework Example III (Persian)

In this clip, the student has brought in a Persian dictation. The mentor has the student read the dictation as he has written it. The mentor gives supplemental information to help the student understand and remember words that he has gotten wrong. This exercise is good for pronunciation, writing, and listening comprehension.

Going Over Homework Example IV (Turkish)

Before handing back the previous week's corrected essay, the mentor quizzes the student over the last lesson's vocabulary to make certain he has retained it.

Going Over Homework Example V (Persian)

While going over homework, the issue of making a phone call and the use of phones and mobile phones comes up. The mentor makes certain that the student understands the vocabulary differences and gives him additional vocabulary to clarify. The student's questions engender a discussion about phones.

Correction

The language for correction in the tutorials can be the target language or in English depending on the situation.

Correction Example I (Swahili)

Here the mentor corrects in Swahili.

Correction Example II (MISSING VIDEO)

Here the mentor gives prompts in English. MISSING VIDEO

Discussion

Discussions are a vital part of mentoring sessions, and they are sometimes difficult to anticipate. Nonetheless, they provide a goldmine of information for the student. Here are two instances of useful discussions that came out of seemingly simple questions.

Discussion Example I (Pashto)

This discussion about when vowels are used in Pashto writing comes out of the question, “how do you spell Boston?”

Discussion Example II (Pashto)

This discussion originates in checking the student’s homework. First they talk about allergies and end with American/Pashto expressions for illness and then they go on to hospitality.

Drill

Drills involve systematic and repetitive practice of a particular form of language usage.

Drill Example I

In this group session for students who are learning to read and write in Arabic, the mentor has students read from the book and work on pronunciation.

Drill Example II

The Swahili mentor drills the student’s memory of vocabulary involving dress.

Drill Example III

The mentor has one student read while the other writes, thus facilitating simultaneous practice of pronunciation, listening and writing.

Drill Example IV

Another example of pair work with one student reading with mentor correction and the other student writing what she hears.

Drill Example V

In this clip, the Swahili mentor makes certain that the student has a solid grasp of a particular noun class by drilling vocabulary of inanimate objects.

Drill Example VI

In this drill of weather expressions, the mentor uses both Swahili and English.

Explanation

One of the main purposes of the mentoring session is to give the student an opportunity to ask questions. The mentor has to not only answer the question but understand the root of the question and perhaps go much further with the explanation than the student had planned. The language of the explanation varies according to the complexity of the issue and the level of the student.

Explanation I (Pashto)

In this example, the student asks about pronouns in Pashto. The mentor answers the goes deep into the issue to get to the core of the student's question and gives a thorough explanation of a complex issue in Pashto.

Explanation II (Pashto)

In this continuation of the explanation of pronouns in Pashto, the student is actively participating in the experience by asking questions and creating his own examples. The mentor, for his part, continues to come up with examples. This is an instance demonstrating that one can never give too many examples.

Explanation III (Persian)

In this discussion of Persian, the mentor uses the board to write a part of his explanation. The student not only writes down what the mentor is saying but then creates his own examples to be sure he has understood the concept.

Explanation IV (Persian)

This clip illustrates how the target language and English can be combined in a mentoring session. The student stays in Persian as long as he can but reverts to English when he needs to make certain he has understood.

Explanation V (Swahili)

Here a bit of English is interjected to clarify.

Explanation VI (Swahili)

In this clip, the mentor combines Swahili and English in her explanation.

Culture

Because the target culture is inextricably intertwined with the target language, questions regarding cultural practices and traditions inevitably surface. While they can be incorporated into situations played out in conversation sessions, the basis for such role plays is usually established during the tutorials. Except with advanced students who can sustain such discussions in the target language, these discussions often take place in English.

Culture Example I (Pashto)

In this Pashto tutorial, the student's vocabulary question leads to a discussion about the treatment of guests.

Reading

While conversation sessions should take place with books closed, tutorials can take advantage of the book for various exercises. In-text dialogues, which may be recited or acted out in a conversation session, can be used in a tutorial to make certain the student understands what s/he is reading and the cultural innuendo behind the text.

Reading Example I (Pashto)

In this clip, the Pashto student is reading aloud and explaining the meaning of what he is reading..

Reading Example II (Pashto)

Here the student is reading aloud and trying to translate. The interjections of the mentor help the student recognize the nuances of what he reads.

Reading Example III (Persian)

Before letting the student read, the mentor gives him a clean copy of the text so that the student has to read without his notes in the margins. The student reads and the mentor asks him questions about what he has read. The exercise develops into a thorough discussion of the textual passage.

Reading Example IV (Swahili)

In this intermediate Swahili tutorial, the mentor has the student read the passage and then the mentor asks questions to ensure comprehension.

Student-Centered Learning

Having concentrated on their assignment all week, students should arrive at their tutorial with questions for the mentor. Therefore, no two tutorials are alike, even if each student is following the same study guide. The mentor has to be prepared to discuss questions raised by the student instead of concentrating on something the mentor thinks the student needs to know.

Student Centered Learning I (Persian)

In this clip, the student opens his book and starts the questioning process. The mentor answers the question and the two of them discuss the issue. Note how the questions originate with the student.

Student Centered Learning II (Pashto)

This following discussion begins with the student's saying "this is still confusing me." He then poses questions about the grammatical pattern and the mentor uses that as the base for his explanation.

Student Centered Learning III (Pashto)

Here the student asks about the future tense and a discussion ensues. The mentor gives a series of pertinent examples and the student follows up.

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