MENU
PRINT VERSION
HELP & FAQs

A Performance Based Curriculum—A Cross Discipline Approach

Charles LeBeau
Toshiba Corporation

David Harrington
Tamagawa University

This paper is a first look at Performance Based Curriculum (PBC), a new approach to language learning currently being developed by the authors. PBC locates the study of language within the performance arts, in the same family as music, drama, and dance, where practice or rehearsal is not an end in itself but the means to an end, i.e. a performance. In the same way that rehearsal prepares musicians, actors, and dancers for a performance before an audience, classroom activity should move students toward performance of a language act relating to a "live audience." This paper applies the PBC approach to a familiar language activity, a self-introduction speech, and demonstrates how PBC integrates diverse classroom activities toward a single end, a performance.

最近著者によって発明されている、語学を学ぶための新しいアプローチ、"Performance Based Curriculum (PBC)"についての最初の説明です。PBCは、練習やリハーサルを目的としているのではなく、音楽やドラマ、ダンスと同じ様にパフォーマンスする事を目的とした"パフォーマンスアート"のくくりとして、語学学習を位置付けています。ミュージシャン、俳優、ダンサーが人前でパフォーマンスをする為にリハーサルで準備をするのと同様に、ライブオーディエンスを念頭において、話したり相談をしたり等、生徒が人前で積極的に外国語を披露する様に、クラスアクティビティを行うべきです。PBCのアプローチが、従来の語学アクティビティ、自己紹介スピーチ、そして最終目的であるパフォーマンスに向けて、いかにして様々なクラスアクティビティを統一しているか説明しています。

Introduction

A self-introduction is a common classroom activity. Let's assume that the object of the activity is for students to do more than just produce or repeat the target language required by this EFL activity. Instead, let's assume, that the object of

the activity is for students to introduce themselves with energy and vigor, to speak their lines with commitment, and to employ appropriate verbal, facial, and physical expression. In other words, if we assume that the object of the activity is not simply to *do* a self-introduction but to *perform* a self-introduction, we shall need to visit the performance arts. This paper borrows from the performing art of music as a case in point.

Step 1: Model the performance

In music, the performance often takes the form of a recital. In the larger sense, a recital is a sort of musical self-introduction. It expresses who we are and where we are in our musical development. A great deal of practice and energy goes into a recital, followed by a sense of accomplishment, a growing sense of confidence, and, hopefully, some positive feedback in the form of applause. Typically, the path towards the recital begins with the teacher playing the piece for the student, for example, Bach's Bouree in E minor. Hearing the model gives the student an aural map of the piece's musical landscape for future reference. In a sense, the student gets an aural "image" of what the piece feels like and how it develops. This aural image is then stored away. It is a reference point, a model of what to aim for in the final performance or recital. This final performance now informs practice. What passages to practice, what scales to practice, what chord sequence to practice, and what fingerings to practice are all defined by the recital of Bach's Bouree in E minor.

In the classroom, we can also use a performance to organize and structure a lesson or an entire curriculum. The performance could be a speech or presentation, a role-play, a game, or a project of some kind (see example projects in Lubetsky et al, 2000). Regardless of the type of performance, we can model it through demonstration, through a video, through a CD/cassette, etc. It is often useful to present several variations of the same model so students develop a clear idea of what is particular just to a single example and what is an essential characteristic of the model itself. To this end, in our classes we use a recording of three high school native speakers introducing themselves (LeBeau & Harrington, 2002). The recording manifests not only the unique elements of each speech, but also the common elements. Of course, each person can compose a self-introduction differently, but the common elements of these three introductions are:

- Greeting
- Name
- Birthplace
- School/Work
- Free Time
- Hopes and Dreams
- Closing

In musical terms, we are presenting students with variations on a theme. The task of the students is to listen and identify the "theme," to discover the underlying structure or progression of these three performances. A musical composition is characterized by a certain chord progression. The seven topics above characterize the "chord progression" of this particular self-introduction. Students have now obtained the model for their performance, the aim of their study, the *raison d'etre* of their practice.

Step 2: Learn the notes

Returning to the preparation of the recital of Bach's Bouree in E minor, after modeling the piece, the teacher would probably send

the student home, score in hand, to learn not only the individual notes but "chunks" of notes that define key passages of the piece. In a similar way, after modeling the self-introduction, the students need to familiarize themselves with not only the individual words used but "chunks" of language, the key passages, of these self-introductions. Borrowing from the lexical approach, (Lewis, 1993) we write the seven topics on the board and elicit from the students several expressions for each topic.

Step 3: Delivery

Once the student learns the notes, usually a key role of the teacher is to help the student with the delivery or interpretation of the piece. Just getting the notes right is necessary but not sufficient for musical expression of a piece. It is not just the notes, but how we play the notes. In the immortal words of Duke Ellington "It don't mean a thing, if it ain't got that swing." Similarly, for our self-introductions, getting the words grammatically right is useful, but not sufficient. Delivering the passages with energy and enthusiasm makes for meaningful, memorable communication. Rather than work on all the components of delivery at once, we have found it useful to break delivery into three clusters of skills and work on them separately (Harrington & LeBeau, 1996).

Step 4: Practice

Once the music students know the notes, and how to deliver the notes, they are ready to practice. Similarly, once our language students are familiar with the language and delivery, they can obtain the best results from practice. However, we have found that repeated practice of the students' own self-introductions steals the spontaneity and freshness from the final performance of their self-introductions. Consequently, we have introduced a pair work activity we call "mystery self-introductions" (LeBeau & Harrington, 2002, pp. 10-13). Students are given a scripted self-introduction of a well-known personality with the name excluded. One partner reads the self-introduction with good delivery, and the other student guesses whom it might be. (As a follow-up, we have students compose mystery self-introductions of famous personalities of their choice.)

Step 5: Performance

Part of preparing for the performance is marking the score. A close look at a score before a recital will probably show that key passages and notes have been marked to indicate attack, volume, intensity, pace, etc. However, if every note is marked and emphasized then it becomes meaningless to mark the score. In a similar way, if students script their self-introductions word-by-word and line-by-line, their script probably does more harm than good. Speaking from concise notes rather than from a fully scripted speech makes for a more interesting language activity. We have found students perform best when they reduce the script to some kind of graphic organizer such as a table, an outline, a fact file, etc. (See examples in LeBeau & Harrington, 2002).

Conclusion

Returning to our comparison, the performance is the act of making music, of playing with other musicians, and communicating with a live audience. Practice is not an end in itself but is linked to a performance. A Performance Based Curriculum allows the classroom to become, by turns, the practice room, the rehearsal hall, and the performance stage, opening up new doors and new roles for the language teacher and language learner alike.

References

Harrington, D. & LeBeau, C. (1996). *Speaking of Speech*. Tokyo: Macmillan Languagehouse.

LeBeau, C. & Harrington, D. (2002). *Getting Ready for Speech*. Eugene, Oregon: Language Solutions Inc.

Lewis, M. (1993). *The Lexical Approach*. Hove, England: Language Teaching Publications

Lubetsky, M., LeBeau, C. & Harrington, D. (2000). *Discover Debate*. Eugene, Oregon: Language Solutions Inc.