



THE USE OF DEBRIEFING IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Abstract:

This paper reflects the effective use of a debriefing strategy in evaluating some classroom activities conducted at Jubail University College –Female Branch, in two sections of semester 371 in the Preparatory Year Program (PYP). Debriefing is a significant task in many of our classroom activities. There have been some activities in the past which were not properly evaluated and reflected upon, so through this strategy, we can look back and check on them to find out the outcomes in both the teaching and learning process. The result of the study showed that when debriefing is conducted in the classroom, student collaboration, reflective thinking, critical thinking, and understanding can easily be achieved. Students displayed awareness and ease when making dispositions and solving problems. The debriefing strategy was used by the researcher to come up with possible techniques and solutions to problems encountered in learning experiences from two courses: Reading and Writing and Listening and Grammar in semester 371, AY 2017-2018. To ensure the quality of this descriptive research, this study supports the enhancement of various classroom activities, and aspires to bring out the best practices in teaching English in the PYP. In addition to this process, the pedagogical approaches of teachers are therefore, enhanced and improved. As a result, the debriefing strategy is a successful tool in examining the effectiveness, usefulness, and practicality of some approaches and methodologies used in every unit of the textbooks, Q-skills for Success.

Keywords: debriefing, language classroom, classroom activities

1. Introduction

Classroom activities are one of the most important aspects in the teaching and learning process. It is imperative that students expect exciting and engaging activities that help them learn the English language. Biggs (2007) emphasizes that teachers should create a certain learning climate through formal and informal interactions with students, which

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establishes how we and our students feel about learning. Eventually, if the classroom environment is positive, this strongly affects on students' learning. Whether the classroom experiences are positive or negative, they have to be evaluated and through the process of debriefing, a teacher will find out what works well in a particular class. Reflecting on some of our classroom activities is useful, practical, and effective if it is properly done. Reed (2016) uses debriefing as a reflective activity following the experiential learning exercise. In her qualitative descriptive study, she showed that learning exists after the debriefing process. She utilized the simulation strategy as a tool coupled with debriefing practices.

Pearson and Smith (1985) express that we cannot learn from experience without reflection. The reflective element of experiential learning can be noticed on experiential cycle which focused on change in the quality of outcomes or in the practice. Moon (2004) emphasizes that reflection in-action and on-action tends to focus on the practice. The role of experiential learning is evident. The Kolb's Learning Cycle of experiential learning is apparently designating a clear role of reflection in the process of learning (Moon, 2004). Moon stresses that: *"Experience cannot be developed into appropriate learning if the learner does not intend to learn or if the flow of experience is too fast."*

Teaching and learning is always a two-way process. Students should be interested in learning while the teacher is eager to teach the lesson. As a language teacher, classroom activities should ensure meaningful, worthwhile, and inspirational learning with the students. The key to achieving this goal is through the debriefing strategy.

In this study, the emphasis is on the use of the debriefing strategy to evaluate classroom activities. It may not be the best way for an evaluation, but it will facilitate students in thinking critically about the activity and improve their learning at the same time. Debriefing is used at the end of every topic. Like other strategies of teaching and learning, students are given questions and answer them correctly using either the oral or written method. The key element of debriefing is the so called "reflection." After the classroom activity, it is important to have time to reflect on what students have accomplished. Likewise, it is also the best time for teachers to think, ponder, and reflect about the past actions as a means to designing a new method for teaching and a new strategy for learning. In this manner, debriefing can be useful, meaningful, and practical. Raths (2018) opines that debriefing gives students the opportunity to reflect on and explain the meaning of their experiences which can help them integrate and retain their new learning. He also expounds that debriefing gives students relatively free rein in organizing, comparing, classifying, evaluating, and summarizing, analyzing an experience.

2. Theoretical Foundation

This piece of work adheres to two principles of learning. The first principle is all about Kolb's Experiential Learning in terms of evaluating students' experience. Experience is the source of learning and development which has an impact on the design and

development of lifelong learning. The researcher believes that there is a need to evaluate these activities in the classroom in order to evaluate, analyze, and reflect the actions and action plans for further improvement. The second principle is the idea of Bigg's theory on Constructive alignment (Biggs, 1999). Students construct meaning from what they do in order to learn. The teacher aligns the planned learning activities with the learning outcomes. In application to constructivism theory, a teacher should always begin with what a student knows (Mc Keachie, n.d.). Learning moves fast when it builds on what they already know and by comparing old, known information or processes with new, unknown ones allows the student to grasp new information quickly. This is focused on the construction of knowledge of the learner to link the new information that exists in meaningful ways. This theory also relates to Ausubel's meaningful learning theory which claims that in order for new concepts to be learned meaningfully, students must relate the knowledge to what they already know.

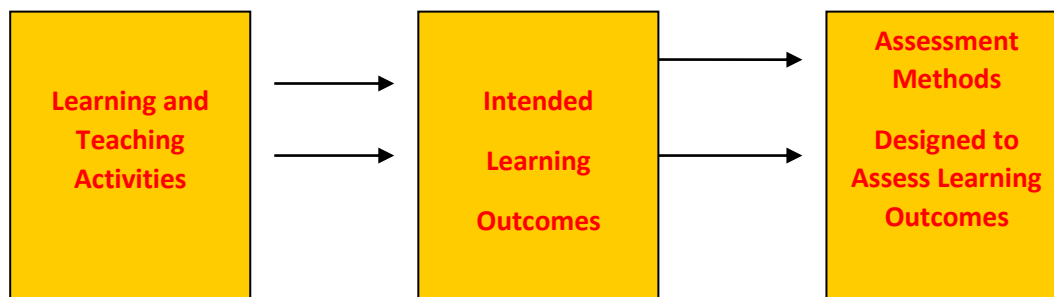


Figure 1: Aligning learning outcomes, learning and teaching activities and the assessment
(Adapted from Biggs (1999))

3. Context

3.1 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to emphasize the importance of the debriefing strategy in evaluating the various activities in the classroom. This debriefing strategy is also a form of reflection on the author's experience in two courses taught in semester 371. The analysis of this task is a part of improving the teaching and learning process.

3.2 Methodology

This study uses the qualitative-descriptive type of research. After an activity was conducted in the classroom, the application of the debriefing strategy followed. The results were recorded, analyzed, and reflected upon for further improvement.

3.3 Scope and Limitation

Two sections of the PYP in semester 371 experienced the debriefing strategy as a tool to provide critical analysis on student learning experiences.

3.4 Reflections in Teaching and Learning

The researcher believes that a teacher can be more effective if he/she reflects on what is happening around him/her. It is important to study different classroom scenarios like

students' performance, study habits, learning styles, classroom management, and reflective practices when making decisions on how to improve. However, this study is focused only on the debriefing strategy that was conducted in order to help the students become reflective, critical, analytical, and transformative in their learning experience. As a teacher, to become reflective means to assess whether a new strategy of teaching is useful or effective in student learning.

Once a strategy or method is used, this must be described, analyzed and interpreted, and then this must be transformed into a more developed strategy. It is understood that a reflective teacher must be open to change. A need to have self, peer and student evaluation is necessary to heighten teaching and to enrich learning. Schon (1983, 1987) recognizes that professional knowledge lies in the doing of the job. Many experienced teachers cannot actually articulate what they know – they just do it. Schon argues that in these situations, professionals use their knowledge and past experiences as a frame for action – a form of knowing an action which comes with experience, and therefore differs from Dewey's conception of routinized action. Schon interpolates that if professionals can begin to separate the things they know when they do them, they become more effective in their work.

In conjunction with the above statements, our knowledge on education is entirely different from what we have experienced in daily teaching. We may not be certain that a strategy is effective without actually trying out. Conclusively, when trying out different activities inside the classroom, they become more effective if they are analyzed, evaluated, and reflected upon.

Let us take for example one student who never participates in the classroom. He/she wants to stop in the middle of the semester. The teacher encourages the student to think about his/her action. Finally, the student realizes that she needs to study hard and stay to finish his/her studies. In the end, she/he passes the course with flying colors. The motivational technique of the teacher inspires him/her, and he/she becomes eager to learn. Because the student is honest to his/her teacher, the solution is easily found. Now the student is busy participating in various clubs and academic activities. This course of action is called reflection-on-action. This takes place after the event or teaching session and is a more deliberative and conscious process. There is more critical analysis and evaluation of the actions and what might have happened if a different course of action had taken place. This example is one of the best examples of critical evaluation and thereby produces reflections-on-action.

4. The Debriefing Strategy

According to Cummings in one of her "Training Wheels" article (www.training-wheels.com), debriefing is a term used in experiential education to describe question and answer sessions with participants. She elaborated on many activities that will actually show how a debriefing strategy has been done. Some of these activities include: anchor pieces, sit and get, community puzzle, action and reflection, UFO ball, and many others. These activities helped her audience to reflect and to give their insights upon

conducting a task. As a result, students became engaged in what they were learning and this allowed them to create time to reflect on their own learning.

The researcher has discovered various researches on feedback and reflection, but there have been no empirical studies about debriefing strategy in a language classroom. However, the classroom activities were created to cater to the learning needs of every student. Thus, the researcher has different ways on how to conduct her debriefing strategy. Using a variety of techniques leads the students to learn effectively and focuses on improving student learning. Schuell (1986: 429) opines that a teacher's fundamental task is to get students engaged in learning activities that will help achieve his/her Intended Learning Outcome (ILO). It is more important to remember what the student does rather than what the teacher does in a classroom.

4.1 Reflective Feedback

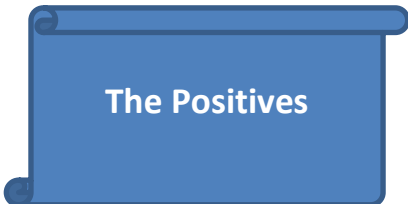

I have examined some views that have changed due to reflective feedback from my students. Teaching is a professional activity and in learning how to teach, we need to dwell on three questions to become a reflective teacher: (1) *what have I done?* (2) *what affects all the things I have done?* (3) *How can I improve what I have done?* It is the last question that I have to focus on to improve my teaching practice. Quinn and Gregory (1997) in an article published "Reflecting and debriefing"(2018) state that helpful feedback improves performance in achieving ones goals.

Reflective practice is a dynamic developmental process and has been part of the issues in this study. Examining all our experiences and students' experiences determine the values that underpin all our teaching practices. Students were asked about their feelings, experiences, and benefits of each activity that was conducted in the classroom. Both oral and written formats were important tools in describing how students feel and think about something. One way of getting students engaged in learning is through various activities that will maximize their skills and encourage them to do something in the class that they actually like doing. In this study, the researcher used four (4) forms to conduct the debriefing process.

4.2 Pre-debriefing Process

At this stage, I handed out a form to identify the strength and weakness of a certain activity.

A. Reflective Feedback Form 1

Course: English _____	Section: _____	Date: _____
		
?		

This form was given to students after a specific classroom activity. First, they wrote about their interesting experiences they encountered. The advantage of this was it allowed them the opportunity to write their positive and negative feelings about the activity. The question mark also allowed them to ask a question if they did not understand the lesson or the activity, in general. The students did their own self-reflection on the things that happened, and decided if there were things to be improved upon in learning or in the activity itself. I found this practical because the form has only three items to fill out. Students could relate to share their personal experiences and feelings about a certain task. Some students tried to make some improvements in their learning or in the activity that was accomplished. However, it turned out that students were most concerned about their learning. To view samples of their responses, the following were recorded:

Student	Positive	Negative	For Improvement
1	"The topic 'what is more important: taste or nutrition?' is very timely because I became aware of my diet. The breakfast in the classroom as an activity made me feel happy and important as part of the group. We became closer together. (Reference Topic: Unit 2 Food and Taste Q-skills Textbook)	I feel shy to explain what I normally eat at breakfast because not all of them are healthy.	I should try my best to eat healthy diet. I will try to be confident next time to speak about the food I eat. I believe that my fellow students understand me.
2	Getting ideas from other people about their success and failure helped me realize that if you really work hard and put your best, you will become successful. (Reference Topic: Unit 3 Success Q-skills Textbook)	I don't like to share the negative things that happened to me. I feel down if I remember my failure.	Talking about other people's success was a bit difficult because I prepared only few questions. I should have asked my teacher to give me tips on the questions I needed to ask from other students.
3	I love to watch advertisements, so I was able to make my own advertisement. News report coupled with advertisements in the classroom made it so real and effective. (Reference Topic: Unit 6 Advertisements Q-skills Textbook)	The group lacked time to prepare our news report and advertisement.	Provide more time to rehearse before the presentation.
4	I love the idea of going out of the classroom once in a while and interview some teachers and students about their food preferences. This helps me boost my moral and build my self-confidence. Reference Topic: Unit 2 Food and Taste Q-skills Textbook)	Not everyone that I saw answered me correctly. Because I was so shy, I did not elaborate the question with them.	I think it would be better if I was with my peer who is so confident enough to talk with other people. It is a bit hard for me to start a talk.
5	The mini-debate about money and happiness helped me realize the importance of family. Money can be found anywhere but not the true happiness brought by your family.	I lacked time to do research about the topic.	I could have improved it by giving more information on the importance of family and happiness brought by family members.

Based on these sample answers, I proceeded to the debriefing proper to continue with the discussion. The idea of brainstorming with the students on how they feel and what improvements can be made both in the teaching or learning process enables everyone to

participate without pressuring them to justify or elaborate their points. Their reactions were natural and simple. They described their positive and negative feelings and gave some points for improvement. I did not expect that their answers on this piece of paper would be so extensive.

4.3 The Debriefing Proper

Aside from the form used above, in this stage of the debriefing process, the facilitator asked some questions before the start of the activity. All members of the group gave their reactions *before, during, and after the activity*. There were arguments during this stage among the students themselves, but this became manageable. This allowed them to be critical and self-reflective.

4.4 The Summary and Conclusion Stage

The facilitator gave a summary and conclusion of the activity conducted in the classroom after the discussions. The students were asked to rank their thoughts in reflective learning as shown in the form below as a post debriefing activity:

4.5 Other Forms Used in the Debriefing Strategy

A. Reflective Learning Form 2

Course: English	Section: _____	Date: _____
How do you feel when you are reflecting on learning? Rank the following statements according to importance. (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10)		
_____ It makes me feel contented of something I'm thinking about.		
_____ It makes me feel comfortable about the topic.		
_____ It makes me feel relaxed and accountable about something.		
_____ It inspires me to change for the better.		
_____ It enriches my skills to study better.		
_____ It makes me feel confident and optimistic to learn.		
_____ It teaches me to study hard.		
_____ It encourages me to consider possible solutions to any difficulties.		
_____ It makes me cognizant of my learning behaviors and aptitude.		
_____ It helps me to be mindful of my time and budget my time wisely.		

Using the above form, the importance of debriefing among students was emphasized to them right after an activity. The ranking provided a clear picture about the significance of each classroom task.

B. Student Reflection Form 3

Student Reflection Form No. 3									
Today,	I	feel							because
			_____.				Last meeting, I felt		(that)
			_____				because _____.		
			_____.				Now I want to		
			_____.						

In some cases, the form above was used to describe the feelings of a student about a current or past activity. This was also compared to their feelings now. It allowed them to recall activities that happened in the past with their possible recommendations for improvement. Communication between students and teacher became easy and spontaneous. As compared to the first two forms, this was used to practice the English language by creating good sentences and helped the students to be honest and reflective in analyzing the actual scenario.

The following general questions served as a guide to conduct another strategy of debriefing.

C. Student Reflection Form 4

Student Reflection No. 4
1. How well do you think team members work together?
2. How well do you feel each member contributed to this activity?
3. How well do you think the team listened to each other's role?
4. How well do you think the team worked together to start and end the task?
Stages of Reflection
Stage 1 What?
1. What happened in your _____ (role play, brainstorming, etc.) experience?
2. What went well in your activity?
3. Was there any problem encountered?
Stage 2 So What?
1. Is the activity important? Is it related to the lesson?
2. Did you know you could do that?
3. Can you see what that worked? (any related theory)
4. How would you do things differently?
Stage 3 Now What?
1. What will you do differently in the future?
2. Can you make a new plan and strategy?
3. What support do you need from your group?
4. What might be the consequences of your action?

This form above is actually the most comprehensive one, and it is the most essential part of any debriefing procedure. The first stage speaks about the “what” of the activity. Whatever happens in the activity should be recorded to show what really happened. The second stage “so what” gives the readers an idea on how to evaluate a certain activity and if there is any significant related theory underlying this task. The last stage is the “now what” which means that an action plan has to be made in order for the individual, group, or activity to improve. The last stage should be a significant aspect in finding out the real essence of each task by drawing some information from the students. In this stage, students will think of alternative ways on how to improve the activity in the future.

5. Some Workshop Classroom Activities Used by the Researcher/Facilitator were:

A. Role Play a Job Interview

1. Materials Needed: A Reading Article on a Job Interview
2. Ideal Group Size: 3 to 4 Students

3. Description: Students are advised to choose a paragraph to portray or role play in the class instead of reading the article as a whole.
4. Procedure: Students will be grouped into three or four. Then, read one paragraph from the article and analyze it. Role play their most favorite lines by either showing the do's or don't's for a job interview. One will portray as a manager, another one is a supervisor, and two students will play as applicants.

In this activity, the students enjoyed portraying their own roles. To evaluate the effectiveness of this task, the facilitator used form no. 4 to identify the strengths, weaknesses, and improvements of the activity. One good thing that happened in this workshop was the student became the facilitator of the debriefing process. It was the first time a student led the debriefing, and it went well because everyone participated in fulfilling this task. First, the leader mentioned the goal of the activity and the goal of the debriefing. Everyone agreed to answer all the questions; they then discussed the activity among themselves, and this allowed them to solve problems and be critical.

B. Teaching the Three Parts of Speech Game (Noun-Verb-Adjectives)

1. Materials Needed: sticky paper with words written on it which can be posted on the forehead of a student or on the board.
2. Ideal Group Size: In two's
3. Description: One student will guess the word while asking the question (Is it a noun, verb, or an adjective), while the other student says Yes or No only.
4. Procedure: Two students will be called upon to perform this task. One student has to post the vocabulary on his/her forehead or on the board. Student 1 will ask the question: Is it a Noun? Verb? Or Adjective? Student 2 will answer only yes or no. If the answer is no, she has to ask again about the part of speech of the word used. If it is Yes, Student 2 will now guess the word based on the part of speech given. For example, is it a noun? Yes. Is it a person? No. Is it a thing? No, Is it a place? Yes. Then student 2 will guess....New York, The Philippines, etc. etc.

After the aforementioned activity, the teacher divides the group into two and asks the students about their opinions on the task. Through their answers, the teacher can check students' understanding on a certain question. Students will learn how to be critical and realize the importance of certain ideas and information.

C. Teaching Simple Vocabulary (Last Letter)

1. Materials Needed: A Ball
2. Ideal Group Size: 15-25 students
3. Description: Last Letter Game Using a Ball
4. Procedure: The teacher provides a word and passes the ball to a student. The last letter of the word used by the teacher will be the first letter of the word to be given by the student, and so on. For example, the teacher says ACCOMPLISHMENT, the ball is passed to the student and she/he says, TEACHER....The ball is passed again to another student and the student says, RICH, etc.

The students analyzed what happened in this activity as a whole group. Student participation was strong and they were given the freedom to use the vocabulary that they wanted. They were also given a chance to practice different kinds of vocabulary.

On the other hand, Rath (2018) recommends some activities to help students attach meanings to learning experiences and these are:

Writing Diaries: These document students' reactions to activities or events that are particularly useful if the entries interpret what has happened.

Writing a precis: Asks students to identify the gist of an experience, reading, or observation.

Naming Themes: Asks students to think about the personal lesson that was learned, a message thrust of a reading passage or experience that was conveyed.

Imagining: Requires students to imagine, "What if," or to pretend and create alternatives.

Evaluating: Asks students to rate or rank an experience. Students are given the chance to defend their evaluations.

Role-playing: Gives students an opportunity to act out their understanding of processes, a literary character's personality, or new problematic situations.

Drawing: Helps students identify major themes or issues in a non-verbal manner.

Comparing: Requires students to relate reading a book or poem or taking a field trip to another similar experience.

Concept mapping: Asks students to visualize and draw the relationships between concepts with a series of links or chains.

According to Rath (2018), it is through process of constructing personal meanings that students will be able to reveal such misunderstandings, oversimplifications, and personal theories. The activities mentioned above were tried out and evaluated this made the debriefing strategy an effective tool to improving student learning.

I would like to agree with most of Rath's ideas on classroom activities, however, not all students are able to perform all tasks. For example, the use of writing diaries in the Preparatory Year Program is difficult because they already have writing portfolios to be completed in a semester. Thus, an alternative way was the use of "journal writing." I provided each student with a small notebook where they can write their ideas, questions, reflections about the lesson or anything that they can start pondering on. Before I start with my lecture, I ask them one or two questions and write their answers in the journal. Students learned how to create good sentences and compare their answers with their peers. Role playing was very effective with my students. For example, when the topic was all about celebrations, they actually demonstrated a role play of a "Wedding in Saudi Arabia." Unexpectedly, students became aware of their newly-created vocabulary. Aside from this, students showed their enthusiasm in discussing a topic they have knowledge of, so the role play became exciting and valuable.

6. Impact of Debriefing Strategy on Student Learning

Along with these theories of teaching and learning, I have tried to make improvements on my teaching. Teaching is a very unique profession. I learned to become creative. In an article, "The Importance of Creativity in Classroom," (www.edsys.in/creativity-in-classroom) states that, "*a good classroom environment always has some elements of creativity along with curriculum helps students to be innovative and also encourages them to learn new things.*" The selflessness to impart ideas and experiences with students is necessary as it moulds the youth of today. The idea of feedback is continuous although more time is needed to conduct such an activity like this. After the session, questions were asked as to whether the students had learned something, if something needed to be clarified or improvements could be made. Also, they had enjoyed the lesson, and what else could have been done to improve the subject, the delivery of the subject matter, etc. Both the teacher and the students learned to *listen* to each other – problems, concerns, suggestions, and recommendations. Students' behavior also improved after this process. Ornstein (1990) says that behaviour is shaped by its *consequences*. The debriefing strategy encourages and increases student investment, motivation, and performance because they students are given the chance to be more responsible in the course. In an article, "Active learning" (<https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/resources/learning-resources>) states that, "*When you invite students to actively participate in the learning environment, they take more responsibility for their performance in the course. Similarly, when they have an opportunity to make decisions about what they learn and how to use that knowledge, students see a course as being more valuable and more directly related to their goals.*" It also mentioned some activities that make the students involved like the brainstorming learning objectives. If students are involved in the development of classroom activities, it allows them to choose the topic of a short discussion or to generate their own ideas about a concept. In this way, it automatically increases engagement levels. It also requires them to assess their own understanding and skills and rather than allowing them to rest comfortably with a surface knowledge, it forces them to develop a deeper understanding of the material.

According to Rath (2018), if we teach students strategies which help them recall and reconstruct what they have learned, teachers can instruct not only for facts, but for understanding.

6.1 Possible Changes Brought by Debriefing Strategy

Due to the various activities conducted using the debriefing strategy, these were the necessary and possible changes carried out in semester 372:

- More time was allowed for students to prepare a presentation;
- Students were given more time to reflect on their own presentations;
- Their progress in every task was monitored as necessary;
- The purpose of drawing out ideas, implications and possible strategies of learning become a real focus;

- Students were motivated to realize their character and helped them to improve their own roles;
- Methods of teaching the PYP students were employed in accordance to their needs, suggestions, and recommendations, and;
- They were given time to perform role plays that would help them interact among themselves and require them to seek solutions to real-life situations. This will also help them discover themselves as a human being and improve their communication skills.

7. Conclusion and Recommendation

Debriefing is used as an experiential learning in describing the events through questions and answers, whether verbal or written. It is also believed that this strategy enhances student learning, so it is found to be effective in identifying what went well, why it went well, what went wrong, and why it went wrong in a certain classroom activity. In this manner, teachers will be able to align their teaching strategies and methodologies to improve the teaching and learning process. The activities used in the debriefing stages were found to be more meaningful and useful because students participated well during the debriefing process using various forms. It is recommended that this strategy should be done in a language classroom, but it should be made clear at the beginning of the class that such a strategy will be conducted. Good management practice begins on the first day of school with carefully organized, systematic plans for accomplishing classroom tasks and activities. As teachers, a good rapport, plan, and creativity are good qualities which can be implemented on the first day of class. Finally, teachers should try using debriefing in finding out the effectiveness of a teaching strategy, and to reveal the outcomes of this strategy in the language classroom environment.

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