

David Latz started using CiC last year, at Shimonoseki University near Fukuoka. We had a late night interview, using the instant message function of Skype.

David and I covered the following topics in this week's talk:

- What's new compared with the first year using CiC?
- How do you go about introducing the new material?
- Class timeline.
- Other activities.
- Pair practice and test management.

I would be really happy to interview others about their teaching experiences, so if you are interested please e-mail me: brunovannieu@yahoo.com, and we'll set up an online meeting.

As for the format of this blog, Stephen and I are thinking that we should alternate between teacher interviews such as this one, and shorter texts about how a given lesson was used practically in class. This way we can offer a much broader scope and many different perspectives. What do you think?

Bruno Vannieu

What's new compared with last year?

Bruno: Hi David. This is the second year you have been using CiC. Any differences with the first year?

David Latz: The first big difference is I'm much more conscious of the three Golden Rules. I repeat them all the time during the class. If a point related to them comes up, I get the students to turn to the relevant page to re-read it. I'm really trying to get those rules repeated over and over so the students remember and apply them! I have made my own "catchphrases" for them : Rule 1 - "Speak Up!", Rule 2 - "Long Answers!", Rule 3 - "Variety!". Almost a mantra!

Bruno: For me too, pragmatics have become more and more important. I found I could focus on them more as I was getting more at ease with the Immediate Method itself.

David: That's right - I've got a good foundation in the 3 rules so I know where to go with that - I can always return to this solid underpinning. The three rules / catchphrases can summarize a lot of information for me to convey to the students. When I say "remember

Variety!", that should get them thinking back to that rule summary back on page 15 of the textbook. Hopefully, the more I repeat it, the more they'll be encouraged to adopt it, and will see the changes in their conversations.

The second thing is I'm bringing in a few different activities and variations - I'm using CiC more as a platform rather than strictly following the Teacher's Book. I have enough familiarity now that I can adapt things more - I can also do a lot of experimentation. This keeps the lessons fresh for me and lets me try things out.

Introducing new material

Bruno: Do you have a standard way of introducing the new material ?

David: Typically, after I introduce the Grammar Toolbox and do some oral practice, I get the students to complete the three *Vary Your Speech* questions, and also to write a "Your Turn" conversation. I call on students to give their answers to the *Vary Your Speech* questions - they'll answer, and I can ask them whether a given question structure is an open/closed question, for example. The two types combined act to vary things - I would demonstrate that by using the same question style with three students, then do this a second time but varying it - the students get the difference between open/closed and also see how you can vary patterns of speech.

This week / itinerary through CiC

Bruno: What lesson did you do this week?

David: This week I had four classes using CiC:

(1) three classes of first and second year students, all on 6A "What are going to do this Summer?".

(2) One class on 11A, "What was your favourite TV show when you were ten ?".

The first three classes have never taken my lesson before, so I can go from the beginning. I'll have about 12 classes with them in the semester, so I'll do 1A-5A, then go back to revise with 1B-5B - really happy with being able to go over and consolidate. The other class had a few students who took my class before, but because of the way CiC is structured, I can go and do those higher lessons that they didn't do the first time. Flexibility of the textbook is a real stand-out.

Bruno: So in those three classes you cover about one A lesson per week. Do you also cover the third page, "One Step Further"?

David: Yes, one A lesson a week. There are a couple of students in each of my classes

(averaging 20 students / class) that I would actually point to the One Step Further section, as they are really keen and desire the challenge.

Bruno: For the class as a whole, you cover the first two pages then: Toolboxes 1 and 2. Do you cover the exercises on page 4 during class time?

David: Yes, students are told to go on to the pg. 4 exercises after they've done their Speaking Test. When we start class the following week, I give them 10 minutes to try and finish off the questions, if they haven't done so. I find this is a good way to get the students to settle down in the room, and get ready for the lesson. Students who finish the exercises can get the solutions to check their answers, or get a photocopy of the day's new vocab. It's a good time to set things up, check on where the students are at, etc.

I've also been playing music in the background - lends a good, relaxed atmosphere to the classroom. When the music's playing, the students are either doing these exercises or answering *Vary Your Speech* questions/ *Your Turn* exercises. Confidence with the Immediate Method means I can try and keep building on the atmosphere, to make it relaxed and friendly.

Class timeline

Bruno: What does each section of the class represent, timewise?

David:

1. First ten minutes: answer p. 4 questions, check your answers, note new lesson's vocab.
2. Grammar Toolbox 1:
 - (1) We go over the expressions, note differences, usage. Lead the students in choral drills (about 5 mins.).
 - (2) I then give the students 3 mins. to practice in pairs.
 - (3) Vary your speech/ Your Turn! - 4-5 mins. to do this, then I'll check some answers - probably ask six students to present the answers/ their conversations. I use playing cards to decide which student gives their answer - these playing cards are CRUCIAL to what I'm doing.
3. Grammar Toolbox 2: again, explanations, drills, then free practice of 3 mins. for the students among themselves. Depending on time, the students will do Grammar Toolbox 2's *Vary your speech/ Your turn!* section. I'll check answers here - because students know they may be called on, they'll do the exercises (I always tell them it'll help for the speaking test).
4. Prep for the speaking test: I'll tell the students how today's speaking test is set up - student-to-student only, teacher also participating, etc. I then give them 10 minutes to practice. Each student pair is called up to do their speaking test; order of the tests is decided

by the playing cards I've given out - told you they were important!

5. After the 10 minutes of practice time are up, the students start coming up to me to do their test - this should take us through to the bell – the class is 90 minutes all up. Sometimes I run over time, but my classes are generally about 20 students. I've had some bigger classes this year, up to 28 or so - this means cutting stuff out earlier.

Conversation tests

Bruno: So you test all your students every week?

David: Yes, I do.

Bruno: Wow. You must be fast. I've been struggling trying to keep testing half of my classes every week (36+ students in each class). That's also 20 students a week, 10 pairs.

David: I also teach at a nursing school with 40 students - in that case, I test half the class every week. The other half do written exercises. This is working well.

With the nursing school, I don't use CiC - I use the set text - medical English textbook. I pair this with the Immediate Method - it's working well.

Bruno: Yes, but testing 20 students (10 pairs) per class is tiring. I must be getting old!

David: I've got a lot of energy for it, as I find the interactions with the students to be genuinely enjoyable - you find out all sorts of interesting stuff, especially about areas of Japan, etc. So on that humanistic angle, for me, it's a really good fit. The other institutions where I do not use CiC/ the IM, I do not have anywhere near the rapport I enjoy with the above classes. It's this idea of a real exchange of information - genuinely communicating - nothing beats that feeling of surprise when a student tells you something really interesting - you forget your testing, and want to know more (then I run over time!). And for the classes I'm teaching, where the reason for why the students are studying English is not at all clear - there's no 'instrumental' purpose -, this actual communication seems really worthwhile!

Playing cards

Bruno: Can you tell me more about that playing cards system?

David: OK, the playing card system. I use ordinary 'trump' cards. I will take one suit of cards at the start of the lesson, and hand a card to each pair of students. I will take another suit of cards, and take out the cards corresponding to the ones I've dealt out earlier. During the lesson, I'll pull out a card – "Where is number 2?". The student with the 2 will then answer the question. I like this because a) every student has a fairly equal chance of being called upon, b) the cards seem to be an "impartial" referee – I'm not calling out the student

personally – the cards are. I've seen people make up name cards and use them. The playing cards have been very flexible.

Bruno: Good one. And you use the same system to decide the order pairs will be tested in?

David: Later, for the speaking tests, I use the playing cards to determine the order of student pairs taking the test, e.g. aces go first, then 2's, then 3's. The students know what order they have to take their test, and when to come up to me – speeds things up time-wise. Later on, I can change things. The students will get lazy – if they get the King, they know they're going last, so they don't practice too much. One week, I'll tell them the playing card order is reversed – kings go first. That gives them a shock, spurs them on. I can also just say the order is completely random; the students don't know when they're up. It lends a bit of 'creative pressure' to things – I think it's a fair means of gently pushing them to try – they usually give it a good shot and do well - and end up surprising themselves!

I can also distribute cards randomly, so the student doesn't know who they'll be speaking with. Otherwise, students in set pairs will tend to memorize a speech, and just 'recite' it – this is not a real conversation. If I announce their partner just as the test starts, the students will come up to the test 'meeting' their partner for the first time – the 'rehearsed' conversation goes out the window, and hopefully we get a more spontaneous, realistic, conversation.

Of course, when I participate in a conversation, that also throws in that wildcard element – the students don't know what the teacher will say; rehearsed stuff won't work!

Bruno: Yes, students do benefit from practicing with more people.

David: That's right. I feel that for the first two rounds of free practice with the Grammar Toolboxes, they can speak with their set pairs. For the speaking test, I will alternate between these set pairs and new pairs. If I'm introducing a new style of speaking test, e.g. “questions only to teacher”, etc., then I might give them a 'dry run' with their set pairs. The following week, I want to get them to do the speaking test with a different person.

New activities

David: Another thing at the moment that I'm doing is trying to bring in activities. I've been reading a little on Multiple Intelligences - especially activity guides by Mario Rinvolucri. Sometimes I'm worried that with the Immediate Method's push for students to speak in the speaking test, I might be pressuring some students a bit much – they might not be 'linguistically intelligent', but may be better in one of the other 'intelligences' – so I want to bring in some writing, some 'conversation loops', etc, to try and vary the ways I'm presenting the material. Backing off on the constant verbal / speaking push may give them a bit of

breathing space.

Bruno: Can you give me an example of such an activity that worked well for you recently?

David: Conversation loops. The idea is there is a question at the top, e.g. "Where are you from?". Below this is the answer to a different question, e.g. "I watch movies". The next slip of paper has the question matching the preceding answer, e.g. "what do you do in your free time?". There could be about 20+ slips of paper with one question and one answer - corresponding to structures from CiC. Students receive slips of paper – I select one student to start. They ask their question, e.g. "How far is your hometown from here?". The student with the matching answer (Four minutes on foot) has to listen and say their answer aloud, then read the question they have. The questions and answers go round the classroom, and loop back to the first student.

This conversation loop lets me revise past structures – I can get structures from all the lessons in there. It gives the students listening practice as well, of course. I would do this at the beginning of the lesson, and have a stopwatch. The first time, students will have some trouble. I'll repeat it the next lesson, and they'll get faster. It seems to go really well, trying to vary the input, approach things from different angles to engage the students' 'intelligences' a different way.

Bruno: Two last things, very quickly.

First, playing background music is an original idea! Classical music? I like also this kind of little experiments, which help keeping me fresh.

David: I tried classical music at first, and I found it a bit... uptight. I tried a ska / reggae CD after that, and that went really, really well – nice, upbeat music, nothing too intrusive. I've also encouraged students to bring CDs in, a student did so today. Had to stress that it should be an English-language CD. It might not be to some students' tastes, but if it gets a few students to relax – the musically inclined ones - then it's a good thing!

Bruno: One last little detail: to give students the exercises answers and new vocabulary, do you photocopy the "answer keys" and "Vocabulary lists" that are in the Teacher's Book?

David: For the exercise answers and vocab – yes, I photocopy both from the Teacher's Book, and hand these out as needed during the 10 minutes. Students who haven't finished won't get the answers. Students who have get the vocab to keep them occupied.

Bruno: I see. Well, that's plenty of interesting ideas. Thanks a lot, David. I'd like to do another interview later in the semester or during the second semester, if that's OK with you.

David: Sure – I have absolutely no feedback from other teachers on my lessons. It's really important for me to keep trying to find new stuff. Otherwise, I will get complacent and start 'coasting' with CiC. I also hope we can all meet up in November for the IM workshop!

Bruno: Cool. Talk to you soon, and thanks again.