

Developing Students' Speaking Skills through Recap(ping)

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Abstract

Recap(ping) is a practice of summarizing and reflecting upon the activities conducted during a lesson. A teacher can choose to conduct this activity either at the beginning, or at the end of a lesson. As an English language teacher, I have been using recapping as a signature pedagogy since the beginning of my teaching career. In this article, I have examined my long-time practice of recapping activity in my English language classroom using analytical-interpretive autoethnography. I have narrated and analyzed my memory data of using recapping activity in my English language classroom to discuss its usability, pedagogic importance, merits, and demerits as a signature pedagogy. This study underscores the effectiveness of recapping as a pedagogic tool with its high adaptability and multiple benefits for both the teachers and the students.

Keywords: recapping, take-away activity, signature pedagogy

Introduction

Recapitulation is an act of presenting the concise summary of a lesson. It is called 'recap' in short. The person who presents a recap can be called a recapper. The recapper reflects upon the lesson activities while highlighting, or critically appreciating them. Then, the recapper picks up the main ideas of the lesson and explains why those ideas from the lesson are important. Therefore, an English language teacher can use lesson recapping as an activity to help the students learn actively in classroom (Chu & Nguyen, 2022). The use of recapping makes the lesson productive and engaging.

As an English language teacher working at both secondary and tertiary levels, I have been using lesson recap as a 'signature pedagogy' (Shulman, 2005) since I began my teaching career in 2008. Shulman (2005) has defined a 'signature pedagogy' as the main activity that the teachers use to teach a profession to their students to develop them as future professionals. So, a signature pedagogy differs in its type and pattern on the nature of a profession it is being used.

Shulman (2005) has taken a signature pedagogy as the development of work culture in any profession so that it ultimately affects the quality in the work of the professionals. This work culture develops from the professionals' creation and practice of the habits of their mind, heart, and hand. These habits are developed in the professionals through the teaching of the three basics of a 'signature pedagogy'- thinking, performing, and acting. Therefore, a signature pedagogy is a way of teaching the students for the development of a certain habit, or a set of habits, which will be useful in their future profession.

In my case, I have been teaching the habit of recapping to my basic level and secondary level school students as a signature pedagogy. As an English language teacher, I have to teach them think critically, speak (act) critically, and express their opinion (perform) critically. This habit, if developed properly, will help the students to progress and get success in their future endeavors.

Using analytical-interpretive autoethnographic method, I have attempted, in this article, to self-reflect on my use of recapping activity as a signature pedagogy in my English language lessons. I have sought answers to my queries such as how much useful the recap activity has usually been in my English language classroom, how my students

have been benefited from it, and how I have been able to develop critical thinking skills in my students using the recap activity. The findings will be helpful to all the English language teachers who would like to use recapping as an activity in their lessons in future.

Literature Review

Recapping helps students get connected with the lesson. They are active and alert throughout the lesson so that they can understand and analyze particular information or issue. Doing so helps them present their view on a topic critically with their own personal reflection. Moreover, recapping helps the students process the information from the lesson with an idea of organization (Start with a Recap, 2021). Therefore, recapping the lesson is a learner-centered approach that activates the students as the lesson's main stakeholders and engages them in “multi-dimensional thinking” (Tan, 2019). The students are encouraged to apply the systematic thought process, develop their attitude, and enable themselves with abilities to deal with any topic, or issue from multiple angles and approaches.

Generally, the teachers and students feel tired towards the end of the lesson and reach the mood of having some relaxation. Sometimes, the discussion arrives at the dead end abruptly. But recapping saves a teacher from getting into this pedagogical jet lag, and helps him leave the lasting impression among the students for the next day lesson. As Chu and Nguyen (2022) observed, recapping is beneficial for students because it helps them explore the lessons and retain the information for long.

Recapping is useful for both teachers and students in all modes of teaching and learning activities – online, blended, and face-to-face. It is equally useful for teachers while applying lecture, tutorial, or workshop method in their classroom. Students of all levels can benefit from the recapping activity as it engages and encourages them to interact (Chu & Nguyen, 2022). The “dynamic use of recap” (Chu, 2021) helps students by engaging, discussing, sharing, and clarifying the ideas. Particularly introvert students can benefit from recaps like simulation, discussion, or testing questions. As a result, the students can learn better with the help of recapping.

The students need regular recap sessions so that they can revisit their lessons and deepen their knowledge (Baker, 2022). Recapping is fruitful for all kinds of learners in

the same setting (Chu & Nguyen, 2022). Even the dedicated students have opportunity to understand the topic differently and more deeply while correcting their misunderstanding, if any, while the teachers can keep their students active throughout the lesson using the recap session at the end of their lessons. The only demerits of recapping are that it repeats the details of lesson activities and increases the workload for the teachers. However, even repeating the lesson details is fruitful to students who might have missed them in course of the lesson.

Recapping is beneficial to the students for mainly three reasons: due to variety of learning opportunities, due to the increased learning experiences, and due to its positive effects in learning process (Chu, 2021). Therefore, recaps can be used at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the lesson. Even after some sessions or at the end of the course, the recaps can be used. Similarly, recaps can be in various forms such as simulation, discussion, testing questions, verbal, or a combination of verbal, visual, and written pieces.

On the bases of their purpose, recaps can also be called work recap, training recap, shift recap, meeting recap, project recap, summary recap, financial recap, conference recap, deal recap, overview, communication tool, documentation, summary, and reminder. The main elements found in all these types of recaps are the basic information, agenda, and list of discussion (Stavnezer & Lom, 2019). Since recaps are for student engagement and active learning, they are mainly student-oriented classroom techniques.

Some other researchers (Hagan et al., 2022; Ewing et al., 2009) have studied recap as an acronym (RECAP) in the modified form of teaching-learning activities in their own contexts. Hagan et al. (2022) used the RECAP framework based on K-W-L (know, want to know, learned) for online classes. The acronym represented the five steps of an institutional strategy used for encouraging the students in their self-learning through reflection. They have found the steps - Reflect on your week, Explain what you learned, Compare your work, Act on feedback, and Plan for success – elaborate and useful mainly in flip model classroom as a method or an approach. Therefore, it is not fit for day-to-day English language lessons for student engagement and their involvement in the practice of critical thinking.

Ewing et al. (2009) reported RECAP as an acronym for Read/Recall class materials, Engage in discussions, and group activities in class, Apply what was learned in class via exams, assignments, projects, and Progress/Performance as determined by course grade. They used this approach for weekly task to help the students to grasp the concepts taught in class and prepare the exam systematically. The instructor can also benefit from this approach by being able to track the students' performance.

This study has attempted to study recap activity as a signature pedagogy which I include as a regular component in my lesson plans of English language classes beyond Grade Six for high-school students. My personal 'reflexivity' (Adams et al., 2017) of my own practice of 'recapping' activity has enabled me to discuss its significance and usefulness as a signature pedagogy in English language classrooms. I have explored the significance of recapping activity for my school English language students and the way I have implemented this activity in my classes for their maximum benefits.

Methodology

I have used analytical-interpretive autoethnography for this study. As a research method, autoethnography allows the researcher for including personal experience in the cultural analysis as both the subject and the researcher (Ellis et al., 2011). By using this method, I aim to critically examine the pedagogical significance of lesson recaps, reflecting on how they shape language teaching practices within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction.

The data I have analyzed for this study are from my personal reflections (Adams et al., 2017) of conducting the recapping activity as a regular signature activity in my English language classrooms. I have documented my thoughts and experiences in teaching, particularly focusing on the implementation of lesson recaps.

For this, I engaged myself in retrospective reflection, recalling specific lessons and instances where lesson recaps were employed. This process of reflecting back helped me build the themes related with the usages of the recaps on the basis of my memory. Thus, the autoethnographic focus on my own 'lived experience' as a researcher has become the main source of inquiry (Spry, 2001). This inquiry of my own experiences has helped me relate myself with my students in a kind of healing process.

In conclusion, the analytical-interpretive autoethnography provides an in-depth

exploration of lesson recap as a signature pedagogy in my teaching practice. By critically reflecting on my own experiences and analyzing the impact of lesson recaps, I contribute to the understanding of how self-reflection can enhance the effectiveness of English language teaching in my classes. Through this methodology, I demonstrate the potential of autoethnography to inform both personal and professional growth, ultimately shaping more effective and reflective teaching practices.

Results

I knew and practiced recap in my lessons since long ago, from the beginning of my teaching career, though I cannot remember the exact date when I first used it seriously. However, I remember I knew about this activity since my school days.

Recapping as a Tool for Quietening Students

I remember that my teachers often exploited this activity as a tool for humiliating and quietening their students (us) when I was a school student. Whenever somebody made noise, or did any activity that disturbed the regular course of the lesson, my teachers used recapping as a weapon to quieten them. The teachers used to order the students to stand up and recap the discussion currently going on in the lesson. In most such cases, the students would not be able to recap the lesson as they would not be listening to the teacher attentively. That would provide the teacher an opportunity to deride or/and punish the 'noise-maker' and silence him/her with further questions, such as 'What were you doing?' 'Why were you talking so much?' etc.

The pain of not being able to recap or answer the teachers' questions would be so immense that the 'noisemaker/s' would feel ashamed and humiliated. Moreover, the teacher would either slap or abuse 'the noisemaker/s' verbally in front of the other classmates who would often grin and groan in mockery of the punished. Therefore, the recapping activity might have entered my subconscious mind as a method for managing the unmanageable students in my English language classroom.

When I became an English language teacher, I also followed the footsteps of my respected teachers. I created the situation of “apprenticeship of observation” (Shulman, 2005, p. 57) for myself by applying the same method of my teachers to manage the unmanageable students in my classroom in the initial days of my career. I would not

allow the disruptive students who could not recap as per my demand to sit down on the bench or chair again. They would be standing the rest of the period while their classmates laughed and mocked at them.

I also used the recapping activity occasionally at the end of my lessons to check if my students had remained alert enough throughout the lesson. It would be a good tool for me to give surprise check to my students. However, I did not use it regularly and seriously in my classes as a pedagogy or teaching method as I was not aware of its advantages in English language teaching.

Whenever I asked my students to recap the lesson, most of them used to remain quiet except one or two so-called 'brighter' ones. I experienced many times that most of my students tried to hide their faces, or looked down to their feet, being afraid of my sudden demand. Therefore, I mostly used this activity in my lessons for managing the unmanageable students in class. Mostly, I got engaged with other activities in class and I lacked enough time for this valuable activity.

Recapping as a Tool for Helping Students

I think I took recapping seriously for the first time in 2019, when I was conducting *Exploratory Action Research* in one of the English language classes I taught. I was a mentee teacher/researcher on a research program titled “Mentee in Online Exploratory Action Research Training for Nepali EFL Teachers” conducted by Action Research Nepal with the support of A. S. Hornby Trust, U. K. Later, I had also an article (Shrestha, 2021) published on how teachers can encourage their students to speak English in an English language class as a chapter of the book *Exploratory Action Research: Stories of Nepalese EFL Teachers* (Gnawali et al., 2021).

During that one-year long involvement in Exploratory Action Research project, I got my students engaged in many group-work and pair-work sessions. Each time they were involved in group- or pair-work, the students had to present their report one by one at the end. I realized that the activity of individual presentation at the end of the lessons encouraged them, even the weak and the shy ones, to speak English more than they actually wanted to. Then, the idea of conducting a recap session, as a regular feature of my pedagogy, for my students in my English language lessons clicked in my mind. As a result, I started to include recapping in my lesson plans from the next academic session.

Now, I have realized that recapping at the beginning or at the end of English language lessons is really a fantastic activity as the students are often keenly interested in participating in it. Through this activity, the students seem to be developing their confidence slowly in their efforts of speaking English. Some students have informally confirmed that the lesson recapping has been much useful to them because it gave them opportunity to review the overall lesson. Therefore, I often give priority to the inclusion of recapping as an activity in my English language lessons. Recapping has often helped me promote the habit of speaking English among my students.

At present, recapping has been an important component of my teaching pedagogy in classrooms. The students are often alert and ready for it because they know I will call them for recapping at the end. It has also been a useful tool for formative assessment of my students.

My personal 'reflexivity' (Adams et al., 2017) shows that a recap activity is useful for the students mainly in three ways. Firstly, it activates those students who generally do not pay so much attention to listening, grasping the ideas, and participating in the lesson activities for various reasons. A recap session helps them get clarity on the topic or subject matter discussed in the lesson even if they might have somehow missed it. Another great advantage of recap for students is that it inculcates and promotes their confidence and skills in speaking English. The involvement in recapping enables and emboldens even shy or introvert students to build self-confidence and self-motivation for speaking in front of their classmates. Also, the recappers, by frequently practicing or involving themselves in this activity, can develop their skills for critical thinking and analysis of the lessons they are engaged in. Therefore, recap sessions can be a regular feature of an English language class as a 'signature pedagogy' from which the students can benefit a lot.

For me, the merits of recapping outweigh the demerits, and it has the possibility of being a good tool of English language pedagogy. I have been practicing it since 2008 when I began my teaching career. In my experience, recapping has been highly fruitful for me and my students. Since the students will join various professions in future, I believe recapping as a signature pedagogy in my classes will help them develop the basic critical thinking skills, such as analyzing and evaluating, that they will need in

their future professional life.

Recapping as a Signature Pedagogy in My Lessons

I regularly include recapping in my lessons as a signature activity. I conduct this activity in my lessons either at the beginning or at the end, or both. At the beginning of the lesson, the recapper presents the summary and his/her reflection on the lesson of the previous day. At the end of the lesson, the recapper recaps the lesson of the same day.

I usually call two to four students for presenting recap. Concerned with the issue of gender equality, I focus upon balancing the numbers of boys and girls unless there is an exceptional situation. Similarly, I also try to balance between the representation of the so-called two groups of students: the bright ones and the weak ones. However, these are generally the categories of my personal supposition on the bases of their everyday classroom participation and their performance in my continuous assessment. I usually call the so-called weak students at the beginning of the lesson for recapping the lesson of the previous day and the so-called bright ones at the end of the lesson though it is not a hard and fast rule I follow. My supposition in doing so is that the weak students will get at least a day for preparation of the recapping; whereas, the bright students are generally capable of outright summarizing and highlighting of the main features of the lesson along with their analysis on it.

I usually do not reveal beforehand who is going to present the recap of the lesson until it is time for this activity. As Shulman (2005) has stressed on the importance of “a pedagogy of uncertainty” (p. 57), I call the recappers randomly by calling their names, or roll numbers. Each student anticipates that s/he will be abruptly called for lesson recap. As I have often observed, this anticipation creates a kind of anxiety for learning in my students. As they keep waiting anxiously for their turn to present the lesson recap, they get a challenge to develop their habit of coping with uncertainty and surprise, and face any kind of sudden challenge in their future professional life. This makes their learning experience full of excitement in the environment of risk taking and foreboding.

Sometimes, I announce the names of the recappers beforehand, especially if they are presenting their recap the next day. Since I generally call the so-called weak students for the recap of the lesson of the previous day, they get enough time for the preparation. Each student gets 2-3 minutes for presenting lesson recap which helps them develop their

confidence in speaking and competency in language use. I inform them beforehand that they are going to present the lesson recap because I am aware that my students should not be terrorized only (Shulman, 2005, p. 57). Otherwise, the students might get paralyzed with fear that they cannot tolerate and may not learn the lesson effectively.

Therefore, I also help my students, especially the weak ones, manage their fear of/while recapping the lesson with my lead or my inputs in course of their delivery. I am also conscious that I should not criticize any student for their mistake/s. Rather, I praise them wholeheartedly for any positive aspect or strong point/s they raise or discuss during the recap so that they can be encouraged to feel confident and competent for the activity.

Generally, I separate five to ten minutes of my total lesson period for recapping. When I use the recapping at the beginning, it becomes a warm up activity for my lesson. When I use it at the end of my lesson, I halt the lesson activities five to ten minutes before the bell rings. Then, I ask the students to present their recaps. While doing so, they generally have to follow the structure of recap presentation I have already prescribed to them.

I generally encourage my students to present their recaps in a format so that they will feel it easy. I often give them three questions to answer in this format. They are: a) What were the activities conducted during the lesson (topic, teacher's lecture or note, students' participation, etc.)? b) How did I (the recapper) participate in the lesson? and c) What did I learn (take-away) from the lesson? These questions prompt the recappers stay on track while presenting their recaps.

The recappers first provide the details of activities conducted during the lesson as briefly as possible. While talking about the activities, they will summarize what teacher did and said about the topic, what the teacher and the students did to achieve the goal of the lesson, and how the students participated in the activities. Then, the recappers explain how they became active in the lesson. This is an attempt to present the lesson in their own perspective. Finally, the recappers elaborate their learning from that particular lesson. This is the conclusion of the recap where the recappers use their critical thinking and analyzing abilities to reflect upon the overall activities of the lesson. The recappers can also provide their advice on what they think would serve to make the lesson more interesting or more engaging. They can talk about their unfulfilled expectations, or lack/s,

if any, from the lesson.

In this way, the students are expected to be as critical and analytic as possible during the recapping session. By recapping, I have envisioned my students to gain mainly four 21st century skills – critical thinking, creative thinking, communicating, and collaborating (University of Nebraska, n. d.). While presenting their recaps, the students develop their habit of thinking into the lessons and activities critically and creatively so that they can analyze those lessons for their weaknesses and strengths.

Recapping provides the students with opportunity to communicate their findings to their classmates through speaking. I have observed that their frequent practice of speaking through recapping helps them overcome their “English language speaking anxiety” (Tati et al., 2016) in a span of time. Even the recappers who often feel nervous and less confident with low morale are encouraged to overcome their fear of being laughed at.

Creating Variety in Recapping Activity

Sometimes, especially when time for long lesson recaps is not sufficient, or when I want to break the monotony of long lesson recaps, I also conduct two different kinds of short recapping activities. The first is: recapping with one sentence 'take-away' from the lesson. The second is: 'One key word of the lesson I remember'. Both are very useful for recapping a particular lesson.

While recapping with one sentence take-away from the lesson, the students remember and share one main idea of the topic discussed in the lesson, or what they have understood from the lesson. I can conduct this recapping activity with my students in a flexible way as I can call five to ten of them, if time is constraint, or the whole class one by one when there is sufficient time.

The recapping with 'one keyword from the lesson I remember' is also usually for the whole class, but, if time is constraint, I also call only five to ten students for recapping. In this activity, each recapper has to remember a keyword from the lesson and try to say one sentence about it. For example, a recapper can say, “I remember the word 'pink'. It is a type of color. The butterfly in this story is pink.” This recapping activity is full of fun and is also very much helpful in building vocabulary of the students. Whatever kind of lesson recap I use in my class, my main goal is to engage my students

actively and provide them opportunity to develop their speaking skills.

Discussion

According to Shulman (2005), a signature pedagogy is conducted at three levels – surface, deep, and implicit (pp. 54-55). The surface structure of signature pedagogy contains the overall activities conducted for teaching and learning. The understanding and realization of the lesson and the way implemented to impart the knowledge gained comes under the deep structure of the signature pedagogy. Finally, the change in attitude, or development of new values, or formation of new dispositions among the students becomes the implicit dimension of signature pedagogy.

I agree with Tan (2019) that the integration of all these three structures in a pedagogy is essential for making any pedagogy a signature pedagogy. Therefore, I have also developed all these structures in my signature pedagogy, i. e. recapping. All the teaching and learning activities conducted during the implementation of the signature pedagogy come under its surface level. They might be teaching activities, or question-answer session, or interaction activities, or group- or pair-work activities, etc. before I call the students for recap of the lesson. Similarly, my act of choosing the students for presenting lesson recap itself is at the surface level of my signature pedagogy.

The recappers share what they have learned from the particular lesson and how the activities conducted during the lesson helped them achieve the learning constitutes the deep level of my signature pedagogy, i. e. recapping the lesson. Then, finally, the students come to the realization of the objectives of the particular lesson. They evaluate whether the objectives were achieved, or not. They even suggest what could have been done for better learning from the lesson, or what the lacks of the lesson activities were. This realization, I think, comes under the deep level of my signature pedagogy. Moreover, they gain skills like critical thinking and analyzing the situations, though implicitly. Improvement in their self-confidence and speaking skills brings the direct benefit to them at the implicit level. This practice helps the students fight their habitual dependence on teachers for the interpretation of the lesson topics and come out as reflective thinkers. Thus, they can transform the knowledge they gained into the knowledge they can use practically in various situations in their everyday life.

Moreover, my signature pedagogy is the amalgamation of uncertainty,

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engagement, and formation (Shulman, 2005, pp. 56-57; Tan, 2019). First, I create curiosity in my students who are anxious if they happen to miss any issue or content from my lesson. They put all their efforts not to miss any part of my lesson. Otherwise, they will have difficulty in recapping the lesson. However, they are always uncertain about who the next recapper will be.

Since there always remains the situation of uncertainty about lesson recapping, the students are thrilled, or excited. They always remain vigilant during the lesson because they find themselves vulnerable and highly visible in the eyes of the teacher. Therefore, they get engaged in the teaching-learning activities throughout the lesson. Through their engagement with the lesson, they make-up their mind about what they will share or avoid from the lesson while recapping.

Finally, they form their habit of critical thinking and analyzing the situation guided by their anxiety for sharing their recap at the end of the lesson. Their newly-learned habit of critical thinking and analysis represents the formation of the pedagogy that shapes their personality fit for their future career/s after student life. This way, I can link my signature pedagogy with Shulman's (2005) idea of the development of professionalism through signature pedagogies (p. 56). Though course completion is usually the main objective of most of my English language lessons at the high school, I provide my students ample opportunities to practice speaking with critical thinking and oral presentation skills via lesson recaps.

When they are called for their presentation, the recapping excites and energizes the students for their class participation and practice of their autonomy with the articulation of their own views. They are also encouraged to consider their peers' views and get engaged in knowledge co-creation. This helps me take my students beyond the level of knowledge transmission to the level of knowledge exploration. The knowledge the students explore themselves becomes the “crucial knowledge” (Baker, 2022). The students need this knowledge to achieve the objectives of their study by building understanding and developing necessary skills.

Conclusion

Students' recapping at the beginning, or at the end of an English language lesson is my ideal signature pedagogy. I have been using it regularly in my English language

classrooms for long. It has helped my students focus on the lesson activities with full attention, boost their self-confidence in speaking English, and develop their critical thinking and analyzing skills. With the situation of uncertainty that they face while preparing for the recap, my students learn to face daily life challenges without being much afraid of the difficulties and surprises. They also learn creative thinking, communicating, and collaborating skills. As a formative assessment tool for me as an English language teacher, recapping has also helped shape my students' personalities with the habit of thinking critically. Ultimately, this habit will help them in their professional life in future.

Recapping is useful in all modules of teaching and learning activities – online, blended, and face-to-face. It is also beneficial for all kinds of learners with various backgrounds. It is very much useful for teachers to keep their students actively learning. Therefore, it has the possibility of becoming a good signature pedagogy for English language teachers like me. However, the limitation of this paper is that the researcher does not have any empirical data regarding the effectiveness of lesson recap.

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