Instructional Features: Things to make happen in your language classroom now

1. **Foster an active community in the classroom** (Glisan & Donato, 2017; Thoms, 2014)
   It's usually about half-way through our first semester that I see many students comfortably sharing personal ideas and experiences in our class discussions, in the target language if they can. If they can't use the target language, then I take their ideas and turn it into a discussion using the target language. We talk about pictures, make up stories, learn about recent travels, by topic, or whatever really.

2. **Listening precedes reading** (Ray & Seely, 2015; Everson, 1994)
   After hearing a few phrases many times across many meaningful contexts, seeing words on a page can spark a new inner language voice, as in, very simply, "this sounds right," as native speakers do.

3. **Teacher as input provider** (Lee & VanPatten, 2003)
   "Input" is the language itself, not analytical explanations about language, like "gender modifies noun endings", etc. Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research consistently shows that mental representation of language is largely built from experience comprehending the language (the input). It's important that whatever we hope is in the input is indeed in the input (sounds, words, grammar). The instructor tends to be the most reliable person in the room to give this, especially for beginners.

4. **Focus is mainly on meaning** (Glisan & Donato, 2017)
   Defining language as "sounds which represent meaning" (or, "sign-language signs which represent meaning") learners will pick up most of the sounds, words, grammar, discourse markers and other features of the language if they are clear on what these sounds *mean* in communication. A teacher can let frequency in the input, or "repetition," take care of most of the learning.

5. **Occasional "popups" as "focus-on-form"** (Waltz, 2015)
   Sometimes we notice that learners aren't perceiving a certain sound or other feature in the input, so *on occasion* we briefly point it out, in plain language, again focusing on meaning, as in, "Notice how this word ends in this ending? That just means the action is continuing." And instead of listing off many similarities and exceptions for other contexts, keep it simple and just say what this means in the current context, and then go on with the conversation or reading. If a student asks about a similar form seen earlier, say something like, "I'm glad you noticed that. It does mean that in that context."

6. **Few words heard & read many times** (Jeon & Day, 2016; Ellis, 2002)
   Cognitive psychology and cognitive linguistics both find that it is through experiencing something many times that we begin to form categories of use and context in our minds. With these categories we can say, based on experience, "Oh, this is the normal kind of word to have in this context, but that other word sounds rare and a little strange there." Also, having too many new words in a text or class discussion at once--even with a word list--quickly becomes too difficult to follow, and can easily overwhelm and frustrate learners. When students give up, we need to look to ourselves to see how we could have provided better support, ideally offering greater volumes of easier materials.

7. **Start slow and clear, then your follow learners' pace** (Ray & Seely, 2015)
   New learners do not yet have the sound systems in their heads that experienced speakers have. This often leads learners to mis-hear sounds if said fluently by the teacher, as in, "Yeamunna h'dout." is heard by native English speakers as "Yeah, I'm going to head out." It is also common for proficient speakers to experience breakdowns in communication, and ask "What did you say again?" leading the other speaker to repeat more slowly and clearly, giving the hearer two experiences with one statement--fast and slow. We too can do this as teachers, starting slow to help build the sound system, and speeding up with those words and phrases that our students have heard many times before. Keep watching you students to see when they are, and are not, understanding ("teach to the eyes").

8. **Clarify meaning and check comprehension in the L1** (Cook, 2010; Swain & Lapkin 2013; Kerr, 2014)
   If we travel to a country where people speak a language that is unfamiliar to us, we could just point to pictures and make gestures, but language makes meaning so much clearer--that's why humans have language, and that's why students want to learn them. In the classroom, relying *only* on pictures and gestures, 100% of the time, reliably leads to unclear meaning, confusion, and frustration. Research over the last ten years has increasingly advocated for using the students' own language(s) to clarify

meaning, so that listening & reading in the target language can be clearly understood, especially for beginners. Also, asking the class "do you understand" usually leads to everyone nodding, either because they believe they understood, or to avoid slowing down the discussion or reading. Instead, asking someone to translate into English gives the instructor evidence of misunderstanding, and precisely which words are causing the misunderstanding and breakdown in communication.

9. **Roman alphabet and new orthography kept separate** (Waltz, 2015; Everson, 1994)
    This one sounds like magic but I've watched it work with Chinese and other languages that use non-Latinized writing systems, like the Arabic script. During the first interactive listening stage, write words in Roman spelling to keep sounds clear. At this stage, sounds and meaning and the ongoing discourse are already a lot to process, so don't show the target language script for new words during this listening-focused lesson. In the next lesson, provide a paragraph-level reading in the target language script with no Roman script visible, and only showing words they know from listening. If learners have solid sound-meaning familiarity in their heads, then the instructor can point to each word in the new script, saying each word aloud, and learners will often say, "Oh that's what ___looks like?" Seeing the new script with only familiar (heard) words allows new learners to naturally pick up the written vowels, consonants, tone marks, etc. in a short amount of time, without ever memorizing a list of letters or other symbols.

Recommended Podcasts
Teachers that Teach: http://www.teachersthatteach.com/podcast/
Tea with BVP (Bill VanPatten): https://soundcloud.com/teawithbvp

Websites
The Comprehensible Classroom: https://martinabex.com/
Comprehensible Input Blog: http://terrywaltz.com/comprehensible-input-blog/
Beginner-level Novels: https://tprsbooks.com/;   https://fluencymatters.com/products-page/
Assessment rubrics: (Google "ACTFL IPA rubrics"); also https://teachforjune.com/resources/

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