

## 論文

# Beyond Language: Creating Opportunities for Authentic Communication and Critical Thinking

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### 要 旨

本稿では学部・短期大学部における一年生向けの英語の授業の可能性について、著者二人の実践にもとづいて報告する。スピーキングスキルが中心の授業で行われたもので、教材、教授法、学生の反応を詳しく説明する。入学までの「受験英語」に魅力を感じなく、大学で本格的に英語を学習しようとする学生のニーズを浮き彫りしながら、一年生に対して提供できる授業の中身について提案する。

This article describes the methodology and classroom practices in a Japanese university, focusing upon first-year students enrolled in oral English communication classes. Using a content-based instruction (CBI) and a sustained-content language teaching (SCLT) approach in our respective classes, we endeavor to create a classroom situation in which students engage in meaningful exploration of challenging content and share the results of their inquiries in an authentic communicative context. The examples reported involve the use of videos and student-produced projects. The article suggests that, within the existing curricular structure, instructors can initiate innovations that expose students to a wider range of language forms and structures and have the potential to renew students' interest in learning English.

キーワード : content-based instruction, sustained-content language teaching, critical thinking, autonomous learning, collaborative learning, communication skills, project-based learning, communicative competence

### **Beyond Language: Creating Opportunities for Authentic Communication and Critical Thinking**

*The effectiveness of language teaching will depend upon what is being taught, other than language, that will be recognized by the learners as a purposeful and relevant extension of their schematic horizons (Widdowson, 1990).*

Our own experience and the experience of other teachers and researchers confirms a gap exists between the communication skills Japanese students need to function in a second language and the instruction that they receive in their EFL classes. After six years of language study in middle and high schools, most incoming, first-year university students perceive English as an academic task involving copious amounts of memorization and frequent testing rather than as a tool for communicating ideas and feelings. Many have become bored with studying English and are disinterested in their first-year required classes. Despite years of study, they are ill-equipped to accomplish basic communicative transactions in English and are acutely uncomfortable when faced with expressing themselves in authentic conversational situations. To address this problem, the Ministry of Education has called for a more communicative approach to language learning. Although “communicative” textbooks have been adopted, teaching practices in Japanese public schools, and even in many university English classes, show little change.

The gap between communicative competence and the years of language instruction that public schools and universities provide suggests that it is time to reconsider our methodology and teaching practices. Clearly, our students need something more than they are getting in their current education if they are to participate fully in an international society. In today’s rapidly changing world, methods that foster English communication in an authentic context and acquaint students with a wide range of knowledge may better serve the language goals of educational institutions and

individuals. Equally important is a methodology that assists students in developing the discourse patterns and critical thinking skills essential to understanding and expressing ideas in English. Such a methodology encourages students to participate more fully in their own education and can reawaken students' enthusiasm for language learning when the focus of instruction moves from mastering English as an academic subject to experiencing English as a tool for meaningful communication.

Applying these methodological principles to our own practice, we have implemented an approach to language teaching that integrates language study with complex and meaningful content. Classroom activities offer students multiple opportunities to share their ideas, reflect upon their learning, and engage in extended, unrehearsed communication with peers, teachers, and others both inside and outside of the classroom. Students work with authentic English materials, and we try, in so far as possible, to replicate an authentic context for communication in which students present their thinking and research in much the same manner as they will be called upon to do in their future academic and professional lives.

This approach, Sustained Content Language Teaching (SCLT), a form of Content-Based Instruction (CBI), fosters a deeper engagement with language, subject matter, pragmatics, and rhetorical forms than is possible through the cursory treatment of content found in many topic-based or theme-based texts (Pally, 2000, chap. 1). In contrast to conventional English language courses that lead students through a succession of loosely related topics, a sustained-content curriculum is constructed around the in-depth exploration of a single idea or question and follows an organic progression of thought guided by students' interests and discoveries. Students generate many of the materials, research different aspects of a topic, and share their insights in an authentic communicative context. In addition to content knowledge, students acquire relevant vocabulary, encounter complex linguistic structures, gain insights into social and pragmatic conventions of language, develop critical thinking skills, and improve their ability to convey information and ideas to others in the target language. Language instruction and content are not competing elements, but rather complimentary functions that facilitate linguistic competence and enhance motivation (Pally, 2000; see also Grabe & Stoller, 1997; Murphy & Stoller, 2001, for fuller discussion of SCLT).

A complementary focus upon content and language is not restricted to

intermediate and advanced students. Because students work with content as well as language, low-skilled students can make significant contributions to the class, and all students can make progress in the acquisition of language forms at their respective skill and ability levels. SCLT is especially appropriate for Japanese university students who share similar educational backgrounds, but who vary a great deal in their capacity to generate speech and conduct an extended conversation in English. The range of abilities and competencies found in typical first-year Japanese university English language classes actually facilitates language acquisition when SCLT methods are employed because students gain communicative competence as they act as resources for one another. Furthermore, the collaboration inherent in the discovery and application process presents more opportunities for comprehensible input and negotiation of meaning in mixed-level classes than occurs in streamed classes following an objectives-based curriculum (Grabe & Stoller, 1997; Pally, 2000; see also Johnson & Johnson, 1986; Tinzmann, Jones, Fennimore, Bakker, Fine, & Pierce, 1990; Long, 1996).

Unlike many language-teaching methodologies, which tend to be fixed systems with prescribed techniques, CBI and SCLT are approaches, or philosophies, that can be interpreted and applied in various ways in different educational settings. Our application of CBI and SCLT is in response to Japanese university students who have put a great deal of effort into studying a foreign language without attaining communicative competence. We find that a content-based approach reawakens our students' desire to study English, furthers language acquisition, accommodates itself to the teaching environment at this institution, and prepares students for the role English will play in their future.

## **Content-Based Instruction at Aichi University Junior College**

### *Rationale for Using Content-Based Instruction*

For the past six years, I have taught women junior college students. Most are recent graduates of high schools located within commuting distance of the university. The overwhelming majority will seek employment upon graduation. When asked what they hope to gain from their English classes at the tertiary level, they express a desire to learn how to communicate using the language, not having had the opportunity

to do so at the secondary school level. However, Aichi University Junior College students are limited to four semesters of study with only one weekly class devoted to speaking. During their two years in our program, students most likely will have one oral communications skills class per semester, or a maximum of four classes should they elect to take them all. The first year of study is an exceptionally critical one because it is the only time students will be able to focus primarily on their studies, rather than on the job search.

Based upon the type of students, their professed desires, and the goals of the program, I decided to integrate CBI into my first-year English classes to create opportunities for students to engage in authentic communication about topics relevant to their life experience. Students gain confidence as language learners if they can share thoughts that are important to them, despite having had little or no experience using the language for actual communication. Because the majority will soon be in the work force facing situations in which they must use English for communication, students need to gain experience interacting with others and negotiating meaning with English speakers.

One of my biggest challenges has been to tailor the course content and methodology to the students' pre-intermediate level of oral communication competence. Most students are able to make simple greetings or self-introductions, do short narrations on recent personal experiences and answer simple comprehension questions, but have had little experience with discussion skills. Visual aids, especially commercially produced videos, provide a good deal of comprehensible input and are very effective tools in bridging this gap.

Video's textually rich content is accessible to a wide range of levels and abilities. In choosing videos, I consider several criteria. As students are very sensitive to current trends, I try to choose materials that were produced in the last quarter century. In addition, I consider whether the subject matter would be interesting to this age group. Other criteria include having a clear plot line that is easy to follow and that will whet students' interest in viewing the next portion. The students must be able to relate to the characters. The level and content of the language and the way it is delivered are other points to keep in mind. Excessive profanity or lines quickly mumbled can be very distracting and de-motivating. I also consider the amount of violence and number of sexually explicit scenes, which some students might find offensive.

For first-year students, I have chosen as themes: education, making decisions, relationships with parents and teachers, taking responsibility for one's actions, dreams for the future, and school life, all of which I thought especially appropriate for young adults dealing with similar issues. The tasks to be completed and the final product to be shared are designed so that all students are able to contribute regardless of their speaking skills. Some colleagues are skeptical that students of this level can function as required. That the main focus is upon content and fluency rather than on form and accuracy is a point that is not often well understood. There seems to be a very strong belief that students must completely master certain grammatical forms before they are allowed to enter situations that require them to use more complex forms than they can successfully manipulate. However, I have found that unless students ARE put into those situations, they will never have the opportunity to learn how to use these forms. Unless the students are aware of the context in which certain forms can be used, they most likely will not acquire them.

Students repeatedly have shown that they can discover ways in which to contribute to class and group work and learn from their peers in the process. That their speaking level is higher or lower compared to another student is not what is important. To have one's efforts recognized and the end product or performance be understood by the instructor and one's peers is what counts. Without some sort of positive recognition, the motivation to further develop communication skills is difficult to maintain.

### *Classroom Practice*

*Dead Poets Society* (1989) was chosen for its accessibility and portrayal of young people grappling with issues similar to those I wanted my students to consider, i.e. taking responsibility for their actions, thinking about their future, maintaining relationships with adults, etc. Worksheets were provided to give support regarding vocabulary, characters in the story, and the plot line. Students were encouraged to view the video outside of class time, and the majority of students did so. Journal entries were also assigned, such as asking students to respond to incidents in the movie and finding similarities with their own experiences as high school students. Students shared these journal entries with their peers and then with the class at large. The instructor wrote student comments on the blackboard to summarize the day's discussion. This activity served as the link to viewing the next segment, usually about 20 minutes in

length.

To close the video part of the unit, students chose topics concerning the issues in the movie, such as school rules and conflict with parents, and made short presentations to the class. Students were given delivery guidelines emphasizing eye contact, speaking slowly and clearly, and using note cards with only key words and not sentences. The video classes and activities provided the base for the next phase, during which the themes introduced would be further developed.

By six weeks into the fall semester, students had begun to adjust to a lifestyle very different from high school and had come to realize both the good and bad points of the university environment. I wanted the students to connect the themes of the film with their own lives and to look critically at their own surroundings. First, they brainstormed aspects of the university campus that they deemed warranted improvement. Then, they made a list and formed groups of two or three students according to topic. Next, the groups determined what the problem entailed, decided how to collect relevant data, and developed a poster presentation to demonstrate their research to the class.

One group consisted of students who had purchased notebook computers as recommended by the department. However, they found that their classes did not support or encourage computer use, so they wondered how other students and teachers felt about this situation. Another group looked into the lack of bicycle parking lots on campus. Two other groups focused their attention on the student union building, with one looking into ways of improving the cafeteria menu and another into how students could make better use of the facilities. These projects reflected the students' day-to-day concerns.

Classroom sessions during this phase involved groups working on questionnaires, planning field-work, consulting with the instructor, collating data, and drafting the final poster. Students negotiated with other teachers to allow time for questionnaire administration, sent email inquiries to teachers about their opinions, spoke with college staff, and took photos of problem areas. As they worked with their data, students realized that more questions could have been asked and that some were superfluous. They struggled with the discrepancy between their original intention and how the project actually developed. Some groups worked at a faster pace than others, but this encouraged and motivated those who were sometimes floundering.

Students assembled the final product outside of class. On presentation day, students were allowed to use note cards. The rationale of their project, the methodology, the results, and their analysis were clearly stated. The groups ensured that each member had a significant role in the explanation of their project. If presenters were nervous, they were good at disguising it, for students spoke in loud, confident voices, making a good effort at maintaining eye contact. Their posters were large and some very colorful, with a range of artistic talents shown. Some groups used computer-designed graphs or pie charts, whereas others used photos of campus areas in question. At the conclusion, they fielded questions from their peers and the instructor, who also gave presenters feedback in written form.

### *Evaluation*

Students were evaluated as follows: classroom participation 30%, journal writing 30%, and presentations 40%. Students were informed of the evaluation criteria in the course description catalog, and in the syllabus handed out on the first day of class. Because interaction with one's peers is essential to this type of class, a large percentage of the grade is allotted accordingly. I routinely observe how individuals are using their time during the class and make mental notes. Journal writing also is heavily weighted because the writings become the starting point for group discussions. Because oral communication skills are the focus of the curriculum, presentations constitute almost half of the total grade.

### *Reflections*

In retrospect, there were several other possibilities that could have been explored. For example, students could present their poster session to other classes. Repetition would give them the opportunity to make further improvements. Prohibiting the use of note cards would wean them from this support and result in a more spontaneous delivery. Another idea would be to re-examine the posters themselves to improve form and accuracy of language use. These tasks would encourage students to become more reflective of their work. Finally, creating an opportunity for the students to present their ideas to the authorities in charge would be an ideal finish for this cycle. (In one case, a student did pass on her group's findings regarding notebook computer purchase and usage to an instructor of computer skills.)



Making what we do in the classroom relevant to the students' lives remains one of my big concerns as an instructor. Encouraging students to make inquiries about issues directly affecting them increases their involvement and furthers critical thinking. Since what they discover through their own research and field-work is indeed their own work, the chance to inform others of their results can rightly be considered authentic communication. Through collaborative efforts, students experience the process of making meaning with others, and, as they work toward common, negotiated goals, they discover the communication tools that foster communicative competence.

### **Integrating Content-Based Instruction into a Coordinated Language Program**

#### *Rationale*

Like Laura, I find that a content-based approach to instruction engages students' interest, helps them to become independent learners, and fosters their development as English speakers better than curricula built around textbooks that change topics frequently and exhibit only a superficial concern for content. First, I will describe my experience in a coordinated English language program and demonstrate how teachers interested in a content-based approach to language teaching can incorporate CBI principles into a structured curriculum. Then I will describe the role of sustained content and cooperative learning in English language courses in the Department of Comparative Cultures at Aichi University.

#### *The Program Structure*

Our junior college English language program consisted of first-year required courses and second-year electives. Students were streamed into 6 levels, based on written tests and oral interviews. First-year classes met twice a week for 90 minutes. Each level had a required textbook, and the curriculum called for four mandatory activities: a book review, a movie review, STEP test practice, and a final project, with dates set by the program.

The teaching situation facilitated collaboration, as teachers shared a common room and all classes were held on the same days in the same building. A colleague and

I decided to build our low-intermediate courses around three extended projects that would facilitate cross-classroom exchanges. Although not as in-depth as a semester-long focus upon a single topic, the projects would allow students to develop both content and language expertise as they gathered information from various sources, analyzed and evaluated the information, and presented their results to members of the other class. I will describe one of the projects.

### *Theme Park Competition*

This project was an extension of the textbook's chapter on theme parks. After the students had been introduced to the topic by the text, groups were assigned to research issues of design, safety, facilities, location, transportation, entertainment, expense, and so forth on the Internet. At least one source had to be in English. At the same time, students were to interview friends about their reasons for visiting theme parks and their favorite activities. After students shared their research with their group members, the class came up with a list of criteria that a successful theme park would meet. Then we teachers announced a fictitious competition to build the best theme park. Teams were to design a theme park and create an attractive poster showing the features and facilities at the park. The poster would be entered into the competition. This part of the project took about five classes, or two and one half weeks.

The next phase of the project involved teams selling their theme park idea to the other class whose teams of judges would choose the winning theme park. Team members had to familiarize themselves with the criteria for a successful park and be able to explain how their park met those criteria. They also had to come up with unique features and selling points that could win the competition in their class. As each team would also judge the theme parks designed by the other class, students had to think about the questions that they would ask the other class in order to select a winner.

The poster presentations were spread over two class periods so that each class had at least 45 minutes to present their posters to the other class. Teams in the presenting class hung their posters on the wall and informally described the selling points of their park to teams of judges from the other class. Students were not allowed to use notes or read from papers. Judges went from team to team, asking questions and gathering information to decide upon a winner. All conversation was extemporaneous. Judges

returned to their own classroom and conferred with team members. Each team cast a vote for one poster and explained their reasons to the class. Then the whole class voted by secret ballot for the winning theme park, writing the most important reasons for their choice. One park was selected from each class, and a representative from the judges presented an award to the winning team.

### *Reflections*

Although our three projects were shorter in duration than true sustained content courses, they nevertheless provided students with an opportunity to direct their own learning, conduct research, build critical thinking skills, acquire content knowledge, collaborate on tasks with meaningful outcomes, and engage in discourse in an authentic communicative context. Although some students used Japanese in the classroom, and some consulted Japanese language sources, most students performed as much of their work as they possibly could in English. During the preparatory phase, teams frequently had to discuss their progress and explain their ideas to the whole class in English. Thus, they soon began to see that group work was best conducted in English as a rehearsal for whole class discussions and presentations.

Even within streamed classes, language acquisition progresses in different ways at a different pace for each student. The focus upon content rather than upon discrete language items accommodated these individual differences. Student attainment was possible on many different fronts, and each individual student could make a significant contribution to the class.

As students collaborated on group tasks and shared complex information, they were exposed to a far wider range of vocabulary words and linguistic forms than they ever would have encountered or used in following the textbook. The in-depth exploration of a single topic provided the students with numerous opportunities to reinforce their learning of both content and language. The recurrence of vocabulary items and grammatical structures in an authentic context assisted memory and heightened students' awareness of the pragmatic features of English (Snow, Met, & Genesee, 1989).

Despite the competitive nature of two of the projects, the very serious discussions and rigorous preparatory work that went into the final products raised these events from the level of entertaining games. The contests were a reward for hard work as well

as providing a form of feedback as to how well the team had prepared. Although, the projects did not extend as far into the “real world” as Laura’s projects, the students nevertheless researched topics that were meaningful to them, acquired content knowledge that enhanced their understanding of real world situations, and, by being asked to share their knowledge in the manner in which learners in other academic and professional programs do, formed an authentic student discourse community.

### *Evaluation*

Grades for the projects were based primarily upon the various tasks leading to the final product. Students compiled their project work in a folder that was evaluated holistically. Some tasks, such as summaries of Internet articles, were assigned individual grades, whereas other tasks, such as presentations, received a group grade.

Self-evaluations, peer-evaluations, and group self-evaluations were included in the grading process. Certainly not all work in the process was graded. Students were involved in deciding the criteria for evaluating presentations and projects. Teacher assessment and peer-evaluations were sometimes combined to arrive at the final grade.

The three projects comprised 60% of the course grade. The book review, the movie review, and the STEP test made up 30% of the course grade for all sections in the program. Teachers were allowed a 10% “TDI,” or “teacher discretion grade,” which we used to reward class contributions, group work skills, and improvement. Thus, a balance was achieved between program requirement grades and teachers’ instructional grades.

Had our program had a heavily-weighted exit test or final exam, the evaluation process would not have been as accurate or as appropriate or as comprehensive. However, the progress we observed made us confident that our students could do at least as well, if not better, on an objective test as students in other sections of the program. In addition, they had acquired learning skills, research skills, content knowledge, pragmatic competence, fluency, and self-confidence that no standardized test is designed to measure.

## Sustained Content in Aichi University Department of Comparative Cultures

The Department of Comparative Cultures integrates language instruction with content that furthers students' understanding of world cultures. For my two sections of first-year English, I chose the same video as Laura, "*Dead Poet's Society*." Our different applications of CBI illustrate the flexibility of content-based instruction in meeting the needs of incoming students and fulfilling requirements in different programs.

### *English Conversation 1, Classroom practice*

The primary objective for the first three weeks was to acquaint students with the techniques of English discourse, especially small group discussion and group process. The second objective was to encourage them to think interpretively about topics and apply critical thinking skills, such as classification, analysis, and cause and effect, to topics discussed (Bloom, 1971). Therefore, I assigned group tasks that would help students acquire the vocabulary and skills for analysis and interpretation, for example, asking the groups to decide what qualities are important in a boyfriend or girlfriend, and then engaging the whole class in classifying, analyzing, comparing, and synthesizing these qualities. The vocabulary elicited would be transferred to discussing characters and events in the film. Through these exercises, students became accustomed to supporting their ideas and elaborating upon the contributions of others.

As students practiced discussion skills and performed tasks in small groups, they learned to support each other and to respect individual abilities and contributions (Tinzmann et al, 1990). Small groups chose a leader, a note-taker, a reporter, and a facilitator. These well-defined roles helped students direct their discussions and carry out decision-making processes in the early stages of learning to collaborate.

Students wrote a one-page homework assignment each week in their journals. At first, I assigned topics that raised the same issues of independence, responsibility, and self-reliance that would emerge from the film. As the course progressed, topics were drawn from the film or from questions raised in class discussions. Students shared their writing in small groups, reading aloud from their notebooks or speaking extemporaneously. After about 15–20 minutes of discussion, the reporter for the group orally summarized the group's discussion, and the whole class responded to the ideas

raised by the small groups. By beginning with an individual task that allowed time for reflection and that could be shared with others in a meaningful way, students gained the skills and confidence to participate fully in discussions with the whole class.

The next six weeks were devoted to the film. First, students searched the Internet for English sources of information about *Dead Poets' Society*. Small groups were assigned a topic, such as Peter Weir, the director; Robin Williams, the lead actor; the soundtrack; or awards won by the movie. Each group member had to bring at least one reasonably comprehensible English article on their group's topic to class. Groups prepared a 10-minute oral presentation about their topic from the information they had gathered. Students were allowed one small note card with key words and phrases, but not sentences, for their presentation.

We then watched the opening scenes of the film with no language support in order to encourage close observation and build schema to create a context for the film. We watched the remainder of the film in 25–45 minute segments over next few weeks, observing natural breaks in the action. Language support included close captioning and, sometimes, Japanese subtitles. Class discussions focused upon themes and literary elements, interpretation of character and action, cinematic features, soundtrack, directing, acting, and students' personal responses. Discussion was mostly in English, although when articulating difficult concepts, students resorted to Japanese as they struggled to find appropriate ways to communicate their ideas in English. These opportunities were prime times for direct instruction in language, and students gained better recall of vocabulary and grammatical forms because the instruction was provided when support was needed in an authentic communicative context (Halliday, 1999; Hymes, 1971; Krashen, 1982, 1985; Swain, 1988).

The final weeks of the course were devoted to activities such as a graffiti wall where students wrote their responses to quotations and situations from the film, a final project, and an exercise in which teams wrote questions they would like to ask characters in the film, and members of another team assumed the role of the character and answered the question extemporaneously. Students wrote the questions before they prepared their final presentations, and answered the questions during a game with topics and points on the last day of class. When students assumed the role of characters in the film, they gave thoughtful, extended, and complex answers, supporting their ideas with examples and illustrations.

The final project was an *explication de scene*, in the form of a 15-minute group presentation. Groups chose an important scene from the film and, as in an *explication de texte*, analyzed and explained how the scene worked and what the scene contributed to the film. The soundtrack and the cinematography were discussed, as well as the directing, acting, meaning, and functions of the scene. This capstone project required students to demonstrate not only content knowledge, but to apply the linguistic, critical thinking, interpretive, and group process skills acquired during the course.

One class period was allowed for students to prepare their scenes. Students worked with the video in two nearby classrooms, and I moved between the rooms giving assistance as requested. All students were totally engaged in their work. Teams chose a variety of innovative formats for presenting their work, and their presentations were well received.

### *Reflections*

At the beginning of the term, students struggled with basic interpersonal communication. They were not accustomed to the in-depth interaction and extended discussion that are at the heart of sustained content courses. When they worked in teams, they tended to divide group tasks and focus upon the end product, rather than collaborate in a manner that enhances understanding and builds upon each individual's contribution. Their expectations for the class were low. Over the course of the semester, students developed expertise in collaborative-learning, gained fluency in expressing their ideas, improved their reading, writing, listening, and research skills, and exhibited greater motivation and interest in both language and content study.

The students' progress and improved motivation may be attributed to content-based instruction, the collaborative approach to learning, and the creation of an authentic context for communication. Students want to communicate their thoughts and feelings about things that matter. Content dealing with real, complex human issues is a far better stimulus for discussion than generalized topics like sports or fashion. Despite lack of language facility, even the most basic level students have something to say, and a collaborative approach to learning gives them the support to make their views understood. The exploration of a topic and the sharing of results then become genuine information exchanges among people personally invested in the outcomes.

### *Evaluation*

Grades were assigned to notebooks (30%), presentations (50%), and class contributions (20%). Notebooks contained class notes, journal assignments, group work, and vocabulary development. They were graded holistically according to criteria developed and shared with the class early in the term. Midway through the term, I collected the notebooks and gave feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of their “textbook” so that students could make improvements before the end of the term.

Self-evaluations, teacher assessment, and peer-evaluations were all considered in the presentation grade. Students kept a learning journal, writing a few sentences after every class about what we had done and how they felt about their learning that day. Students also were asked to write a reflections page evaluating their learning and the challenges they faced. These tools gave me in-depth feedback about the students’ perspectives of the course and my teaching.

### **Conclusion**

In this article, we have explored ways in which authentic communication and critical thinking can be incorporated into the English curriculum at Japanese post-secondary educational institutions. We have introduced classroom practices that are new to the university foreign language classroom such as group work, project-based work, and presentation skills. As university students are expected to take an increasingly proactive stance in their education, the language classroom experience should also mirror this overall institutional goal. A break with the practices instilled during their lengthy examination-driven study is necessary for students to become more active, engaged, and questioning participants in their own learning.

In our experience, engagement in the language learning process happens when a link is created between language study and the outside world. Students see no reason to engage in learning if the outcomes are not relevant to their lives or if, in the case of language study, the focus of study does not further their own desire for communication and self-expression. As students gain a deeper understanding of content area and its connection to self and society, their investment in their own learning increases.



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