

Content-based Instruction in the EFL Literature Curriculum

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The purpose of this paper is to familiarize EFL instructors with the effectiveness of using literature in the content-based foreign language instruction. By applying the collaborative content-based literature teaching technique, students can acquire English abilities, not only to communicate, but also to use as a tool to comprehend the subject matter in school. Because the course of literature emphasizes the exploration of themes more than other courses, students can learn more about how to express their ideas through language.

Introduction

When EFL students enter the university, due to the lack of English language ability and the use of the immersion education in school, they often encounter a lot of frustrations. As a result, many researchers and scholars try to apply various teaching methods not only to increase students' language ability, but also to help them comprehend the academic subject matter in school. One of the most popular methods is content-based language instruction. This teaching method can simultaneously help learners use the foreign language to express their thoughts in different situations, and further use it as a tool to comprehend the subject matter in school. Because the course of literature emphasizes the exploration of themes more than other courses, students can learn more about how to express their thoughts through language. It is hoped that this newly designed literature curriculum can simultaneously increase students' knowledge of a content area, as well as enhance their critical thinking ability and English fluency.

To understand thoroughly the basic concept of content-based instruction, the rationale of content-based instruction and benefits of collaborating content-based instruction and literature teaching are discussed in the following section. Finally, the new collaborative literature curriculum, including course objectives, class activities, and assessment is designed and discussed.

What Is Content-Based Instruction?

Content-based instruction (CBI) is "the integration of a particular content [e.g., math, science, social studies] with second language aims It refers to the concurrent teaching of academic subject matter and second language skills" (Brinton et al, 1989, p. 2). According to Krashen (1982), in content-based instruction, students can acquire the content area of the subject matter with comprehensible input, and simultaneously increase their language skills. To achieve the goal of language skills improvement, Krashen states that the focus of the teaching is on the authentic and meaningful input, not on the grammatical form.

There are two types of models in the content-based instruction. The first type is a theme-based model in which selected topics or themes provide the content for students to learn (Brinton et al, 1989). From these topics, EFL teachers should extract language activities which follow naturally from the content material. For example, teachers can select the topic of "advertising" and have students engage in a variety of activities, such as designing and administering a marketing survey, comparing and contrasting consumer attitudes, etc. Under such circumstances, students would be more familiar with the content and the meaning of the topic. Krashen and Terrell (1998) suggest that EFL teachers must choose reading texts at an appropriate level of complexity and the topic has to hold students' interest to increase their motivation for learning.

The other type of the content-based approach, which is also the focus of this paper, is the adjunct model. This model rather emphasizes the importance of concurrently teaching the academic subject matter and foreign language skills (Brinton et al, 1989). EFL teachers have to design various teaching activities that combine four modes (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, and writing) in order to enhance students' literacy, oral development, and thinking skills positively. To achieve the enhancement, Krashen (1985) advocates that using one extended text, such as a novel or a short story, can help students develop familiarity with a particular literacy

style and later unknowingly promote their literacy development. To guarantee successful reading, Taguchi et al (2004) suggest that schemata play an important role in constructing meaning from text. As a result, reading instructors need to relate to the EFL students' background knowledge for better reading performance (Inoue, 1998). Lin (2004) also proves that through reading stories, students not only get involved when they are reading, but also link their personal experiences to the contents, which are positive to their reading development.

In short, CBI employs English at a comprehensible level so as to increase students' understanding of the subject matter and build language skills simultaneously. In addition, research (Custodio & Sutton, 1998) has shown that CBI often uses authentic tasks centered around authentic materials, so it can help language minority students increase their motivation, and provide more opportunities for them to explore prior knowledge. Therefore, the use of the CBI can be effective in the EFL classroom.

Why Use Literature?

Writing about the use of literature with EFL students, Langer (1997) states, "because it taps what they know and who they are, literature is a particularly inviting context for learning both a second/foreign language and literacy" (p. 607). According to Langer, literature allows students to reflect on their lives, learning, and language. Literature can open "horizons of possibility, allowing students to question, interpret, connect, and explore" (p. 607).

In addition to open horizons of possibility for students to explore, Goodman (1986) and Smith (1971) state that language is not learned from the part to the whole, but from the whole to the part, and all language functions interrelate. In other words, students have to learn the foreign language in a holistic process in order to increase their language ability. As a result, FL teachers must simultaneously apply teaching activities that tend to combine the four modes so as to enhance both literacy and oral development. According to Fitzgerald (1993), literature can be the vehicle to improve students' overall language skills. It can "expose students to a wide variety of styles and genres" (p. 643). It is in literature that "the resources of the language are most fully and skillfully used" (Sage, 1987, p. 6). Indeed, EFL teachers should use the best literature available as a model of masterful language usage. In other words, language and literature can not be separated. Teaching language in isolation from literature will not move students toward mastery of the four language skills (Abulhaija, 1987).

Benefits of Collaborating Content-Based Instruction and Literature Teaching

To effectively teach academic subject matter and foreign language skills, EFL teachers should collaborate content-based instruction and literature study. Brinton et al (1989) list several benefits of collaborating CBI and literature teaching. For example, students can gain knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and paragraph structure, interactive communication skills, and types and styles of writing. Besides, according to Custodio and Sutton (1998), literature is a valuable language tool (with authentic texts), so it can help language minority students increase their motivation, explore prior knowledge, and promote literacy development. Abulhaija (1987) further supports that language and literature can not be separated because each has something important to offer in the development of a well-rounded student. Literature teaches idiomatic language and cultural context; it can also improve reading and comprehension skills, promote correctness in speech and writing, and encourage students to read for enjoyment. In addition, Erkaya (2005) states that by integrating literature in the curricula, students can learn the four skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing – more effectively because of the literary, cultural, higher-order thinking, and motivational benefits. To achieve these benefits, EFL instructors should design the collaborative content-based literature class carefully to meet the needs of their students.

Curriculum Design of the Collaboration

Course Objectives

The focus of literature teaching is not only to help students comprehend the meaning that the author tries to express, but also to enhance students' thinking and language abilities, as well as study skills. Students have to learn vocabulary, discover questions, evaluate evidence individually and in group discussions, form judgments based on synthesis and analysis, and develop a coherent argument in support of a position.

The objectives for this course include the following:

- Build on students' educational background and personal experiences based on the topic of the literature

- Help students comprehend the meaning that the author tries to convey in order to enhance their reading ability
- Provide the opportunities for peer cooperative learning
- Enhance students' critical thinking and judgmental abilities
- Develop students' aural/oral fluency by asking questions and sharing their feedback
- Develop students' writing ability by writing an essay or comments related to the topic of the literature

Class Activities

The focus of the class activities should be to elicit knowledge of content, acquisition of thinking skills, and development of English language abilities. The novels or short stories containing specific topics should involve consideration of the cultures, reading levels, and interests of the students. For example, we can select a historical fiction, with the topic of "immigration". The class activities include the following:

- **Build background knowledge:** Before reading the novel, teachers can ask students general questions related to the content, in order to have a schematic understanding. For example, we can ask students whether they have friends or relatives who have immigrated, or the reasons for immigration, etc.
- **Teach new vocabulary:** Before reading the text, we should ask students to make associations among key words, like "immigration". In another exercise, students can guess the meaning of words from context, using the dictionary if necessary.
- **Arouse learning motivation and interest:** Before reading the novel, we can ask students to watch the film or the video tape. Students can discuss the content of the film to have a basic understanding of the content.
- **Enhance four modes and critical thinking abilities:** After reading the novel, students can discuss the meaning that the author expresses, share their feedback, or make a comparison with their own lives and experiences. Through the interactive group discussion, students can develop their language fluency and critical thinking abilities. In addition, by writing comments or abstract, students can develop their writing ability.
- **Promote cooperative learning:** Students would be divided into groups. Each group has to go to the library and find the resources related to the topic of the novel. They then make a report to the other groups. By cooperative learning, students can not only make use of the resources from the library, but also gain more knowledge from the peers.

Assessment

We can use a variety of instruments to assess students' English and content learning. For example, we can use a written test, such as true or false, multiple choices, essay questions, etc. to test students' reading comprehension. We may also ask students to write down an essay to evaluate students' writing ability. Besides, we can design a game, similar to a very popular American TV show (*Jeopardy*). Basically, students would be asked questions which are related to the content of the novel. Through such kind of game, teachers can evaluate students' aural/oral ability, as well as their vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Conclusion

According to Sagliano and Greenfield (1998), the use of the collaborative content-based literature teaching can improve EFL students' motivation and comprehension. The teaching of literature subject is compatible with a focus on the development of English fluency precisely because by discussing the issues presented in the novels or short stories, students can convey their thoughts through language, promote higher level thinking skills, and use language authentically. Meanwhile, literature provides a window into western cultures, helping students understand how foreigners live and think. Literature in deed helps students to expand their "linguistic and cognitive skills, cultural knowledge and sensitivity (quoted in Shanahan, 1997, p. 165)". Consequently, one can say that this collaborative CBI with literature teaching can promote simultaneous learning of academic content, cultures, English language skills, and critical thinking abilities.

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