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TAKING ENGLISH BEYOND THE EVERYDAY

Most people probably remember studying a foreign language and learning dialogs and vocabulary related to valet parking, going to the library, and other such activities. A young Mexican man talking to a radio show host about his early experience learning English in the US said that the two phrases he remembers the best are: "The window is open" and "Listen up, class", two phrases he has never used outside the classroom. The average language learner can probably identify with that. They may know these or similar phrases in every language they have studied and could probably count on the fingers of one hand the number of times they have actually used such phrases in a real life situation in any language.

Why are such useless phrases taught to language learners of all ages? What purpose do they serve? Is it any wonder that young learners, especially, tune out when asked to practice vocabulary and phrases that have no relevance to their lives? What young person needs to know how to order valet parking or cares whether or not the window is open? Of course, learners do learn more than these types of phrases once they exit early courses. However, there is still a tendency to present material and information that is designed for the language classroom rather than for real life.

Best practice in teaching recognizes that one key component for effective teaching and learning is relevance for the learner[1]. This is as true for foreign language learning as it is for any other subject. In the 21st century there are many new publications and materials that address the interests of young people, but teachers may not always know how to use these materials effectively. There are also numerous materials that can be accessed online, but

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[1] See: D. Nunan, *The learner-centred curriculum: A study in second language teaching*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1988, p. 42.

teachers may not always be sure how to use them effectively in the language classroom. Teacher training for foreign language teachers can offer techniques and strategies in content instruction which can bridge this gap, so that foreign language teachers can integrate interesting content and language objectives for their students. There are a number of facets of learning, and language learning in particular, which create the background for the relevance of using content as the basis for foreign language teaching. Cognitive factors as well as affective factors, such as motivation, quality and quantity of interactions, and the relationship between learning and development all play roles in what learners learn and how they learn it. Although this article is based on research in the area of content instruction for English learners, the material presented is relevant for all foreign language learning situations.

D. Brinton, M. Snow, and M. Wesche[2] define content-based instruction as the integration of content learning with language teaching aims. Its purpose is usually gaining knowledge of a particular topic for academic purposes. However, in the foreign language context it can be extended to gaining knowledge about topics that are of particular relevance and interest for the students. For example, high school students may be interested in learning about what school and education is like for their peers in other countries. Developing a comparison chart which shows the similarities and differences between their experience and that of students in other countries takes the lesson beyond acquiring knowledge about other educational systems. The learners use a visual means to demonstrate what they have learned.

Academic content can also be used to teach language especially if the students already know and understand the content. The language teacher does not have to teach the concepts, just the language needed to talk about them. For example, unless they are in a bilingual program or an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program, it may not be necessary for the students studying a foreign language to study all aspects of science. However, it may be of interest and important for them to learn the names of the planets in the target language and how to talk about meteors and other astronomical phenomena. Generally content-based instruction is appropriate for all levels except beginners who do not have enough of the target language.

One way to introduce more relevance into the foreign language classroom is by using Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), the simulta-

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[2] See: D.M. BRINTON, M.A. SNOW, M.B. WESCHE, *Content-based second language instruction*, Boston: Heinle and Heinle Publishers 1989.

neous teaching and learning of content and a foreign language. By integrating language learning with content learning the teacher can activate higher order thinking skills (HOTS) which not only increases relevance but also promotes student interest. Higher order thinking skills are often used in the classroom to move learning beyond the concrete to the abstract. Rather than just learning and repeating knowledge and information about a topic, learners can develop better reasoning skills which are needed to solve problems and to think of new ideas. This integration of language and content can stimulate critical thinking so that learners can not only determine the accuracy or authenticity of what they are learning about, but it gives them the ability to look for the reasons behind problems and alternatives to solving them[3]. The integration of language and content also provides them with the language skills and knowledge necessary to carry on collaborative discussions with their classmates about the topics.

An important aspect of CLIL is that the teacher does not assume that the students are ready and able to make these connections immediately. In planning and implementation of the lessons, the teacher makes accommodations for the learners through adapting tasks and materials so that learners can understand what they have to do and can demonstrate what they know. Often the teacher starts by activating prior knowledge, what do they already know about the topic, and the learners' ability to express their ideas about it. Students produce language around what they already know about a subject before going into it in depth.

This concept is supported when we consider Bloom's Taxonomy which represents learning as a pyramid with knowledge acquisition on the bottom. Students must first have a solid foundation of knowledge about the content and the necessary English grammar, vocabulary, and the four skills areas before they can move up the pyramid to more complex and authentic activities. However, the pyramid is not completely static. The teacher may move back and forth among the levels, giving students a variety of experiences at different levels, as long as they are prepared for the next step.

Scaffolding is a key way in which the teacher can help students get ready for the tasks and move forward with them. Scaffolding is any number of ways that the teacher supports pupils in carrying out activities and helps them to solve problems. Some examples include simplifying tasks by brea-

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[3] See: University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, *Teaching knowledge test content and language integrated learning glossary*, vol. 3, Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press 2009.

king them down into smaller steps, keeping pupils focused on completing the task by reminding them of what the goal is, showing other ways of doing tasks, and using writing frames to guide their writing. Scaffolding is a temporary support which is gradually taken away so that learners can eventually work without it.

Visual organizers or graphic organizers are one effective scaffolding tool that can help learners remember new information and language by making thinking visual. By writing down or drawing ideas they can easily make connections among ideas and among elements of language. For example, using a Venn diagram to record the similarities and differences between two texts can promote higher thinking skills. As the learners visually represent elements of comparison and contrast between the texts, they are using language that goes beyond just describing the elements of the texts. In the language of Bloom's Taxonomy, they are building on their knowledge base and moving from knowledge acquisition to being able to use this knowledge critically and authentically.

Differentiation is also an important part of Content and Language Integrated Learning. Differentiation is providing support for learners based on their abilities and knowledge. Those who are less proficient in the language or less knowledgeable about the topic often require modified input, such as simplified texts, additional visual support, or additional information to increase their knowledge base. They may also need modified output, such as answering fewer questions or presenting their work as a poster that relies more on visuals than text. Learners who are more proficient in the language may be encouraged to support their peers by working with less proficient students. If their knowledge about the topic is greater than other students' they may do extension activities which take them beyond what they already know. In the language class, having more proficient and knowledgeable students 'teach' some of the content is an effective way to increase their involvement.

This integration of content and language is also supported by the Goodman-Smith Hypothesis[4] which states that language acquisition and literacy development can occur when the reader encounters new aspects in the text that she has not yet acquired, but is developmentally ready for, such as new vocabulary, new grammar, new functions, etc. Authentic materials are an important resource that

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[4] Cf. D. FREEMAN, Y. FREEMAN, *Essential linguistics: What teachers need to know*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann 2014.

can provide the foreign language learner with opportunities to acquire relevant vocabulary and grammatical structures related to a variety of content.

A wide range of authentic materials is available for language learners, and the teacher can select those which are relevant and useful for their students and guide them toward appropriate materials. In some instances the foreign language teacher can use actual textbooks written for students who are native speakers of the target language to teach content-based language. However, to be effective, that is, to be relevant and interesting, the materials must be communicative, leading students to further inquiry. For that reason, non-textbook authentic materials such as TV, magazines, catalogs, pictures, maps, reference books, popular song lyrics, etc. tend to be more interesting and, therefore, more effective.

In order to utilize materials and strategies effectively, A. Pennycock[5] proposed a pedagogy of engagement, a participatory teaching of relevant issues. Content-based instruction and CLIL fit well into such a model of a participatory learning experience. The Participatory Learning Experience includes *identifying* the students' wants and needs and *negotiating* the curriculum to meet those wants and needs through *developing a dialectical relationship* among learners and teachers. *Skills development, exploration of issues, collaborative learning, and critical analysis* all play a part in this experience. Using this model, the teacher can see that some activities and materials can be easily adapted for different levels and ages by adapting the content and goals, so that the learning can go from more concrete to more abstract.

For example, language students may be interested in environmental issues. Focusing on an environmental issue in their town, such as a polluted stream, can provide an authentic opportunity for them to explore issues related to water pollution, learning appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures for discussing the issues, and how to work together to determine a possible course of action. Going from more concrete to more abstract will take students to higher levels of learning and higher levels of language use. Students begin by learning appropriate vocabulary and grammar forms to express their ideas and opinions about the problem and how to solve it. This type of use of content material also promotes collaborative learning, which is an important part of the content and language learning experiences. One group of students may write a proposal for a public awareness campaign about the issue, while an-

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[5] See: A. PENNYCOOK, *Introduction: Critical approaches to TESOL*, "TESOL Quarterly" 33(1999), p. 329-348.

other group who is especially interested in science might focus on the chemi-
cal and biological implications of the polluted stream.

How can the teacher select topics that students will be interested in? One
simple way is to ask them. The teacher could have a discussion about topics
of interest or could design a questionnaire to be incorporated as part of a le-
sson. This can be a paper/pencil questionnaire which they complete in class
or for homework. However, if the teacher and students have access to com-
puters, a product like *Survey Monkey,* which is free and fairly simple to set
up, can be used. If the teacher tells students to do it for homework, they are
more likely to do it if they can do it on the computer than on paper. If the te-
acher and students have access to mobile devices, *Poll Everywhere,* is a sur-
vey app that is quick and easy to use. The students use it to quickly and
anonymously submit their choices.

Once topics are identified, the teacher then needs to decide how to tie in
relevant vocabulary, grammar, and language skills into the lessons. While it
is easy to see the connection between teaching content and vocabulary, it
may be less obvious how grammar fits into this framework. First of all, we
have to recognize, that despite how we have been taught in our own foreign
language classes, language learning research[6] points to direct instruction of
grammar not being very beneficial. A study by H. Winitz[7] found that stu-
dents benefited more from implicit instruction of grammar. N. Ellis & D.
Larsen-Freeman[8] suggest using communicative activities which incorporate
grammar practice. The reasoning is that such instruction is contextualized.
When skills and knowledge are integrated, in other words when you are not
using skills in isolation, there is more context helping the learner acquire the
strategies being used. If you want to focus on a particular grammar point,
embed it in the content. For example, if you are studying the life of some-
one, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., you can incorporate use of past passive
into the lesson. Students will not only read materials written using the past

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[6] Cf. R. ELLIS, *Second language acquisition*, Oxford University Press. Oxford 1997;
J. HARMER, *Essential teacher knowledge*, Pearson, New York 2012; P. LIGHTBROWN, N. SPADA,
How languages are learned. 4th ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford: 2006; M. PIENEMANN,
Psychological constraints on the teachability of languages, "Studies in Second Language
Acquisition" 6(1984), p. 186-214.

[7] See: H. WINITZ, *Grammaticality judgment as a function of explicit and implicit instruc-
tion in Spanish*, "The Modern Language Journal" 80(1996), fasc. 1, p. 32-46.

[8] See: N.C. ELLIS, D. LARSEN-FREEMAN, *Language Emergence: Implications for Applied
Linguistics. Special issue*, "Applied Linguistics" 27(2006), fasc. 4, p. 558-589.

passive, but they will have to reproduce it when they write or report on his life. He was born, he was married, he was assassinated, etc.

Although topic selection and contextualization of language are key in creating engaging lessons, delivery is equally important. If the way in which the material is presented does not engage them, even the most interesting and relevant topic can be deemed boring by students.

As mentioned earlier it is often easy to engage students using technology. Education has recognized how technology has influenced human behavior, and it has introduced the use of technology for learning purposes. The convenience of phones, tablets, and personal computers has put learning, and language learning, at our fingertips in most countries around the world. Web 2.0 tools have changed the way we communicate. The biggest benefit is the self-empowerment that the use of technology gives the student. We should take advantage of this aspect to connect with our students, to get them excited and turned on to learning English. Computer-based learning can be fun because it allows interactive games, interaction with both native and nonnative speakers, the exploration of language through virtual worlds, and a whole range of interactivity. For example, *Tricider* is an easy-to-use tool which is convenient for making opinion polls about anything from what to have for lunch to narrowing topics for teaching. Students can vote on their favorites, comment on pros and cons, and can add their own ideas of choices for others to comment on. A lesson may even involve their creating their own polls. *Poll Everywhere,* mentioned earlier, is also an easy-to-use app that students can access using any type of mobile device.

If there is ready access to technology, online discussions and blogs can be used within the language class or to link students to the world outside the classroom. A blogging tool such as *BlogSpot* or a learning management system such as *Moodle* can be set up for online discussions and is fairly flexible. These interactive applications can be used in a variety of ways for students to practice all skill areas as well as vocabulary and grammar. In the educational environment, this increased capability as an interactive tool has potential to involve students in activities outside the classroom. The use of the Internet for international and intercultural collaborative activities has been recognized by language teachers, especially as a means of providing their students with authentic communication opportunities.

Recently an English professor in Taiwan wanted her university students

to discuss a topic with some students in the US[9]. Her students read some materials about the Civil Rights Movement in the US and about Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. In the *Moodle* she created, they posted a short essay about their reading and then the students in the US commented on what they had written. One objective for the activity for the students in the US, native and near-native English speakers, was to see how a student in another language used English in a formal posting. The other objective was for the American students to interact with the Taiwanese students. The American students commented that though this activity they not only saw how the Taiwanese students used English, but they learned facts about the Civil Rights Movement that they did not know. The Taiwanese instructor said that it gave her students a chance to interact with native English speakers, an opportunity which they may not have had otherwise. Something like this activity goes beyond the "penpal" idea. In the case of the students in Taiwan, they knew they were not only writing about the content for their teacher, but also for outside readers who were going to interact with them.

There are a variety of ways that blogs can be used in the foreign language classroom. Students can use them to keep track of an event or something that they are interested in. They can be set up as student portfolios, where they can showcase their work. A blog can also be a collaborative meeting place for students, teachers, even parents, and community members. In this way, the blog goes beyond the classroom increasing its authenticity. Another use would be as a knowledge-management tool. The teacher and students could maintain a grammar blog or a blog with topics are being covered in the classroom.

Social media such as Facebook and Twitter can also be used in foreign language classroom. Many students already use these media, so the teacher just needs to develop ways in which to incorporate their use for language learning.

One way that students can be encouraged to communicate with one another in English is to set up a Facebook group for the class. This is a special group within Facebook whose setting can be set to make the group 'private' which means that only members can read posts and add content. This is advisable if you want to create a secure learning environment in which your students feel confident enough to communicate in English. Since many of them use Facebook already anyway, it also does not feel like another task they have to perform.

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[9] See: L. ZIMMERMAN, *Instructional challenges in international online communication activities with university students*, Paper presentation at the *43rd Annual TESOL Convention*, Boston, MA, March 2010.

Twitter is another popular social networking site that many young people already use. Because it operates through the exchange of short status messages (140 character limit) it can be used in the classroom context for sharing links to websites, worksheets, games, articles, and much more. If the students are working on a project, such as their environmental issues project, it is a quick and easy way for them to exchange information.

Videos are also a useful tool for teaching in the foreign language classroom. Most teachers are accustomed to using dvds to show videos, either those that come with coursebooks or authentic materials such as movies and TV shows. However, with access to the Internet, *YouTube* is a useful resource for lessons that use all four skill areas. These videos also provide students the chance to listen to someone use English besides the instructor. Taking advantage of the wide variety of material from *YouTube* can help the language instructor create lessons on a wide range of topics that engage different learning styles and address the four skill areas. One good feature of *YouTube* is that it is searchable which makes finding appropriate materials a little easier. However, keep in mind that anybody and everybody can upload their videos there, so instructors will have to preview carefully any that they intend to use.

As with written materials, lessons can be planned with pre-listening/viewing activities, during activities, and after activities. The instructor might prepare some questions for students to answer or use any of a variety of graphic organizers. A KWL chart is a simple 3-column chart in which students write down what they know about the topic (K), what they want to know (W) before reading or listening. What the learned (L) is to be filled in at the end.

As a follow-up to activities using authentic materials, the teacher can do a variety of activities. Depending on the level of the students, they may do a guided discussion about the topic; write about what they saw; or draw a picture of one of the concepts and explain it. What they do is dependent also on what the content objectives for the lesson are and what language objectives the students should meet.

YouTube, for example*,* can be used a source for publishing students' materials if they are able to create recordings. For example, perhaps the students have created a public service announcement about their environmental topic. Traditionally, they would have presented it to the class and that would have been the end of it. However, with modern technology they can polish it and record it and post it as an authentic public service announcement, not

just as an assignment for their class. This type of production of student work makes foreign language learning relevant, interesting, and authentic.

Foreign language teaching requires an interwoven, integrated curriculum that is based on the students' goals and needs which presents many possibilities for planning and implementation. Therefore, a cyclical combination of thematic and content-based topics and situations can be used to create an integrated program which is relevant and interesting for students. When combined with technology, content-based language learning can develop learners that use their knowledge critically and authentically.

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JĘZYK ANGIELSKI PONAD CODZIENNOŚCIĄ

Streszczenie

Jednym z najważniejszych elementów efektywnego nauczania i uczenia się jest adekwatność i znaczenie treści dla uczącego się. W kontekście uczenia języka obcego są one powiązane z odpowiednimi tematami, które wzbudzają zainteresowanie uczącego się oraz ze stosownymi umiejętnościami oraz funkcjami językowymi. Kształcenie nauczycieli języków obcych może oferować techniki i strategie, które mogą pomóc nauczycielom włączyć treści i cele uczenia się adekwatne dla uczniów. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), jednoczesne nauczanie i uczenie się treści i języka obcego, jest jednym ze sposobów realizacji tego celu. W XXI wieku adekwatność odnosi się również do technologii. Wykorzystanie Internetu, mediów społecznościowych i Web 2.0 zostało uznane przez nauczycieli języków za sposób wyposażenia uczniów w możliwości autentycznej komunikacji, która zwiększa celowość i zainteresowanie uczeniem się języka obcego. Połączone z technologią, oparte na treści uczenie się języka może rozwinąć u uczących się umiejętność efektywnego i wiarygodnego używania własnej wiedzy.

Słowa kluczowe: Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), uczenie się języka, technologia.

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Summary

One of the strongest elements of effective teaching and learning is relevance for the learner. In the foreign language teaching context, relevance is related to relevant topics which engage learners' interest and relevant language skills and functions. Teacher training for foreign language teachers can offer techniques and strategies which can help these teachers integrate relevant content and language objectives for their students. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), the simultaneous teaching and learning of content and a foreign language, is one way to accomplish this goal. In the 21st century, relevance is also related to technology. The use of the Internet, social media, and Web 2.0 has been recognized by language teachers as a means of providing their students with authentic communication opportunities which boost the relevance of and interest in foreign language learning activities. When combined with technology, content-based language learning can develop learners that use their knowledge effectively and authentically.

Key words: Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), language learning, technology.