



Why Content Based Teaching is Most Effective When Teaching a Second Language

(PP 307 - 313)

<http://dx.doi.org/10.21271/zjhs.22.2.19>

Khawlah Rauof Khanekah

Salahaddin University

khawlah.khanekah@su.edu.krd

Received: 23/07/2017

Accepted: 26/09/2017

Published: 26/03/2018

Abstract

The paper will specifically evaluate why Content Based Teaching is most effective when teaching a second language. In particular, this is a by-product that directly coincides with the ability to effectively teach English language as a second language. This is a phenomenon that is of the utmost importance to understand as correctly applying the linguistic techniques behind content-based learning, can provide invaluable information that could make the teaching process much smoother and also far more efficient within the process. The paper will define an operative definition of what content-based teaching involves, and the best practices that the educator could utilize to most effectively leverage the different benefits and mechanisms offered within a content-based teaching framework. The paper will also take a cognitive linguistic perspective in evaluating the effectiveness of content-based learning, as well as the current and most innovative techniques that are currently being utilized within the field. The evaluation of the current literature as well as the different techniques that are utilized within content-based learning can provide an effective overview that can help the educator better understand the benefits of this theoretical prism and its applications in linguistic educational development. Throughout this study, it has been proven that content based teaching is the most effective technique for teaching a foreign language. Although it is granted that content based teaching requires adequately trained teacher who could potentially utilize all appropriate techniques that this approach offers, but the outcome outweighs whatever efforts the teachers put in it. The skilled teacher will be able to incorporate the student's current knowledge of the second language, what motivates him/her and how to assist him/her built their personal experience and adapt it and combine it with the external communication skill which is the essence of language learning. Furthermore, the strength of this method lies its capability to improve long-term learner's retention and hence improved long term results

1. Introduction

The ability to understand the specific implications that are associated with content-based learning is a phenomenon that is of the utmost importance when looking to teach a second language. The paper will look to evaluate, specifically, why content-based teaching is the most effective strategy that should be leveraged when teaching a second language, and how this could be applied from a theoretical thought process. Research clearly indicates increased levels of retention, the ability to theoretically conceptualize cognition as well as thought processes, as well as the ability to use content-based teaching as a bridge to transfer linguistic meaning.

The specific strategic advantage that is clearly present with content-based teaching act as a very effective tool that could be applied to objectively teach a second language. The evaluation of the current literature as well as the different techniques that are utilized within content-based learning can provide an effective overview that can help the educator better understand the benefits of this theoretical prism and its applications in linguistic educational development. For this model to effectively work, an educator must have their finger on the classroom environment and understand what motivates students. By understanding these different derivatives as well as processes, English could be effectively taught using the content-based teaching technique through a collaborative process with the student and educator.



2. Current literature

In order to effectively understand how content-based teaching could be leveraged to teach a second language, an operative definition first must be defined. This definition should include what content-based teaching involves, what the application of content-based teaching could be, and the specific techniques that could be utilized to increase the probability of content-based teaching having success. Content-based teaching is also known as content-based instruction, and it is a very important ideological approach of language education that is directly designed to teach second-language learners instruction and content within the new language (Stevens, 2015). This can be objectively utilized to leverage a linguistic commonality between the native language as well as the second language that is being taught. These commonalities are vitally important to ensure operational as well as organizational success on a long-term level.

There are many different effective techniques that could be applied within content-based education. One of the most important techniques is exposing students to the new language through the integration of stimulating as well as promoting content. Researchers clearly indicate that learners that are exposed to interesting content and are engaged directly through a contextual analysis will have higher rates of retention based upon the ability to interpret contextual meaning within linguistic teaching (Snow, M.A. 2001). This creates an environment where languages are not learned to direct macro level instruction, but are rather acquired through natural as well as automatic cognitive processes. The primary basis is collaboration and understanding an operative definition of how this collaboration could thus take place. Likewise this falls back on the instructor, and effectively understanding the theoretical application of content-based instruction. If an instructor does not understand how these processes could be integrated within a classroom setting, the ability to directly integrate as well as apply these processes could be extremely limited.

Another important derivative that is present within content-based instruction, is the way that the learner is directly able to interact with the content. The literature demonstrates that this interaction essentially correlates with higher rates of retention, understanding, as well as the ability to pick up on very specific cultural cues (James, M.A, 2006). This model essentially supports contextualized learning through language as it is essentially embedded within disclosure contexts, rather than different isolated linguistic frameworks. This allows the individual to make connections with the language that is already known to their own direct life experiences.

This perhaps is one of the greatest values that is associated with this model, as it directly correlates with operational capacity by connecting language learners with indigenous experiences. The contextual knowledge thus becomes more real, allowing the learner to create greater connections which thus increases the probability of making the content real as well as applicable to the experience of the learner (Turner, 2013). It is this specific connection with the learner that is so vitally important. Other models are strictly based upon repetition, as well as shared continue processes. This makes it extremely difficult for the student to objectively understand the end results, and what role could exist within the related process. This difficulty makes it a theoretical process, that is very limiting, which has played a major role in contributing to a mass educational movement to content-based instruction.

The literature also demonstrates the success of this model as it directly correlates with the delivery techniques that take place. Specifically, complex information is essentially delivered through the different real life experiences that learners go through on a daily basis. This creates a unique level of connection between the teacher and student which allows the students to grasp the content leading to higher levels of intrinsic motivation (Guthrie, J.T. et. al., 2013). This allows the learner to connect with strategically delivered information directly correlated with specific situations that the student may have, which enabled the learner to learn through emotional connections. It is this personalized learning that the literature



demonstrates to be so effective. This model allows the content to be delivered through practical examples that the learner could directly relate to through the personal experience. This is a distinct separation from other models that often make it very difficult to learn outside of a theoretical linguistic framework.

Relevant works in this area show that the combination of these broad processes, have the ability to create an environment that is clearly specific to the needs of the learner. This direct integration and applicability allows the learner to personalize the English language. All too often it seems that language is strictly viewed as an academic topic. This can make it extremely difficult to objectively understand how English can interact with one's personal interest. Once a foreign language is being learned, there are clear cognitive processes that take place. Specifically internalizing the language and understanding how it fits with one's subjective experiences, is one of the most challenging and difficult processes that the learner will inevitably face. The integration of this model creates a collaborative approach between instructor as well as the student. Essentially this allows the instructor to walk the student through the entire process, and help them establish their own personal meaning. By doing this in a very structured and focused environment, it takes the guesswork out of learning for the student. This creates greater applicability that is far more efficient than other learning techniques that will inevitably lead to successful mastering of the English language. It is a collaborative approach that must be taken seriously as well as understood by the instructor as well as the student. (Moore, 2015)

This represents a high level of adaptability that essentially correlates with flexibility as well as adaptation of the curriculum. Curriculum has the ability to be adapted and reactive as a contingency, to the very specific needs that are associated with the learner. This flexibility as well as adaptability make content-based instruction for second-language superior comparative to other theoretical models with simply lacked direct adaptability within the overall process. The primary goal of this model is to essentially prepare students to acquire the language through context of multiple subjects, so the student becomes used to learning it within a very specific context. The model looks to keep students motivated as motivation and interest are absolutely vital in supporting students with challenging information. The theory operates under the premise that when the learner is motivated on an intrinsic level, they are able to make greater connections with the second-language and recall information better (Moore, 1989). This is believed to set the baseline for further instruction within the second-language, allowing the student to make personal connections and conceptualize the language. This personal level of connection is vitally important, as it helps bridge the gap between theoretical practice as well as direct application. This perhaps is one of the greatest battles that a teacher faces when teaching a foreign language.

The very interesting thing about this model is that the model is able to have such great success, as it directly applies a strategic focus on the student. The model directly falls under communication language teaching, making the classroom much more learner focused rather than teacher focused (Dalton et. al., 2011). This type of classroom environment should stimulate active engagement within the learning process, as a student should not depend on the teacher or direct learning or to be the primary source of all information. This educational model goes far beyond the inputs that are created by the teachers within the classroom, as the model specifically focuses on peer interaction as well as input that can take place within the classroom as well as through the different scenarios that are focused on by the teacher.

Students must assume active classroom roles, promote social roles within the classroom that involve strategic interactive learning, and play a role in assisting students in being able to gather information through constructive and meaningful contextual experiences. In many ways, the model directly coincides with creating a level of autonomy within the student, allowing them to focus and have an objective understanding of human need. Instruction must revolve around providing students the opportunity to have a voice, especially within a world



that is traditionally dominated by standardization as well as ineffectiveness. Being able to apply direct applicable action is vitally important for operational and organizational success (Snow, M. A. 2001)

The evaluation of the literature review directly demonstrates that Content-based instruction is gaining traction across a global level. For instance, the European commission found that content-based instruction was the most effective theoretical mechanism that would allow a language student to make considerable progress when learning a foreign language (Simmons et.al, 2010). This has acted as an extremely effective framework that could be applied to increase the probability of the English language being successfully transmitted to the learner.

The model has been shown to increase the learner's English language proficiency, and enables individuals to learn contextual analysis across academic as well as vocational industries. Learners can essentially gradually acquire greater control of the English language, through participation as well as interaction with an ever-changing complex academic as well as social environment. The process is much more natural comparative to other theoretical models, which have acted as a primary driver in allowing this model to have such great success. The model can also be adapted based upon need that is clearly manifested within the classroom environment. For instance, English could be taught based upon very specific social structures, vocational desires, or personal interests. This level of adaptability make content-based instruction extremely valuable for both employers, employees, college professors, students, as well as individuals that simply just want to learn the English language.

Content based teaching uses numerous pedagogical principles to ensure reaching out to learners previous experiences through using subjects that are within the interest and knowledge of the learners. Likewise, learners realize through their participation in the class that language is a means to an end. Scaffolding is used as one of the principles when learners try to fill in vocabulary gaps and when classroom instructions come through the target language, then the learners' focus is on the information that is being conveyed rather than the language. (Larsen-Freeman, 2013)

3. The Role of the Teacher

In order for this framework to have immense success beyond the classroom, it is vitally important to objectively understand best practices that can clearly exist in the process. Teachers must understand how this model could be used in the language classroom. This model goes beyond simple theoretical integration, as best practices must be done effectively and efficiently. Having an objective understanding of how the teacher can stimulate personal learning, accountability, and passion from the learner, are vital internal contingencies that must be understood as well as appreciated. The very first best practice would be creating extended input, meaningful output, and promoting feedback through language scenarios that help students grasp content (Stoller, 2002). This process should include encouraging learner information gathering, the ability to understand both processing techniques and reporting. The teacher could also use integrated skills that include different reading scenarios, writing scenarios, speaking, and listening, within the natural classroom environment. There should also be the promotion of very specific task-based activities, as well as different strategy training that can create real world scenarios. These different variables will allow a diversified approach to be taken, that similarly promote adaptability in addition to long-term efficiency within the field. This all correlates with greater learner outcomes, because the model challenges the learners` to apply the content directly with their personal experiences plus their interests.

Another best practice that could be applied would be the integration of visual techniques that would essentially include images that are directly associated with the language. A skilled educator will have the ability to tie these images directly to personal and real-world experiences that can be created within the classroom environment. The educator must have an



objective understanding of the importance of what is being taught, how the learners are receiving the content, how interaction could be stimulated, and how collaboration can thus take place within a operational environment. Once more, this model goes far beyond simple teacher inputs, and must directly be based upon collaboration with the student. This mandate a level of emotional intelligence and situational intelligence, on the part of the teacher to ensure that the learning content is transmitted effectively and efficiently. As a result, this model should be taught by experienced instructors, to understand the multiple variables that could arise through the transmission of content.

This model has clear applicable integration in addition to action within the classroom environment, because it directly correlates with collaboration as well as personalizing the experience of language acquisition. From a linguistic perspective, the educator can create very specific inputs that would directly correlate with stimulating conversation as well as feedback and student interaction. Within the classroom the educator should be prepared to focus on subjects that are applicable and of interest to the student. An educator will pick a topic that is of interest, and will allow the students to learn about the subject through the utilization of the language that they are trying to learn. This makes the content that much more interesting to the students.

The educator should then divide the class into different smaller subgroups, and allow the group to establish simple small research tasks through information that is provided to help them conceptualize and understand the subject that is being portrayed. The educator could then form new groups once the research is completed, where information could be shared and compared. By placing learners in groups, a collaborative approach to personalization can realistically take place. This will allow the content to be shared amongst the students that would allow and enable greater insight to occur. This insight also is based upon the collaborative nature of this model, and how it could directly be linked through effective group work and collaboration amongst the learners. Essentially small groups act as an effective feedback loop that would allow the organization to have long-term and lasting overall success.

This essentially creates an environment within the classroom where learning a language is much more interesting and motivating. The language thus becomes correlated with the fulfillment of the very real purpose, which creates a level of autonomy on top of confidence. This is a strategy that is applicable within the classroom, but is contingent upon the teacher understanding the effective integration of the external environment along with the motivation needs of the student population within the classroom. The group work will allow the teacher to also see the success of what is being taught in terms of content. If groups are collaborating and personalizing the content, the teacher should follow up with stimulating content that is based upon the foundation that was already put out there for the students. If, however the group seems extremely disinterested, this could be a clear sign that the teacher needs to create an adaptive strategy based upon other types of content personalization. The instructor should be able to learn through observation, as this can act as an effective sign of what is actually working.

4. What is new in the field

The primary research is continually looking to evaluate specific updates that could take place within the field. Specifically, an educator must apply these updates to the specific content-based retention processes. One correlated factor that is being evaluated within future research, is how cognitive connections are made utilizing this methodology, for students that are learning a second language. For instance, the field is now starting to incorporate measures that are associated with operant conditioning and direct learning. This has allowed the model to use different re-enforcers to stimulate participation with user attention.



Operant conditioning essentially operates under the premise that an individual has the ability as well as capacity to retain information and increase the probability of retention, based upon positive feedback and reinforcement. As a result, research is now looking at ways that this method could directly integrate different reinforcement methods, that could directly occur through the engagement as well as the collaboration process within the classroom. This can directly include public recognition, understanding the benefits that could take place through a collaborative process, and how this could benefit the classroom in general by focusing on effective growth. The specific steps play a very positive role in terms of identifying different operational strategies that could be leveraged, that would directly increase the probability of effective attention being present.

5. Language levels that are most effective with theory

Adaptability within theory is one of the most important theoretical processes that is associated with this model, as it directly correlates with adaptability as well as long-term understanding. Specifically, an educator that utilizes content-based teaching, can effectively leverage it for adaptability within the process. For instance, this model could clearly be effective for new English learners, advanced English learners, as well as intermediate English learners. The adaptability of this model demonstrates that it could be an effective theoretical prism that could have implications for both beginning as well as advanced English learners. Many other model simply do not demonstrate this range in scope. This is part of the primary reason why content-based instruction has become so popular and widespread when teaching a second language.

The success of this adaptability however is often contingent upon the teachers. They must make a concerted effort to leverage different teaching techniques, integrate student activity within the classroom, and create a collaborative approach where the content becomes meaningful. For instance, for beginning learners, a best practice that may take place would be teaching about the weather. This is something that is very basic, and can help learners learn some very simple words in English and apply it to their understanding of the physical world. A more trivial concept can limit the abstract nature that may be associated with the second language. As the learners become more advanced, there are clearly more structuring techniques and processes that could be applied to ensure operational growth.

For more advanced learners, the teacher could create an adaptive process perhaps by focusing on topics such as popular culture or areas of interest that are very specific to the students. More advanced English speakers for instance, will be able to apply the scenarios within their real-world situations, and help them to understand more abstract associated concepts. This is something that is very important to effectively understand as well as appreciate how content-based learning can be adaptive, and meet the needs of students both from beginning of the learning process, through the progression of their development of language acquisition. This is a process that is vitally important to understand, and is one of the major reasons why this theory is so effective. This is a theoretical prism that can improve retention, can be adaptable based upon the teacher specific preferences, and also has the ability to create unique and personalized experiences that are very focused on student learning, as well as the overall application of learning.

6. Conclusion

The evaluation of the research as well as the data, reinforces the primary point that was made in the introduction of the paper. Content-based learning is the most effective mechanism that could be leveraged by a skilled teacher, to create adaptability as well as growth within the process. As a result, content-based instruction is the most effective theoretical framework that should be applied when teaching a second language. This is truly a vitally important process that must be understood as well as appreciated, to create long-term and lasting change. The



reality is that the effective integration of content based learning within the classroom, can improve long-term student retention as well as overall outcomes. It is the personalized experience that makes this teaching theory so effective, and learning a second language something that is feasible for many people. It is the personalization of this theory that makes it so unique and applicable for the learning experience.

One of the most important and applicable derivatives within this theory, is the fact that they can be so adaptable. As a result, the need for the instructors to directly have their finger on the pulse of the classroom, is vitally important. Instructors must have an objective understanding of what motivates students, what interests the students within their daily lives, and how this can directly correlate with content-based learning within the educational environment. A skilled educator that can effectively bridge this gap, will have students that have higher rates of retention as well as a deeper understanding of the language that is being evaluated within the classroom based setting and process. If an educator is not able to understand what motivates the students, it can be very difficult to create the necessary level of connectivity that is mandated to personalize the learning.

This personalization is extremely important to understand different strategies as well as overall processes that are associated with the theory. When this area is objectively applied to learning a language, the probability of operational success as well as growth will increase substantially. Institutions such as the European commission, view content-based instruction as the most effective way to make progress from learning a foreign language. Learners are able to objectively attain control over the English language, allowing them to directly participate within their personal experiences as well as the external environment. This level of connectivity creates a long-term process of adaptability, that can increase the probability of operational growth as well as long-term success being present. Based upon these collective reasons, it quickly becomes apparent that content-based instruction is the most effective mechanism that could be leveraged by an instructor to teach the English language. This premise is based upon the adaptability, the personalization, the connection with the instruction, and most importantly the personalization of content. The evaluation of these different processes enable this model to be extremely effective, and allow the end-user to master the English language.

So in content based teaching, the focus is on students' needs , use of authentic materials, use all skills in an integrated style, use the second language in the classroom with the native language being used for explanations, focus on communicative activities and finally grammar and vocabulary serve communicative needs

References

- Dalton-Puffer, C., 2011. Content-and-language integrated learning: From practice to principles?. *Annual Review of applied linguistics*, 31, pp.182-204.
- Fleming, M. and Stevens, D., 2015. *English Teaching in the Secondary School: Linking Theory and Practice*. Routledge, London and New York
- Guthrie, J.T., Klauda, S.L. and Ho, A.N., 2013. Modeling the relationships among reading instruction, motivation, engagement, and achievement for adolescents. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 48(1), pp.9-26.
- James, M.A., 2006. Transfer of learning from a university content-based EAP Course. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(4), pp.783-806.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. and Anderson, M., 2013. *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching 3rd edition-Oxford Handbooks for Language Teachers*. Oxford university press.
- Moore, M. G., 1989. [Editorial: Three types of interaction](#). *American Journal of Distance Education* 3:2, pages 1-7.
- Simmons, A.M. and Page, M., 2010. Motivating students through power and choice. *English Journal*, pp.65-69.
- Snow, M.A., 2001. Content-based and immersion models for second and foreign language teaching. *Teaching English as a second or foreign language*, 3, pp.303-318.
- Stoller, F.L. (2002). Content-Based Second Language Instruction: What is it? *TESOL*. Retrieved July 7, 2009, from <http://www.carla.umn.edu/cobalt/CBI.html>
- Turner, M., 2013. Content-based Japanese language teaching in Australian schools: Is CLIL a good fit?. *Japanese Studies*, 33(3), pp.315-330.