

## Holistic Health Elements in a Japanese Sport University Content-based Instruction English Course

Steve JUGOVIC<sup>1)</sup>

### Abstract

With the rise of globalization the subsequently rapid physical and virtual interconnectedness has increased the focus on languages, in particular English. Throughout Asia, increasing numbers of universities are offering subject content-courses in foreign languages. Similarly in Japan, a greater variety of subjects being taught are conducted in English, which also compliments the promotion by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) to attract more foreign students to Japanese tertiary institutions.

Japanese students rely upon university English programs to provide suitable courses that enable them to develop linguistic and communicative proficiency. In addition to mainstream approaches, a variety of language learning courses have prevailed in many contexts over the years which include; occupation-based English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)-the European equivalent for Content-Based Instruction (CBI). This paper aims to identify CBI as an effective language and education approach implemented for elective English courses at a Japanese sport college. Over several years of course-content modifications, three particular themes emerged and were selected to integrate the holistic combination of mind, body and spirit. Such themes are prevalent in the fields of Lifelong Learning and Education and essentially aim to; compliment the sports students' studies and interests, support their present and future long-term health knowledge, instigate and stimulate critical thinking and improve learning motivation.

Key words : content based instruction, English course, communication, content, holistic

---

1) 共通・教職科目群

## Introduction

An analogy posed by Yoshida (2002) suggests that many Asian EFL classrooms are likened to “fish bowls” and the real world is the “open sea”. In the classroom students are passive and the teacher maintains control, it provides a homogenous ideal environment with an “ideal” native speaker with no errors allowed. The students do not communicate with others outside the classroom and target their efforts towards passing English tests. Conversely, the “open sea” is where EFL students want to employ their English but must rely on themselves and initiate communication, where they will encounter a diversity of linguistic varieties and values. Additionally, students will require communication with other “non-native” English speakers from various language and cultural backgrounds. In essence “fish bowl” classrooms are unable to adequately prepare EFL students for the multilingual/multidialectal real world. Therefore a more active role in the classroom alongside content and learning procedures is required.

## Content-Based Instruction

CBI is a means by which students may acquire language skills in an integrated and communicative fashion. It refers to the “concurrent study of language and subject matter, with the form and sequence of language presentation dictated by content material and the language curriculum is centered around the academic needs and interests of the students” Brinton, Snow & Wesche (2003) whereby the content-based curriculum contains language elements in order to increase language proficiency. CBI

has been gaining prominence in a variety of contexts and has been supported by research in second language acquisition, training studies, educational psychology and cognitive psychology.

According to Kasper (2000) the theoretical basis of CBI is; “the linguistic and cognitive theories that provide the foundation for CBI each emphasize the importance of providing multiple opportunities for ESL learners to interact with authentic, contextualized, linguistically challenging materials in a communicative and academic context”. An example of this is “discourse comprehension processing” which relies on verbal and visual representations of information for improving memory and recall (Stoller and Grabbe, 1997). The authors claim that CBI is also consistent with “depth-of-processing” regarding students’ self-generated elaborations, complex linkages, spaced study and recycling of information.

## Theoretical Approaches

A broad range of course types and teaching experts can be viewed as existing along a continuum in relation to CBI courses. At one end, the English teacher has minimal or no knowledge of the content, while at the other end the content-specialist has no or limited language teaching expertise. This has a significant bearing on the design of courses and implementation of approaches.

One important perspective of CBI is consideration of the Six-T’s Approach, which Stoller and Grabbe (1997) claim is adaptable to many instructional contexts and differs from structural, communicative or task-based approaches in that content drives all curricular decisions. Effective curricular

approaches often commence with the consideration of student needs and goals, institutional expectations, available resources, teacher abilities and resultant performance. According to Stoller and Grabbe (1997) upon specification of these criteria, resolutions can be made regarding the curricular components of the following six T's;

*Themes*- central ideas that organize major curricular units appropriate to student needs and interests, institutional expectations, program resources and teacher abilities;

*Texts*- content resources which drive the formation of theme units and consider; student interest, relevance, instructional appropriateness, format appeal, length, coherence, connection to other materials, accessibility, availability and cost;

*Topics*- the subunits of content in order to complement student interests, content resources, teacher preferences and broader curricular objectives;

*Threads*- linkages across themes that create greater curricular coherence such as abstract concepts;

*Tasks*- the instructional activities and techniques for vocabulary, language structure, discourse organization, communicative interaction, study skills etc.;

*Transitions*- actions that provide coherence across topics in a theme unit and across tasks within topics such as topical and task transitions. Essentially this approach views theme, topic and text content as providing all curricular decisions and enables a workable framework to be improved upon.

Furthermore, according to Murphey (1997) five important issues need to be considered in EFL contexts aiming to implement CBI, which include;

choosing an approach and methodology, selecting and orienting teachers, selecting courses, convincing students, staff and administrators of the value of CBI and encouraging the continuation of CBI in upper-level courses to provide continuity. Additionally, the students must be considered in the decision-making process in terms of age, proficiency level, needs and goals, educational background, prior experience or background in content area and motivation level (Brinton et al., 2003).

### Course Planning Considerations

A holistic view of integrating content and language learning can be identified through the 4Cs framework, which includes the following elements; *Content*-as subject matter, *Communication*-with language learning and using, *Cognition*-employing learning and thinking processes and *Culture*-developing intercultural understanding and global citizenship (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010). Such considerations play an important role, not only in understanding the interconnectiveness of the relationships but also as fundamental elements in course planning. Additionally, the interrelationship between content objectives and language objectives may be viewed in terms of language *of* learning, language *for* learning and language *through* learning, which will be elaborated upon with selected examples in the following CBI course outline of this paper.

Furthermore, in the Japanese context much of the English teaching emphasis targets language *study* and grammar, as opposed to *use*, which ultimately reduces opportunities for improving communicative proficiency. This is often the dichotomy posed by language learning focus on

meaning compared to focus on form. It is also suggested by Savignon (2004) sighted in Coyle et al., (2010) that “the goal of language learning encompasses language using in authentic interactive settings for the purpose of developing communication skills instead of focusing almost solely on grammar”, which can often de-motivate the students.

### **Interest and Motivation**

According to Brinton et al., (2003) curriculum planners should strive to “unlock” the interests of students, choose themes, text types and activities which are relevant to the particular language needs of the learners for whom the program is designed, in addition to maintaining the delicate balance between language and content. Furthermore, for content learning to be effective learning, the students must be cognitively engaged. This can be accomplished through various means such as analyzing facts and figures as well as differing perspectives and understandings. With the primary focus on substance, students can obtain such new knowledge and skills and connect this with their own existing knowledge skills and attitudes (Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols, 2008).

Increasing the content diversity for sports students is pertinent, considering the breadth of the field and applicability to student needs. An integrated method of building students interest, increasing motivation and enhancing the learning of subject content is possible by implementing input from a rich variety of sources characterized by diverse perspectives and genres (Stoller & Tedick, 2003). Choosing content that provides “positive tension” with multiple perspectives, different but

complimentary views and opposing viewpoints creates an awareness mixture stemming from different perspectives of the same theme and may also stimulate critical thinking. According to Grabbe & Stoller (1997) motivation, positive attributions and interest are vital features that maintain student success by providing challenging informational activities, which consequently enable learning of complex skills. Students with strong “self-image” in terms of success and capability also learn and accomplish more. Those with high interest and motivation, engage the learning material better, make more connections concerning topical information and can recall information more successfully (Grabbe & Stoller, 1997). This is in accordance with enhanced learning, depth-of-processing and discourse-processing. Such engagement can be fostered through the important element of critical thinking.

### **Critical Thinking**

Crocker & Bowden (2011) in their Japan-based CBI course suggest that critical thinking can become a useful focus of content-based teaching exclusively and can simultaneously motivate language learning. The authors further claim that research indicates that intellectually challenging and stimulating activities like critical thinking tasks foster intrinsic motivation, leading to increasing long-term retention of language. In light of this, careful attention must be taken when considering that teaching and learning language is socially and culturally laden and involves the education-culture in light of student needs, experience and expectations.

According to Holliday (2005) citing

Atkinson, language educators need to be wary of imposing “individualism, self expression and using language as a tool for learning, which are deeply implicated in critical thought” that may “marginalize” rather than improve the learning of language students. This may be especially true for Asian students from Confucian Heritage Cultures such as Japan and those with low English proficiency.

### **Holistic Health Elements CBI course**

This Japanese sports university for obvious reasons has not prioritized English in the curriculum agenda, although students are required to undertake one weekly ninety-minute compulsory class in first and second year. In order to satisfy the credit-point requirement, an extra fifteen-week language elective is required. A variety of topics are introduced to the students through English-I by combining email writing with cultural awareness, while in the second year English-II class, a topical communication and listening focus is undertaken.

Currently, English-III and IV are electives available for second, third and fourth year students. The English-III course, as the focus of this paper is based on a thematic CBI approach incorporating issues relating to mind, body and spirit. Additionally, English-IV is a preparatory course for international travel and study abroad.

Over a period of several years, much consideration has continued in order to re-modify the course content and approaches. The four interrelated themes of the course content are briefly outlined as follows;

(1) Yoga- discussing overall benefits, physical action by including peer teaching as

Yoga “teachers”, cultural understanding of India and providing a guest Yoga teacher to take a class.

(2) Ki-also known as “Chi”, is considered a life-force or human energy, critical thinking, physical action activities using non-muscle and the mind (Ki power), understanding cultural differences in relation to Ki, using critical thinking skills to define your own impression of Ki.

(3) Health- formulating opinions about healthy lifestyle choices based on typical modern health issues, designing a simple health and fitness program for friends or family, the problems of sedentary lifestyles in modern society, and what are contemplative practices?

(4) Presentations- making a poster and presenting and/or physically demonstrating with action regarding Ki, Yoga or Health.

Providing full lesson plans/outlines for the abovementioned themes proves to be impractical in terms of the scope of this paper. Instead, some background justification of the course content will follow;

- Language *of* learning includes key course-content vocabulary such as; biochemical, physiological, psychological, culture, sedentary, cancer, obesity, mind, lifestyle, positive thinking.

- Language *for* learning includes; asking various questions such as What does.... mean?, offering opinions, how do you spell....? Please tell me about Ashtanga Yoga history, Yoga imperatives such as bend down, reach up, look at you third eye etc.

- Language *through* learning incorporates emerging language such as during presentations; peer teaching demonstration vocabulary and imperatives such as push up, keep straight, focus your mind and

concentrate clearly using Ki. These three factors are crucial when designing and modifying courses.

### **Justification of the Course Content.**

(1) For many years Yoga has increasingly become one of the most complimentary routines carried out by professional athletes. Numerous overall advantages exist in terms of physiological, biochemical and psychological benefits. Although many of these can be attained through other various exercise forms, the psychomotor and cognitive benefits are highly relevant to sports students and beneficial in reducing health problems in the general population, such as alleviating depression. Yoga can be carried out as a lifelong pursuit, which compliments healthy lifestyle choices in order to combat the ill-health effects of leading increasingly sedentary lifestyles. In terms of the students, former classroom research already undertaken regarding Yoga has indicated the motivating effects of integrating the movement with peer teaching (Jugovic, 2011).

(2) Forming personal opinions about Ki based on information stemming from various cultural perspectives is complimentary to the students' sports. This is further complimented with various Ki activities which involve focusing the mind, as opposed to using muscle to perform the same function, i.e. lifting. This often leads to surprising discoveries by the students and they are required to relate their knowledge of Ki in terms of the sports played by giving demonstrations, peer-teaching and presentations.

(3) Issues in health are also linked to the present themes in terms of lifestyle choices

such as healthy food as medicine and current health issues in society relating to cancer, obesity and metabolic syndrome and dangers of overconsumption of highly processed food.

(4) The students in pairs research different types of yoga and prepare interactive question and answer posters labeled with topic sections composed in point-form only. Some pairs demonstrated yoga but most only responded to questions in their allotted 10-15 minutes of communication. In addition, students had the opportunity to prepare a Ki presentation and subsequent demonstration.

This outline aims to briefly provide an indication of potential content provided by an English teacher in a specific sports context. Essentially it is possible include a variety of stimulating topics with equally effective variables. For example, a Sociology (course content) specialist may incorporate a sociological analysis of sports advertising and TV commercials. This can enable students to analyze various elements such as markets, sports and identity, in addition to cross-cultural analysis while also incorporating stimulating video snippets. With this in mind, the course designer must carefully consider the language *of*, *for* and *through*-learning amongst other significant abovementioned considerations of course design.

### **Summary**

One of the aims of this CBI English course was to consider a holistic approach with interest, fun, choice and variety. The themes and activities were initially intended to stimulate the sport students cognitively and physically by incorporating movement in the classroom. Lifelong related health topics and sport compliment the courses of the present sports institution and attempt to serve the

students' future knowledge. The students are able to benefit greatly from the combination of appropriate content and language learning, especially when carefully considering the multitude of variables in designing CBI English courses.

### References

- Brinton, D., Snow, M. and Wesche, M. (2003) Content-based second language instruction: Michigan Classics Edition. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Crocker, J.L., & Bowden, M.R. (2011) Thinking in English: A content-based approach. In A. Stewart (Ed.), JALT2010 Conference Proceedings. Tokyo: JALT.
- Coyle, D., Hood, P. & Marsh, D. (2010) CLIL Content and language integrated learning. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Grabe, W. & Stoller, F.L. (1997) Content-based instruction: Research Foundations. [http://www.carla.umn.edu/cobal/tt/modules/principles/grabe\\_stoller1997/READING1/foundation.htm](http://www.carla.umn.edu/cobal/tt/modules/principles/grabe_stoller1997/READING1/foundation.htm)
- Holliday, A. (2005) The struggle to teach English as an international language. Oxford: Oxford Applied Linguistics
- Jugovic, S. (2011). English-learning sports students: Is there a catch? In A. Stewart (Ed.), JALT2010 Conference Proceedings. Tokyo: JALT.
- Kasper, L. (Ed.) (2000) Content-based college ESL instruction. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Mehisto, P., Marsh, D. and Frigols, M.J. (2008) Uncovering CLIL- content and language integrated learning in bilingual and multilingual education. Oxford: Macmillan Education.
- Murphey, T. (1997) Content-Based instruction in an EFL setting: Issues and strategies. In Snow, M.A. & Brinton, D.M. (Eds.). (1997) The Content-Based Classroom: Perspectives on Integrating Language and Content. New York: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Snow, M.A. & Brinton, D.M. (Eds.). (1997) The Content-Based classroom: Perspectives on integrating language and content. New York: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Stoller, F.L. & Grabe, (1997) W.A Six-T's approach to content-based instruction. In Snow, M.A. & Brinton, D.M. (Eds.). The Content-Based Classroom: Perspectives on Integrating Language and Content. New York: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Stoller, F.L. & Tedick, D.J. (2003) Methods for promoting the acquisition of content and language. ACIE Newsletter. The Bridge Online.
- Yoshida, K. (2002) Fish Bowl, open seas and the teaching of English in Japan. In Baker, S. (Ed.), Language Policy: Lessons from global models (pp. 194-205). Monterey: Monterey Institute.

