Starting Out Right: Guiding Students Towards ESP

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Introduction

One challenge facing teachers in many science and technical universities in Japan is how to effectively prepare first year students for the ESP courses they will eventually need to attend later in their academic career. This presentation guides teachers through choosing topics for student activities, using news media as source material and using learning-based evaluation tools. Also included in the presentation is a suggested website to help students to become more autonomous vocabulary learners.

Project Choice: Cognitive Considerations

Early in the teaching process teachers must consider which topics may be at a suitable level for their students to engage in effectively. Starting with less cognitively challenging tasks can help build confidence and fluency before moving on to more challenging tasks.
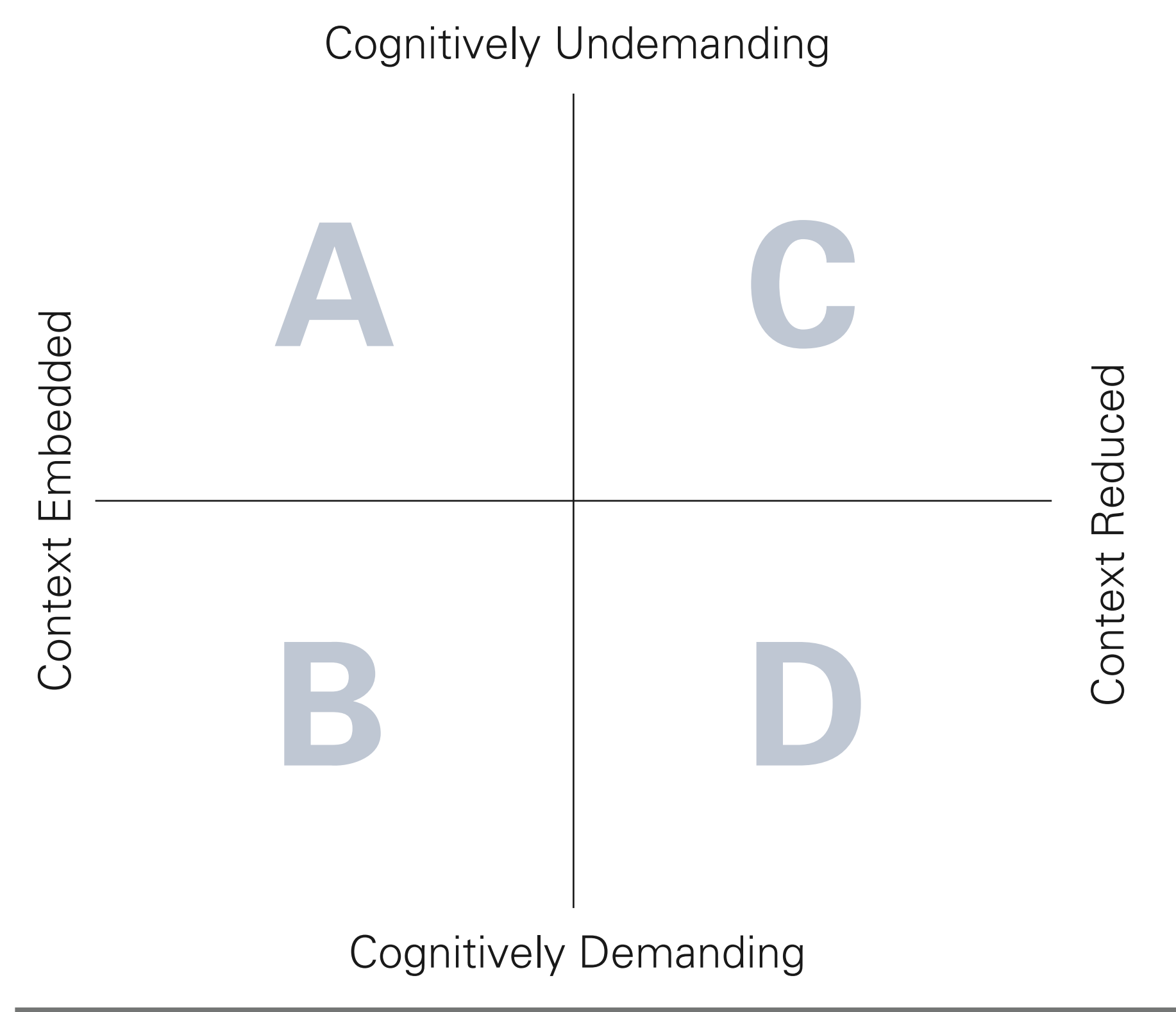

Figure 1. Range of contextual support and degree of cognitive involvement in communicative activities (Cummins 1983: cited in Myskow, Underwood and Hattori, 2012, p. 24).

Some Example Activities:

A Quadrant
Personal diary, speaking about daily events.

B Quadrant
Essay or speech on a topic familiar to the students.

C Quadrant
Offer opinions on a less familiar topic, conform to academic register.

D Quadrant
Academic argument on an unfamiliar topic.

Using News Media as a source for students

Advantages

- Fresh and topical, using current language.
- A variety of topics are covered including science and technology.
- Written in a way to appeal to general audience.

Disadvantages

- Extra instruction can be required to make students aware of the differences between newspaper language and organization and that which is required in academic language.
- Some simplification may be needed to make the source understandable to the students

Assessing Projects with learning tools: Checklists and Rubrics

Checklists

- Why checklists are needed:
  - ignorance - there may be only a partial understanding.
  - ineptitude - the knowledge exists yet students may fail to apply it correctly (Gawande, page 8)
- Checklists are thus useful in guiding students to include specific requirements in a project
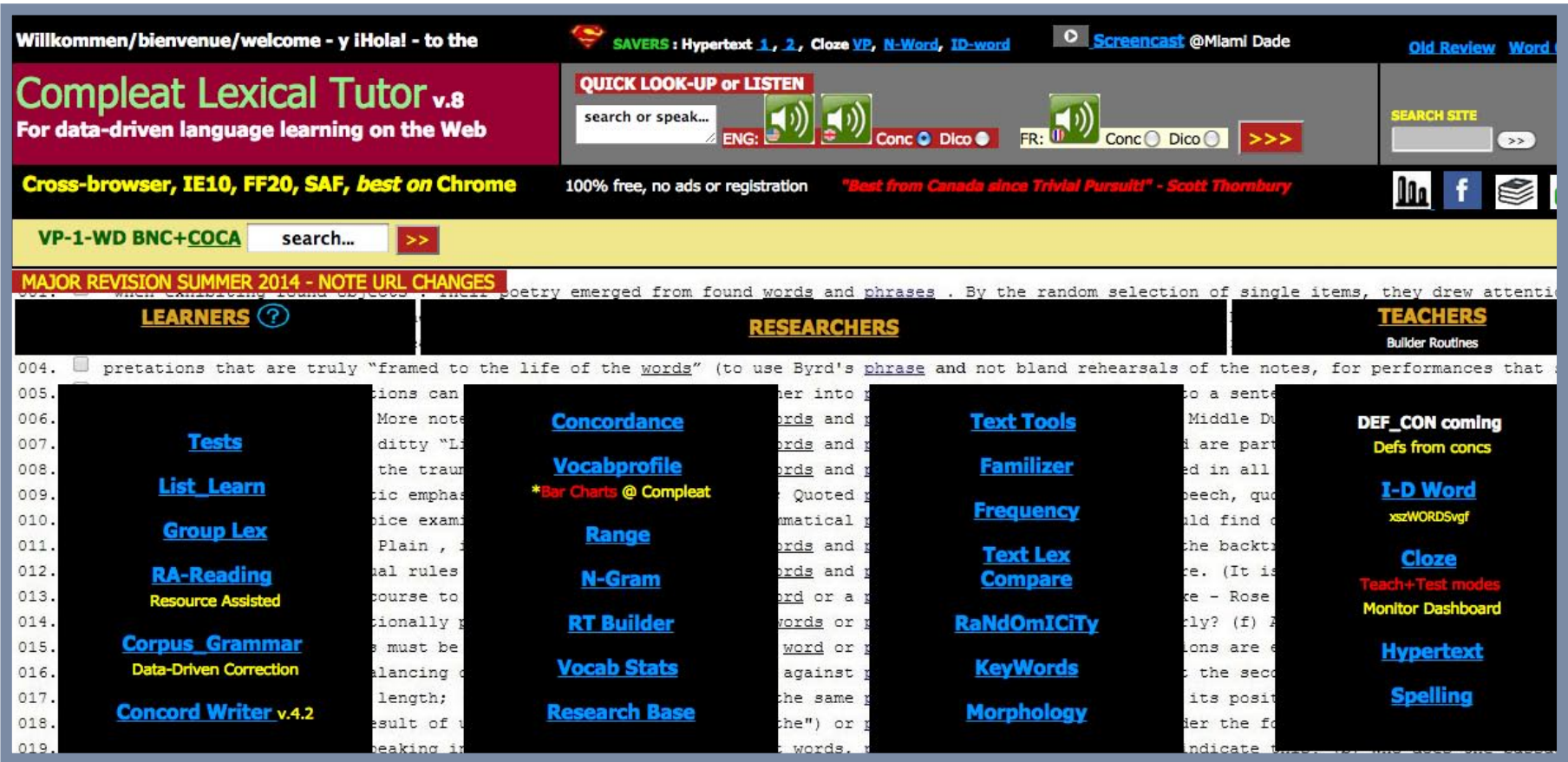
Rubrics

- Where checklists generally deal with specific requirements a rubric can be a useful teaching tool, in giving more holistic feedback to a project. Rubrics can also provide a very efficient way of grading for teachers.

Outside the classroom: Autonomous vocabulary learning

- www.Lextutor.ca offers a variety of tools that students can be trained to use in order to build their vocabulary independently.

References

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