
Poster Presentation

Making the Most of Content-based EFL Classes

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Background

What distinguishes English for special purposes (ESP) from English for general purposes (EGP) is its focus on learners' specific needs and goals (Robinson, 1991; Strevens, 1988), with relation to particular content areas (Strevens, 1988), and using the methodology of learning that content (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). ESP courses are distinguished by the following: their use of authentic material; that the language learned will be put to specific purposes, and that learners are expected to become eventual users of that language (Carver, 1983). What teachers must do, therefore, is create environments in which specific content is learned; in order to do this, they must choose effective material, deliver it appropriately, and evaluate students' work fairly and transparently.

Outline of This Paper

In this paper, suggestions are given for adapting any content for use in ESP classes. Such suggestions include the use of an ice-breaker activity to create a good communicative classroom environment, creating slides and class notes on a given content topic, effective use of student groups, a sample order of activities, a sample rubric for assessment, and recommendations for dealing with problems. For the purposes of this paper, I will show some sample handouts from the first unit of a Media Literacy course I adapted for students in the Faculty of International Studies and Regional Development, based on American Center for Media Literacy Kit (Share, Jolls, & Thoman, 2007).

Before Starting

Because working with content is as challenging as asking students to communicate in English is, it is important to create an effective learning environment in which students feel safe and comfortable speaking to their classmates in a second language. To this end, in the first class of a semester, I use an ice-breaker activity which requires all students to speak to at least half of their peers. Using a series of PowerPoint slide prompts which I provide for the activity, students talk about one slide for 1-2 minutes with the person across from them. The person at the end of one row moves to the other end of the same row and all students in that row shift down one. Then students move on to the next slide, continuing until all students have talked to everyone in the opposite row.

Materials

Organizing the content to be used in class is very important. To do this, I use PowerPoint slides for my teaching notes because content can be changed easily, videos can be embedded into the slides, and every very time I teach the course, I can update materials easily. While making my teaching notes, I create simple language-level-appropriate handouts for students based on the content concepts to be discussed in class. This is an important step as content materials may be appropriate in L1 classrooms, but may need to be modified considerably for L2 students. Materials should, as far as possible, address all four language skills.

Groupings

To deal with content effectively and in a communicative way, students should be grouped appropriately. To this end, I try to ensure that in each class, students work alone, with a partner and in a small group. Individual work is good for reading and writing assignments, pair work is good for discussions, writing assignments, and peer editing. Small group work is good for discussions for activating background schema (Carrell, 1984), for working on projects and presentations, and for checking class work. To ensure that all students work with different groups each time in class, I tend to form the groups for most activities that need them, rather than let students do it. However for presentations, I allow students to choose their own group members.

A Typical Lesson Format

In this section, I outline how I conduct a class based around a content unit in a media literacy course consisting of five units based on five core concepts. Each unit consists of five activities – generally each activity takes one class period to complete. First, I do an activity to activate background schema with pre-content group discussions. Appendix A is a sample of a group activity in which students watch a commercial of Psy (Gangnam Style) advertising Korean cup noodles and answer five key questions guiding the course while referring to the advertisement. Then, I usually show a video related to the topic or give students an authentic reading based on the topic, along with comprehension questions I've made. Readings can be adapted to suit students' levels, or students can be asked to keep vocabulary logs for new words. Students can then do an activity in pairs related to the unit, as in an activity where students have to demonstrate the principles of one-way vs. two-way communication. For this task, students sit back-to-back, one facing the board and the other facing the back of the room. The student facing the board describes a picture to the partner to draw, but the partner is not allowed to ask questions or communicate in any way. The second time, the students are allowed to communicate with each other while doing the task. Afterwards, they do a reflective activity about what happened during the activity. Next, I have students write paragraphs or essays based on the content of that lesson/activity, either individually or in pairs. In this case, students were asked to write a narrative paragraph describing their experiences of being a sender or receiver. Finally, at the end of each unit, I ask students to do a group presentation to demonstrate their understanding of the topic for that day/lesson. Appendix B lists the project options for the first of the five units comprising this course.

Assessment

How to grade students is another important consideration. For presentations, I find that it is a good idea to use scoring rubrics. Making criteria clear to students before they present helps them understand what is being asked of them and helps me explain my grading if questioned (which happens rarely, since students

know what is required). Appendix C is a rubric I use to score presentations. I also use peer assessment, in which students grade each other on participation in group projects, evaluating each other's active contribution of ideas, preparation of materials, and smoothness of presentation. Peer assessment may form only a small part of the overall grade, but requires students to honestly think about their contributions to group projects.

Student Passivity/Non-engagement

Changing students' groups in each class period ensures that all students become accustomed to working with all classmates. As mentioned above, having students do peer assessments will help motivate students to contribute to their groups because students generally enjoy being positively evaluated by their peers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, by creating an effective environment for collaborative learning, by doing a variety of activities in class, by changing groupings, and by using assessment rubrics that are shared with students, I have created an ESP course by using authentic material combined with communicative activities in pairs or groups and including peer assessment. I would follow the same procedures with any set of authentic content materials.

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Author bio

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Appendix A

Activity for Activating Background Schema

Watch the TV commercial and fill in the following chart:

KEY QUESTIONS	YOUR ANSWERS
Who constructed (made) this message?	
What techniques are used to attract our attention?	
How might different people understand this message differently?	
What lifestyles, values, and points of view are shown in or left out of, this message?	
Why was this message sent?	

Appendix B

Presentation Topics and Guidelines

Each group will make a 10-minute presentation on ONE of the following topics:

1. One-way vs two-way communication: Choose any kind of media and show us how it is one-way or two-way.
2. Matching messages and Media: Show us different varieties of the same message according to different media.
3. The World in 22 Minutes: Constructing a News Lineup: Analyze a news program and tell us what you found out.
4. Behind the Screen: Movie Makers and Their Choices: Analyze different versions of a movie or different endings of a movie and tell us what you found out. Or, you could look at the scenes movie makers left out of a movie and tell us why they did so.
5. Maps and the Pictures in our Heads: Tell us more about the Peters Map.

In your presentation, make sure that you address the first important idea, which is Authorship. Your presentations should answer the following questions:

- What kind of text is it?
- What are the various elements (building blocks) that make up the whole?
- How similar or different is it to others of the same genre?
- Which technologies are used in its creation?
- What choices were made that might have been made differently?
- How many people did it take to create this message? What are their various jobs?

Appendix C

Presentation Scoring Rubric

	1 point	3 points	5 points	Total / 25
Time	The presentation is far too short	The presentation is a little too short or too long	The presentation is the correct length of time	
Content	The information is unrelated to the topic, poor, or too simple	The information is good, but a little thin	The information is interesting and detailed	
Language	Too much Japanese is used or English text has been translated badly and is hard to understand	Most of the English is understandable, but there is still reliance on Japanese or some poorly-translated English	The whole presentation is in simple, understandable English	
Presentation: Visuals	Visuals are confusing and hard to understand or contain language errors	Visuals are mostly good, but some are not necessary, unclear, or contain mistakes	Visuals are all relevant to the topic and correctly written	
Presentation: Performance	It seems that the group members are seeing the information for the first time and haven't practiced beforehand.	Some members understand the topic well, but some members don't. It appears that only a few group members prepared and practiced beforehand.	It seems that all members cooperated in the presentation and practiced it beforehand.	

Comments: