

CONTENT-BASED INSTRUCTION TO LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Content-based instruction (CBI) is a teaching approach that focuses on learning language through learning about something. The centre of its attention are academic courses such as basic study skills, computers, geography, or cultural knowledge. CBI is effective because students acquire language skills with an emphasis on meaningful content rather than on the language itself. CBI results not only in language acquisition but also in content learning, increased motivation.

What is Content-based instruction?

– CBI is "...the integration of particular content with language teaching aims...the concurrent teaching of academic subject matter and second language skills" (Brinton et al. 1989).

– CBI approaches "...view the target language largely as the vehicle through which subject matter content is learned rather than as the immediate object of study" (Brinton et al. 1989).

– CBI is aimed at "the development of use-oriented second and foreign language skills" and is "distinguished by the concurrent learning of a specific content and related language use skills" (Wesche 1993).

– CBI is "...an approach to language instruction that integrates the presentation of topics or tasks from subject matter classes (e.g., math, social studies) within the context of teaching a second or foreign language" (Crandall & Tucker 1990).

'Content' in CBI is defined in the following ways:

– Curtain and Pesola (1994) limit the definition of CBI to those "...curriculum concepts being taught through the foreign language ... appropriate to the grade level of the students...".

– Genesee (1994) suggests that content '...need not be academic; it can include any topic, theme, or non-language issue of interest or importance to the learners' .

– Met (1991) proposes that "... 'content' in content-based programs represents material that is cognitively engaging and demanding for the learner, and is material that extends beyond the target language or target culture".

– "...what we teach in any kind of content-based course is not the content itself but some form of the discourse of that content – not, for example, 'literature' itself (which can only be experienced) but how to analyze literature...for every body of content that we recognize as such – like the physical world or human cultural behavior – there is a discourse community – like physics or anthropology – which provides us with the means to analyze, talk about, and write about that content...Thus, for teachers the problem is how to acculturate students to the relevant discourse communities, and for students the problem is how to become acculturated to those communities" (Eskey 1997).

– "...it is not so much the content itself, in terms of factual knowledge, but some form of the discourse of that content as it is constructed in the German-speaking world that is being taught...that means that it is critical that we explicitly teach on the basis of the assumptions, conventions, and procedures of their own L1 discourse communities (usually U.S. – American and English language) and toward the assumptions, conventions, and procedures of the L2=German language discourse communities" (Georgetown German Dept. website <http://www.carla.umn.edu/cobalt/CBI.html>).

Content-based instruction includes sheltered, theme-based and adjunct learning.

In sheltered learning teacher's aim is to enable learners to study the same content material as regular native speakers. It is called 'sheltered' because learners are given special assistance to help them understand regular classes. Usually two teachers work together in order to give instruction in a specific subject. One of the teachers

is a content specialist and the other one is an ESL specialist. They teach the class together or the class time is divided between them. For example, the content specialist gives a lecture in a specific subject and then the English teacher will check whether the learners have understood the target vocabulary or not. This kind of team teaching requires teachers to work closely together to plan and evaluate classes (Brinton 1989).

Theme-based approach chooses a topic which is interesting to learners and then starts developing skills around this topic. Themes can include current events, literature, or other cultural topics. For example, native English speakers can be offered French language courses based on such themes as French literature and art.

Adjunct learning implies not only separate teaching of language and content courses but also some coordination in order to enhance oral language development and thinking skills. The aim of adjunct classes is to prepare learners for 'mainstream classes' where they will join native speakers. The emphasis is placed on learning specific target vocabulary, familiarizing learners with listening, note taking, skimming and scanning texts.

Because of the nature of the content, all four skills are integrated in a content-based lesson. It's important to remember that the content continues through the whole course, not just a small group of lessons. For example, one day a course on shopping, using the bank – the next lesson, then making hotel and restaurant reservations etc. is an example of a CBI lesson.

The preparation for CBI lesson includes:

- a choice of topic;
- finding sources that deal with different aspects of the chosen topic (e.g. books, audio, video materials, websites and others).

The lesson itself consists of the following steps:

- division of class into small groups;
- each group is given a research task and a source of information;
- sharing and comparing information, discussion;
- a final report or presentation of each group's work.

The advantages of this approach are:

- more interesting and motivating language learning;
- learners are offered knowledge in the form of different subjects;
- learners are provided with an opportunity to develop such skills note taking, summarizing and extracting key information from texts, films, interviews etc.;
- development of collaborative skills, especially when using group work.

There are still several disadvantages:

- CBI implicit language instruction can confuse learners and may give them the wrong impression that they are not **actually** improving their language skills. In order to avoid it the teacher should include language focused follow-up exercises to draw learners' attention to linguistic features within materials and discuss any difficulties in grammar and vocabulary;
- Overuse of native language can be a problem. Benefits of using a foreign language should be explained to learners;
- Finding information sources that lower levels learners can understand can be difficult;
- Some learners may copy directly from the sources they use. To avoid this the teacher should design tasks where learners have to analyze the information, to make conclusions.

CBI is an effective method of combining language and content learning. The degree to which teachers adopt this approach may depend on the willingness of learners, the institution in which one works and the resources available within the environment.

REFERENCES

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