

USING ENGLISH TO LEARN SUBJECT CONTENT

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Abstract

This paper is intended to focus upon using English for learning other subjects, and how other subjects can be resources for English language learning. When one combines English language teaching and subject teaching, English is not learned in isolation. The academic content of the school curriculum provides a strong and interesting basis for language learning. It becomes a very useful and an effective method that can be used collaboratively with other teachers in a school or in a community, cluster or block through the medium of a foreign language learning and learning a foreign language by studying a content based subject.

Key Words: Content, Curriculum, Collaborative learning, Method

Integration of English and content instruction becomes popular in various countries now a days because this approach helps the learners learn a language effectively when it is the medium of instruction, rather than as just a subject. Based on this belief, integrated English and content instruction is a method that integrates English with subject matter instruction. The technique focuses not only on learning English, but also using English as a medium to learn mathematics, science, social studies, and other academic subjects. (Crandall 1987, Crandall 1998, Genesee, 1994, Reilley, 1988, Snow 1989, Short 1991, Short 1993, Taylor 1983).

Integrated English and content instruction has many benefits. First of all, language acquisition is based on input that is meaningful and understandable to the learner. Such integration increases students' interests with content themes, and therefore, it also provides a meaningful basis for understanding and acquiring new language structures and patterns (Genesee, 1994, Krashen, 1989, Snow 1989, Taylor, 1983). Second, language, cognition and social skills develop concurrently among young learners. Language is a crucial medium that social and cognitive development proceeds (Genesee, 1994). By learning core subjects in English-, learners can obtain core concepts and develop social skills. Third, the integration of English and content instruction emphasizes the specificity of functional language use. (Genesee, 1994)

When integrating English and content instruction, Short (1991) specifies teachers can adjust their teaching style with such things as developing a student-centered approach to teaching and learning, reducing and adjusting teacher talk as well as recognizing the fact that students make language mistakes. Furthermore, Short (1991) recommends ways to teach multilevel classes such as using cooperative learning, incorporating peer tutoring, designing lessons for students' discovery learning, and including information gap activities. Short (1991) also urges teachers to adapt traditional English teaching techniques into the content classroom such as including music and jazz chant activities, having students do hand-on activities, doing demonstrations, bringing regalia into the class, using films or videotapes, supplementary books, etc. As for evaluating students' comprehension of the content instruction, alternative assessments are recommended such as dialogue journals, role-playing, or portfolio.

Gehrke (1998) defines curriculum integration as, "A collective term for those forms of curriculum in which student learning activities are built, less with concern for delineating disciplinary boundaries around kinds of learning, and more with the notion of helping students recognize or create their own learning" (p. 248). Case (1991) defines content and skill integration as:

Integration of content means connecting the understanding promoted within and among different subject areas or disciplines. For example, a course on environmental problems might

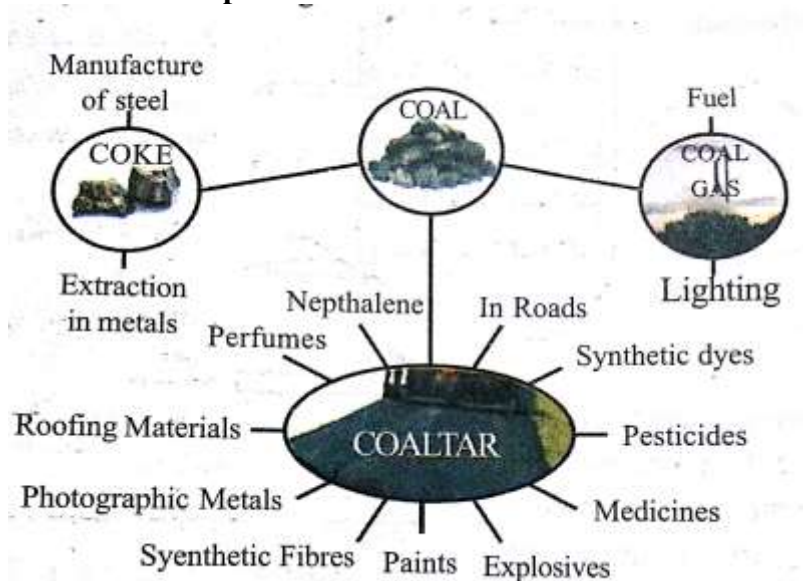
integrate information from biology, geology, economics, and cultural anthropology. Integration of skills and processes refers to so-called generic skills and processes. The call to “teach reading and writing in the content areas” is an example of integrating reading and writing “skills” into subjects such as social studies and science. (p. 216)

Every subject consists of its own vocabulary of using language. There is a lot of difference in speaking, reading and writing about social studies and science. While teaching content knowledge of the language becomes the means of learning content and it becomes a major platform to learn language through integration. In contextual learning there is increased motivation and the scope for study of natural language. When learners are interested in a topic they are motivated to acquire language to communicate as language is used in real-life situations. So language can be acquired naturally rather than enforced learning.

In content based teaching, subject teachers are able to make use of opportunities for language learning and it happens through reading texts. In such situation where language teaching runs parallel to content teaching with a specific focus on developing knowledge and skills to use the language. For this teachers as well as their learners require knowledge of the content-obligatory language. The term includes the subject specific vocabulary, grammatical functions and functional expressions needed for gaining knowledge of a curricular subject and communicating ideas (Bentley, 2010). This helps develop linguistic abilities for students. Developing language through use is challenging: functional and notional levels of difficulty should prevail over grammatical levels of difficulty. For example, to operate successfully a science student should be able to describe a laboratory experiment or write a report (Vavelyuk, 2012).

First thing a teacher should do at the beginning of the class is a warm-up activity aimed at finding out what learners already know about the topic and what they know about the language of the topic (Dale & Tanner, 2012). For example, warming can be as follows. The teacher asks the students to observe the uses of coal and its products and they are also asked to think the words that they use while knowing the uses of coal and its products. After warming up session the teacher explains the topic by giving a mind map on the usage of coal and its process so that the learners are able to know the content and the usage of language together.

Uses of coal and its products



Through this the learners are able to find out the words that are used in the diagram and it helps them use the words in real life contexts.

Content area literacy was a major topic in the literature of the 1980's and 1990's (Langer, 1986). The primary thrust of the movement was using reading and writing to facilitate learning in the content areas (Harp, 1989; Langer, 1986; McKenna & Robinson, 1990). Writing about content knowledge is an effective way for students to make sense of their own understanding as well as grasp the limitations to their knowledge (Harp, 1989). Children's literature brings mathematics to life and provides a context for learning (Stewart & Cross, 1993). Integrating literacy, though, is not only helpful for learning the content.

Reading and writing in the content areas is also important for the development of literacy skills. With prior knowledge playing such an important role in reading comprehension, content area reading comes with a whole new set of challenges for students. The need for teachers to teach intermediate students new skills for reading nonfiction content texts challenges the old adage that primary students learn to read and intermediate students read to learn (Harp, 1989). Reading and writing in the content areas also provides meaningful backdrop for the complex tasks involved in literacy. The content applications allow students to explore their understandings of literacy while focusing on the content (Taylor, 1989).

To improve speaking skills of students the teacher can give activities on information gaps that make students to communicate, pair and group work. The following picture demonstrates an example of communication activity with the focus on subject content.



Now the learners are asked to describe the picture in pair or group work. They try to say the names of the different kinds of animals and the place that is there in the picture and they try to guess how once man lives among the animals in the forest. Then they are able to know the difference between man in nature and how man makes fences to separate animals from him. So the picture is useful to use the language to learn the content of social living and the importance of living in nature.

Thus using English to learn the subject content paves the way for the learners to learn not only content and using English effectively in various contexts in their real life.

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