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ABSTRACT
                Two common problems with advanced reading courses in
English as a second language (ESL) for students of science and
technology are the lack of authenticity in the reading tasks and the
fact that the choice of reading material is often limited by what the
language teacher can understand. These two constraints often diminish
student motivation. An interactional, learner-centered reading
comprehension course has been developed for advanced ESL students of
science and technology. In this course, student interest and
knowledge of a specific content area are used to create both the
motivation to read and an authentic task to complete: the preparation
and presentation of an oral report. The success of this approach
depends on the teacher's willingness to (1) adopt a non-authoritarian
attitude and genuinely respect the student's interests, preferences,
and specialized knowledge; (2) invest time and effort beyond that
required by conventional teaching; (3) acknowledge ignorance of
certain subjects and enjoy learning from students; and (4) work out
and adhere to a detailed schedule of student conferences and
presentations in advance. (MSE)

An Interactional, Learner-Centered Reading Course

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Abstract

Two well-known problems associated with advanced EFL reading
courses for students of science and technology are the lack of
authenticity in the reading tasks and the fact that the choice of
the reading material is frequently limited by what the language
teacher can understand. These two contraints often lead to lack
of motivation on the part of the student, other than the
motivation to pass the course. This article describes an
interactional, learner-centered reading comprehension course for
advanced-level EFL students of science and technology in which
student interest and knowledge of content-area subjects are used
to create both the motivation to read and an authentic task to
accomplish — the preparation and presentation of an oral report.

Introduction

Among the current developments in teaching English to
speakers of other languages is a focus on the special language
needs of particular groups of language learners, or English for
Specific Purposes (ESP). The term ESP includes English for
Science and Technology (EST), English for Academic Purposes
(EAP), Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL), and
English for professional purposes. The number of ESP courses,
language immersion programs, and courses in which content is the
focus is increasing as language teachers become more aware of the
advantages of teaching language through subject matter.

Review of Literature

A review of the literature indicates the centrality of a
number of trends which are of concern to language teachers. The
learner's role in the language learning process is viewed as one
of active creator, not passive recipient. With this, "comes the
corollary that both similarities and differences will be observed
in the way individual learners go about the task" (Morley
1987:17). As active creator, responsibiltiy for learning is
placed with the learner, not the teacher.

Teachers are viewed as managers or facilitators of
language-learning experiences, rather than as instructors or
presenters of material. In order to make students more receptive
to learning, teachers should provide a non-threatening

environment in which students are not on the defensive.   Corder
(1976) noted that efficient language teaching must work with,
rather than against, natural processes if it is to facilitate and
expedite, rather than hinder, learning.   In other words,
teachers, as managers of language-learning experiences, and
teaching materials must adjust to the learner rather than vice
versa (the situation in traditional language classrooms).

There is much support for content-based language learning.
A form of communicative language teaching not only provides
learners wich opportunities to use their English for
communicative purposes but also endeavors to integrate such
activities into a wider program of language teaching (Morley
1987).   Attention is increasingly being given to the intellectual
involvement of the learner in the learning process.   It is no
longer sufficient for the learner's intellect to be involved only
with language; the intellect must also be involved with the
content as it uses the language.   This may be viewed as a
"narrow" versus "broad" approach to language learning (Morley
1987).

On the theoretical side, Krashen (1982) argues that his
criteria for optimal input can be met by content-based teaching.
The teacher's role is to make the linguistic input comprehensible
to the learners.   The content is in itself interesting, or at
least relevant, to the learners.   Course content is not
grammatically sequenced and provides much input.   Anxiety can be

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reduced to a minimum by concentrating on the content, rather than on the medium of instruction. Taylor (1983) points out that language is best acquired when it is not studied in a direct or explicit way, but rather when it is a vehicle for doing something else. Maley (1983) also notes the importance of recognizing that the target language (L2) is a means to an end, and not an end in itself.

Among the fundamental principles of ESP are an emphasis on context, the importance of attending mainly to meaning and not to language form, and consideration for the needs of the learner. In order to meet the objective of preparing learners to function in very specific environments, ESP courses are primarily structured to promote efficient and effective acquisition of particular language and communicative skills (Graham & Beardsley 1986).

In EFL, university-based, academic settings, the focus in ESP courses is often on the reading of academic discourse, with exams designed to assess reading comprehension. The type of motivation needed to perform this task is known as extrinsic motivation; i.e., the learner performs in order to achieve an end result (passing the exam and the course). It is claimed that assigning a reading and then asking comprehension questions to check whether students have understood the text merely induces surface processing (Alderson & Urquhart 1984). Students trained in this kind of activity come to perceive reading in English as a

compartmentalized skil! to be performed only in the English
classroom in response to a requirement of the teacher and not as
a tool for acquiring information in the real world. Such
language teaching is based on narrow, language-oriented
objectives which restrict the learner's development and are
counterproductive to the learning of effective reading (Tarantino
1986).

If reading of technical discourse is to be successful,
readers must have a reason for reading. They must actively
engage themselves in the process of reading and be keyed into the
material to be read even before beginning the actual task of
reading (Wardaugh 1976). In order to provide the learner with
tasks which depend on intrinsic motivation (i.e., performing out
of interest or relevance to the learner), both Widdowson (1982)
and De Escorcia (1984) stress the need for conceptual and
procedural activities which characterize the learner's area of
study. "Content provides a vehicle for engaging the learner's
participation and increasing his motivation. Familiarity with a
given topic will make the student feel that, for once, he is not
at a disadvantage in front of the teacher, who traditionally has
provided all the answers" (De Escorcia 1984:143). Williams (1986)
also empahsizes that the text must be of interest to the learner,
for without interesting texts it is impossible to achieve very
much. Such an approach to language teaching differs from the

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traditional formalistic one and provides fresh motivation to
university students.

As English has developed into a language of wider
communication, the number of native-nonnative and
nonnative-nonnative exchanges has increased. To adequately
prepare learners to achieve external communicative goals, De
Escorcia (1984) suggests mirroring communicative skills in the
native language; similarities and not differences should be
stressed. Barnes (1983) has termed this "hot" education:
pupil-centered learning, role equality in the classroom, varied
interaction, problem solving, and the creation and simulation of
real events within which learning occurs.

Background

The role of EFL in Israel is similar to that in other
countries. Students begin to learn English from an early age in
elementary school and continue their study of the language at the
secondary and tertiary levels. While emphasis at the elementary
and secondary levels is on communicative English, the goal of
English study at the tertiary level is on reading for academic
purposes. University students thus have a good foundation in
spoken English and are able to read narrative and news-type
texts; they are not, however, prepared to read long academic
articles. Although lectures at the university are conducted in
Hebrew, most assigned reading is in English. It should also be

noted that the majority of students do not continue their studies
directly upon completion of high school. There is generally a
two-four-year gap between the end of secondary and the beginning
of tertiary study, when the majority of Israelis complete their
compulsory military service. While such interruptions in study
are not atypical in EFL, they often result not only in very slow
gains in proficiency but also in actual setbacks (Maple 1987).

At Ben Gurion University of the Negev, students are placed
into EFL classes on the basis of a nationally-administered
psychometric examination, one section of which is an English
placement exam. In addition to being divided into basic,
intermediate, and advanced levels, students are further divided
according to faculty (Humanities-Social Science and
Science-Technology).

Reading selections in the advanced-level science and
technology courses have traditionally been selected by classroom
teachers. While it is not difficult to find interesting and
topical material for students of science and technology, such
readings are rarely utilized in the classroom for a number of
reasons. First, material that is relevant and current often
requires some specialized knowledge of a particular field. Such
knowledge is not always available to the first-year student or to
the non-specialist teacher. Second, students in the EFL
classroom are not always divided according to major
field/department of study and thus have varied academic interests

and backgrounds.   This places a constraint on the selection of
readings, with articles usually limited to material that is
general enough to be comprehensible to the entire class.   Such
readings, however, are rarely relevant or interesting to
individual students.   Finally, readings in the EFL class are used
primarily as a vehicle for teaching language; content is regarded
as being of secondary importance.   As a result, even when
readings on specific topics are selected, they are adapted to
serve a linguistic purpose and their content often proves too
elementary to stimulate serious involvement (Tarantino, 1986).

The absence of any real interest in the reading material
itself has led teachers to devise reasons to induce students to
read.   While contrived inducements, such as assigning homework
and asking comprehension questions, may provide the learner with
extrinsic motivation (the desire to pass the course), they do not
result in the learning of effective reading.   All too often
students complain that while they have learned how to answer
questions and pass their EFL courses, they have not learned how
to read; i.e., they cannot deal with the bibliographies given
them by their content-area teachers.   They are neither prepared
to deal with their immediate real world (the university) nor with
the real world that faces them as university graduates (a need to
keep abreast of developments in their own and related fields,
participation in international meetings/exchanges/conferences,
further study, etc.).

Teaching Approach

In an attempt to provide my advanced-level students of
science and technology with goals and tasks that adhere more
closely to the priorities readers establish in real life, I have
designed a project-oriented EFL course. The course has three
practical objectives: a) to raise the interest level of the
reading material used in the course; b) to present students with
an authentic and motivating reason to read in English; and c, to
provide a link between reading in the EFL class and utilizing
skills and knowledge for a meaningful purpose in a real-world
situation.

The course is based on pedagogical assumptions drawn from a
review of the literature and based on many years of experience,
and is consistent with current trends in teaching English to
speakers of other languages. The assumptions which underly this
approach are:
a) effective language learning requires the intellectual
involvement of the learner;
b) language is not an end in itself, but a means toward achieving
external, i.e., real-world, communicative goals;
c) language learning is most effective when learners assume
responsibility for their own learning.

Adoption of these assumptions necessitates the restructuring
of some of the traditional student-teacher roles (Figures 1 and

2). Teachers, who are now viewed as managers or facilitators of
language-learning experiences, must relinquish their traditional
center-stage authoritarian position as students assume major
responsibility for their learning. As active directors of the
learning situation, students become aware of what they need to
learn and how this can best be accomplished. Skills thus learned
become more personal and meaningful and are more likely to be
carried over when reading in real world situations.

Insert Figure 1 and Figure 2 about here

Description of Course

The advanced-level EFL course for students of science and
technology runs for thirteen weeks, with classes meeting twice a
week in two-hour sessions. During the first four weeks of the
course, those reading, reference, and study skills applicable not
only to the students' immediate work in the EFL class but also to
their work at the university are covered. Reading skills, such
as skimming and scanning, recognizing the author's purpose and
point of view, previewing, and predicting, are reviewed. During
this period, reference skills, specifically the understanding and
use of graphic presentation, and study skills, including
outlining, note-taking, and the use of flowcharts, are taught.

Gee, Huxley, and Johnson (1984) and Mohan (1986) emphasize the
use of graphs, tables, and flowcharts as aids to learning since
they enable written information to be presented in a clear,
legible, and unambiguous manner.   Reading texts during this
period, selected from such journals as Scientific American,
American Scientist, and Science, are full-length unedited
articles; content is general enough to be comprehensible to
first-year students from various departments within the Science
and Technology Faculties. During this part of the course,
articles are chosen for their teaching value in terms of the
skills to be reviewed, taught, and practiced.

It is during the second part of the course that the focus
and emphasis shift from skill to content and from a traditional
to a learner-centered classroom as students prepare short reports
which they present in class. Students are responsible for many
of the learning-management decisions that are the domain of the
teacher in the traditional classroom. The project-oriented
course allows students to choose what material will be read, what
part of the material will be focused on, how much help will be
provided by the teacher, how much time will be spent on the
project, and where the work will be accomplished; evaluation
remains the responsiblity of the teacher.

The Actual Project

Introduction

Depending on the size of the class, students work individually or in small groups to prepare a 15-minute oral presentation. It is important that students respect all deadlines. To this end, a calendar is drawn up by the students and the teacher before beginning the project, with enough time allowed for revisions prior to actual presentation.

It is recommended that the teacher make two or three 15-minute presentations as an example. It is suggested that the teacher focus on the organization of the oral presentation, the evaluation form, and how to select a topic. One of the teacher's presentations should be based on an article selected from a scientific journal.

While the level of difficulty of the reading material is controlled by assigning specific academic journals, the subject matter is not constrained by pedagogical considerations. Ideas for possible topics are generated in class by brainstorming before students select a topic and text. Prior knowledge and student interest are the major factors in choice of text; student preference is respected.

Preparation

After students have selected an article, they notify the
teacher in writing of the title, author, "lead" or abstract,
volume, month, year, and number of pages. At this point, frontal
teaching is replaced by student (individual or small
group)-teacher conferences. These conferences become the forum
for an authentic exchange of information in which student-teacher
roles are reversed (see Figure 2). Students are responsible for
explaining the content of the article to the teacher. In the
case of highly specialized texts, students must provide the
missing background knowledge in a format comprehensible to the
non-specialist teacher. The teacher asks questions in order to
get information, not in order to test the students. This helps
the students to clarify their ideas and to assess their own
comprehension. It is during this in-depth reading stage of the
project that students are also encouraged to seek the assistance
of content-area experts.

Students plan their presentations by preparing written
reports. Information contained in the written reports includes
the main idea of the oral presentation, an outline or flowchart
of the main points and supporting details to be included in the
report (not necessarily a review of the entire article but
perhaps only those points of greatest interest to the
presenters), audio/visual aids to be used, definitions of

difficult or specialized vocabulary used by the presenters, three comprehension questions (to be answered in writing by the audience, i.e., the rest of the class, at the time of the presentation), and a written summary of the contents of their actual oral presentation.

The teacher is available for consultation during the time the students are preparing their written reports. During such consultations, or conferences, the teacher evaluates, provides criticism, and offers suggestions. The students, however, remain free to accept, reject, or modify the teacher's suggestions. The teacher also contributes linguistic information, in response to such requests as "How do you say _____ in English?", "What is a better word for _____?", and "How can I/we express this idea more clearly?". Such questions reflect an authentic need to know specific terms, expressions, and grammatical and rhetorical structures, and are therefore more likely to be retained and integrated into the students' linguistic repertoire.

The number of student-teacher conferences varies according to student need and ability. This ensures that the teacher's time is distributed fairly between "strong" and "weak" students. The teacher must be satisfied that the students are well prepared and have attained a minimum level of competency before they make their actual presentations to the class. This can be accomplished by means of a "dry run," where the students make their presentations to the teacher.

Presentation

Several class periods are reserved for presentations. The setting for these sessions is similar to that in a seminar or conference. The presenters take on the role of speakers while the rest of the class becomes the audience. The teacher serves as time-monitor and evaluator, and solicits questions at the conclusion of the presentation. The organization of the presentation is described in Figure 3.

Insert Figure 3 about here

Evaluation

During the presentation itself, the teacher completes an evaluation form, which has previously been explained to the students (Figure 4).

Insert Figure 4 about here

In addition to the evaluation form, students should be evaluated on an individual, or small-group, basis. There are

several reasons for such an evaluation, which is not based on a comparison of one-student's performance with another's. Students who give their reports early in the semester are at a disadvantage, since much of the real learning about what makes an effective oral presentation is learned through observation and during the discussion period which follows each presentation. For example, while it is useful to tell the students to use large visual aids and not to read their reports, the point is made much more effectively when the visuals are too small to be read by the audience and the student merely reads from a piece of paper. Similarly, although the teacher can stress the necessity of clear introductions and conclusions, the need for good organization becomes obvious when one speaker jumps into the middle of a report, making it impossible for the audience to understand what is being discussed because the introduction has been omitted, or leaves them hanging because no conclusion is forthcoming.

Students who do not speak clearly in English, whose oral competency interferes with audience comprehension, or who profess shyness, should be encouraged to prepare visuals, either in the form of transparencies or large posters, or to use a slide or movie projector or video, to accompany their report. Use of visual aids instills a feeling of confidence in even the weakest students, and can turn a probable disaster into a success.

The teacher can also evaluate the comprehension questions prepared by the presenters. Such evaluation should focus on the

centrality and relevance of the questions to the presentation itself. While the written task is intended to help the students organize their ideas for the presentation, it also provides an opportunity for students with poor speaking skills to demonstrate a grasp of the material.

Special Features of the Project

Special features of the oral report project include the following:

1. Because students select their own articles, the range of the reading material is extended; it becomes possible to use specialized and up-to-date texts in the students' content areas.

2. Preparing the presentation trains the students to read like "experts" in the field; students focus on content and information, rather than on language.

3. Students learn about the rhetorical organization of formal discourse actively, rather than passively. While preparing their presentations, students deal with the following questions:

    a) What information should be included in the presentation?

    b) Who is the audience; i.e., how much background knowledge can be assumed? Which terms and concepts will have to be explained?   /

    c) What are the various options for organizing an effective presentation?

    d) When and how should examples be used?

It is at this stage that students also learn to use concise and
precise language, to differentiate between relevant and
irrelevant information, to organize ideas logically, and to
summarize.

4. In assuming responsiblity for the oral report project,
students acquire more control over their own learning process.
The teacher relinquishes the conventional authoritarian position
and acts as a guide or facilitator.

5. Finally, work on the project trains students to cope with
reading tasks they will encounter outside the foreign language
classroom.*

Results

The response of students to the oral report project has been
positive. Most students find the preparation and presentation of
an oral report to be both challenging and relevant, leading to
increased attendance and participation in the English class.
Motivation is high, both with respect to the subject-matter,
which students find interesting, useful, and understandable, and
the language work, because they understand why it is necessary to
know the English language well. In addition, the oral report
project offers students practice in such "academic" skills as
preparing, using, and reading outlines, flowcharts, and graphs -
skills useful not only in the university but also in the real
world of science and technology.

A change in student attitude toward reading for information in English is evident. The emphasis on content facilitates the development of self-confidence in their ability to deal with texts in English assigned in their content-area courses and a lessening of the need to seek translations. Since students of science and technology are already familiar with flowcharts, graphs, and tables, their use in the EFL classroom helps to make students more receptive to learning in a non-threatening environment. Content-area lecturers have also reported improvement in the students' ability to read texts in English.

The restructuring of student-teacher roles in the classroom has resulted in placing much of the responsibility for learning on the student. Students are viewed as individuals possessing interesting backgrounds and specialized knowledge. This leads to spirited discussions and a more integrated class. Students realize that they are able to speak on a subject with interest and sophistication, and to make themselves understood, even if their grammar and pronunciation are not always perfect.

Conclusion

The success of the oral report project depends on several factors:

1. The teacher must be willing to adopt a non-authoritarian attitude and genuinely respect the student's interests, preferences, and specialized knowledge.

2. The teacher must be willing to invest time and mental
effort beyond that which is required by conventional frontal
teaching.

3. The teacher must be willing to acknowledge ignorance of
certain subjects and be able to enjoy learning from students.

4. Although the teacher relinquishes much of the
responsibility for the students' individual work, tight control
must be maintained over the management of the project. This
includes working out a detailed schedule of conferences and
presentations well in advance and requiring that students adhere
to it.

Focusing on the student as active creator in the language
learning process has led to the development of an English course
that is more interesting and relevant to the learner. Although
in the first part of the course the emphasis is on reading,
reference, and study skills that are generalizable, it is only
in the second, learner-centered part of the course that students
actually realize that these skills are transferrable. It is then
that they are ready to be independent readers.

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Figure 1.   Traditional Teacher-Student Roles.

Teacher	Student
selects text	passive
introduces topic	listens
devises tasks/activities	responds
initiates discussion	participates
writes questions	responds
assigns reading	reads
tests and grades student	performs

Figure 2. Re-structured Student-Teacher Roles.

Student	Teacher
selects topic	—
selects text	—
asks for help with language	helps when asked
explains content	asks real questions
writes questions	evaluates
prepares audio-visuals	learns
delivers presentation	listens + evaluates
answers audience's questions	learns

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Figure 3. Organization of Presentation.

1. Before Presentation (5-10 minutes)

   a. Speaker: distributes any handouts

                 sets up audio/visual aids

                 explains difficult/specialized vocabulary

   b. Teacher: instructs students to listen and take notes

                 evaluates (see Figure 4)

2. Presentation Period (15 minutes)

   a. Listeners:answer comprehension questions (which have

                 been distributed in a handout or written on

                 the chalkboard)

   b. Teacher: reminds speaker at end of 10 minutes and at end

                 of 15 minutes

                 critiques, using oral report evaluation form

                 (see Figure 4)

3. Discussion Period (5-10 minutes)

   a. Speaker: answers questions

                 clarifies points

   b. Listeners:answer comprehension questions

                 ask questions

   c. Teacher: evaluates (see Figure 4)

Figure 4. Oral Report Evaluation Form.

SCORING: VG=very good; G=good; S=satisfactory; P=poor;
           VP=very poor

Content & Preparation)___worksheet completed

VG=40   G=35   S=30   )___outline completed

P=20   VP=15   )___"dry run" completed

)___adequate knowledge of subject

)___clear purpose

Organization   )___clear introduction

VG=30   G=25   S=20   )___difficult vocabulary explained

P=15   VP=10   )___logical development

)___clear examples & illustrations

)___clear conclusion

)___followed outline

Presentation   )___aroused listeners' interest

VG=30   G=25   S=20   )___spoke at a good rate

P=15   VP=10   )___spoke without reading

)___visuals were clear

)___visuals were helpful

)___adequate volume

)___able to answer questions

)___stayed within time limits