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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the KELP (Kanda-English Language Proficiency) Project, a project for self-directed English-as-a-Second-Language learning at Kanda University of International Studies (Japan). In the study, students plan and direct their own language learning programs, using individually designed learning contracts. Examples of three kinds of instructional materials from the bank of resources being developed at the university are presented: (1) students' use of a database of instructional materials and a collection of videotape recordings to make informed choices in planning their contracts; (2) use of popular music for language learning; and (3) an individualized, communicative reading program. (MSE)

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The Learner As Course Planner and Director

by

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Abstract

This paper reports on-going research at Kanda University of International Studies into the establishment of an EFL classroom where each student plans and directs his or her own learning programme. Examples of three kinds of instructional materials from the bank of resources being developed are given here. The first example is the use of Database and Video to help students make informed choices in planning their learner contract. The second is an example of the use of music in the KELP classroom instructional system and the third focuses on an individualized and communicative reading programme.

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The Learner As Course Planner and Director

I. Introduction: The KELP Project

This paper reports on-going research at Kanda University of International Studies into the establishment of an EFL classroom where each student plans and directs his or her own learning programme. The KELP (Kanda English Language Proficiency) Project has two main goals. These are :

1) to install and operate a classroom instructional system which is characterized by the concepts of *learner autonomy* and *interpersonal interaction*

and 2) to develop a bank of complementary instructional materials which facilitates the operation of the instructional system.

In the KELP classroom, the student, in consultation with the teacher, plans a course - a personal curriculum - by choosing sequences of activities from the bank of materials. There are constraints on what choices a student may make to ensure exposure to a variety of types of content and learning. The student's course is set out as a *learning contract*. This contract represents the autonomy learners have to design a course which reflects their interests and preferences within a set of constraints which represent their needs.

The learning contract is carried out in a classroom where there is a high density of interpersonal interaction. The KELP classroom is not an independent learning centre where students work alone. It is a classroom where students cooperate with and depend upon others to carry out their learning contracts.

Examples of three kinds of instructional materials from the bank of resources being developed are given here. The first example is the use of Database and Video to help students make informed choices in planning their learner contract. The second is an example of the use of music in the KELP classroom instructional system and the third focuses on an individualized and communicative reading programme.

II. The Use of Database and Video

Database

We are currently developing a database for the KELP classroom which will be used by the students to search for materials under a number of different categories such as topic, function, level of difficulty, etc. If the students have a basic idea of the type of materials they want to use, they can search for them under an appropriate heading. If, for example, the students are looking for materials which are in some way related to music, then they will search through the topic category under the general heading of music until they find a listing which sounds interesting. At this point, however, the students may still lack adequate information to make an informed choice.

Many textbooks have a short blurb at the beginning of each unit informing the students of the general goals and focus, but, due to an assumption of a teacher-fronted, lock-step classroom, more detailed information clarifying aims and goals is usually reserved for the teacher's manual.

Since the basic concept behind the KELP classroom is that the students will plan their own course, then all of these details will need to be made clear to the students before they can make informed choices. The materials that we

are designing will then include an introductory page which will lay out for the students a clear description of the aims and goals.

Learner logs

Canale and Swain (1980) identified five different types of language competencies. More recently, Thomas and Legutke (1991) have proposed another type of competency called "process competence" which entails an understanding of the procedural details of a given interaction that enables learners to complete the task at hand. Learner Logs are an attempt to address the students' need for process competence in the KELP classroom. In the logs, students record all of the steps they took in the completion of a given unit or project.

The word log is used instead of journal because it holds the connotation of a ship's log which was kept in the expectation that it would later be used by someone else in order to determine and direct a future course. The Learner Logs should help direct other students in the same way.

As the students are working on a unit or project they will review their work in order to make informed suggestions on how the project could be carried out differently in the future. These suggestions will then form their Learner Logs. As other students go through and read these Log entries they will then be able to see the courses that other groups have taken and to decide if they would really like to traverse the same waters or whether they would like to take a different route. Although the communication is in written form it is still a prime example of learners teaching learners and learners helping other learners to become more autonomous.

In addition to the Learner Log students will also have the option of making a Video Log of any given unit or project. The videos will be used to record the different steps which the groups followed in order to reach goals or complete tasks. For example, they could have one short twenty second segment of the students brainstorming ideas. The following segment could be of the students discussing the ideas. The third segment of the students then implementing their ideas in some way and then possibly exchanging the information with another group. The students could then narrate their actions at each segment in the video. These videos should be no longer than five minutes in length since they will be viewed by other students as they try to make informed decisions about which materials they will work with.

III. Music In the KERP Classroom

Rationale

In addition to the KERP classroom goal of facilitating learner autonomy, using music as a basis for language learning activities has several advantages. First, music is a popular theme amongst students. Activities and materials related to the topic are of high interest to the students and thus have a greater inherent motivational value to them. Moreover, there are a variety of music media available today such as video, CDs, cassettes, and printed matter¹ that are ideally suited for use in an instructional system such as the KERP classroom. These materials are always the latest on the market since the entertainment industry is extremely sensitive to consumer trends. This creates a constant supply of authentic current materials for instructional use, from the latest MTV music video to Top 10 Pop charts to pop star interviews, album reviews, and concert information. Given the high degree of student interest in the topic and the wide selection of available materials, the activities

¹Many lessons in this unit were adapted from materials in Tim Murphey (Oxford University Press, 1992)

in this unit are designed to use student selected and created materials. This enhances the students' investment in, and commitment to, the curriculum by creating a sense of ownership amongst the students. It also guards against any possible rejection of teacher imposed materials.

Music Tape Exchange: Activity 1

The price of admission for students into the KERP music unit is to record an English song of their choice on a 30-minute cassette. The students write the name of the artist and song on the front of the cassette along with their ID number. On a separate sheet of paper, the students write the first four lines of the song's lyrics and then give the cassette to the teacher to include in the bank of available materials for other students to use. The only rules here are that all the songs chosen must have intelligible English lyrics. Other students will then listen to the song for ten minutes each, checking the accuracy of previous students' work and then transcribing as much of the song as they can in the remaining time left. When the song has been fully transcribed, the tape is returned to the original owner, who prepares a final lyrics print of the song. Besides creating a huge bank of student selected and created materials for future use in the classroom, Activity 1 practices listening, reading, writing, and student to student error correction skills, making it an educationally worthwhile activity in and of itself.

Students Teaching Content

After completing Activity 1, students have a variety of optional activities related to music from which to choose. The activities A-J listed below represent just a few of these:

- A) Lyrics fill-in (1+ people)
- B) Goofy lyrics error correction (1+ people)

- C) Translating a Japanese song into English (1+ people)
- D) Metaphor & Rhyme scheme fill-ins or sentence/verse completions. (1+ people)
- E) Making a TV advertisement or program set to music. (3+ people)
- F) Distance dictation (2+ people)
- G) Translating Non-Standard English lyrics to Standard English (1+ people)
- H) Rock group interview Role Play (4-10 people)
- I) Music trivia crossword puzzle (1+ people)
- J) Group song writing (4+ people)

As with the initial dictation exercise in Activity 1, each of these follow-up activities serve the dual purpose of focusing on particular languages skills while also enabling students to become teachers to other learners. For example, activity A is a simple lyrics fill-in exercise. Students listen to an English song and fill in the missing words. The omitted words may be grammatically or semantically linked in some way in order to highlight a given aspect of language. The student may then chose to design his or her own lesson on some aspect of language of interest to them. For example, the student might want to brush up on his or her understanding of the simple past tense. He would then select a song using this verb tense frequently and omit the words using the simple past tense. The student would then use these materials with another group of students to teach them about simple past tense usage. In this way, the student's knowledge of the grammar point must progress sufficiently to enable him or her to clearly explain it to others.

Students Teaching Process

The students teaching process option is another example of addressing the learners' need for process competence in the KELP classroom. After completing any task, students may opt to explain the procedures of the

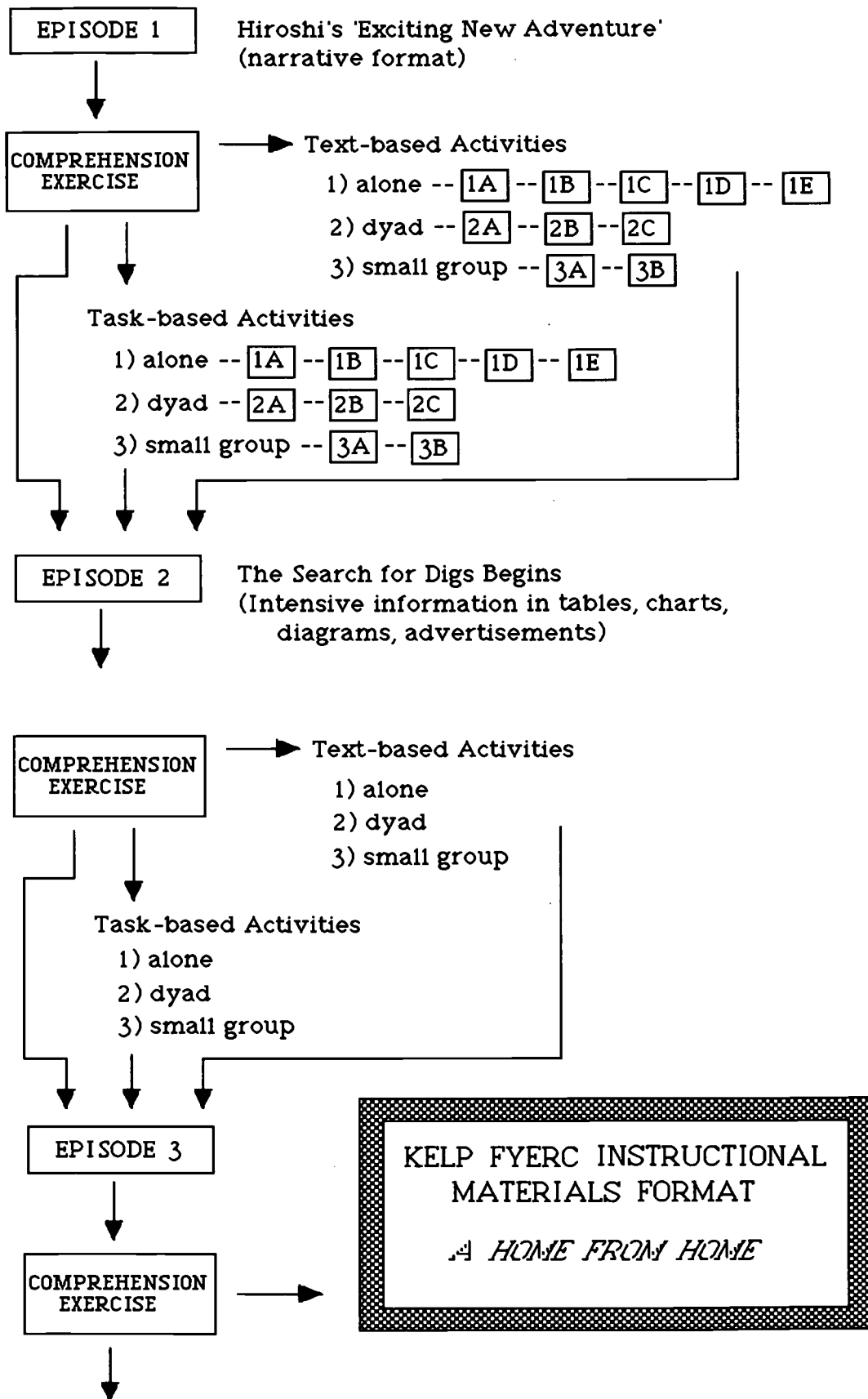
activity to other learners by completing an activity report. As was mentioned in part II, this report could be video taped in the style of a TV news report on some exciting new student project. Alternately, the report could simply be a written summary of the steps involved in the activity, perhaps mentioning possible problems and concluding with some recommendation of who might benefit or enjoy the activity best and why. In either case, students effectively become teachers of other learners by modeling the process competence needed to successfully complete the task.

IV. Some Reading Materials

One of the reading programmes being developed for the KELP classroom is a series of stories. The experimental instructional materials given as examples here are taken from a story entitled *A Home from Home* in which a Japanese student attempts to find accommodation while studying at the University of London. His experiences give rise to a number of topics for study including British vs. other Englishes, intercultural communication, racism, lifestyles etc.

The story is seen as a congenial format and context for developing reading skill for a variety of reasons. The episodic nature of stories provide for cumulative focus on changing meaning and context and relating new to known information. It also provides for review and preview activities in terms of plot, character and setting. The story can be told using a variety of genres giving students opportunities to process information in different ways.

The first example of the reading programme is part of the progress schema. As shown in the chart below, students can progress through the story in a variety of ways .



After reading the episode and successfully completing a comprehension exercise, the student can choose from text-based activities (where the end-

product of the activity is correctable language) or task-based activities (where the end-product is the solving of a problem, completion of a project, or some other task). Note that some activities may be completed alone. Others require a student to work with one other student. Still others require a small group of students (4 people) to work together.

The second example shown below is a text-based activity which is a parallel writing exercise. The student expands an abbreviated classified advertisement into a paragraph of connected sentences.

FYERPC; *A HOME FROM HOME*

EPISODE 1: HIROSHI'S 'EXCITING NEW ADVENTURE'

TASK-BASED EXERCISE 3A

(A Small Group Project)

Learner Contract Credit : 4 1/2 hours

INTRODUCTION:

When Hiroshi flew to London, he took a direct, non-stop flight. The flight, JL 170, took off from Narita at 7.45 p.m. and landed at London's Heathrow Airport at 11.45 a.m. the next day. Most business travellers go by such non-stop flights to save time.

Procedures:

Report Format:

Space limitations have led to the exclusion of a task-based activity example in the form of a small group project as well as the instructions for resources to be used, procedures to be followed and the required format for the final report.

References

Canale, Michael & Swain, Merrill. 1980. Theoretical bases of communicative to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics* 1: 1-47.

Legutke, Michael & Howard Thomas. 1991. *Process and experience in the language classroom*. New York: Longman.



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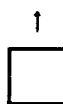
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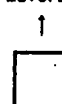
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