Integrating 4 skills in a short project-based course

塩原フランセス

神戸松蔭女子学院大学文学部

Author's E-mail Address:　fshiobara@shoin.ac.jp

Integrating 4 skills in a short project-based course

SHIOBARA Frances

Faculty of Letters, Kobe Shoin Women's University

Abstract

一般的なカリキュラムにおいて、英語を含む語学教育は「読む」「書く」「話す」「聞く」の４つの技能の内の一つ、ないしは二つの技能に注視する傾向がある。しかし本来の言語教育において、この４つの技能は包括的な英語力を高めるために同時に教えられるべきである。この論文は世界の文化の学びを通して４つの英語能力を同時に高めるプロジェクトを基本とした教育を紹介する。このカリキュラムは２つの柱から成り立っており、１つ目はインプットとディスカッションに焦点を当てたものであり、２つ目は生徒自身による調査、ポスター作成、そしてプレゼンテーションから構成されている。この教育法はすでに日本の高等教育機関において実施されており、その成果は実証されている。学生はこのカリキュラムを通して英語を話すことに自信をつけるだけではなく、語彙を的確に理解し得ることで英語学習に対するモチベーションを高めてゆく。

Most curriculums divide English language teaching into separate courses each one focusing on one or two of the language skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. This unnatural separation of language skills can often impede the recycling of vocabulary and grammar necessary for students to learn a language comprehensively. This paper will present a course designed to integrate the four skills through a project-based course focusing on cultures around the world. The course was divided into two sections, the first section focusing on input and discussion activities. The second part of the course focused on independent research, the creation of a poster, and a poster presentation. The course was taught to a group of Japanese Senior High School students. Through this course it was discovered that with repetition of activities students not only gained confidence speaking English,

but were also able to learn vocabulary deeply through recycling of words in listening, reading, writing and speaking activities. In addition, this course made extensive use of digital technology to increase motivation and build schema.

Introduction

Most curriculums and teaching programs separate English classes into reading, writing, speaking and listening classes. Although it might make curriculums more manageable, language cannot be divided neatly into different skills. There are very few cases of someone learning to speak a language without hearing the language or to write a language without reading the language, unless there are special physical challenges. This unnatural separation of the skills can prevent authentic communication between learners, which can be achieved in an integrated-skill approach (Brown, 2000). Integrating all four skills is not only an efficient use of class time, but also each of the skills can reinforce each other through common vocabulary and language patterns.

In order to integrate all the language skills into a course, various styles of teaching have been proposed; project-based learning, problem-based learning, task-based learning and content based learning are some of the most popular. In this case project based learning was chosen as a way to integrate the four skills whilst also allowing culture to be introduced into the classroom in a natural way. This paper will explain what is meant by project-based learning, then outline how a short project-based course taught to a group of high school students integrated four skills of reading, writing speaking and listening, as well as presentation.

Literature Review

The learning of English is a complex process, it is iterative involving a great deal of repetition and practice to acquire the language. Iftikhar and Aslam (2017) describe this process as creating a tapestry. When all the strands of learning a language fit together well it creates a beautiful master piece, but when they are misaligned it may not appear fluent and the knowledge might be short lasting (p.46). In order to create a balance of language skills, integration may be the best method of teaching. Integrating not only skills but also language and culture can have a mutually beneficial effect. The ultimate aim of integrated language learning is for authentic communication according to Brown (2000). This type of learning incorporates content and language. Jing (2006) stated that integration of four skills can develop communicative competence through students not only gaining knowledge of the language, but also through learning how to use the language appropriately in communication. In addition, when students are collaborating they are by necessity producing and comprehending language orally, aurally or through written text. As Chen (cited in Bastias et al, 2007) states, all the skills of a language are

interdependent and integrated, thus teachers should take this into account in any class. Additionally, teaching students to improve their skill in one area can often enhance performance in other language skills (Oxford, 1996). This is obvious in the case of writing classes, which frequently incorporate a number of reading passages to act as models for the students' writing, but it is also common for students to acquire speaking skills through extensive listening and reading. Nation (1997) stated that extensive reading improved not only reading skills, but also writing skills. Productive skills can also serve to solidify students' knowledge gained through language input. By summarizing what you have read and explaining to another student the understanding will be far deeper. In a similar way, by presenting to others what you have researched requires a clearer understanding of the material than just writing a report.

Iftikhar and Aslam (2017) state that activities integrating two or more language skills also enhance collaborating and socializing. This is probably due to the fact that integrated learning usually involves a variety of pair work and group work activities. Activities involving collaboration make it easier for students to comprehend as they assist each other, both learning and teaching. This results in a better level of competency than by only interacting with a teacher (Motteram, 2013). Although there have been some doubts as to the grammatical accuracy of receiving input from non-native English speaking class members rather than the teacher, Pica and Doughty (1985) found that in group work between non-native English speakers there was an increase in the amount of negotiation, leading to greater grammatical understanding. Although they caution that authentic input is also necessary. It was also found that the increase in communicative opportunities offered to students through group work was very effective at improving the development of second language fluency.

Within a project-based course a combination of task-based learning and content-based learning can be incorporated. Nunan (1991) describes task-based learning as "the tasks, which require comprehending, producing, manipulating or interacting in the target language".

Content Based Learning

Content based learning is another way in which language skills can be integrated in the classroom. According to Brown (2000) content-based learning refers to the concurrent study of language and subject matter, with the language and vocabulary presentation directed by the content. The language becomes a way to achieve the goals of understanding and interpreting the content. Some of the benefits of content-based learning are the increased intrinsic motivation of students achieved by studying something, which interests them, and is hopefully relevant to their lives (Snow 1998). Brown (2007) states that it is impossible to separate language from culture without losing the significance of one or the other. There have been various definitions of culture, but overall everyone agrees that culture (however it is defined) needs to be incorporated in language teaching. Seelye stated that; "learning a language in isolation of its cultural roots prevents one from becoming socialized into its contextual use." (1997, p.10). When teaching a language outside the native country of that language it can be very

difficult to incorporate culture in the language classroom. Aykut (2008) introduces three models of content-based instruction; theme-based, adjunct and sheltered. Theme based is when the course is based on one central theme, this has the advantage in language teaching of providing plenty of opportunities to recycle language, leading to a deeper understanding and hopefully long-term memory. Adjunct content based language learning is when non-native speaking students take a regular university class, which may be beyond their current language level. The adjunct class can take place before or after the class previewing vocabulary or explaining difficult ideas or concepts. Finally, the sheltered model teaches the content subject, but using slightly easier English specially tailored for language learners. The theme-based model was adopted in this study. Content-Theme Based Instruction effectively increases learners' English language proficiency by enabling them to participate in complex academic and social situations (Yugandhar, 2016), although Crandall (1992) states that the topic for theme based classes must be interesting to students and allow for a wide variety of language skills to be practiced. In order to raise interest and build schema, videos and other multimedia technology are extremely effective.

Project-Based Learning

In this style of learning the teacher assigns a project or variety of projects for students to complete over an extended period, this involves a series of tasks with a clear output. This can be done individually or in groups. Through the completion of the project various skills will be practiced and learned. Project-based learning in English language teaching should incorporate the following aspects.

1. Long term group orientated production of publishable/ concrete output.
2. Students may use their native language during collaboration, so English needs to be built into the project though one or more of the following;
    i. Research in English required
    ii. Translation required
    iii. Interaction with native speakers

3. Students should not be able to Google answers.
4. Each student should have a responsibility within the group.
5. Various goals and deadlines should be set along a time continuum.
6. Students should take responsibility, but have opportunities for support and help from teachers.
7. Students are required to use a variety of skills.

(Blumenfeld, et al., 1991)

Incorporating Technology

As previously mentioned by Aykut (2008), incorporating technology in the content based classroom

greatly enhances motivation and schema building. In addition, in this course digital technology was used to aid learner autonomy and teamwork. Woodbridge (2004) defined technology integration as teachers using digital technology to enhance the learning experience. Aykut (2008) cites three ways in which technology might enhance learning; teaching materials, authentic materials and reference materials. These can be of benefit to learners and teachers. In this course, the teacher accessed extensive use of online video and written material, but in addition students accessed images to use on their poster project as well as reference materials. The use of technology was not inhibited by the fact that there were no computers for students to use. On the contrary, students were very familiar with their own smartphones and were very comfortable using them. Although the use of computers and software is a skill students need to learn, in this case the simple research necessary for this project could be accomplished effectively without access to a computer laboratory.

Context

This course was taught to seventeen high school students over a seven-week course. The aim of the course was to incorporate four skills plus presentation, whilst encouraging students to work independently of the teacher. This was achieved through pair work, group work and individual work. Various aspects of student centered learning and active learning were also incorporated. As much as possible the students were encouraged to engage in critical thinking through discussion and writing. In addition, students were encouraged to engage in their own online research. The class did not take place in a computer classroom, but in order to engage in online research students were permitted to use their mobile phones. Any images which the students wanted to print were sent to the teacher's computer. The teacher had access to a computer and large screen to display online images and videos.

The Project

The students were required to work in a group to produce a poster about a country for a poster presentation in the final lesson. The students needed to incorporate images and writing on the poster. In this way students were required to engage in group work and discussion when creating the poster. Through research, poster preparation and presentation, students engaged in reading, writing, speaking, listening and presentation.

This fit with project based learning as it was over a number of weeks, the product was concrete in the form of a poster, students were required to use English for research and when writing for the poster, each student had a responsibility for one part of the poster, there were continuous goals, students had to take responsibility for producing the poster, and a variety of skills were necessary, including reading, writing, discussion and presentation.

Course Design

The course started with four units on themes from various different countries around the world. The first theme was food, the second theme was festivals, the third theme was houses and the last theme was free time. Each theme incorporated reading, listening, speaking and writing. Authentic listening was incorporated through YouTube videos, graded reading was provided in the form of articles written by the teacher. Each activity incorporated writing and speaking using information gap, pair work and group work activities.

The final three weeks of the course involved preparation for the poster presentation. This involved research in books and online, writing summaries of information to be presented and presentation practice. In the final lesson students were divided into two groups. Half the students presented in the first half of the lesson while the other students circulated listening to the presentation, asking questions and filling in work sheets. The students then switched at the half lesson point and the other half of the class presented their posters.

Skill integration

Listening

There are two important aspects of listening that were introduced in this class; listening holistically to understand the main idea and listening for details. Each unit started with a short video introducing the topic with holistic questions to check for general understanding of the video topic. This served as schema building as well as listening practice. The videos were generally found on YouTube, but some were on other websites. After reading and speaking activities the students then listened again to an audio recording. This time they listened for specific details to answer questions. The listening videos were generally under three minutes to maintain student attention.

Reading and Speaking

The second stage of each lesson was reading. This was carried out through an information gap activity. Students were put into groups of four. Each student in the group had a different passage to read and then had to fill in part of a chart based on their reading passage (see appendix 1 for an example of the chart). In order to complete the rest of the chart students needed to speak to the other members of the group. Students were given scaffolding questions to help them ask their other group members. This activity needed to be carefully monitored as students were tempted to just copy from their partner's paper rather than ask and answer questions in English.

Writing

Students were divided into groups to produce a poster about one country. Each student needed to

research and summarize information about the food, festivals, free time activities and houses in each country. The writing activity focused on paraphrasing and summarizing rather than freewriting, although some students chose to write some of their opinions and observations.

Presentation

Students were shown a video from National Geographic's 'Destination: Japan' (National Geographic, n.d.). This video contained information on the country, sightseeing places, free time activities and festivals. Students completed a cloze activity. After watching students were given a worksheet to write the script for their own presentation. As theirs would be a poster presentation they would use that for visual support. Students were warned to not just read from the poster.

The students were encouraged to divide the presentation equally between the members of the group. These posters were graded by the teacher based on;

1. Written English
2. Visual appeal of the poster
3. Spoken English
4. Presentation body language

Topics

Food

This unit incorporated an initial video showing breakfast around the world. Students watched whilst noting the breakfasts in different countries on a table. The object of this activity was to raise awareness to the vast variety of food that people eat around the world, leading to a discussion of their own breakfast, what constitutes a healthy breakfast and how food might be connected to climate and geography. The third section of the unit was focused on reading. Each student was given one of eight different a reading passages about food in a country. Students were encouraged to read these passages silently and fill in a chart summarizing the main ingredients used in that country and a few of the most famous dishes. In larger classes, or with weaker students, two students could work together on the same passage, in this case having students work alone ensured that all students worked equally. After all students had finished they were told to stand up and mingle to try to fill in the information about all the other countries without reading the other passages. To do this they needed to ask their class mates about the different reading passage. Scaffolding questions were given for the weaker students e.g.

"Which country did you read about?"

"What are the main ingredients in the food of this country?"

"What are some famous dishes from this country?"

Festivals

In this unit students started by reading about one of four festivals around the world. The students filled

in a chart on where the festival takes place, when the festival takes place, if there is any special food eaten and what the meaning of the festival is (See appendix A). Then students asked other members of their group to fill in the rest of the chart. The students then watched a short YouTube video about a festival and answered questions related to the video. Finally, students interviewed a partner about their favorite Japanese festival and filled in a worksheet.

Houses

This unit started by watching four short YouTube videos about famous building around the world. Students filled in a worksheet about the buildings. The students then each read about one of four different famous palaces around the world. They had to find information about where the building is, who lives there, and one special or interesting feature. The students again filled in a chart about their reading then asked other students about the other buildings to fill in the rest of the chart. The advantage of repeating a similar activity is that as students become more used to the activity they also become more confident completing the activity. The second time of introducing the information gap students were much quicker to start work and by the third time students were noticeably comfortable with the information gap activity.

Free time

The final topic was free time around the world. This topic incorporated sports and other activities that are enjoyed in various countries. In this unit students started by watching a video about Bollywood in India. They were then asked to answer questions asked on the video. This type of visual input was very stimulating for the students, which led into a group discussion of the differences between American Hollywood movies and Indian Bollywood movies and which they preferred. In general students can find it difficult to discuss a topic with no knowledge, but as the students had been introduced to vocabulary and ideas through the video it was easier. It also helped having a comparison activity rather than a purely open discussion. This activity integrated listening with speaking and critical thinking. The second part of the lesson students were again given information gap activity about sports around the world, this included basketball in the united states, Taekwondo in Korea and Sumo in Japan. The students were asked to summarize the ideas in a chart and then ask other students to fill in the missing parts on the chart. In this final information gap activities students were noticed to speak more English, having gained confidence that they could complete the activity without using Japanese.

Poster Presentation

The final section of this course was for students to prepare a poster and present it about a country of their choice. The aim was to integrate research, writing and presentation skills. An added advantage of assigning poster presentation is that students who are not good at English sometimes excel at the visual aspects of making a poster. Students worked in pairs. Each pair was asked to choose a country, which

they would like to research.

Poster Requirements

    1. Posters must include five sections;

        a. Facts about the country such as capital city and official languages

        b. Food eaten and produced in the country

        c. Traditional festivals in the country

        d. Famous houses and traditional architecture in the country

        e. Typical free time activities in the country

    2. Posters must include a balance of written and visual information

    3. Posters must be in English

    4. Posters must be made jointly and collaboratively

Research

The teacher prepared some materials, such as books or basic information for each country to help students to start, but students then needed to research on their own. As the class was not conducted in a computer laboratory the students needed to use their own devices for research. All of the students had brought smart phones and used these for research. The students were allowed to research in English or Japanese as there are advantages and disadvantages with both, which were explained to the students. If they research in English they acquire skim and scan reading skills through reading quickly to see if the article is suitable and through searching for specific information. The disadvantage is that is can be very difficult to assess what are reliable sources. The students were provided with some recommended websites and the teacher monitored the research carefully. The advantage of researching in Japanese is that it is easier to find appropriate websites and much quicker to search for the information. Students also acquire skills of translating into English. The disadvantage is that students have limited English practice. Most students used a mixture of researching in English and Japanese. Pictures and other visuals from the internet were sent to the teacher, who printed them out.

Poster making

The teacher provided large paper to make the posters, a variety of colored paper for decoration, marker pens, colored pencils, glue and scissors. Although students were not necessarily speaking English during the poster making period it was a very enjoyable time for students and added to their overall enjoyment of the project. An added benefit was that as students were also writing summaries about the countries the teacher had time to go to each student and check their English. Students also used the time to research and ask the teacher for help in researching.

Presentation Practice

In order to help students with confident presentations various presentation skills were taught. These included body language, intonation and loudness of voice and eye contact. Students were divided into pairs and practiced reading the notes for their presentation using gestures. The students were also given activities, in which they had to read sentences to their partner on the opposite side of the room. This activity necessitated students speaking loudly and clearly. Although students were allowed to use notes during the presentation this practice allowed them to memorize many of the sentences.

Conclusion

Through this course students were given the opportunity to learn speaking, listening, reading, writing and presentation skills in an integrated and natural way. Many of the vocabulary items and activities could be recycled through the four skills, building students' confidence. Additionally, the repetition allowed students to learn new vocabulary more thoroughly than by a single input. "We need to see learning any particular word as being a cumulative process where knowledge is built up over a series of varied meetings with the word." (Nation, 2005, p. 48). Nation states that to learn vocabulary students must encounter it in a variety of ways, in this case students listened, read, spoke and wrote about the topics. It is recommended that all classes should be approached with an aim to integrate a variety of skills in a natural way. Even in a typical academic writing class, students benefit from reading and listening about the topic before attempting to write.

As an added benefit the students were very motivated by this topic and focused on the content rather than the language. At the end of the course one of the students posted a picture of her poster on social media stating "I just learned about Italy, it was so much fun, I want to do it again."

References

Aykut, A. (2008). Implementing a Holistic Teaching in Modern ELT Classes: Using Technology and Integrating Four Skills. *International Journal of Human Sciences, 5*(1), 1-21.

Bastías, M. E. (2011). Integration of the four skills of the English language and its influence on the performance of second grade high school students. *Universidad del Bío-Bío. Red de Bibliotecas - Chile*.

Blumenfeld, P. C., Soloway, E., Marx, R. W., Krajcik, J. S., Guzdi, M., & Palincsar, A. (1991). Motivating Project-Based Learning: Sustaining the Doing, Supporting the Learning. *Journal Educational Psychologist, 26*(3), 369-398.

Brown, H. (2000). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (2nd Edition ed.). Longman.

Crandall, J. A. (1992). Content-centered instruction in the United States. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 13*, 111-126.

Ellis, R. (2000, July 1). Task-based research and language pedagogy. *Language Teaching Research, 4*(3), 193 - 220.

Harmer, J. (2001). *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (3rd ed. ed.). Essex, UK: Pearson Education.

Hinkel, E. (. (2010). Integrating the Four Skills: Current and Historical Perspectives. In *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Linguistics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. Retrieved October 5, 2017, from http://www.oxford handbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195384

Iftikhar, S., & Aslam, A. (2017). Integration of Four Language Skills in English Class at Matriculation Level. *SCIMASS (Scientific Journal of Management and Social Sciences), 1*(1), 45-53.

Jing, W. (2006, December). Integrating Skills for Teaching EFL — Activity Design for the Communicative Classroom. *Sino-US English Teaching, 3*(12). Retrieved from http://www.linguist.org.cn/doc/su200612/su20061201.pdf.

Larsson, J. (2001). *Problem-Based Learning: A possible approach to language education?* Retrieved October 31, 2017, from Polonia Institute: https://www.nada.kth.se/~jla/docs/PBL.pdf

Motteram, G. (2013). *Innovations in learning technologies for English language teaching.* London, UK: British Council.

Nation, P. (1997). The Language Learning Benefits of Extensive Reading. *The Language Teacher, 21*(5), 13-16.

Nation, P. (2005, September). Teaching Vocabulary. *The Asian EFL Journal, 7*(3), 47-54.

National Geographic. (n.d.). *National Geographic Destination Japan.* Retrieved November 26, 2017, from https://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/destinations/japan-dest

Nunan, D. (1991). *Language Teaching Methodology.* New York: Prentice Hall.

Oxford, R. (1996). *Language learning strategies around the world. Cross-cultural perspectives.* Manoa: University of Hawaii Press.

Pica, T., & Doughty, C. (1985). The Role of Group Work in Classroom Second Language Acquisition. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 7*(2), 233-248. doi:10.1017/S0272263100005398

Snow, M. (1998). Trends and Issues in Content-Based instruction. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 18*, 243-267.

Woodbridge, J. (2004). Technology Integration as a Transforming Teaching Strategy. *NECC Research Paper Series.* Retrieved from http://www.iste.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Research/

Yugandhar, K. (2016, August). Content-Theme-Based Instruction to Increase the Quality of EFL Class. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL), 4*(8), 86-90.

Appendix A

Festivals Around the World

Read your article and fill in the chart.

> # Mardi Gras
> The carnival in Rio do Janeiro in Brazil is one of the biggest festivals in the world. It's always in February or March. Mardi Gras actually means 'Fat Tuesday' in English and is a time to eat and celebrate the day before lent - the period leading up to the Christian celebration of Easter. During the festival, there is a parade with music and dancing. Most people wear colourful costumes and they stay out dancing all night.

Walk around the class asking other students.

Festival	Where does the festival take place?	When does the festival take place?	What do people do in the festival?
Mardi Gras Carnival			
Diwali			
Hanukkah			
Eid			