Business Education Influenced by English-as-a-Second Language Approaches

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Abstract

This report reviews viewpoints and experiences of the author relating to teaching business subjects to international students with English as their Second Language (ESL). Management consulting approaches to high performance organizational change is also drawn upon to enhance classroom learning. Classroom observation is made of other teachers teaching ESL, to note and discuss similarities and differences in methods, content, and pedagogy as well as implications for teaching practice.

Introduction

Language provides a means for communication to share knowledge and culture, to express ourselves, work together, overcome conflicts and disputes, generate wealth in the economy, interact with others, and belong to a larger community (Brown, 2001) (Felder/Brent, 2005) (University of Manitoba, 2007a/b).

There follows a personal viewpoint of approach indicators to teaching business subjects in English and terminology to students as if it was a different language (including international students), with supported reasoning. Following that is a section addressing teaching implications through activities, classroom management, and roles of participants (Brown, 2001) (Felder/Brent, 2005) (University of Manitoba, 2007a/b).

Approach Indicator 1: We learn a second language (L2) in the same way we learned our first language (L1) in dealing with new (business) terminology.

The author **disagrees** with this indicator for the following reasons:

- Most people learn their first language as a small child in a family unit, with unique surroundings, and set of unstructured and structured activities to stimulate subconscious links between thoughts and the external real-world;

- The cognitive principle of automaticity requires additional specific focus upon pedagogical approaches for adults and second language-teaching, with childlike automatic efficient links without over analysis (Brown, 2001)(Felder/Brent, 2005);

- Practical experience learning a second version of a computer language or software application, is more of a 'it's the same as for everything, but ten things are done differently..' compared with the approach to learning the first language or application, which is more comprehensive and time-consuming in nature; and

- The affective principle of language ego for second languages, which suggest a sense of fragility, defensiveness, and raising of inhibitions which are not present for first languages (Brown, 2001) (Goleman, 1998).

Approach Indicator 2: A communicative class should pay equal attention to developing fluency and accuracy.

The author **agrees** with this indicator for the following reasons:

- In data transmission terms such as a television signal, there is a requirement for speed of transmission so that a full picture appears versus a quarter screen only, but also that the correct colors are represented rather than a full screen of red dots only (representing a totally inaccurate weather map, for example)- thus both are required for a timely, but understandable communication;

- The cognitive principle of meaningful learning leans towards longer-term retention that rote-learning of grammar alone (Brown, 2001);

- The affective principle of self-confidence in completion of tasks is achieved through exercises of both fluency and accuracy (Brown, 2001); and

- The linguistic principle of communicative competence focuses upon usage and fluency rather than just accuracy, to enable real world application in external contexts (Brown, 2001).

Approach Indicator 3: The ultimate goal of any method should be to wean the learner from the instructor or the need from instruction. That is, to facilitate an independent learner.

The author **agrees** with this indicator for the following reasons:

- The cognitive principle of intrinsic motivation that learning behavior links to needs, wants, or desires including long term success using a second language (Brown, 2001);

- The affective principle of language ego of the second language requires support so that it can be strong without requirement for support from teachers or the first language (Brown, 2001);

- The affective principle of risk-taking to allow the strength to overcome future second language challenges (Brown, 2001)(Goleman, 1998); and

- The linguistic principle of communicative competence focuses upon usage and fluency rather than just accuracy, to enable real world application in external contexts (Brown, 2001).

The above three approach indicators have teaching implications, which are detailed in the tables. Table 1 looks at different approaches, and procedures spanning resources, materials and outcomes. Table 2 looks at design issues of the course, syllabus, activities, and related different roles of learners and teachers.

Table 1- Teaching Implications of Viewpoints to Approach & Procedure- Business Subjects (Brown, 2001) (Felder/Brent, 2005) (Goleman, 1998)

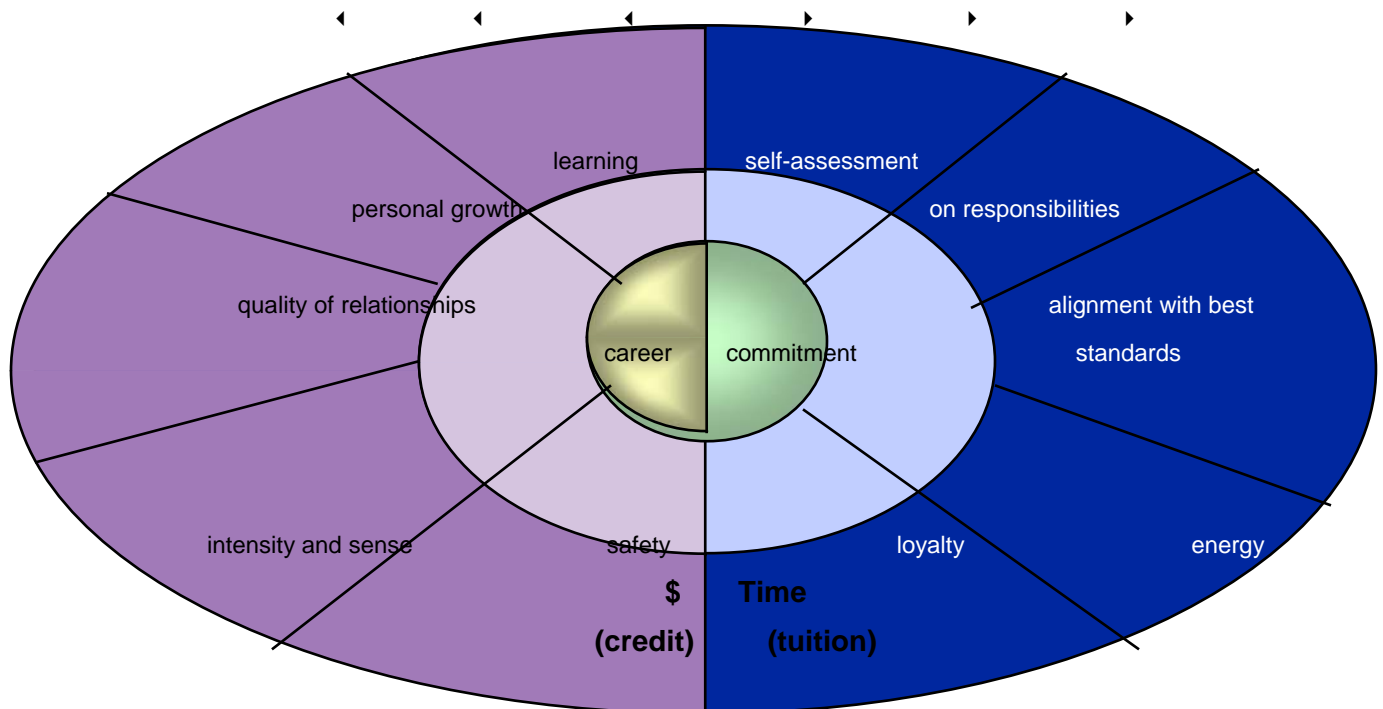|	**New Terminology**	**Fluency and Accuracy**	**Facilitate Independent Learner**
Approach	The Natural Approach - language is about meaning through unconscious acquisition as well as learning. Use of real-world exercises.	Community Language Learning - language extends beyond a person to embrace community, culture, and society. Collaborative learning through innovative and traditional activities.	Community Language Learning (as before). Also Communicative Language Teaching- Language to express meaning for interaction and communication. Use of task-based materials and learner roles of negotiation, and interaction.
Procedure Resources & Materials	Realia including magazines, and manufactured products rather than texts.	Experiential team challenges such as building paper towers, bridges, and scavenger hunts. Materials developed in response to needs. Supplemented by community external resources.	As before. Also key parts of textbook. Also role-play of tradeshows, overseas assignments, negotiation, and job interviews. Task-based materials.
Observed Results	Meets course objectives.	Meets course objectives.	Meets course objectives.
Design Course & Viewpoint Objectives	To develop and apply fundamentals for communication in business English through specific vocabulary and methods applying business content. Linguistic and subject content based upon current business news.	To develop a broader understanding of cultural and business context, and embrace collaborative methods for the use of English in business settings. The same- also as gathered by students. Also business text and case studies.	To develop and apply a greater independence in the use of English in real-world situations, learn business content, and enable continual improvement. The same as all. Use of business computer software for analysis calculations.
Syllabus			

Table 2-Teaching Implications of Viewpoints to Design, Activities & Roles-Business Courses (Brown, 2001) (Felder/Brent, 2005) (Goleman, 1998)

	New Terminology	**Fluency and Accuracy**	**Facilitate Independent Learner**
Images Representing Learning Viewpoints			

Design (ctd)

Activities	Includes a variety of activities, customized to student needs, including but not limited to: lectures, calculations, group work, brainstorms, questions and answer, information sharing, free conversation and discussion, summary translation presentations, case studies, role-play, trade-shows, computers labs, audiovisual, presentations, reports, quizzes, experiential challenges, visits, visitors, and exams. Classes involve action learning.
Learner roles	Learning tasks span: business vocabulary, concepts, methods, and application to real-world businesses. There are many routes of learning that lead to overall goal and required standard- the students strongly influence business content and application emphasis (including company names) based upon their experiences and ambitions, and actively change group members regularly through choice. There is a balance of individual and group learning to avoid over-reliance on a group in the future. Roles vary within the classroom learning community, including immersion in meaningful deadline-driven business activities, negotiation of activities, group interaction, and taking responsibility to contribute content and concepts.
Teacher/ Instructor roles	Ultimately students must meet a standard equivalent to good management consultant, analysts, or business entrepreneurs. Teacher uses broad experience in business, consulting, teaching, and research in eight countries to supplement text and audiovisual materials, and create variety of real-world activities. There is much facilitation of the business communication process, including responding to day-to-day changes in student needs. There is a strong mentoring/coaching/ counseling role ensuring a lively but safe emotional classroom setting. Occasional changes to emotions and risk (10% of time) allow a stretch of capability in future stressful work situations.

Aside: Using Management Consulting Methods to Inspire Business Students

   Teaching student about business, including those with English as an additional language, often is enhanced in the author's view from some senior business experience to supplement the academic theory.

Figure 1- Ensuring an Emotional Learning Exchange and Learner-Centeredness

Figure 1

learning   self-assessment

personal growth   on responsibilities

quality of relationships   alignment with best standards

career   commitment

intensity and sense   safety   loyalty   energy

$ (credit)   Time (tuition)

   This model as shown in Figure 1 is based upon an approach used by the author at the Fluor Corporation, as a senior management consultant during 1999. Essentiality the 'old paradigm' is where the employer offers money in exchange for work time, with nothing beyond that expected (similar to student paying for academic credits and class-time). As you move away from the centre, more exciting and motivating exchanges take place between the employer (or educator), and the worker (or learner). Using just a learner checklist, one can discover the purpose such as growth or empowerment, content needs, method appropriateness to learner style, and evaluation suitabilities. The learner is at the core, and their autonomy to change their personal journey of learning, including credentialism, immigration and mobility of employment, contribution to society, and so on, is respected.

Benchmarking Approach to Three TESL Educators

   The TESL Live videotape (University of Saskatchewan, 1998) was reviewed, and content, methods, sequencing, and activities of three TESL Educators were compared

with the author, together with commentary on the level of agreement with approach indicators of the author (Brown, 2001).

Approach Indicator 1: We learn a second language in the same way we learned our first language.

It appears that the all three teachers **disagree** with this indicator for the following reasons:

- Restructures whole class into groups on a more frequent basis (almost all activities) to mimic the dynamics of small family units, where L1 learning took place, suggesting a different approach;

- The affective principle of language -cultural connection was recognized through activities in 'group work and report back' relating to who fixes household problems in Canada; and

- Use of realia such as plungers, electrical outlets, overhead projectors, and Draino in the 'warm-up motivator'.

Approach Indicator 2: A communicative class should pay equal attention to developing fluency and accuracy.

It appears that two out of three teachers **agree** with this indicator for the following reasons:

- Multiple activities such as the 'warm-up motivator', 'group review', 'charades', 'pair work' and 'concentric circles' balanced both fluency and accuracy, demonstrated automaticity, the affective principle of self-confidence, and the linguistic principles of interlanguage and communicative competence;

- Appropriate room-setup as a U-shape supporting small group activities, and direct student contact; and

- Encouraged a noisy participative classroom (no hands-up required for 'warm-up motivator', and most exercises), and used expressive body language including 'ringing a bell' to signal for class quiet and attention.

Approach Indicator 3: The ultimate goal of any method should be to wean the learner from the instructor or the need from instruction. That is, to facilitate an independent language learner.

It appears that two out of three teachers **agree** with this indicator for the following reasons:

- All students participated with activities gears towards strengthening of language ego, self-confidence, and risk-taking, all supported by encouragement and feedback and strategic investment; and

- Whole real-world theme was resolving many household problems, with all the interactions entailed- it seems just from the video that students could deal with these household issues readily and with confidence.

Figure 2- Example Images from In-Class International Student Trade-Shows Indicating Real-World Problem Solving Results

Personal Concluding Comments

This report has taken a perhaps slightly different approach from many others, in that it looks at ESL from the teaching of business content and methods perspective rather than the language alone. The author has extensive experience in this setting with perhaps 400 MBA students to date (with another 2000 L1 English students in business and engineering subjects). It seems upon reflection, by diligent effort, responsiveness to student needs, and even some good fortune (including management consulting approaches), the author has adopted a number of established TESL approaches and activities to ensure successful student outcomes.

Acknowledgements

About the Author

David T. Wright has more than nineteen years award-winning engineering (i.e. space, aerospace, motorsports, defense, oil/gas, and mining), consulting, teaching and research success. Qualifications include: BEng, MBA, PhD, CEng MIET, MCMI, FRSA, SMIIE, and SMIEEE.

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