

# At the Intersection of Language and Content

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Riding a bicycle in Shanghai is an education. Weaving among cyclists, fruit vendors and pedestrians, I am learning the nuances of turn taking, overtaking, and advantage taking. Intersections provide the most interesting challenges. Often, as I ride up to a crossroads, vehicles pour into my path from two opposite streets; however, after momentary and subtle negotiations, flow resumes and I find myself on the other side of the intersection, continuing my ride homeward. In the same way, when language teaching intersects with content learning, it can feel difficult to navigate or it can appear as if the two processes are moving in opposite directions. In diverse and integrated classrooms of the 21st century, teachers need tools for supporting all students' learning. Through collaboration and reflective practice, English language teachers can understand linguistic traffic patterns and work with colleagues to help students thrive within integrated learning environments.

## CHANGING CONTEXTS, CHANGING INSTRUCTION

In classrooms around the world today, students are learning *through* English, that is, students are learning English as a new language while learning other subjects in English. Although the integration of language and content is not necessarily a new development in the field of English language teaching, what is striking is the extent and diversity of programs that have developed within the past 10 years (Freeman, 2005; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Examining common questions and challenges reveals useful lessons and practical insights from teachers in the field.

In both English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, curriculum reform and demographic trends are introducing English language learners (ELLs) into classes where nonlanguage subject matter is taught through the medium of English. Educational policy in many

English-speaking countries has shifted “from assimilation to multiculturalism to mainstreaming” (Davison, 2001, p. 30). In countries where English is not a native language, teaching subject matter through English is a chance to develop content knowledge and English fluency at the same time. In many cases, teachers of English and other subjects are being asked to teach classes that may be new or unfamiliar and for which they may not have experience or training.

The chapters in *Integrating Language and Content* describe how the definition of *English language classroom* is changing and illustrate how students are acquiring English in a variety of different classrooms around the world. Contributors from North America describe how integrating language and content serves emerging bilingual students who need to learn grade-level academic material or valuable job skills, but cannot wait 5 or more years to develop the requisite English skills (Cummins, 1981a; W. P. Thomas & Collier, 2002).

In the larger global context, contributors to this volume share how young learners in Italy, the Netherlands, and Yemen are acquiring English as an additional language through the study of religion or science. The teacher authors who are university instructors in Turkey, Taiwan, and Russia describe students’ opportunities to learn English for specific purposes—along with advertising, fashion design, or philosophy—in newly integrated classrooms. Instructors in both the United States and South Africa reflect on curricula that empower adult learners by integrating essential English skills with health literacy, conflict resolution, and social justice. These integrated English language teaching environments present rich opportunities to reconsider the role of language and the role of language teachers within larger professional contexts.

## DEFINING TERMS

A primary challenge in discussing the integration of language and content is one of definition. Within this volume, as in the larger field of English language teaching, educators use a variety of terms to describe similar practices. In each chapter, the authors have defined program types with respect to the local context. Terminology is not standardized, even within a single national context, but three foundational terms are used to describe the wide variety of curriculum designs and instructional approaches used to integrate language and content.

*Content-based instruction (CBI)*. Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (1989) define content-based instruction generally as “the integration of particular content with language teaching aims” and more specifically as “the concurrent teaching of academic subject matter with language teaching aims” (p. 2). The term *CBI* is used more frequently in North America and includes many different models and program types such as English for specific purposes and English for academic purposes (EAP). One challenge inherent in this label is that it implies primacy of teaching language rather than content.

*Language as a medium of learning.* As a way to synthesize the dual perspectives of language and content learning, Mohan (1986) proposes viewing English as neither a means nor an end but as a medium of learning:

Since it takes a considerable amount of time to learn a second language for academic purposes, to learn to use it adequately as a medium of learning content and culture means that ESL students must learn language and subject matter *at the same time*. (Mohan, 2001, p. 107)

Viewing a language as a medium of learning helps to illustrate the interdependent and cyclical nature of English skills and subject matter knowledge.

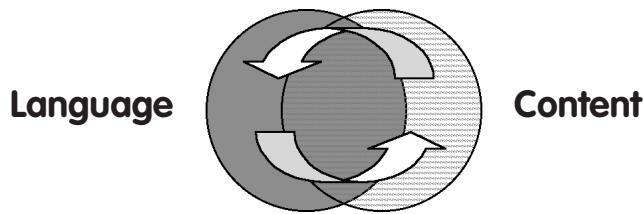
*Content and language integrated learning (CLIL).* This is an umbrella term most commonly used in Europe. In most cases, it refers to students learning in a new language, one that is not spoken in the home or community. Marsh (2002) defines CLIL as “any dual-focused educational context in which an additional language, thus not usually the first language of the learners involved, is used as a medium in the teaching and learning of non-language content” (p. 15). The CLIL classroom creates a meaningful context for authentic academic communication. The dimensions of CLIL have been outlined as the four Cs (Coyle, 2002):

- *curriculum*: content or subject demands
- *communication*: language as a medium for both learning and communicating
- *cognition*: developing thinking and learning skills
- *culture*: defining pluricultural opportunities

Marsh, Cenoz, and Hornberger (2007) further explain that, in CLIL,

learning outcomes tend to focus on achieving higher levels of awareness and skill in using language in real-life situations, alongside the learning of subject matter. This approach can be viewed as being neither language learning, nor subject learning, but rather an amalgam of both. (p. 233)

CBI, language as a medium of learning, and CLIL are different ways of describing the relationship between language and content, as illustrated in Figure 1. The top arrow represents content as a vehicle for language learning. An engaging theme or relevant academic subject area can provide a meaningful context in which students can master language objectives. In this case, content serves the language. The bottom arrow, on the other hand, represents how language can be adjusted or scaffolded to help students attain content objectives. In this case, language serves the content. Although depicted separately, the two arrows in Figure 1 represent interdependent processes that occur to a greater or lesser degree in all classrooms. All students can benefit from these processes. As Mohan, Leung, and Davison (2001) observe, “there is more recognition of areas



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*Figure 1. The Cyclical Relationship Between Language and Content*

of common ground: that, differences notwithstanding, both ESL learners and native speakers are learning language for academic purposes, and both groups are using language to learn” (p. 218).

## **RATIONALE FOR LANGUAGE AND CONTENT INTEGRATION**

It is useful to consider established rationales for integration as well as problems inherent in framing a language/content dichotomy. In describing classroom practice, it is beyond the scope of this volume to provide an in-depth review of theoretical or research foundations for the integration of language and content, but several resources are available to readers interested in more extensive discussion of this topic (Brinton et al., 1989; Met, 1999; Mohan, Leung, & Davison, 2001).

Since the 1980s, the integration of English and other subject matter has been a consistent practice in schools. Teachers and researchers have recognized that teaching language and content together is an effective way of developing English language proficiency (Brinton et al., 1989; Genesee, 1994; Grabe & Stoller, 1997). Indeed, there are a number of reasons for using a content-based language curriculum focus on promoting the acquisition of English:

- It builds on the interests and linguistic needs of learners.
- It increases motivation by using content relevant to learners.
- It incorporates the eventual uses that learners will make of the target language.
- It teaches meaningful language embedded within relevant discourse contexts.

Another reason why teachers integrate language and content is to help students achieve academically and participate in a discourse community (Mohan, 2001; Stoller, 2002). From elementary school CLIL classes to university lectures, students can develop valuable thinking skills and build background knowledge in the context of learning English. Content-based language instruction motivates students through the interaction of English with content they need or want to



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learning of content or language; how student progress will be assessed, by whom, and for what purposes. (Met, 1999, p. 21)

Met further contrasts the two ends of the language/content curriculum, as seen in Figure 3.

### **Content-Driven Curricula**

On the content-driven end of the continuum, language acquisition is considered incidental. Language objectives, if they are used at all, are included only to support content learning. M. A. Snow, Met, and Genesee (1989) have defined content-obligatory versus content-compatible language objectives, distinguishing between the language skills or structures necessary to learn specific content (content obligatory) and the language that would naturally accompany a topic (content compatible). When content drives instruction, teachers need to scaffold content instruction in order to make key concepts more accessible for ELLs. One well-known resource for content-driven classes is the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). Short and Echevarria (1999) developed SIOP as a research tool for describing effective practice for teachers of ELLs. By rating teachers using the protocol, Short and Echevarria found that teachers who scored higher on the SIOP scale had a positive effect on students' narrative and expository writing skills.

Of course, in content-driven courses, language is still essential. The cyclical nature of language and content learning means that for content-driven curricula, comprehension of English texts and oral English allows greater access to subject matter. Improved speaking and writing skills allow students to perform better on content assessments. In reading or writing to learn, students use the language to acquire content, and subject area teachers are in a unique position to help them develop language skills in context. Mohan (1986) proposes that "the expert on writing to learn chemistry should be the chemistry teacher" (p. 12).

<b>Content Driven</b>	<b>Language Driven</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Content is taught in the second language (L2).</li><li>• Content learning is priority.</li><li>• Language learning is secondary.</li><li>• Content objectives are determined by course goals or curriculum.</li><li>• Teachers must select language objectives.</li><li>• Students are evaluated on content mastery.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Content is used to learn the L2.</li><li>• Language learning is priority.</li><li>• Content learning is incidental.</li><li>• Language objectives are determined by L2 course goals or curriculum.</li><li>• Students are evaluated on content to be integrated as well as language skills and proficiency.</li></ul>

*Figure 3. Content-Driven Versus Language-Driven Curricula*

Note: Adapted from Met, 1999, p. 7.

Although many content teachers embed literacy skills and use language-across-the-curriculum approaches, collaboration with language specialists can provide additional support in differentiating for a range of English proficiency levels to create opportunities for language development.

### Language-Driven Curricula

For language-driven curricula, on the other hand, “content learning may be considered a gratuitous but welcome by-product, but neither students nor their teachers are held accountable for ensuring that students learn it” (Met, 1999, p. 6). The curriculum may be organized around themes or topics, chosen specifically to maximize language development. For some teachers, an integrated approach means letting go of a grammar-driven syllabus. In a content-based language curriculum, Brinton et al. (1989) propose that English language teachers need to

let the content dictate the selection and sequence of language items to be taught rather than vice-versa . . . [and] view their teaching in a new way, from the perspective of *truly* contextualizing their lessons by using content as a point of departure. (p. 2)

Changes in curriculum and assessment also support the integration of language and content. Recent revisions of English language proficiency standards have been linked to content standards, helping teachers understand and assess the academic English skills that ELLs need in order to learn math, science, social studies, and language arts. English proficiency standards from TESOL (2006) and the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Consortium (2007) are integrated with the content areas and anchored in academic content standards. These standards describe content-based language skills at different English proficiency levels and provide valuable support for teachers in both designing lessons and understanding student progress.

### Integration and Collaboration

Most integrated classrooms fall somewhere along the middle of the language/content continuum. The reality is messy, complicated, and at times contradictory, presenting an exciting but challenging paradigm shift. Teachers are rethinking how they design courses, plan lessons, and assess students. When students have the opportunity to learn both content and language at the same time, disciplinary boundaries overlap. Viewing language teaching as an integrated process rather than a discrete discipline introduces new ways of engaging with colleagues. Collaboration across subject areas not only supports student learning but also facilitates professional growth.

When schools build intentional collaboration among language specialists and content specialists, they foster targeted professional development that is embedded in the daily work of teachers and aligned with existing administrative structures. To integrate language and content, learning communities can use tools such as the Critical Friends Groups protocols to support collaborative inquiry

and embedded professional learning (Dunne, Nave, & Lewis, 2000). As teachers, researchers, and policy makers redefine the role of the language teacher, professional development should reflect these new realities.

In *English Next*, Graddol (2006) observes that integrating language and content alters “the working relationship within schools, and requires a cultural change of a kind which is often difficult to bring about within educational institutions” (p. 86). This challenge presents an opportunity: Greater cooperation within schools can enrich both student and teacher learning by bringing specialists together to share techniques and approaches across disciplines.

## **IN THIS VOLUME**

All of the contributors represented in this volume have encountered situations requiring them to examine the interdependence of language and content learning and consider how their practice has changed in response. They describe the context of their work and explain personal, institutional, and theoretical rationales for implementing an integrated approach. Across continents and classrooms, they share several important observations about dual-focused learning environments:

- Students’ needs should remain at the center of each curriculum.
- Assessment should inform instruction.
- Professional collaboration between disciplines supports student learning and teacher growth.

Although these insights are neither new nor revolutionary, they emerge as consistent themes for classroom practice. The authors’ honest reflections and their students’ experiences help to show how integrating language and content learning can be an effective and meaningful way of engaging with English as a new language.

### **Why Do Teachers Design Courses to Integrate Language and Content?**

Reflecting on the genesis of a particular course, each author in this section shares the rationale for using content to support the acquisition of English and describes the skills and knowledge—beyond language—that helped students in their classes achieve success. The teachers trace their own thought processes and how they communicated their rationale to colleagues, students, and parents. In each case, students’ needs served as a central organizing principle in course design.

In Chapter 2, “Content for Change: Integrating Radical and Socially Relevant Content Into a Business English Curriculum,” Sedia Dennis describes the passionate advocacy that she brings to her experiences working with students in Winterberg, South Africa:

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Students walk into the English language classroom with subject matter. It seems counterproductive to me if we, as their teachers, look past the material they bring—material so relevant to their lives and central to who they are as cultural beings—in search of material that may not be as connected to them or as urgent. (p. 29)

In Chapter 3, “Danger Learning: Experiencing ESL Through Conflict Resolution Techniques,” Christopher Stillwell describes how an intensive ESL course in New York City, was designed to challenge advanced English language learners and provide “techniques useful in the negotiation of meaning in their daily lives to confirm understanding and repair communication breakdowns” (p. 38). Stillwell goes on to state that,

in the use of conflict resolution and mediation techniques as the subject of language study, the ESL seminar focused primarily on practices that would not only provide the most interesting content, but that would also prove transferable to the teaching and learning of language. (p. 32)

In Chapter 4, “A Pound of Prevention: Health Literacy for Beginning-Level Adult English Language Learners,” Susan Dalmas and Judy Trupin outline a new health literacy course designed for adult students in New York. They agree on the following purposes for the curriculum: “to help students acquire the language necessary to navigate the health care system, to provide them with content-specific knowledge about the U.S. health care system, and to teach preventive health knowledge” (p. 45).

In Chapter 5, “Does Content and Language Integrated Learning Work With Young Learners?,” Elena Pratisoli describes an interdisciplinary unit developed at her primary school in Italy. During initial planning meetings with her team, “it became clear . . . that there was a risk of the project expanding too much and losing focus” (p. 59). After choosing specific content for the project, Pratisoli and her team agreed that “the tasks may be cognitively demanding as long as they are concrete; they may be emotionally complex as long as they are experiential” (p. 72).

### How Do Teachers Integrate Language and Content?

The second section of this volume considers some of the specific techniques and materials teachers use to help students navigate the intersection of language and content. Contributors provide examples of how some general terms such as *CLIL*, *sheltered instruction*, and *EAP* are applied to specific contexts. Although every chapter in this volume shares practical examples of how teachers have worked with a particular group of students, this section provides an additional window into teachers’ approaches and their reflections.

In Chapter 6, “Two Birds, One Stone: Using Academic Informant Projects as English for Academic Purposes Content,” Shawna Shapiro outlines a university

course in Seattle, Washington, in the United States, that is built around the exploration of discipline-specific reading and writing:

Whether they are explaining their academic majors, analyzing a document from an organization they have joined, or reflecting on their own writing process, students have an authentic reason to communicate as academic informants. In addition, this sort of work incorporates types of writing that students will likely use in other courses: exposition, analysis/evaluation, response, and reflection. (p. 84)

In Chapter 7, “A Short Course on the Miniskirt: Providing a Language Toolkit for University Instructors in Turkey,” Steve Darn analyzes a CLIL project and explains its dual focus, defining CLIL in the following way:

Content and language are learned simultaneously and in balanced proportions. A CLIL lesson is not a language lesson, nor is it a subject lesson transmitted in a foreign language. The second language is the means by which the content objectives are reached. (p. 93)

In Chapter 8, “Opening the Door: Making Mathematics Accessible to English Language Learners,” Anita Bright describes a variety of strategies she used to teach math to middle school ELLs in Virginia, in the United States, including using students’ home languages. She comments on how her collaboration with the math teacher resulted in growth for students and teachers alike:

[It] take[s] thought, time, and perhaps even courage, but the dividends are well worth the investment because students are provided with multiple avenues to gain access to the curriculum. (p. 115)

In Chapter 9, “Links in a Food Chain: Guiding Inquiry in Science for English Language Learners,” David Crowther, Lori Fulton, Joaquín Vilá, and Eric Hoose describe a unit on the food chain taught to fourth-grade students in Nevada, in the United States. The authors propose that inquiry-based science instruction can support ELLs through

- the use of real materials to build context,
- equality of common experiences among students,
- access to one’s primary language to explore ideas,
- access to peer assistance through cooperative learning,
- comfort that not knowing the answer is accepted,
- the creation of a positive attitude toward learning.

Crowther and colleagues also explore the role that standards can play in shaping assessment and instruction.

In Chapter 10, “Building Bridges Between Language and Content in

Religious Education,” Rosie Tanner and Lorna Dunn describe how they used language and content objectives to guide instruction in a religious education class for adolescents in the Netherlands. The authors observe that “learners used their academic English authentically to refine their understanding of lesson content, interacting in authentic ways to produce a real product . . . and through the various tasks gradually refined their understanding of the topic in a foreign language” (p. 141). They conclude with suggestions for getting started with a CLIL class when students are just beginning to develop English proficiency.

### How Do Teachers Evaluate Language and Content Learning?

This section explores the tensions related to assessment and how teachers can address the critical decision about what will drive instruction. Contributors discuss how objectives and standards can inform teachers’ work and provide useful guidelines for student learning.

In Chapter 11, “Big Ideas in Little Pieces: Science Activities for Multilevel Classes,” Ann Fathman and Patricia Nelson discuss integrating the teaching of English and science to help adolescent English language learners in California, in the United States, think like scientists:

Remembering any specific detail is not as important as for students to grasp the themes and to think back and say, “That was fun. I understand. I really like science.” . . . Through scientific inquiry, students use English in various functions to express themselves while making observations, posing questions, planning investigations, gathering data, and communicating results. Students learn not only academic vocabulary related to the theme, but also sentence patterns for scientific discourse. (p. 158–159)

In Chapter 12, “Exploration: One Journey of Integrating Content and Language Objectives,” Kate Mastruserio Reynolds reflects on a middle school mapping unit in Wisconsin, in the United States, which helped her see the richness of an integrated approach:

By the end of the unit, learners mastered the language and content objectives, but the learning went far beyond what was written as objectives on paper. Learners were inspired and motivated by the material and began to engage cognitively with the future material as active classroom participants and generators of knowledge. (p. 173)

In Chapter 13, “Blending Digital Media and Web 2.0 in an English Advertising Class,” Aiden Yeh explains how university students in Taiwan used Web 2.0 tools to develop their English skills in the context of advertising:

The job list that the students submitted as part of the assessment also shows how tasks were divided and shared. But most important, this project enabled students to gain deeper awareness of their culture and society, and it provided them with the exposure to understand social issues that have direct impact on their lives. (p. 186)

In Chapter 14, “Developing Language Skills While Studying Cultural Identity,” Pavel Sysoyev and Stephanie Funderburg-Foreman, describing an American Cultural Studies course in Russia, discuss how integrating language and content was

an effective way to motivate and practice a second language while focusing on important issues that promote critical thinking and evaluation of one’s self in the world today. . . . [S]tudents in this course gained a deeper understanding of their culture and how it impacts society, all while using a foreign language. (p. 206)

### How Do Teachers Collaborate to Integrate Language and Content?

In this final section, contributors discuss strategies for collaboration as well as what competencies teachers need in order to most effectively work in integrated environments. Many teachers who learn new strategies to support ELLs remark, “This could help *all* my students.” However, the authors of these chapters show how attention to the linguistic layer of instruction is more than just good teaching. Effective classrooms should be accessible to students who are still learning English and, at the same time, provide opportunities to extend language acquisition. Teachers must work together to develop the skills necessary for this complex, multilayered learning environment.

In Chapter 15, “What Counts as Good Math Instruction for English Language Learners,” Kimberly Hunt and Linda Walsleben discuss the fine balance of shared professional growth that resulted from two teachers working together at a middle school in Vermont, in the United States: “Collaboration is not always easy. Both people in the collaboration must think carefully about the words they choose when giving advice to each other while at the same time being ready to learn about their own teaching” (p. 216).

In Chapter 16, “Sustained Content-Based Academic English Teaching Through Paired English and Philosophy Courses,” Jerry Spring analyzes the effects of two parallel courses in a university in Turkey: a political and social philosophy course taught by a philosophy teacher and an EAP course taught by an English teacher. “By bringing together two rather different academic tribes (Becher, 1989), the project has valuable effects on both sets of instructors that feed back into enhanced teaching and learning,” Spring says (p. 226). In describing successful collaboration, he says that “for all instructors, it is a chance to experiment with a wide range of solutions (and hear about other experiments) to the learning problems posed by the courses” (p. 226).

In Chapter 17, “Motivating Students to Develop Their English Literacy Skills Through Science,” Eilidh Hamilton describes how she helped implement a new CLIL program with EFL and science teachers at secondary schools in Yemen. She outlines a number of specific competencies that language teachers need to develop when working in integrated environments, including “the necessary knowledge and ability to relate the language focus and choice of topic to what

learners are covering in the broader school curriculum—making content work relevant and useful” (p. 237). Hamilton adds that teachers need to be able to “communicate across subjects and willing to coplan and codeliver where logistically possible” (p. 237). She concludes that “the collaborative planning work between departments laid an excellent foundation for the lessons, and the students’ motivation to use English in class significantly increased when engaging with a relevant topic” (p. 236–237).

As a collection of classroom practice, *Integrating Language and Content* illustrates the trend toward greater integration and collaboration by bringing together educators from a variety of contexts and locations, telling their stories and sharing their excitement. Each chapter describes practical examples of how teachers approach language and content with a specific group of ELLs. Although the students and schools vary greatly, the authors have faced common challenges and reached many similar conclusions. As practitioners, these teachers share their work at the sometimes chaotic intersection of language and content by honestly reflecting on teaching, learning, and professional growth.

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