

タイトル	Content-Based Language Instruction in Second/Foreign Language Programs
著者	Cunliffe, Brenda
引用	北海学園大学人文論集, 11: 221-238
発行日	1998-10-31

Content-Based Language Instruction in Second/Foreign Language Programs

Brenda Cunliffe

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of content-based instruction and then to discuss the benefits of such an approach in the acquisition of second language. The paper first provides a description of content-based teaching, including its theoretical rationale, and then outlines its three main approaches and provides examples of each. The paper concludes with an argument for the extended implementation of content-based instruction within ESL/EFL programs.

Keywords: *content-based instruction, theme-based content instruction, adjunct content-based instruction, sheltered content-based instruction*

Content-Based Instruction: An Overview

In the content-based paradigm of second language instruction, content may be defined as the use of subject matter to facilitate second language acquisition. Subject matter in such an approach may be broadly or narrowly defined from themes selected for student interest or need to the academic course material which students study in mainstream school or university settings.

The paradigm of content-based ESL instruction, also known as Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) or English for Specific Purposes

(ESP), is perhaps one of the most important paradigms of the last decade. These language teaching approaches which emphasize the mastery of specific content arose from the findings of a committee commissioned by the British government in 1975 that first language instruction should be across all curriculum content areas; that is, “the perspective taken is that of a reciprocal relationship between language and content learning” (Brinton et al., 1989, p.6).

This cross-curricular approach to first language instruction led to the development of content-based second language instruction intended to prepare ESL students with specific needs to meet their real-life demands. In this paradigm, language experts distinguish between “language learning and using language to learn” (Mohan, 1986, p.18). Thus, in contemporary communicative second language classrooms, the context of communication is the specific subject matter students need to understand and master.

In order to provide a cross-curricular structure for language teaching, Mohan (1986) suggests that the following characteristics can be identified:

1. Develop an organizing framework of language and thinking skills which apply across the curriculum. The organizing framework must help the student to connect work in the language class and the content class.
2. Improve communication of subject matter. Communication of subject matter is fundamental to education, and the framework should assist it.
3. Find strategies for developing language skills in this general framework. This, of course, is of special importance to the language teacher.

4. Find strategies for developing the thinking skills in this general framework. This is of special importance to the content teacher who is interested in not only in conveying information but also in ways of thinking about information. (p.p.18-19)

Within such a framework, “communication of content material can be improved, thinking skills can be developed more easily, and transfer of learning is enhanced” (Mohan, 1986, p.122). Hence, experts conclude that content-based instruction can facilitate both first and second language development and is “particularly appropriate where learners have specific functional needs in the second language” (Brinton et al., 1989, p.9).

English for Academic Purposes (EAP), in which second language instruction is linked to the content area of one or more academic disciplines is a major subdivision of ESP courses (Brinton et al., 1989). While general ESL/EFL programs provide a good preparation for academic study, many students enter postsecondary education under-prepared to deal with the actual academic classwork they encounter (Christison and Krahne, 1986). Many of these students consequently “fail to reach their potential in academic achievement because their language learning is poorly coordinated with their learning of content or subject matter” (Mohan, 1986, p.1).

In the content-based paradigm, EAP language objectives must be coordinated with specific academic subject matter to promote the understanding and mastery of specialized content. As Mohan (1986) points out, “any educational approach that considers language learning alone and ignores the learning of subject matter is inadequate to the needs of these learners” (p.1). Hence, content-based EAP aims to effectively prepare advanced ESL students for the academic course

work they will encounter in first year college or university courses by eliminating the artificial separation between language instruction and content instruction which exists in most second language programs.

Brinton et al. (1985) define content-based instruction at the post-secondary level as “the concurrent teaching of academic subject matter and second language skills” (p.2). Consequently, language class activities are specific to the academic content being studied and “are geared to stimulate students to think and learn through the use of the target [host] language” (p.2). Such an approach requires the integration of the four language skills so that, for example, students respond to authentic readings and lectures and synthesize information from discussion and presentations in preparation for realistic content writing tasks.

The development of content-based courses involves the task of selecting appropriate content materials as well as designing challenging language and content activities. All models of content-based instruction emphasize the authenticity of texts selected (Shih, 1988). Brinton et al.’s (1989) suggestions concerning text selection for content-based courses include the following:

1. Content authenticity — How up to date is the content material?... Does the material give students an opportunity to practice the more extensive type of reading, writing, and listening typically required in content disciplines?
2. Task authenticity — Are the tasks required of students appropriate to the discipline/subject matter? Do they promote critical thinking?
3. Difficulty level — Are the materials appropriate for the proficiency level of students? How heavy is the lexical/syntactic load? Is the length of the text appropriate?

4. Accessibility — Do the students have the necessary background knowledge to engage in the text? Is it culturally accessible? Is the information load appropriate?
5. Availability — What content-specific materials (e.g. readings, audio/videotaped lectures, films) are available for use in this course?
6. Textual aids — Are textual aids (e.g. glosses, study questions, indices) utilized to assist students in their comprehension and retention of the content material?
7. Flexibility — Does the text lend itself to the integration of skills? To information exchange activities? (p.90)

Program developers must also consider whether they wish to use a content textbook or whether they wish to develop their own content related materials (Shih, 1988).

Main Approaches to Content-Based Instruction

Brinton et al. (1989) discuss three main approaches to content-based teaching: theme-based language instruction, adjunct language instruction, and sheltered content instruction.

1. Theme-Based Content Instruction

According to Brinton et al. (1989), theme-based language courses are “the most widespread... since they can be implemented within virtually any existing institutional setting, and topics can be selected to match students’ interests” (p.15). Such theme-based courses may consist of a series of independent cultural topics where the topics or themes provide the content for the language class. In practice, this type of

theme-based approach is perhaps the one most commonly used in intensive second language programs. The latter is the approach adopted by this instructor who selects themes for her language classes. From these topics, she extracts language activities that follow naturally from the content material; hence, students are involved in readings, lectures, films, oral activities, and writing about a particular topic or topics.

Theme-based courses may also be short courses on a single topic. An example of single topic courses are those offered by UCLA Extension American Language Centre which provides three-week modules on topics such as "The Brain," "Marketing and Advertising," and "The Roles of Men and Women" (Baker et al., 1984). A further example of single-topic theme-based teaching is an instructional methods course for pre-service EFL teacher trainees designed by Professor Yonesaka and implemented by her at Hokkai Gakuen University. The goal of this course is to help "pre-service teacher-trainees make meaningful connections between pedagogy lectures [taught in L1] and their experience as second language learners" (Yonesaka, 1997, p.13).

During this course, students explore seven methods of second language instruction: Grammar translation, Direct Method, Audio-lingual Method, Total Physical Response, the Silent Way, Community Language Learning, and Communicative Language Teaching. Through their experiential learning, students not only realize that grammar-translation is but one method of EFL instruction, but also become aware that "realistic methodology choices do exist" (Yonesaka, 1997, p.4). Thus, this thematic content course effectively blends abstract pedagogy and personal experience in order to help teacher-trainees "explore not only methods, but the self as learner and as teacher" (Yonesaka, 1997, p.13).

2. Adjunct Content-Based Instruction

A second form of content-based teaching, adjunct language instruction, entails linking EAP courses or tutorials to specific postsecondary content courses. Students are registered both in a specific content course as well as a specially designed language class, and the responsibility for guiding their thinking, understanding, and assignments is shared between the academic content instructor and the EAP instructor (Shih, 1986). This content-based model is most suitable in postsecondary institutions “where such linking or adjuncting is feasible. A key feature of the adjunct model is the coordination of objectives and assignments between language and content instructors” (Snow, 1991, p. 5). The adjunct course requires close cooperation between the content specialist and the EAP instructor as well as the willingness of the EAP instructor to be involved in and to keep pace with the events of the content class. The primary goal of adjunct courses is “to promote the development of academic language skills necessary for success” since many first year university students are “inadequately prepared to deal with the demands of the university environment, particularly with respect to their reading, writing, and study skills” (Brinton et al., 1989, p.57).

Although adjunct or tutorial courses have been adopted by many universities for native language speakers, for example, a first year composition course at Cornell University which is taught synchronously with an elementary biology course, they have been much more slowly established in second language programs (Shih, 1986). However, at the UCLA Freshman Summer Program, ESL courses have been linked with introductory courses in the liberal arts and sciences (Brinton et al., 1989).

Another example of an adjunct course is a diploma course in

business management offered at Okanagan University College in British Columbia, where business specialists and an EAP instructor concurrently develop the academic skills necessary for students to successfully complete their diploma program. As the EAP instructor for this course, this teacher attended mainstream lectures in business management with her students and then developed language activities dictated by the students' needs in the content class. Similarly, the content specialists provided tutorials in the language class to review difficult material and to respond to students' concerns.

3. Sheltered Content-Based Instruction

A third approach to content-based second language teaching is sheltered content instruction in which native speakers of the host language are excluded from the course. The exclusion of native speakers helps to ensure that instructor input is adjusted to the students' level and aims to ease students into learning specific academic subject matter in the second language. Krashen (1985) states that typically such courses may be organized around sets of readings on selected topics which provide "narrow input" (p.73). For the EAP context, Hudson (1991) recommends the use of "well selected authentic (unmodified in any way) texts" since simplified texts may prohibit the successful development and application of reading skills (p.84). He further stresses that the language learning process should involve tasks which are authentic to the specialist area and are realistic.

Such sheltered courses are often taught to a homogeneous segregated group of second language students by a content area specialist who is a native speaker of the host language or by an EAP instructor who also has training in the area of content. In the sheltered environment, students benefit from "the adjustments and simplifications made

by native speakers in communication with second language learners, and from a low-anxiety situation” (Brinton et al., 1989, p.16). Some examples of sheltered programs are the credit courses offered in both French and English at the University of Ottawa such as an introductory psychology course, and the philosophy of science course offered at the Graduate School English Language Centre in Beijing in which students study cross-cultural perspectives in scientific research (Brinton et al., 1989).

The sheltered content-based approach was also the one adopted for “An Introduction to Literature for ESL Students” at the University of Alberta (Cunliffe and Begin, 1988). Since most EFL students who ultimately study overseas are required to successfully complete a six credit course in English literature, the need for content-based instruction in the home postsecondary institution in this discipline is arguably the greatest. Hence, the design and objectives of this sheltered content-based introductory literature course, developed and implemented by this instructor, are next presented in detail.

This course was designed to prepare second language students to enter the freshman mainstream English literature course required by most faculties. Traditionally, ESL students had performed very poorly in first year literature courses and many had had less than positive experiences. Students had reported negative experiences such as ridicule in front of the class; a professor who began his course by advising all ESL students to withdraw since they were bound for failure; a student whose professor had commented on a written assignment “this is an offense to my sensibilities” and so on. Such experiences had been related to peers and cumulatively promoted negative student attitudes which included the widespread belief that ESL students could not be successful in mainstream first year literature courses

— an unfavorable attitude that the introductory course sought to dispel (Cunliffe and Begin, 1988).

In determining the objectives of the introductory course, first a needs survey was conducted. Both ESL students taking freshman literature courses and professors teaching these courses were surveyed. Literature concerning the use of literary texts in ESL classrooms was then reviewed to investigate further areas of difficulty for ESL students studying literature and to identify techniques effective in overcoming these problems. Course objectives were then defined and activities were designed to meet these objectives. Thus, the course incorporated current research in second language education with insights gained from the needs survey.

The overall objective of the new introductory course was to develop students' informed critical response to literature. In accordance with the content-based paradigm, specific academic content objectives related to the study of English literature were taught concurrently with second language objectives. Global course objectives were as follows:

1. To develop an analytical, disciplined reading of a text
2. To develop the skills necessary to write critical literary analysis essays
3. To formulate an oral response to literature.

An overview of global and intermediate objectives for each of the language comments is presented in Figure 1.

Thus, as shown in Figure 1, the course aimed to improve students' abilities to read literary texts, to write critical analysis essays, and to formulate oral responses to literature.

The course required the reading and discussion of literary texts

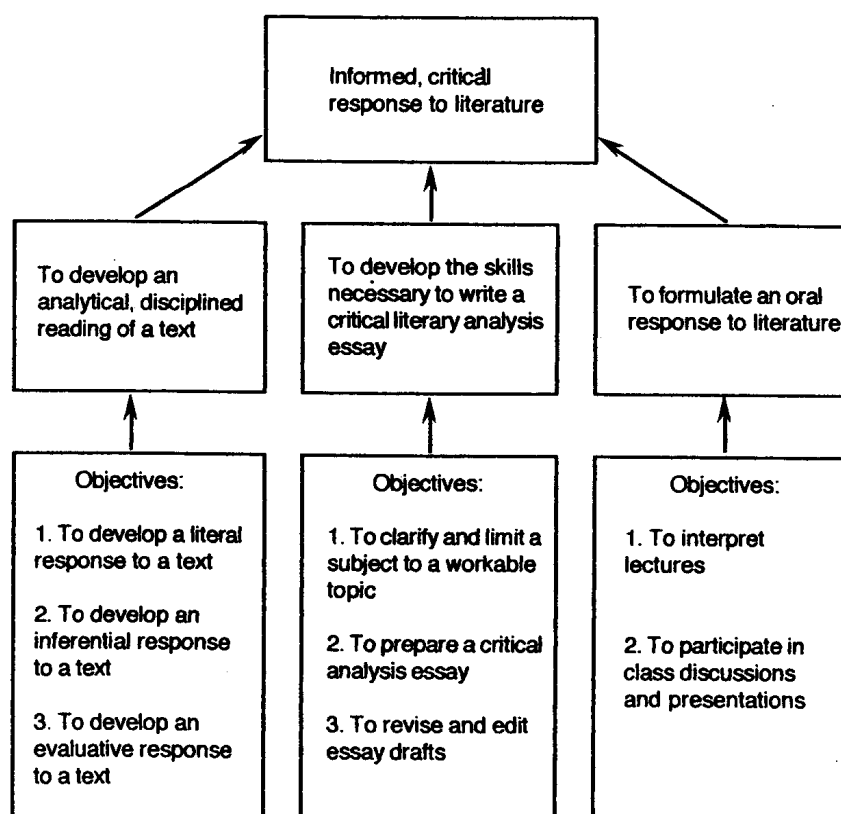


Figure 1 Overview of Course Objectives
(Cunliffe and Begin, 19988, p.25)

such as short stories, novels, poems, and plays. As required by a content-based approach to instruction, the works analyzed were matched closely to the standard university curriculum for introductory literature courses. In addition to developing the ability to respond to texts on the literal, inferential, and evaluative levels, students participated in classroom discussions and presentations; they also learned how to prepare critical analysis essays.

Although an emphasis of the introductory literature course was to develop students' writing skills, the interrelationship of reading and writing was also stressed since the basis of writing about literature is careful readings of a text. Study of texts began with a variety of pre-reading and pre-writing activities designed to promote content schemata and to preview key concepts. As a review of the research on the activities of reading, writing, and responding to literature reveals,

these three areas of study, often taught separately, can be viewed as similar processes of “constructing meaning from words, text, prior knowledge, and feelings” (Petrosky, 1982, p.22). In the course, students read literary texts and their written assignments were analyses of the works studied in class. Topics for their essays were developed through pre-reading activities, class and group discussions, pre-writing activities, and notes so that students benefited from instruction which emphasized the connections between reading literary texts and writing critical analysis essays.

In addition, interactive activities such as class or small group discussions promoted the exchange of ideas and interpretations, helped students’ understanding, and assisted them in constructing meaning. Pre-reading and pre-writing activities, particularly important in ESL classrooms, prepared participants to read challenging prose and facilitated students’ comprehension. The instructor also provided background information and previewed content of specific texts to prepare students for difficult vocabulary and cultural details which may have limited their understanding. Students were thereby constantly reviewing and revising while building skills and confidence.

Even though not explicitly stated, an implicit objective of the course was to increase students’ confidence to study literature, That is, by improving the knowledge and skills to formulate informed responses to literature, the course aimed to increase students’ confidence to approach the study of first year literature courses.

Gardner (1985) proposes that second language learning is a “social psychological phenomenon” which relies heavily on the conditions under which it takes place to be successful (p.2). Although he recognizes the importance of the instructor’s role as facilitator as well as the need for a low-anxiety learning environment, Gardner (1985) stresses

that students' attitude influence how successful they will be: "Simply, favourable attitudes tend to cause the experience to be perceived positively. If, on the other hand, attitudes are negative, the experiences will tend to be perceived unfavourably" (p.8).

Furthermore, students who have successfully completed their studies in ESL programs often feel afraid and unprepared for the academic course work that lies ahead (Smoke, 1988). There is often good reason for this anxiety. Cummins' research (1981) shows that it takes approximately five to seven years to become proficient in academic English. Thus, a two year ESL program provides a solid foundation for academic study but cannot be expected to make its students as proficient as their native English speaking peers. As Rosenthal (1992) suggests, ESL students often enter mainstream courses facing numerous difficulties. These difficulties might include inadequate preparation for university-level study and non-familiarity with the Western style of education which may be very different from that experienced in their native countries. Moreover, there is "the possibility of discrimination based on accent, skin color, country of origin, as well as differences in culture and behavior" (Rosenthal, 1992, p.63).

Student fears promote anxiety, "a state of apprehension, a vague fear" (Scovel, 1978, p.134) toward the learning situation. Such apprehension can cause motivation to decrease and attitudes to turn negative. Scovel (1978) also indicates that low motivation may lead to poorer performance which in turn results in still greater anxiety. Although some experts point out that "facilitating anxiety" can be useful in keeping students alert (Brown, 1987; Scovel, 1978), "debilitating anxiety" negatively affects students' performance both indirectly through worry and self-doubt and directly by reducing participation and creating avoidance of the language. Horowitz and Young (1991) sug-

gest that “facilitating anxiety” is only helpful for very simple learning tasks, but not with more complicated language learning progresses.

Through the sheltered content-based model of language instruction utilized in the introductory course, students benefited from the low anxiety learning environment promoted in a homogeneous segregated group of second language learners. Furthermore, the introductory course aimed to increase students’ confidence by reducing anxiety through the realization that they have acquired the specific content knowledge and skills to interact effectively in first year literature courses. As Wlodkowski (1985) reports:

A sense of competence occurs when there is an awareness of personal mastery: the realization by the person that a specified degree of knowledge or level of performance has been attained that is acceptable by personal and/or social standards.... When the person knows... how well he can do what he is learning... feelings of competence will occur. (p.55)

Wlodkowski (1985) further states, “once the person knows with some degree of certainty that he is able or adept at what he has learned, he will feel self-confident” (p.55).

“Adults learn best in environments which provide trusting relationships, opportunities for interpersonal interactions with both the teacher and other learners, and support and safety for testing new behaviors” (Brundage, 1981, p.26). Therefore, the focus of the introductory course was to promote a low-anxiety, interactive learning environment where students felt free to express their opinions despite their “deficiencies” or lack of native-speaker proficiency in English. Class and group discussion promoted interpersonal interactions which enabled students

to learn from each other. The instructor's role was also crucial to establish a trusting, caring relationship with students, to promote classroom rapport and a sense of camaraderie, and to increase students' self-confidence and language skills while helping them to develop informed responses to literature. As Kidd (1973) states:

The learner needs to feel at home with himself, sufficiently confident that he can meet the challenge successfully, or he may make no effort at all. He must have enough well-being and enough challenge or he will not dare the pain or discomfort that, in little or large, always accompanies any learning. (p.120)

Moreover, Rosenthal (1992) reports, "when teaching new concepts we should use several examples and explain concepts step-by-step" (p. 65). The introductory course utilized the process approach to teaching writing and presented the writing of critical analysis essays as a series of small, simple steps to be mastered. Instruction involved the frequent use of models including examples of the students' own writing. Rosenthal (1992) also recommends other teaching techniques which facilitate learning and promote confidence; these techniques include writing clear and legible information on chalkboards, providing handouts and guide sheets, using audio visual materials, speaking clearly and slowly, and providing written instructions.

In accordance with Rosenthal's suggestions, in the introductory course, all major concepts were written on overheads or the chalkboard and were not erased until students had sufficient time to copy down the information. As recommended in the sheltered content-based model of language instruction, students were given handouts and study guides which helped them follow what was being presented in class; these aids

could also be used when students were studying at home. Whenever possible, videos, films and other aids were used to reinforce information visually and aurally from lectures or from reading materials. Instruction was given slowly and clearly and written instructions were provided for major assignments. Perhaps most importantly, the instructor was supportive and endeavored to make students feel welcome in the classroom since ESL students “need a lot of courage to ask questions or to participate in discussions” (Rosenthal, 1992, p.65).

The goal of the introductory course was to realize these conditions which promote increased self-confidence in order to help students to succeed academically, for “adults with positive self-concept and high self-esteem are more responsive to learning and less threatened by learning environments” (Brundage, 1981, p.26).

An evaluation of the effectiveness of the introductory course was conducted by this researcher as a basis for her master’s thesis. Data compiled from both questionnaires and interviews completed by all students participating in the course, indicated that respondents had clearly benefited from the sheltered content based approach to the study of Western literature; all students demonstrated both improved skills and confidence on course completion; all students were subsequently successful in the required mainstream freshman literature course. Hence, in keeping with content research, this study provided limited but encouraging evidence that content-based instruction enhanced both language and concept development and promoted positive attitudes.

Conclusion

As Brinton et al. (1989) point out, “despite the relatively recent

appearance of content-based approaches on the second language instructional scene, there is a growing body of research indicating that these models lead to high levels of language development and academic achievement while providing students with worthwhile and interesting subject matter" (p.213). These approaches are particularly appropriate in postsecondary settings where the traditional artificial separation of language and content classes does little to prepare EFL students to study in Western countries. As Krashen (1984) points out, students do not acquire the target language by memorizing vocabulary or by manipulating grammatical structures; comprehensible subject input is more successful. Thus, professional experience, academic research, and personal reflection about both second language acquisition and student well-being all strongly indicate that content-based instruction is an invaluable component of ESL/EFL programs.

References

- Baker, L., Baldwin, R., Fein, D., Gaskill, W., and Walsleben, M. (1984). *Content-based curriculum design in advanced levels of an ESL program*. Workshop presented at the 18th Annual TESOL Conference, Houston.
- Brinton, D. M., Snow, M. A., and Wesche M. B. (1989). *Content-based second language instruction*. New York: Newbury House.
- Brown, H. D. (1987). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. (2nd ed.) Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Brundage, D. H. (1981). *Adult learning principles and their application to program planning*. Research Project, Ministry of Education, Ontario.
- Christison, M. A., and Krahne, K. J. (1986). Student perceptions of academic language study. *TESOL Quarterly*. 20(1), 61-81.
- Cummins, J. (1981). Age on arrival and immigrant second language learning in Canada: A reassessment. *Applied Linguistics*. 2, 132-149.
- Cunliffe, B., and Begin, S. (1988). *An Introduction to literature for ESL*

- students. Edmonton: University of Alberta.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Horowitz, E. K., and Young, D. J. (1991). *Language learning anxiety*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice-Hall.
- Hudson, T. (1991). A content comprehension approach to reading English for science and technology. *TESOL Quarterly*. 25(1), 77-100.
- Kidd, J. R. (1973). *How adults learn*. Chicago: Follett Publishing.
- Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. New York: Longman.
- Mohan, B. A. (1986) *Language and Content*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley.
- Petrosky, A. (1982) From story to essay: Reading and writing. *College Composition and Communication*. 33(1), 19-36.
- Rosenthal, J. W. (1992). A successful transition: A bridge program between ESL and the mainstream classroom. *College Education*. 40(2), 63-66.
- Scovel, T. (1978). The effect of affect on foreign language learning: A review of the anxiety research. *Language Learning*. 28, 129-142.
- Shih, M. (1986). Content-based approaches to teaching academic writing. *TESOL Quarterly*. 20(4), 617-648.
- Shih, M. (1988). *Selecting and sequencing college reading and study skills materials*. Paper presented at TESOL 1988, Chicago.
- Smoke, T. (1988). Using feedback from ESL students to enhance their success in college. In *Ending remediation: Linking ESL and content in higher education*. Benesch, S (Ed.) Washington, D.C.: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.
- Snow, M. A. (1991). Content-Based second/foreign language instruction. *The Language Teacher*. 25(11), 3-5.
- Wlodkowski, R. J. (1985). *Enhancing adult motivation to learn*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Yonesaka, S. (1997) *Take it from experience: A methods course for pre-service teacher-trainees*. Paper presented at JALT 1997, Hamamatsu.