

**Authentic practices to teach English as a foreign language at secondary level business
schools**

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the Finnish educational system the national curriculum defines the skills and knowledge the students should master after completing their studies. A new curriculum was introduced in the autumn of 2009, emphasizing larger study modules and integration of individual subject courses. The implementation of the new curriculum made it necessary to pay more attention to the integration of subjects and to restrict the role of textbooks as only information source.

In this capstone project I am concentrating on the degree programme in business administration, which focuses on customer service and sales. In general, English language is studied together with subject studies, omitting only two compulsory English language courses which also focus on vocationally oriented language. After completing the secondary level education, the students will be able to work e.g. as salespersons or customer service representatives, but they are also eligible for further education in tertiary level institutions.

Since teaching methods are based on learning theories, this capstone project will present three major learning theories as described by Greeno, Collins and Resnick (1996):

Behaviourist/Empirist Framework, Cognitive/Rationalist Framework and Situative/Pragmatist-Sociohistoric Framework. These learning theories have built the frameworks for the development of foreign language teaching: for example, audiolingual methods were developed following the behaviourist framework, extended projects and portfolios followed the principles of cognitive framework etc. The National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (NSFLEP, 1999) present the current standards in the US education system for foreign language learning using what is known as the 5 Cs

(Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, Communities) as goal areas. The same goals can be seen in the objectives laid out by the Finnish National Board of Education for vocational foreign language teaching at secondary level.

The aim of this capstone project is to find best practises in teaching English in secondary level business colleges using one English course as a case study. The outlines presented at the end of the project will reflect situated learning theory, taking into account a teacher's role as a tutor and facilitator and aiming at increased motivation and low affective filter. In the spring term 2010 I will implement the outlines into my business English courses at Omnia Vocational College and ask the students to give feedback. On the basis of the students' feedback I will further develop the language courses.

2. WHAT IS MEANT BY AUTHENTIC

The term *authentic* can be defined both narrowly and broadly. In general, authentic refers to originality, and regarding language instruction authenticity usually refers to authentic materials (narrower description). Pauli Kaikkonen (2000, 53) defines the term authenticity on the basis of its original meaning, the Greek word *authentees*, meaning *actor*. This leads to the definition of authenticity in the context of foreign language learning: in the context of studying, authenticity means the sense of meaningfulness in learning (Kaikkonen 2000, 54). This definition describes authenticity in its broader sense, referring to student's immediate experience as an actor or experiencer. According to Kaikkonen (2000, 54) this demonstrates the fact that authenticity in foreign language teaching is connected to many factors, and it should not be restricted to one specific element, for example the authenticity of some text.

According to Juurakko and Airola (2000, 23-24) foreign language use becomes authentic only in cross-cultural situations, in other words in authentic language use. Unless the students are provided with real language use experiences, the language will remain abstract and it might be impossible for the student to see the meaning of language learning as a part of his or her professional growth.

In this capstone project the term authentic will be used in its broader sense, referring to meaningful learning experiences. But what are the learning theories that have brought up the whole issue with meaningful contexts and tasks? In the following I am going to review three major learning theories as defined by Greeno, Collins and Resnick (1996): Behaviorist, cognitive and situative /pragmatist-sociohistoric learning theory. I will also discuss the role of the teacher in the chapter dealing with the theme tutoring and learning by observing.

3. HOW DO PEOPLE LEARN

3.1. Behaviorist learning theory

Behaviorist learning theory defines learning as a process in which associations and skills are acquired, and *transfer* occurs when behaviors learned in one situation are utilized in another situation. According to Greeno et al. (1996, 21), "When people's knowledge is viewed as their having associations between ideas or stimuli and responses, learning is the formation, strengthening and adjustment of those associations". Regarding the instruction, this view emphasizes individual instruction in order to enable each student to respond actively to

questions and problems and receives feedback, which he or she can relate clearly to the given response. (Greeno et al. 1996, 21)

A response that has been learned as an association to one stimulus can be generalized more or less strongly to new stimuli. According to Greeno et al. (1996, 22), “The idea of transfer in conditioning involves *gradients of similarity* along stimulus dimensions, so that a response learned as an association to one stimulus generalizes more strongly to other stimuli that are similar to it in all respects, and less strongly to other stimuli that differ from it in one or more dimension”.

In designing learning environments the behaviorist or empiricist view emphasizes routines of activity for effective transmission of knowledge. The learning program has to be well organized with routines for classroom activity that students know and follow easily. Second, the goals, feedback and reinforcement must be clear. It must be ensured that the students have learned prerequisites for each new component, and the teacher has to provide opportunities for students to respond correctly, to give sufficient feedback to follow their progress and to provide reinforcement for learning that satisfies student’s motivations. Third, the acquisition of basic information and routine skills can be facilitated by using technologies that support individualized training. (Greeno et al. 1996, 27)

The curricula should follow a bottom-up model; instruction should proceed from simpler components to the more complex component. The assessment of knowledge components can be constructed “by analyzing the procedures and information to be acquired and constructing items that assess students’ knowledge of components.” (Greeno et al. 1996, 27)

According to the behaviorist view of language learning the native language (L1) has negative interference on L2 (second language) learning. Language learning is viewed as an individual achievement, where people learn by a stimulus-response habit formation pattern (Shrum & Glisan 2005, 12).

Reflecting behaviorism and stimulus-response learning the Audiolingual Method (ALM) was a method developed to emphasize listening and speaking by means of repetition, dialogue memorization, and manipulation of grammatical pattern drills. The drills, however, lacked context, having little apparent meaning or situation in the real world where one would interact this way. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 41). “With the ALM method, unfortunately, learners were seldom exposed to meaningful, contextualized input and were unable to transfer the memorized material into spontaneous communication” (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 41).

Audiolingual method sees language as a system of structurally related elements for the coding of meaning. The goal of language learning is not communicative competence, but the mastery of the elements of this system, which are defined in terms of phonological units (e.g. phonemes), grammatical units (e.g. sentences), grammatical operations (e.g. adding or joining) and lexical items (e.g. function words). (Richards & Rodgers 2001, 20)

3.2 Cognitive learning theory

Constructivist research was influenced by Piaget’s ideas about cognitive development. For Piaget (1979) learning and mental development are independent processes, and since

maturation precedes learning, learning does not affect the course of development: the learner must be cognitively and developmentally ready to handle certain learning tasks. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 21) According to Piaget, the learning process of an individual is launched by the problems and contradictions the learner perceives in his or her surroundings. (Pruuki 2008, 18)

Constructivism characterizes learning as an active process of construction rather than passive assimilation of information or rote memorization. (Greeno et al. 1996, 22) Problem-solving heuristics is an important theme in the cognitive view of knowing and learning. Another important theme is the concept of *metacognition*, which means the ability to reflect upon one's own thinking and monitor and manage it. (Greeno et al. 1996, 19)

The cognitive approaches in foreign language teaching, first introduced in the 1960s, put more emphasis on meaningful language use and creativity. Noam Chomsky (1965) introduced the term *language acquisition device* (LAD) to language learning. He claimed that children are born with an innate language acquisition device which enables them to process language. LAD contains abstract language principles, which are universal to all languages. LAD gets activated when children pay attention to features of the language they hear, triggering and selecting the innate rules specific to the language they hear. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 12).

Chomsky also made a distinction between the terms *competence* and *performance*.

Competence refers to the intuitive knowledge of grammar and syntax rules and knowledge of the operation of linguistic system. Performance, on the contrary, describes individual's ability to produce language. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 12-13).

In general, the cognitive view emphasizes general concepts and methods, and engagement in learning is seen as an intrinsic property –in contrast to the behaviorist view, which emphasizes rewarding and extrinsic motivation. (Greeno et al. 1996, 25) In designing learning environments, “learning environments can be organized to foster students’ constructing understanding of concepts and principles through problem solving and reasoning in activities that engage students’ interests and use of their initial understandings and their general reasoning and problem-solving abilities.” (Greeno et al. 1996, 27)

Curricula should follow the sequences of conceptual development, starting with issues and problems that are within reach of students’ initial understanding and reasoning ability and moving towards issues and problems that require greater extensions of their intuitive capabilities. Attention must be paid to generality, so that students will understand the major unifying principles of the domain. Regarding assessments, extended projects or performances can show the students’ intellectual abilities and growth. It is also important to encourage students with diverse backgrounds and abilities by crediting varieties of excellence. (Greeno et al. 1996, 27).

3.3. Situative/Pragmatist-Sociohistoric View

The situative view of knowing shifts the focus on successful activities. From this point of view one form of knowing is an attribute of groups that carry out cooperative activities. Knowing consists of the abilities of groups in their practices (collective knowing) and abilities of individuals to participate in those practices (individual knowing). (Greeno et al. 1996, 20)

According to Greeno et al. (1996, 20), “Knowing how to participate in social practices plays a crucial role in all aspects of a student’s learning in and out of school”. Greeno et al. (1996, 20) describe typical patterns of classroom discourse as characterized by Cazden (1986), Mehan (1979) and others: teacher asks a question, receives an answer from the one he or she calls on, and then evaluates the answer for the class’s information. Alternative patterns of discourse, on the contrary, include small groups of students interacting with each other or students in the class formulate questions and evaluate other students’ presentations (Greeno et al. 1996, 20)

From the situative point of view, learning is the strengthening of the practices of communities and participatory abilities of individuals. Apprenticeship is one example of a system in which individuals learn to participate in social practices. The learning of practices can be described as “processes of participation in which beginners are relatively peripheral in the activities of a community, and as they become more experienced and adept, their participation becomes more central.” (Greeno et al. 1996, 23) According to Greeno et al. (1996, 26) participatory relationships in communities build people’s identities, and participating in communities where learning is valued can make students engaged in learning.

Lave and Wenger (1991, 29) use the term apprenticeship in a broad sense: they refer to learners as apprentices, about teachers and computers as masters, and they talk about cognitive apprenticeship, apprenticeship learning and life as apprenticeship. Like Greeno they also define learning as an integral aspect of social practice (Lave and Wenger 1991, 31)

In designing learning environments, it is important to build environments of participation in social practices of inquiry and learning. Formulating and evaluating questions, problems, arguments and so forth are aspects of the social practices of sense-making and learning.

Learning environments should also support the development of students' personal identities as capable and confident learners and knowers. The curricula should be formulated to support the development of disciplinary practices of discourse and representation. Another important goal is to formulate practices of formulating and solving realistic problems. (Greeno et al. 1996, 27-28) Furthermore, "learning activities can focus on problematic situations that are meaningful in terms of students' experience and in which concepts and methods of subject matter disciplines are embedded" (Greeno et al. 1996, 28)

Realistic problems that are meaningful in terms of students' experience could also be described as authentic problems (see the definition of authentic in chapter 2). By integrating realistic problems into curricula formulation the situative approach provides an adequate theory basis for this capstone project, which aims at finding authentic teaching methods for vocationally oriented foreign language teaching.

In this approach language is seen as a tool for the creation and maintenance of social relations. Language is a vehicle for the realization of interpersonal relations and for the performance of social transactions between individuals. (Richards and Rodgers 2001, 21)

Assessing the students' learning requires observation of the participation in inquiry and social practices of learning, and students should participate in the assessment. The design of assessment systems should take into account the effects of assessment on the learning

environments and teaching interactions, and the assessment should be meaningful for student's progress in learning. (Greeno et al. 1996, 28)

There have been attempts to take context into account in foreign language teaching. Savignon (as cited in Shrum & Glisan 2000, 13) claims that "the development of the learner's communicative abilities is seen to depend not so much on the time they spend rehearsing grammatical patterns as on the opportunities they are given to interpret, to express, and to negotiate meaning in real-life situations" (Savignon 1997 as cited in Shrum & Glisan 2000, 42). The methods that were developed to reflect Savignon's ideas included Natural Approach, Total Physical Response Method, or methods emphasizing the emotions like the Silent Way, Community Language Learning or Suggestopedia. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 42).

3.4 Tutoring and learning by observing

Teachers or tutors play a significant role in all the learning theories described before, no matter whether the focus is on individual or collaborative learning: they provide stimuli, create projects and learning environments, enable students to access professional communities etc. According to Wiggins & McTighe (2006, 241) there are three types of teaching: didactic or direct instruction (demonstration or modeling, lecture, questions), facilitative or constructivist methods (cooperative learning, problem-based learning, open-ended questions etc.) and coaching (guided practice, feedback). But how do the teachers or tutors best facilitate the learning process?

Chi et al. (2007) have made an interesting study about the human tutoring effectiveness. In their study they evaluated an alternative learning environment consisting of pairs of students collaboratively observing a videotape of another student being tutored. They compared this collaboratively observing environment to four other instructional methods – one-on-one human tutoring, observing tutoring individually, collaborating without observing, and studying alone – and found out that students learned to solve physics problems just as successfully from observing tutoring collaboratively as the tutees who were being tutored individually. They explain the effectiveness of such learning environment by claiming that “such a situation encourages learners to become active and constructive observers through interactions with a peer. In essence, collaboratively observing combines the benefit of tutoring with the benefit of collaborating.” (Chi et al. 2007, 301).

The learning environment of Chi et al. combines the benefits of learning from tutoring and collaborating with learning from observing. They introduced the *active/constructive/interactive observing hypothesis*, referring to how actively engaged and constructive the observers are. (Chi et al. 2007, 302)

Looking at tutor’s feedback, the researchers came to the conclusion that feedback per se is not the critical factor, but “what kind of feedback a tutor gives, and whether or not tutees can assimilate, understand, and use the feedback - - the most effective form of dialogue units are scaffoldings followed by relevant substantive Tutee responses” (Chi et al. 2007, 332). One research finding was that “Students can learn by observing tutoring vicariously has promising implications for how individual classroom interactions between a teacher and a student (such

as at the blackboard) can be productive for the rest of the students in the class” (Chi et al. 2007, 337)

In the outlines presented at the end of this project I am referring to teachers as coaches of learning. The learning activities suggested in the outlines enable students to take an active role in their learning, interact with each other and get feedback from the teacher. I will, however, use traditional textbook-oriented methods for the first part of the classes. As was seen in the studies described above, there is evidence that observing collaboratively is an effective way of learning and individual classroom interactions between a teacher and a student can be productive for the rest of the students in the class.

4. TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

4.1. Communicative Competence

A recent model of *communicative competence* (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, & Thurrell, 1995) defines the core of the concept as *discourse competence*, which is surrounded by *sociocultural*, *linguistic*, and *actional* competence. Discourse competence refers to the ability to arrange words and phrases into utterances in order to express a coherent idea on a particular topic. Sociocultural knowledge includes context, stylistic appropriateness, nonverbal factors and cultural background knowledge. Linguistic competence is the ability to make meaning based on the forms of morphology, syntax, vocabulary and spelling. Actional competence refers to the ability to match linguistic form with the speaker’s intent. All these

skills are sustained by strategic competence, which enables people to compensate for deficiencies in the other competencies. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 13-14).

Savignon (1997, 48-49) divides the components of communicative competence into grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences. She points out that “an increase in one component interacts with the other components to produce a corresponding increase in overall communicative competence.” Savignon (1997, 49)

4.2. Krashen’s Input Hypothesis

Krashen (1982) built his “Monitor Model” on the innatist views of language learning proposed by Chomsky. Krashen’s Input Hypothesis has been influential in classroom instruction, because it is intuitively appealing to teachers. This hypothesis emphasizes optimal quantity of comprehensible input that is interesting and a little beyond the students’ current level of competence ($i + 1$), not grammatically sequenced, but understandable for students using background knowledge, context, and extralinguistic cues such as gestures. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 14-15)

Krashen claims that acquisition, not learning, leads to spontaneous, unplanned communication. Learning is a conscious focus on knowing and applying rules, whereas acquisition is subconscious picking up of rules characteristic of the first language acquisition process. The learner possesses an internal “monitor” that checks and edits language output when the learner has sufficient time, attends to linguistic form and knows the rule that is applied. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 14)

Furthermore, Krashen maintains that learners acquire the rules of a language in a predictable order, regardless of the order in which rules may have been taught. This claim finds evidence in studies which show that learners go through similar stages in language development in spite of their first languages.

Whereas Krashen is of the opinion that input is necessary and sufficient condition for language acquisition, other researchers like Swain (1995) add sufficient output for acquisition to occur. In other words, learners need to speak the language to achieve higher levels of language competence. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 20) “By repeatedly using the target language in natural communicative situations and focusing on their output, learners eventually develop automaticity and move from analyzing what they want to say to being able to say it with ease (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 20).”

4.3. Long’s Interaction Hypothesis

According to Long (1983) learners make their input “comprehensible” by (1) making the input simpler, (2) by using linguistic and extralinguistic features and (3) by modifying the interactional structure of the conversation. The modification of interactional structures is involved in the *meaning negotiation*, which means attempt to work toward mutual comprehension between learners and their interlocutors. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 19)

According to Shrum & Glisan (2000, 19) to negotiate meaning in the context of classroom learning “means that both parties in a teacher-student and student-student interaction must seek clarification, check comprehension, and request confirmation that they have understood

or are being understood by the other.” Long criticizes the traditional roles between teachers and students, which does not allow negotiation of meaning, since students are often hesitant to question or counter-question the teacher. This theory emphasizes the active role of learners as conversational participants. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 19)

4.4. Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development

Except Long’s Interactional Hypothesis, where learners need to negotiate meaning with their interlocutors, all earlier theories focus on a learner as an individual, reflecting behaviorist and cognitive views. Vygotsky (1978), however, puts emphasis on the role of social interaction in learning and development, which reflects the situative learning theory. Contrary to Piaget, for whom maturation must precede learning (see ch. 3.2), Vygotsky is of the opinion that “learning precedes and contributes to development, and the learner’s language performance with others exceeds what the learner is able to do alone (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 21)”. The *actual development level* of the learner represents what the learner can do alone, and a *potential development level* represents what the learner can do with the assistance of others, and what the learners can do with assistance right now, they will be able to do alone in the future. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 21).

Scaffolding means the interaction between expert and novice in a problem-solving task. The expert simplifies the task, keeps the learner motivated and in pursuit of the goal, highlights relevant features and points out discrepancies between what has been produced and the ideal solution, tries to reduce stress and frustration and models an ideal solution. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 23) According to Shrum & Glisan (2000, 23), “In order to provide scaffolded

assistance, it is important that the teacher knows where students are in terms of their language development. Furthermore, the teacher's role is (1) to recognize that the assistance is contingent on what the novice is doing, not on what the expert thinks should be done, and (2) to know when to turn the task over to the novice for solo performance."

It is important to make a distinction between Krashen's $i + 1$ and ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development). Whereas in $i + 1$ the focus is on an individual's innate knowledge processing comprehensive input, ZPD sees language learning as an activity happening through interaction and collaboration in social settings and by participating in a community. ((Shrum & Glisan 2000, 25) According to Vygotskian sociocultural theories "private speech, mental rehearsal, and language play foster flexibility and change within the interlanguage system of the learner, resulting in its growth and development (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 25)".

4.5. The Role of Affect and Motivation

Affective filter hypothesis was first introduced by Dulay and Burt (1977) to refer to motivation, anxiety, personality and attitude as factors influencing the degree of success in foreign language learning. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 28). Krashen points out that the affective filter (anxiety) should be low in order for the input to be acquired and reflected upon by the learner. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 14-15)

Motivation is one of the most complex issues in language learning, and it is difficult to match specific motivational factors to success. Motivations are often divided into instrumental and integrative motivations, the first one referring to language learning as a way to get a better job

or to fulfill an academic requirement, and the latter referring to language learning to “fit in” with people who are native speakers of the language. It is, however, possible that instrumental and integrative motivations are interrelated, which means that they may operate together or one may lead to the other. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 28)

Dörnyei (1994, as cited in Shrum & Glisan 2000, 29) maintains that “Language learners are often motivated by the classroom experience itself: (1) course-specific factors, such as the degree to which the teaching method, materials, and learning tasks are interesting and engaging; (2) teacher-specific factors, such as the teacher’s personality, teaching style, and relationship to students; and (3) group-specific factors, such as the dynamics of the learning group.” Motivation usually leads to greater success in language learning and maintenance of language skills over time. Besides motivation, personality or cognitive styles also have an effect on language learning. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 29)

The effects of motivation can also be explored by studying performance on tasks. According to Shrum & Glisan (2000, 29), “Wen’s 1997 study illustrated that expectations of the learning task and of one’s own ability play a significant role in motivation and learning: When learners think that learning experiences will lead to certain meaningful results, they exert more effort.”

Oxford & Shearin, 1994 (as cited in Shrum & Glisan 2000, 30) summarize the implications for teachers to heighten the motivation of their students as follows: “(1) identifying why learners are studying a language; (2) helping shape the learners’ beliefs about success and failure in L2 learning; (3) illustrating the rewards of L2 learning; (4) providing a positive classroom atmosphere where language anxiety is kept to a minimum; and (5) encouraging

learners to set their own personal goals for learning and to develop their own intrinsic reward system.”

Savignon (1997) adds an important aspect to the topic: teacher attitudes. “Not until we have taken a critical look at teachers’ attitudes, both individual and professional, will we be ready to determine what obstacles still lie in the way of creating the kinds of learning environments that will be most helpful to our students.” (Savignon 1997, 113) In my opinion this aspect has not been discussed enough between teachers, though it is of crucial importance.

5. NATIONAL STANDARDS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION PROJECT

The National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (NSFLEP, 1996) were drafted in the USA by members representing a variety of languages, levels of instruction, program models, and geographic regions. The first draft was published in 1996, and it was expanded in 1999 to include standards for the post-secondary level (K-16) as well as language-specific versions of various foreign languages. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 44)

Instead of representing communication as four separate skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, the standards emphasize the learning experiences of all learners, and place content as the central focus for instruction, describing what students should know and be able to do. The goals defined by the standards are known as 5 C’s or foreign language education:

Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, Communities. (Shrum & Glisan 2000, 44-45)

In short, the Standards of Foreign Language Learning include the following components taken from Shrum & Glisan (2000, 45):

1. Communicate in Languages Other Than English

Standard 1.1: Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.

Standard 1.2: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

Standard 1.3: Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics.

2. Gain Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures

Standard 2.1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.

Standard 2.2: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied.

3. Connect with Other Disciplines and Acquire Information

Standard 3.1.: Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language.

Standard 3.2: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures

4. Develop Insights into the Nature of Language and Culture

Standard 4.1: Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.

Standard 4.2: Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.

5. Participate in Multilingual Communities at Home and Around the World

Standard 5.1: Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting.

Standard 5.2: Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

In the following I am going to present outlines for best practices in the context of foreign language teaching in the Finnish vocational schools. These outlines have been influenced by all the theories and foreign language goals described above, but the purpose is to give more emphasis on the situated learning theory and vocationally oriented teaching. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001, 24), what links theory with practice is called *design*. Approach does not specify procedure, and theory does not dictate a particular set of teaching techniques and activities.

6. OUTLINES FOR BEST PRACTICES

6.1 Safe learning environment and low affective filter

Based on the situative learning theory and authentic teaching methods, the best learning environment for vocationally oriented language learning would be a professional community where the students could practice their language skills in authentic situations. However, in the absence of an authentic professional community would it be possible to create communities of practice in classroom situations? Wenger & Snyder (2000, 139) define the communities of practice as groups of people informally bound together to share expertise and passion for a joint enterprise and later continue with how “people in communities of practice share their

experiences and knowledge in free-flowing, creative ways that foster new approaches to problems” (Wenger & Snyder 2000, 140).

If the students cannot participate in a professional community in authentic settings, the teacher should create a community of professionals among the students and the students should be able to gain *authentic learning experiences* (see Ch. 2). The students should be able to identify themselves as representatives of the professionals, although they are at the beginning of their career.

Teachers have many ways of creating a community, and every teacher has his or her own preferences. When starting a new course, I would spend some time to discuss the goals of the studies and the English course and then design the study objectives and rules for the class. The students would be given opportunity to think about the professional community they want to be a part of, and the rules that apply to that community (e.g. discuss the question whether it is appropriate to arrive late or laugh at others). The rules also have a positive effect on the feeling of safety, which is an important aspect in learning, because the affective filter should be as low as possible (see Ch. 4.5).

During my Fulbright exchange in the USA I had the opportunity to visit Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta. Although the school was a middle school and not a vocational school, some of the practices used in this school could also be applied in the Finnish vocational schools, especially the use of rules. In his book “The Essential 55” Ron Clark offers 55 rules as suggestions, “as tried-and-true methods that have served my students well.” (Clark 2003, xxvii). The rules include both classroom behavior and customs and manners in more general

level: make eye contact, congratulate a classmate, respect other students' comments, opinions and ideas, do not ask for a reward etc. Some of these rules can be easily adopted to the Finnish vocational schools, but the students also need to make up their own rules for their own learning context.

6.2 Designing curricula

“Backward design” is an approach starting with a statement of the desired results – the priority learnings – and deriving the curriculum from the performances called for or implied in the goals. After framing the goals, the designers should ask questions related to what would count as an evidence of such achievement, what does it look like to meet these goals and what are the implied performances that should make up the assessment, at which all teaching and learning should aim. (Wiggins & McTighe 2006, 17)

In order to implement backward design, the teacher and the students should agree on the learning goals and what it looks like to meet these goals. The students can be asked questions such as “What kind of communication situations do customer servants face in their everyday work?” The teacher would then introduce the goals of this particular English course, and the requirements for completing the course successfully. Goals are also important for motivating the students (see ch. 4.5).

As a suggestion to motivate students, I will here introduce the concept of “Learning contract”. I have borrowed this idea from Randy Stolle, a conference speaker of Tennessee Foreign Language Teaching Association in Cool Springs, Franklin, on November 13th, 2009. The idea

of the learning contract is to motivate students by increasing the feeling of ownership in one's own learning. The students are encouraged to use the language outside the classroom, and they will get points by using the language in the way that most motivates them: by interacting with native speakers of the target language, watching movies in the target language, writing children's book etc. In order to get the points, the students need to return an artifact designed by the teacher.

The learning contract that I am going to implement in my own teaching is a modified version of the learning contract introduced by Randy Stolle. In the case of English at Work the learning contract will be used for the independent study, but the course also contains traditional teaching with the help of the textbooks as well as spoken language exercises with the help of games etc. According to Wright et al., 2006, it is the teacher's responsibility to offer a wide range of approaches in order to meet the needs of different learners.

In the following I will first present the learning contract model, and then discuss the use of the learning contract in the case "English at Work".

LEARNING CONTRACT

Title of the course: _____

Name of the student: _____

1. Write the class rules as discussed during the first classes:
2. What are your strengths and weaknesses in the English language?

3. See the objectives of this English course on the syllabus. What areas should you practice most and why?
4. During the course, you will
- (1) study the vocabulary and do the exercises as stated in the syllabus (textbook Business First)
 - (2) choose the most useful and interesting tasks from the list below, and collect 100 points. Most of the tasks will be done during the classes at school, but there are also tasks that you can do at home and return to the teacher.
 - (3) at the end of the course, you have the possibility to demonstrate your skills in a test. You will, however, pass the course by actively participating in the classes and completing the required tasks.

After completing a task, return it to your teacher. Keep a record of your tasks and points here:

Task	Points	Date
Reading		
a. News Articles: Read a news or business article Artifact: Copy of article and the main points in Finnish	10 points	
b. Job advertisement (see e.g. www.jobserve.com) Artifact: Copy of the job advertisement and main points in Finnish	10 points	
c. Company homepages Artifact: Copy of the homepage and 15 new vocab words	10 points	
Writing		
1. Company visit: visit a company and report on your experiences Artifact: 1 page report (ask teacher for more instructions)	15 points	
2. CV: Write your own CV Artifact: Curriculum Vitae (ask teacher for more instructions)	10 points	
3. Comic strip: Write and draw a comic strip on customer service Artifact: Comic strip, minimum 6 squares, 2 sentences per square	5-10 points	
4. Children's Book: Write and illustrate a children's book telling about some work place from the perspective of children Artifact: Children's book, min. 5 pages, 3 sentences per page	10 points	
5. Poetry: Write a poem that is related to working or studying Artifact: Typed poem, min. 5 lines	5 points	
6. Instant message: Converse with someone via online chat Artifact: Printed copy of min. 2 pages of conversation	5 points	
7. Scrapbook: Create a scrapbook with photo captions telling about your studies Artifact: Scrapbook, min. 5 pages, 3 sentences per page	10 points	
8. Learning diary: write about your learning experiences during this course Artifact: Learning diary, min. 3 sentences after each class	10-15 points	
Speaking		
1. Video: Act out and make a video on customer service Artifact: Video on CD/flash drive, min. 10 minutes (ask teacher for more instructions)	15 points	
2. Conversation: Conversation about your studies and future career prospects with target language speaker	10 points	

Artifact: Audio copy or act out for the whole class, min. 10 minute conversation

3. Interview: in pairs, act out a job interview 15 points
Artifact: Audio copy or acting out a job interview (min. 10 questions) for the whole class
4. Presentation: Make a presentation on a businessman /woman 15 points
Artifact: PowerPoint presentation, min. 10 minutes
5. Teach: Teach part of a class lesson 15 points
Artifact: Teaching. Plan with teacher!

Listening

1. Movie: Watch a movie without subtitles 10 points
Artifact: 1-page summary in English
2. Conversation: Listen to a conversation either on tape or face-to-face
Artifact: Audio copy of conversation, main points in Finnish 10 points

Culture

1. CultureGram: Read about business customs and manners in different countries
Artifact: Read and reflect on new knowledge (min. 1 page) 10 points
2. Famous business person: Read and reflect 10 points
Artifact: Write an essay (min. 1 page)
3. Telling about your home country: business customs in Finland
Artifact: Read and write an essay (min 1 page) 10 points

6.3 Case English at Work

6.3.1 Objectives

Foreign language teaching in vocational schools focuses on listening and spoken interaction skills. Assessment is based on Common European Frames of Reference (CEF), separating listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing skills.

<http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/LanguageSelfAssessmentGrid/en>

After completing the second compulsory English course, English at Work, the students at Omnia Vocational College should have the following skills and knowledge:

1. The students will be able to communicate and interact with speakers of the target language as participants of the work community and as active citizens, and they will be eligible for further education
2. The students will master basic customer service and business situations using the target language
3. The students will know how to interact in multicultural and multilingual work environments

The key skills for life-long learning in this course include learning and problem solving, communication and collaboration, communication and media skills, active citizenship and different cultures. (<http://www.omnia.fi/Resource.phx/sivut/sivut-omnia/ammattiopisto/tutkinnot/merkonomi.htx> Translated from the school-based standards derived from National Standards).

As can be seen from the objectives above, all the 5 C's defined by NSFLEP (see ch. 5.1) have been included as goal areas: Communication, cultures, connections, comparisons and communities.

6.3.2 Designing curriculum

The main idea in this case is to provide the students with multiple opportunities for learning, using both situated learning and tutoring as anchors of the design. The learning contract serves as a motivating factor, providing students with authentic language use and committing students to the common goals. In order to meet all the standards and to make the affective

filter of all students as low as possible, traditional methods will be used to provide students with vocabulary and cultural knowledge.

The course “English at work” is taught four hours per week during a seven-week period. The idea is to use half of the time for traditional textbook-driven exercises, and half of the time for independent work as stated in the learning contract. Like Savignon (1997, 1310) puts it, “There is no such thing as an ideal textbook. Materials are but a starting point.” During the independent work the students can choose the tasks they want to complete, and they need to collect a certain number of points (100 points) during the course in order to pass the course. For students with learning disabilities the completion of the tasks and active participation in all the classes will be enough to pass the course, but for other students there will be a possibility to demonstrate the skills at the end of the course.

The first classes will be spent by interviewing the students about their future plans, discussing the professional community the students will be part of, and designing the class rules derived from the company policies used in business situations (see also 6.1). The purpose of this activity is to strengthen the feeling of professional community, motivate them by discussing the goal of the studies and to make the students feel safe in their learning environment by setting the rules. After reviewing the class rules the students will discuss the goals of this English course as described in 6.2, and the teacher will give them the syllabus and explain the idea of the learning contract.

6.3.3 Objective 1: Communication and interaction in work environments

As stated before (6.3.1), after completing the course students should be able to communicate and interact with speakers of the target language as participants of the work community and as active citizens, and they will be eligible for further education. The textbook used in the English courses provides with several exercises related to interaction in customer service and other business situations, and those texts and exercises can be used as an introduction and afterwards as an additional material to the topic.

The learning contract enables students to practice the foreign language in different creative ways: by filming a video, recording a conversation, making an interview or presentation, and teaching or chatting online. In order to complete the tasks, the students need to use business vocabulary, but the students will be able to choose the tasks they find most meaningful and comfortable for their own purposes. At the same time they should see the usefulness of the activities for their future careers and possible further studies. For example, if the students want to continue their studies at universities of applied sciences, it is useful for them to practice presentations in a foreign language. And if the students are going to work as customer service representatives, it is useful to practice basic customer service situations and see themselves on the video afterwards.

6.3.4 Objective 2: Basic customer service and business situations in foreign language

Customer service can be demonstrated by the means of the interaction as well (see above 6.3.3.) In addition, it is beneficial for the students to visit companies in order to get familiar

with the professional community and see how the experts manage customer service and other tasks. The students can also get familiar with the business concepts of different companies by visiting their websites.

6.3.5 Objective 3: Interaction in Multicultural and Multilingual Work Environments

In order to be able to work in multicultural and multilingual work environments, it is important to become aware of cultural differences and understand one's own cultural inheritance. The degree programme in business administration includes other courses dealing with cultural aspects in more detail, but it is important to raise the question of cultural identity and cultural differences in work communities. The cultural section includes tasks related to students' own culture and foreign cultures, and one task is about identity: by writing an essay about some relevant businessman or woman may help students to identify themselves as members of the same professional community.

6.3.6 Life-long learning objectives

The Finnish National Curriculum has defined 11 life-long learning objectives that have been distributed to various subjects and need to be assessed together with the content knowledge of the subjects. During the course "English at Work" the students need to demonstrate the key skills of learning and problem solving, communication and collaboration, communication and media skills, active citizenship and different cultures.

Problem solving is a key element in most of the tasks, requiring students to find their own ways of doing the tasks and solving the problems. Interviews, conversations and videos need collaboration and communication among students and also between students and the teacher, and the use of the computers and videos require media skills. By visiting companies or teaching parts of the lessons the students become active participators and actors, and not passive recipients of the knowledge. The cultural aspect was already discussed above (see 6.3.5).

7. CONCLUSION

The aim of this capstone project was to find best practices in teaching English in secondary level business colleges using the English course English at Work as a case study. Much attention was paid to the situated learning framework: the students should be encouraged to build a community among themselves and actively engage in learning tasks that reflect real world tasks. However, as described in the case English at Work, the second part of the classes still follows the traditional methods using textbooks and other teaching materials as an information source, and thus there are still elements of behaviourist and cognitive learning frameworks.

Although it is widely acknowledged that teaching with the methods reflecting behaviourist thinking (e.g. drill-patterns or filling in the blanks) often does not result in successful transfers to real-life settings, the traditional methods can still contribute to successful learning by providing input and repetitions. I am convinced that using textbooks as the only information source and restricting activities only to the tasks of the textbook is not enough in today's

foreign language classrooms, but it is the combination of both teacher-centred and student-centred learning which gives the best results for both high-performing students and students with learning disabilities. During the teacher-centred language teaching (use of textbooks and other materials under teacher's instruction) the students will get a lot language input, which they can then use creatively during the student-centred learning (working on tasks and playing games). As was seen in the chapter 3.4 (tutoring and learning by observing), observing collaboratively is also an effective way of learning.

I have not been discussing the role of language games in this project, but they will also be a part of the classroom practices, contributing to the collaboration in the classroom. I have always been in favour of language games as a way to improve one's language skills in a creative and fun way.

The next step in this project is to implement the learning contract into my own language teaching in the spring term 2010. I will use the same formula with different student groups, and after each course elicit student feedback. After collecting all feedback my aim is to further develop the idea of the learning contract and introduce it to a larger audience.

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INTERNET SOURCES

<http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/LanguageSelfAssessmentGrid/en>

<http://www.omnia.fi/Resource.phx/sivut/sivut-omnia/ammattiopisto/tutkinnot/merkonomi.htx>

APPENDIXES
RUBRICS

Appendix 1

Case ENGLISH AT WORK

Objectives of the course: After completing the second compulsory English language course, the students at Omnia vocational college will be able to communicate and interact with speakers of the target language as participants of the work community and as active citizens, and they will be eligible for further education. The students will master basic customer service and business situations using the target language, and they will know how to interact in multicultural and multilingual work environments.

DURING THE FIRST CLASSES:

1. Design class rules with the students
2. Discuss the study goals and future plans of the students
3. Discuss the goals of the English course
4. Give the syllabus and explain the idea of the **learning contract**
 - Individual learning plans (strengths, weaknesses)
 - Learning in and outside the classroom

IN ALL CLASSES:

- Pay attention to the class rules
- Strengthen the feeling of a professional community: invite visitors, discuss the culture of the professional community or visit companies
- Use textbook and other materials (newspapers, internet, TV etc.) as information sources and study material for the first part of the classes, but let the students to work in pairs or alone with their learning contracts the rest of the time
- Play games!

FINALLY:

- Ask the students to evaluate themselves and give them positive feedback on their work

(6) at the end of the course, you have the possibility to demonstrate your skills in a test.

You will, however, pass the course by actively participating in the classes and completing the required tasks.

After completing a task, return it to your teacher. Keep a record of your tasks and points here:

Task	Points	Date
------	--------	------

Reading

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| a. News Articles: Read a news or business article
Artifact: Copy of article and the main points in Finnish | 10 points |
| b. Job advertisement (see e.g. www.jobserve.com)
Artifact: Copy of the job advertisement and main points in Finnish | 10 points |
| c. Company homepages
Artifact: Copy of the homepage and 15 new vocab words | 10 points |

Writing

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 9. Company visit: visit a company and report on your experiences
Artifact: 1 page report (ask teacher for more instructions) | 15 points |
|---|-----------|

10. CV: Write your own CV 10 points
Artifact: Curriculum Vitae (ask teacher for more instructions)
11. Comic strip: Write and draw a comic strip on customer service 5-10 points
Artifact: Comic strip, minimum 6 squares, 2 sentences per square
12. Children's Book: Write and illustrate a children's book telling about some work place
from the perspective of children 10 points
Artifact: Children's book, min. 5 pages, 3 sentences per page
13. Poetry: Write a poem that is related to working or studying 5 points
Artifact: Typed poem, min. 5 lines
14. Instant message: Converse with someone via online chat 5 points
Artifact: Printed copy of min. 2 pages of conversation
15. Scrapbook: Create a scrapbook with photo captions telling about your studies
Artifact: Scrapbook, min. 5 pages, 3 sentences per page 10 points
16. Learning diary: write about your learning experiences during this course
Artifact: Learning diary, min. 3 sentences after each class 10-15 points

Speaking

6. Video: Act out and make a video on customer service 15 points
Artifact: Video on CD/flash drive, min. 10 minutes (ask teacher for more instructions)

7. Conversation: Conversation about your studies and future career prospects with target language speaker 10 points
Artifact: Audio copy or act out for the whole class, min. 10 minute conversation
8. Interview: in pairs, act out a job interview 15 points
Artifact: Audio copy or acting out a job interview (min. 10 questions) for the whole class
9. Presentation: Make a presentation on a businessman /woman 15 points
Artifact: PowerPoint presentation, min. 10 minutes
10. Teach: Teach part of a class lesson 15 points
Artifact: Teaching. Plan with teacher!

Listening

3. Movie: Watch a movie without subtitles 10 points
Artifact: 1-page summary in English
4. Conversation: Listen to a conversation either on tape or face-to-face
Artifact: Audio copy of conversation, main points in Finnish 10 points

Culture

4. CultureGram: Read about business customs and manners in different countries
Artifact: Read and reflect on new knowledge (min. 1 page) 10 points

5. Famous business person: Read and reflect 10 points

Artifact: Write an essay (min. 1 page)

6. Telling about your home country: business customs in Finland

Artifact: Read and write an essay (min 1 page) 10 points