Incorporating Issue Logs into Language Curriculum to Foster Learner Autonomy for Language Learning at Higher Levels

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LEARN Workshop, July 25-27, 2017

Loyola Columbia Graduate Center, Columbian MD

Outline of the Presentation

- What is an "issue log"
- Why using issue logs
- Challenges in implementing issue logs
- How to implement issue logs: a pyramid design
- How to implement issue logs: suggested procedures and teacher modeling
- Sample log templates
- A list of sample issues/topics

Defining the "Issue Log"

 "An issue is a topic that people are particularly interested in at the present time. A log is a record of information gathered over several weeks. Each learner has to choose their own issue to gather information about." (Nation, 2013: 28)

 In the "issue log" activity, students choose an issue or topic they are interested in and gather information on their own for a sustainable period of time. Periodically they report to the class on what they have learned about the topic.

Suggested Means of Info-gathering for an Issue Log

ᘓ By reading books, online/print articles and reports

ᘓ by interviewing and talking to people

ᘓ By listening to news broadcasts and audios

ᘓ By watching online video clips (on YouTube and VOA, etc.)

Rationale: the Cognitive Aspect

ଔ Applying Nation's idea of "four strands" to language learning, esp., the idea of linking and integrating skills (2013)

  ଔ Meaning-focused input
  ଔ Meaning-focused output
  ଔ Language-focused study
  ଔ Fluency development

ଔ Providing good conditions for language learning such as repetitions, skills integration and a strong focus on meaning

Rationale: the Cognitive Aspect (cont.)

ↄઈ Reducing the vocabulary load of the topic-related listening and reading input (by at least 50%) as compared with focusing on a variety of topics

ↄઈ Building up background knowledge of the topic and making it easier for learners to deal with the input material and to gain large quantities of comprehensible input

(Nation: 2013)

Rationale: the Metacognitive and Affective Aspects

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ᘒ Building learner autonomy
- ᘒ Choose one's own topic
- ᘒ Set personal learning goals
- ᘒ Select means for data collection
- ᘒ Reflect on and monitor one's learning
- ᘒ Evaluate its effectiveness

ᘒ Promoting learners' motivation and engagement

Challenges

 લ How to hold learners accountable for what is expected of them throughout the process?

 લ How to create prime conditions to motivate and engage learners?

 લ Is assessment of learners' work necessary? If yes, how?

 લ How to balance learner's autonomy and instructor's guidance ?

 લ What if a student chooses a very specialized topic?

 લ If a sharing session is held in class, how to deal with unfamiliar vocabulary from learners working on different issues/topics?
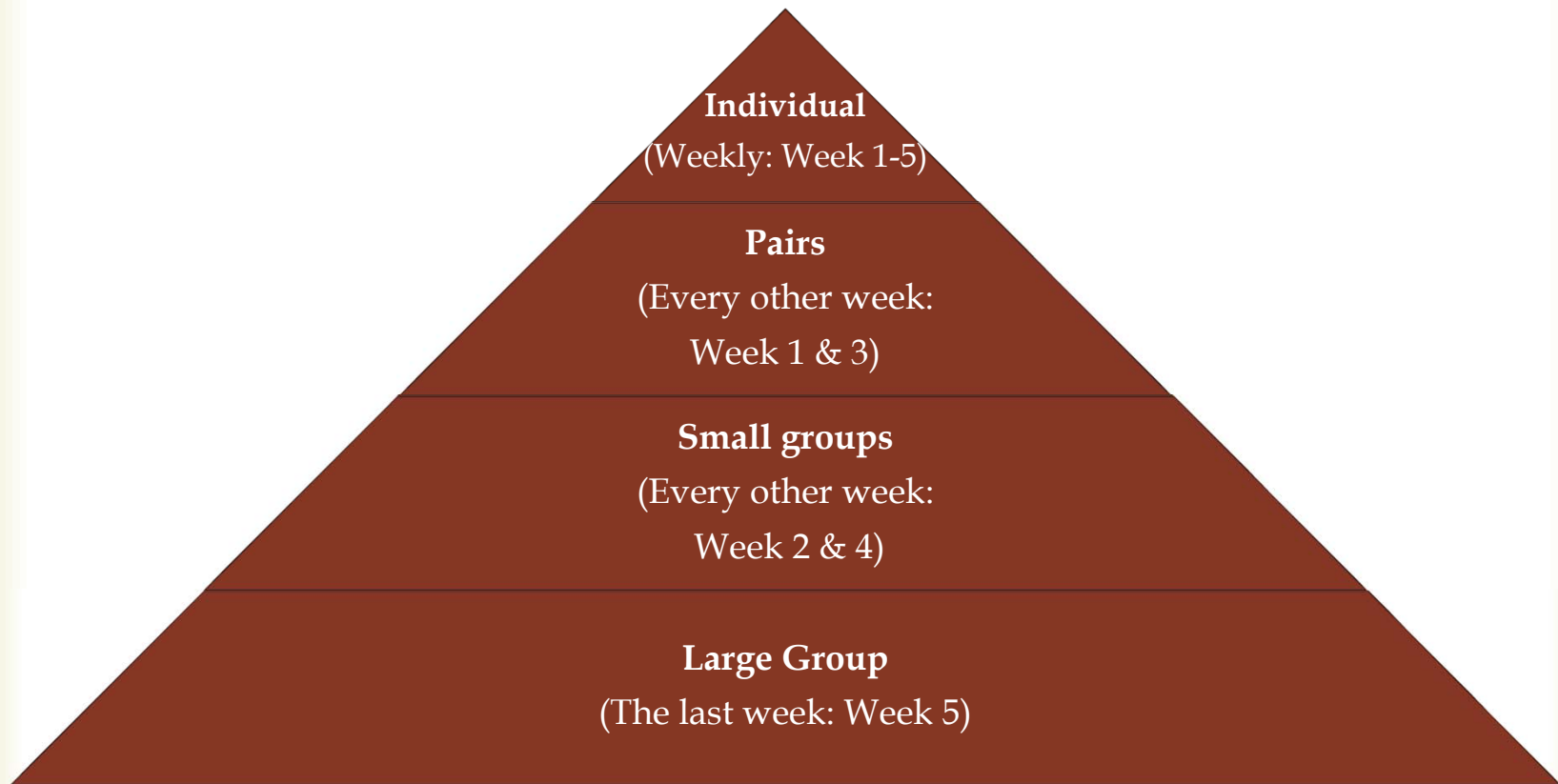
Suggestions for Dealing with the Challenges

- Make your expectations clear by providing timelines, sample work, log templates and rubrics.

- Encourage learners to choose an issue that they are interested in and can *easily* gather information about via different channels (Consider providing students with a list of issues for them to choose from)

- Create an autonomous learning environment to ensure that students take responsibility for their own learning.

- Provide students opportunities to work collaboratively for peer support and learning.

- Try using teacher modeling to demonstrate what is expected of the students.

- Have students assemble a portfolio that document the progress of their issue log project and their reflection of the learning process.

A Pyramid Design for an Issue Log

The "pyramid procedure" provides multiple opportunities and contexts for students to work on their reports. In all contexts the teacher and the learner only use the target language.

Individual
(Weekly: Week 1-5)

Pairs
(Every other week:
Week 1 & 3)

Small groups
(Every other week:
Week 2 & 4)

Large Group
(The last week: Week 5)

Step-by Step Procedures (1 of 4)

Individual Work (Week 1-5)

Students gather relevant info on their chosen topic and prepare a report on their own (both written and oral). The classroom teacher may provide help if needed.

Suggestions:

1) In terms of oral reports, start shorter (5-6 minutes) and gradually expand into longer ones (12 minute for the final project sharing).

2) The teacher should conduct reflective activities with students in the *target language* for them to examine their learning process

Sharing in a Pair (at the end of weeks 1 & 3)

Students work in pairs to present to each other on what they have learnt on their own topic, followed by questions from the partner.

Suggestions:

1) Each student pair stays the same for the 5-week cycle

2) For each report, each student prepares a handout for each other (see a sample on the next slide)

A Sample Issue Log Table

(to be shared with pair/group partners)

Topic: Economy--Rising Gas Price (Week 1)				
Theme	**Source/ Means**	**New Word**	**Parts of Speech**	**Meaning/Example Usage**
Adjusting to increasing gas price	Washington Post/ Reading	Skyrocket	Verb	-(of price) Increase steeply and rapidly 1) the <u>skyrocketing</u> fuel price 2) The gas price <u>skyrocketed</u> across the country in the recent months.
		Recession	Noun	-Declining, falling 1) In 2008 we witnessed a worldwide economic <u>recession</u>.
		Offset	Verb	-counteract (something) by having an opposing force or effect 1) The company had to lay off some staff to <u>offset</u> the increase in fuel costs.
		Relief	Noun	-Help, aid 1) an energy <u>relief</u> plan 2) The state government provided <u>relief</u> to the flood victims.
Summary: The skyrocketing fuel price has pushed the weak economy into recession. To offset the fuel price, some people have bought hybrid or smaller cars. One state has used an energy relief plan by not raising tax on gas.				

Sharing in a Group (at the end of weeks 2 & 4):

Students present to the small group (of 4) on their own topic, and answer questions from the group mates.

Suggestions:

1) Two original pairs are grouped into a group of 4
2) The current report should include some info from the previous ones and add some new info. Each student prepares a handout to be shared.

Step-by Step Procedures (4 of 4)

Final Project Sharing (at the end of week 5)

Students present to the large group on what they have learnt about the topic, and answer questions from the audience (students and teachers). Teachers collect students' portfolio for assessment.

Suggestions:

Students should have freedom to choose a format of their preference for the presentation (PPT, poster, and so on.)

Teacher Modeling

The classroom instructor demonstrates what is expected of the students by choosing a topic to work on (preferably one related to language teaching), and report to the class periodically over a period of time (like a week).

Suggestions:

The instructor should--
1) conduct the cycle of tasks before students start theirs
2) provide written handouts for the issue log as expected of the students.

A Sample List of Issues/Topics

1) Copyright on the internet
2) The future of newspapers
3) U.S. Government debt
4) The rise of China
5) The effects of cell phones
6) Healthcare reforms in the U.S.
7) Gender inequality in the workplace
8) Immigration reforms in the U.S
9) Media influence on American society
10) Internet privacy
11) Food shortage/world hunger
12) Bullying in American schools
13) Reducing road accidents
14) Rising gas price

15) War on Terrorism
16) Green cars are not green
17) Smoking and health
18) Global climate change
19) The impact of China's one- child policy
20) Fast food chains and the obesity problem
21) The impact of violent video games
22) Identity theft
23) Home schooling
24) Caring for old people
25) **Using animals in medical research**
26) Issues with the U.S. election process
27) My post-city: X
28) Marriage customs in X country

KWLE Chart: A Learner Log Template

Issue/Topic:			
What I know	What I want to know	What I have learned	Evidence that shows how I learned it

Faye Rollings-Carter http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/linguafolio/5795

Reference

1. Paul Nation (1996) *"The Four Strands of a Language Course"*. TESOL in Context Volume 6 No 1. June 1996

2. Moon, J. (2003). Learning Journals and Logs, Reflective Diaries. Good Practice in Teaching and Learning, Dublin: University College Dublin.

3. Paul Nation (2013) *"What Should Every EFL Teacher Know?"*. Compass Publishing.

4. John Medina (2014) *"Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School"*. 2nd Ed., Pear Press.

5. Faye Rollings-Carter (2013) *"Reflective learning and teaching in an autonomous environment"* in *"LinguaFolia Training Modules"*. http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/linguafolio/3.0

Thank you!

For more discussion and implementation of the activity, please contact WangL2@state.gov