



Maximizing Motivation: Learning English Through Electives

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Outline

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 - Background of MAIA
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Background: Motivation & choice

Motivation

- Key role in language learning
- Can outweigh aptitude in effect on learning¹
- Enhanced by sense of agency²

Choice

- Many choices in classes at university
- Many pre-college international students not given academic choices
- Should prepare international students for making academic choices



Electives

- Students given a choice
- Stick to rigorous accredited academic program
- Focus area chosen by teacher
- Not as straightforward as R/W/L/S classes
- Expands students' background knowledge of non-ESL subjects

Background: MAIA

Massachusetts International Academy Marlborough, MA



- Ten-month university prep program for international students; five 8-week sessions
- ~200 students and 14 teachers
- Accredited by CEA
- Classes: R/W/LS, 6 levels (CEFR A1-C1), curriculum standardized within and across classes and levels
- Level progression based on “mastery” (75% or better) on ALL of the following:
 - SLOs
 - Formatives/summatives
 - Final exams



Elective Structure: Creation & placement

Two weeks before: Elective topic brainstorming meeting with all faculty (fill in chart on right)

One week before: Elective syllabus and intro Powerpoint slides due

Three days before: Send out intro slides to students who passed elective last session

Two days before: Place all students into classes and inform teachers of any minor changes to elective needs

| MAIA Level | Level 1/2 | Level 3 | Level 4 | Level 5 | Level 6 |
|------------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| predicted # Ss | 11 | 26 | 41 | 54 | 41 |
| predicted # sect | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |



Classes start!



Elective Structure: Placement

Introduction Slides: TOEFL

I WANT YOU TO PASS THE TOEFL
Bo Zhang

TOEFL
Level 4, 5, 6

What you will learn...

Reading:

- Reading to find information
- Basic comprehension
- Reading to learn
- Academic vocabulary & grammar

Listening:

- Listening for basic comprehension
- Listening for pragmatic understanding
- Connecting and synthesizing information
- Academic vocabulary & grammar

Speaking:

- In-Classroom speaking skills
- Outside of classroom speaking skills
- Academic vocabulary & grammar

Writing:

- Integrated writing
- Independent writing
- Academic writing
- Academic vocabulary and grammar

TOEFL Skills 8 Strategies

Class Activities

- Individual/group work
- Class Discussions and Presentations
- Games
- Interactive Activities



Elective Structure: Placement

Introduction Slides:
Travelling in America



What you will learn

- The different regions (parts) of America and what makes them unique
- What places are good to visit and when they are good to visit
- How to plan a vacation in America
- How to plan a road trip
- Other areas of travel that interest you
- How to use mobile travel apps



Projects in this class

- Create a travel guide for all students at MAIA
- Create an advertisement for a city, state, town, or other area you are interested in

[Example Advertisement: Visit California](#)

- Interview MAIA staff and faculty about their home town to learn about parts of America
- Create your own trip
- Use Yelp & TripAdvisor to review your trip



Elective Structure: Level progression



This year, we tried one way:

- Level determined by average of other three classes: R/W/LS
 - Four skills in electives should be associated with one of the other classes
 - Some students felt like the elective grades “didn’t count”
- Students could choose elective if they passed previous session elective
 - Being able to choose elective wasn’t enough motivation for some students
 - Not enough students were able to choose

Next year, we will try:

- Students move up in elective independently of other class levels, same way as other classes ($\geq 75\%$ SLO, $\geq 75\%$ class grade, $\geq 75\%$ final exam)
- All students can choose elective

(Note: No placement test for electives, so still must place initially using average of other class levels)



Elective Structure: SLOs

- SLOs from each skill R/W/L/S
 - Selected SLOs from other MAIA courses
 - E.g.: Level 2:
- E.g.: Level 6:

| Listening | |
|----------------------|---|
| Comprehension | Can understand speech that is slowly and carefully articulated. |
| Speaking | |
| Presentation | Can give a simple description or presentation as a short series of simple phrases and sentences linked into a list. |
| Interaction | Can ask and answer short questions and carry on a short conversation. |
| Writing | |
| Development | Can use supporting ideas in a paragraph with basic details. |
| Vocabulary | Can describe routine, familiar situations and topics using sufficient vocabulary (some high frequency words) with correct form and meaning. |
| Mechanics | Can spell basic words accurately. Can use basic punctuation and capitalization accurately. |
| Reading | |
| Comprehension | Can understand short texts. |

| Listening | |
|----------------------|---|
| Comprehension | Can understand information in longer formats, especially if the accent is unfamiliar. |
| Speaking | |
| Presentation | Can give logical, clear, and detailed descriptions or presentations on complex subjects developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion including personal opinions. |
| Interaction | Can initiate and lead discussions and explain and defend their opinion using evidence. |
| Writing | |
| Development | Can develop ideas to explain, analyze, synthesize, construct and expand upon personal observations and ideas. |
| Vocabulary | Can convey complex ideas, through accurate and appropriate use of a range of vocabulary and idiomatic phrasing with correct form and meaning. |
| Mechanics | Can accurately format and use correct punctuation consistently. Can spell a wide range of vocabulary accurately except for minor errors. |
| Reading | |
| Comprehension | Can understand in detail lengthy, complex texts. |



Elective Structure: Assessments

- Same **number** of formative/summative assessments
 - Make sure all students at each level complete comparable tasks → Grades are comparable within and across levels → Level progression stays consistent
 - E.g.: All electives must have 1 multi-draft writing and 2 timed writings graded by standardized level-appropriate rubric
- Flexibility in **type** of assessment
 - Not all types of assessments are appropriate for every elective
 - E.g.: The multi-draft writing for Personal Blogging might be an edited blog post (with peer review)



Elective Ideas

Personal Blogging

Creative Writing

Detective Fiction

Sports

Photography

Food and Culture

American Culture Through Film

Influential People in History

Psychology

Traveling in America

Idioms

Fairy Tales

How to Succeed in the Business World

Global Issues

TOEFL Prep



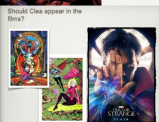
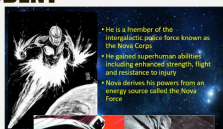
Example 1: Superheroes (level 1/2)

GOALS

- Learn about and discuss the popular new superhero movies (Marvel, X-Men, DC)
- Research and read the comics that influenced them
- Connect themes to the broader world



SAMPLES FROM STUDENT PRESENTATIONS



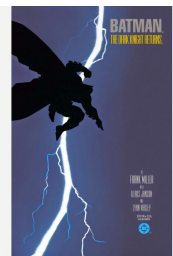
READING

- Archetypes: Learn about the Hero's Journey and the Marvel Formula
- Research: Read comics connected to your research topics
- Social Issues: Read about identity politics and how they play out in comics



WRITING

- Analysis: Compare superheroes to the Hero's Journey
- Creative: Write your own superhero and backstory
- Compare/contrast: Who is stronger?



PRESENTATIONS

- Adaptations: Research the differences between the film and the comics
- Expectations: Present on an upcoming film character





Example 2: Literary Translation (level 5/6)

Students will...

- ✓ Translate Chinese poetry into English
- ✓ Critique Chinese to English translations already published in America
- ✓ Read and discuss new theories/ideas about literary translation
- ✓ Translate at least one poem from the English language to Chinese
- ✓ Submit English translations for publication in America

This class will help students to...

- ✓ Learn new vocabulary
- ✓ Improve usage of English grammar structure
- ✓ Improve writing style
- ✓ Develop confidence in command of the English language
- ✓ Develop new appreciation about languages and literature

Assignments:

- ❖ Translations
- ❖ Timed Writing
- ❖ Presentations
- ❖ Multi-draft essay

[SPARKS - A Book by MAIA Students](#)



Implementing Electives: Concerns

- Can be time-consuming
 - Creating all curriculum and materials from scratch
 - Coordinating creation and placement
- Balancing student choice and teacher effort
 - If offering same material, level must change
- Maybe not enough interest from students in one level
 - Offer multi-level electives
- Some topics naturally lend themselves to concentrating on just one or two skills
 - Focus one session on only L/S skills and next session on only R/W skills



Implementing Electives: Public & private

Both can do it!

Private: Most already offer some electives (TOEFL, Business English, etc.)

Public: Time to fill during last few weeks of school year, after standardized tests finish



Feedback: Comments from teachers

Electives are great. I believe if the class is well organized and lots of activities planned out in advance, the motivation of the students is and remains high. I've had no problems with my electives all year.

I enjoy teaching a class that I can choose the topic for. However, it can be a challenge finding the right materials, especially when the levels change.

Elective class is definitely a good chance for students to learn something new and develop their interests. I think the major problem with electives is students' motivation.

Based on my experience teaching two elective classes, students do not take their electives seriously compared with LS/ R/ W classes. This can be seen through their homework, their preparation for class, as well as their attendance. However, things work better when I attempted to bring in some games and interactive activities.

If the course content is well-chosen, student engagement is higher.

More like a content-based university class

Variety of activities: not just all writing all the time or anything like that

Personally rewarding for me to be planning stuff I'm already passionate about.

The key for this class was keeping it project-based.



Feedback: Comments from students

show us more daily knowledge not to academic

because i can touch with more American culture in this class

I think Class participation is really good.

I learn many knowledge about American history and culture the movie help me to understand.

Acquiring about a lot sport content and information that it inspire me to learn more. I did not know any things about sports before my teacher told me and learnt lots of things about different sports and That made me focus on this a lot.

After I understand the rules of American football and baseball, I note the sports news that I didn't note before. I become interested in them.

Superhero class is the most interesting class in this season, cause other class is not so interesting than Superheros.=.

The class is very funny, so I spend more time to learn those superhero after school.

before, I can not take a photo which can satisfied with myself, now, I can take some awesome picture.



Thanks!

References:

¹ Gardner, R. C., & Lambert, W. E. (1972). *Attitudes and motivation in second-language learning*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

² Dörnyei, Z. (1998). Motivation in second and foreign language learning. *Language teaching*, 31(03), 117-135.

Questions?

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