

Engaging Students through Social Research in the College IEP Classroom

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Outline

- Background
- Theoretical Grounding
- Course Components
- Discussion

Background

- Intensive English Program at a small, private, health sciences, teaching-focused university in Boston
- Students take ESL courses full time before beginning their academic programs in the health sciences



Background

- Social Research course is a 3 credit hour “special topics course”
- Low-advanced level
- Mix of undergraduate and graduate students
- Mostly from Saudi Arabia
- 5-15 students per class



Theoretical Grounding

- Critical pedagogy
- Sustained content-based instruction

Critical Pedagogy

- Language learning = An *investment* of learner identities (Norton-Peirce, 1995)
- Teachers must strive to engage learner identities in a way that is appropriate for context

Critical Pedagogy

- Norton-Peirce (1995) proposes a set of objectives for what she calls “Classroom-Based Social Research,” which is “collaborative research that is carried out by language learners in their local communities with the active guidance and support of the language teacher. In many ways, language learners become ethnographers in their local communities” (p. 26).



Sustained Content-Based Instruction

“Students practice English language skills--reading, writing, speaking, listening, and grammatical forms--in the process of studying one subject area, usually for a semester” (Pally, 2000, p. vii).



Course Components

- Course description
- Routine activities
- Units (themes and tasks)

Course Description

Social Research for the Health Sciences:

This course provides an introduction to experimental methods and designs used in social research for the health sciences. Students will design their own pilot studies and collect data through methods such as interviews, surveys, and observation. Analyzing their data, students will write papers and give presentations to report their findings.



Routine Activities

- Listening to lectures about methods and taking notes
- Quizzes about methods
- Online discussions



Units

- Unit 1: Interviews
- Unit 2: Surveys
- Unit 3: Observational Studies
- Unit 4: Research Proposal

Unit 1: Interviews

Themes:

- Interview methods
 - Open-ended vs. closed-ended questions
 - Ethics and confidentiality

Unit 1: Interviews

Tasks:

- Analyze a videoed research interview
- Review question writing grammar and write interview questions
- Practice interviews and peer review with classmates
- Conduct a research interview with a student outside the English Language Academy
- Transcribe the recording of the research interview
- Write an interview analysis paper, including paraphrases and quotations from the interview



Unit 2: Surveys

Themes:

- Survey methods
 - Preventing bias in survey questions
 - Analyzing survey data

Unit 2: Surveys

Tasks:

- Analyze sample survey questions for flaws
- Create and deliver an online survey to former ELA students
- Analyze survey data
- Create graphs using Excel to present survey data
- Orally present to the class about survey findings



Unit 3: Observational Studies

Themes:

- Observational research methods
 - Objective vs. subjective observations
 - Qualitative vs. quantitative data
 - Covert vs. overt observations

Unit 3: Observational Studies

Tasks:

- Conduct a pilot observational study on door holding behaviors on campus
- Analyze the results of the pilot study
- Create a proposal for an observational study related to health issues on campus (partner project)
- Conduct the observational study on campus, taking observation notes
- Analyze the results of the on-campus observations
- Present with a partner to the class about the findings of the study



Unit 4: Research Proposal

Themes:

- Putting all methods together to create a proposal for a social research project relating to the health sciences
 - Triangulation
 - Research proposal and approval processes

Unit 4: Research Proposal

Tasks:

- With a group, identify a research topic and population
- With a group, write a research proposal that clearly states all of the research methods used and gives the rationale, detailed plan, and limitations for each method
- Deliver a panel presentation to the class about the research proposal



Discussion

- Benefits
- Challenges
- Going forward

Benefits

- Improved academic speaking and writing skills
- Improved analytical abilities
- Students interact in English with students outside the IEP with increased confidence
- Realistic context for working on language structures (grammar)
- Professionalism in collaboration with classmates
- Increased learner engagement because they can easily see the applicability to their future studies/careers
- Students take on a professional “researcher” role and hold themselves to high standards
- Improved computer skills (document formatting, PowerPoint, Excel)



Challenges

- Students must adapt to the academic rigor and homework load of a college course
- Adjustment to group work can be hard, especially when grades are at stake
- Maintaining the balance between language and content focus



Going Forward

- Include even more opportunities for linguistic interaction with students outside the IEP
- Possible collaboration with courses outside the IEP (i.e. Intro to Public Health)
- Incorporate more language-focused “mini-lessons” into the course

References

- Norton-Peirce, B. (1995). Social identity, investment, and language learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(i), 9-31.
- Pally, M. (2000). *Sustained Content Teaching in Academic ESL/EFL*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston & New York.

