

# INNOVATIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING

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## Abstract

Traditional teachings are often seen as practices that lead students to view language learning as a set of theories with less or no relevance to the real world. Teachers in traditional classrooms tend to pose children with many grammatical rules. As a result, children will only be able to memorize or master the rules of the target language, while they are less capable of applying what they learn in school to their daily lives. Therefore, educators now find it necessary to rethink how we teach language. This article discusses some innovative language teaching methods to help learners learn the target language as a holistic and contextual part.

Keywords: *innovative, language learning*

## PENDAHULUAN

Traditional education practices starting from kindergarten through college, tend to produce students who are often disenchanted and bored with their education. They are faced with a vast amount of information to memorize, much of which seems irrelevant to the world as it exists outside of school. Students often forget much of what they learned, and that which they remember cannot often be applied to the problems and tasks they later face in the real world. Traditional classrooms also do not prepare students to work with others in collaborative team situations. The result is students tend to view learning a language as a set of theory with little relevance to the real world. Education is reduced to acquiring a diploma (merely another commodity to be purchased in the marketplace), and the final grade becomes the overriding concern (rather than learning). Moreover, even though students have learned the target language for years, they are still unable to speak the target language for their daily communication.

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Therefore, influenced by the new 20<sup>th</sup> –century scientific worldview that finds reality in relationships, that sees in the whole something that transcends its parts; educators now find it necessary to rethink how we teach. Today’s teaching, learners should no longer be considered as passive learners. Language learners should be encouraged to effectively use the target language particularly in emerging meaning from the relationship between content and context. Contextual Teaching and Learning or CTL and Communicative Language Teaching or CLT, then come into existence. CTL is considered as an instructional system which is based on the premise that meaning emerges from the relationship between content and its context. Context gives meaning to content. The broader the contexts within which students are able to make connections, the more meaning content will hold for them. Furthermore, CLT shows how, through practice and experience in an increasingly wide range of communicative context and events, learners gradually expand their communicative competence, consisting of *grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociocultural competence, and strategic competence.*

## **PEMBAHASAN**

### **Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL)**

#### Defining CTL

Majority of students in our schools are unable to make connections between what they are learning and how that knowledge will be used. This is because the way they process information and their motivation for learning are not touched by the traditional methods of classroom teaching. The students have a difficult time understanding academic concepts as they are commonly taught (that is, using an abstract, lecture method), but they desperately need to understand the concepts as they relate to the workplace and to the larger society in which they will live and work. Traditionally, students have been expected to make these connections on their own, outside the classroom. According to contextual learning theory, learning occurs only when students (learners) process new information or knowledge in such a way that it makes sense to them in their own frames of reference (their own inner worlds of memory, experience, and response). This

approach to learning and teaching assumes that the mind naturally seeks meaning in context, in relation to the person's current environment by searching for relationships that make sense and appear useful. Building upon this understanding, context learning theory focuses on the multiple aspects of any learning environment, whether a classroom, a laboratory, a computer lab, a worksite, or a wheat field. It encourages educators to choose and/or design learning environments that incorporate as many different forms of experience as possible - social, cultural, physical, and psychological-in working toward the desired learning outcomes. In such an environment, students discover meaningful relationships between abstract ideas and practical applications in the context of the real world; concepts are internalized through the process of discovering, reinforcing, and relating.

In line to the above explanation, Johnson (2002: 24) defines CTL as a holistic system which consists of interrelated parts that, when interwoven, produce an effect that exceeds what any single part could achieve. Just as the violin, cello, clarinet, and other instruments in an orchestra produce distinctive sounds that together generate music, so CTL's separate parts involve distinctive processes that, when used together, enable students to make connections that generate meaning. Each of these distinct elements of the CTL system contributes to helping students make sense of schoolwork. Taken together, they form a system that makes it possible for students to see meaning in, and retain, academic material. CTL engages students in significant activities that help them connect academic studies to their context in real-life situations. By making these connections, students see meaning in schoolwork. When students formulate projects or identify interesting problems, when they make choices and accept responsibility, search out information and reach conclusions, when they actively choose, order, organize, touch, plan, investigate, questions and make decisions to reach objectives, they connect academic content to the context of life's situations. A great part of teacher's job, then, is to provide context. The more students are able to connect their academic lesson to this context, the more meaning they will derive from these lessons. To discover meaning in knowledge and skills leads to mastery of knowledge and skills.

#### The CTL System: Eight Components

According to Johnson (2002), the CTL encompasses the following eight components:

1. Making meaningful connections
2. Doing significant works
3. Self-regulated learning
4. Collaborating
5. Critical and creative thinking
6. Nurturing the individual
7. Reaching high standards
8. Using authentic assessment

CTL, the distinctive educational approach made up of these parts, does more than guide students to join academic subjects with the context of their own circumstances. It also engages students to explore the meaning of “context” itself. It encourages them to consider that human beings alone have the capacity, and the responsibility to influence and shape an array of context ranging from the family, classroom, club, workplace, community and neighborhood to the ecosystem.

#### CTL strategies

CTL helps us relate subject matter content to real world situations and motivate students to make connections between knowledge and its applications to their lives as family members, citizens, and workers and engage in the hard work that learning requires. CTL strategies consist of:

- a. **Problem-based.** CTL can begin with a simulated or real problem. Students use critical thinking skills and a systemic approach to inquiry to address the problem or issue. Students may also draw upon multiple content areas to solve these problems. Worthwhile problems that are relevant to students’

families, school experiences, workplaces, and communities hold greater personal meaning for students.

- b. **Using multiple contexts.** Theories of situated cognition suggest that knowledge can not be separated from the physical and social context in which it develops. How and where a person acquires and creates knowledge is therefore very important. CTL experiences are enriched when students learn skills in multiple contexts (i.e. school, community, workplace, family).
- c. **Drawing upon student diversity.** On the whole, our student population is becoming more diverse, and with increased diversity comes differences in values, social mores, and perspectives. These differences can be the impetus for learning and can add complexity to the CTL experience. Team collaboration and group learning activities respect students' diverse histories, broaden perspectives, and build inter-personal skills.
- d. **Supporting self-regulated learning.** Ultimately, students must become lifelong learners. Lifelong learners are able to seek out, analyze, and use information with little to no supervision. To do so, students must become more aware how they process information, employ problem-solving strategies, and use background knowledge. CTL experiences should allow for trial and error; provide time and structure for reflection; and provide adequate support to assist students to move from dependent to independent learning.
- e. **Using interdependent learning groups.** Students will be influenced by and will contribute to the knowledge and beliefs of others. Learning groups, or learning communities, are established in workplaces and schools in an effort to share knowledge, focus on goals, and allow all to teach and learn from each other. When learning communities are established in schools, educators act as coaches, facilitators, and mentors.
- f. **Employing authentic assessment.** CTL is intended to build knowledge and skills in meaningful ways by engaging students in real life, or "authentic" contexts. Assessment of learning should align with the methods and purposes of instruction. Authentic assessments show (among other things) that learning has occurred; are blended into the teaching/ learning process;

and provide students with opportunities and direction for improvement. Authentic assessment is used to monitor student progress and inform teaching practices. Many of these strategies are used in classrooms today. Activities such as team teaching, cooperative learning, integrated learning, work-based learning, service learning, problem-based learning, and others support CTL and are already occurring in many classrooms and schools. Many educators routinely use these activities to encourage inquiry, creative problem solving, and use of higher order thinking skills. These educators see these teaching / learning processes as methods to help all students meet state and local standards.

For CTL to be effective, all strategies must be presented in the teaching / learning experience. Implementation of CTL may not require drastic changes in practice for all educators. It may require enhancement of practice in one characteristic and not another. Continual use and reflection on CTL processes broadens and deepens educators' knowledge and ability to facilitate learning.

#### 2.1.4 The CTL Principles

Johnson (2002) stated that CTL applies three following principles:

##### 1. CTL reflects the principle of interdependence

Interdependence is manifest, for instance, when students collaborate to solve problems, and when teachers confer with colleagues. It is apparent when different subjects are linked, and when partnership join schools with businesses and community.

##### 2. CTL reflects the principle of differentiation.

Differentiation is evident when CTL challenges students to respect one another's uniqueness, to respect differences, to be creative, to collaborate, to generate new and different ideas and results, and to realize that diversity is a sign of robustness and strength.

##### 3. CTL reflects the principle of self-organization.

Self-organization is apparent when students explore and discover their own distinctive abilities and interests, benefit from the feedback authentic assessment provides, review their own efforts in the light of clear objectives and specific standards, and participate in student-centered activities that make their heart sing.

### The CTL Components

CTL was designed to help all children learn demanding academic material. There are numbers components of CTL in order to teach children (Johnson, 2007). Those are:

1. Students will become self-regulated, active learners who develop individual interests, working alone or in groups. They will learn by doing.
2. Students will make connections between school and such real-life contexts as businesses and community agencies.
3. The students will perform significant work that is work which has a purpose, matters to others, involves making choices and results in a product, tangible or intangible.
4. The students will use creative and critical, higher order thinking: analyze, synthesize, problem solve, make decisions, use logic and evidence.
5. The students will collaborate which means that CTL helps students to work effectively in group; helps them understand how they affect others; and helps them communicate with others.
6. CTL nurtures the individual in which students will know, pay attention to, and hold high expectations for each child. CTL also motivates and encourages each student. Students cannot succeed without adult support, thus, students need to respect peers and adults.

7. The students will be able to recognize and reach high standards: CTL helps students to identify the demanding objectives and motivates students to attain them and show them the way to achieve the excellence.

### Elements of CTL

There are seven elements in CTL such as:

- a. Inquiry

Inquiry refers to a process which constructs knowledge or concept starting from the process of observing, questioning, investigating, analyzing, and then raising a concept.

- b. Questioning

Questioning is done by both the teacher and the learners. The teacher's questions are used to direct, guide and evaluate the student's way of thinking. Meanwhile, students' questions reflect their curiosity.

- c. Constructivism

Constructivism encourages students to arrange and construct meaning upon the new experience based on the certain knowledge.

- d. Learning Community

Learning community or a group of community in which learners can share their experience and ideas.

- e. Authentic Assessment

Alternative assessment encourages students to perform their authentic ability.

- f. Modeling

An activity which demonstrates certain behavior, thus, the students can imitate and learn or do something based on the model given.



#### g. Reflection

Reflecting or giving response towards certain event, activity and experience which aims at identifying things known and unknown in order to be able to take a better follow-up.

### **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**

#### Defining CLT

Richards and Rodgers (1986) in Hadley (1993) describe CLT as an *approach* rather than a method, since it is defined in rather broad terms and represents a philosophy of teaching that is based on communicative language use. CLT has developed from the writing of British applied linguists, such as Wilkins, Widdowson, Brumfit, Candlin, and others, as well as American educators, such as Savignon (1983), all of whom emphasize notional-functional concepts and communicative competence, rather than grammatical structures, as central to language teaching. Although the movement first began with reconceptualization of the teaching syllabus in notional-functional terms, CLT has broadened to encompass a wide range of principles for developing communicative competence.

#### Major Characteristics of CLT

Richards and Rodgers (1986) citing Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) in Hadley (1993), outline 22 major distinctive features of this approach. Some of these principles are:

1. Meaning is primary importance in CLT, and contextualization is a basic principle.
2. Attempts by learners to communicate with the language are encouraged from the beginning of instruction. The new language system will be learned best by

struggling to communicate one's own meaning and by negotiation of meaning through interaction with others.

3. Sequencing of materials is determined by the content, function, and/or meaning that will maintain students' interest.
4. Judicious use of the native language is acceptable where feasible and translation may be used when students find it beneficial or necessary.
5. Activities and strategies for learning are varied according to learner's preferences and needs.
6. Communicative competence, with an emphasis on fluency and acceptable language use, is the goal of instruction. "Accuracy is judged not in the abstract, but in context".

Richards and Rodgers state that although CLT does not claim a particular theory of language learning as its basis, there are several theoretical premises that can be deduced from a consideration of the approach:

1. *The communication principle*: Activities that involve communication promote language learning.
2. *The task principle*: Activities that involve the completion of real-world tasks promote learning.
3. *The meaningfulness principle*: learners must be engaged in meaningful and authentic language use for learning to take place.

#### Basic Features of CLT

David Nunan (1991:279) lists five basic characteristics of CLT:

- (1) An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language
- (2) The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.

- (3) The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on the language but also on the learning process itself.
- (4) An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
- (5) An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom.

#### The Roles of the Learner and teacher

The emphasis of CLT on the processes of communication, rather than mastery of language forms, leads to different roles for learners from those found in more traditional second language classrooms. Breen and Candlin (1980) describe the learner's role with CLT is as negotiator-between the self, the learning processes and the object of learning-emerges from and interacts with the role of joint negotiator within the group and within the classroom procedures and activities which the group undertakes. The implication for the learners is that they should contribute as much as they gain, and thereby learn in an interdependent way.

Meanwhile, the teacher has two main roles: the first role is to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and texts. Teacher as facilitator is allowing students to be in charge of their own learning. The teacher still sets up exercises and gives direction to the class, but the students do much more speaking than in a traditional classroom. This responsibility to participate can often lead to an increased sense of confidence in using the language. The second role is to act as independent participant within the learning-teaching group. The third role for the teacher is that of researcher and learner, with much to contribute in terms of appropriate knowledge and abilities, actual and observed experience of the nature of learning and organizational capacities (Breen & Candlin, 1980).

#### **Strategies for applying CTL and CLT in the classroom**

There are many effective ways to connect teaching and learning with the context of a student's daily circumstances as well as encouraging them to speak using the target language effectively.

### The Application of CTL in the classroom

#### 1. Constructivism

In daily teaching and learning process, we have applied this philosophy-when we design our teaching in the form of making students doing and practicing something, having them doing physical exercise, composing paragraphs, demonstrating, creating ideas, etc.

#### 2. Inquiry

Students are asked to state the problems, observe, read references, collect as many data as possible and then analyze and present the result in the form of reports or pictures, etc. Students make descriptive paragraphs by their own. They present their observation or experiment to the readers, classmates, teacher or other audience. Presenting to others aims at achieving feedback or comment to gain new idea.

#### 3. Questioning

Questioning has been applied in almost all teaching activities which can be conducted among the students, between teacher and students, between students and others invited into the classroom, etc. Questioning can also be done during the discussion section, group work, during observation time or when the students face difficulties or problems.

#### 4. Learning Community

The application can be in the form of small group activities, large group activities, or it can be done by inviting an expert (s) into the classroom

#### 5. Modeling

Teacher is not the only one model. The student who won the English speech contest can be also a model to demonstrate her ability. Outside the classroom, native speakers (i.e. singer, actor or actress) may also be the models besides the English using printed media

## 6. Reflection

Reflection can be done by the students themselves or given by the teacher. For example: a direct statement of what they get at the moment, “alright, I know now that the expression of ‘we pay alone’ is wrong. The right one is ‘we go halves’”. Or maybe, the teacher can give note or journal on students’ worksheet telling about what the students have learned at that moment.

## 7. Authentic Assessment

Learning improvement is assessed from the process. Teacher is not the only assessor, but other students can be also the assessor. Assessment is conducted during and after the process of teaching and learning. The students are assessed based upon their knowledge and skills, through project and its report, homework, quiz, presentation or students’ performance, research journal, and the like. The authentic assessment can act as feedback towards students’ learning

### CLT: Theory, Practice, and Personal experience

This article was taken from *Mandiri* (2007) which presents about theory and practice based on the personal experience of Applebaum (2007) who conducted a research on CLT application in Indonesia. He stated that English teaching in Indonesia has been mostly teacher-centered. This idea is supported through class observation and in talking with teachers and students. He has also team-taught speaking classes at the university level with Indonesian lecturers. This allowed him a unique perspective on how they teach and think about teaching English. He found that there was a major difference in the students' reaction to the approaches he uses and the approaches used by most Indonesian lecturers. This is mainly because he uses a mainly student-centered approach which allows the students to use the target

language in an authentic and realistic way. He provides many opportunities for students to produce the target language in activities and learn from experience. This allows them to take more ownership of their own learning. Most Indonesia teachers are still using a teacher-centered lecturing approach. Their speaking activities usually involve students giving a short speech, telling a story or reciting some material. The problem with this approach aside, from being boring and inauthentic for students, is that students would be able to say the sentences accurately in the classroom but would be unable to use the target language in a real situation outside the classroom (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The main approach he uses in his teaching is CLT. There are many activities the teacher can use incorporating CLT. He/she can find them on websites, in activity books or from other teachers at conferences and workshops. However, when choosing or creating an activity the teacher must keep three things in mind. The activity must:

1. Use authentic language, materials and language situations;
2. Have a purpose that the teacher can state and be achievable; and
3. Allow for freedom and unpredictability (Xiaoju, 1990).

In using authentic language and materials the teacher must consider the students he/she is teaching. The teacher must consider what students will be using English for. This will dictate the choice of materials used. A class of high school students preparing to study at universities in America will not be interested in the studying the same material used to teach adults studying English at a continuing education class so they can use English when they travel on vacation or vice versa. The teacher must also incorporate activities using situations students might actually find themselves in after completing their English study. The teaching must be purposeful. Students must be in a situation in their learning and activities where they need to communicate with each other in order to accomplish their task in the activity. This will also allow them to use each other as resources and learn from each other. Use will not be unlike what their situations could be in real life. In real life they will learn through practice in using the language in a purposeful way. They will also learn from their experience through interacting with other English speakers. In having freedom and unpredictability in the classroom students have the

freedom to make their own choices in using the target language. Often, when traditional teachers do interactive activities they allow students to only to use specific answers, for example either affirmative or negative response to a specific statement or question. Allowing unpredictability the activity becomes more interesting and challenging and much more like real life. The activities do not have to be acting out a real life situation but can also be light and fun like a game. This could appeal to adult learners as well as young ones. There many choices the teacher can make in selecting activities for use in the classroom. Some examples of communicative activities the teacher can use:

- Role play
- Language games
- Scramble sentences

Though these activities are not real life situations they do allow learning to be more interesting and fun for the students. This will help them to be more productive and spend more time using the target language. Varying the lesson with different activities and avoiding lessons that are overly redundant in the activities used will make the classroom atmosphere much more conducive to teaching. When using role play the teacher should structure the activity so that students know the speakers, location, topic and function. An example of a role play have students in a restaurant one student would play the waiter/waitress and the other(s) would be patrons. The topic and function would be obvious. When using role play activities the teacher should make sure the role play activity is in the context of the material being taught. Once the students start the activity the teacher should either participate in or facilitate it. Role playing has been an excellent productive activity. As long as the teacher structures it properly the students can have a great opportunity to practice the target language as they would use it in a real-life situation. It can also allow for a certain amount of unpredictability and spontaneity as well. The author has always used role-playing after students have learned the new grammar and vocabulary and had the chance to practice in at least one or more controlled activity. Once the role-play begins, he either observes and answers questions or becomes a

participant. He never tries to control it or influences its outcome. As stated before the teacher has to allow for spontaneity and unpredictability.

An example of a language game would be speed search where students are each given a task to find specific information about other students in the class. They get this information by asking some questions. Once they find this information they share it with the whole class (Kealey & Inness, 2002). The author has used this game many times, always with university students, though not always with English majors. He has found it to be very successful because it allows all the students to stand up and move around while they are interacting with each other. It will also allow all the students to practice speaking with each other.

Another example is using scrambled sentences is where the lines of one or more dialogues are given out of order and students, in pairs or groups have to put the sentences in the correct order with the correct dialogue to make a conversation. Students can then change or add to the dialogues and role play the conversation. These activities and other have been used by the author in his teaching experience. In using any of these activities or others the teacher must modify them to fit the context of his/her teaching situation. Too many times the teacher takes an activity right out of a book without any modification. When the teacher tries to implement it in a lesson the students see no connection between it and the material they are learning nor they are properly prepared to use the grammar or vocabulary to be used in the activity. Therefore, the activity fails or does not meet the teacher's expectations. When this happens the teacher usually gives up and falls back on the approach he/she is comfortable with and the teacher is no better off than he/she was before. Making such revolutionary changes in one's teaching takes time and effort. There is going to be a lot of trial and error but if the teacher uses the tools of reflective teaching and persistence he/she and can make great advances in using CLT over time. The author has realized that reflecting on how CLT has helped him and how it could be utilized in the future. He has found that CLT has greatly improved the quality of the learning environment in the classroom. In working in a large class (as most teachers in Indonesia do) CLT allows for participation by the whole class and gives the teacher the opportunity to work more closely with



students individually and in small groups through monitoring. It also allows for equal participation in the activity. Teachers constantly need to be involved in professional development. Using the tools of reflective teaching, the teacher can make adjustments to better utilize CLT. As great an approach as CLT is, it is not perfect. The teacher stills needs to be able to teach now grammar and vocabulary and allow students to practice in a controlled context before engaging in a CLT activity. CLT is great for producing the target language in an authentic and meaningful manner but the teacher should combine it with other methods and approaches to be more complete in his/her teaching. For example, the teacher needs to consider how to teach grammar and introduce new vocabulary. The idea is for the teacher to focus on the students and what will allow the students to better learn and practice the target language. It must also be emphasized again that the focus of CLT is on communication and conveying meaning. Language form or accuracy can and should be taught also but they are not emphasized in CLT activities. The teacher can create plenty of plenty of opportunities for the students to focus on those points. However, the objective in communication is to exchange information and ideas.

## **SIMPULAN**

Language is used for communication. For this reason, CTL and CLT make use of communication and context to teach languages. Whereas traditional language teaching places a lot of emphasis on grammar rules and verb conjugations, CTL and CLT emphasizes real-life situations and communication using the target language in context (Galloway, 1993). While grammar is still important in the CLT classroom, the emphasis is on communicating a message. In CTL and CLT, students practice real-life situations, for example, buying food at the market or asking someone for directions. Students will learn to use language as a means of expression, expressing values and judgments and students will learn to express the functions that best meet their own communication needs. In these exercises, the goal is for the student to communicate his or her needs and thoughts, without worrying about having perfect grammar. CTL and CLT also stress social and situational contexts of communication. For example, in many languages, the form of “you” changes depending on the age and status of the two speakers. Addressing

a person in the proper way can make a big difference in having a successful exchange, even if the verb tenses aren't right.

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