Content-based instruction for OLE: The French forum

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In a globalized world where English is the undisputed lingua franca, how worthwhile is it to continue teaching other foreign languages such as French, German, or Spanish at Japanese universities? Citing the apparent uselessness of such languages, many students, and even faculty members, often express a desire to diminish the teaching of (or indeed dispense with) such languages. Foreign language teachers will, naturally, always oppose such strong views, but ignoring them would be unwise. What is needed in the field of Other-Language-Education (OLE) is, therefore, a reevaluation of *what* is taught and *how* it is taught. This paper argues that content-based instruction (CBI) methods could be used to offer students not only the traditional language, literature, and culture studies usually associated with foreign language instruction but also practical, useful, real-world subject matter. This, argues the author, would do much to change current views of these languages as "useless."

英語がリングワフランカであり、グローバル化された世界にて、日本の大学でフランス語やドイツ語、またはスペイン語のような他の外国語を教え続けることは、どれほど価値があるのだろうか。そのような言語の明らかな「無益さ」を挙げて、多くの学生が、そして教員までもが、それらの言語を教えることを縮小（またはむしろ免除）することを望んでいる。当然、外国語教員は常にそのような強い見解に反対しているが、その考えを無視することはあさはかであろう。もって、多言語教育（OLE）の分野では、何をどのように教えるかを再考する必要がある。この論文では、Content-Based-Instruction（CBI）教授法が、通常、外国語教育に関連した従来の言語、文学、文化研究にとどまらず、実践的で有益な実世界の問題を学生に提供するために用いることができることを論じる。これにより、英語以外の言語が無益だという現在の見解を変えるのに大いに役立つということを著者は述べる。

THE TEACHING of second foreign languages (i.e. languages besides English) at Japanese universities currently seems to be in a precarious state. In view of the fact that English is the established global lingua franca, researchers and observers in the field of Other-Language-Education (OLE) report that languages like French, German, or Spanish are increasingly being viewed as superfluous, a drain on resources, or indeed a waste of time. This paper argues that 2nd FLs would not seem "useless" if they were taught differently, namely in such a way as to provide students with practical, real-world information in addition to the usual focus on grammar, literature, or culture. The author proposes that Content-Based-Instruction (CBI) methodology provides an effective way of accomplishing this goal and gives an example of CBI in French. In addition to giving a brief history and description of CBI, the author also

enumerates some of the many benefits that CBI can have for learners, while also touching upon some important challenges and issues to consider in order to successfully implement CBI for OLE at the university level.

Current problems and challenges in OLE

Even a cursory review of recent articles in various scholarly publications, including this one, concerning the current state of OLE in Japan should reveal to the reader a field beset by numerous, multi-faceted problems and challenges that, at best, can seem daunting and, at worst, quite demoralizing to the average OLE teacher. In his preliminary study of the effects that the recent university reform in Japan has had on foreign-language education, long-time OLE researcher Reinelt (2007) points out several worrying issues. One important issue concerns universities' attempts to please its clients' (i.e. students') wishes and/or the wishes of certain faculty members (e.g. math or science departments, which compete with foreign language for funds and administrative support). For example, some institutions may start "…reducing complexity and amount of contents in order to facilitate entry, studies, and graduation" (p. 1121). In a worst-case scenario, as Reinelt ominously warns, this can all culminate in "a reduction of requirements and classes disliked *and* thought useless by a strong faction within the university…or even [in the outright] abolition of foreign language requirements (sometimes even including English)…" (p. 1121). Reinelt goes on to identify three general trends affecting OLE that can be discerned from universities' various answers to these problems. The first trend is capitulation (what Reinelt terms "the quiet disappearance"), in which, facing strong criticism and weak support, the study of a second foreign language simply dies. The second is the exact opposite of the first, with the university actually obligating the study of a second foreign language as a graduation requirement. Finally, the third (termed "the changeling") can be seen

in general as describing those universities currently trying to find a suitable middle ground (pp. 1125-6). For those universities intent on developing that middle ground and trying to avoid the stark zero-sum choice of either keeping or abandoning OLE altogether, one consideration should be taken into account: reforming and/or improving foreign language classes in such ways as to render their content interesting, practical, and thus valuable for students and faculty alike without having to abandon the foreign-language teacher's usual goal of imparting *linguistic*, *literary*, and/or *cultural* knowledge. How to accomplish such a difficult task? Drawing support from an extensive body of literature as well as from his own teaching experience, the author proposes that CBI can help.

An overview and brief history of CBI

Genesee (1994) broadly defines "content" in CBI as "…any topic, theme, or non-language issue of interest or importance to the learners" (p. 3). The keyword here is *non-language*. In other words, in a CBI second or foreign language classroom, the goal for students is not just the mastery of linguistic aspects but also the study of a subject matter that may or may not have much to do with the target language *per se*. That subject matter, topic, or theme presented to learners through rich authentic material in effect becomes the medium through which linguistic points (e.g. the perfect tense, relative clauses, passive voice, etc.) can also be studied and practiced.

To be sure, such a contextualized approach to language teaching is not wholly new. In fact, it has quite a long history with documented success. Many bilingual programs for primary and secondary school students (notably in Quebec, Switzerland, and other areas with strong bilingual traditions) have been using CBI methodology quite effectively since at least the 1960s, and certainly long before that. In such programs, Francophone children, for example, would be taught math, science, or social

studies in English, while Anglophone children would be taught history, geography, or art in French. Studies commissioned by the Council of Europe often mention CBI as an effective approach for fostering bi- or multilingualism (see Vollmer, 2006, p. 10). Such an approach makes sense in these situations because students need proficiency in their native *and* second (or third) language(s) in order to integrate successfully into society while also keeping up with their regular academic subjects. Similarly, CBI programs have been implemented in countries with considerable immigrant populations, such as Britain and the United States, where school-age children simply cannot afford to lose valuable time by first trying to "master" the target language in order then to be ready to follow mainstream content classes; essentially, they need to do both concurrently.

A two-part study by the Modern Language Association (MLA) has revealed that CBI is now increasingly employed for foreign language instruction at American universities as well, a development that the authors deem "striking" (Goldberg, Lusin, & Welles, 2004, p. 44). The authors of the first part of the study point out that approximately a *quarter* of departments participating in the study "reported that they have a nontraditional language strand for business or other purposes" (Goldberg & Welles, 2001, p. 186), and in part two of the study some telling observations are offered as to why this might be the case:

> Student populations…are increasingly career-minded and concerned that their language study be useful to them. The traditional rationale that learning a language deepens understanding of the world through the study of the linguistic, literary, and cultural artifacts of another people has been supplemented by the idea that language knowledge will be practical and enhance professional situations in later life. (Goldberg, Lusin, & Welles, 2004, p. 27)

At the university level, whether in a second or foreign language context, there are three basic models that CBI classes can follow depending on the resources available to teachers and/or the particular needs of students: sheltered, adjunct, and theme-based CBI. While all of these three models share the same underlying goals and principles, each has distinct features as Brinton, Snow, and Wesche point out (2003, pp. 20-23), with sheltered CBI having academic content mastery, rather than language, as the main goal, and the adjunct model seeking an equal balance between content and language. The theme-based model, on the other hand, leans more toward language learning, as opposed to content learning, as the overriding pedagogical aim. It would be difficult to get a content expert who is also a trained language teacher to implement the sheltered CBI class, and the adjunct model would require intense collaboration between content and language teachers. So the theme-based model seems the most flexible and feasible to implement for foreign language departments at Japanese universities.

The theme-based model, as the name suggests, would consist of a class taught entirely by a language teacher in which interesting, useful content-area themes or topics (as defined by Genesee) are used as the basis for language practice. One key feature worth underlining is that rather than having grammar (e.g. the present tense followed by the past tense) or purely trivial language-focused themes (e.g. talking about the weather) dictate the chronology and scope of the syllabus, it is the content-area theme or topic that will be "…forming the backbone of the course curriculum" (Brinton et al., 2003, p. 14). Therefore, the theme-based model readily provides a plausible way of making foreign language classes seem much more relevant, useful, and practical, thus offering some viable solutions to the problems currently affecting OLE.

Some specific benefits of using CBI

As evidenced by the studies alluded to above and many others, clearly CBI is at the forefront of current foreign language pedagogy in many places. It is not difficult to see why if one considers even just a few of the numerous benefits of using a CBI approach.

First and foremost, as already mentioned, CBI provides a direct response to the principal dilemma for OLE in Japan: that of the perceived *uselessness* of studying languages beyond English as reported by Reinelt. This negative perception, in the author's opinion, is in part the result of foreign language departments' usual stress on language (i.e. grammar), literature, and/or culture as the main vehicles for language learning, topics that do not necessarily translate readily into *marketable* skills with real-world applications. This overall focus on language, literature, and culture is understandable when one considers the fact that foreign language teachers themselves often lack in-depth knowledge of other content areas. There is, of course, nothing wrong with studying literary texts or talking about culture; they are important, and there would certainly always be ample room to incorporate aspects of these topics even within a theme-based CBI approach such as the one proposed in this paper. French, German, or Spanish classes, however, begin to seem pointless to Japanese university students when language, literature, and culture are the *only* topics available, especially if they compare these classes to English-language curricula, in which attractive titles like *English for Science and Technology*, *English for Business Communication*, *English for Engineers* are regularly on offer in addition to the usual conversation and writing classes. These English classes are appealing (even if at times they are disliked and thought difficult!) because they are immediately linked to practical, useable, *marketable* information for today's globalized world. If English-language syllabuses are offering such topics, should they not also be offered in French, German, Spanish,

Portuguese, Arabic, Korean, and Chinese—languages that many ambitious Japanese students will clearly need in addition to English if, for example, they seek employment with multinational companies within Japan and abroad? Therefore, changing from a language, literature, and culture focus to practical, real-world subject matter would be more student-centered because this is indeed what many students are craving. That notwithstanding, language teachers need not switch to overly-complicated topics in content areas like business, engineering, or math, but by using the theme-based CBI approach, teachers would go *beyond* language, literature, and culture. As Stoller (2002), a leading CBI advocate, succinctly puts it, "I'd prefer to send a student out of the classroom able to talk about rainforests than relative clauses any day of the week!" (p. 2).

A CBI approach can have general affective and cognitive benefits, too. Topics that students find practical and useful would presumably also be interesting. According to Grabe and Stoller (1997, pp. 12-13) as well as Brinton et al. (2003, p. 3) and many others, interest in the topic(s) can naturally lead to increased intrinsic motivation to study, and a virtuous cycle of ever more "effective learning" is created. If the teacher chooses to present topics in which he or she is also interested, the teacher's intrinsic motivation and enthusiasm can equally rub off on the students, creating a powerful synergistic effect. Moreover, the teacher increases his or her content knowledge by researching, collecting, and preparing material for the topic(s). Stoller (2002) also draws attention to the higher-level thinking skills that are developed when working with content-area topics that will naturally invite truly communicative discussions, analyses, debates, and perhaps even controversy. Stoller prefers to call this "positive tension" generated by differing points of view, without of course inviting too much controversy, which would, for example, make Japanese students uncomfortable. Stoller declares that through CBI

…we send [our students] out as more knowledgeable citizens of the world…when we send our students out of the classroom with enhanced language abilities, critical thinking skills, and collaboration skills, we send them out with the ability to apply knowledge to real world problems and we send them out with enhanced self-confidence and motivation. (p. 2)

Because a CBI language class would be firmly rooted in a clear context provided by the topic(s) or theme(s), it would be rich in what Krashen (1985) calls comprehensible input, which many SLA researchers consider essential for successful language learning. When the input is appropriately contextualized and meaning is emphasized over form, students will simply understand more than when only partial, unrelated clumps of context are used merely to practice discrete, isolated, sentence-level grammar points. Also, because the content/context stays the same throughout the entire time that students spend in the CBI class, materials used will be meaningfully repetitive, offering varied and continuous opportunities to recycle important vocabulary and linguistic elements. This natural repetition can aid in memory and recall of material (Grabe & Stoller, 1997, p. 11). Additionally, real-world topics will more easily connect with students' previous background knowledge, enabling better scaffolding opportunities for the teacher and an enhanced ability to fill in comprehension gaps for the students. Contextualized authentic material will naturally contain many complex elements above the language level of the students. This again can be a benefit rather than a drawback if properly exploited. As Brinton et al. (2003) assert, "Since input which will serve for language acquisition must also contain new elements to be acquired, comprehension is accomplished with the help of cues from the situational and verbal contexts" (p. 3). As Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development might also explain, because they are intrinsically motivated to study the contextualized topic and

because they are appropriately helped along by the teacher, it can be reasonably assumed that students would rise to the challenge of understanding this complexity rather than shying away from it, thus actively extending both their content and language knowledge (Grabe & Stoller, 1997, pp. 7, 13-14). Lastly, even if students do not reach a high-level of *productive* proficiency in the target language through a CBI approach as some researchers maintain (see Grabe & Stoller, pp. 6-7), one could expect that rich comprehensible input would, nevertheless, engender good *receptive* skills in the target language with the added benefit of having exposed students to interesting, useful subject matter.

An example in French of theme-based CBI at work

The author's interest in CBI for OLE arose after observing some of the effects that took place when the English department where the author is employed changed from a general-English curriculum to a content-based curriculum, with the content being English for international business. Before this change took place, the textbook used for core, general-English classes was based primarily on grammatical points. "Context" was presented in relatively short, unrelated snippets (i.e. varied topics such as jobs, daily activities, the weather, famous inventions, etc.) with grammatical practice being the overriding aim. This was a good example of what Stoller (2002) calls using content "simply as a shell for language teaching" and not as a "framework for strategic language and content learning" (p. 1). When the new content-based textbook and curriculum were adopted, it was the author's general view that many of the benefits described in the previous sections were taking place. Armed with the conviction that CBI was working in his English classes, the author sought to apply this effective approach to his private French classes. Previously, the author had been using a grammar-based textbook, much like the English one described above, for teaching

French. While this approach was not necessarily ineffective or uninteresting, it was clear that things could be done differently.

The author used a CBI approach in French with one student. This student already had some knowledge of French, was quite motivated to learn, and was quite fluent in English, thus able to readily understand French/English cognates as well as the general grammatical workings of a romance language. One topic of interest for the student was "French cuisine," so this was used as the general content through which language would be practiced. The theme of French cuisine was also linked with "healthy eating." This related topic proved very fruitful for generating discussions and debates not only about *culture* but also about practical, real-world topics like exercise, nutrition, obesity, and disease. It was clear that the student appreciated the in-depth exploration of content *and* language much more than when only language learning had been stressed.

The author met with the student an average of two times per month over a period of several months. Each study session would last anywhere from two to three hours. Below are shown three tables giving a representative sampling of exercises and materials that were used for this private class. Rather than representing one single exercise that was completed as such, the author has tried to incorporate in these tables condensed versions of content and language elements from various exercises and activities that were done at different study sessions, thus offering a general picture of the range and scope of the class. These exercises, of course, formed only a small part of much larger lessons that were heavily enhanced with pre-vocabulary work, relevant grammar explanations and drills, readings, discussions, pictures, cooking recipes, sound recordings, internet video clips, and so on. Most important, however, was the fact that all material, exercises, and activities were always related to the theme "French cuisine" and/or "healthy eating," and an appropriate gradation of complexity was incorporated. Table 1 shows a sam-

ple from the beginning stages of the student's language study, Table 2 shows one from a more intermediate stage, and Table 3 shows an advanced stage. In the last example (Table 3), the level of both content *and* language complexity has risen considerably. Therefore, in order to facilitate better understanding of the text as a whole, meaning was emphasized over discrete vocabulary items (which are anyway easily looked up in a dictionary). Specifically, discourse-level markers such as *remettre en cause* (call into question), *cependant* (nevertheless), or *pourraient être expliqués par* (could be explained by) were explicitly taught and emphasized because they show meaningful relationships between important pieces of information in the text. This helped the student to achieve better reading skills applicable to *any* French text. It should be mentioned, however, that because this was a private class with no institutional affiliation, no formal testing or evaluation of the student was conducted. Testing, of course, would be a crucial, indeed central, aspect of any CBI university class.

Table 1. Beginning stage

Vocabulaire à table
Les boissons: le thé, le café, le vin, le jus d'orange, le lait**,** la bière, l'eau
La viande: le poulet, le boeuf, le porc, le jambon
Pour le petit déjeuner: le pain, le beurre, le sucre, un croissant**,** la confiture, l'ananas, une pomme, une orange, des céréales

Exercices	
Le verbe *aimer* avec le partitif (présent, passé composé et imparfait)	Posez les questions suivantes à un(e) ami(e). Écrivez les réponses.
1. **Pour le petit déjeuner, qu'est-ce que vous *aimez* manger?** J'*aime* manger • du _____. • de la _____. • des _____. 2. **Qu'est-ce que vous *avez mangé* hier matin?** Hier matin, j'*ai mangé* • du _____. • de la _____. • de l'_____. 3. **Quand vous *étiez* petit(e), qu'est-ce que vous *aimiez* manger?** Quand j'*étais* petit(e), j'*aimais* manger • de la _____. • de l'_____. • des _____.	1. **Pour le petit déjeuner, qu'est-ce que tu *aimes* manger?** • _____ • _____ • _____ 2. **Qu'est-ce que tu *as mangé* hier matin?** • _____ • _____ • _____ 3. **Qu'est-ce que tu *aimais manger* quand tu *étais* petit(e)?** • _____ • _____ • _____

Table 2. Intermediate stage

Les vacances de marcel
Pendant les vacances, Marcel reste chez lui. Il passe beaucoup de temps assis devant l'ordinateur ou la télé ou allongé sur le sofa à écouter de la musique. Ce qu'il préfère à la télé le samedi, c'est le match de foot. Il s'assoie sur son sofa, ouvre une canette de Coca ou de bière et ses chips, débale un sandwich et dépose dessus un mélange de mayonnaise, moutarde, ketchup, accompagné de frites.
Le match de foot fini, Marcel se rend compte qu'il est déjà tard pour préparer le dîner et décide d'aller au restaurant du coin. Marcel habite dans le Sud-Ouest de la France: on y sert du confit de canard, avec pommes de terre sautées à la poêle, une salade de gésier, suivie des fromages que Marcel étale sur les morceaux de pain de campagne servis chauds. Au dessert, c'est la coupe de glace framboise, citron, menthe, café et son coulis de chocolat, bien sûr!
Il est 22H00. Il s'arrêtera prendre un verre au bar avant la séance de cinéma et aura juste le temps d'acheter ses popcorns. Puis pendant l'entracte il prendra un café et quelques biscuits…
1. Faites une description de Marcel. Est-il mince, gros, etc…? Comment le savez-vous?
2. Offrez des suggestions à Marcel en employant le *conditionnel*:

Ce que Marcel **fait**…	Ce que Marcel **pourr*ait*** faire…
ex. Il *passe* beaucoup de temps assis.	ex. Il *pourrait* faire du cyclisme…
Sa nutrition…	
ex. Il *mange* des frites devant la télé.	ex. Il *pourrait* manger des fruits.

Table 3. Advanced stage

Mythes et réalités du fameux «paradoxe français» alimentaire
Un constat: en France, on meurt moins de maladies cardio-vasculaires qu'aux États-Unis, en consommant autant, sinon plus de matières grasses. L'idée fut très vite avancée que la consommation modérée et régulière de vin rouge serait à l'origine de ce paradoxe. Mais deux acteurs essentiels et méconnus viennent remettre en cause ce quasi-dogma: les produits végétaux et les habitudes alimentaires.
Les vertus supposées du vin
L'explication communément admise pour ce paradoxe repose sur les propriétés particulières du vin: plusieurs études ont démontré que le vin rouge est antioxydant, antiagrégant plaquettaire, anti-inflammatoire, vasodilatateur. Il inhibe la prolifération cellulaire, et protégerait également l'oxyde nitrique, élément clé de la fluidification sanguine. Cependant, d'autres recherches scientifiques récentes, ont montré que le vin rouge, avec ou sans alcool, augmente aussi le temps de saignement, réduit l'adhésion des plaquettes sanguines et le poids des thromboses. Ces effets pourraient être expliqués par le resvératrol (famille des flavanoïdes) du raisin rouge libéré par le processus de fermentation du vin. De plus, la différence de sensibilité entre l'homme et la femme au sujet du vin doit aussi être signalée: certaines etudes suggèrent en effet que, chez la femme, la consommation de vin augmenterait le risque de développer un cancer du sein. L'alcool du vin accroît le niveau d'oestrogène qui peut à son tour stimuler les tumeurs sensibles aux hormones.
À la recherche des régimes alimentaires souhaitables
L'alimentation joue un rôle très important sur notre santé, et en particulier les antioxydants apportés par les fruits et les végétaux en général. Cependant, nous avons encore beaucoup de chemin à faire en matière d'études, pour mieux connaître nos aliments et nos boissons. Par exemple, des études épidémiologiques européennes ont montré que l'Europe du nord est plus sujette aux maladies cardio-vasculaires—tout comme le nord de la France—comparé au sud. L'alimentation de type méditerranéen est la principale cause expliquant ces différences, suivies par les modes de vie.
Le Japon
Si nous examinons le régime alimentaire japonais, nous constatons qu'il est très diversifié: faible consommation de corps gras saturés, prépondérance du poisson, faible consommation de viande, forte consommation de fruits, légumes, légumineuses et céréales et de thé vert. Malheureusement, la malbouffe gagne ce pays: on note ainsi par exemple qu'en l'espace de 4 ans (1993 à 1997), le nombre de Mac Do est passé de 1043 à 2439! Parallèlement la consommation de tofu, de produits de la mer et de produits végétaux a chuté de façon inquiétante. Il en a été de même de l'activité physique. Conséquence: 1 jeune sur 3 de l'âge de 30 ans a dorénavant un excès de poids.
texte adapté de *L'Éconovateur*
http://www.econovateur.com/rubriques/anticiper/alimsant010302.shtml

Mythes et réalités du fameux «paradoxe français» alimentaire		
Remplissez le tableau:	**effets bénéfiques** ☺	**effets nocifs** ☹
Le vin rouge		

Répondez aux questions suivantes:

1. Quels sont les régimes alimentaires souhaitables pour rester en bonne santé?

2. Croyez-vous que vous avez de bonnes habitudes en ce qui concerne la nourriture? Pourquoi?

3. À votre avis, les Japonais vont-ils prendre conscience du changement de leurs habitudes alimentaires?

Issues to consider when using CBI

CBI is not without its own challenges, and certain problematic issues need to be tackled if it is to be implemented successfully. First and foremost, universities need to be committed to OLE. As Reinelt (2007) declares, "The deterioration of OLE would probably not take place if there were a definition on a higher level of the required contents to be taught at a university, such as a requirement for universities to require FLs for graduation" (p. 1122). While it is hoped that the present paper shows how CBI can make a firm commitment to OLE worthwhile for Japanese universities, the following issues should be considered:

Foreign language departments would need to conduct a rigorous needs analysis in order to ascertain exactly what content topic(s) or theme(s) would be most appropriate and beneficial for their student populations. This needs analysis, moreover, would be on an ongoing basis (Brindley, 1989, p. 76-7), with teachers adequately modifying their classes as they receive positive and/or negative feedback from students. A careful needs analysis is also crucial if one is to avoid topic(s) and theme(s) that may be interesting and practical but *too* controversial or discomfiting for Japanese students, which would foment reticence rather than discussion.

After an initial needs analysis, the teacher would then need to invest considerable time and effort in researching (including closely collaborating with colleagues), preparing, and collecting authentic material rich and appropriate enough for content *and* language learning. It is clear that institutional support for the teacher is vital in this endeavor. Moreover, it would also necessarily be ongoing.

Additionally, as already mentioned, appropriate and sufficient testing and evaluation of students would need to be carried out to document progress (or lack thereof) in both content *and* language acquisition. Accomplishing this in an accurate and balanced way can be tricky.

Conclusions

Supported by an extensive body of research and positive teaching experiences, the author of this paper has argued for the systematic use of CBI, and specifically a theme-based CBI model, as an effective approach for a much-needed revitalization of OLE at Japanese universities. With a long, well-documented history of successful implementation at elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education, CBI methodology can offer students an enjoyable way of studying a foreign language while at the

same time learning useful subject matter. This would do much to counter the view (as described by Reinelt) that second foreign languages are "useless" and perhaps a waste of time. The author has shown one example in French of theme-based CBI at work in which a student went beyond just *language* learning to explore interesting topics in the content-areas of health and nutrition.

Like any method, however, CBI has its own problems and challenges, not least a considerable time and labor commitment on the part of teachers and administrators. Nevertheless, the myriad benefits that a CBI approach would provide students (and by extension teachers and the institution as a whole) would far outweigh these problems and make the effort very rewarding.

Informed consent

The author hereby declares that the student mentioned herein gave informed consent.

Bio data

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