

Investing Game Promotes Critical Thought and Interaction

Jennifer Altman
University of Washington

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Readers will learn how and why to use an investing project with university-level ESOL students. The author, who uses this project with Japanese Business English students, will present the rationale for this activity and include sample student handouts.

Several American colleges and universities, including the University of Washington, have student clubs where members learn about investing by actually doing it—with real money. When I began teaching in the *English for International Business Professions* program (a program for Japanese students only) at the University of Washington, I realized that an investment club-type activity would benefit the students who were preparing and searching for a three-month internship at a Seattle-area company following an intensive, nine-months of English study. And thus, the *Investing Project* was born.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The investing project, at its core, is a learner-centered project and as such has several principles of adult

learning and communicative language learning as base assumptions; those assumptions being that learning will help learners achieve immediate or future goals (Nunan 1988: 22-23). Brundage and MacKeracher (1980) identified a number of principles of adult learning in their book *Adult Learning Principles and Their Application to Programme Planning*. Among those principles are the ideas that adults learn best when they are involved in developing objectives, when the content is relevant to their experience, when the learning process is relevant to their lives, and when novel information is presented in various ways. Moreover, adults who understand that their, and others', experiences are valuable learning tools, and how learning experiences will be beneficial, are more productive language learners (Brundage and MacKeracher 1980: 21-31). Transferring these adult learning principles to communicative language learning means that the principles boil down to two aspects: learners must develop the ability to make grammatically correct statements, but also to use the language to accomplish specific tasks (Nunan 1988: 25).

Theory in Practice: The Investing Project

The *Investing Project* is a term-long simulation that takes about twenty minutes of class time each week. Students choose an industry to research, form groups, research industries, and select stocks to “purchase.” Once they have chosen stocks, they track the price and determine

whether to keep or sell each stock. At the end, each group presents its stock-picking method (investing strategy) and profit (or loss) results to the class.

This project encourages students to analyze industries and companies, while learning about investing. As students practice critical thinking skills, they also practice computer, time management, teamwork, and presentation skills. All these skills further students' success in academia and in the workplace.

Students research industries and companies where they hope to work. Linking the classroom to the workplace motivates the students; they connect and contextualize the “real world” to the classroom seeing this activity's relevance to their lives. Students thus move toward taking more responsibility for their own education.

Objectives

While this project's linguistic objectives encompass reading, listening, speaking, and presentation skill, students' objectives are related to learning about a particular company or industry (often related to their internships and future career goals). Students practice these skills throughout the term preparing for and participating in weekly meetings with their investing teams.

Reading Objectives

1. Students will learn common investing vocabulary

and idioms.

2. Students will research industries and companies by reading English-language newspapers, magazines, and annual reports.
3. Students will learn how to read newspapers' stock pages.

Listening Skills

Students will improve their listening skills by following printed and aural (television and radio) daily and weekly business news.

Speaking and Presentation Skills

1. Students will practice their speaking skills by sharing news, negotiating investing strategy, and tracking the progress of their stock portfolios.
2. Students will prepare a presentation in which they must explain why they chose their industry and stocks as well as how their portfolio performed.
3. Students will prepare a visual aid and use it effectively during their presentations. For example, students will be able to discuss the trends a graph represents, students will be able to point to the visual aid without obscuring the audience's view, and students will be able to create an easily understandable visual aid.

Requirements

1. Students will meet with their groups once each week in class for 20 minutes to discuss stock performance, news, and strategy.
2. Students must read daily and weekly printed news and listen to daily and weekly news programs related to their companies and stock prices.
3. Students must complete the weekly worksheet with their team.
4. Students must prepare a 5 to 10 minute oral presentation with visual aids (like graphs of each stock's progress) at the end of the term.

Benefits

1. Students will broaden small talk topics they can discuss because they will be familiar with business news, the state of the economy, the companies they invested in, and current business trends.
2. Students will see how culture impacts business.

Conclusion

As a learner-centered project, students quickly understand how this project benefits them in the immediate and long-term future. As one student eloquently put it:

Investing is an interesting activity for me. Stock prices change everyday and every minute, so we

can understand the real world is changing. To earn money by investing, we need to understand an economic situation, industries, and companies, etc. It's useful for us. However, most students have never invested. We don't know how to invest well. So if we have an opportunity to learn about stocks or investing technics, it would be very helpful for us (October 10, 2001).

References

- Brundage, D. H. and MacKeracher, D. (1980). *Adult Learning Principles and their Application to Programme Planning*. Ontario: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- Nunan, D. (1988). *The Learner-Centered Curriculum*. Glasgow: Cambridge University Press.