TIME AND SPACE
WITH COMMUNITY LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract

The use of time and space in ESL/FL classrooms is of critical importance. The first purpose of this paper is to explain Community Language Learning as a time-learning configuration. Part one does this by defining CLL with special attention to time within the learning process. The second purpose of this paper is to explain the use of CLL as a time-configuration within classroom space. Part two illustrates this time/space relationship by examining the use of four CLL contracts, or learning exercises, within the spatial configuration of the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Our biggest problem as English teachers is how to use the time and space available for the utmost possible learning. The first purpose of this paper is to explain Community Language Learning (CLL) by the late Charles A. Curran (1972; 1976). CLL will be introduced in part one as a time-learning

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configuration. The second purpose is to show how CLL works in the classroom, which is a space configuration. Much classroom learning takes place today in a space configuration characterized by rows of desks rooted to the floor. At the front is a podium from which learning descends in a single direction from the teacher to the students. By way of contrast to the space configuration of the row, the CLL teacher works with circles of students, as will be shown in part two. The circle, as a space configuration, can be much more supportive of basic communication than the row. The exercises used to illustrate the potential of the circle in part two are also arranged to show to some extent the way that developmental stages of CLL, the time structure, can be integrated with allocation of classroom space.

A BRIEF DEFINITION OF CLL

CLL is a supportive language learning contract which consists of group experience and reflection. There are five elements of this definition which deserve particular attention: First, CLL is a *learning contract*; second, CLL is *group experience*; third, CLL is *group reflection*; fourth, CLL is a *supportive contract*; fifth, CLL is *language learning*. The rest of this part will be devoted to an explanation of each element of the CLL definition.

First, CLL is a *learning contract*. In general, a contract is a basic agreement made by a number of people to work together toward a common goal, a learning goal such as the improvement of English speaking ability. A contract fills three important functions: First, it is a way of using time; second, of deploying energy; third, of defining roles. First, a contract contains time provisions, so the CLL contract consists of time-limited group experiences in learning. The time limit clarifies the experience and sets it in a frame which is easier for the students to accept. Students generally find that a

10-minute speaking experience is easier to accept than one which lasts for 20 minutes or one without any time specifications at all. Second, energy is deployed by describing a set of conditions in which a group works. The size of the group makes demands on the energy of the participants. For example, students seem to use more energy when they speak English with a large number than if there are only a few students or one other person in the group. Thirdly, a contract defines roles. The roles of the teacher and students are clarified by the contract. Under the terms of the contract, a teacher may adopt an active role, or in a flexible manner, a more passive role. The roles of the students change as they gradually alter their positions in the community from "non-speakers" to "speakers" of English. The demands on time, energy, and the roles of the group members are defined by the contract. The existence of a contract differentiates CLL from mere group activity. Over a period of time, the "Community" emerges from a variety of group activities. Each learning experience is reviewed as part of the learning contract. Group reflection, to be explained later, is an essential part of the CLL time-learning configuration. One CLL contract, therefore, is a group learning experience together with its reflection period.

Second, CLL is *group experience*. There are three kinds of group learning which are chracteristic of CLL. In common with the classroom as we know it, learning takes place with the whole or larger numbers of students, 10 or 15 to a group. The teacher participates in the large group activity. The second kind takes place in smaller units composed of five or six students. The teacher does not participate in the small group activity. The third type takes place in pair or triad groups. The teacher's participation is optional. These three kinds of group experience, which are basically space configurations, are used by the CLL teacher according to the needs of the students. CLL classrooms are characterized by

circles of students rather than rows of students. The flexible use of three kinds of space configuration will be further demonstrated in part two.

Third, CLL is *group reflection*. In the time sequence, a period of review, evaluation, and reflection is held after each group experience. The reflection period gives the students and the teacher a chance to review the events of the experience part of the class. What proves valuable to learning is separated from what is of less value. But more important, the students begin to compare their gains from a number of group experiences and place a self-evaluation on the events of the course. The CLL reflection period consists of a short period of silent reflection on the past events of the class. During this time, the students are asked to compose a brief English report about the class. After the reports are written, they are read to the class and shared by all the members. Valuable suggestions for future classes are made during this part of the reflection period. If the teacher adopts these, they become a force in learning. Students are more powerfully motivated to learn by a teacher who listens and accepts suggestions.

Fourth, CLL is a *supportive contract*. Besides classroom space, another dimension of space lies between the teacher and students called "Learner Space" by Curran (1972: 91). This space is essential if one person is to learn from another. If the teacher fills the space, then the students are deprived of a chance to grow and fill the space. If the teacher allows the students to expand and grow, learning increases at a rapid rate. Supportive use of learner space is related to the time dimension of progress in English speaking. The teacher operates on a time scale from activity to silence. There is a time when his activity with the whole or larger groups of students is necessary for the supportive communication of knowledge. There is also a time for the teacher's supportive silence when the students are allowed to exercise the knowl-

edge which they have acquired in small group activity. In a supportive way, the teacher may employ a CLL contract which calls for partial silence. He is silent toward the whole, but active in speaking with individuals in the class during pair group activity. Unfortunately, a fuller explanation of how partial silence works is impossible within the scope of this short article.

Fifth, CLL is *language learning*. According to Curran (1972: 128-135), language learning is a process of growth which occurs in five stages. The five stages parallel the life of a human person from birth (Stage I) through childhood (Stage II), adolescence (Stages III & IV), into adulthood (Stage V). In the next part, these stages will be further explained as they occur in the English speaking classroom. They will be exemplified by four group learning experiences.

SPACE CONFIGURATIONS WITH CLL

The purpose of part two is to focus on the space configurations of the CLL class. The following four CLL contracts will be explained: (1) *"The Shape I'm In"*; (2) *"The Clock Line Up"*; (3) *"52 Questions for the Teacher"*; (4) *"A Personal Interview."* These four exercises were chosen because they can be easily implemented in any classroom. As will be explained later, the roles can be redefined or the exercise can be reversed for more effective learning at later CLL stages. During the course of the group experience, the space configuration changes from the whole to small, or even pair groups. If the teacher learns to use circles of different sizes, the flexible use of space will contribute to communication and learning.

Stage I: The Introduction. Stage I is called the "Embryonic" or "Birth" Stage. At this point learners on the college level in Japan have a six-year background of English study,

but lack experience with English as a means of communication with others. They have had minimal contact with native speakers of English. Their conduct is characterized by anxiety and lack of confidence in themselves as English speakers. Self-introduction in supportive small groups seems to be the best remedy for the situation. The students are seated in groups of five and instructed to help each other prepare a brief speech about themselves, their hobbies, interests, and motives for studying English. They are given time to discuss and prepare their speeches together. After the preparation time, each student rises to present the self-introduction to the whole class.

Reflection on this activity reveals several interesting points which the teacher should stress. First of all, the problem of anxiety in speaking English is a common problem which can be solved if mutual help is available to each individual in the class. Second, the mutual assistance characteristic of the CLL class is pointed out in contrast to classes based on other methods. Students appreciate the friendly relationships which they find in the small groups. Third, the small group space configuration greatly supports learning. The learner at this stage is told what to say and, therefore, is not completely independent of the small group. As a space configuration, the small group functions as a protective embryo out of which the English speaker gradually emerges.

Stage II: The Shape I'm In. After the student has discovered his existence during Stage I, his next task is to clarify his identity as an English speaker. Stage II, called the "Self-assertion" Stage, is characterized by a strong drive toward self-expression and the need for contact with other speakers of English. The learner picks up many new English expressions, even though he may be able to use these only in a semi-grammatical way. The teacher should encourage the interaction and not interrupt the communication to correct mistakes.

An exercise which greatly facilitates communication during Stage II is called "*The Shape I'm In*." It was taken from Moskowitz (1978: 62) and can be done with the whole group together. A triangle, a circle, a square, a hexagon, and an irregular wavy line are drawn on the board. As a first step, the students are asked to choose the figure which best expresses the way they feel on that day. More important, they are also asked to write down the reason why they feel that way. After the students are given time to make their choices, individuals are asked, as a second step, if they would care to report their choice and share the reason for the choice with the class. At this point, it becomes clear that one figure can be interpreted in a variety of ways. As a third step, groups are formed of those who chose the triangle, the circle, the square, and so on. If the number is too large for a single figure, several groups can be formed. The students are left free to discuss their choices for about 15 minutes.

The reflection period after this exercise revealed several important aspects about communication in the class. First, it was difficult to talk about feelings directly, but easy to identify with a figure and discuss differences of feelings. Second, a communication barrier existed in the class. As teacher, I was totally unaware of the problem. The students were taking employment examinations at this time. Because of this situation, the class was divided roughly into three groups, A, B, and C. Group A was composed of those who had family businesses and, therefore, were not concerned with the employment examinations. Group B was made up of students who had passed their examinations successfully and had their future employment settled. They were extremely elated at their success but were prevented from communicating for fear of offending those who might not have passed. Group C consisted of those who had failed their first employment examinations and were feeling depressed. They were not anxious to talk about their failures.

Identifying with the figures helped the students to overcome their communication difficulties, especially when they realized they had common problems. The circle in Japan represents good condition. Those who had passed ended up in the group with others who had chosen the circle. Thus, they could communicate their good luck in finding suitable employment. Those who failed found themselves with others who had chosen the irregular wavy line (all out of shape). Great relief was expressed by this group when individuals discovered others with similar problems.

Stage III: The Clock Line Up. Stage III is the "Separate Existence" Stage. By this time, the students have built up enough confidence through the use of English to function independently of the teacher. Their English is still characterized by its semi-grammatical quality. At this point, the center of the students' attention is on themselves and their functioning as English speakers. When they become convinced that they can really speak English, their self-confidence tends to exclude the assistance of the teacher. The action of the teacher is still necessary if the students hope to improve the grammatical quality of their English. Therefore, a crisis arises during Stage III. If they hope to speak better English, the students have to make the teacher part of the Community again.

The best way to assist the students through the crisis is to promote self-understanding (Implication: How am I excluding the teacher) and the understanding of others (For example: the teacher). This can be done with an exercise reported by Moskowitz (1978: 63). The numbers of a clock are positioned at equal points around the classroom walls from one to 12. The students are asked to go to the time of day which they like best. They are requested to write down the reason for their choice also. After using this exercise, called the "*Clock Line Up*," on several occasions, I found that mini-groups tend to cluster around the

morning hours. Others take shape around the afternoon or evening hours. Modern culture has perhaps divided the human race into either "Early Birds" or "Night Owls." These mini-groups can be combined or divided in order to promote communication. The students are allowed about 15 minutes to discuss their choices.

Reflection on the exercise greatly promoted self-understanding. The students came to the realization on their own inner time-clock. Some people function best in the morning; others, in the evening. People make the same choices for a wide variety of reasons. The students came away from the exercise with a more vivid sense of time and its importance in living. Suggestions for variations of the exercise included using the months of the year, or the days of the week.

Stage IV: Reverse Process and Role Reversal. During the first three CLL Stages, the teacher has exercised an understanding role of assisting the students. At Stage IV, the students begin to perform in a role of understanding the ideas which the teacher wishes to present. Self-understanding gradually increases during Stage III and leads to a better understanding and acceptance of the teacher. Learning can be enhanced through "Reverse Process" and "Role Reversal" during Stage IV. For the *"Clock Line Up,"* the students were asked to choose the hour which they liked best. During the CLL reflection period, the students suggested that the process be reversed. They were to repeat the exercise, but choose the hour of the day which they liked least. This is an example of reverse process learning. Many other exercises can be reversed in this way for greater learning effect.

An example of role reversal occurred in the case of the interview. After the students had performed interviews composed by the teacher (Stage III), they were allowed to construct an interview with the teacher acting as interviewee. The whole class functioned as interviewer. This is an example of role reversal. Preparation for the exercise was done to-

gether with the students. The students were asked to compose a series of questions to be asked of the teacher. These were collected and put in order, according to life history. The students were allowed to ask about the child-hood, adolescence, and university life of the teacher. Repetitive questions were discarded and new ones were composed to fill the gaps. The students formed a large semi-circle around the teacher. Each student was allowed to ask two questions of the teacher. Since I could think of no other appropriate title, the exercise was named: *"52 Questions For The Teacher."*

Stage V: A Personal Interview. Stage V is the "Adult Stage." After a 45-minute experience with the teacher as interviewee, the roles were reversed again as the students were assigned the task, in groups of five, of conducting interviews among themselves. By this time, they were able to function in the foreign language in an independent way. The exercise, patterned after Hopper and Whitehead (1979: 223-252), was called *"A Personal Interview."* The purpose of the interview was to help the interviewee establish a better self-understanding and to make progress in speaking English. The exercise was divided into three parts: preparation, conducting, and evaluating the interview. The group of five students prepared a single set of questions covering the personal history of an individual. The preparation for the interview with the teacher, the previous exercise, became the model for composing the questions for this interview. The same set of questions was used as a guide when each student took the role of interviewer. One student was inter-viewed, one acted as time-keeper, and the other two were observers. At the end of each interview, the roles were changed and the interview was repeated. With repetition of the interviews, the students gradually departed from the prepared set of questions. They were able to introduce new topics or ask spontaneous questions as the need arose.

SUMMARY

The first purpose of this article was to explain CLL as a time-learning configuration. The second purpose was to show CLL works in the classroom, which is a space configuration. A definition of CLL was presented in part one. The following four CLL contracts were explained in part two: (1) *"The Shape I'm In"*; (2) *"The Clock Line Up"*; (3) *"52 Questions For The Teacher"*; and (4) *"A Personal Interview"*. By way of conclusion, I would like to appeal to English teachers to become more aware of how the following four items are used in their classrooms: First, time configurations; second, space configurations; third, reverse process; fourth, role reversal. If time and space configurations can be used to promote communication, more effective learning will be the result.

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