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## Teaching Art History to EFL Students

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### ABSTRACT

Teaching art history or any other academic subject to EFL students can be done successfully. A course called Western Images was created to teach Japanese students art history while only using English in the classroom. An approach known as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) was used as a basis for this course. This paper's purpose is to state the reasons why learning about art history is important, go through the process of creating content for the course, and suggest multiple tasks to help students practice the critical thinking skills used in analyzing and drawing conclusions of works of art from western culture. As a guide for this paper, Brown's (1995) six elements of a language curriculum will be used. These stages include needs analysis, goals and objectives, assessment, materials, teaching method and tasks, and evaluation of the course. The goal here is to inspire debate and discussion regarding CLIL and its pros and cons, and to question current curriculum in university language courses.

*Keywords: Content and Language Integration Learning, critical thinking, art history, EFL*

### INTRODUCTION

Now more than ever we are living in a visual world. Whether a person is at home or at work, if they are on vacation or studying at school, they can't help notice man-made visual images everywhere. These images can have a variety of purposes. Some are commercial, with the goal of getting a consumer to buy a product. Others can be political, with the intent to persuade a voter to cast their vote for a particular candidate. No matter what the purpose of the images we are confronted with on a day-to-day basis, they can be powerful and can change the narrative in our social or cultural perspectives. It is important to understand how these images influence us in our decisions that we make everyday.

Table 1.0

**Aims for Studying Art History**

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- to understand our visual environment
  - to interpret our own culture, as well as other cultures and the value systems of both the past and the present
  - to appreciate diverse art forms
  - to enhance cross-cultural communication
  - to develop global perspectives in the contemporary world
  - to reveal the processes of human creativity
  - to play an essential role in aesthetic education
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Fine Arts Department. University of Hong Kong. (2011)

This is where the study of Art History can help. There are multiple goals for students when studying Art History (Table 1.0). One goal in studying Art History is to learn lots of titles and dates of important works of art. Another goal can be to study the artists themselves and learn about their process of how they created works of art. This can help build a narrative for art and understand how far the art world has come since from say the Renaissance to Contemporary Art. It is the hope that students use this knowledge when encountering images seen in their daily life. These skills, to observe and analyze new images to help the viewer come to a well thought out opinion about the message the image is delivering, are necessary in the ever changing visual world (Table 1.1). By studying Art History and practicing visual analysis skills students can practice these skills to help them reach conclusions on media they observe in their everyday life.

Table 1.1

**Skills Gained from Studying Art History**

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- critical thinking and creative thinking
  - analytical writing
  - visual analysis and interpretation
  - cross-cultural communication
  - historical or archival research methods
  - self-directed learning
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Fine Arts Department. University of Hong Kong. (2011)

Teaching these skills may seem challenging in any setting, let alone in an EFL classroom; however, by presenting images from art history, this task can be easier than with other subjects of academic study. This paper's goal is to propose

several tasks that blend art history and English as a foreign language. This paper will present a course taught at Kwansei Gakuin University called, Western Images. The next section will examine the process of constructing this course for EFL students.

## BACKGROUND

While creating and teaching Western Images to ESL students in class, this question occasionally arises, “What kind of class is this? Is it an art class or an English class?” Well the answer to that can be, “Both and neither.” At the beginning of the school year, students go through a list of courses they can choose from. They can find subjects such as art history, English or economics. These subjects are very distinct. However, the intent in creating Western Images was to create a course that uses elements from diverse subjects like art history, art appreciation, and English as a foreign language. This approach, fusing multiple subjects into one course, can be called Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010) define CLIL as an approach which is neither language learning nor subject learning, but an amalgam of both and is linked to the processes of convergence. Convergence involves the fusion of elements, which may have been previously fragmented, such as subjects in the curriculum.

Another popular approach to language learning is Content-Based Instruction (CBI). This is also different from other methods of language learning, in that course instruction is not focused on language. Students are using a different language, an L2, to learn about a subject. That subject is the content in CBI. Met (1999) helps us define ‘content’ in CBI. The ‘content’ in content-based programs represents material that is cognitively engaging and demanding for the learner, and that extends beyond the target language or target culture. The difference between CLIL and CBI is that in CBI the primary focus of what is being learned is the content, but in CLIL both the content and the language are equally focused upon.

J.D. Brown’s book *The Elements of Language Curriculum* (1995) served as a guide for the decision making process when creating Western Images. The six elements of curriculum design Brown lists are needs analysis, goals and objectives, testing and assessment, materials, teaching, and evaluation. Before explaining the creation of the Western Images course, each of these elements should be defined. The first element is a needs analysis. A needs analysis is a systematic collection and analysis of all subjective and objective information necessary to

define and validate defensible curriculum purposes that satisfy the language learning requirements of students within the context of a particular institution that influences the learning and teaching situation (Brown, 1995). The needs analysis must be completed before the construction of the course.

The second element in a successful language curriculum is setting goals and objectives. Brown (1995) defines goals as general statements concerning desirable and attainable program purposes and aims based on perceived language and situation needs, and he feels objectives are specific statements that describe the particular knowledge, behaviors, and/or skills that the learner will be expected to know or perform at the end of a course or program. The third element is testing and assessment. This is needed to understand if the students completed their objectives and achieved the course goals successfully, teachers have to consider how to properly assess the students' progress throughout the course. Also these tests are necessary to help gauge the students' proficiency, determine future placement in other courses, and/or identify areas students are lacking in to achieve their goals successfully.

The fourth element is the materials to be used in the course. Teachers should be able to adopt, adapt and develop materials to use over the period of the course while also considering clearly defined approaches, syllabuses, techniques and exercises. All four of these elements should be completed before the course begins. The fifth element is teaching. In regards to teaching, teachers need to have multiple abilities in the classroom. They need to be able to possess a massive knowledge of the input utilized in the course, to motivate students, to discipline fairly, to accurately produce language clearly, to monitor students learning and to sometimes be a counselor. Teachers must be consistent, relevant and efficient with their students' and the university's time in their instruction. Teachers should provide constructive feedback to the students throughout the course.

The sixth and final element is evaluation. There are two perspectives when examining this element, the teacher's point of view and the students'. Teachers should reflect back on all five of the previous elements and try to use quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate the effectiveness, the efficiency, and the attitude of the teacher and the students involved in the course. Students should also be responsible for keeping track of their progress and reflect on their lessons and the tasks completed in the course.

## **METHOD AND COURSE**

With these six elements of a course curriculum as a guide to the Western Images course was created and over time adapted. There is no doubt that new tasks will be added and adjustments will continue to be made to the course over time. However, for the purposes of this paper, the course will be presented as it is at its present state. The main focus will be on the materials used in the course.

### **Needs Analysis**

This is the second year that Western Images has been taught. Over the course of this time, some observations have been made on what the students needs are and what they are missing in their education. Among these needs, there are a few that stand out. Students need to improve their speaking and listening abilities. They also need to strengthen their vocabulary skills. Additionally, they need to work on their critical thinking skills and learn how to look at problems with a broader scope. This final observation has initiated most of the changes in this year's curriculum: teaching critical thinking skills. But before this is addressed, the content and language needs of the students should be examined.

An art history course needs to cover a wide range of artistic styles over a set period of time. Western Images is divided into two semesters. This divide works out nicely in fact. Art before the Impressionists was mainly focused on skill and technique, but after the Impressionists there is a stronger emphasis on ideas. (Gompertz, 2012) So considering the timeline, it was decided to begin the first semester with the Renaissance and ends with the Impressionists. The second semester begins with Post-Impressionism and ends with Contemporary Art today. It is important for students to get an overall picture of art history while learning about individual works of art.

As for the language component, there was a need to improve students' vocabulary, and their listening and speaking skills. Also, it was uncertain how students learned vocabulary in their previous English studies, so there was a need to not only teach vocabulary, but to also teach students what vocabulary acquisition is and how to acquire a knowledge of new words more efficiently. Learning new words is an important component to learning a new language efficiently. It is useful for beginning learners of English to know the 2000 most frequent words. If learners know the top 2,000 words and their families, they will know around 85% of the words in any general English text, and around 95% of the words in an everyday conversation (Barker, 2010). But knowing the meaning of a word is not enough. Knowing a word well involves knowing its spoken and written

forms, knowing its related, inflected and derived forms, knowing its meaning and its range of senses, knowing how to use it in a sentence, knowing the other words that it typically goes with it, and knowing any restrictions or limitations of its use (Nation, 2010). So to better get a sense of knowing a word, repetition is very important. This can be done by encountering the word in different ways, not just reading and writing, but also using words while speaking and listening.

The final point in the needs analysis focuses on critical thinking. According to Norris (1985) teaching critical thinking is not widespread. Most students do not score well on tests that measure the ability to recognize assumptions, evaluate arguments, and appraise inferences. Also in every kind of knowledge-based, progressive organization, new knowledge and new directions are forged through dialogue. The dialogue in Knowledge Age organizations is not principally concerned with narrative, exposition, argument, and persuasion (the stand-bys of traditional rhetoric) but with solving problems and developing new ideas. (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 2005) Now with these ideas in mind a different set of tasks was added to the Western Images course, one that would teach students different ways to look at problems or situations and broaden their thinking abilities. With this new attention to critical thinking, combined with previous observations of the students needs in the course, a list of goals and objectives was compiled.

### **Goals and Objectives**

The current course will focus on a variety of goals and objectives based on the needs analysis of the previous year's course and current ideals. These goals and objectives (Table 2.0 and 2.1) focus both on the content and the language equally, as the CLIL approach emphasizes. An evaluation at the end of the semester in the form of a portfolio will help determine if the goals and objectives were achieved.

Table 2.0

#### **Goals for Western Images**

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- Improve students listening, speaking, reading and writing levels.
  - Increase students' vocabulary knowledge and fluency in all four skills
  - Increase students' knowledge of the history of western culture by studying visual images from the last 600 years, with particular emphasis on 2D images.
  - Build students' critical thinking skills.
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Table 2.1

**Language and Content Objectives for Western Images**

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- Students will work on their vocabulary knowledge by writing information about the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> 1,000 words in English and words from the Academic Word List.
  - Students will focus on language used in conversations about art
  - Students will be able to think in various ways to complete tasks.
  - Students will perform in pairs and groups using English.
  - Students will have knowledge of over 100 works of art from the past 600 years.
  - Students will be able to do a visual analysis of art.
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**Testing and Assessment**

What is needed for testing at the end of this course is an achievement type test. Achievement testing determines how affectively the students have mastered the desired objectives. The test should focus on student's knowledge of Art History, the vocabulary learned throughout the semester, their fluency in using their speaking and listening skills, and how they perform in problem solving tasks. Ideally one test should not determine the overall performance of a student throughout the course. To help determine students' performances, individual homework, a presentation, daily conversation tasks, and a student portfolio have been added to the test results for the final grade. All tests, presentations, tasks, and portfolios are done in English only.

**Materials**

After considering the needs analysis, setting goals and objectives and stating the protocol for the testing and assessment, materials need to be chosen. There are three main materials used in Western Images. These materials are Learning English Vocabulary (LEV) by David Barker (2010), the Western Images I and II course books created by the instructor, and weekly Western Images presentations to help students during their tasks. Learning English Vocabulary is mostly used as a reference. The LEV book can be used to help students learn the vocabulary used in the Western Images course. Students are given a word list for each week's lesson. They must choose words they do not know well and write the meaning and an original sentence for each word for homework. This initiates the repetition the student will experience with the word: once for homework, then multiple times in the classroom.

Western Images I and II are two books created with multiple tasks to help

achieve the goals and objectives set for the students. As mentioned before, the content in *Western Images I* focuses on art from the early 1400s to the late 1800s. The *Western Images II* book focuses on art from the late 1800s to the present day. Each book contains sets of task sections for over 45 images. These images have been chosen based on the instructor's own experiences learning art history, as well as the current location of the works of art. The majority of the chosen artworks are in cities that are popular for students to visit, giving them a chance to see what they have learned in class.

There are four major components that make up *Western Images I* and *II*. They are Goals and Reflection, First Impressions, the Art pages, and the Mind Maps. To understand how each component was created and used in class, a typical *Western Images* class will be described here. At the beginning and end of each class students are asked to do Goals and Reflection. When class starts students choose a main goal from a list in the book and write it down in the Goals and Reflection section. Then they are asked to make a prediction and estimate the percent of how well they will achieve this goal. For example, a student may choose a goal, "I want to stop making easy mistakes in English." Then they will write what percentage that represents how well they believe they can achieve this goal. Then, students will turn to a partner and ask each other about their goals and predictions. This is meant to place some accountability with the other student.

At the end of class, students return to this section. They will evaluate themselves and write a percentage of how well they achieved that goal. This is meant to build students self-esteem and self-efficacy. Also in the Goals and Reflection students are asked to write down new words or phrases they have heard in class, any Japanese they want to know how to say in English, and what is happening in the news around the world, in Japan, on campus or in their own life. All of this information will be used at the end of the semester in a Portfolio of the students work. The Portfolio has a section that reads like a language journal. This helps students reflect on what they have learned over the semester.

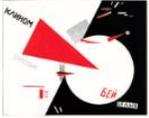
So, the first, and the last, five minutes of class are spent on Goals and Reflection. After the first five minutes, students are asked to show their vocabulary homework for a spot check by the instructor. During this time students are asked to do a question and answer session. This helps students get into the flow of listening and speaking English. Students look at a list of questions and answers with follow-up questions as a guide. For the next 40

minutes of class, students will use the First Impressions and Art pages sections. In one class students will focus on 4 Art pages. During this time students are constantly working on multiple tasks. The first task of each Art page is First Impressions. This task requires students to use critical thinking skills.

The First Impressions task was adapted from Artful Thinking. Artful Thinking is a model approach to integrate art in regular classroom instruction. It was developed by Project Zero at Harvard University. Artful thinking emphasizes thinking routines. These routines have been well researched and documented. Ritchhart (2002) proposes that thinking routines provide the structures through which students collectively, as well as individually, initiate, explore, discuss, document and manage their thinking in classrooms. Lyman (1981) believes these “thinking routines” are simple patterns or structures, used over and over again, that support and scaffold specific thinking moves or actions, like Think-Pair-Share. And Pat Klos (2012) states that routines also play an important role in shaping and directing the academic and instructional space of the classroom. We have routines for handing in homework, starting the warm-up, getting into groups, etc. Just as we use these routines to help students create good habits in the classroom, we can help them create good thinking habits. So Artful Thinking can be useful for teaching students how to critically think about problems or situations that present themselves. These thinking routines were adapted and the language adjusted, so that EFL students were able to comprehend the meaning. (Figure 1.0)

The First Impression task has students working in groups of four. For the first step, students look at an Art page. Second, they must choose 2 two sets of thinking routines, then each pair writes down their ideas individually. After one minute, the pairs share their ideas in a question-and-answer dialogue. Then, two pairs will share their ideas within a group of four students. In this quick exercise students initiate, explore, document, and discuss their ideas within a few minutes. The First Impression exercise is done four times per class and almost 50 times in one semester, giving students a lot of repetition with the task. Also from observation when students complete their First Impressions, they seem to enjoy it. It is as though the task were a game or a puzzle to be solved.

Figure 1.0  
**First Impressions: Thinking Routine Sets**

<p><b>1. Look. Write. Share. (10 words)</b></p> <p>Q: What did you <i>write</i>?  A: I <i>wrote</i> ... ( red, people, god, yellow, cloud, flying, religion, heaven, going up, in the sky, etc... )</p> <p>Q: How about you?  A: I <i>wrote</i> ... (crowded, big, angels, dark, passion, reaching, crown, dress, three layers, very emotional, etc... )</p> 	<p><b>5. Before. Now. Next.</b></p>  <p>Q: If this is the middle of a story, what <i>happened</i> before?  A: Before this, ... they (<i>were drinking</i> beer / <i>talking</i> to a woman, etc.)</p> <p>Q: What is <i>happening</i> now?  A: Now, ... they (<i>are playing</i> cards / <i>waiting</i> for their boss, etc.)</p> <p>Q: What <i>happens</i> next?  A: Next, ... the winner (<i>is going to</i> laugh / go home / buy a car, etc.)</p>
<p><b>2. I see. I think. I wonder.</b></p>  <p>Q: What do you <i>see</i>?  A: I <i>see</i> ... ( a tall building / many people, etc.)</p> <p>Q: What do you <i>think</i> about that?  A: I <i>think</i> ... ( it looks old / they are busy, etc.)</p> <p>Q: What do you <i>wonder</i>?  A: I <i>wonder</i> ... ( <i>who are they?</i> / <i>if they are from Italy?</i>, etc.)</p>	<p><b>6. Write Five Questions.</b></p> <p>Q: What did you <i>write</i>?  A: I <i>wrote</i> ... ( Where are they? Who is the black man? What happened? Are they fighting? When is this? etc.)</p> <p>Q: How about you?  A: I <i>wrote</i> ... ( What kind of trees are those? Is the man alive? What is in the background? How long did they fight? Can he ride a horse? etc.)</p> 
<p><b>3. What's going on? Why?</b></p> <p>Q: What is <i>going on</i>?  A: ( A person is <i>playing</i> an instrument./ A man is <i>standing</i> on the right./ People <i>are watching</i> a show, etc.)</p> <p>Q: Why?  A: (That person is a musician. / He is the boss./ They <i>like</i> music, etc.)</p> 	<p><b>7. Feel. Know. Care.</b></p>  <p>Q: How does she <i>feel</i>?  A: She <i>feels</i> ... ( sad / worried / terrible, etc.)</p> <p>Q: What does she <i>know</i>?  A: She <i>knows</i> ... ( she is poor / life is hard, etc.)</p> <p>Q: What does she <i>care</i> about?  A: She <i>cares</i> about... ( her children / money, etc.)</p>
<p><b>4. Colors. Shapes. Lines.</b></p>  <p>Q: What colors do you <i>see</i>?  A: I <i>see</i> ... (red, black, white, etc.)</p> <p>Q: What shapes do you <i>see</i>?  A: I <i>see</i> ... (a triangle, a circle, a rectangle, etc.)</p> <p>Q: What lines do you <i>see</i>?  A: I <i>see</i> ... ( straight, diagonal, curved, short, etc.) lines.</p>	<p><b>8. Think. Question. Explore.</b></p> <p>Q: What do you <i>think</i> about this?  A: I <i>think</i> it is... ( scary / powerful / original, etc.)</p> <p>Q: What is the artist's message?  A: The message is... ( War is horrible / Dying is sad, etc.)</p> <p>Q: What do you <i>want to find out</i>?  A: I <i>want to know</i> more about... ( Picasso / Spain, etc.)</p> 

The second task of the Art page is to listen for details and to write notes. These details include the artist's name, the year the work of art was created, the size of the art, the current location, the media used, and the artistic style. With each detail a specific grammar point is used. The third task involves highlighting. Four 25-word passages are read by the teacher. Each passage gives information about the work of art, the artist, and its historical context. Students have to follow along in their text and highlight the main ideas. This task is a primer for the following task. The fourth task focuses on listening and retelling. Students work in pairs. One student reads a chunk of text, a sentence or the entire passage (this depends on the level of the student's English ability). This task is valuable because it requires students to think in English about the content, which in this case is art history. This listen and retell task is done with two passages, then the students change roles.

One note on the content and its construction: there are a few guidelines that are followed to make the content more efficient for learning. The content in this

course must be comprehensible to the EFL students. To help make the presentations comprehensible the Compleat Lexical Tutor website is used (Cobb, 2005). By using this software, it is possible to delete words with low frequency and create new text where needed. To do this, the percentage of high frequency words is kept at over 90 percent. The remaining words fall into the category of proper nouns, words from the Academic Word List, and low frequency words. Part of the homework assignment each week is to copy the text in their Western Images book and look up the unknown words, the meaning of those words and their collocation. By doing this, students have encountered these words by reading and writing them for homework, then in the classroom using them in their spoken form and listening to them. Again, repetition is the key to acquiring vocabulary.

The final task on the Art page involves comparing and contrasting the work of art to another work of art previously studied. Students are asked to work together and decide how the two works of art are similar and how they are different. This task entails critical thinking skills and can also be used as a review for past artworks studied in the course. All of the Art page tasks are done in a ten-minute span and 4 Art pages are done in each class. It is a very compact set of tasks and demands a lot of energy and focus.

The final 30 minutes of the class are devoted to pair and group work. For homework, students write out a mind map choosing a work of art from the class and writing it in the middle. Students are then encouraged to branch out from the middle with their own thoughts and feelings about the work of art. Students need to write at least 25 ideas on their maps. With these map completed, students will work in pairs in a 2-1 task. This is an altered version of the 4-3-2 task used in language classes. In this task there are two rounds. The first round is 2 minutes long and the second round is one minute long. In the first round one student will use their mind map and try to say as much as they can about their chosen topic in sentence form for two minutes. That student's partner will listen to the student and count the independent clauses spoken by the mind map student. After two minutes the students change roles. The second round is the same as the first round, but it must be completed in half the time, one minute. When the task is completed, the students tell each other their scores and they write them down. This task and the recording of the scores can help the students keep track of their progress and they can see if they are becoming more fluent over the course of a year.

The second part of the mind map task involves working in groups. In this task students are using their mind maps, but instead of a monologue as in the 2-1 task, students in the group need to comment and question the mind map speaker on their ideas. A checklist of conversation phrases is provided for each student. These lists include the following categories: rejoinders, agreements and disagreements, interrupting someone, expressing opinions, referring to a source, answering with details, asking for clarification, comprehension check, keeping the conversation going, asking for help, and asking follow-up questions. Each of these phrases is useful for conversations and discussions. The mind map speaker uses their mind map as the basis for the discussion. The discussion lasts for 3 to 4 minutes. After that, the group members change roles. This is done until all members of the group have had a chance to speak using their mind maps. Students are encouraged to check all the categories at least once.

### **Teaching**

The fifth element in a successful language course is teaching. Teachers need to fulfill many roles in the classroom. In this course the teacher has a few roles that stand out. The first role is being a guide. The teacher needs to keep the class moving and change tasks at appropriate times. Another role is being a disciplinarian. Due to the high amount of activity in the classroom, students may stray in their attention. One way to prevent this is to assign random seats for students. This way they have a new partner for each class. Having a new partner in class prevents a cozy effect, in that if a student sits next to the same partner over a long period of time, there is a sense of comfort between the two that could lead to laziness in completing tasks. Also, by keeping a seating chart, it is easier to write down notes on students' performances in the class, whether those notes are positive or negative. The final role is being a knowledge master. The teacher needs to be well versed in English and have a strong knowledge of art history. This is needed to answer any questions instantly when they occur in the classroom. Failure to do so may decrease the moral in the classroom.

### **Evaluation**

The final element of the course is the evaluation. At the end of the course, students in Western Images are asked to write out a Portfolio. In this Portfolio students answer questions about their previous knowledge of art history and English, provide the information from their weekly Goals and Reflection tasks, show the results of their 2-1 Mind Map activity in a chart, write a PMI (Plus Minus and Inquire) survey of the course, and what they will do in their future with regards to art history and English. This is not only helpful for the students, but

for the instructor as well. The instructor can learn what tasks were useful or liked and what students didn't like about the course. Another role of a teacher is to be a cheerleader. That can be demonstrated in the way teachers present themselves in the classroom. They need to be active in the classroom and show that they care about what they are doing. By acting lethargic and not caring about what they teach, it can have ill effects on the efficiency and the success of the class.

## CONCLUSION

Teaching Western Images and using the tasks in the class have been challenging, but also interesting and fun. Having said that, it is understandable that art history is not everyone's favorite subject. However, that should not deter one from using CLIL in the classroom. By choosing a subject that is highly regarded by the teacher, CLIL can be very successful in creating a learning atmosphere. For example, currently a Pop Culture in the USA course using the same tasks and structures used in Western Images is being taught. There is room for CLIL classes at universities, and these classes can be extremely beneficial for students. It is hoped that more CLIL will be implemented in the future.

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