L2Journal
Volume 18 Issue 1 (2026), pp. 1-26

ARTICLE

The NOLC Model: A Framework for Inclusive and Sustainable Language Instruction

DARYL M. RODGERS

Susquehanna University
rodgers@susqu.edu

This study examines the Non-Level Concept (NOLC), an instructional model that integrates learners of differing proficiencies into a single, content-based classroom. Originally developed in a study abroad context, NOLC offers an alternative to traditional, proficiency-sequenced curricula by emphasizing collaborative learning, differentiated expectations, and inclusive participation. In response to institutional enrollment challenges and equity goals, this study explores the adaptation of NOLC within a small, under-enrolled Italian program at a North American liberal arts university.

Using a mixed-methods approach—including classroom observations, student questionnaires, self-assessments, and interviews—this research investigates how the NOLC model was implemented in a thematically-organized intermediate-advanced course and how students perceived their own success and self-efficacy within this framework. Instruction emphasized real-world content and differentiated tasks to support all learners' engagement and contribution.

Findings indicate that NOLC is both structurally and pedagogically feasible in a domestic university setting. Students across proficiency levels reported gains in content knowledge, increased confidence, and a stronger sense of belonging. Peer collaboration, instructor guidance, and differentiated support emerged as key factors in promoting learner agency and affective growth.

This study offers practical evidence that the NOLC model can foster inclusive language learning while also supporting curricular sustainability in small or at-risk programs. The findings suggest that integrating learners into mixed-level content courses, when supported by intentional design and equitable expectations, provides a viable, flexible approach to rethinking language instruction in higher education.

Introduction

Rodgers (2018) examined the use of the Non-Level Concept (NOLC) in a study abroad context and found that integrating learners of varying language abilities in the same content-based course offered a viable alternative to traditional language sequencing, particularly beyond the beginning level. This study analyzes how NOLC was adapted to a content-driven Italian course at a North American university as a model for inclusive instruction and curricular sustainability in small or under-enrolled programs. Drawing on a broader investigation of NOLC implementation, this paper focuses on two dimensions: (1) how inclusive instructional practices—such as peer collaboration, differentiated expectations, and instructor support—were enacted, and (2) how students perceived their own self-

efficacy and success within this mixed-level environment. Given the cognitive and linguistic demands of content-based instruction, as well as the challenges posed by mixed-proficiency classrooms, understanding how students experience learning in this context offers valuable insights into the pedagogical and affective potential of the NOLC model.

Literature Review

The Non-Level Concept (NOLC)

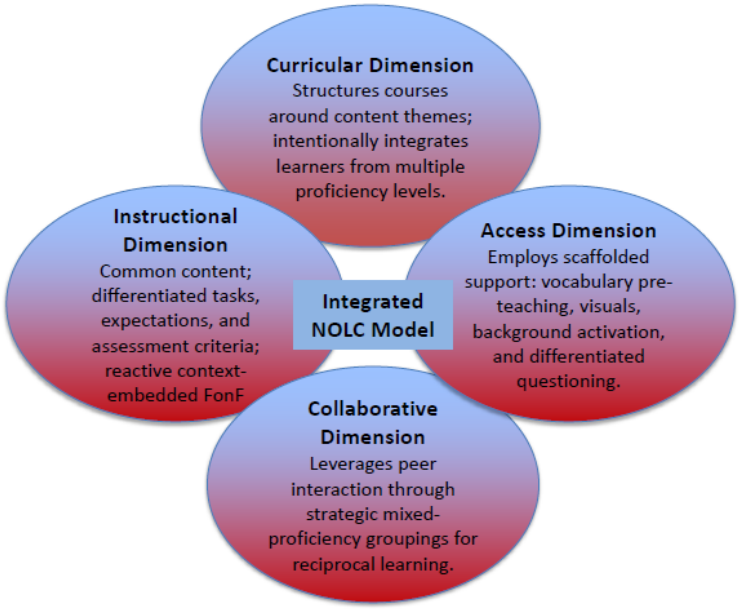
The Non-Level Concept was developed by instructors at Siena Italian Studies (SIS), an Italian study abroad program, as a pedagogical technique within their Full Immersion: Culture, Content, Service (FICCS) approach (Biagi et al., 2012). NOLC integrates students of varying language proficiencies—from beginners to advanced—into shared content courses conducted entirely in the target language. Rather than organizing learners by proficiency, this approach treats linguistic diversity as a pedagogical resource.

Rodgers (2018) conducted a detailed examination of NOLC's implementation at SIS through classroom observations as well as student and instructor interviews documenting the instructional strategies that made content accessible across proficiency levels: activating background knowledge, scaffolding vocabulary, using visual aids, and strategically structuring peer interaction. Rodgers (2023) argued that when integrated with content-based instruction (CBI) principles, NOLC could foster both inclusive and intellectually-engaging classrooms. Although NOLC originated as a technique within a larger instructional approach (Biagi et al., 2012), subsequent research has positioned it as a more comprehensive pedagogical model through systematic examination and theorization (Rodgers, 2018, 2023). The 2018 study concluded with a call for empirical research into NOLC transferability to domestic university settings, particularly given its potential to address both pedagogical and programmatic challenges. The present study responds to that call by examining NOLC's adaptation and implementation in a North American university context.

Based on the systematic observation and analysis of NOLC in its original context (Rodgers, 2018), the model can be understood as operating across four interrelated dimensions (summarized in Figure 1):

- Curricular dimension: NOLC structures courses around content themes rather than grammatical sequences. It intentionally integrates learners from multiple proficiency levels—not as an accommodation for low enrollments, but as a deliberate pedagogical choice that views linguistic diversity as a resource for learning.
- Instructional dimension: While all learners engage with the same content, NOLC differentiates how students demonstrate understanding and learning through level-appropriate tasks, expectations, and assessment criteria. Language instruction occurs primarily through reactive and context-embedded focus on form rather than through isolated grammar lessons.
- Access dimension: To ensure all learners can access complex content regardless of proficiency, NOLC employs systematic scaffolded support in the form of vocabulary pre-teaching, visual aids, background knowledge activation, and differentiated questioning, all of which maintain content rigor while supporting varied levels of participation.
- Collaborative dimension: NOLC strategically leverages peer interaction through mixed-proficiency groupings that promote reciprocal learning: less proficient learners benefit from peer modeling and support, while more advanced learners consolidate understanding by explaining concepts and language to others.

Figure 1
The Four Interrelated Dimensions of the NOLC Model



These four interrelated dimensions function as an integrated system (see Figure 1) with each dimension addressing a distinct aspect of the model: structural (curricular), pedagogical (instructional and access), and social (collaborative). Their integration creates a coherent system for mixed-proficiency content-based language learning: the curricular structure of mixed levels *necessitates* differentiated instruction of content, which is *enabled* by collaborative peer interaction and *supported through* intentional scaffolding.

What might this model look like concretely? Let's take a class focusing on Italian migration (Curricular dimension) in which all students might engage with an authentic video about the mass migrations from the Italian South during the post-war economic boom (the Access dimension requires subtitles, vocabulary pre-teaching, and instructor assistance). Students discuss the reasons presented for migration and the challenges faced (Collaborative dimension). Intermediate and Advanced learners together make a list of reasons and challenges, while advanced learners only are asked to compare these migration issues to those faced by Italians who emigrated from Italy at the turn of the 20th Century (Instructional dimension differentiates the output and level of critical thinking). Throughout, the instructor addresses emerging linguistic questions reactively, such as clarifying the use of comparative structures and past tense verbs when they arise in student discourse.

In addition to research conducted in the areas of CBI and self-efficacy (which will be dealt with in more detail in the subsequent sections), NOLC also draws on other complementary frameworks. The reciprocal peer learning central to NOLC (Collaborative dimension) is supported by the sociocultural theory of language learning (Donato, 2016; Sato & Ballinger, 2016). This perspective views learning as a social and collaborative process shared across participants and thus emphasizes the role of social interaction and expert-novice collaboration in the development process. As such, it reinforces NOLC's positioning of linguistic diversity as a pedagogical resource.

NOLC and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

The principles embedded in NOLC's dimensions —such as differentiated expectations, flexible assessment criteria, peer support, and emphasis on learner experience—reflect core tenets of inclusive instruction and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) which seeks to provide equal access to education for all students by providing multiple means of representation, action, and engagement (CAST, 2024; Florian, 2015). In NOLC, learners with developing proficiency can engage with content alongside more advanced peers thanks to collaborative learning and differentiated content that is represented in various modes (auditory, visual, textual). Moreover, students who bring prior content knowledge or lived experience are positioned as legitimate contributors, even if their linguistic skills are still emerging. In terms of action, students are provided with multiple means to show what they know and can do thanks to a range of differentiated tasks and assessments.

NOLC and Differentiated Instruction

Like UDL, NOLC is a holistic, proactive approach that seeks to make learning accessible to all. However, in terms of everyday practices, it also shares elements in common with differentiated instruction. Instructors must make responsive adjustments based on the strengths and limitations of individuals or groups of students to create an optimal learning environment. NOLC adapts content to proficiency level, makes use of tiered assignments and tasks, and acknowledges the variance in student readiness levels. These are all hallmarks of differentiated instruction (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023). Nonetheless, differentiated instruction typically adjusts a common curriculum within a homogeneous proficiency level whereas NOLC structures course content for an intentionally-heterogeneous proficiency level, viewing such differences as an integral resource to promote collaborative learning and, as such, a fundamental part of this curricular model. Additionally, as mentioned above, like differentiated instruction, NOLC began as a pedagogical strategy. However, in this and my previous work (Rodgers, 2018, 2023), I have positioned it as a comprehensive, multi-dimensional curricular model specifically suited for content-based language learning.

NOLC vs. Mixed-Proficiency Classes

Research on teaching mixed-proficiency language classes has documented both the challenges and potential benefits. Ashton (2019) reported on the approaches taken by New Zealand secondary teachers who created multi-level language classes due to declining enrollments—including the use of common topics across levels with differentiated tasks. The author noted the need for greater professional development and further research in this area, including student perspectives. Similarly, Gordon (2010) examined a multi-level ESL secondary school classroom in Canada and found that while integrating students of multiple proficiency levels in one class could positively impact participation through peer modelling, it also presented challenges related to student motivation and identity negotiation. More recently, Huhn and Davis-Wiley (2023) surveyed 124 U.S. K-16 world language classes and discovered that while some teachers identified benefits of mixed-level classrooms such as classroom community-building, peer learning opportunities, and the preservation of at-risk programs, many highlighted the challenges of what is often viewed as "making the best of a bad situation." Difficulties mentioned included insufficient planning time, balancing learner needs, and lack of training.

In previous research, the mixed-level structure has typically arisen out of obligation. It has often been conceptualized and implemented as a less-than-desirable but necessary fix for declining

enrollments. In NOLC, on the other hand, mixed-proficiency grouping is viewed as the organizing pedagogical principle rather than an obstacle to be overcome. While enrollment pressures may prompt the adoption of NOLC, the model's effectiveness is premised on the position that linguistic diversity in a single classroom functions as a resource for collaborative learning rather than a limitation to be managed. Therefore, this study investigates how such a pedagogical model can be implemented in a new context (i.e., a domestic university) and analyzes it through a new lens (i.e., self-efficacy and inclusive pedagogy).

Content-Based Instruction (CBI)

The NOLC framework was developed in the context of content-based classes. CBI refers to the learning of a language through engagement with a content area (e.g., geography, history, science, etc.). Originating in Canadian immersion programs, CBI now takes a variety of forms along a continuum: from language-driven models that use content to support language goals on the one hand to content-driven courses where subject knowledge is primary and language development occurs incidentally on the other (Lyster, 2017). Depending on context, CBI may appear under different labels such as CBLT (content-based language teaching), CLIL[1] (Content and Language Integrated Learning), Sheltered Instruction, and EMI (English Medium Instruction). All aim to promote language learning through meaningful content engagement.

CBI provides a communicative context for language learning, making language a tool for learning rather than the object of study (VanPatten, 2025). It is supported by a robust body of research (Banegas, 2012; Fitzsimmons-Doolan et al., 2017; Martel, 2021). To cite just a few of its benefits: students' interpretive abilities improve thanks to the provision of abundant written and spoken comprehensible input; engagement with compelling content promotes deeper processing of information and critical thinking; students are more likely to retain information and thus be more motivated to learn.

Studies have also highlighted the challenges associated with CBI (Amat et al., 2022; Banegas, 2012; Cammarata & Tedick, 2012; Lyster, 2017). Provision of adequate and appropriate teacher training has proven to be a common difficulty. Not all instructors are or feel prepared to effectively integrate both content and language instruction due to a lack of content knowledge and/or limited target language proficiency. Creating a curriculum that balances both content and language is recommended but continues to be a challenge. On a related note, instructors can struggle with integrating effective tools to assess both content knowledge and language proficiency as more traditional assessment methods often prove to be insufficient. Additionally, there may be issues of time (how to dedicate sufficient time to developing both content and language), institutional support (how to convince reluctant administrators that a CBI curriculum can also meet required standards), and available resources (how to deal with a lack of availability of appropriate instructional materials). To be sure, despite the many advantages of a content-based curriculum, there are still several issues that need to be addressed if a program is to be effective and successful in the long term.

Even so, overall, research supports the effectiveness of CBI in improving both language skills and content knowledge. Indeed, studies have shown that students in CBI programs often outperform their peers in traditional language courses (Cammarata et al., 2016; Fitzsimmons-Doolan et al., 2017). CBI classrooms also lend themselves to inclusive practices like NOLC that support content learners of differing proficiency levels (Rodgers, 2023).

[1] Although CLIL has different origins from CBI, Martel (2021) argues that CBI and CLIL share many of the same characteristics, goals, and pedagogy.

Self-Efficacy

This study will examine students' perceptions of their success and self-efficacy in a content-driven course that adopts a NOLC framework. Self-efficacy, as proposed by Bandura (1986), refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to meet challenges and succeed. In language education, higher self-efficacy correlates with learner persistence, motivation, and improved academic outcomes (Graham, 2022; Waddington, 2023). To develop strong self-efficacy beliefs, learners need opportunities to succeed in meaningful tasks (or mastery experiences) as well as peer modeling (or vicarious experiences), and a sense of task value. Engagement in relevant content and verbal persuasion—encouragement and reassurance from instructors or peers—can also play a significant role, particularly in shaping learners' willingness to take risks or persist through challenge (Graham, 2022).

Studies have shown the strong influence of self-efficacy on language learning. For example, Wang and Sun's (2020) meta-analysis confirmed a positive relationship between self-efficacy and language development. Mills et al. (2007) demonstrated that self-efficacy for self-regulation—learners' confidence in their ability to manage and direct their learning—was a strong predictor of academic success. In EMI contexts, Thompson et al. (2022) found that self-efficacy beliefs, shaped by perceptions of L2 ability and linguistic preparedness, predicted academic success. Higher self-efficacy is also associated with greater classroom engagement and likelihood of viewing challenges as opportunities for growth (Bai et al., 2022; Busse & Walter, 2013)

While the concept has been extensively researched in language learning, no research to date has examined how self-efficacy functions within inclusive, content-based courses that adopt a NOLC framework. This study addresses that gap by exploring learners' perceptions of self-efficacy and success in a mixed-level, content-driven Italian course at a North American university. In so doing, it seeks to address the call in Rodgers (2018) to examine the application of the NOLC model in domestic contexts and adds the lens of self-efficacy and inclusive pedagogy.

This study thus addresses the following questions:

1. How was the NOLC model applied in this domestic university context, and what instructional practices characterized its implementation?
2. How do students perceive their levels of self-efficacy and success within NOLC's inclusive, mixed-level instructional approach?

To address these questions, I conducted classroom observations and analyzed student interactions, instructional strategies, and the instructor's role in promoting engagement and inclusion. I also analyzed questionnaire and interview data to understand how learners experienced self-efficacy, success, and inclusion in this mixed-level, content-driven course.

Methods

Participants

Eleven adult learners in a combined Italian 200/300-level course at a small liberal arts university participated in the study. Six were female, and five male; majors varied, and seven had declared a minor in Italian Studies. Five participants were enrolled at the 200-level (intermediate) and six at the 300-level (advanced). Two of the 200-level group were first-year students with five years of Italian study.

The 300-level students had varied prior experience with Italian content courses. Table 1 summarizes participants' language backgrounds and relevant experience.

Table 1
Biographical Data for Participants (n=11)

Name (Pseudonym)	**Course level**	**University Year**	**Previous experience in Italian**	**Previous CBI/ NOLC courses**
Maeve	200	First year	5 years (school)	0
Damian	200	First year	5 years (school)	0
Clara	200	Sophomore	2 semesters (college)	0
Lilly	200	Sophomore	2 semesters (college)	0
Evan	200	Junior	2 semesters (college)	0
Sophie	300	Sophomore	6 years (school); 2 semesters college	2
Paige	300	Junior	4 semesters (college)	2
Theo	300	Junior	5 years (Italian school); 4 semesters (college)	4
Autumn	300	Senior	4 semesters (college); 3 domestic, 1 abroad)	1
Gianna	300	Senior	4 semesters (college)	2
Micah	300	Senior	4 semesters (college); 3 domestic, 1 abroad)	1

Instructional Context

This content-driven course combined intermediate and advanced learners using a NOLC model, with tiered expectations by enrollment level. Adopted in response to enrollment pressures, this structure enables repeatable course offerings with rotating themes. The course examined in this study focused on four units related to contemporary Italian society: (1) vacation and tourism, (2) health and well-being, (3) education and work, and (4) linguistic diversity.

Content was delivered through authentic and semi-authentic texts and audiovisual materials, with tasks designed to build content knowledge and language ability. Class activities used whole-class,

group, and pair formats, with follow-up completed independently. Language instruction incorporated reactive and proactive focus on form (FonF), always linked to the content.

Procedures

Data included class observations, pre-/post-course questionnaires, and end-of-semester interviews with five participants. Observations were based on three 1-hour sessions from weeks 3, 7, and 13 of a 14-week semester. Video recordings of these sessions were transcribed and analyzed to document how the four NOLC dimensions were enacted (particularly the Access, Collaborative, and Instructional dimensions) in the form of pedagogical strategies such as task differentiation, scaffolding, and interaction patterns. The questionnaires captured learners' language backgrounds, self-assessments of content knowledge and language ability, self-efficacy, and perceptions of the NOLC model (see Appendix A). Interviews expanded on questionnaire responses and explored classroom dynamics, instructional format, and perceptions of linguistic development. While inclusion was not a separate analytic category, constructs such as differentiation, cross-level participation, and learner voice were analyzed as indicators of inclusive practice (CAST, 2024; Florian, 2015).

Data Analysis

Beginning and end-of-semester questionnaires were examined quantitatively to determine if any significant changes were found in ratings of the pedagogy used and perceived levels of self-efficacy. Due to the small sample size and violations of normality assumptions, non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were used to compare participants' ratings across time (beginning to end of-semester) for the group as a whole. For items showing significant change, follow-up Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted on beginning-end difference scores to determine whether changes varied by course level (intermediate vs. advanced). This two-step method maintained a focus on meaningful changes while minimizing the number of comparisons.

For qualitative data, I conducted a thematic analysis of observation transcriptions, questionnaire open-ended responses, and interview transcripts. Following an iterative, inductive approach, I read all data multiple times to identify recurring patterns and strategies in the classroom pedagogy and frequently-occurring themes related to students' experiences with the NOLC model, perceptions of self-efficacy, and reported success. An examination of participants' responses provided the opportunity for a fine-grained analysis beyond what the quantitative results could reveal. Throughout the analysis, I attended to both confirming and disconfirming evidence and triangulated findings across data sources to increase trustworthiness.

Given my dual role as instructor-researcher, I employed several strategies to mitigate potential bias: (1) systematic data collection procedures applied consistently across participants, (2) triangulation across multiple data sources, (3) foregrounding participant voices through extensive use of direct quotations in findings, and (4) reflexive awareness of how my instructor position might influence interpretation. While this dual role provided valuable insight into the instructional setting, I remained attentive to the risk of imposing predetermined interpretations on the data.

Results

Class Observations: What Does NOLC Look Like in Practice?

To address the first research question—how the NOLC model was applied in this domestic university context, and what instructional practices characterized its implementation—I highlight key insights from the three classroom observations, focusing on pedagogical practices, student interactions, and the instructor's role (see Appendix B). Each class followed a flexible format alternating between whole-class, pair, and small group work. Students engaged with texts of varying lengths—some prepared in advanced, others encountered in class. Class time was used to unpack the various layers of meaning through close reading or listening tasks, progressing from word- to discourse-level understanding. Frequently, in small groups or pairs, students then discussed their interpretations, the significance of their discoveries, and, when appropriate, their application to related contexts.

Peer interaction was a constant feature. During the first observation, students compared types of accommodation found in Italy and the U.S., including the *albergo diffuso*—a unique model where rooms are dispersed across historic buildings. When Maeve, an intermediate student, struggled to express her opinion, her group members Evan and Micah supported her. First, they prompted her to explain in English, then helped her rephrase it in Italian. This type of collaborative peer dynamic was common across sessions.

Instructional formats varied regularly, alternating between individual, group, and whole-class work. In the second observation, during a review of a pre-reading task on psychological states, a student asked about the gender of *perfezionista* (perfectionist). The instructor explained that adjectives like *comunista* retain the same singular form across genders but change in the plural. Students then discussed which three of seven statements best promoted mental well-being (e.g., "I live in the present and not only in the past or future"), justifying their choices in small groups. The instructor circulated to help, as needed. A whole-class synthesis followed, where each group shared their decisions and the instructor summarized common themes.

The third observation focused on linguistic diversity in Italy and highlighted the course's varied activity formats. Class began with an Instagram reel about languages spoken in the Trentino-Alto Adige region. Students worked in small groups to match dialect descriptions with regions, completed a vocabulary-building task, and read short bios of figures known for dialect use (e.g., Carlo Goldoni), matching them to related visuals. The session concluded with a listening task featuring four dialogues about dialects and language. Students used all four skills across group formats.

Focus on form (FonF) appeared primarily in incidental ways. The *perfezionista* discussion illustrates how grammatical forms were addressed reactively. In the third observation, Evan asked about the meaning of *già* in two of the dialogues. The instructor explained both its literal meaning ("already") and its informal use as a discourse marker (similar to "right"). He also reviewed two forms: the gerund (e.g., *parlando* [speaking]), and the use of *ci* in place of *gli* (to him) in neo-standard Italian.

There was also evidence of differentiated instructional strategies. First, to foster peer collaboration, groups were intentionally mixed by proficiency. Assignments were adapted accordingly: in Observation 1, advanced learners chose a specific destination and accommodation to analyze; intermediate students selected only an accommodation type. In Observation 2, advanced students compared Italian with U.S. data on life satisfaction, requiring more preparation and a deeper level of cultural awareness. The instructor tailored feedback and questioning: more vocabulary, comprehension, and pronunciation support was given to intermediate students; advanced learners received more open-ended and interpretive prompts.

To summarize, key strategies and patterns observed were:

- **Alternating Formats**: Small group and pair work alternating with whole-class and individual tasks
- **Mixed-Level Groupings**: Strategic groupings, changed regularly
- **Variety in Activities**: Tasks targeting multiple skills (reading, listening, writing, speaking)

- **Instructor Support**: Vocabulary, pronunciation, visual scaffolds, and summaries
- **Incidental Focus on Form**: Mostly reactively FonF, brief and context-specific proactive FonF
- **Differentiated Instruction**: Tasks, feedback, and questions adapted to language level

Questionnaires and Interviews: The Students' Perspective

Having outlined how the NOLC was implemented in practice through class observations, I now present findings related to the second research question: How did students perceive their self-efficacy and success within this model? Drawing on both questionnaire data and semi-structured interviews, this section highlights key themes in students' experiences and development.

Quantitative Analyses

Students' self-assessed overall language ability increased significantly from the beginning of the course (*Mdn* = 3) to the end (*Mdn* = 3), $Z = 2.33$, $p = .020$, $r = .70$. Based on Cohen's widely recognized conventions, this represents a large effect size, despite identical medians. This indicates substantial practical significance beyond statistical significance. No significant changes occurred in individual skill areas. Gains did not differ by level.

Students also reported significantly greater content knowledge by semester's end. Wilcoxon signed-rank tests showed increases in ratings in three of four units also with large effect sizes:

- Vacation/ tourism: *Mdn* = 3 → 4), $Z = 2.52$, $p = .012$, $r = .76$
- Health and well-being: *Mdn* = 3 → 4), $Z = 2.51$, $p = .012$, $r = .76$
- Education/ work): *Mdn* = 3 → 4), $Z = 2.58$, $p = .010$, $r = .78$

Unit 4—originally supposed to focus on politics but later changed to linguistic diversity[2]—was excluded from direct comparison but showed a similar trend (*Mdn* = 2 → 4). These changes did not differ by level, suggesting all students perceived gains.

Attitudes toward mixed-level instruction also improved (*Mdn* = 4 → 5), $Z = 2.33$, $p = .020$, $r = .70$ with no differences by level. Ratings of content engagement (*Mdn* = 4 → 5) and perceived success (*Mdn* = 4 → 4) remained high throughout. These findings suggest that while attitudes toward the format improved, students consistently found the course content engaging and viewed themselves as successful.

Qualitative Analyses

Four themes emerged from questionnaires and interviews:

1. Initial intimidation followed by growth
2. Peer support and collaboration
3. Perceptions of success and development
4. The instructor's role and class climate

Initial Intimidation and Subsequent Growth. One of the clearest patterns to emerge from the data was a shift from initial uncertainty and intimidation to greater confidence and security—especially

[2] This decision was made halfway through the semester when it became obvious, based on students' interests, that a unit on linguistic diversity would likely prove more engaging than politics to this group of students.

among the intermediate group. This trajectory is particularly relevant when evaluating the effect of the NOLC model on students' perceptions of self-efficacy in a mixed-level learning environment.

Several intermediate-level participants reported initial feelings of uncertainty that were later replaced by greater confidence. Early reflections point to a common concern among the intermediate learners: feeling behind their more advanced classmates and fearing they might not be able to contribute equally. Damian said: "I like the idea of having people around me that can help me get better, but I hope I'm not expected to be at the same level as them." Despite this apprehension, many also expressed a willingness to try and a belief in the potential value of the mixed-ability format. Clara wrote, "…it is a little scary and overwhelming right now, but I know that it will help me grow in my Italian knowledge and as a student overall." Attitudes toward the mixed-level format were more positive by the end of the semester. Maeve, for example, reported in her oral interviews that it was her favorite aspect of the class and added in her written response that she appreciated hearing others' perspectives. In his oral interview, Evan shared that speaking had been the most difficult but rewarding aspect of his language abilities to develop, especially early on when "it was very daunting being with 300 level students," but eventually became "very rewarding" as he was able to participate successfully even with more advanced students.

This pattern of initial anxiety followed by growth was primarily reported by intermediate-level students. Advanced learners, all of whom had prior experience with NOLC courses (see Table 1), did not report similar initial concerns in this course, suggesting that familiarity with the model may reduce apprehension in subsequent courses. Some advanced learners recalled their past experiences and the positive effect of being in class with more advanced students. Autumn reflected on her early hesitation in a previous NOLC course and how her confidence had grown over time to the point where she is now much less concerned about committing errors. Indeed, at the end of the semester, Autumn expressed how her view of collaboration with more advanced peers and of error correction had evolved: "We all mess up in class, so it's not really anything I'm nervous about anymore. And like if I mess up, if someone else corrects me or you correct me, it's constructive." Her comments signal not only a decrease in her fear of making errors but also a shift in how she interpreted mistakes. She came to view them more positively—not as signs of failure, but as opportunities for linguistic growth.

To sum up, these comments highlight a clear growth in learner confidence over the course of the semester. This shift appears closely linked to the NOLC model, which supports both affective and cognitive development, fostering greater risk-taking and persistence in the face of challenges.

Benefits of Peer Support and Collaboration. Participants placed value on peer interaction and the sense of community that developed thanks to mutual support. Across proficiency levels, learners noted that working with classmates helped them overcome linguistic challenges, gain diverse perspectives, and stay engaged. The structure of the class provided opportunities for students not only to learn from others but also to reinforce their own learning by explaining material to peers. Evan, for example, credited his classmates' support as essential to his early-semester progress. Although he initially felt like an outsider in a class, peer support helped him feel welcome and motivated: "Once I became friends with them, and they started helping me with my Italian, I would say it definitely helped." Evan's comments suggest that social belonging played a key role in reducing initial anxiety and promoting active engagement in the target language.

For advanced-level learners, the benefits of peer learning were often framed in terms of reinforcement and reflection. Looking back on her earlier NOLC experience, Autumn recalled how working with more advanced classmates had supported her comprehension and linguistic development. In her final questionnaire, Sophie highlighted the mutually beneficial nature of the mixed-level model and its effects on feelings of self-efficacy: "Having students of mixed levels encourages us to help each other, and explaining things to other students helps me have a better grasp

on the material." In addition, Paige appreciated the questions intermediate learners asked and the fresh perspectives they brought to the discussions.

Taken together, these reflections show that students came to view the classroom as a collaborative learning community. The NOLC model fostered an inclusive space where learners of all levels contributed meaningfully and learned from one another. Peer collaboration played a central role in promoting engagement, growth, and self-efficacy, with students describing the format as both supportive and empowering.

Perceptions of Success and Language Development. Participants described a broader and nuanced view of success in a mixed-level, content-driven classroom—one that encompassed linguistic development, improved understanding, and greater confidence. While some initially identified speaking and listening as areas of weakness, they often reported noticeable gains by semester's end, along with vocabulary expansion and better comprehension.

Experiences of success varied by level. Sophie, an advanced student, noted more subtle progress this term, possibly due to reaching a plateau, but still described gains in both cultural knowledge and language use. Other students emphasized how the course's authentic themes supported their growth. Clara explained, "I think that my Italian language abilities have improved as a result of learning about the themes, because I felt more connected to the topics as opposed to just learning vocabulary and sentence structure." Micah, an advanced learner, echoed this: "Learning content has helped me figure out how to comprehend the language better. I was interested. I wanted to understand."

Participants also connected their development to the immersive, daily use of the language. Autumn noted the cumulative effect of consistent exposure and active engagement: "Every day, coming to class and speaking [Italian]. Like practicing speaking or reading and broadening my vocabulary that way." In short, these reflections suggest that the NOLC approach within a communicative, content-driven curriculum—characterized by real-world content, regular use of the target language, and collaboration across levels—fostered a learning environment where learners experienced multidimensional success.

Instructor's Role and Class Climate. A final theme that emerged was the importance of both the instructor and advanced peers in establishing a classroom climate that supported risk-taking, inclusion, and student agency. Having been in the same position, advanced students better understood what was needed from them to make this model work. At the start of the semester, Gianna emphasized the responsibility of more experienced learners to support their peers. Reflecting on her own first NOLC course, she noted the potential for anxiety among the intermediate-level learners if this support was absent. She explained:

> I think having the varying proficiencies in class is super helpful, but only if the higher proficiency students are aware of how they may have to slow down or break things down. It is a great advantage because we can learn new phrases and words just by listening to them speak.

While peer dynamics were crucial, participants also highlighted the instructor's role in shaping an inclusive and supportive learning environment. They stressed the importance of clear communication about the rationale of the NOLC model and reassurance that students were at different stages in their learning journey. The instructor was consistently described as approachable, encouraging, and central to fostering a space where students felt comfortable taking risks. Micah noted the impact of the instructor's openness and responsiveness: "Everyone is not only encouraged but sometimes inspired to talk. [He] make[s] class exciting and engaging."

These reflections underscore the dual role of the instructor and advanced learners in creating a learning environment that is both supportive and challenging. Taken together, the four themes—initial uncertainty and growth, peer collaboration, perceptions of success, and classroom climate—demonstrate how the NOLC approach fosters an inclusive and empowering educational experience.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to examine the application of the NOLC model as an inclusive pedagogical strategy within a content-based course in a North American university context. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach—including learner self-assessments, written questionnaire responses, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations—the findings offer converging evidence that a NOLC-based course is a feasible and effective instructional model, both in terms of inclusive classroom practices and students' perceived levels of success and self-efficacy.

Instructional Practice

To address the first research question, it is useful to begin by revisiting the institutional context that led to the adoption of the NOLC model. Like many other language programs across the U.S., the Italian program at this liberal arts university faced declining enrollments and the risk of cancellations at the intermediate and advanced levels. To maintain these offerings, the program adopted a more flexible, mixed-level structure by combining these levels in content-based courses. In Rodgers (2018), I proposed that NOLC could serve as a viable curricular adaptation for small or under-enrolled language programs. This study builds on that proposal by examining the model's application through class observations and student perspectives.

The central principle of the NOLC model is that students are not separated by language ability but instead included meaningfully in the same classroom space. This is made possible by providing authentic and cognitively engaging content, which becomes the vehicle for language acquisition. As argued in Rodgers (2023), when content drives instruction, the course becomes more inclusive and opens access to students at various stages of language development. For instructors accustomed to designing courses around grammar concepts, this shift may require a rethinking of instructional priorities, keeping in mind that it also expands who can participate in upper-level courses.

Of course, inclusion across levels requires more than simply mixing students. It demands intentional and deliberate use of targeted pedagogical strategies, i.e., both the Instructional and Access dimensions of the model. In this course, the instructor adapted tasks, feedback, and questioning techniques to ensure all students could contribute meaningfully. Rather than simplifying content for intermediate learners, the course challenged all language abilities while differentiating expectations for performance. Content can be explored and understood at different levels depending on a student's linguistic competence. For example, during an infographic activity, advanced students were asked to compare Italian life satisfaction with U.S. data, while intermediate students interpreted only Italian trends. Similarly, students were assessed based on what was realistic for their level. There was clear communication throughout the semester that expectations varied by enrollment level. This approach ensured that content complexity remained high while students were able to demonstrate learning to varying degrees.

Inclusive practice was supported through a range of high-impact instructional strategies that shaped classroom dynamics. As in the study abroad use of NOLC, this course incorporated a mix of whole-class, pair work, and small-group work. Importantly, groups were intentionally composed of students with varying levels of language ability. These mixed groupings promoted peer collaboration,

as seen in the example of Maeve, an intermediate student, who was supported by her group while trying to express her views on accommodations. These moments exemplified the shared nature of learning (i.e., the Collaborative dimension) within the NOLC framework.

Another hallmark feature of the NOLC model was the learner-responsive treatment of form. Instead of isolated grammar instruction, attention to language arose through FonF embedded in meaningful contexts. The majority of FonF instances were reactive (e.g., recasts or clarification), with some proactive FonF integrated into tasks. For example, the instructor's spontaneous explanation of *-ista* adjectives or clarification of the discourse marker *già* responded directly to learner needs during instruction. When learners' linguistic needs are taken into consideration and language is embedded in real-world, compelling topics, it is more effective (and natural) to address linguistic issues in connection with the content being studied. Furthermore, in both class discussions and written assignments, language performance was evaluated only in terms of communicative success, with the awareness that expectations were differentiated. This holistic approach to language instruction—that typifies the Instructional dimension of NOLC—reflects a developmental view of acquisition and aligns with current models of CBI (Lyster, 2017; VanPatten, 2025).

In sum, these strategies supported an inclusive learning environment rooted in community-building that promoted the active participation of all students, regardless of proficiency. In addition to pedagogical advantages, this study also demonstrates the model's feasibility as a curricular solution for small, under-enrolled language programs. By integrating students of varying language abilities into a shared learning environment, the program was able to continue offering content-rich and developmentally appropriate instruction while still meeting enrollment goals. In this way, the four dimensions of the NOLC model—Access, Collaborative, Instructional, and Curricular—offer a dual benefit: fostering inclusive learning and supporting curricular sustainability (Rodgers, 2018, 2023).

Student Experience

Having explored how the NOLC model was implemented through course design and instructional practice, I now turn to the second research question: how students perceived their self-efficacy and success in this learning environment. Self-efficacy, following Bandura's framework, is shaped by factors such as agency, perceived task value, peer modeling, and opportunities for mastery. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data, this section highlights key themes in how students navigated challenges, built confidence, and experienced growth. Quantitative measures showed significant increases in students' self-assessed language ability and content knowledge, while qualitative data revealed the mechanisms underlying these gains, namely the roles of peer collaboration, engaging content, and instructor support.

The first theme to emerge—especially among intermediate learners—was a shift from early learner uncertainty to increased confidence. All five intermediate participants reported anxiety at the start of the course, particularly around speaking. This kind of apprehension is common in mixed-level classrooms, but many students reported feeling more capable as they became familiar with the instructor, course expectations, and classroom routines. In Bandura's terms, these "mastery experiences" likely contributed to a greater willingness to take risks and a stronger sense of competence. This trajectory aligns with previous research highlighting how inclusive, content-based instruction fosters self-regulatory strategies associated with increased self-efficacy among language learners (Graham, 2022; Mills et al., 2007).

Peer collaboration also played a central role in building self-efficacy. The course format promoted interaction among students of different language abilities, with regular cycling between whole-class, small-group, and pair work. Participants frequently commented on the benefits of this

collaborative dynamic. Intermediate learners noted the value of modeling and support from more advanced peers. For instance, Evan and Autumn described how working alongside higher-level classmates helped them grow more confident in expressing themselves in Italian. These vicarious experiences—where students observe the success of more proficient peers who previously persevered through similarly challenging tasks—are thought to positively influence self-efficacy beliefs (Graham, 2022; Waddington, 2023). For advanced learners like Paige and Sophie, explaining content or grammar to others reinforced their own understanding and provided important mastery experiences. Acting as both learner and "teacher" allowed them to recognize their own progress and linguistic confidence. In both cases, students benefited from encouragement and affirmation from classmates, reflecting the role of what Bandura identifies as "verbal persuasion." This qualitative finding helps explain why attitudes toward mixed-level instruction improved significantly over the semester (from *Mdn*=4 to *Mdn*=5, p=.020). As students experienced the benefits of peer collaboration firsthand, their initial apprehension gave way to appreciation for the model's collaborative dynamics.

Course content also had a positive effect on learners' perceptions of self-efficacy and success. Participants reported significant gains in content knowledge across thematic units. Quantitative data confirmed consistently high ratings for both content and overall feelings of success, and qualitative comments linked language growth to the relevance of course topics. For example, Micah, Clara, Autumn described how engaging themes helped strengthen their interest and language development. These findings reflect the role of task value in self-efficacy theory: learners are more likely to engage and persist when content feels meaningful and relevant.

This connection is supported by research in second language acquisition, which emphasizes the role of compelling input in promoting acquisition (Lyster, 2017; Martel, 2021; VanPatten, 2025). When learners find content personally meaningful and culturally relevant, they are more likely to process it deeply and persist in engaging with it, even when their language skills are still emerging (Fabbri, 2023). This sustained engagement enhances not only language development, but also students' motivation and confidence.

From questionnaire responses and interviews, it was clear that the collaborative nature of the NOLC model bolstered feelings of self-efficacy for both intermediate and advanced learners. Initial concerns about the challenges of mixed levels were largely replaced by an appreciation for a classroom dynamic grounded in mutual support. Students referenced the ability to give and receive help, to explain language and content to peers, and to view mistakes as a normal part of learning—all of which contributed to a sense of growth and belonging. These experiences underline the model's effectiveness in fostering collaborative learning and individual confidence.

Finally, the classroom environment itself—particularly the instructor's role—contributed significantly to shaping students' self-efficacy. Learners consistently noted that the instructor created a safe, encouraging space where risk-taking was welcomed and supported. This kind of "verbal persuasion" (where the instructor communicates belief in students' ability to succeed) can be a powerful influence on self-efficacy (Graham, 2022). Instructor reassurance and transparency around course expectations helped reduce anxiety, particularly for intermediate learners who might otherwise hesitate to participate. Moreover, the instructor served as a model for advanced students in their own peer interactions, reinforcing their ability to support others and contribute meaningfully in class.

It is clear, then, that quantitative and qualitative findings converge on the same conclusions. Self-assessment ratings showed significant improvements in overall language ability and content knowledge, while the qualitative data revealed the mechanisms driving these gains. Students' descriptions of mastery experiences, peer modeling, and task value—all key sources of self-efficacy in Bandura's framework—explain the numerical increases in confidence and perceived success. Moreover, qualitative themes illuminate an important pattern: despite no significant change in the individual skill ratings, overall language ability gains emerged, suggesting students experienced a more

holistic growth that went beyond discrete skill categories. This interpretation is supported by comments about feeling more comfortable using Italian across contexts.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate how the NOLC model promotes self-efficacy and success through an inclusive learning environment where students feel supported, challenged, and valued. By fostering learner agency and confidence through peer collaboration, engaging and relevant content, and responsive instruction, the approach positions learners of all levels as capable contributors—reflecting a core tenet of inclusive pedagogy.

Implications

This study has examined the application of the NOLC approach in a mixed-level, content-driven course at a small liberal arts university in North America. While the findings are context-specific, they offer insights for institutions and instructors grappling with similar enrollment and curricular challenges.

At the institutional level, the NOLC model presents two key advantages. First, by integrating students across levels of language ability into a single course, programs can maintain or even expand their upper-level offerings without requiring large enrollments. This may involve revisiting course sequencing or credit policies to accommodate repeatable, mixed-level courses differentiated by expectations rather than content. Such flexibility could allow small programs to offer more consistent access to intermediate and advanced courses within existing curricular structures.

Secondly, the approach promotes inclusion through intentional instructional design—one that values student engagement and contribution over linguistic accuracy and structures the course to ensure meaningful participation across levels. As noted in previous work (Rodgers, 2018, 2023), NOLC's emphasis on content learning, flexible expectations, and collaboration makes it a promising avenue for curricular innovation. Institutions seeking to address enrollment concerns or to adopt more equitable pedagogies may benefit from piloting similar approaches. Supporting faculty with targeted workshops or professional development may further facilitate implementation.

At the instructional level, several takeaways emerge, particularly concerning the intentional planning required to create an inclusive, mixed-proficiency environment. First, transparent communication from the outset is essential. Students (especially those unfamiliar with mixed-level instruction) benefit from repeated explanations of the rationale, expectations, and what success looks like in this learning environment. Clear messaging reduces initial anxiety and builds learner buy-in. It is important to remember, however, that it may take some time to convince learners, especially if they are new to the approach.

Next, instructors should intentionally design tasks that maintain content rigor while supporting differentiated performance. Purposeful scaffolding allows students at all proficiency levels to contribute meaningfully to shared goals when task complexity and expectations are tiered to accommodate differing language abilities. This also extends to classroom interactions, where questioning and feedback can be adapted in real time to maximize participation and strengthen student confidence.

Creating a culture of peer collaboration is also critical. Peer interaction supports both linguistic and affective development, and its effectiveness is mediated by the social relationships of the learners (Sato & Ballinger, 2016). More confident learners can model linguistic forms and problem-solving strategies, thereby helping peers while reinforcing their own knowledge. Instructors play a key role in shaping this dynamic by modeling constructive peer support, establishing norms for equitable interaction, and fostering shared responsibility to learning (Walqui, 2006).

Finally, content selection matters. For students to succeed in a content-driven course using NOLC, the material must be engaging, relevant, and intellectually stimulating. Themes that connect to students' lived experiences or future goals foster both motivation and confidence (Fabbri, 2023). As CBI research highlights (Cammarata et al., 2016; Martel, 2021), balancing linguistic focus with meaningful content is crucial for language development and critical thinking. Even without formal needs assessments, instructors can boost engagement through enthusiastic delivery and by connecting content to students' interests. Ultimately, NOLC's effectiveness depends not only on the structural model but on the intentional choices that enable inclusive participation across levels.

Limitations and Future Research

The study's findings are limited by the small sample size, lack of control group and single-course context, reducing generalizability. Future research could examine a larger population across multiple NOLC courses (perhaps with the addition of a control group) or follow a single cohort longitudinally to assess long-term retention, self-efficacy, and language development. Comparative studies examining traditional sequencing versus NOLC courses in terms of language outcomes, motivation, and instructor experience could offer additional insight. Incorporating both standardized proficiency measures and affective indicators (e.g., anxiety, motivation) would help elucidate NOLC's full impact on language learning and learner engagement.

Conclusion

This study investigated the application of the NOLC model as an inclusive instructional framework in a content-based Italian course at a North American university. In response to declining enrollments and the need for more equitable pedagogical approaches, it examined how the course was designed and enacted to support principles of inclusive instruction—such as peer collaboration and differentiated engagement—across levels of language proficiency. It also explored how learners experienced success and self-efficacy within this mixed-level context. Through classroom observations, student questionnaires, and interviews, the study assessed both instructional practices and learner perceptions to evaluate the potential of the NOLC model to promote equity and sustainability in small or at-risk language programs.

Findings demonstrated that the NOLC approach is both structurally and pedagogically viable for integrating students of varying language abilities into a single course. Peer collaboration, engaging content, and differentiated support were central to learners' experiences of self-efficacy and success. Instructor guidance and classroom dynamics further contributed to creating an inclusive learning environment that empowered students at all levels.

This study provides practical evidence that the NOLC model can support inclusive language learning while addressing enrollment and curricular challenges. As such, it represents a viable and equitable alternative to traditional proficiency-based course structures. Beyond its classroom applications, the model has broader pedagogical, ethical, and institutional implications, particularly for small or at-risk programs seeking to balance access with rigor. In this context, the NOLC approach invites a shift in how success and progression are conceived and offers a sustainable path forward for language instruction in higher education.

References

Amat, E. N., Tejada, K. J., & Ilustre, R. G. (2022). Content-based and task-based language teaching in L2 classroom. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, 4*(3), 24–34. https://doi.org/10.32996/jeltal.2022.4.3.3

Ashton, K. (2019). Approaches to teaching in the multi-level language classroom. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 13*(2), 162–177. https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2017.1397158

Bai, B., Nie, Y., & Lee, A. N. (2022). Academic self-efficacy, task importance and interest: relations with English language learning in an Asian context. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 43*(5), 438–451. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2020.1746317

Banegas, D. L. (2012). Integrating content and language in English language teaching in secondary education: models, benefits, and challenges. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 2*(1), 111–136. https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2012.2.1.6

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory.* Prentice-Hall.

Biagi, F., Bracci, L., Filippone, A., & Nash, E. J. (2012). Instilling reflective intercultural competence in education abroad experiences in Italy: The FICCS approach+ reflective education. *Italica*, *89*(1), 21-33.

Busse, V., & Walter, C. (2013). Foreign language learning motivation in higher education: A longitudinal study of motivational changes and their causes. *The Modern Language Journal, 97*(2), 435–456. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2013.12004.x

Cammarata, L., & Tedick, D. J. (2012). Balancing content and language in instruction: The experience of immersion teachers. *The Modern Language Journal, 96*(2), 251–269. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2012.01330.x

Cammarata, L., Tedick, D. J., & Osborn, T. A. (2016). Content-based instruction and curricular reforms: Issues and goals. In L. Cammarata (Ed.), *Content-based foreign language teaching* (pp. 1–21). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203850497

CAST. (2024). *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 3.0.* https://udlguidelines.cast.org

Donato, R. (2016). Sociocultural theory and content-based foreign language instruction: Theoretical insights on the challenge of integration. In L. Cammarata (Ed.), *Content-based foreign language teaching* (pp. 25–50). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203850497

Fabbri, F. (2023). *Why study Romance languages in the US? Investigating and addressing the enrollment and retention crisis in US-based Romance language programs* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Arizona]. UA Campus Repository. https://repository.arizona.edu/handle/10150/669726

Fitzsimmons-Doolan, S., Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. L. &. (2017). Research support for content-based instruction. In M. A. Snow & D. M. Brinton (Eds.), *The content-based classroom: Perspectives on integrating language and content* (2nd ed., pp. 21–35). University of Michigan Press. https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.8198148

Florian, L. (2015). Conceptualising inclusive pedagogy: The inclusive pedagogical approach in action. In J. M. Deppeler, T. Loreman, R. Smith & L. Florian (Eds.), *Inclusive pedagogy across the curriculum, vol .7* (pp. 11–24). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-363620150000007001

Graham, S. (2022). Self-efficacy and language learning – what it is and what it isn't. *The Language Learning Journal, 50*(2), 186–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2022.2045679

Gordon, S. S. (2010). *A case study on multi-level language ability groupings in an ESL secondary school classroom: are we making the right choices?* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto]. University of Toronto TSpace (Scholaris). http://hdl.handle.net/1807/24883

Huhn, C., & Davis-Wiley, P. (2023). Multi-level world language classes: Teacher perspectives and practical solutions. *Dimensions*, *58*, 89-110. https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/dimensions/vol58/iss1/9

Lyster, R. (2017). Content-based language teaching. In S. Loewen, & M. Sato (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of instructed second language acquisition* (pp. 87–107). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315676968

Martel, J. (2021). *Moving beyond the grammatical syllabus: Practical strategies for content-based curriculum design*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003017424

Mills, N., Pajares, F., & Herron, C. (2007). Self-efficacy of college intermediate French students: Relation to achievement and motivation. *Language Learning, 57*(3), 417–442. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2007.00421.x

Rodgers, D. M. (2018). The "Non-Level Concept" and Its Potential for Curricular Innovation. *ITALICA, 95*(3), 434–460.

Rodgers, D. M. (2023). Content-based instruction: Dalla teoria alla pratica. In D. D'Eugenio, & A. Gelmi (Eds.), (pp. 49–64). Franco Cesati Editore.

Sato, M., & Ballinger, S. (2016). Understanding peer interaction: Research synthesis and directions. In M. Sato, & S. Ballinger (Eds.), *Peer Interaction and Second Language Learning: Pedagogical potential and research agenda* (pp. 1–30). John Benjamins Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1075/lllt.45.01int

Tomlinson, C. A., & Imbeau, M. B. (2023). *Leading and managing a differentiated classroom* (2nd ed.). ASCD.

VanPatten, B. (2025). *While We're on the Topic: BVP on Language, Acquisition, and Classroom Practice* (2nd ed.). American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

Waddington, J. (2023). Self-efficacy. *ELT Journal, 77*(2), 237–240. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccac046

Walqui, A. (2006). Scaffolding instruction for English language learners: A conceptual framework. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 9*(2), 159–180. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050608668639

Appendix A

Beginning and End-of-Semester Questionnaires

BEGINNING-OF-SEMESTER QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete this brief questionnaire. All answers will be confidential. Please answer ALL questions.

Background Information

1. a) NAME: ……. b) Age: …….

2. Class standing: first year sophomore junior senior

3. a) Primary major: …….

   b) Secondary major (if applicable): …….

   c) Minor(s) (if applicable): ……..

4. Have you ever been to Italy? If so, for how long (e.g., 2 weeks) and for what reason (e.g., school trip).

5. How many semesters of Italian study had you completed BEFORE this semester?

6. Do you have any exposure to Italian outside of class (besides completing course-related assignments)? If 'yes', please explain.

7. Do you know any other languages (besides Italian and English)? If so, which language(s)? What level of proficiency would you rate yourself in this (these) language(s) [*1 = very weak; 2 = weak; 3 = good; 4 = very good; 5 = superior*]?

A. Content knowledge & Language proficiency

1. Rate your <u>INITIAL</u> proficiency level in Italian using the following scale: *1 = very weak; 2 = weak; 3 = good; 4 = very good; 5 = superior*

Initial proficiency

OVERALL	_____	Reading	_____
Speaking	_____	Writing	_____
Listening	_____	Grammar	_____
		Vocabulary	_____

2. Thinking only of the *themes* you will study in this course this semester (i.e., *la cultura delle vacanze in Italia; la salute e il benessere in Italia; il sistema scolastico e universitario in Italia; il sistema politico in Italia*), rate your INITIAL level of knowledge of each subject-matter (theme). (*1 = very little; 2 = little; 3 = some; 4 = a lot; 5 = extensive*)

e.g., Theme: *il sistema politico* – Initial knowledge: 2

B. Self-efficacy, Motivation and Opinions.

1. On a scale of 1-5 (1=very low, 2= low, 3= neutral, 4 = high, 5= very high), what is your level of enthusiasm regarding the content (themes) of the course this semester? 1 2 3 4 5

2. Please explain your rating above (Are there themes that sound more or less interesting to you? Why? Please give as many details as possible.

3. On a scale of 1-5 (1=very negative, 2= negative, 3= neutral, 4 = positive, 5= very positive), how do you feel about completing end-of-unit tasks as the main form of assessment this semester? 1 2 3 4 5

4. Please explain your rating above (Do you like this approach to assessment? What are some of the advantages/ disadvantages in your opinion? Would you prefer more traditional assessment measures?) Please give as many details as possible.

5. On a scale of 1-5 (1=very low, 2= low, 3= neutral, 4 = high, 5= very high), what level of confidence do you have that you will succeed in this course this semester? 1 2 3 4 5

6. Please explain your rating above (Do you feel linguistically prepared? Why/ why not? Which aspects do you feel more/ less prepared for?) Please give as many details as possible.

7. On a scale of 1-5 (1=very negative, 2= negative, 3= neutral, 4 = positive, 5= very positive), how do you feel about having students of varying proficiencies in Italian in the same content class with you? 1 2 3 4 5

8. Please explain your rating above (Do you like this idea? Can you think of some of the advantages/ disadvantages in your opinion? Please give as many details as possible.

9. Are there any other comments you would like to make about your expectations for this course?

*****GRAZIE MILLE*****

END-OF-SEMESTER STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Content knowledge & Language proficiency

1. Rate your CURRENT proficiency level in Italian using the following scale: *1 = very weak; 2 = weak; 3 = good; 4 = very good; 5 = superior*

Current proficiency

OVERALL _____

Speaking _____

Listening _____

Reading _____

Writing _____

Grammar _____

Vocabulary _____

2. Thinking only of the ***themes*** you studied in this course this semester (i.e., *la cultura delle vacanze in Italia; la salute e il benessere in Italia; il sistema scolastico e universitario in Italia; le lingue d'Italia*), rate your CURRENT level of knowledge of each subject-matter (theme).

   (*1 = none; 2 = minimal; 3 = some; 4 = a lot; 5 = extensive*)

   e.g., Theme: il sistema scolastico – Current knowledge: 2

3. Overall, do you feel that your Italian language abilities have improved *as a result of the content (themes) you have studied this semester*? Why or why not?

4. Which aspects of the course this semester have contributed most to improving your language skills? (e.g., studying the content, working in groups, the end-of-unit tasks, etc.). Please explain.

B. Self-efficacy, Motivation and Opinions

1. On a scale of 1-5 (1=very negative, 2= negative, 3= neutral, 4 = positive, 5= very positive), how did you feel about having students of varying proficiencies in Italian in the same content class with you? 1 2 3 4 5

2. Please explain your rating above (Did you like it? What were some of the advantages/ disadvantages in your opinion? Please give as many details as possible).

3. On a scale of 1-5 (1=very low, 2= low, 3= neutral, 4 = high, 5= very high), how would you rate your overall effort in class this semester? 1 2 3 4 5

4. Please explain your rating above (Do you feel like you were always engaged? Did you prepare for each class and put time into the various assignments? Why/ why not? Please give as many details as possible.

5. On a scale of 1-5 (1=very negative, 2= negative, 3= neutral, 4 = positive, 5= very positive), how did you feel about completing end-of-unit tasks as the main form of assessment this semester? 1 2 3 4 5

6. Please explain your rating above (Did you like this approach to assessment? What were some of the advantages/ disadvantages in your opinion? Would you have preferred more traditional assessment measures? Please give as many details as possible.)

7. On a scale of 1-5 (1=very low, 2= low, 3= neutral, 4 = high, 5= very high), as you look back on the course, how would rate your level of success in what you completed this semester? 1 2 3 4 5

8. Please explain your rating above (Did you feel linguistically prepared? Why/ why not? Which aspects do you feel more/ less prepared for?) Please give as many details as possible.

9. On a scale of 1-5 (1=very low, 2= low, 3= neutral, 4 = high, 5= very high), what is your overall level of satisfaction regarding course and what you got out of it this semester? 1 2 3 4 5

10. Please explain your rating above (Which parts of the course were you most/ least satisfied with? Please give as many details as possible.

11. Are there any other comments you would like to make about your experiences in this course?

Appendix B

Summary of Class Observations

Observation 1 (Week 2)

- **Theme**: Accommodations in Italy; Italian islands.
- **Activities**:
    - **Student Presentations**: Students shared their experiences and preferences regarding different types of accommodations.
    - **Group Discussions**: Mixed groups with varying proficiency levels discussed advantages and disadvantages of different accommodations.
    - **Whole-Class Discussion**: Students shared their preferences and experiences, with the instructor providing feedback and asking questions to elicit more information.
    - **Listening Comprehension**: Students listened to a video presentation about Italian vacations and completed a comprehension task.
    - **Class Reading**: Instructor reads a text about Italian islands to the class. Students completed comprehension questions in small groups.
    - **Instructor's Role**: Provided vocabulary support, recasts, and content summaries. Circulated among groups to facilitate discussions and answers questions.

Observation 2 (Week 7)

- **Theme**: Psychological well-being.
- **Activities**:
    - **Group Work**: Students worked in groups to decide on articles for an Instagram reel comparing Italian and U.S. perspectives on psychological well-being (in preparation for end-of-unit tasks).
    - **Whole-Class Discussion:** Students rated their happiness, read short text on happiness, and discussed their psychological states.
    - **Vocabulary Matching**: Students matched vocabulary related to mental well-being and discussed the importance of different statements about mental well-being (first on their own and then reviewed and discussed as a class).
    - **Infographic Analysis**: Students analyzed an infographic about life satisfaction in Italy while answering three comprehension questions; followed by whole-class review and comparison to the U.S.
    - **Instructor's Role**: Provided vocabulary support, recasts, and content summaries. Circulated among groups to facilitate discussions and answers questions.

Observation 3 (Week 13)

- **Theme**: Italian dialects and languages.
- **Activities**:
  - **Introductory Reel**: Focused on languages and dialects in Trentino-Alto Adige.
  - **Map Activity**: Students matched descriptions of dialect areas with locations on a map in small groups; then reviewed in a whole-class discussion.
  - **Definitions**: Reviewed definitions of dialects and linguistic terms (in whole-class format).
  - **Famous Italians**: Students matched descriptions of famous Italians who used dialect in their works with pictures (in whole-class format).
  - **Dialogues**: Listened to dialogues related to Italian dialects, matched dialogues to photos, and completed transcription tasks (individually then in whole-class format).
  - **Discussion**: Discussed the use of dialects as a sign of identity.

Instructor's Role: Provided explanations of content and language, facilitated group work, and gave feedback on pronunciation and comprehension.