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English for Academic Purposes: Teacher Development in a Demanding Arena

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Abstract—Practitioners in the field of second language (L2) teaching have, since the last decade, experimented with a variety of models for teaching language through content (Brinton *et al.*, 1989). This paper describes a framework for training prospective ESOL instructors in teaching language through a content approach. The teacher-education model presented here integrates three courses—an undergraduate literature course, an EAP methodology course, and a content-based pre-academic L2 instruction course. TESOL trainee teachers and ESOL students were brought together in a modification of the adjunct model. What makes this approach unique is that the TESOL students served as part-time instructors in the adjunct course. Basing our assumptions on the reported pedagogical skills gained by the trainee teachers and the favorable reactions of the Precourse ESOL students, we suggest that such a joining of forces is of unequivocal benefit to both parties. © 1997 The American University

Introduction

As more and more international students flock to American universities, preparing them for the demands of academic content courses has become a pivotal concern to the ESOL community. It has been amply demonstrated that the demands made on students who enter the academic community are different from the survival requirements and social skills of everyday life (Cummins 1989; Cummins & Swain 1983; Bridgeman & Carlson 1983). Students aiming for the academy, as Johns and Dudley-Evans (1980) point out, demand a distinctive and particular methodology. Among the specialized skills required by academics are strategies for condensing large quantities of material; synthesis of original idea with the concepts of research; and familiarity with expository conventions of academic writing, as well as practice in the customs that pertain to critical thinking and opinion exchange. In addition, students who enter the professions must be prepared to continue their professional development in English. Johns (1993) has noted that more than 65% of professional international journals appear in English.

Cummins' (1989) most recent language proficiency model differentiates between two types of language, conversational language skills and academic language skills. The former refer to typical everyday interactions which are cognitively undemanding and contextually rich with clues to the intended meaning, while the latter refer to school language which is cognitively demanding and context-reduced. Cummins argues that what ESOL students need to succeed in school is "academic language proficiency". They need to have the ability to read and write critically in various content areas without the contextual support provided in face-to-face interactions. Thus, the main task of the ESOL instructor is not simply to develop students' "conversational language proficiency", but also to expand their ability to handle academic subjects. Although Cummins' distinction between conversational and academic aspects of language proficiency refers mainly to K-12 students, it, no doubt, also has important implications for the academic language needs of ESOL students at the post-secondary level. Several inquiries have indeed been made into the special language needs of post-secondary ESOL students (e.g. Johns 1981; Santos 1981; Spack 1988; Saville-Troike 1984; Adamson 1990, 1991).

In Spring 1994, the University of Arizona offered a teacher development course as an elective in its MA/ESOL program. In a three-tier process, the course was designed to prepare prospective ESOL instructors for readying international students for the academic demands of mainstream content courses. A skilled TESOL instructor would provide EAP training to TESOL trainee teachers unskilled in EAP methods who, in turn, were to provide support for ESOL students attempting to increase their academic study skills in an undergraduate literature course.

Structuring the Course

The cooperation of three instructors facilitated the interconnectedness described above. Table 1 illustrates the role of each.

TABLE 1

Natalie Hess, the methodology instructor, taught an MA-TESOL course (English 599, English for ESP) in which the trainee teachers studied and practiced EAP methodology. The trainee teachers in this course assisted and worked with Mohammed Ghawi, the ESOL instructor, who taught the ESOL Precourse at CESL.

Mohammed Ghawi, a doctoral student and an instructor at the Center for English as a Second Language (CESL), taught the ESOL language adjunct Precourse at CESL, and frequently attended the sessions of the MA-TESOL course. In this teaching of the Precourse, Ghawi was aided by the trainee teachers of the MA-TESOL course.

Douglas Canfield, a professor in the department of English at the University of Arizona, taught English 270D (Human Rights in Literature and Art) to undergraduate native speakers of English. This course was attended by the ESOL students and their instructor. Its content provided the basis for the language instruction in the Precourse adjunct class.

We chose the adjunct model, in which an ESOL language course is linked to an academic content course (described by Briton *et al.* 1989), since various studies (Peterson 1985; Snow & Brinton 1988; Adamson 1990) showed it to be the paradigm most useful in helping ESOL students adjust to academic demands. The standard adjunct model, however, poses several quandaries:

1. Should the students be given academic credit for the course? If so, will they not be hopelessly disadvantaged when competing with native speakers?
2. Who is to grade the ESOL students — the language teacher or the content teacher?
3. How will the adjunct course, with its needed support in teaching and administrative staff, be funded?

We believe that our modified model of the adjunct course successfully copes with the above problems, and we will clarify our suggestions in the concluding section of the article.

Design and Procedure

The ESOL Precourse

The Precourse had two components, a content component and an ESOL component. The content part was *English 270D*, an undergraduate literature course entitled *Human Rights in Literature and Art*, offered at the University of Arizona in Spring 1994. The class, which was composed of 150 native speakers, met three times a week: two 1-hour lectures with the course professor, and a 1-hour discussion session with teaching assistants in six smaller groups. The texts used in this course were novels, dramas, and films. The following texts were used during the 8-week period of the Precourse:

- *Monsieur Toussain*, a play by Edouard Glissant
- *The Communist Manifesto*, by Karl Marx
- *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, By Mary Wollstonecraft
- *The Subjection of Women*, by John Stuart Mill
- *My Bondage/My Freedom*, by Frederick Douglas
- *Anthills of the Savannah*, by Chinua Achebe
- *I Will Fight No More Forever* (a film)
- *Incident at Oglala — The Leonard Peltier Story* (a film)

The ESOL component of the Precourse was an advanced English for Academic Purposes course offered in the Center for English as a Second Language (CESL) at the University of Arizona in Spring Session II 1994. In the class there were thirteen ESOL students from six countries: five came from Kazakstan, two from the United Arab Emirates, three from Korea, and one each from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Japan. The class met 5 days a week for a total of 7 hours. Instruction in this course was based completely on the content materials in the literature course.

Choosing an appropriate content course for the ESOL students was one of the most important steps in the preparatory phase of this project. Hess and Ghawi considered a number of courses before selecting *English 270D*. This course was chosen because both instructors felt that the subject of human rights would be of interest to international students. The format of the content literature course was also thought to be ideal, since it would expose ESOL students to two teaching modes, the lecture mode in the large lecture format, and the discussion mode in the small discussion sections. In addition, the professor of the course and one of his teaching assistants were willing to welcome the ESOL students into their classes.

ESOL students in the Precourse joined the literature course in the second eight weeks of Spring 1994. Every week, they had a total of 10 hours of instruction, 3 hours in the literature course and 7 hours in the adjunct language course. In the content course, ESOL students were required to perform most of the tasks expected of native speakers, such as attending classes regularly, reading original texts, taking notes, participating in class discussions, and taking some of the essay exams. In the language class, they did language and academic skills activities that were completely based on the content course.

The Methodology Course

The methodology class was a 3-hour MA/ESOL course for the education of trainee teachers who would be dealing with academically-oriented students. It was composed of twenty-four trainee teachers. Sixteen were US born and the remainder hailed from places as diverse as mainland China and Poland. Since the course was mainly designed as a hands-on training experience, the approach was emphatically pedagogical. Theory was referred to only in its direct influence on pedagogy. For their reading assignments, the trainee teachers were directed to a variety of teacher resource books and professional journal articles from which they learned about theory and practice in content-based L2 instruction. There were two required textbooks for the course: *Content-Based Second Language Instruction*, by Brinton *et al.* (1989); and *Academic Competence: Theory and Classroom Practice—Preparing ESL Students for Content Courses*, by Adamson (1993). Highly recommended on the additional reading list was *Talking Texts: Innovative Recipes for Intensive Reading*, by Holme (1991).

The process of the class was very much its product. Trainee teachers first performed, then thought and talked about what they had done and why they had done it. The input of the trainee teachers was highly valued and in a certain sense created the syllabus for the course. In pairs, trainee teachers were responsible for presentations of articles and chapters which explored the theoretical aspects and pedagogical practices of teaching L2 for academic purposes. Their presentations often ended with demonstrations of content-based activities for teaching university-bound ESOL students. In groups, trainee teachers took responsibility for one aspect of the Precourse, and

together they worked through approaches to make complex material accessible to the ESOL Precourse students. They were also to assist the Precourse instructor in classroom teaching. They were to keep a journal of their reactions to their work and of their interactions with the material and with the ESOL students in the Precourse.

In class sessions, trainee teachers analyzed varieties of pre-reading, in-reading, and post-reading strategies; they worked on approaches to academic writing; they practiced a variety of vocabulary acquisition techniques; they produced summaries that would facilitate extensive reading; they worked on text adaptation; and they contemplated the possibilities of more efficient note-taking. Most of this was directly or indirectly practiced on classmates and later revised and brought into the Precourse. After each session in the Precourse, the trainee teachers shared and analyzed their experiences. The idea was to penetrate the intrinsic interest level of the content-course material by cutting through its linguistic density.

It was with such a plan in mind that the trainee teachers created pre-reading strategies through which Precourse students might be encouraged to focus on their own life experiences and link them with the ideas of the text. Thus, for example, they used a dictation/discussion strategy to introduce the work of Wollstonecraft. In a classroom simulation, each of the trainee teachers was given a provocative statement associated with the predicament of women. For example, two such statements were "Women can never serve in the battle units of an army" and "The primary responsibility of women is home and family".

Trainee teachers in the simulated class then divided a sheet of paper into three columns labelled "agree", "disagree", and "not sure". As each dictated his/her statement, the others wrote the statements in the most appropriate column. Thus, each trainee teacher functioned as both a dictation-giver and a dictation-taker. Once all the statements had been recorded, trainee teachers were able to discuss their various positions and later tie these to the ideas of Wollstonecraft. Having experienced the techniques in the enacted role of the Precourse student, trainee teachers were prepared to use the techniques as teacher aid in the Precourse.

We soon discovered that the complexity of the content texts made it virtually impossible for the trainee teachers to become experts on all the texts of the undergraduate course. Therefore, trainee teachers, in small groups, became experts on one text only. They were to aid the Precourse ESL instructor in generating materials and teaching during the week in which *their* text was taught. This arrangement turned out to be practical and convenient. Each trainee-teacher-expert-group worked as a team with the ESOL instructor when the time came to teach *their* text. Even teaching a single text demanded a great deal of preparation time. The average time spent by trainee teachers on each text was 22 hours (range = 10-31 hours). During these preparatory hours, trainee teachers did some or all of the following activities: textbook reading, preparation of text summaries, generating text-based ESOL activities, typing summaries and activity sheets,

conducting expert group meetings, giving presentations of the expert group's work in the teacher trainee course, note-taking in the content class, library research, and teaching or assisting another trainee teacher who functioned as cooperating teacher in the Precourse ESOL class.

Background of Teacher Education

Much interesting and useful work has gone into ESP/EAP teacher preparation. Robinson has made a valuable contribution through her *ESP Today: A Practitioner's Guide* (1991), and the entire Volume 2, Number 3 of *The ESP Journal* (1983) was devoted to the subject of teacher preparation. The question most hotly debated in the literature is whether EAP/ESP teachers must out of necessity turn themselves into experts or at least competent laypersons in the field of specialization of their students. Ewer (1983) in the lead article of the above mentioned journal answers with an emphatic "yes". Ewer, who deals with a well-defined group—Chilean teachers who are getting ready to teach English to undergraduate science majors—envisions the ESP teacher as a bridge between content and language, and admonishes his trainee teachers to become familiar with the "core" vocabulary of their future students' specialties and to gain a layman's proficiency in the field.

Such a content-centered attitude is echoed by Adams Smith (1983), who relates her experiences as an educator of ESP teachers teaching health personnel in Kuwait. These teachers developed such enthusiasm for their content that several of them actually switched careers!

Many EAP/ESP educators, however, favor a more general EAP approach. Much research focuses on genre analysis (Swales 1993; Tarone 1983; Rivers 1983). In an insightful paper Swales and L'Estrange (1983) offer a case approach through the use of letters. Abbot (1983), in a thought-provoking response to Ewer, notes that an ELT/ESL professional cannot possibly be even layman-versed in all scientific disciplines. Abbott writes about his own students who are postgraduate experts in their fields and who would only find his layman's knowledge of their field annoying. Abbott offers an approach in which students inform their teachers while the teacher provides helpful and relevant language. Hall and Kenny (1988), in their highly readable article on communicative methodology in EAP teaching, describe an 8-week pre-session course for incoming engineering graduate students. Hall and Kenny favor a content-based methodology in which the instructor releases the "illocutionary force" of students: this involves a great deal of independent work by the students, followed by "reporting back sessions". The eliciting technique most frequently employed by Hall and Kenny was a "flaunting of their own ignorance in the matter under discussion".

The teacher trainees in Hess's methodology course quite naturally worried about their ability to turn themselves into knowledgeable laymen in a great many fields. The many hours they devoted to prepare for their work as helpers in the Precourse made them quite wary of their future role as independent classroom practitioners. Hess, therefore, saw her role as the

provider of humanistic approaches and communicative techniques that would prove useful across varied and diverse contents.

Hess based her methodology on the principles of the process-aligned approach. She saw the process option of teacher education advocated by Woodward (1992) and promoted by Parrott (1993) as a system that enables the teacher to become a facilitator, a reflective theoretician, as well as an effective classroom technician.

The process approach, as proposed by Woodward (1989), encourages the unity of process and content. In this teacher-education strategy, prospective teachers consider techniques, present them, practice them, and then “move backstage” to analyze the content of their process and integrate it with theories of language learning. For example, when prospective teachers learn the jigsaw technique, Woodward asks them to do a jigsaw reading on the implementation of the jigsaw strategy. Later, trainees move up from their student roles, assume the teacher position, and analyze the effectiveness of the strategy they have just practiced. They then discuss the content presented through the strategy and tie it to the language acquisition theories they have studied. Thus, content and process merge and intertwine in a loop of understanding. Teaching through the process method becomes what Woodward refers to as “a series of choice-full options”, all of which offer possibilities that must be carefully extracted.

Thus the central approach of the methodology course was one of working through techniques, applying them to the material of the adjunct course, but also stressing how such techniques could well apply to any EAP material. In Hess’s methodology course the trainee teachers principally worked on jigsaw strategies, dictation tactics, questioning techniques, approaches to discussion, note-taking techniques, elicitation practices, and review procedures.

Results

Due to the qualitative nature of this research, the results will be reported mainly in the form of reactions to and feedback on the efficacy of the teacher development model proposed in this paper. Trainee teacher reactions were obtained from two main sources: journals and course evaluations. Throughout the methodology course, trainee teachers kept journals in which they noted their reactions to the methodology sessions as well as to their classroom experience in the Precourse. These journals were collected three times during the course, and the requests, questions and problems that surfaced in the journal writing frequently became a subtext for course content. At the end of the course, trainee teachers also wrote an evaluation of the methodology course.

Precourse students’ reactions both to the Precourse experience and the involvement of the trainee teachers were obtained by the ESOL instructor through structured oral interviews at the end of the session. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour. The interview questions, which differed for

each student depending on that student's areas of interest, generally solicited the students' overall reactions to the Precourse experience, their opinions on the content and language materials, and their accounts of the difficulties they experienced. Ghawi also recorded field notes and videotaped most of the content and language class meetings. Gains in the ESOL students' language proficiency, which were substantial, were ascertained through two quantitative measures: pre- and post-TOEFL tests, and pre- and post-Academic Skills Tests (see Ghawi 1996).

Generally, the trainee teachers described their work with the Precourse students as both interesting and lively. They were impressed by the Precourse students' genuine involvement in studying the subject of human rights. In their teaching reports they repeatedly used words such as "inquisitive", "dedicated", "cooperative", and "enthusiastic" to describe the Precourse students' attitudes towards their studies.

In their final evaluation of the methodology course, 22 of the 24 trainee teachers wrote that the course ought to be included in the program, and 23 of the 24 students said that they would recommend the course to a friend. On the whole, students praised the practical nature of the course and the opportunity to analyze ideas. Comments such as those below predominated.

I loved sharing and learning about new activities. It was enjoyable and helpful. There was a lot of opportunity to learn about the reality of teaching. Some of the pre-academic exercises helped me with my own academic work. (Anonymous student evaluation of course)

The Class required a lot of attention to the task of preparing to teach. How does one go about preparing a class, what is the relationship between the needs of the student and what they should do on a given day. We were made to face up to actual day-to-day requirements and put them down on paper and try them out. All in all, a very valuable experience. (Anonymous student evaluation of course)

Likewise, in the journal describing his work with the ESOL Precourse students, Sudirman, a trainee teacher from Indonesia who was a member of the expert group on Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, wrote,

From this tutoring experience, I feel I gained more knowledge on the history/development of women's rights in the West, which I knew nothing about before.

However, it must be noted that trainee teachers repeatedly complained about the time-consuming nature of the work they had to put into the preparatory stages of their teaching assignments in the Precourse. Much of this preparatory work had to be done before trainee teachers actually met their students, and several of the trainees complained about the difficulty of planning activities and assignments for students they had not yet met. In her report, Christine wrote,

The most difficult part of this assignment was trying to anticipate the students' needs, proficiency levels and interests and design a unit accordingly without having met them.

On the whole, the Precourse experience was described by the trainee teachers as “interesting”, “useful”, and “challenging”. It contributed to their professional growth in areas related to course development and to innovative teaching techniques. In her journal, Holli, a trainee teacher who described her involvement in the Precourse as one of the most useful experiences in her MA program, articulated most of these invaluable practical gains:

Overall, I feel this experience is one of the most useful I encountered thus far in the program. Not only was it practical in the sense of materials development and implementation, but it also gave me a taste of the realities of collaboration and curriculum modification involved in an EAP course.

The Precourse students' reactions to the entire experience were also very encouraging. Most of them referred to the experience of studying together with native speakers in a standard university course as one of the strongest advantages of the teaching model. They reported learning some interesting new aspects of classroom life and interactions in an American university. Natasha compared the “formal” and “tense” learning environment in Kazakstan with the “relaxed” and “informal” environment in the American classroom. Jaglas, also from Kazakstan, was impressed by the “openness” and “aggressiveness” of American students when they debated controversial issues. Svetlana, another Kazakstani, was surprised that the content teachers had the courage to say “I don't know” to their students. In Kazakstan, she claimed, such an expression would have caused students to lose confidence in their teachers. Although half of the students in the Precourse did not have backgrounds in literature, they nevertheless indicated that the content literature course was of great interest. The three engineering majors in the group claimed that they preferred the literature course to a content course in their own fields because the literature was so interesting and language rich.

In the early part of the trainee teachers' involvement in the Precourse, ESOL Precourse students complained that trainee teachers oversimplified their language and thus appeared to be talking down to them. As the trainee teachers adjusted to the language level and sophistication of the ESOL Precourse students, this particular grievance stopped.

Concluding Remarks

On the whole, we would highly recommend our “merger version” of the adjunct models to academic institutions involved in trainee teacher education as well as in intensive ESOL preparation. However, as is often the case at

the completion of a project, we see areas for improvement to our original approach.

It was interesting to note that even the scientifically minded students found literature an appropriate vehicle for language learning. Our findings in this area are in agreement with those of Kelly and Krishnan (1995), who successfully incorporated a literary component into the English program for engineering students at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Nevertheless, we should like to rethink the choice of an academic content course with such dense and demanding reading material. A less-demanding undergraduate course would permit us to expose the trainee teachers to all of the course material, thus making the specific content of the undergraduate course curriculum the core content of our methodology class.

The complaint that trainee teachers talked down to Precourse students must also be addressed and become part of the methodological course components. Here, we would turn to the work of Hutchinson and Waters (1987), who point to the mismatched state of conceptual skills and linguistic capacities of pre-academic ESOL learners, and suggest various approaches through which teachers can reach beyond mere language into the cognitive needs of EAP students. Since the completion of the course a new book, *The CALLA Handbook: Implementing the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach*, by Chamot and O'Malley (1994), has been published by Addison-Wesley. This text uses the kind of cross-content strategies that we very much favor; it would be an asset to our model.

In spite of the above drawbacks, we strongly recommend the introduction of a methodology of English for academic competence as a primary area of consideration in TESOL teacher education. We suggest that our approach, with certain modifications, may well serve as an appropriate model. Our version of the adjunct model in the service of teacher education has certainly overcome difficulties associated with standard versions of this model. As we previously noted, adjunct courses as a rule require costly support networks both in administrative and tutorial staff (Brinton *et al.* 1989). Another problematic area is the evaluation and accreditation process. Who is to grade the Precourse students? If they are to be given university credit for the course, should they be expected to fulfill the same requirements as the native English speakers? Such a demand, as Iancu (1993), among others, noted, creates unfair competition which may inhibit the L2 students' learning of both language skills and subject matter and turn the ESOL instructor into a tutor whose role is, at best, supportive. Our linking solution has, in fact, eliminated such concerns. The costly aspect is no longer an issue since MA/ESOL students receive course credit in lieu of money. Furthermore, since the Precourse students were awarded CESL grades rather than university evaluations at the completion of the course, they could enjoy and profit from contact with native speakers and at the same time be relieved of the strain of competing with them.

Needless to say, we have much yet to learn about the most appropriate model for a content-based methodology, but approaches to such a meth-

odology must continue to be attempted, refined, and redefined. Our merger model is a small, but we hope, useful step in this direction.

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