

Teaching ESL On-line

- In Fall 1998, an on-line intermediate grammar/writing course was offered using the Internet and e-mail as the primary means of instruction and communication. The goal was to transfer successfully the involvement and the dynamism of the ESL classroom to an on-line environment. The author describes the planning involved in adapting an existing course to the Internet, including the rationale for instructional design decisions. At the end of the semester, the course was evaluated both by the instructor and by the students. While general communication between teacher and student was good, the author concludes that the adaptation was not completely successful. Based on the evaluations, recommendations are given for improving the course in future semesters.

While distance learning may not be perceived as ideal for the teaching of ESL, the use of technology and computers in particular is quite widespread in ESL instruction. As testimony to this, the international organization Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) has recently published several volumes on using technology in the ESL classroom (Boswood, 1997; Egbert & Hanson-Smith, 1999; Hanson-Smith, 1998; Healey & Johnson, 1999; Warschauer, 1995). Boswood (1997), for example, points to the use of e-mail and networked computers as a strong source of motivation for language learning as well as a means for providing immediate feedback from both instructor and other students. Further, a study by Pratt and Sullivan (as cited in Warschauer, 1995) showed that the use of e-mail increased student participation in class discussions.

One of the early leaders in the use of the Internet for ESL learning is Dave Sperling, the creator of the largest ESL resource site on the Web, *Dave's ESL Café* (1998a). Sperling created the *ESL Café* after a Web-page

development project with an unmotivated ESL class generated lots of e-mail, authentic communication, and motivation (Clemes, 1998). In addition to his Web site, which receives hits and submissions from all over the world, Sperling has published two guides to Internet use—one for English language teachers, *The Internet Guide for English Language Teachers* (1998b) and one for ESL teachers, *Dave Sperling's Internet Activity Book* (1999).

In addition to Sperling's work, Padron and Waxman (1996) cite several studies showing that appropriate instructional technology programs can benefit English language learners from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Advantages mentioned include the flexibility to address a variety of levels of English proficiency, the ability to introduce and reinforce vocabulary in context, and the provision of opportunities for students to speak, listen, read, write, and communicate in authentic and meaningful ways. In order to achieve these benefits, materials must be flexible, be presented in context, be appropriate for the learner, address multiple learning modalities, promote interaction, and have an extensive help system. Hunt (1993) emphasizes that teachers also need in-service to learn how to use the materials effectively.

While the use of technology in general is fairly well-accepted in ESL instruction, its application to ESL distance learning programs is not as universally accepted (California Virtual University, 1998). Nonetheless, examples of technology used for ESL distance learning do exist. In 1996, the publishing company of Heinle & Heinle produced the video series *Crossroads Café* (Savage, Gonzales, McMullin, & Weddel), targeting this series squarely at the distance learning market.

This 26-episode series was designed "to teach English to adult learners working independently, with a tutor, in a distance-learning program with or without a classroom component or in a traditional classroom setting" (Savage et al., 1996, p. i). As a video course, *Crossroads Café* represents a non-interactive approach to distance learning. A search through the Internet for information about ESL courses using a more interactive approach reveals even fewer sources.

One of the few published reports of ESL instruction delivered via the Internet is Goodwin, Hamrick and Stewart's (1993) account in the *TESOL Journal* concerning the use of e-mail to better prepare students in the Latin American Scholarship Program of American Universities for studying and living in the United States. The students received reading and writing assignments via e-mail and were instructed to e-mail each other in order to get acquainted. Technological difficulties marred the effectiveness of the program, but the overall evaluation by the participants from Peru, Paraguay, Ecuador, El Salvador, Colombia, Chile, and Mexico was positive.

At the 1998 CATESOL State Conference, there were two presentations on teaching ESL via the Internet (Tucker, 1998; Chan, 1998). Both

of these presentations prompt the question of what is needed for effective ESL distance learning using on-line technologies. Perhaps part of the problem lies in the fact that so few ESL educators are currently involved in on-line distance learning. As a result, recommendations for ESL educators are coming from people outside the field—technology support personnel, administrators, and educators in other disciplines.

Denise Murray, former president of TESOL, summarizes this problem in a column she wrote on language learning in cyberspace: “I worry about the new information technology. I worry because I don’t see [ESL] educators and language specialists taking the lead” (Murray, 1998, p. 9). This article is a first step in addressing Murray’s concerns and in examining the particular issues that confront the on-line ESL educator.

Introduction to the On-line Course

At Ohlone College, one of the California Community College campuses, a survey of Writing Lab students had shown that significantly more ESL students than native-speaking students had access to computers and used them in their daily lives. As a result of this study and in response to Ohlone’s initiative to explore the delivery of on-line courses, I adapted the second of two intermediate ESL grammar/writing courses offered at Ohlone (ESL 148) for on-line delivery in Fall 1998. Ohlone gave each on-line instructor a stipend equivalent to 3-units of overload pay for course development, advertising the course with fliers, in a special section of the Fall course schedule, and on the college Web site .

Seven students enrolled for the first semester, five women and two men. Two of the women and two of the men worked full time and used computers regularly at work. They took the course primarily to help them with their professional goals. Two of the remaining three women were full-time students. They took the on-line course because their schedules prevented them from taking other sections of the class offered on campus. Both of these women used computers, but neither classified themselves as experienced users. The last student was the wife of an executive and took the class to give herself an incentive for improving her computer skills as well as to work on her English. Of the seven students, five finished the course. One woman and one man, both of whom were working full-time, had to drop the course because of work demands.

I taught ESL 148 again in Spring 1999, with a class enrollment of twelve. Eight of the students completed the course. Other on-line courses at Ohlone College enrolled more than twenty students, the minimum required for an in-person course, and offered transfer credit, while my ESL grammar course did not. While the college was supportive of on-line

courses, my second semester course was threatened with cancellation due to low enrollment. Despite the possibility of cancellation and the enrollment and attrition problems, I was not disheartened. Chan (1998a) describes a similar gradual increase in course enrollment and a similar attrition rate for her on-line ESL grammar and editing courses. Tucker (1998) also reports high attrition rates for her on-line ESL advanced reading and composition course.

Instructional Design

My "in-person" ESL 148 grammar class is both an active and interactive classroom. My evaluations are consistently high, and students have commented on the clarity of my explanations, my classroom humor, and my concern for their progress. The task in adapting my course to Internet delivery was to find equivalents for the most successful strategies.

The first design decision concerned lesson presentation. The ESL department had a required text for all sections, including the on-line course, and the course outline required short writings to reinforce the grammar being taught in the class. In my in-person class, students read the grammar explanation in the book for homework; I re-present and clarify this text in class. Since what I re-present in class is not new information, I decided not to re-present the already available text on-line. The students had their books, and if the explanations were not clear, they could e-mail me for clarification. Sometimes, however, I added additional points. For example, in the chapter on adjectival clauses, the book does not cover the use of punctuation with such constructions. For the in-person class, I provide an additional handout with a brief overview as well as an exercise.

Therefore, when developing the on-line chapter notes, I focused on the supplemental information that I presented for each in-person lesson. I also included two interactive grammar units that I had created for use over the Web, one on the passive voice and one on adjectival clauses. I used few graphics from the in-person class, so the chapter notes did not suffer in their adaptation to a Web page. In fact, because they were on the Web, students could simply print them out for reference, rather than copy them off the board, as my students do in the traditional class.

Lesson presentation in the traditional class usually occupies only 5 minutes out of 50 for any given class period. The bulk of each class period is spent correcting and reviewing the homework using the overhead projector, orally as a class, or in pairs with me answering specific student questions. Finally, students write some exercises that I correct and return, usually for revision and resubmission.

Translating the exercise correction that I traditionally do with the

overhead projector for use in the on-line class was quite simple. For fill-in-the-blank questions, I typed up an answer key that on-line students could refer to. For sentence responses, I prepared a set of possible answers, noting that the students' answers might differ. In both situations, students could use either e-mail or the discussion lists to ask questions about their own answers.

I was unable to find an equivalent for oral exercises, so students answered those questions in writing instead, with a key provided for possible answers. For pair work, I set up assignments where students exchanged e-mails with their answers and responses. In addition to changing the focus from teacher to student, I also hoped these e-mail exchanges might help foster some of the sense of class community that develops in my in-person classes. I scheduled the same written assignments for the on-line students as I do for the in-person students.

My in-person classes meet two to three times a week. As a result, the homework for a week is spread out over multiple sessions with two nights to complete each assignment. For my on-line students, posting a new homework assignment every other day seemed impractical. While e-mail was a reasonably effective medium for communication, it could not compare in economy or speed with raising one's hand in class to ask a question.

In addition, some students might not check their e-mail more than once every 24 hours. If they happened to miss the posting one day, they would have then only one day to complete the assignment. Pair assignments via e-mail could clearly take several days—as opposed to minutes in an in-person classroom. As a result, I decided to post one weekly homework assignment that equaled in amount the two assignments I give in-person for the week.

Because the first official day of class was a Wednesday, I designated Wednesdays as the date on which I posted homework assignments for the coming week. I wanted to provide the answer keys early enough so students could still post questions before the next homework assignment came out, but not so early that students would be tempted to look at the answers before working on the exercises. For this reason, I set the weekend, preferably Saturday, as the time to post the answers in order to give the students three days to review their work.

The format for the homework was fairly standard. To provide content, I typed full sentences for answers regardless of whether the exercises were fill-in-the-blanks or sentence completion. Midway through the semester I began highlighting the words for fill-in-the-blank answers with bold-faced type. I considered only briefly having my on-line students submit every exercise for correction because I could not see how I would find time to correct 200 sets of exercises a week in addition to writing and quizzes.

For the eight chapters that I cover in the in-person class, there are six review sessions followed by quizzes. The review prepares the student for the format of the quiz, which varies from chapter to chapter. For example, the chapter quiz for passive voice requires students to read a paragraph and decide which sentences to change into the passive voice. The chapter quiz for adjectival clauses requires students to make adjectival clauses to clarify sentences based on a picture. The chapter quiz for gerunds and infinitives requires the students to write a story using eight pairs of verbs.

The review is always distributed as homework before the class prior to the quiz itself. The students review the questions in class, usually putting sample answers on the board for discussion and offering alternatives for consideration. The actual quiz takes place during a fifty-minute period. All quizzes are open book, and students are able to use dictionaries and notes in addition to the class grammar text. I proctor each quiz and am available to answer questions.

For the on-line class, the review was assigned as homework approximately one week before the quiz took place. Because most of the quizzes required students to create their own sentences, an answer key did not seem useful. However, for the chapter quizzes on the passive voice and adjectival clauses, answers were fairly standard for all students. Therefore, I posted an answer key to the review. Since I felt that the review was optional, I did not require that answers be turned in to me.

Administering quizzes on-line raised several issues. Because the schedules of my students varied and because e-mail could be delayed, I established a twenty-four hour window for students to complete and return a quiz to me. The 24 unproctored hours gave on-line students much more time to complete a quiz and greater freedom to copy someone else's answers or ask for help, but I decided to rely on their honesty.

Two factors made me feel better about this decision. First, ESL courses at Ohlone college are non-transferable and non-degree applicable. This means that they can neither be used for transfer credits at a four-year institution nor applied toward an Associate of Arts degree at a community college. The only reason students would take ESL 148 on-line would be for their own benefit. If they chose to cheat, it would only impede their own progress. Second, while ESL 148 was part of the required sequence, passing ESL 148 did not permit students to exit the ESL program. Students were still required to pass ESL 149, Second Language Writing Skills. If they did not do their own work for ESL 148 on-line, it would become readily apparent in ESL 149, to the detriment of the student's progress.

I did decide, however, to require an in-person final exam to confirm the quality of each student's work. Their scores on the final exam should reflect

a competency similar to their quiz results. I required ID for students I did not already know personally.

To be available to answer the questions of on-line students, I scheduled chat sessions during the quiz periods. In addition, students were able to contact me by e-mail, which I read as often as possible during the quiz period. For the first quiz, I accessed my e-mail six times in the twenty-four-hour period.

In my in-person grammar/writing classes, I retype student essays to provide both corrections and a model for their future writing. I require students to recopy the corrected model by hand in order to provide kinesthetic reinforcement for their writing. Because of the use of electronic communication with my on-line students, this method was not practical. Both Chan (1998) and Tucker (1998), experienced on-line ESL instructors, put comments in the body of the essay itself to indicate corrections to student papers.

Following this procedure, I offset my in-line comments with asterisks or parentheses. The corrected essay was then e-mailed to students. This method was significantly slower than the method I was accustomed to, and I found that I sometimes needed several lines to explain or suggest a correction. It was easy to lose track of where the comment began and ended, and the comments often overwhelmed the text. At times, it was difficult to find an appropriate place to insert such comments.

I had already experimented with Martin Holmes' (1998) teaching tools such as *JCross* (a crossword generator) and *JCloze* (a cloze passage generator). In the course of doing so, I discovered that he also produced *Markin'*, a program for marking written work. I experimented with the program during Spring 1998, using it with a former student. The student responded favorably to the format and interactivity, and I ordered a registered version for use with my on-line class.

The *Markin'* program allows an instructor to set up a correction key, providing a short explanation or lengthy examples. Each error is assigned a button in the interface. When instructors locate errors, they highlight them and click on the button corresponding to the correction key explanation. The program creates a hyper-text link between the now highlighted text and the explanation. Free-form comments can also be made. After an error is highlighted, instructors click on the comment button and an empty text box opens up. They can then type in additional comments, and after clicking "OK," the highlighted text is hyper-text linked to the comment. The program also provides two global feedback text boxes for general comments on the writing and a box in which to enter an assignment grade.

When the text is corrected, instructors can upload the essay with corrections as a Web-page that can be e-mailed to the student as an

attachment or put up on the Internet. In either case, students can review the corrections using their Web browsers. Unlike in-line comments using e-mail, this method does not interrupt the flow of the original essay. Corrections are indicated by an underline, which is the convention used on most Web pages. Students can click on the link to access the comment and then click a "return to text" button to go back to where they were in the essay.

Class Communication

For the on-line program, the college wanted to provide a course management program offering mail, discussion lists, testing, and record keeping (see Appendix for web sites for materials and tools used in ESL 148 on-line class). *Top Class*, accessed through a Web browser, provided a full range of communication without the need always to use a specific computer. In addition, an Internet Relay Chat (IRC) server was available for real-time text-based communication, and links were provided on the distance education Web site to several free IRC programs available on the Internet.

In a traditional classroom, students make friends and converse informally about personal and classroom issues. While not sure that on-line students wanted to establish friendships with their on-line peers, I wanted to give them opportunities for communication that did not involve the instructor. Therefore, I decided that they should find out a little about each other in order to feel comfortable exchanging messages. For the first class assignment, I asked each student to write a short biographical statement that would be posted in a folder on *Top Class*. At the end of each biographical statement, I included the student's e-mail address and *Top Class* mail name. In this way, students could directly communicate with each other.

In addition, I set up discussion areas for three topics: technology, grammar, and general. Students could communicate with both the instructor and each other in these discussion areas. The technology area would handle questions about the technologies they were using including *Top Class* and IRC. The grammar area was for discussions of the grammar points being covered. The general area was for students to discuss whatever they wanted. In this last area, the instructor would participate as a peer, not an authority.

Students on campus have access to the instructor in person and via telephone, fax, e-mail, and U.S. mail. On-line students had the same modes of communication at their disposal except for in-person. However, they would have the additional opportunity for IRC and the use of discussion lists through *Top Class*. I felt confident that in this one area, on-line students had the same access to the instructor as their in-person peers.

Formative Evaluation

During the semester, I asked students for feedback about different aspects of the class such as the use of *Top Class*, their ability to handle attachments to e-mail, and their reaction to pair assignments. I also had a chance after their in-person final examination to engage them in an informal discussion of their experience with this on-line class.

Since this was the first semester that on-line classes were offered, there were some administrative problems related to getting students their passwords and usernames. However, once those were resolved, all seven of my students were able to log on to the Internet, use a Web address to access the Ohlone College *Top Class* home page, enter a username and password, and navigate the *Top Class* interface to read and post messages. One student commented that *Top Class* was very easy to access and navigate. Another less technologically sophisticated student said that she knew enough to do what she needed to do. However, she never learned to use several of the icons in *Top Class*.

Students were also able to download easily the programs needed for IRC. In our first on-line chat session, one student stated that she had her husband install it for her. Another student lamented that none of the chats had been scheduled at a time when she could participate. Overall, however, students were very comfortable with e-mail. Three of the students had e-mail accounts through an Internet Service Provider (ISP), while two had e-mail accounts accessed through the World Wide Web. Students knew how to cut and paste their homework from a word processing file into an e-mail, and one student regularly sent her homework as an attachment.

In evaluations of the on-line class, students indicated that classroom materials were "OK" or "good." While the students were content, I felt that most lessons were lifeless and evinced little of the energy and humor that I convey in the classroom. Students were not getting the full teaching experience from me. The one exception to this was the grammar units I developed independently of the class under the title *grammarONLINE*. I used both the unit on the passive voice and the unit on adjectival clauses. One of my on-line students described the *grammarONLINE* units as being very interesting and informative. He hoped that I would create similar units for the other grammar topics.

Homework exercises also provided little of the interactive exchange that I experience in my in-person classroom. The pair work was not successful. For the first assignment, I assigned partners, suggesting that they work individually and then e-mail their answers to each other to check. I provided only a final due date for the assignment. On the due date, two students e-mailed to tell me that their partner had never responded or had e-mailed

them at the last minute. I asked students to post their reactions to their pair-work experience on the discussion list, and the comments were not favorable.

For the second pair work assignment, I followed the advice of Boettcher (1997) and Hiltz (1995) and made the directions for the pair work more explicit. In addition to assigning partners, I assigned each student specific tasks to do and deadlines for e-mailing the other member of the pair, as well as for e-mailing the results of their collaboration to the instructor. In spite of the additional directions, several students did not pay attention to the deadlines. In addition, two students were basically inactive by that time but had not notified me. One confessed after the final examination that she really disliked pair and group work and did not find it beneficial.

I had hoped that the discussion lists would substitute for the interchange that occurs in the classroom when correcting homework assignments as a group. However, a total of only three questions were posted to the discussion lists during the semester. When asked in an end-of-the-semester e-mail why they had not participated in the discussion lists, three students revealed that they had not done most of the non-required homework. They all suggested that I have them submit more work for correction since they found my corrections and comments very helpful, and it provided motivation for them to do the work.

When asked why there were so few questions about grammar, I received varied responses. Three students acknowledged that they had asked few questions because they did little of the homework. One student said that asking questions by e-mail was very difficult because it was hard to explain what it was that she did not understand. Another student reported that the answers to the homework usually answered her questions. In response to a direct question about the effectiveness of using bold-face to highlight homework answers, the students responded that it definitely helped to isolate the answer from the rest of the sentence.

The reviews for quizzes suffered from much the same lack of interactivity as the homework. No questions were posted to the discussion lists. However, for different quizzes, different students e-mailed me their completed reviews for correction. Several students mentioned that I should put up answers for all reviews even though student answers would differ. They said the answers provided a better understanding of what was expected of them on the quiz and provided grammatical examples for further study.

The quizzes went very smoothly. Students received their quizzes by e-mail without problem and generally submitted them within the 24-hour deadline. One student did not read the deadline clearly and submitted a quiz late after an e-mail prompting from me. One quiz came in by fax when a student's e-mail failed.

One of the original purposes of incorporating IRC was to provide a real-time environment in which students could ask questions about their quizzes. The first chat session was held in the evening during the 24-hour window for the first quiz. Two students participated that evening, but neither asked questions about the quiz. Both were interested in trying out the technology, and the exchanges were primarily about downloading software and installing the chat program. The second chat session was held in the early afternoon of the third 24-hour quiz period in order to accommodate students who were unable to log in at night. No students participated during the two-hour session.

As a result of this, the third session was scheduled in the evening of the fourth quiz period. Two students participated, including one student who had participated in the first session. Because it was the evening of national elections, the chat session centered on ballot propositions and a discussion of the ethics of gambling. Of the three chat sessions, this one was the most engaging and interesting. Only three chat sessions were held instead of the originally envisioned six. In the two sessions where there were student participants, no one had any questions about the quiz, my primary reason for holding the chat sessions. In addition, because of students' schedules, all of the chat sessions needed to be at night. Because of my own teaching schedule, this was not possible for all six quiz periods.

Markin' worked well for correcting essays. After the first essay, I used *Markin'* to create a Web-page for each essay with hypertext links from the text to explanations of errors. I generated the Web pages for each student and e-mailed them as attachments. Two students were unable to view Web pages directly in their e-mail programs because they were using an earlier version of a Web browser (which did not support this capability) or a dedicated e-mail program (such as *Eudora*) that did not allow HTML-formatted e-mail to be viewed. Several of the students did not know how to save attachments for viewing offline. Therefore, I uploaded the Web pages of corrected essays to my directory on the instructional server and e-mailed the students the Web addresses for viewing their work.

While this dual method of delivery solved the access problem, one student told me that the explanations were insufficient in guiding her towards informed correction of her papers. In fact, her revisions were excellent. The only area she did not understand was the use of articles, a problematic grammar point for most second language learners. However, her perception that the explanations in general were not sufficient was important to note. In talking to another student after the final examination, I found out that she had no trouble loading the corrected essay into her Web browser. However, she never understood that the blue underlined words were links, so she tried to correct her mistakes without the benefit of the explanations.

Communication between students and me was good throughout the semester. I answered all e-mails within 24 hours, including ones received on the weekend. Students expressed general satisfaction with the ease of contact. They e-mailed me in response to questions or to submit homework, but there was little student-initiated communication. Students explained this by saying that they had few questions they needed answered, or that they did not know how to phrase their questions. There was also little e-mail communication between students except for the two pair-work exercises. Students also commented that they missed the communication that takes place between students in a classroom.

One aspect of communication that I, as the instructor, did not like was the variety of ways in which I could receive e-mails on-line. In addition to my school e-mail, there was the dedicated e-mail in *Top Class*, which one of the students used regularly. There was also my home e-mail account, which I accidentally used at one point and which students ended up using from time to time instead of my school account. As a result, instead of having a single mailbox, I regularly had to check all three mailboxes. Furthermore, e-mails that I received at school were not accessible from home and vice-versa, thus delaying my responses to student questions.

Two of the students took classes on campus, and one of them used that opportunity to submit assignments and ask additional questions. Students also used the fax to submit work, and one student used the telephone when her ISP was down and she could not access her own e-mail.

Two students who had previously taken my ESL classes in person were asked after the final examination to compare the classroom experience with the on-line experience. They commented that both classes were very useful and stressed the convenience of the on-line course. When asked whether one should take a classroom course rather than an on-line class if it is convenient to do so, one of them remarked that good students would study hard and do well regardless of whether they were taking a classroom course or a course on-line. The other said that the in-person class was generally better because attendance in class forced students to stay on top of assignments.

Recommendations for Improving the On-line Class

While the students had little trouble overall with the technology involved in the class, it was clear they needed more initial guidance. Two students mentioned that they took the class to learn more about the Internet. For this reason, I would make the orientation session at the start of the semester more comprehensive. In addition to introducing the students to the *Top Class* interface, I would engage them in activities

using its various features. For example, during the orientation, students could send mail to each other through *Top Class*, post to a discussion list, and add a posting to an existing discussion topic. They could engage in IRC. Finally, they could look at a sample essay corrected using *Markin'* to see how the links worked.

The students were not particularly comfortable working together or communicating with each other on-line because they did not know each other. While the introductions on-line were useful, one student suggested that I add one more in-person meeting early in the semester. I could use the meeting to check on how well the students were dealing with the technology and to give the students a second chance to meet each other. A mixed social and instructional atmosphere might be appropriate.

Feedback on the interactive Web-based units I developed for the passive voice and adjectival clauses was very positive. Although the development of each unit is very time intensive, I would like to create such units for each grammatical topic that I teach.

Students suggested that more homework be submitted. While it would be impossible to grade all exercises in the book, in the future I plan to have at least one exercise submitted per week. In designing the course, one aspect I failed to replicate was the feedback on student comprehension that I receive in the classroom by watching student faces or listening to the hesitancy in their answers. For my on-line students, the only way to ascertain that they are keeping up and comprehending the lesson materials would be to see and evaluate more of their work.

The discussion lists and IRC offer the means to provide feedback to the entire class as well as opportunities for informal communication and community building. However, based on my own experience and that of Chan (1998), I would provide more direction for both of these venues. I would begin by having students contribute on directed topics as part of their participation in the class. As the semester proceeds, I would ask students to suggest further topics. In the second in-person meeting I would provide notes on how to ask questions about grammar.

To improve upon *Markin'*, I would review my explanations and add more examples to clarify difficult topics, cross referencing explanations with sections of the class text to provide students with additional resources. Showing an example of a paper corrected using *Markin'* at the orientation would insure that students knew how to access the feedback.

I touched upon the low enrollments for non-degree-applicable ESL courses and the problem with attrition earlier. Attrition is a problem for all on-line classes. However, with regards to low enrollment, creative solutions are needed in order to offer an on-line ESL course successfully. In my case, I reached an agreement with my area dean to combine the enrollment for

the spring course with an anticipated under-twenty enrollment for the following semester and agreed to be paid for only one course.

Conclusion

While the overall experience with this on-line class was positive, both from the instructor's and the students' perspectives, I was unable to replicate the experience of my in-person classroom with my on-line class. The transmission of information was quite successful, and test taking and essay correction worked well. However, aspects of the classroom that went beyond reading and writing did not transfer well.

My on-line class lacked the motivation that comes from active engagement between learners and the instructor. Students were able to ask questions, but writing out these questions was difficult. Additionally, their questions were asked in isolation and with a time-delay between asking and receiving an answer. On-line students also failed to receive the dynamic presentation of material that normally occurs in the classroom, where they are actively engaged in the process. On-line students received the same information but in a static page of notes.

The Web-based presentations in my *grammarONLINE* units were the closest approximation to my in-class lessons. They provided a level of interactivity and responsiveness that was absent from a mere page of notes. However, each of the two units took a minimum of 40 hours to develop. This type of materials creation is for the enthusiastic hobbyist, not for normal classroom teachers. They do not have the time to develop such materials to make their classes more interactive and stimulating.

One way in which on-line classes could be made more interactive would be via software that could aid an instructor in developing more interactive teaching materials that function well even with today's limited modem speeds. Text can be interactive, as the favorable response to my on-line grammar units shows, but current software is not optimized to produce Web sites of this type.

Video and audio components would also provide an added degree of interactivity and dynamism to an on-line course. Development of such components take time, but they could be taken directly from what the instructor already does in the classroom using a video-camera or a tape-recorder. However, current bandwidth limitations for home users of the Internet makes extensive use of these media impractical. In the long-term, the bandwidth for home access needs to be greatly improved to permit satisfactory Internet access to audio and video. In the meantime, perhaps a hybrid course could be developed involving video-taped lectures and the use of the Internet for communication.

In closing, ESL professionals eager to learn about offering on-line ESL courses themselves should note the following points:

First, be prepared for a lot of work getting your materials on-line. While software continues to improve portability of documents to the Web, the instructor still needs to consider what is appropriate and most effective. The best on-line materials were those that took me hours to prepare. At the same time, software is making it easier and easier for an instructor with basic computer knowledge to create Web documents. My knowledge of HTML (the coding language used in formatting Web pages) helped me in refining my on-line documents. However, many teachers, including some of my on-line colleagues at Ohlone College who have no knowledge of HTML, are creating Web documents with such user-friendly graphical user interface programs as *Microsoft FrontPage*, *Adobe PageMill*, and *Netscape Composer* (see Appendix).

Second, be prepared to make a long-term commitment and to get a long-term commitment from your institution. Enrollments for non-degree-applicable-credit on-line ESL courses may begin low and increase gradually with each semester. Third, be prepared to spend a lot of time communicating and responding to student work via e-mail and discussion lists in addition to preparing materials and posting for on-line delivery.

Finally, do not expect that your on-line class will approach the interactivity and excitement of your in-person classroom. New technologies are on the way to help us better approximate the in-person experience, but in the meantime, be prepared to sacrifice some of the benefits of the in-person classroom for the convenience in delivery that on-line classes offer our students.

Author

Mark Lieu has been teaching ESL at Ohlone College in Fremont, California since 1989. He has an M.A. in TESL and an M.A. in Instructional Technology, both from San Francisco State University. He was test coordinator for the Test Banks that accompany B. Azar's Basics of English Grammar and Fundamentals of English Grammar.

References

- Boettcher, J. (1997). Internet pitfalls: What NOT to do when communicating with students on the Internet. *Syllabus*, 11(4), 46-52.
- Boswood, T. (Ed.). (1997). *New ways of using computers in language teaching*. Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.
- California Virtual University. (1998). California Virtual University: Search of catalog for courses in English language and literature/letters. Retrieved September 6, 1998 from the World Wide Web: http://www.california.edu/catalogs_list.asp.
- Chan, M. (1998, April). *Teaching an on-line ESL grammar and editing course*. Paper presented at the 29th annual conference of the California Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of other Languages, Pasadena, CA.
- Clemes, G. (1998). Dave Sperling: A man with a virtual passion. *ESL Magazine*, 1(3), 20-24.
- Egbert, J., & Hanson-Smith, E. (Eds.). (1999). *CALL environments: Research, practice, and critical issues*. Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.
- Goodwin, A., Hamrick, J., & Stewart, T. (1993). Instructional delivery via electronic mail. *TESOL Journal*, 3(1), 24-27.
- Hanson-Smith, E. (1998). *Technology in the classroom*. Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.
- Healy, D., & Johnson, N. (Eds.). (1999). *1999 CALL software list*. Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.
- Hiltz, S. (1995). Teaching in a virtual classroom. Paper presented at the 1995 International Conference on Computer Assisted Instruction [on-line]. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: <http://www.njit.edu/njIT/Department/CCCC/VC/Papers/Teaching.html>.
- Holmes, M. (1998). *Language teaching programs from Martin Holmes*. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: <http://www.net-shopper.co.uk/creative/education/languages/martin.HHTTP>

- Hunt, N. (1993). A review of advanced technologies for L2 learning. *TESOL Journal*, 3(1), 8-9.
- Murray, D. (1998). Language and society in cyberspace. *TESOL Matters*, 8(4), 9-21.
- Padron, Y., & Waxman, H. (1996). Improving the teaching and learning of English language learners through instructional technology. *International Journal of Instructional Media*, 23(4), 341-354.
- Savage, K., Gonzalez, P., McMullin, M., & Weddel, K. (1996). *Crossroads Caf  (sampler introduction)*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Sperling, D. (1998a). *Dave's ESL Caf *. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: <http://www.eslcafe.com>.
- Sperling, D. (1998b). *The Internet guide for English language teachers* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Sperling, D. (1999). *Dave Sperling's Internet activity book*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Tucker, C. (1998, April). *Teaching composition on-line through the internet*. Paper presented at the 29th annual conference of the California Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of other Languages, Pasadena, CA.
- Warschauer, M. (1995). *E-mail for English teaching: Bringing the Internet and computer learning networks into the language classroom*. Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.

Appendix

URLs for Materials and Tools Used in ESL 148 On-line Class

Adobe Pagemill:

<http://www.adobe.com/>

Front Page:

<http://www.microsoft.com/frontpage/>

grammarONLINE (ancillary grammar units):

<http://on-line.ohlone.cc.ca.us/~mlieu>.

Internet Relay Chat:

<http://mirc.com/>

Mark Lieu's Homepage:

<http://www.ohlone.cc.ca.us/people/mlieu>.

Netscape Composer:

<http://netscape.com>

On-line information and publicity for *ESL 148 On-line*:

<http://www.ohlone.cc.ca.us/people/mlieu/148on-line.html>.

Sample of corrected student essays:

<http://on-line.ohlone.cc.ca.us/~mlieu/esl148/sample.html>.

Top Class:

<http://www.wbtsystems.com/>