



How Can ESL and Content Teachers Work Effectively Together in Adjunct Courses?

YOUNG GEE

Glendale Community College

The ESL teacher must develop a good working relationship with the content instructor if an ESL adjunct course is to be successful. There will be more opportunities for collaboration if colleagues are flexible, caring, and concerned. ESL instructors face many challenges in doing this for any number of reasons: content instructor unfamiliarity with second language learning; disregard for ESL as a discipline; or hidden agendas to have the ESL class serve in a tutoring function rather than as a language acquisition class. However, most content instructors who agree to work in an ESL adjunct situation are sensitive to language issues. How can we develop a good working relationship with the content instructor? Allow me to describe the modified adjunct course I teach at Glendale Community College and explain how I fostered that important relationship.

In 1990 the College Access Program at Glendale Community College proposed the creation of a number of *special paired classes* or *connected courses*, which were meant to improve the performance of students in content classes. This presented the opportunity for the creation of a content-based ESL course in which the ESL students were separated from the general student population in the classroom. In this sheltered adjunct class, we decided to pair the advanced reading and composition class, ESL 165, with a course in social science, Social Science 123—Asians in America. We limited enrollment to 25 students and arranged our class schedules so that the students would go to their ESL class on Mondays and Wednesdays from 9 to 11 a.m. and then immediately to their social science class from 11 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Since this was the first attempt at Glendale College to implement an adjunct class in this area, I felt that an analysis of student needs in the social science class had to be done before the ESL class materials development could begin.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) state that a needs analysis must determine the "necessities, lacks, and wants" of learners as well as the course objectives. Such an analysis brings the learners into the

design of the syllabus and materials development. The *necessities* of the course were the required instructional objectives which had been predetermined by the course outlines used at Glendale Community College. The *lacks* could be defined as skills, knowledge, or abilities that the students lacked as determined by someone other than the learners. To determine lacks, I created a questionnaire for the social science content instructor, Mako Tsuyuki, to complete (see Appendix for a copy of the questionnaire). His answers helped me determine what skills and areas to emphasize in my syllabus and materials. Additionally, I attended three of his class lectures to determine lacks. The *wants* were determined by questionnaires given to all students (native English-speakers as well as nonnative speakers) in his regular Social Science 123 classes.

The needs analysis got my relationship with the content instructor off to a good start. Our meeting to discuss the results of the questionnaire presented an excellent opportunity to get his comments and correct any misunderstandings or omissions in regard to his responses. The questionnaire revealed the instructor's concerns in a number of areas. The first lay in the area of speaking skills. He felt that students needed to ask questions about the readings and respond to questions in class. Listening skills were important because of the rapid speech in lectures. Reading skills needed were for understanding vocabulary and main ideas. Writing clearly was also very important. After meeting with Mako Tsuyuki, I realized that new information presented in his lectures was very important, and I responded to his needs by incorporating exercises to develop skills he felt were necessary to get good grades in his class. I believe that being responsive to the content instructor's needs from the very beginning was an important first step in building mutual respect. It showed him I was on his side.

The meeting also gave me the opportunity to inform the content instructor of the instructional goals of my class and how I proposed to integrate the language skills of writing, reading, listening comprehension, and speaking with a focus on content. I asked him to let me review essay topics from past exams so I could use them for practice essays in my class. I assured him that I would alter these questions and that I wanted them so that students could practice writing in the same discourse modes. For example, comparison and contrast were frequently used, as in this prompt: Describe the similarities and differences between early Chinese and Japanese immigrants. Descriptive questions were common, as in this question: What were some "push and pull" factors affecting the early immigrants?

Because we jointly built the foundation of the ESL class, Mako Tsuyuki and I developed a team spirit and reached mutual goals. In our subsequent meetings, Mako Tsuyuki asked me questions about

student progress, ESL methodology, and language acquisition. I, of course, asked him to clarify content information and had opportunities to further sensitize him to specific language issues in his classroom. These meetings also helped to build trust in each other and respect for our two very different disciplines. When he asked, I explained ESL techniques used to foster language acquisition, such as discussion groups or peer correction, and offered suggestions about how to use these techniques in his class. However, I felt that it was important to offer only when asked because my suggestions could be taken as a pedagogical criticism rather than a sharing of teaching techniques.

Additionally, we both realized the need to maintain frequent communication by having weekly or biweekly meetings. In my modified adjunct, I used the content text from the social science class as the reading text. This required me to keep pace with the content instructor's lectures so that I wouldn't go too slowly or too fast in our content-related class discussion and writing activities. While we tried to have regular weekly meetings in the beginning, we found that these weren't always necessary, and so we met informally as needed. Sometimes the meetings would last much longer than we had expected (2 hours) or they would be no more than 10 minutes. During the meetings we caught up on what we were doing in our respective classes and discussed the progress of the class in general and of particular students in need of help. We also used these opportunities to share information about our respective disciplines.

At about the middle of the semester, we met to discuss student progress and restate our goals for the remainder of the term. This was important because it allowed us the opportunity to negotiate a balance between the remaining course objectives of our respective classes and what the students could realistically complete. The midsemester and subsequent meetings helped strengthen ties. Developing ties can take many forms, from strictly business—that is, discussing students—to more personal ones, such as inviting the content instructor out to lunch or to have a cup of coffee. Informal meetings give both instructors the opportunity to meet in a neutral setting without pressure to be strictly professional. This was another important means to build a working relationship.

At meetings, I tried to guide Mako Tsuyuki into seeing educational issues in terms of language rather than content mastery alone. When we could agree on some issue being language based rather than content based, I could affect his class. Meetings which were held after his tests provided excellent opportunities for this. After his first test, we met to discuss the problems the students experienced. I was quite frank with him about comments from the students. Most said that vocabulary on the test was difficult or unfamiliar and that they simply hadn't had enough time to finish it. In other words, they

spent more time trying to understand the questions than answering them. I suggested using simpler vocabulary and sentence structures in the explanations and test items, giving more examples, grouping similar test-question types together, and especially, allowing enough time for ESL students to finish what would take native English speakers less time. For example, a later test included a multiple choice section and an essay section. I let him know that most students did poorly on the essay because of time limitations. I suggested splitting such a test into two days because ESL students need more time to write. He agreed to do this with later tests. Of course, constructive criticism is a two-way street, so it was important to always ask the content instructor what I could do better in my class. How could I have helped the students prepare for that test better? What weaknesses did the content instructor see that might be language related?

When teaching in an adjunct framework, the language teacher should expect that ESL students will ask questions about the content. I handled this by stating from the beginning that I was the ESL instructor, not the content instructor. While I became familiar with enough content material to correct factual student errors, I made it a point to stress that the students were the content masters. If the students disagreed about information, I asked them to speak to the content instructor. It was important to follow up on these questions, and I always asked him what they had asked. This process served to keep a professional separation between content and ESL. The content instructor knew I wasn't treading in his area of expertise, and I believe that this helped strengthen our relationship.

Content-based instruction is, in my opinion, ideal for ESL instruction at the community college level. Students at this level are above survival ESL needs. But the academic demands placed on them in regular content classes, which are usually taken in addition to ESL classes, are taxing. While traditional ESL classes serve to bridge the linguistic gaps between the students' first and second languages, they focus on language, not content. Content-based ESL classes, where language is the vehicle to content mastery, is an effective way to assist students with the transition to regular content courses. It necessitates, however, many practical considerations—one of the most critical being the need to build a strong working relationship with content instructors. ■

References

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix

Instructor's Needs Analysis

Instructions: Please respond to the following items by checking the appropriate column. Only think about your students who are NOT native speakers of English in SS 123.

There are <i>weaknesses</i> in these <i>speaking skills</i> :	<u>Often</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Never</u>	<u>N/A</u>
1. Participating in class discussions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Participating in small in-class groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Formulating questions clearly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Responding to questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Interacting with the instructor via comments/questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Giving oral presentations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Pronunciation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Other (specify) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

There are <i>weaknesses</i> in these <i>listening skills</i> :	<u>Often</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Never</u>	<u>N/A</u>
9. Following oral dictation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Understanding lectures in class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Understanding comments/questions of classmates	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Understanding films/videos shown in class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Other (specify) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

There are <i>weaknesses</i> in these <i>reading skills</i> :	Often	Sometimes	Never	N/A
14. Vocabulary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Reading speed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Making connections between important ideas from reading assignments to lectures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Distinguishing facts from opinions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Interpreting charts, graphs, statistics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Making logical inferences	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Understanding the writer's biases/positions on issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Other (specify) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

There are <i>weaknesses</i> in these <i>writing skills</i> :	Often	Sometimes	Never	N/A
22. Grammar (e.g., subject-verb agreement)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. Mechanics (e.g., punctuation)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. Proper essay form (e.g., indentation)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. Organization of ideas (i.e., orderly presentation of ideas)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. Essay development (i.e., enough supporting details)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. Clearly stating main ideas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. Being specific enough (i.e., not overgeneralizing)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. Summarizing and synthesizing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30. Explaining/defining ideas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31. Comparing and contrasting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32. Arguing/defending a point	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33. Describing events in order or a process	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34. Showing causes and effects	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
35. Classifying/grouping together related ideas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
36. Other (specify) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

There are <i>weaknesses</i> in these general <i>academic skills</i> :	Often	Sometimes	Never	N/A
37. Coming to see the instructor for help	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
38. Using available resources (e.g., library, tutoring)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
39. Taking efficient lecture notes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
40. Completing reading assignments on time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
41. Completing writing assignments on time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
42. Coming to class late	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
43. Plagiarism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
44. Reading interactively (i.e., marking in text, outlining)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
45. Time management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
46. Other (specify) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Instructions: In this section, DON'T think about language problems. Only think about course requirements. Please rate the importance of the following for ANY STUDENT in SS 123 to get a good grade. Circle only one number per item.

	Degree of Importance				
	Low				High
47. How important is writing essays?	1	2	3	4	5
48. How important is asking questions?	1	2	3	4	5
49. How important is making comments to lecture/reading?	1	2	3	4	5
50. Writing argumentation/persuasion	1	2	3	4	5
51. Writing comparison/contrast	1	2	3	4	5
52. Describing	1	2	3	4	5
53. Explaining events/processes in logical order	1	2	3	4	5
54. Showing causes and effects	1	2	3	4	5
55. Classifying/grouping together related ideas	1	2	3	4	5
56. Analyzing and summarizing ideas	1	2	3	4	5

	<u>Degree of Importance</u>				
	<u>Low</u>				<u>High</u>
57. Synthesizing ideas drawn from many sources	1	2	3	4	5
58. Drawing main ideas from readings	1	2	3	4	5
59. Drawing main ideas and details from readings	1	2	3	4	5
60. Reading critically and arguing with author's ideas	1	2	3	4	5
61. Thinking critically and arguing with instructor's ideas	1	2	3	4	5
62. Giving oral presentations	1	2	3	4	5
63. Participating in whole-class discussions	1	2	3	4	5
64. Participating in small-group discussions	1	2	3	4	5
65. Other (specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5
66. Other (specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5

Note. From a survey reported in *Assessing and Meeting ESL Learner Needs Across the Disciplines*, by Kate Kinsella, March, 1990. Paper presented at the meeting of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, San Francisco, CA. Adapted by permission.