

# CURRENT ESL COLLEGE TEACHING PRACTICES

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades English has become the most studied foreign language in the world. As of 1992, people in 56 countries in the world were studying English as a foreign language. In many countries these efforts to teach English have been effective, but unfortunately in others such as Japan, efforts have been ineffective (Richards, 1990).

### Purpose and Importance

It is my purpose to examine methods and practices used by ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers at the college level, as well as a few ESL teachers at other levels, throughout various locations in the world, and to determine their usefulness in creating a successful class. My definition of "success" will be a class in which students would be able to carry on practical English communication, and would be functional in the four language skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. One example would be the student's ability to enter a restaurant, read the English menu, and order his or her meal using only English.

Similarities of the recent trends of successful ESL teachers have moved from teacher-centered classrooms to student-centered classrooms, and have departed from traditional grammar translation

classes to a more practical everyday use of English communication. These two factors seemed to be prevalent in most of the successful ESL classes in this study.

As the world becomes a more internationalized society, the importance of successful instruction in English becomes vital.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Briefly reviewing current practices in ESL language instruction in colleges throughout the world, studying the present teaching methods used in colleges, and concentrating on various teaching methods that are used by ESL college instructors in various locations in the world, I shall attempt to answer the questions to be addressed in this paper which will include:

1. What styles of teaching are being used in ESL college classrooms today?
2. What methods are being used by ESL college teachers today?
3. What makes a successful ESL instructor at the college level?

### **Scope of the Study**

The research for this study was conducted through resources at the Yokota Air Base, Tokyo, library and from journals available at the colleges that I am currently working for. The tools used included the Newsbank Resource Index, Infotrac Index, as well as various magazine articles.

### **Limitations**

The Yokota base library is very small and is very limited in

resources available in the field of ESL instruction. Most of the information used in this report came from the articles written by and about ESL college teachers. Very few articles were available that included research data in the area of successful ESL teaching.

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

To better understand what methods and practices are being used in the ESL classrooms throughout the world, this section will review literature that relates to current college ESL teaching practices, being used at various locations on our planet. Using the information, an attempt will be made to synthesize the literature and describe characteristics of a successful ESL college instructor.

#### Using Whole Language

Terdal (1993), who has taught ESL for more than 10 years, and is currently teaching in the Applied Linguistics Department at Portland State University in Oregon, believes that whole language activities are authentic ; they take into account the students' purposes for using language, as opposed to the traditional drills and exercises that treat language as bits and pieces of isolated skills.

Effective activities and materials used in the classroom must reflect the whole language approach, and that the language should be meaningful to the learners. Language becomes more meaningful when students use authentic materials.

Terdal (1993) believes that more time should be spent on oral practice than on writing practice in the ESL classroom. She believes that the ESL class should be learner-oriented and should provide an

atmosphere that promotes casual interaction. Students should be allowed to give their own answers rather than depend on the "one right answer". To make the class learner centered, ESL teachers need to select material that have meaning for the students.

### Interaction and Communication

Celce-Murcia (1984), who has taught in Nigeria, Egypt, and Canada and who was teaching ESL at the University of California at Los Angeles, as of 1984, believes that interaction and communication must be integrated into the context of teaching English to speakers of other languages. She stresses the importance of making classroom activities more interactive and communicative.

"Human interaction" is a process whereby two or more people engage in reciprocal action. "Human communication" is a system of giving and receiving information that can be conveyed verbally by speaking, or nonverbally via gestures and body language.

Celce-Murcia (1984) isolates four areas that affect classroom interaction that the teacher should become aware of : social climate, variety in learning, opportunity for student participation, and feedback and correction.

Celce-Murcia (1984) emphasizes school climate as being first because it is the most basic and fundamental of the four. If the class climate is poor, everything else is meaningless. Students must be at ease, and feel good about their language class if communication is to take place. It is the teacher's responsibility to establish the proper atmosphere so that students can relate to the teacher and to each other in a positive and constructive way. In order to accomplish this

purpose, the teacher must enjoy teaching and like his or her students. Teachers and students need to learn each other's names in order to accomplish this purpose, but currently with 470 students I find it difficult to remember all the names of my students. Teachers can also learn about the background of the students, be fair, and make the class interesting and enjoyable.

Celce-Murcia (1984) contends that a variety of learning activities will improve the social dynamics in a classroom and will help encourage communication. The teacher can introduce variety into the learning activities which will provide an external aid of motivation. The instructor should make use of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing). Teachers can turn manipulative drills into communicative activities that can include the use of roleplaying, value clarification, problem solving, and skills competition. Teachers can use overhead projectors, blackboards, realia, songs, games, videos, and also expose students to other guest native speakers of English.

Celce-Murcia (1984) reveals that opportunity for student participation encourages communication and provides needed motivation. The teacher must provide ample time for students to work in pairs and in groups while he or she can be used as a resource person. Student participation means allowing the students to have as much input as possible into the class itself such as making the syllabus, activities, assignments, grading, and management. Communication activities lend themselves well to carry out dialogues, interviews, write dialogues, have one-on-one conversations or do roleplaying. Students need a specific task, a time limit, a reasonable time for completion of

the task, and feedback.

Celce-Murcia's (1984) last ingredient to a communicative and interactive classroom is feedback. The teacher must provide correction, checking, and reconciliation of the various responses. Students can ask each other questions and take on the role of being the classroom teacher and provide one another with feedback.

### **Practical Approach to Teaching ESL Writing Skills**

Shu-min (1993) uses the practical approach to writing at the Qufu Teacher's University in China, where she has taught English for the past 14 years.

Shu-min (1993) stresses the importance of selecting materials that are of practical use to the students. Materials must be of interest to the students in order to motivate them to read and write. Materials should be short, from four to six paragraphs, to enable the students to easily analyze and imitate. The difficulty of the materials should challenge but not discourage the students. The materials used should be well constructed, and should illustrate principles of good organization.

Language input helps students create ideas for their writing. The teacher may give sample paragraphs for the students to read and think about. The students then begin to search for the introduction, body, and conclusion of the brief paragraphs. Students then use methods like brainstorming to generate ideas for use in their writing. The language input may come from the teacher, as well as fellow classmates.

After the students have written their first draft of their composi-

tion, students can exchange and help each other revise and improve their manuscripts. When students receive feedback from their peers, the student writer may read his or her work with fresh ears and eyes while discovering new ideas.

Upon completion of the revision process, the student should look carefully at the marks made by his or her peers, and make the final decisions about the changes in the final product. This method may lead to more creative free writing in the ESL classroom.

#### Learning From The Learner

Martinez (1993), who is a lecturer in the Department of English at Santiago de Compostela University in Spain, recognizes that changes and innovations in English language teaching have given rise to the notion of a learner-centered curriculum. The curriculum should be a collaborative process between teachers and students rather than systematically following textbook curriculum only.

English-language teachers should learn continually from students in their class, with the purpose of incorporating everything they learn into their teaching. Teachers are enriched by the daily contact with their learners, which put them in touch with different people, various backgrounds, interests, ideals, and perspectives.

Teachers may learn the students' attitudes towards English and the English Class. They may find out why they want to learn the English language. Instructors may learn students' preferences for teaching material in the class. They learn what activities students prefer, and if students favor individual, pair, or group work. Teachers observe the learners' view on the role of the teacher, and the learners'

use of learning strategies and study skills.

There is a variety of ways to learn from the learner. Teachers may learn through observation, questionnaires, individual and group interviews, individual and group discussion, self-reports, diaries, and protocols. The teacher should gather information at the beginning of the course, and should integrate the information into the course plan for the year. An evaluation should be conducted near the end of the year, when students and teachers have a more global view of the class work. Teachers should be learning from their students all the time, as an ongoing process.

### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to recognize different college ESL teaching styles, and methods, while attempting to determine what makes a successful ESL instructor at the college level.

It was discovered that college ESL instructors use various methods but many of these methods were internationally consistent.

### **Implications**

Based on the findings of this research, it may be assumed that there are several common denominators among successful ESL college instructors in our world today. Effective ESL instructors today are moving away from the grammar pattern approach to the more natural approach to language learning, using realia to supplement or replace their textbooks, moving from a teacher-centered class to a student-centered class, changing from a one modality teaching style to a mixed modality teaching style, learning from the



learner rather than from just the teacher, and focusing on process-orientation rather than on product-orientation.

It appears that teachers who integrate these methods into their ESL classrooms may see an increase in student learning and interest. If teachers are unwilling to try these new ideas then maybe many students in the world will receive “schooling” rather than an education, and may be unable to adequately learn to communicate effectively in the English language.

### Recommendations

Many of college ESL instructors are moving away from the impractical grammar based curriculum to the more practical everyday situational communicative language curriculum. ESL teachers throughout the world should share their ideas through print, and word of mouth in order to improve the language instruction throughout the world.

Teachers who are using the one-modality teaching style should be willing to try a new method and “give it a chance”. Teachers within cities, states, and countries should gather and have conferences that include the sharing of ideas from all participants.

Teachers should show an interest in their students and learn from them. They should be flexible and allow the students to have a part in planning the content and other aspects of the classroom.

Teachers should build a library of real information to use in their classrooms. This information may be found in the library, bookstore, airport, train station, bus terminal, from friends and relatives, and may be found while on vacation in an English speaking country.

Instructors should try to use all the language skills when teaching in order to effectively reach all of their students. They should include speaking, reading, writing, and listening activities whenever possible.

Teachers should learn the students' names and learn as much about their background as possible. Students may learn more if they feel the teacher is really interested in them.

Teachers should work with the students as a team and allow the students to be themselves and allow for personal growth and development.

#### Resources

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