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ABSTRACT

In this manual, two methods for promoting English as a Second Language (ESL) students' involvement with and understanding of the host culture are presented: (1) visits by guest speakers; and (2) interactive errands executed within the bounds of the school or surrounding community. First, the philosophy underlying the manual is presented in terms of the significance of communicative competence, the importance of students' self-image, the role of classroom instruction, intelligibility, and evaluation. Next, the manual suggests supervised activities to prepare students for the interactive errands within the community. These activities include: (1) exercises to strengthen listening comprehension; (2) instructor explanations of the purpose of the activity and special vocabulary words and social protocols which might be relevant to the situation; and (3) student-teacher dialogue journals for orientation to and ongoing evaluation of activities. After discussing activities to prepare for and follow-up on guest speakers, the manual offers instructions for community interactive errands, including site visits and team quests; "human bingo," which requires students to obtain the signatures of several individuals fitting a number of descriptions; and idiom searches, which require students to ask three native speakers to explain and illustrate the use of an idiom. Suggestions for preparatory and follow-up activities are included. A bibliography and a reading list comprising a total of 38 items are included. (UCM)

# A RESOURCE MANUAL FOR INTRODUCING ESL STUDENTS TO ASPECTS OF AMERICAN CULTURE

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AUSTIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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# INTRODUCTION

## Need for this manual

Greater community involvement in English as a Second Language curricula is a pressing need across the nation. By promoting such involvement, instructors can break down cultural, linguistic, and social barriers between their students and the communities in which they must live.

Lamentably, ESL students left to their own resources tend to employ avoidance strategies which minimize their interaction with the community. Such students often live long in American cities and towns without experiencing a full range of natural contacts and relationships with the host culture. Many develop unfavorable impressions about Americans because of their inability to "break the ice" with them.

Unfortunately, ESL students are generally instructed overwhelmingly by means of in-class activities and individual out-of-class writing exercises. Most instructors fail to draw upon a theoretical base or systematic set of resources to foster community interaction by these students. Something needs to be done to improve this situation.

## Nature of materials to be presented

A number of innovative techniques can help foreign students overcome their cultural, linguistic, social, and informational barriers. After having taught ESL for many years, the authors gradually began to experiment with community interaction as one such innovative means to communicative competence. The favorable results of their experimentation lead them to believe that suggestions proposed in the following pages may aid future instructors who want to help their students acquire communicative competence in the English language.

In this manual, two types of community interaction will be explained in enough detail that a new ESL instructor should be able to conduct all of them with confidence: (a) visits by guest speakers, and (b) interactive errands executed either within the bounds of an educational institution or in the surrounding community. These interactions can be executed in a variety of sequences, employed at all levels of instruction over the course of a single school term, and be re-used repeatedly.

# UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY

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When we plant a rose seed in the earth, we notice that it is small, but we do not criticize it as 'rootless and stemless.' We treat it as a seed, giving it the water and nourishment required of a seed. When it first shoots up out of the earth, we don't condemn it as immature and underdeveloped; nor do we criticize the buds for not being open when they appear. We stand in wonder at the process taking place and give the plant the care it needs at each stage of its development. The rose is a rose from the time it is a seed to the time it dies. Within it, at all times, it contains its whole potential. It seems to be constantly in the process of change; yet at each state, at each moment, it is perfectly all right as it is.

--Timothy Gallwey

**********

Although the activities in this manual should be effective tools, in and of themselves, for enhancing communicative competence, the philosophy underlying them needs to be grasped by the instructor if they are to be used to their full potential. As John Dewey once pointed out, there is nothing so practical as a good theory.

## Significance of communicative competence

Communicative competence may be conceptualized as the ability to interact with other human beings in such a way that meaningful cognitive and affective information is transferred. As Le Page (1979, p. 41) stated, "When we come to the central question of 'competence,' we have to ask: 'What is it an individual needs to know, in order to operate as a member of this society?'"

Krashen (1982), Paulston (1974), Staton (1983), Hayes and Bahruth (1985), Heath (1984), Hatch (1983), and Hymes (1972) have all stated in one form or another that communicative competence should be the ultimate aim of any second language curriculum. Frequent, deliberate involvement in genuine communicative contexts is essential for the

development of this communicative competence, and it is the responsibility of ESL instructors to provide a curriculum which is relevant and meaningful to the lives of students outside of the classroom.

Importance of students' self-image

Many commentators (e.g., Roueche and Pittman, 1972; Roueche and Snow, 1977; and Roueche and Mink, 1980) have asserted that how students feel about themselves has a direct impact on their academic progress. According to Crohn:

> Researchers have clearly demonstrated the relationship between students' subjective and personal evaluations of themselves and their success in school. Often, students' difficulties in basic academic skills are a direct result of their beliefs that they cannot think or perform accurately; students who have difficulty in school have often learned to perceive themselves as incapable of performing or thinking correctly. (1983, p. 3).

The willingness of ESL students to abandon avoidance strategies and begin to interact with native speakers is particularly dependent upon their affective state.

Roles of the classroom

At a very minimum, the classroom should serve as a sheltered environment in which students may encounter new sociolinguistic protocols and practice them among peers, without fear of censure. In Lindfors' words,

> The classroom is, among other things, a social community, a cohesive group that shares a base of common experiences. It is difficult to think of a setting that offers greater possibilities than the

> classroom for giving children a diverse range of situations and purposes for communicative interaction. Of course the classroom has this social potential only if we refuse to think of the classroom as a place, and think of it rather, as people interacting. (1980, p. )

Unfortunately, the traditional perspective on what the classroom is and how it should operate overlooks ESL students' need to participate in the society of the target language. Ideally, the interaction which occurs in ESL classrooms should be not only natural and meaningful, but also relevant to the outside world. Beyond its function as a safe haven where students interact with each other and their instructors, thus, the classroom should provide strategies which students can utilize in out-of-class settings.

Intelligibility

All too often, teachers teach their students according to where they wish they were rather than where they actually are. Such a view is imbalanced and ill-advised. To build students' confidence, it is necessary to accept them as they come to the ESL classrom and try to help each individual to advance at his or her own pace. Most non-native speakers of English students are able to communicate to some degree, although instructors may have to show more empathy and negotiate more for meaning with some than with others.

ESL teachers who have themselves acquired a second language are likely to be aware that a certain amount of confusion is bound occur in adult second language learning and that affective variables play a central role in determining how swift and productive the learning process will be. They are apt to know that errors are unavoidable, misunderstandings are to be expected, and learners are always prone to put their feet in their mouths.

In correcting students' language, instructors should attend primarily to errors which appear consistently. Many erroneous usages will disappear spontaneously as students gain

their footing as language users and pattern their output after the instructor's example. In the area of writing, for instance, Heath (1985) argued in favor of allowing students to produce contextualized writing over which they have ownership. In reporting results of her research into exchanges of letters between herself and various second language learners, she indicated that:

> For most of the students, within the first five letter exchanges, eighty to eighty-five per cent of their words were spelled correctly, and they had left behind many of their mechanical errors. Modelling their correspondents' writing, they intuitively picked up features such as proper use and punctuation of salutations, closings, etc., and they imitated the structures of the opening sentences of paragraphs, as well as ways of introducing topics in their letters. (p. 24).

By accepting students as they were, rather than expecting perfection of them, Heath provided them the opportunity to use the language resources they already possessed and offered a model upon which to base subsequent improvement. Further support for this kind of accommodating approach was voiced by Lamendella (1977):

> There may be little point in choosing the highest levels of (correct) grammatical structure as a pedagogical starting point. It might be more beneficial to use an approach that initially attempted to foster in the learner a regressive 'me-tarzan-you-jane' type lexical communication system. While such a practice would do violence to correct TL [target language] grammar (and probably offend the sensibilities of the teacher), it might actually be a more productive basis for an early *triggering* [italics added] of the learner's ability to communicate efficiently. (p. 185).

One useful concept in dealing with intelligibility is Burt and Kiparsky's (1975) distinction between local and global errors. According to these authorities, global errors are those which completely obscure meaning and make the learner's output unintelligible. Global errors, because they cause communication breakdown, are bound to be addressed through a natural process of negotiating for meaning. They occur very rarely, even among beginning students.

Local errors, on the other hand, are grammatically incorrect yet do not interfere with communication. As developmental forms, they disappear as learners internalize conventional usages supplied by native speakers and texts. Attempting to bring all local errors to student's awareness is unwise because it impedes the communicative flow, causes confusion, is overwhelming, and mars the learner's self-confidence.

Directing attention to recurring local errors is a legitimate pedagogical pursuit, but its effectiveness depends upon sensitivity to each individual's learning style and level of language proficiency. Simply bringing local errors to a student's attention will not magically eliminate those errors; it will take time for the student to internalize new rules or conventions into the cognitive structure. In writing, for instance, local errors which the instructor has cued the student about might be expected to appear nevertheless in a rough draft; they would not be accepted, however, in a final composition evolving out of a draft.

The intelligibility of students' language will grow only if they take risks. According to Smith (1982), "In order to learn you must take a chance. When you test a hypothesis, there must be the possibility of being wrong." The classroom environment and all the activities which take place within it should promote risk-taking, experimentation, and creativity. Attention should be directed first and foremost toward meaning rather than form. The dialogue journal, described in a later section of this manual, is among the tools an instructor can use

with considerable success to concentrate on meaning, facilitate risk-taking, and serve the triggering function described earlier by Lamendella.

One kind of local error students commit in their written work, including dialogue journal entries, is referred to as "invented spelling." Such errors, which are typical also of children learning their first language, were described by Sowers (1983):

> Invented spelling is the name for children's misspellings before they know the rules adults use to spell, often before they know how to read. In some respects inventive spellers are learning to write as they learned to talk. Inventive spellers' errors are systematic. Their judgments result from their tacit knowledge about our system of sounds, but they don't know all our conventions for written language. Like children learning to talk, they construct a series of increasingly elaborate rule systems. We can infer their rules, but children can't formulate the rules they follow. Inventive spellers' errors give us a window on their thinking. (p. 47).

Philosophy of evaluation

As implied above, most of the teacher's specific grammatical feedback should be based upon the output and sensitive to the needs and affective characteristics of each individual. Traditional educational practice to the contrary, instructors should discourage competition and promote cooperation so that students can work together toward the common goal of communicative competence. Individuals should competes, in essence, only with themselves.

An initial diagnostic instrument should be utilized to estimate the approximate level of language proficiency of each student and provide a basis for contrasting results of the final course evaluation. All students should demonstrate progress, but the magnitude of that

progress will depend upon several factors: (a) how much effort they invest in the activities provided, (b) how regular their attendance has been, (c) what their affective characteristicsare, (d) how proficient they were at the outset of the educational experience, etc.

Intermediate students will probably achieve the greatest progress, followed by beginners. Advanced learners are likely to make the least progress in the grammatical realm, because they already have attained a high level of proficiency, but they may well improve substantially in terms of their sociolinguistic skills.

As they give students a range of assignments over the course of a semester, instructors need not attempt to evaluate the individual performance of each student on every task. Generally speaking, a simple tally of whether assignments were completed should be sufficient--along with the instructor's continuing intuitive judgments and personal interactions with students--to motivate students and keep pace with the progress they are making.

If formal grades must be used at the end of a course to describe students' overall performance, they should foster positive rather than negative motivation. For this reason, the instructor should avoid assigning anything lower than a "C" as a final course grade. For the majority of ESL students, who are highly motivated, interested, and able to perform satisfactorily, using "D's" or "F's" runs the risk of unnecessarily damaging their self-concept and lessening their enthusiasm.

When it comes to those few individuals who clearly fail to exert themselves conscientiously--by missing classes, failing to complete homework, and so forth--it is preferable to drop them from a course rather than allowing them to fail it. These students should be counseled to return and try harder the following semester.

## SUPERVISED ACTIVITIES IN PREPARATION FOR INTERACTIVE ERRANDS

Almost all ESL students have interacted with Americans prior to attending organized classes, simply in order to survive. These interactions, however, are generally sources of frustration and misunderstanding rather than of enriching social and linguistic information. Extensive preparation must be provided during class time in order to raise the self-confidence and enhance the communicative abilities of such students so they may eventually enjoy more rewarding interactions with native English speakers.

Supervised activities should be designed to promote success by allowing for individual variation in a heterogeneous group. If these activities are first modeled by the instructor and presented in a deeply contextualized a form, their success will stimulate motivation and healthier attitudes.

### The importance of listening comprehension

We believe that listening comprehension is the logical starting point for enhancing communicative competence. For this reason, considerable in-class time during the first part of a semester should be devoted to familiarizing students with the instructor's natural speech patterns. A variety of activities may be conducted by the instructor during this period to heighten students' comprehension. As time passes, advanced students will reach a point at which they participate in these activities, thereby providing further aural input for beginners. Among activities of this nature are the following:

- Icebreakers and informal social gatherings
- Line-ups

•Information gap activities

•Language matrices

•Peer tutoring

•Use of Cuisenaire rods

•Sentence-combination exercises

•Activities with cartoons and drawings

•Viewing videotapes of advertising and other culturally-rich TV segments

•"Hangman"

•Games and other tasks with newspapers

Activities immediately prior to interactive errands

Once they can easily understand the daily speech patterns of their peers and instructor, students may be equipped with the particular skills they must possess to interact with people outside the circle of the classroom. This interaction may take the three forms mentioned in our introduction: visits by ACC personnel and other community members to the ESL classroom, forays by students to people and places on the ACC campus itself, and trips into other parts of the Austin community and beyond.

Students need to be introduced to specific linguistic and sociolinguistic realities prior to any kind of interaction they will undertake. We suggest that the instructor be sure to perform all the steps on the following list as he or she makes these introductions:

1. Present the purpose of the activity and make sure students understand it.
2. Preview vocabulary words so that everyone becomes familiar with them.
3. Discuss any grammatical features which may be unclear or which might lead to misunderstanding.
4. Cover some possible social protocols which might be relevant to the particular activity.
5. Discuss social and cultural features of American society embodied in the activities and explore relationships between those features and elements of the students' own backgrounds.
6. Allow students to practice among themselves the activities they will be asked to perform later with unfamiliar people.

Dialogue journals for orientation and ongoing evaluation of activities

Dialogue journals have been described with considerable thoroughness by Hayes and Bahruth (1985) and Staton (1983). Basically, they are written exchanges between each language student and his or her instuctor. Students write as much as they please, about whatever they please, directing their messages toward the teacher as a human being rather than a judge of grammar or composition. Instructors then write individual responses which express their own interests and personalities while at the same time validating, encouraging, and reinforcing the creative impulses of the students. Journals may be shuttled back and forth on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

Dialogue journals can provide an invaluable medium for discussion, clarification, and support for interactive errands. Instructors can utilize them (a) to verify that a particular individual has comprehended the aim and requirements of an errand, (b) to trouble-shoot for any inherent difficulties which might not have been anticipated or other problems which may

have arisen, and (c) to carry on follow-up discussions whereby the instructor can ascertain how much energy students have invested in the activities and how much value they have derived from them. While students are involved in interactive errands, dialogue journals may also be used to offer personal counsel and guidance.

# MATERIALS FOR BRINGING THE AUSTIN COMMUNITY INTO THE CLASSROOM

Preparatory and follow-up activities with guest speakers

If it is conducted skilfully, the process of inviting, entertaining, and following up on a visit by an out-of-class guest can give ESL students significant exposure to and practice with American cultural patterns. Here are some of the activities which generally compose this process:

1. Selecting a topic about which a speaker might talk.

2. Determining a potential time for a visit.

3. Reaching the prospective speaker (face to face, in writing, or on the phone) to find out about the person, describe the ESL classroom environment, and request a visit

4. "Setting the stage" for the visit: arranging for parking or transportation, preparing any equipment in the classroom which the speaker may need, etc.

5. Greeting the speaker and introducing him or her to the class

6. Concluding the visit and thanking the speaker for coming

7. Writing and sending the speaker a thank-you message

As they guide students through these steps repeatedly over a number of months, instructors should allow students to take increasing responsibility as their level of assurance and self-sufficiency rises. Though the first few guest speakers' visits will probably be entirely prescribed and demonstrated by the instructor, most of the activities involved with the last few visitors of the semester can be turned over to individual students or groups of them. We have found that committees of students with dissimilar native languages gain a great deal by virtue of cooperating on projects of this nature.

# AN ILLUSTRATIVE LIST OF GUEST SPEAKERS AND RESOURCES

On Campus

| | |
|---|---|
| Ms. Parvin Behmardi | RGC Parallel Studies Tutoring Laboratory |
| Dr. John Cise | RGC Physics Dept.; 311-A; 495-7117 or 7222 |
| Ms. Jane Gamez | RGC Learning Resources Center |
| Dr. Steve Kinslow | RGC Dean's Office |

From the Austin Community

*Individuals*:

Mr. Carlos Hernandez; Austin Wellness Center; 451-6519

*Agencies and Organizations*

Amnesty International

Austin Historical Society

Planned Parenthood

Reading for the Blind

Wheatsville Food Cooperative

# POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS IN INTERACTIVE ERRANDS WITHIN AUSTIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

[N.B.: This list, from January 1987, is provisional. Names are presented as examples only.]

Dr. Dan Angel

Ms. Joan Davis

Mr. Mike Dellens

Mr. Lyman Grant

Ms. Dorothy Martinez

Ms. Ann Palmer

Mr. W. Lee Hisle

# MATERIALS FOR SENDING STUDENTS INTO THE COMMUNITY ON INTERACTIVE ERRANDS

## Kinds of community interactive errands

Site visits, team "quests," "human bingo," and "idiom searches" are all potential community interactive errands. Because these types of errands differ in the level of challenge they present students and in the potential benefits they offer, it is the responsibility of the instructor to understand their characteristics before employing them in the classroom.

### Site visits and team quests

Site visits and team quests dispatch students, singly or in groups, into the community. These errands may vary in degree of complexity and challenge, as illustrated by the following list of examples:

1. Finding, writing down, and discovering the meaning of three bumper stickers or sentences from billboards.

2. Visiting the college learning resource center and bringing back to the class a supply of audiovisual resource lists or labeled floor plans of the facilities.

3. Riding on an assigned city bus route and jotting down demographic data about other passengers (e.g., gender, race, number in party, etc.).

The first few errands created by an instructor should probably require only passive observation of texts rather than complex interaction with human beings; later assignments may call for more advanced behaviors such as interviewing employees of historic locations and community organizations to gather information about their work. Whatever their degree of difficulty, site visits and team quests by dyads and larger groups of classmates should both elicit interesting information and contribute to personal involvement among students.

Human bingo

Human bingo requires participants to fill a matrix of cells with the signatures of several individuals who fit a number of descriptions revolving around a common topic. The task is considered complete when participants have gathered enough signatures to fill up a row or column on their bingo sheets. Sample "human bingo" sheets are included in Appendix A of this manual.

Idiom searches

Idiom searches provide each student with an idiom and require him or her to ask a minimum of three native speakers to do two things: explain the meaning of the idiom and write an example of how it might be used in context. ("Up in the air," for instance, might be put in a sentence such as "My uncle wanted to go to Europe this summer, but his plans are up in the air now that he has a new baby.")

Although superficially uncomplicated, idiom searches are probably the most sophisticated interactive errands because they call for initiating contact with Americans and negotiating totally unknown meanings. To fulfill these assignments, students have no choice but to probe for meanings and ask for clarification when they fail to understand examples.

Suggested preparatory and follow-up activities

Just as in guiding guest speaker experiences and on-campus interactive errands, the instructor who sends students on community interactive errands needs first to expose them to vocabulary, question-asking etiquette and terminology, grammar, and cultural features related to the topic of the assignment. Time to practice asking and answering questions with each other is another necessary component of an effective orientation to community interactive errands.

For a "human bingo" sheet dealing with the topic of food, for example, the instructor ought logically to to do most of the following (Venditti and Bahruth, 1986):

1. Raise questions about the overall topic of the bingo sheet, such as how much and what kind of significance is attached to food and eating in most cultures, including those of students in the class.

2. Explore the meanings of lexical items such as "outdoor grill," "food processor," "chili dog," and other unfamiliar terms appearing in the sixteen cells of the signature card.

3. Explain the advisability and mechanics of setting the stage before posing questions to strangers or casual acquaintances. (It's probably not a good idea to accost a stranger with, "Hi. My name's Abdullah. Have you ever used a doggie bag?")

4. Review English question forms which students will need to employ in their conversations with outsiders.

5. Discuss cultural issues related to particular cells of the bingo sheet, such as why Americans don't bake bread as much today as they did forty or fifty years ago; what kind of person might be most likely to use a food processor, eat at salad bars, or participate in activities against world hunger; to what degree fast food chains selling ice cream may have become common in large American cities; etc.

6. Split the class into pairs or two large groups to role-play the process of asking an outsider questions from the bingo sheet, and following up the practice with a group discussion of rough spots, etc.

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