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ABSTRACT

This brief paper describes a special, informal seminar for international students that used an adjunct instruction model to focus on technical terminology in the field of instructional technology. Foreign students are enrolled concurrently in two linked courses--a language course and a content course with the two courses sharing content base and complementing each other in mutually coordinated assignments. Second language learners are sheltered in the language course and integrated in the content course where both native English and non-native English speaking students attend the same lecture. International students in the adjunct course meet once a week over lunch for the seminar in order to study technical terminology and usage. Enrollment is usually 4-6 students from a variety of nations. Other features of the program include one session of the content course on cross cultural communication where the foreign students share their experiences with miscommunication and a potluck dinner at the instructor's home with international foods contributed by the students. The international students have thrived with the seminar and have shown marked language progress. The instructor has enjoyed friendships with students and a teaching award from the campus international student organization. (JB)

TIG-TOE: TEACHING OF EVALUATION

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Spring 1994 -- Nick Eastmond, Editor
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Reaching the International Student -- Nick Eastmond

Sometimes I ask myself why I feel compelled to help out in teaching the international students in our graduate program in Instructional Technology. And then I remember: I was once a foreign student. During my first year of college, my father worked for the USAID program in Kaduna, Nigeria. I attended Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, some 55 miles away, living first at the home of another American but for two months in the student hostel. I was something of a novelty, as I was unaware of any other American or other foreign students on campus at the time. But the lasting impression, almost 30 years later, was that I was treated with respect by classmates and professors, that the experience was positive, and that the year changed my outlook on life.

But of course in Nigeria, being a former British colony, the instruction was in English. I had a natural advantage, because English was my first language, while it was a second one for all my classmates: the Hausas, the Yorubas, the Ibos, and my favorites, the Tivs. Since that year, I have worked to build my competence in French, and have attended university level courses in French. I know what it is like to be lectured to with terminology and names that are not at all familiar. Try as hard as you like, it is still tough to comprehend. But I know that what a teacher does, little things like writing new terminology on the board, can make a real difference. Sometimes at the end of a day of listening in a foreign language I have walked away with a genuine headache. And the cultural differences -- the small things like politeness, punctuality, and interpersonal space -- are often just as baffling.

The Problem: Something like 20% of the students in our graduate program are international ones, mainly from the Asian rim countries. (For our entire campus, the percentage is about 9%, graduate and undergraduate). Most of these students struggle mightily to master the English necessary to succeed. Typically, they start with enough English competence to pass the TOEFL test, but not much more. They listen closely, and while usually hesitant to speak up with their opinions, they want so much to succeed. For most of them, the learning curve moves up quickly: they may have difficulty in the first couple of quarters, but by the middle of the program, they are competing well, and often by the program's end, many of our internationals are at the top of the class. But my question has been: what can I do to accelerate that process, to help insure that many succeed and have a positive experience comparable to the exhilarating one I experienced in Nigeria?

Sometimes the international students can emerge as real heroes in class, as one male Japanese student did last quarter in the product evaluation class I taught. As a class project, we were evaluating a videodisc and accompanying materials for Japanese language instruction for the elementary school level in Utah. This student, Hiroshi, became the valuable contributor to many student teams, the in-class consultant who could understand and help explain important features of the language being taught. That experience is a reminder of the special skills these students bring, skills that are seldom called upon in the normal course of events, but which could be important in some instances.

One solution: Four years ago, the irony of teaching a class in communication theory, where we examine cross cultural differences but where the international students

invariably receive the lower grades in the class, became apparent to me. I determined to something to "level the playing field." With support from members of my department, I petitioned our graduate council with a proposal to teach a one hour seminar specifically for the international students in the course. The seminar was to be devoted to helping international students with the terminology and language usage in our professional field. The idea was not original to me, but is what is referred to as "adjunct instruction", one of three main models for "content-based second language instruction (Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1989):

> The third type of content-based instruction is the adjunct model. In this model, students are enrolled concurrently in two linked courses-- a language course and a content course-- with the ideal being that the two courses share the content base and complement each other in terms of mutually coordinated assignments. Second language learners are sheltered in the language course and integrated in the content course, where both native English and nonnative English-speaking students attend the same lecture (p. 16).

I encountered some opposition to my proposed course at the University level, since anything with a "remedial" label cannot be counted for credit toward graduation. My argument was that the course represented an enrichment experience, that we would examine issues related to students' experiences in the United States, and that it represented new, not remedial instruction. Because the course carried only one hour of credit, was to be graded Pass-Fail, and required no new funding, since I teach it on a volunteer basis ("out of hide" as we say), the council approved it.

Since then, I have taught the seminar three times. It is just the international students enrolled in the communication course and me. We meet over lunch once per week and are anything but formal. Enrollment is usually 4-6 students, always representing a variety of countries. This quarter's group is from Taiwan (3 students) and Japan (1); last year's group was from Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Nigeria. Since our department requires each student to work as a teaching assistant with one professor as part of the masters degree requirement, I have always had volunteer graduate students (internationals) wanting to assist with this course.

The first time I taught the seminar, each student kept a record of new terminology encountered in reading the chapters of the course textbook. Then each week, we divided up the list of words with me taking what I thought were the most difficult, and then each of us working to define those words on paper. The next week, each person would share the defined words with the others. As the school term progressed, one student from Burma took a more active role in the process and eventually used her compilation of an "extended syllabus" (sometimes called a course guidebook). I was delighted, as it gave us written material for the course. Not contented with studying vocabulary as single words only, on the recommendation of an American graduate student who had studied abroad, I found a book that presents families of words, and have worked to obtain copyright permission to include sections applicable to our field (Lundquist, 1989).

Two other features of the course deserve mention. For their group project in the main course, I routinely assign the international students to conduct an "international panel". During the unit on "Cross Cultural Communication" the international students take a full class period to explain to the American students the kinds of miscommunication they have experienced since coming to the United States, some amusing and some rather sad, as well as to provide background information about their home country. This session is often cited by the American students as the most memorable part of the class. And as an outside of class event, our family hosts an annual "International Night" potluck supper at our house, where each person -- American or international -- brings a dish from his or her country of origin: Irish stew, English trifle,

or sukiyaki. This social event is usually well attended.

The payoff: The adjunct course gives me time in a tutorial session with students who need it. I can see some progress in language as the quarter progresses, but more than that, these students seem to thrive on a bit of extra attention as they make a very difficult transition in a new schooling situation in a different culture. The real payoff comes from friendships that develop with students and continue throughout the program. And one more thing, last year I received the award for Professor of the Year from the International Student Council. There are other awards on campus that convey more monetary rewards and prestige, but none I would rather have received than this one. It was a nice honor from some very important people on campus.

Some student opinions: Last week I asked my students in the international seminar to write a letter to a hypothetical professor at an American university, offering advice on how best to deal with international students. Their responses speak volumes. Here are some sample statements:

> -- Many foreign students can speak English very well, but I can't. I didn't have a chance to learn daily conversations or slang before I came here. Therefore, the first two quarters for me were very tough. Teachers need to slow down their speaking speed; then I can pick the important words and understand them.
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> -- In the classroom, I become very shy. (Because) I have no good pronunciation, I seldom open my mouth to speak English. I also know this is my shortcoming; I must have the confidence to conquer it. Always in the classroom, the professor treats foreign students as American students. I am very happy to tell you I like this situation. But, in the classroom, I do not express my opinions. The professor never gives me encouragement.
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> -- I feel some types of class activities are very helpful for my study in America. For example, presentation, small group discussion, etc. I learn to do public speaking by doing formal or informal class presentations. My spoken English is getting better, because I have more chances to talk and speak. My listening skills become better because I have to listen to group discussions. These activities are good for me.
>
> -- In my experience, I don't want the professors to treat us international students differently or to give us a different grade standard, but we hope that they can understand that we really have some problems and that we study harder. In my two years of college in the U.S., I have felt so lucky because my professors took care of me and gave me a chance to prove myself. Even as an international student I can go to the top in the class. I appreciate that.

Coming full circle: Clearly the language is a barrier for international students that must somehow be overcome. There are other barriers as well to widespread acceptance for these students, and some of those are crumbling. Last year was the first time in the history of our University that an international student was elected Studentbody President. He was from Nigeria, Dan Gowon, the nephew of the General Gowon that led that country during the Biafara War. He served out his term, which finished last month, and did a creditable job in the office. During that year, he applied for and was accepted into the graduate program in my department. Dan took my seminar for international students and contributed in a major way. Only after he had completed the seminar did I learn that he was born in Nigeria in the town, Zaria, where I studied in the year that I was an undergraduate student there. Some things have a way of coming full circle.

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