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# **A Cauldron of Challenges: ESL Students, Tutoring Services, and "College Composition 101"**

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In this article a description of a tutoring session with a foreign student is followed by a brief discussion and suggestions for facilitating the coordination of curricula between mainstream college English courses and ESL courses at the same college or university.

## **Meet Maria**

Since Maria struggles with many of the same writing-related difficulties so common to ESL students, I have decided to present the salient aspects of a tutoring session with her to provide a representative tutoring scenario with its inherent challenges.

Maria is a thirty two year old ESL student from South America who lives here in the United States and who would like to graduate from a four-year college. Before Maria can enroll in "College Composition 101," she must successfully complete several preparatory ESL courses.

During this particular tutoring session, Maria needed help writing a short essay which was to parallel the format of a sample essay in the ESL text required for her course. Maria was to write about coming home after a long stay in a foreign country and any problems that such a long separation might cause her, her family, or her friends. It was interesting to note that in Maria's case, when she did return home to visit her country of birth, that some of

her friends thought that her suitcases were filled with money since "Everyone in the United States is rich."

Maria's difficulty with her assignment was that she really didn't know where to begin. Of course, as an ESL student, her problems were compounded by her limited English proficiency, but what Maria primarily needed were some brainstorming and outlining techniques to overcome her initial hurdle. In other words, her initial difficulty was related more to the organization of her ideas than to the fact that she was not a native English speaker.

After modeling a brainstorming technique, I helped Maria to construct a simple outline which enabled her to formulate her thoughts further. She then began to write her essay. Forty minutes later she finished her essay and expressed her satisfaction with the final product.

I then had Maria explain the process of outlining, and reviewed other salient aspects of our tutoring session. The session concluded and Maria thanked me for my help.

## **A Prevalent ESL Goal on the College Level**

A common goal shared by many college ESL faculties is to prepare ESL students to meet with success in mainstream courses such as "College

Composition 101." But sometimes ESL students can excel in ESL courses, yet their self-confidence can erode quickly in a course such as "College Composition 101" due to the rigor of the course itself in addition to the ESL students' limited English proficiency. Nevertheless, such a situation should not be construed as demeaning the intellectual capabilities of ESL students, the teaching efforts of the ESL faculty, or the teaching efforts of the mainstream English faculty. But what is required to rectify such a situation is the need for more coordination between the mainstream English faculty and the ESL faculty as well as coordination between the mainstream English curriculum and the ESL curriculum.

To effectively meet the challenge of coordinating curricula, the integration of mainstream English course topics, skills, and specific concerns should be addressed in preparatory ESL courses. Unfortunately, certain factors impede the facile integration of mainstream English course concerns into the ESL classroom. Consider the impediments that follow:

1. Many ESL texts are often too general in scope and are not sufficiently coordinated with courses such as "College Composition 101."
2. The nature of assigned readings and major focuses in courses such as "College Composition 101" can vary sufficiently from one semester to the next and from teacher to teacher so as to undermine consistent coordination.
3. Hectic schedules and the pervasive autonomy of instructors can thwart meaningful exchanges among faculty.

Mindful of such difficulties and others, I

would like to make several suggestions.

#### **Suggestions for the Mainstream English Faculty**

1. Make available to ESL faculty current course syllabi for English courses replete with required readings and assignments on an ongoing semester by semester basis. Such syllabi can be placed in a specified place in the English department or college library for easy reference by the ESL faculty.
2. Make specific notations of recurring pedagogic problems encountered with ESL students and share such concerns with the ESL faculty so as to foster meaningful exchanges--teacher to teacher.
3. Extend an open invitation to the ESL faculty to observe your classes.
4. Promote faculty meetings between the English faculty and the ESL faculty which feature an agenda of coordination between the mainstream English curricula and the ESL curricula.

#### **Suggestions for the ESL Faculty**

1. Make available to the mainstream English faculty current course syllabi for ESL courses replete with required readings and assignments on an ongoing semester by semester basis. Such syllabi can be placed in a specified place in the English department, ESL department, or college library for easy reference by the mainstream English faculty.
2. Make a concerted effort to emphasize the teaching of skills and curricular concerns that will have the greatest utility for ESL students in mainstream courses.

3. Whenever possible, be mindful of mainstream curricular concerns when selecting texts.

4. Brainstorming and outlining techniques should be stressed—especially when the ESL course is taken as a prerequisite for a course such as "College Composition 101."

5. Extend an open invitation to the mainstream English faculty to observe your classes.

6. Invite the mainstream English faculty to meetings which feature an agenda of coordination between the ESL curricula and the mainstream English curricula.

#### **Suggestions for the Tutoring Services Faculty**

1. Identify individual students who serve as tutors who express a real interest in tutoring ESL students and allocate those

tutors to specific tables where students are tutored. In this way ESL students will get accustomed to going to the same tutors and to the same place for help.

2. Have bilingual dictionaries and other resources available at the tutoring site for easy reference by ESL students and tutors.

By conscientiously following these suggestions, the mainstream English faculty and the ESL faculty can become more coordinated and effective in meeting the special needs of foreign students. When open lines of communication and sincere efforts for coordination and professional exchange exist among faculty members, challenging educational goals become attainable.

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