BRIDGE PROGRAMS: A LINK BETWEEN ESL AND CONTENT BASED COURSES. A CASE STUDY: UEES

Randy Davis[1]

RESUMEN

Este artículo es un caso de estudio que analiza los problemas que enfrentan los alumnos de ESL y de EFL al pasar de clases ESL/EFL a clases académicas de nivel universitario. Presenta una revisión de algunos de los Programas presentes y pasados de los Programas de Inglés Avanzado, seguido de un modelo de Programa de Inglés Avanzado en la Universidad de Especialidades Espíritu Santo en Guayaquil, Ecuador. Se verá un análisis profundo de las tres clases de Inglés Avanzado que incluyen: Accuracy and Fluency (Fluidez en Conversación), English Structure (Gramática), y Principles of Writing (Principios de Escritura). Además habrá una discusión del por qué y cómo se debe desarrollar un Programa de Inglés Avanzado en una institución. En conclusión, encontraremos los beneficios exitosos de un Programa de Inglés Avanzado no solo para los estudiantes, sino también para la institución.

PALABRAS CLAVE
UEES, inglés, educación, ESL (inglés como segunda lengua)

ABSTRACT

This article is a case study that analyses the problems that many ESL and EFL students face when they transfer from ESL/EFL classes to academic classes in university level. It presents a revision of some of the present and past advanced English programs, followed by an Advanced English Program Model at the University of Specialties Holy Spirit in Guayaquil, Ecuador. We will make a thorough analysis of the three kinds of advanced English, which include: Accuracy and Fluency, English Structure (Grammar), Principles of Writing. Plus there will be a discussion on why and how a program of advanced English has to be developed. In conclusion, we will find the successful principles of an advanced English program not only for the students, but also for the institution.

KEYWORDS
UEES, english, education, ESL (english as a second language)

1 Randy Dennis Davis, EdM in TESOL Boston University 2000. BA in Psychology Boston University 1998 Graduated Magna Cum Laude. Faculty, School of International Studies, Universidad de Espiritu Santo, Guayaquil, Ecuador. Correo electrónico: rdavis@uees.edu.ec

INTRODUCTION

In many universities, faculty are finding students are not academically prepared to be successful in Content Based Courses when they have recently finished an ESL or EFL program even though they may have received an adequate score on the TOEFL exam. The fact of the matter is that these students are often not taught the skills which will help them to be successful at the tertiary level. This leads to a frustration on the part of both university professors and students. This can lead to students not succeeding and dropping out of university programs. This had led many educators to ask the question what type of support could be given to these English Language Learners (ELLs) in order for them to be successful at the academic level. Could there be a link or a bridge which could improve their academic success? This is where many universities have adopted a bridge program to help students learn many of the academic competencies in order to be successful at the tertiary level. The purpose of this paper is to examine the case of the Universidad de Espiritu Santo in Guayaquil, Ecuador to see how one university acknowledged the problems it was encountering and how it resolved these issues.

Overview of Bridge Programs

The transition of and ELL (English Language Learning) students from ELL classes to academic classes at a college or university can be quite traumatic. Many students feel overwhelmed by these classes which offer no support services to English Language learners and end up dropping out of college or university. The intent of this paper is to look at this issue, provide a model for an existing bridge program, and look at other possible scenarios of preparing ELL students for the academic classroom.

Ferris and Tagg (1996) point out that usually writing and reading skills are emphasized in trying to assist ELL students; however, instructors of subject areas have pointed to issues concerning listening and academic problems for ELL which has brought to the forefront literacy based tasks as well as listening and speaking tasks. Teachers felt that their ELL students had

a great difficulty with class participation, asking and responding to questions, and general listening comprehension. Furthermore, they strongly urged the ELL instructors for authenticity in their EAP (English for Academic Purposes) activities. Specifically, they mentioned targeting the listening of real lectures by a variety of speakers, interaction with native speakers, and working with genre-specific vocabulary, reading materials, and writing tasks.

For many years universities have been establishing and promoting summer bridge programs for African-American, underrepresented, low income, underprepared students (Ackermann 1991; Buck 1985; Garcia 1991; Garcia & Paz 2009; Gold, Demming & Stone 1992; Gutierrez 2007; Kezar 2001; O´Connor 2002; Retention Coordinating Group 2005; Santa Rita & Bacote 1997; Strayhorn 2011; Walpole et al.; 2008). What these programs have done is to help prepare students for the university setting, hence, allowing them to increase their self-esteem, giving them the tools to be successful, and increasing the retention rate of these students.

Nesinger(1990) faced the dilemma of having Malaysian transition into American universities. Despite having high TOEFL scores, the ELL teachers found that the Malaysian students were simply being able to understand the teachers. This group had to adapt their original 12 week bridge program to satisfy the need of their students. They found that some students spent up to three semesters taking these bridge classes before they were able to register for university classes.

At Kean College in New Jersey, Rosenthal (1992) designed a program to ease students' transition to mainstream classes by reinforcing existing English skills, encouraging interaction between limited-English-speaking and native-speaking students, providing academic support, encouraging confidence, as well as helping teachers modify teaching techniques for this population.

Some researchers such as Carroll & Dunkelblau(2011) have look at the effect of different types of writing instruction for ELL students. This research led them to the conclusion that some writing instruction may be more helpful

in the successful transition of ELL students into academic classes at the university level.

The Office of Community College Research and Leadership(2010) discusses a new use for the bridge program model. It states that Black Hawk College of northwest Illinois wanted to create a bridge program for ELL adult students that would successfully lead them to a program which would allow them to secure employment and increase their economic potential. Based on several factors, the college chose the Transportation, Distribution and Logistics (TDL) industry sector to develop the program. What they did was to design a 16-week, ESL bridge course which was created to complete two goals: (1) to contextualize a standard adult education ESL course to prepare students to transition into the WDS certificate program; and (2) provide comprehensive support services including tutoring, learning communities, targeted use of instructional software, and career counseling to enhance students' success.

UEES and the Bridge Program

The Universidad de Especialidades Espiritu Santo (UEES) is a medium sized University located in Samborondon just outside of Guayaquil, Ecuador which has approximately 5,000 undergraduate students in a number of career programs such as medicine, law, business, communication, etc. Although being located in South America, the university is dedicated towards the development of all of their students to become bilingual speakers and learners. All current students have to take at least 8 classes in English no matter what their entry English level may be. No students are currently entered into the university without at least having a high basic level of the language.

The idea for the bridge program developed when a number of the teachers who taught subjects entirely in English realized that many students were ill-prepared to take classes entirely taught in English. Hence, a bridge program was designed to bridge the gap between the ESL courses and the regular academic classes. After an analysis of the student´s needs, it was decided to form 3 classes: Accuracy and Fluency, English Structure, and Principles of Writing.

The teachers and administration felt that these classes would help students become better prepared to take courses in English. Currently, between 350 and 400 students enroll in each of the bridge classes every year. When students finish their bridge classes, they are then allowed to take classes in the International College Program (ICP) where all classes were taught in English and many by native-speaking teachers from the United States and England. The ICP was originally established in order to prepare students for transferring to other international academic opportunities.

The Bridge Classes

As mentioned previously, the bridge program consists of three classes which are Accuracy and Fluency, English Structure, and the Principles of Writing. First of all, Accuracy and Fluency concentrates on the student's oral production of the language as well as their ability to listen and answer questions appropriately. Next, the English Structure class looks at the structure of English as a whole and reviews all the grammatical and syntactical forms of the language. Lastly, the Principles of Writing class instructs students on how to write strong sentences, paragraphs, and short compositions or essays.

Accuracy and Fluency

In Accuracy and Fluency, the use of oral and aural skills is emphasized. The whole course is designed around students using these skills in a non-threatening environment. After an ice-breaking activity, teacher and students converse about the job interview process. In Ecuador, the majority of students never get a job until they finish their university career. The discussion continues concerning appropriate interview questions and the resume with special consideration given to cultural differences and the interview process. Students are given an assignment to write a North-American resume in English and to choose 25 questions for a job interview. Diads are created and students go through the interview process; once as an interviewer and once as an interviewee. The next assignment is giving the students the opportunity to lead a conversation. Each student is asked to prepare a topic which is one of current interest along with a num-

ber of conversation questions to keep the conversation going. Other students are seated in a circle formation and expected to take part in the conversation. Depending upon how strongly a student feels concerning a particular subject, students fight through linguistical problems in order to express their opinions upon the subject matter. After the conversations, the next assignment is the 5 minute speech. The teacher first explains to students the structure of a five minute speech and the importance of practice in order to reduce nervousness. After the speeches, the students begin to prepare for their Midterm project which is a Professional Powerpoint Process Presentation. The teacher first reviews with the students how to create an appropriate presentation and then goes on to explain a process or "how to" presentation. Subsequently, the students shift into debate mode. The teachers discuss debates with the students and show a model of how a debate works. Students then prepare for a series of two on two debates. Following the debates is the role play activity where students join into groups of three or four and produce 15 minute role play skits. This is followed by a five to ten minute student produced video for a Final project. At our university, we have a communications department which assists students with the filming and editing of their projects. This project allows students to choose a communication method in English which best fits their strengths. For example, many Arts students choose to sing a song in English or perform a work of Edgar Allen Poe; whereas, a medical student may choose to demonstrate a medical technique such as CPR or the Heimlich maneuver.

One point that is crucial when preparing and teaching an Accuracy & Fluency class is flexibility. Mini lessons concerning pronunciation, idioms, and combined speech should be incorporated depending upon the time available. For example, teaching a class of 16 students versus a class of 22 means 6 more assignments for each project. Hence, it is the teacher´s job to use their discretion concerning additional topics.

On the following page, you will find a presentation rubric which is used for all oral presentations. The first item on the rubric is organization and content which decides how well a presentation is organized and if it has appropriate content for the presentation students are working on. Next, the student´s knowledge of the topic as well as their preparation is evaluated. This can be judged based upon the student´s presentation of the material and answers from questions from the teacher or other students. The third criterion is the graphics and / or body language. The use of the graphics is important many presentations. Students should not be reading Powerpoint presentations but using them as a means of support. In addition, some presentations may have no graphics whatsoever; thus, appropriate body language can be assessed by the evaluator. The fourth point is the use of language/mechanics both written and oral. Appropriate grammar and word choice is vital in being able to understand the presentation. The last factor is elocution which includes the pronunciation, speed, and volume of the delivery. Some may notice that the lowest grade is 40 points. However, this gives an individual at least some points for attempting a presentation and will not allow a student to pass unless they do exceptionally on the other assignments.

Presentation Rubric

	20 pts	16 pts	12 pts	8 pts	Total
Organization and Content	Student presents information in logical, interesting sequence which audience can follow.	Student presents information in logical sequence which audience can follow.	Audience has difficulty following presentation because student jumps around.	Audience cannot understand presentation because there is no sequence of information.	
Subject Knowledge and Preparation	Student demonstrates full knowledge by answering all class questions with explanations and elaboration.	Student is at ease with expected answers to all questions, but fails to elaborate.	Student is uncomfortable with information and is able to answer only rudimentary questions.	Student does not have grasp of information; student cannot answer questions about subject.	

	20 pts	16 pts	12 pts	8 pts	Total
Graphics and/or Body Language	Student's graphics explain and reinforce screen text and presentation. Student demonstrates professionally confident body language.	Student's graphics relate to text and presentation. Student demonstrates appropriate body language.	Student occasionally uses graphics that rarely support text and presentation. Student demonstrates appropriate body language some of the time.	Student uses superfluous graphics or no graphics. Student has no idea concerning body language.	
Use of Language/ Mechanics	Presentation has no misspellings or grammatical errors and makes appropriate word choices.	Presentation has no more than two misspellings and/or grammatical errors and makes appropriate word choices most of the time.	Presentation has three misspellings and/or grammatical errors and chooses many inappropriate words.	Student's presentation has four or more spelling errors and/ or grammatical errors and makes poor word choices.	
Elocution	Student uses a clear voice and correct, precise pronunciation of terms so that all audience members can hear presentation.	Student's voice is clear. Student pronounces most words correctly. Most audience members can hear presentation.	Student's voice is low. Student incorrectly pronounces terms. Audience members have difficulty hearing presentation.	Student mumbles, incorrectly pronounces terms, and speaks too quietly for students in the back of class to hear.	
				Total Points:	

English Structure

English Structure is the next bridge course and its purpose is to review all the components of how the English language is used. Advanced grammar books as well as other handouts are used as a guide for instruction. This is a rather intensive course which covers the majority of the more complex grammatical issues an ELL student would face in the academic classroom.

A preferred method of teaching this class is to do so deductively and inductively at the same time. This is accomplished by having students work with editing sentences in English which are based upon some of the most common errors of English students. In the beginning, the teacher goes through a sheet sentence by sentence having the students correct the errors orally or written. Then the teacher corrects the sentence and asks the students to answer why an answer or answers needed to be changed. This presents an opportunity for a mini grammar lesson on the particular grammatical point and the students are able to see how this relates to real life editing and the proper usage of language. The key is that students are actively involved in deducing the grammar rule which will be necessary in a number of other similar situations. It also gives the student a special insight into the grammatical rule when it is lat-er taught inductively by means of a traditional grammar textbook.

This course is really intended to aid students to become better editors of English. This should prepare them to become better writers of English by focusing more on the content and format and worrying less about the grammatical issues.

The assessment in this class is more traditional than in other classes. Objective quizzes and tests are used as a means of measuring an individual´s understanding of the material. After all, in grammar things are either correct or they are not which leads to objective assessment.

Principles of Writing

One of the downfalls of many ESL or EFL courses is that they do not teach writing skills. They usually tend to focus more on learner output and not on format or style. Since this course is the first real writing course an ELL student may have, there is a large focus on teaching the basics.

Instruction starts with teaching students the difference between a sentence and a sentence fragment or run-on sentence. In Spanish, many students write on and on using a multitude of commas which is contrary to an English writing style. After this introduction, the teacher starts

to talk about the paragraph and how there are differing sizes of paragraphs which range from one sentence to more than a page. Then we settle down to the 5 to 7 sentence academic paragraph. Teachers emphasize the fact that most communication written or oral have three parts; namely, the beginning, the middle, and the end. In writing, the academic paragraph has the introduction, supporting details, and the conclusion. In order to get students to reproduce a strong academic paragraph may take a few weeks but it is essential for the development of a successful writer. This becomes the basis for the 3 and 5 paragraph essays which follow.

Teachers continue instruction in terms of many of the typical essays the students may be asked to write. Some of these include the narrative, descriptive, analytical, and persuasive essays. One by one, the students complete these compositions according to the writing process which the teacher emphasizes. By learning and working with the writing process is how students will become more structured in their attempts to successfully create organized papers. Students must learn to brainstorm and organize their ideas before they start writing their papers. Editing is another skill which is essential for all students to learn to master. These skills are the foundation for any academic writer and without learning these skills students are unlikely to succeed. Another key point noticed by writing teachers is ¨quality versus quantity¨ which means spending more time getting a person to write a strong paragraph or essay is more important than how many essays they produce.

In assessing writing, there are a number of techniques which may be used. However, one that has been effective at UEES is Collins (1997) Focus Correction Areas. Collins (1997) informs us how Focus Correction Areas (FCAs) are a powerful tool to help students target areas of improvement and allow teachers to grade papers quickly and efficiently. It forces students to focus on a limited number of areas instead of a large number of areas in writing to worry about. Collins breaks them into four categories which include content, organization, style, and conventions. Collins recommends three focus correction areas to be assigned for each writing activity.

Collins (1997) gives examples of possible areas of focus correction in the different areas. For example, under content, the areas that may be used could be: clear statement of purpose, sufficient and relevant details, and the definition of the similarities and differences. Organization could include: ideas in logical order, clear sequence of information, and a conclusion that reinforces and summarizes. Style: vivid and powerful verbs, a hook that draws you in, and figurative language. Finally, conventions could include: proper use of quotations, complete sentences, and proper punctuation.

The North Allegheny School District (2011) in conjunction with Collins´ Focus Correction Areas has broken their scoring rubric into these areas:

1. FOCUS:
   • Topic recognition
   • Purpose
   • Thesis
   • Development
   • Coherence

2. CONTENT:
   • Development and explanation of main idea
   • Factual statements
   • Relative details (details that relate to the thesis)
   • Illustrative examples
   • Comparisons and contrasts
   • Concrete examples to support opinions
   • Deletion of unrelated ideas

3. ORGANIZATION:
   • Introduction that draws reader into the writing
   • Paragraphs logically ordered
   • Transitions between and within paragraphs
   • Conclusion that reinforces thesis statement

4. STYLE:
   • Clear and consistent voice
   • Effective diction/tone
   • Concise wording
   • Varied sentence lengths and types
   • Active voice verbs
   • Specific nouns
   • Appropriate vocabulary
   • Literary devices/syntax techniques

5. CONVENTIONS:
  • Correct spelling, punctuation, grammar, mechanics, and syntax

These are only ideas on how to make grading quicker, more objective, and not so overwhelming for the student. However, each teacher must find what works for themselves and their students.

Discussion

The creation of a Bridge Program is not an easy task. Many ESL or EFL students are in a hurry to enter academic classes. Time and money are both factors for many of these individuals. The burden is upon the administration and the teachers to make these courses valuable for the students in terms of their improved success in the academic classes as well as the time and financial value. What are the classes to be offered? Should they differ for ESL students versus EFL students?

In the case of UEES, we have no advanced reading or literature classes. Many programs offer specific courses which focus on students reading skills. Others may find that an accuracy and fluency class isn´t necessary for many ESL students who find themselves forced to use the language every day. While still others may feel that an advanced grammar class is unnecessary when students may be reviewing grammar in a reading or writing class.

The first thing that needs to be done when creating a Bridge Program is to identify the needs of the students. Surveys to former ELL students should help to identify some of these needs. Discussions with academic teachers should also be a priority in order to know what skills the students need to be successful. Who is more capable of knowing the shortcomings of ELL students than the academic teachers? Furthermore, it would be of value to get the feedback of the students themselves to evaluate their perceived weaknesses and to improve their self-esteem concerning these academic tasks.

Another point of discussion is that we don´t want to students to feel frustrated by taking classes they feel are unnecessary for them to take. Thus, we want to make sure we have an appropriate means of evaluating student´s academic skills so that they will only have to take those bridge classes which are necessary for them to take. Some students may only need a course to improve their writing skills while others may need a lot more study.

Some programs even have a level system where there may be 3 or 4 levels of instruction in 3 or more different academic areas. This allows for students to receive the proper amount of skills training in order for them to be successful.

Conclusion

It has been proven that "at-risk" students such as ELLs improve their ability to be successful in academic classes when engaging in Bridge Programs such as the UEES model in this paper. A Bridge Program can be extremely effective if it first identifies the needs of its students and then works on fulfilling those needs. Key factors include the appropriate evaluation of the students to see which classes and which levels they need to be assigned. The UEES model is a case-study of a working model which is meeting its expectations. Many other universities may want to adopt such a program for their institutions in order to meet the needs of their international students. However, they should get the feedback from their present, past, and potential students in designing their own program. Inasmuch, they should also consult with the academic teachers who know what skills are needed and where they have found ELL students lacking in the past.

REFERENCES

Ackermann, S. P. (1991). The benefits of summer bridge programs for underrepresented and low-income transfer students. Community/Junior College, 15(2), 211-224.

Buck, C. B. (1985). Summer bridge: A residential learning experience for high risk freshmen at the University of Califor-

nia, San Diego. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED264462).

Collins, John J. Selecting and Teaching Focus Correction Areas: A Planning Guide. Collins Education Associates, 1997.

Communication Arts/English Style Manual North Allegheny School District (http://www.northallegheny.org/cms/lib4/PA01001119/Centricity/Domain/18/Style_Book_12-13-11_Word_format.pdf) 8/29/14

Ferris, D. & Tagg, T., (Summer, 1996). Academic Listening/Speaking Tasks for ESL Students: Problems, Suggestions, and Implications. TESOL Quarterly, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 297-320.

Garcia. P. (1991). Summer bridge: Improving retention rates for underprepared students. Journal of theFreshman Year Experiences, 3(2), 91-105.

Garcia, L. D,, & Paz, C. C. (2009). Evaluation of summer bridge programs. About Campus, 14(4), 30-32.

Gold. M,, Deming, M. P., & Stone, K. (1992). The bridge: A summer enrichment program to retain African-American collegians. Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition, 4(2), 101 — 1 17.

Gutierrez, T. E. (2007). The value of pre-freshmen support systems: The impact of a summer bridge program at UNM. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. The University of New Mexico.

Kezar, A. (2001). Summer bridge programs: Supporting all students. ERIC Digest. Retrieved April 25, 2010,from http://www.ericdigests.org/2001 -1 /summer.html.

Nersinger, Janice. Preparing Malaysian students for American university education. (Fall 1990). Cross Currents, Vol. 40 Issue 3, p218. 6p.

O'Connor, C. (2002). Black women beating the odds from one generation to the Retention Coordinating Group. (2005. April). Strategic Retention Master Plan: 2005-2011. Tucson: The University of Arizona.

Rhoades, G. (2006). The higher education we choose: A question of balance. Review of Higher Education,29(3), 381-404.

Robert, E. R., & Thompson, G. (1994). Learning assistance and the success of underrepresented students at Berkley. Journal of Developmental Education, 17(3). 4-6.

Rosenthal, Judith W., (Spring, 1992). A Successful Transition: A Bridge Program between ESL and the Mainstream Classroom. College Teaching, Vol. 40, No. 2, pp. 63-66.

Santa Rita, E,, & Bacote, J. B. (1997). The benefits of college discovery prefreshman summer program for minority and low-income students. College Student Journal, 31. 161-173.

Strayhorn, T. (2011). Bridging the pipeline: Increasing underrepresented students' preparation for college through a summer bridge program. American Behavioral Scientist, 55(2), 142-159.

Walpole, M., Simmerman. H., Mack, C., Mills, J. T., Scales, M,, & Albano. D. (2008). Bridge to success: Insight into summer bridge program students' college transition. Journal of the first-year experience &students in transition, 20(I), 11-30.