

# **ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC ACADEMIC PURPOSES: A PILOT TUTORING PROJECT WITH UNDERGRADUATE ESL STUDENTS IN A SOCIOLOGY COURSE**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Over the last 30 years the number of NNSs (non-native speakers) seeking degrees in higher education in English speaking countries has nearly quadrupled (Woodhall, cited in Beard and Hartley, 1984). In the United States, the number of NNS students entering American colleges and universities has increased from approximately 149,000 entering students in 1976 to over 450,000 in 1999 (Census Bureau Statistical Abstracts of the U.S., 1999, p.194). In order to assist these students in achieving language proficiency levels and learning the basic study skills needed for American academic studies, most universities and colleges offer ESL pre-academic programs. Nevertheless, too often as these ESL students become mainstreamed into content classes, it becomes evident that many are not adequately prepared for the transition. Their experience with authentic lecture discourse, different genres of academic writing, extensive reading and synthesizing, and most fundamentally, analytical processing of subject-specific information is limited.

Many institutions have recognized the difficulties that ESL students are having in content courses and are seeking ways to assist students in adapting to American academic cultures and discourses. Some universities have been experimenting with a "language through content" approach in the form of adjunct courses or precourses (Adamson, 1993; Johns, 1995) to teach academic competence through exposing ESL students to authentic content course material while working with them to develop the necessary conceptual scaffolding and academic strategies. Both of these course types involve the development of a curriculum in which the ESL instructor and the content course instructor work closely together. The ESL students attend the content course for experience in authentic lectures and assignments while participating in an ESL class that provides the students with academic strategies that function to support their efforts in the specific content course. A similar, but strategically less complicated approach exists in an ESL tutoring program in which an ESL tutor participates in attending the content course with the ESL students and structures a tutorial around their academic needs related to the course.

The primary purpose of this paper is to discuss the process of designing, conducting and evaluating an ESL tutorial for a Sociology course as a part of a pilot project at American University. The designing process involves examining the role of objectives for the tutees, familiarizing oneself with the content course, analyzing the students' needs, and assisting them in developing the relevant skills. To achieve a better understanding as to the probable causes of the difficulties that ESL students encounter in academic studies, I also found it essential to provide an overview of culturally specific learning styles. Lastly, to the extent that is possible due to the short amount of time spent with the tutees, I evaluate the effectiveness of the tutorial and make some suggestions for future ESL projects and tutors. To begin this discussion however, it is necessary to first take a look at how English for Academic Purposes is defined.

## **ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES**

### **Defining EAP, the programs and their limits for NNS**

The intentions that lie behind learning a new language vary from simply wanting to use the language as a means for social ends, such as conversational purposes and communicative situations to needing it for developing professional skills geared toward a specific purpose. English for Academic Purposes (EAP), often identified as a sub-category of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), is described by Bernard Coffey (1984) as a student's need for "quick and economical use of the English language to pursue a course of academic study" (p.4). Jordan (1989/1997), an author with extensive research and practical experience in the area of EAP, concludes that there is general agreement that EAP can be further divided into two additional groups: 1. "Common core" or "English for General Academic Purposes" (EGAP), 2. "Subject-specific" or "English for Specific Academic Purposes" (ESAP) as proposed by Coffey (1984) and Blue (1988), respectively (Jordan, 1989, p.151). In other words, in the first instance, general academic language as well as study skills including strategies for reading, writing, speaking and listening effectively for all academic subjects would be taught. In the second case, vocabulary and skills specific to a subject of study (as well as its curriculum), for example, Psychology, are emphasized. Jordan argues that in the first as well as the second scenario, study skills are a "key component" of EAP (1997, p.5).

Native English speakers as well as non-native speakers (NNSs) may lack study skills necessary to be successful in tertiary studies, especially if they were not cultivated in their prior learning environments. Generally speaking, study skills include areas such as effective lecture listening comprehension and note-taking, writing in the appropriate academic register, reading effectively for study purposes, participation in class discussion, and library research (Jordan, 1999). Most universities have what they call "Writing Centers", or other tutoring services available for native speaking undergraduates who are lacking sufficient practice in these skill areas. International students, in some cases, may be able to transfer their study skills to the new target language. In many cases however, the foreign students are socialized differently toward learning in their home cultures and acquire other study skills or learning styles, which correspond to the methodologies and belief systems in practice in their native countries. In addition to negotiating the differences in the culturally-based learning styles, NNSs' difficulties are compounded with the challenge of learning to process information in a language other than their native tongue.

In a typical arrangement on U.S. campuses, international students with limited English proficiency proceed through graduated ESL instruction. As they progress to the higher level ESL courses, the students are required to take an increasing number of content courses. In this phase, many students are having difficulties applying the language and the new study skills that they have learned to the subject area courses (Adamson, 1993). The reality is that they face what seems at the time like an insuperable amount of subject-specific terminology, theoretical information from texts, unfamiliar discourse modes in lectures, and new rhetorical writing conventions; and they are obliged to synthesize it all by applying critical thinking skills instead of the more rote-learning techniques prevalent in many non-Western cultures. This can lead to problems in understanding the course material and result in frustration and poor grades. For most students, university matriculation is dependent on their success in making this transition. Universities interested in retaining these students offer adjunct ESL courses, precourses, theme-

based courses, individual tutoring or establish tutoring programs for ESL students in general education content courses (ESAP).

## **THE TUTORING PROJECT**

In an effort to meet the needs of international students at American University, the Department of General Education and the TESOL program in the Department of Languages and Foreign Studies embarked on a collaborative effort to provide ESAP tutoring for ESL students in individual content classes. The purpose of the pilot tutoring project was to offer supplementary help to international students with academic skill needs. The primary focus group for this assistance was students who were still attending English courses at the English Language Institute but have also begun to take General Education courses for credit. The English Language Institute, which operates as an affiliate of American University, provides general, pre-academic English language (EGAP) instruction in grammar, reading, writing, and speaking. The EGAP courses at the English Language Institute are not for credit and the students are required to pass all 5 levels in each skill area to become fully matriculated at American University. Essentially, the goal of the ESAP tutoring project was to help the tutees build bridges to close the “skills gap” between the skills developed in the general pre-academic English (EGAP) course, and the actual skill demands of the elected content course they are required to attend. The aim, in other words, was to focus on the skills that the tutees still needed to develop to be successful in the content class. In order to achieve a better understanding of the kind of difficulties international students face, it is necessary to explore the area of learning styles and cultural differences in more detail.

### **A general overview of NNS student difficulties:**

#### **Learning styles and cultural differences**

Learning styles “refer to cognitive and interactional patterns which affect the ways in which students perceive, remember and think” (Scarcella, 1990, p. 114). Non-native English speakers enter American colleges and universities with various ideas about academic education and academic relationships. To a great extent, this is because individuals are socialized according to the values and belief systems of their cultures. Each culture fosters and rewards the cognitive processes and learning styles in their society and schools that they consider pertinent to success in their society and schools; therefore, “the culture determines what kind of thinking is important and what kind is devalued” (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 1995, p. 243). Individual preferences in learning exist as well; however, a discussion of the role of personal, preferred styles of learning is beyond the scope of this paper.

A number of studies confirm that learning style differences and the academic conventions attached to them vary across cultural groups (Ballard & Clancy, cited in Jordan, 1997; Oxford et al., 1996; Reid, 1995), and the manifestations of this diversity are often apparent in the following academic areas:

- **Relationships with professors**

NNS students bring expectations of student-teacher relationships to the American academic environment that reflect cultural-specific patterns and orientations of behavior that is expected in the classrooms in their cultures. Damen (1987) says that “classroom behavior in Arab cultures will be strongly influenced by religious beliefs and tenets” (p. 315). Perhaps we can predict that

the roles of the teacher and student will be affected by Islamic principles as well. Flowerdew (1994) reports the reaction of a Japanese student who found American university scholars to be very “performative” (p. 207). She was surprised to see teachers walking around freely in the classroom and sitting on the desk and “using their hands and making facial expressions when they talk” (p. 207). This kind of behavior from a professor was contrary to what she had been socialized to expect, consequently, this student will need to adjust her view of the teacher-student relationship.

While it is true that some lecturers tend to speak informally in Western educational institutions, it is expected that students listen quietly during the lecture. This is typically the rule in other countries as well; however, Jordan (1997) cites an anecdote from Coleman (1987) about an extreme perspective on learning English at the university level in some Indonesian universities. The prescribed roles in the relationship dictate that the students give little attention to the teacher and in turn invest it in speaking with their colleagues during class time. This attitude would needless to say, cause conflict in American classrooms, and it is rather an exception to the rule of otherwise respectful behavior toward teachers. Nonetheless, it is beneficial to be aware of the different perspectives of student-teacher relationships. Another aspect of this relationship will be discussed next.

- Class participation

Students are encouraged to ask questions in U.S. learning institutions in order to clarify an idea they have or to request something to be restated because they did not hear it. They may also be asked to give their own opinions on an issue being discussed in class and support that opinion with a valid argument. International students may be adverse to open participation in a class due to their view of the undisputed authority of the professor and/or because of the concern especially among Asian students for losing face should they ask a foolish or absurd question (Shin, 2000; Lynch, 1994). Levine (as cited in Damen, 1987) discovered another cultural perspective of the American practice of classroom participation: “some Saudi students have reported that a teacher who elicits opinions in class or allows a student to challenge ideas is incompetent and therefore unqualified to teach” (p. 315)

- Logic and organization of thought

“Research on discourse shows that confusion in goals or in interpreting the main point of another’s speech is caused by the fact that each side is using different principles of discourse to organize its presentations” (Scollon & Scollon, 1995, p.1) . Shin and Lee (2000) report that “most Korean students are not used to American-style linear thinking, rather they are accustomed to a kind of spiral thinking” (p. 3). Scollon & Scollon (1995) also provide an example of the contrasting the style of discourse between a native speaker of English and a Chinese speaker. The Chinese speaker would most likely give supporting reasons or background information first before stating the main point or making a suggestion for an action. Such a strategy would be contrary to one a native English speaker would select. Thus, the cultural differences in organizing discourse not only reflect thought pattern preferences among cultures but also contribute to the potential for confusion that could affect reading, listening (comprehension) and writing skills of NNS.

- Rhetorical writing conventions

Concordant with the above argument, a culture’s pattern of thinking may also have an influence on the writing conventions practiced in a group. In 1966, Robert Kaplan was the first to point out that writing conventions differed across cultures. He illustrated his findings by depicting the rhetorical organization patterns of academic style writing in different cultures and by

demonstrating the differences between the linear “direct” English way of presenting ideas in writing and the Semitic “parallel”, Oriental “circular” and the Romance and Russian “digressive” styles. The formal or academic writing style of these languages appears to be less direct than that of English writers. The conclusion is that different cultures organize ideas in accordance with beliefs, values, and conventions of how one presents knowledge in that culture. Ron Scollon summed up the general position of researchers of contrastive rhetoric as follows:

A very broad range of studies have shown that no language or culture can be reduced to one or two diagrammatic structures that might be applied across the board from internal cognitive schema to paragraph structure.... At the same time, strong clear evidence, amply demonstrated across the languages of the world, shows that there are situationally, generically, or stylistically preferred compositional forms and that these are not the same from language to language or from culturally defined situation to culturally defined situation. (Scollon, 1997, p. 353)

In other words, many foreign students will be confronted with the necessity to reorganize their thoughts as well as how they organize them for their academic writing assignments.

- Rote learning vs. an analytical/critical approach

Richards and Skelton (1991) observe that “overseas students evaluate less, and evaluate less critically” (p. 40). This too is a matter of previous cultural socializing. Levine (as cited in Damen, 1987) explains that original thought is discouraged in the Saudi educational system because of “the close association between organized education and Islamic principles” such as “fate and the wisdom of God’s direction” (p.315). Learning practices in the Middle East generally “includes much repetition and oral recitation” says Damen (1987, p.310). Similarly, in the case of Korean students, for example (Shin and Lee, 2000), many have not been encouraged to develop analytical or critical thinking because rote memorization is the pedagogically preferred and promoted method for internalizing information (p.2). Chinese students traditionally view the teacher “as an authority who is not to be questioned” (Flowerdew & Miller, 1995, p.365) and choose to present the professor’s views when doing an assignment. This perspective is likely to collide with a modern Western professor’s objectives in encouraging students to produce original thought in their assignments.

- Other study skills

The development of good study habits is generally considered to be a key to successful performance in an academic environment. In American universities, students are encouraged to complete assigned readings before class, utilize time effectively, take notes, and plan the writing of assignments and time needed to review for examinations. The scope and depth of readings and lectures as well as requirements for assignments may be quite different, as discussed above, from what visiting foreign students are accustomed to. Slow reading speed can hinder NNSs from completing the readings prior to class (Jordan, 1997) and perhaps from completing the readings at all. Underdeveloped reading skills could result in a domino effect in that the students are then less prepared for the specific context of the lecture (interfering with comprehension) and for asking questions. Note-taking too can be a difficult task for NNS. James (cited in Flowerdew, 1994) lists a number of skills that the student must engage in to take notes. The student has to simultaneously decode the string of sound, comprehend the language, be able to identify the main points of the lecture, and decide when and what to write down, and write clearly and comprehensibly. Thus, developing good study habits is dependent on mastering a number of sub-skills first.

- Learning from a variety of information sources and referencing others’ ideas

It is not uncommon to find that many international students have little or no experience in reading multiple texts for one course (informal inquiries of the tutees in this pilot tutoring project revealed that none had read more than one text for a course in their home countries) (Adamson, 1993). In American academia, a variety of texts are typically selected so that various views are presented on the same subject to give the student a broad spectrum from which they can derive knowledge and form opinions. In addition to these sources of information, the student attends a lecture and may even view films portraying different perspectives of the content course matter. Synthesizing all of this data has come to be an important part of modern Western education, particularly in institutions of higher learning.

Moreover, students accustomed to obtaining information from only one or two sources, such as their teachers and/or their book, need to be made aware that in the American academic environment, there is no single authority on a subject. Rather, learning is accomplished by being exposed to a free market of ideas. Consequently students need to be informed that giving credit where credit is due for those ideas is a highly valued ethical practice in academic studies in American universities. This is necessary because copying from texts is not frowned upon in some cultures because the written word is highly respected as a legitimate authority from which one can quote without citing (Jordan, 1997). Due to this sense of respect or honor for someone who has published a piece of work, it follows that these same students may have difficulty critically reviewing written material as well.

Raising the students' awareness of these culturally defined learning styles by contrasting the styles with American style through discussion, tasks, learning strategies and modeling, which I talk about in detail later, may dissipate some of the confusion the tutees are experiencing and help them to assess their problems with more clarity. Students can thereby be prepared to make necessary changes by revising their repertoire of skills and habits for the context of their new academic environment. With the help of a tutor, tutees can develop skills that will directly contribute to their academic success. This idea is congruent with the focus of the pilot tutoring project; however, before the tutor can help the tutees develop the skills necessary to succeed in their course work, the tutorial needs to be planned. In the following sections, I will discuss the role of objectives in establishing an ESAP tutorial for a content course as well as the evaluation of the tutees' needs, the specific (sociology) content course the tutees were attending, and how I went about designing the tutorial.

## **Objectives**

Embarking on a tutoring venture, one can never be sure what to expect; nonetheless, we are conditioned as teachers that in order to be effective there must be objectives at the outset to establish a framework and set goals for the tutor and the tutees. For each new particular tutoring situation, the tutor must first get to know the instructor of the class and become familiar with his/her teaching style and the objectives for the content course. Secondly, the tutor should become acquainted with the students interested in the tutorial and evaluate the needs of the tutees' in light of the demands of the undergraduate course. This discovery process takes time because the students' difficulties are not apparent all at once and they can only be addressed one at a time. Ultimately the objectives that one determines for such an ESAP tutorial will have to be frequently redefined almost from session to session. For this reason, fixed objectives would be an unrealistic expectation, and preparing a syllabus in advance would be an exercise in futility. However, some general, initial objectives may be useful to serve as a point of departure.

The following are the original objectives of the project, designed to assist the tutees in developing appropriate academic skills and practices: Help the students to:

- Participate effectively and appropriately in class
- Learn how to interact with course instructors during office hours and conferences
- Develop library and research skills and strategies
- Develop reading strategies for
  - Picking out themes
  - Relating themes to personal experience and to the course
  - Effectively synthesizing themes from various sources
- Write successful academic papers by developing skills to
  - Brainstorm and implement a research procedure
  - Organize concepts
  - Use discourse markers and cohesive devices effectively
  - Provide appropriate support for assertions
  - Understand the rhetorical conventions of the type of paper to be written
  - Recognize plagiarism and use citations and practice effective self-editing

Some of these objectives, cannot be achieved without complete participation on the part of the tutor in the content class. Therefore, the tutor needs to attend all the classes and do the assigned readings to become familiar with the subject matter of the course. General knowledge of the content course is paramount in designing the tutorials and the materials. For example, by understanding the course material, the tutor is better equipped to guide the tutees in building critical and analytical cognitive skills which they need to make the connections between lectures, films and readings, and the themes of the course. This in turn directly affects the ability of the tutees to organize their thoughts in a way that will help them to successfully complete a course writing assignment. Another reason for the tutor's presence in the content class is to observe if and how the tutees are asking questions and if the professor is able to maintain their attention (possibly indicating a listening/comprehension problem).

### **The content course**

The content class for this project was entitled "Views From the Third World." It was an undergraduate elective foundation course for the curricular area called The International and Intercultural Experience. The focus of the course is to explore, analyze, and develop an understanding for the historical and current social, economic, political, and cultural issues of third world countries. The grade for the course was based on five written assignments as well as attendance. The professor of the course volunteered his cooperation in the pilot tutoring project; it was, therefore, appropriate for me, the tutor, to establish a good rapport with the professor at the outset to ensure a pleasant collaboration. I met with the professor to discuss the content course as well as the prospective role of the tutor and followed up the meeting with a questionnaire designed to obtain the professor's input (appendix 1).

The focus of the questionnaire directed to the professor was for me to gain an understanding of the content course professor's practices as well as his expectations of what a TESL tutor should provide for his NNS students. The professor was asked how he envisions the role of the tutor outside of encouraging the students to seek his professional advice in course related matters. Regarding course readings, the professor reported that the tutor should "stress the importance of doing the reading before the class and thinking about how the readings relate

to class topics.” He also believed the tutor should “review the readings with the students as needed and encourage them to ask questions about the readings in class.” Concerning writing, the tutor should recommend “general writing tips”, emphasize the significance of the guidelines for writing assignments in the syllabus and review the tutees’ graded written assignments and provide them tips for improvement. In the assessment of the written assignments, the professor said that he was more concerned with content than with mechanical accuracy. This is an advantage for the tutees because their time can be spent more constructively in developing concepts rather than working on the tedious task of perfecting prescriptive grammar. The professor also suggested that the tutor could review the topics of lectures and films with the tutees as well as encourage tutees to ask questions about these two listening components of the course during content class time. All of the professor’s suggestions appear to reflect the kind of academic study habits and skills typically expected of a student studying in an American institution.

The professor estimated that the student body of his sociology course (Views from the Third World) was composed of 50 to 60 percent non-native speakers of English. In his opinion the greatest difficulties facing the students are: adjusting to American-style education practices, analyzing (versus rote learning) a variety of sources and synthesizing information using critical thinking skills. He reported that he made no adjustments in his lectures to accommodate NNSs nor did he have a different grading standard in place for these students. To the extent that I am able to judge, the professor’s statement was accurate. The tutees’ papers seemed to be graded using the same criteria as were used for the native speakers’ papers as the professor gave me NSs’ papers as writing models on two different occasions.

### **Analysis of students’ needs**

Ten NNS students representing three linguistic areas (Arabic, Spanish, and Japanese) expressed an interest in attending the tutorials. In an initial effort to evaluate the tutees’ academic needs, I developed a three-part questionnaire and gave it to them for completion (appendix 2). The purpose of the questionnaire was to conduct an analysis of the students in 5 areas: prior English language experience, motivation, self-evaluation of needs, study habits, and the students’ understanding of what was expected of them in the American academic environment. The first section addressed the extent of the students’ exposure to English and their involvement in learning the language prior to this project as well as the amount of accumulated course credits they carry at American University. The second section encouraged the students to self-evaluate their needs, and inquired about their level of motivation in the content course. Section three focused on the tutees’ study habits, listening comprehension, and their understanding of what was expected of them in the content course.

It is necessary to remember that though questionnaires are useful instruments for collecting data, the reliability of the information is subject to various psychological factors and language deficiencies. Some of the factors that may influence the validity of the questionnaire are: memory, incorrect interpretation of the question, the desire to answer according to what one thinks is the expected (or “correct”) answer not reflecting the respondent’s actual experience, or simply a lack of interest. I had compensated for this kind of interference by using additional methods for assessing the tutees’ needs such as: observing classroom behavior, listening to students’ comments during the discussion of content course themes in the tutorials, examining



tutee's difficulties in the written assignments for the content course, and by conducting informal inquiries.

Generally speaking, the results of the survey show that there did not appear to be a correlation between the number of years that the tutees studied English and the level of interest expressed in reviewing course material and working on reading, writing, and listening skills (see appendix 3 for details of questionnaire). Even though 6 of the students had previously practiced developing reading, writing and listening skills in English classes in their home countries they were equally interested in continuing to improve these skills in the context of this sociology course. This also proved to be the case for the 2 tutees that had already attended university courses at American for 2 semesters. This information could be interpreted to mean that some of the students might have considered the function of the tutor to be primarily that of a content study group guide. However, the only pattern to emerge in this section of the survey was found along language lines. The Japanese students reported to have had much less training in developing study skills in their homeland than the other two groups. They were also the only ones to report that asking questions during class-time in their home countries was not customary.

The students' exposure to English in their home countries varied greatly: from as little as 1 year, to as many as 14 years of study. The majority, however, had had more than 3 years of English instruction in their native countries. Concerning academic English studies at the ELI, two of the tutees had completed all five levels in the various skill areas at ELI (grammar, reading, writing, listening/speaking) while the others were continuing to study at levels 3, 4, and 5 in reading, writing and grammar. This information nonetheless confirmed that the students would have different needs as well as different levels of proficiency. The two Japanese students, for example, had little experience practicing the 4 skill areas in English in their country. They also reported having the most difficulty following the professor's lecture.

Overall, there appeared to be a clear lack of development of study skills (habits). Seven students spent only 1-3 hours a week reading. Since they only 'sometimes' did the reading before class, the question was whether they did it then after the class or perhaps not at all (relying on the tutor for summarizing and synthesizing information). These responses could have also indicated that the students were having problems with the reading or gave it less priority compared to other classes. Moreover, six students responded that their notes from lectures and films only 'sometimes' provided adequate information to be of any value for writing assignments. At least half of the students said that they 'sometimes' had difficulties understanding the terminology that the professor used in lectures. The two Japanese students reported having the most difficulty following the professor's lecture. These responses too could be investigated further for problems with note taking, listening, course terminology, or all three. Overall, the results of this survey revealed no correspondence between the amount of time the learners' had spent at an American institution and the demonstration of appropriate or requisite study skills.

The students seemed to have a solid understanding of what the professor expected of them in the course with the exception of one area. Eight of the 10 students answered positively that they should share their thoughts about issues unrelated to the course with the class. It is reasonable to assume that this response was misread with regards to "unrelated" and it is unlikely to cause problems since students rarely, if ever, volunteer such information in a large class.

Finally, there seemed to be a healthy level of motivation to succeed in the content course since all the tutees were concerned about passing and more than half were willing to spend more than 1 hour per week with the tutor. However, the mediocre interest in the course matter is

another topic to be examined. It is possible to presume that a lower level of interest could be attributed to difficulties students may have been having with listening and reading.

### **Designing the tutorial**

Securing a meeting place and finding a common time when all the tutees could convene is the first task that I encountered. Once all of the tutees consulted their schedules, it was agreed that the tutorial would take place on Mondays after the content class in the archives room in the A.U. library. At the request of the tutees, there was an occasional Sunday tutorial. These appeared, however, to be less successful since the enthusiasm of the tutees' waned when it came time to actually attend the sessions. E-mail was a great facilitator in arranging meeting times for the tutoring sessions as well as for many other aspects of the tutorial. Some other ways in which I used e-mail were: sending reminders to tutees about upcoming assignments, sending messages in case there was a change in meeting place or meeting times, maintaining an open line of communication by asking how things were going with the course readings or writing assignments and giving tips, reviewing written assignments of the tutees, and lastly, requesting that tutees notify the tutor by e-mail if they were unable to attend the scheduled tutoring session.

To follow is a discussion of the process of designing the tutorial over the course of the semester. It addresses the strategies used in the three skill areas, reading, writing and listening, as well as many of the realities the tutor and the tutees faced. As was mentioned before, objectives for the tutorial evolved and were adapted to the needs of the students to help them meet the demands of the course. The questionnaire served as a guideline but it was through observation, discussion, informal inquires and written assignments (details to come) that I discovered most about the tutees' needs.

### **Identifying challenges in the relevant skill areas**

During the first couple of tutoring sessions, the students were particularly eager to discuss the lectures, movies, and readings. The subject matter and the terminology were new to most of them and they were still working out how to synthesize the information contained in the readings from the 3 course texts, and the films and lectures. The course underscored a comparative sociological perspective; therefore, it was necessary for the students to be able to draw parallels between gender issues in India and those in South Africa, for example. Discussion during the tutorial was a useful tool for the tutees to demonstrate their ability to pick out the main themes from readings, lectures and films and make the necessary connections between and across themes and countries. I would ask the tutee's questions to lead them in thinking about social, political, religious and ethnic issues in one country as it was portrayed in a film and what was discussed about it in the course readings. Then, I would encourage them to make associations between countries by comparing and contrasting the issues prevalent in each society. Bligh (cited in Beard & Hartley, 1984) says that there is a good deal of evidence from comparative studies that indicates discussion to be "more effective than lectures in promoting thinking" (p. 175). Some of the objectives of group discussion that Beard and Hartley (1984) suggest are: to promote critical and logical thinking; to aid students in solving problems or making applications of theory; to discuss students' work, such as essays, designs and plans; to widen interests and change attitudes.

The two Japanese tutees were particularly reluctant to express their opinions during discussion in the tutorials. This was understandable due to face and authority issues in their previous cultural venue; however, I needed to convince them that it was OK to have an opinion and to share it; as there are often many perspectives on a topic. The three of us made an appointment to meet alone one other day during the week and talk about the themes in the course. We did this twice and it seemed to have built the confidence of one of the tutees because thereafter, she had begun to participate in discussions more often in the regular Monday tutorial sessions.

Academic listening. One of the very first issues that needed to be addressed was related to listening. The professor did not like to use a microphone in the lecture hall where the class was held because it contributed to the already impersonal atmosphere of such a large space; consequently, his decision resulted in the students having *difficulty hearing* the lecture. Once I made him aware of the problem, however, he agreed immediately to use the sound system that was intended for this space.

As soon as the tutees were able to hear the professor, they realized that they were not able to fully comprehend the *professor's discourse*. Naturally his speech was filled with subject related terminology, names of individuals, and slang that was not yet familiar to the tutees, for example; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, neo-colonialism, Desmond Tutu, and the expression "it's a two-way street". In an attempt to remedy this matter, I created a handout with relevant terminology for the next tutorial session (appendix 4).

The *professor's lecture style* proved to complicate the task of listening and comprehending the lectures. His lecture style fell between two categories defined by Dudley-Evans (1994) as the "conversational style in which lecturers deliver the lecture from notes in a relatively informal style with a certain amount of interaction with the students, and the 'rhetorical style', in which the lecturers give a performance with jokes and digressions" (p.148). A lecture tends to be more densely packed with information, has more literary vocabulary and a much more complex syntactic structure than conversational discourse (Hansen and Jensen, 1994). This was apparently more than the two Japanese tutees could digest as I made the observation that they were sleeping during the professor's lecture. They may have been tired from staying up late and writing papers but they confirmed that they were having difficulties following the professor's discourse.

I therefore designed a listening task for all of the tutees that emphasized chunks of speech used in transitions, hoping that it would aid them in following the lecture. The task (appendix 5) provided the students with macro-listening cues or discourse markers that denote transitions in speech that indicate emphasis of a point ("An interesting point is.."), introduction of a new topic ("to begin with"), chronology of ideas ("One of the problems was") or contrasting ideas ("On one hand..") (Jordan, 1997). I distributed the handout before class with the assignment that the students should listen for those markers and write down what follows them. Most of the students did the exercise, unfortunately however; due to the unpredictable nature of oral discourse the professor only used 2 of the 6 markers I assigned that day. The tutees reported that the task was helpful, but I did not repeat it (although I taped a lecture with the intention to do so) due to the number of different study skills I was trying to cover, taking one situation at a time. A possible suggestion for future tutors would be to tape 2 or 3 of the content professor's lectures making notes of the macro- and micro-markers used and develop a couple of handouts for the tutees to use during the lectures (see Jordan, 1997). With more consistent practice, the tutees would

become more aware of the transition markers while getting used to the professor's idiosyncratic style and, therefore, have less difficulty following the lecture.

An additional difficulty the students reported, related to problems understanding the documentary and feature *films* shown in class. The films conveyed the social, economic, political, ethnic and religious complexities in and between nations and the impact of global economies and past hegemonies. The tutees were unable to fully comprehend what was being said in the films due to the diverse foreign accents in which the English language was being spoken. Approximately half of the time in class was spent viewing films however, the most that could be done in this situation was to order a closed caption device so that the script would appear on the screen in the case that the films were equipped with this feature. I had spoken to the professor about the problem, he arranged for the closed caption device, but there were few films that had this feature.

Academic writing. Before the first of the 5 writing assignments was due, I reviewed basic *essay organization* with the tutees, as well as the notion of *brainstorming for ideas*, *quoting*, *citing*, *the necessity for self-editing*, *caution of plagiarism*, *proper formatting*, and even the benefits of using the *spell check* (appendix 6). I also asked the tutees to demonstrate their ability to *paraphrase* from excerpts in the readings. The use of *transitions and support for assertions* were emphasized in the tutorials throughout the semester (see below for activity); however, the work of many tutees revealed that the application of these concepts was not yet a part of their cognitive processing and thus perhaps evidence of a remaining culturally conditioned rhetorical style.

It was common among the Arab tutees, for example, that they would often repeat their assertions rather than give examples to support them. Maybe this could be attributed to a lack of taking the time to conceptualize their thoughts; however, Damen (1987) confirms that this finding is characteristic of Arabic speakers. She says that the "strongly worded, often repetitive and extravagant statements of Arabic speakers [reflect the] patterns of the Arabic language" (p. 307). Often the Japanese students' papers lacked either assertions, or details, or both. Here too, Damen's comments confirmed that the tutees' style represented rhetorical patterns of politeness associated with Japanese cultural habits, beliefs, and values. She says that students from Japan avoid making strong assertions and prefer "not to present a 'clearly stated' main idea, but rather to coast to it obliquely" (p. 307). Damen also reports that "paragraph forms in Japanese tend to be organized by a 'slender' form which dwells upon details only or a 'stumpy' form which is limited to general statements" (p. 307). Neither pattern lends itself well to the rhetorical conventions of American academic writing.

It soon became clear that the standard essay approach would not be applicable to the writing assignments for this course. The requirements for the assignments were clearly delineated. Typically, each paper had 3 sections, and it was specifically stated in the form of a series of questions, what was to be discussed in each section. For example, in a novel reaction paper, the students were to describe a novel they were assigned to read, the main characters, the plot, the themes, the setting, and the message it carries in section one. In section two of the paper they were to discuss 3 ways in which the novel related to themes that were discussed in the course (e.g. what does the book say about: gender relations, ethnicity, social class, colonialism, nationalism, politics, conflicts, religion, human rights, environment, resources or development, etc.) and give examples. In the last section, the students were asked to give their opinion of the book, say how they reacted to it, discuss the author's point of view, and whether the student agreed or disagreed with this viewpoint. Lastly, the students were to evaluate and critique the

novel and report whether they would recommend it to be used for such an assignment the following year. This format seems straight forward but it was not uncommon for the tutees to leave out an entire section or not address one or more of the questions in the various sections of the paper, regardless of how many times or ways the guidelines for the paper were reviewed with the tutor. I can only speculate that these tutees may have had difficulty conceptualizing and developing a response to particular questions. Unfortunately, the samples of their work were not numerous enough to find a pattern, nor were the assignments they responded to always posing the same type of questions.

I used different approaches to assist the tutees in meeting the requirements for the writing assignments. First of all, I encouraged the students to complete their written work early enough so they could send it to me via e-mail for comments so that they would be able to make necessary changes before the due date. Most commonly, the suggestions I made were formed as questions to guide the tutees to link issues across countries and associate them with themes, or to develop an idea more completely. I also assisted them in presenting ideas according to the conventional “linear” pattern of organization and corrected major grammatical and syntactical errors. Five of the seven tutees took advantage of this service, but only two did so with consistency. Whenever possible, I met individually with the tutees to discuss their work after it was graded by the professor. In addition, before assignments were returned to NS students, the professor of the course agreed to provide “A” papers as models from which I designed exercises (appendix 7 and 8). In the first task (Review of the novel reaction paper), I asked the tutees to work in pairs, using a handout listing the required criteria for the written assignment and discuss whether the author of the paper successfully addressed each criterion. Another task required the students to identify assertions and support for the assertions as well as transitions. Again in pairs they worked together to pick out assertions and the examples to support those claims from an authentic “A” paper. Then, using another model paper, the pairs identified transitions by matching together six paragraphs.

Another method employed to assist the students in preparing for assignments was discussion to review themes and synthesize information from the texts, films and lectures. I posed questions to encourage the kind of analytical and critical thought that the tutees needed to develop in order to write and participate in the course successfully. For example: “Do poor Andean farmers contemplate the ethical ramifications of the drug crops they grow for export?” Why? The kind of answer I wanted to elicit would be as follows: The farmers are part of an economic system that is protected and managed by guerrilla groups who see that their product gets exported. In taking part in this activity, the farmers and their families manage to make just enough to survive and the guerrillas make money by trafficking the crop to pay for arms and to bribe corrupt officials. “In what other countries do rebel groups grow illegal drugs to finance their interests?” (Possible answers: Afghanistan, Bolivia, etc.) How does the United States react? Through this kind of discussion, I could help the tutees link socio- economic and political issues together and assist them in recognizing similar patterns elsewhere in the world.

However, the realities of the grading system in this course were such that the student could not receive less than a “C” unless he/she had not turned in the assignment or the work he/she submitted was not his/her own. Consequently, a paper that did not address all of the questions, and did not provide adequate support for all of the assertions could still qualify for a grade in the “B” range. Therefore, if a student was satisfied with marks in a “B” or “C” range, he/she could achieve one with relatively little effort. Such assessment practices might prematurely cap some of the tutees’ motivation to produce better papers.

In one particularly delicate situation, a Saudi tutee received a “D” on her third paper for the course. Apparently she had felt confident about turning it in because she was quite upset with the resulting grade. She had used information from the internet, copying it verbatim in quotation marks and citing the source, yet the copied data comprised about seven eighths of her 5 page paper. She had not attended the tutoring session in preparation for this assignment, and she had attempted to send the paper to me for review but had failed to attach it to her e-mail. Before I had actually seen the paper, I had requested permission from the professor to help the student rewrite the assignment. The professor cordially declined the request primarily because it was against his policy, but he also remarked that since the student had not made use of the assistance available to her, “cutting her slack is not the message she should receive”, especially if she is not ready for college-level work. The student did not plagiarize, but she had not developed her own thoughts either. I had discussed the paper with her and the reason for the grade and encouraged her to use the method of analyzing we had been doing in the tutorials. Moreover, I reassured her that I was always available to review her work. What was interesting about this case is that she had received a B and a B- on her 2 prior papers. She had been trying to follow the American writing conventions as well as analyze the issues in the course, yet she reverted to a learning style considered acceptable in her native Arabic culture. It did not occur to me at the time to ask her why, but perhaps it was due to time constraints to complete the task.

Academic reading. In the academic arena as in this content course, students have a great deal of required course reading to process. The development of effective reading strategies can improve the student’s comprehension of material and make the reading experience a more efficient one. Jordan (1999) points out that the most fundamental aspect of reading is the purpose. Students’ reading purposes include: obtaining information, understanding ideas or theories, discovering author’s viewpoints, and seeking evidence for their own point of view. All of these reading purposes are germane to the course writing assignments and to asking intelligent questions in class. I reviewed and practiced pre-reading strategies with the tutees using assigned readings to demonstrate how they may be helpful in setting the schema for the comprehension of content information through *predicting/surveying, scanning and skimming*. Predicting or surveying involves looking at the assigned chapter of a text focusing on the title, sub-headings, maps or diagrams with dates to establish a sense of what is going to be covered. A quick reading through the introduction and the conclusion of the chapter completes the preliminary scaffolding for the task. The scanning strategy is applied when the student is looking for specific information on a topic, perhaps a date when an incident occurred or its location in the text by checking the index. Lastly, skimming involves reading quickly to grasp the *main ideas or themes* of the text by rapidly glancing through the text to get the gist.

To determine what skills the tutees were using to comprehend the course readings, they were asked about what kind of tips they could share with each other. Some said that they made *annotations* in the margins of the texts, so it was explored further as to whether they related the ideas in the readings to personal thoughts and experiences and if the readings raised questions. Only one tutee responded that he connected concepts in the readings to personal experience so it was emphasized to the others that this would be an efficient way to remember more of what they read. Students were also surveyed as to what measures if any they took to *deduce the meaning of unknown words*. As a part of the discussion, the students were directed to specific readings in the texts and asked which words they did not understand and if it was in fact necessary to know the exact definition of the word to be able to understand the sentence. The purpose of such an

exercise was to demonstrate that a certain tolerance of ambiguity would allow them to read more efficiently.

Once again, encouraging discussion of the readings and films through asking pertinent questions was a manner in which I attempted to aid the tutees in developing individual thought and analysis of the subject matter. I felt that the understanding of as well as the appropriate application of *course terminology* played a central role toward understanding the reading mastering the rhetoric for the content course. As a means to link course terminology with cognitive goals, I adapted a task (handout) to provide a scaffolding for synthesizing and discussing the crossover of themes in the readings and films (appendix 9, Jordan & Nixon's Pyramid discussion). The handout was particularly effective in engaging the tutees to discuss the terms and apply them. In this exercise, the students each choose 3 items that they believed would best help a developing country improve its economic development. The students' names and choices are listed on the board, then the students are paired so that they have at least one choice in their list that differs from their partner's list. They then negotiate and use examples to convince each other why their choice is more appropriate. If neither succeeds, then they must agree on another item to replace the ones they are in disagreement with. This task deepens their understanding of the content course and its relevant terminology, exercises their negotiating skills and encourages the tutees to find support for their arguments.

Unfortunately, I observed that as the semester progressed, the tutees were doing less and less of the assigned reading from the texts (3 tutees also did not complete their assigned novels; however, here the two Japanese tutees asked the professor twice for extensions on the assignment because the author they were given, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, was extremely challenging for them, especially in writing style). One tutee had admitted that she had done absolutely none of the assigned readings from the texts (she also read only half of the novel she was to write about and received, to her surprise, an A- on that paper). Another tutee's textbooks looked brand new, which led me to suspect that he also felt that he could do well enough in the course without doing the assigned reading. When I approached him with this suspicion, he confirmed it. The responses of these two tutees to the question of how much time they spend reading per week in the questionnaire also became consequently invalid.

Why were many of the tutees not doing the readings and how were they able to perform satisfactorily on the written assignments without doing the readings? Through regular, casual inquiries I discovered that the tutees all had full class schedules and other courses they felt were more demanding (those with in-class exams). They felt that they could put off preparation for this course because there were no in-class exams and perhaps because they had a tutor to help them. As a result, I predict that they used their scanning skills to find appropriate support from the text for their assertions in the writing assignments which required it. Many of them also discovered that they could refer to issues in the films viewed in class to support their arguments and naturally, chose their arguments accordingly. The method of assessment (The TA circled key course terms and issues and checked that the ideas presented were adequately developed and examples provided) was not designed to discourage the use of this approach, therefore why should they work harder than they already were?

Other academic conventions. I emphasized the importance of reviewing the syllabus on a regular basis and asking questions in class (I even made an attempt to set goals for this task). Three of the tutees did ask questions in class, albeit only one on a regular basis, and his questions were sufficiently vague that the professor had to reformulate them. Generally speaking, very few of the other roughly 40 students in the class asked questions at all, so modeling for the behavior

was lacking in this environment. I also stressed that the tutees go directly to the professor with questions and concerns; it is in this way that they take responsibility for their learning. Four of the tutees indeed sought the professor after class to talk about paper grades or extensions. To my knowledge, however, none of the tutees sought the professors advice on content related aspects of the course.

One of the study habits inquired about in the questionnaire but not yet discussed in relation to the course was note-taking. Most of the tutees indicated that their notes only “sometimes” provided adequate information from lectures and films for writing assignments. I asked the students to share their methods for taking down information but I admit to having spent little time on the matter, and this for three reasons: 1. Note-taking is a complex process engaging numerous sub-skills as I mentioned earlier; 2. The professor provided talking points (a list highlighting the relevant issues presented in the assigned readings for the day as well as those found in a film to be viewed during class) for every class that covered the relevant points of his lecture and more; therefore, the student could add comments on this paper if needed; 3. The students demonstrated adequate recall from the films viewed in the class. I did, however, emphasize the value of the talking points and encouraged the tutees to utilize them as scaffolding for following the lecture and taking notes, as well as a guide for the readings. My own notes were very detailed and therefore not a very good model for non-native speakers of English. In retrospect however, a condensed version of my class notes could have provided the students with an example of what class notes can look like by writing down key terms and ideas to jog the memory.

### **Was tutoring effective?**

It would be idealistic to expect that I could dramatically change the tutees’ culturally determined pattern of logic and study skills in 12 one to two hour sessions. However, from our discussions of the content course issues and through providing cognitive modeling of analytical thought, I believe that the tutees definitely made progress in conceptualizing the goals of the course: They had begun to demonstrate such understanding in our discussions as well as in their written assignments. As far as motivation is concerned, a couple of the students reported that they thought the course was becoming more interesting in the last four weeks and that they had a better understanding of how to organize the information that they were learning. Such evidence indicate that the tutees had benefited somewhat from the discussions and activities in the tutorials.

The tutees’ grades for the five writing assignments show a definite pattern of improvement, with the exception of the student who quoted 7/8ths of her paper, on the third assignment, the novel reaction paper. The two Japanese students’ work improved by as much as a full grade in the third and fourth assignments which may well have been a result of the tutoring since they attended all of the tutoring sessions. The professor of the content course said that it is common that the grades for the fifth and final assignment drop slightly due to the culminating pressures of deadlines for exams and final papers. As of this writing, two of the tutees had not turned in their final written assignment; however, all of those who had, did not perform as well as they had on their previous two assignments, receiving anywhere from a half to a full grade less. Overall, it appears from looking at the trend of the first four assignments, that the tutees work did improve. It was difficult to say whether this development can be directly attributed to the tutoring, the tutees may have improved as a natural course of learning by trial and error.



The average attendance of the seven tutees was 9.2 times in the 12 sessions held over the course of the semester. Attendance was voluntary; therefore, the average rate of attendance may also be an indication of the general level of motivation of the ESL tutees. Below is an example of a final satisfaction survey (with the tutees' responses) that I conducted at the end of the semester. I structured the questionnaire specifically to find out in what particular ways the tutees had found the tutoring helpful, as well as where they thought the tutoring was lacking.

### Was Tutoring Helpful?

	Yes	No	Somewhat
1. Do you feel that tutoring helped improve your comprehension of:			
The readings?	6		1
The films?	7		
The lectures?	6		1
2. Did tutoring help improve your understanding of how to write assignments?	7		
3. Did tutoring generally help you improve your writing skills?	4		3
4. In what skill area do you feel the tutor should have worked more with you?			
Reading?	4		1
Writing?	2	1	1
Listening?	2	1	2
5. Did you feel comfortable expressing your opinions in the tutoring session?	6		1
6. Were you always given the opportunity to speak during tutoring sessions?	7		
7. Would you recommend tutoring for General Education to your peers who are not native speakers of English?	7		
8. Did tutoring help you to understand more clearly how to analyze arguments and think critically about the course subject through the readings and films?	6		1
9. Do you feel that thinking more critically and analytically will make you more interested in asking questions in class?	4		3
10. Do you feel that discussion of the readings, films, lectures and assignments was:			

Very helpful    Somewhat helpful    Not very helpful    (All 7 students responded: very helpful)

11. In terms of developing skills to help you achieve your academic goals, how was tutoring most helpful?

**SS1.**“One, it made me realize points of view that I didn’t think that needed to be focused on. Two, It gave me a strong overview and background on how to approach this course. Three, It gave me a specific idea about the course.”

**SS2.**“I should have worked on this course, and I wanted to, but I couldn’t unfortunately. Anyway, [tutoring] session was really helpful at least I could hear many opinions and ideas and I think I could understand better because of it.”

**SS3.**“It helped me analyze concepts with deep insight into social and economic issues and develop adequate writing and comprehension about topics.”

**SS4.**“It was very helpful in organizing our ideas and correcting them, it was helpful also in understanding the main themes of this course.”

**SS5.**“Tutoring was most helpful to me in writing my reaction papers, especially the novel reaction paper.”

The juxtaposition of the responses to questions two and three in the survey show that the guidance I provided the tutees in writing during the tutorials was particularly course specific. I focused directly on what would help them in their performance on class assignments rather than assist them in grammatical and semantic aspects of the language. Question four reveals that a majority of the tutees still felt that they needed help in developing more efficient reading skills. In order to set a purpose for the readings, I had asked the students on a couple of occasions to extract what they found to be the main ideas of a particular chapter and be prepared to discuss those concepts in the next tutorial (after demonstrating how this was done with an assigned article in the tutorial). The tutees had not returned to the following sessions ready to discuss this task, saying they simply did not have the time to do the assigned readings. Thereafter, I had requested that the professor e-mail me the talking points that he hands out in class, far enough ahead of the next lesson so that I could design some specific questions to give the tutees more focus in the readings. However, by the time I had organized this, another writing assignment came due and the tutees wanted to give that priority (one reading task can be viewed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of appendix 9, another on the bottom of appendix four). Moreover, they had also begun to realize that they were getting passing grades on their work without doing the readings. Perhaps I could have provided more structured reading exercises during the tutorial; however, due to the amount of assigned readings in the various texts and their combined theoretical and factual nature, author’s opinions and main themes were more often a compilation of variables in degrees that affect people, regions and countries rather than clearly defined statements. Overall, the responses to the above questionnaire reveal that the tutees did feel that they benefited from the ESAP assistance that they were provided by this project.

### **Suggestions for future tutors in this project**

First of all, the framework of such a project entails that the tutor recognize the number of roles that he or she is challenged to keep in balance. For a summary of what I found to be the roles of a tutor, see the attachment in the appendix (10). In addition to the roles of the tutor, there are some supplementary observations I made that may prove helpful for my successor.

1. Due to limited time and a wide variety of skill needs, do not expect a tremendous change to occur as a result of approximately 12 one to two hour sessions in one semester. Accordingly, it is important to stay focused on the students’ most immediate needs (objectives change). I made the mistake and reviewed general essay development tips before their first writing

assignment. This, as it turned out, was not necessary because the format of the writing assignments resembled a list of questions to be addressed rather than an opinion or comparative essay. For this reason, it would be a good idea to ask the professor for the writing assignments ahead of time and teach the tutees reading and writing skills specific to the upcoming task. Remember attendance is voluntary so make it count.

2. The tutees are carrying full course loads with their studies at ELI therefore any additional work the tutor may want to assign for outside of the sessions would only be an extra strain on the already burdened tutees.
3. One week before the course finished I found what seems to be a very useful book for note-taking and reading activities for tutoring sessions or adjunct courses: *Academic Competence* by H.D. Adamson (1993). The text is well organized and filled with relevant research on ESAP courses, academic strategies, student difficulties as well as case studies. Adamson (1993) suggests videotaping content class lectures that ESL students attend (p. 138). In a second viewing of the lecture, the students listen only and write down where they had troubles following the lecture. In a third viewing, the tutor and the students take and compare notes. Adamson describes another note-taking activity in which the students take notes during a lecture on the right side of their paper only (divided note taking activity). Immediately after the lecture, students work in groups and compare notes underlining the most important material and adding what they missed on the left side of the paper (p. 141). Scanning activities for test preparation and writing assignment research can also be found in Adamson's work.
4. As mentioned earlier, it might also be useful to record a couple of the professor's lectures to isolate macro-listening cues that the student's can listen for during the lecture to organize the incoming information.
5. Reading suggestions specific to this course "Views of the Third World", would be to use the "flashback" stories at the end of each chapter in the textbook for the course *The Other World* for reading and discussion activities during the tutorial. Some of the articles in another text for the course *Developing World*, would be useful for scanning, skimming and summarizing activities. These stories are short and deal with the interrelated complexity of the social, political, economic, religious and ethnic issues in many countries.
6. A foundation in reading and writing skills or TESL. 524.A01 Reading and Writing would be beneficial for future tutors (and tutees).

### **Some ideas for further study**

Throughout the course of the semester I found myself wondering what study skills and strategies the students had already covered at the ELI and in what context? Were the students being prepared for the kinds of academic situations that they would encounter in specific content courses and if so, to what extent? I feel that it would be beneficial to have a general idea of the curricula in the various skill areas and levels at ELI, particularly in reading, writing and listening, and to know how the instructors are teaching specific strategies. Tutors could be more helpful to their tutees if they could find new ways to present strategies (in the context of the content course) to them that the tutees still are still not applying.

The professor of content course that was the subject of this tutoring project was also teaching a second section of this class during the semester. An interesting topic for further study would be to conduct a study comparing the performance of the ELI students in the second

section (as a control group) to those in the section receiving tutoring. Moreover, a longitudinal study would be beneficial to explore how many students from each group decided to discontinue their academic studies altogether due to poor grades and frustration. Of course, a larger number of subjects for such study would be more appropriate, perhaps different classes from the same curricular area could be combined for study .

## **Summary**

To briefly summarize the findings of this pilot tutoring project, it is safe to say that the inherent meanings of “tutoring” and “pilot” accurately capture the unpredictable nature of such an undertaking. Being unfamiliar with the content course as well as the tutees and their needs, I soon found out that it was not possible (nor would it have been responsible) to set and follow fixed objectives for the tutoring sessions from the outset. Through a needs analysis questionnaire and observation, I ascertained that the needs of the tutees were quite varied; however, the problems and concerns that the tutees had in the weekly classes of the content course determined which needs were addressed first, tutoring sessions were then designed accordingly.

The first skill area the tutees needed assistance with was listening to comprehend the lecture and the films shown in the course. I prepared a worksheet with verbal cues or discourse markers that the professor used to help remedy this difficulty but a more pressing concern of the tutees’ soon followed: the first writing assignment. To ready the tutees for the pending assignment, I coached them through discussion to analyze and synthesize information from readings and films and lectures. Writing instruction became very course specific as the guidelines to the assignments dictated what skills needed to be taught: paraphrasing, support and references for claims as well as properly quoting a source, scanning for information, and course specific terminology. Conducting tutorials requires flexibility to adjust to the students’ most immediate needs, a thorough understanding of the content course material and the objectives of the content course as well as a good rapport with the professor.

Although it is difficult to validly evaluate any benefit the tutees may have derived from the tutorial program (average attendance of 9.2 times during a 12 week period) the majority of the tutee’s grades for the five writing assignments did reveal definite pattern of improvement. In addition to this, tutees’ final comments on the tutoring indicate that discussing and analyzing themes of the content course and writing instruction was most helpful. Finally, All of the tutees would recommend tutoring for General Education courses to their NNS peers.

## **CONCLUSION**

This experimental tutoring project was a first step in providing NNSs assistance in making the difficult transition from ESL pre-academic classes to full participation in university content courses. To function successfully in the American academic discourse system the NNS students have to readjust their native cultural learning styles and adapt to some degree to the values and beliefs of their host culture. Western values and beliefs pervade our academic system as they influence what we call “valid evidence” and how we organize thought and “logical” arguments, which consequently affect the pattern of how information and ideas are presented in academic lectures, reading and writing. In developing better analytical skills, which are also a product of our value system, the tutees are one step closer to making a successful transition into university

content courses and one step closer to achieving their academic goals. Are ESAP tutorials; however, the most effective approach for mainstreaming NNS into university content courses?

If the goal is to help NNS develop skills to become academically competent as quickly as possible they may not be well served by a tutoring program. In tutorials, attendance is voluntary, time is something they are short of, and homework is not required therefore, students often come to the tutorials unprepared, looking for assistance to pass the course rather than to learn skills to improve overall academic competence. Additionally, tutees would only gain the maximum benefit from a tutoring program that offers tutors trained in both ESL as well as the content course material (prior to the beginning of the tutoring sessions) in order to adequately assist the tutees in synthesizing information from reading, lectures and films and learning new study skills and comprehension strategies. To conclude, although the pilot tutoring project appears to have been somewhat successful, I believe that a closer look should be given to an adjunct course. An adjunct course with a curriculum developed and adapted to the objectives of the content course, would offer NNSs not only solid conceptual scaffolding but a more systematic approach (than a tutorial can) to developing transferable academic skills necessary for overall academic success.

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