

**Newtown High School
Development & Dissemination Initiative
Action Research Reports
June, 2000**

The following reports were written by teachers at Newtown High School who were members of the collaborative action research team during 1999-2000. They include descriptions of their research questions, tools that they developed for their work, and what they were learning through the process.

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THE NECESSITY OF THOROUGH PREPARATION

In order to show the necessity of thorough preparation before we rush to notes taking, I am going to compare the results obtained in two of my ESL 2 classes.

Materials: Side by Side, textbook, audio and video cassettes

Time the classes are given: 1. Period 6 and 7.
2. Period 11 and 12.

Aim: “How to make excuses” (I won’t be able to...I’ve got to...)

Approaches: In each class I used a different approach:

1. To my first class I taught this lesson from Side by Side 2. Students learn the pattern by repetition and answer the same question by varying the reason which is given under pictures in the textbook. The next day I used the videotape for this lesson: I first introduced the characters and the new vocabulary. Then I played the videotape which uses in its dialogues both the words we learned the previous day and the new vocabulary. After I played the tape, the students could easily recognize on a hand out what each of the characters had said and put the sentences in the correct order. As we progressed with the tape, more situations gave them the opportunity to listen to the same words in a new context somewhat related to the situations they listened to at the beginning. The final exercise was Reading and filling in the words in a story about the same topic.
The starting point being Listening and understanding Vocabulary, we went on to Understanding the Order of Actions, and finally to Using words and patterns creatively. The homework was to write about themselves and a situation in which they had to make excuses.
2. In my second ESL class I presented the video without any preparation. I did not introduce the pattern one day in advance and we did not listen to the tape recorder. I simply played the videotape and tried to elicit from the student the names of the characters and whatever they understood. The students were not able to fill in the sheet identifying the characters. I played the two minute segment of the tape three times and I offered some of the answers. As soon as they understood and remembered the names of the characters they were able to put actions in the correct order. (This was especially difficult for the Chinese students who have difficulty in understanding English names, so I had to write the names on the b/b and repeat them with the whole class). This delayed the understanding of the pattern and the whole lesson was a lot slower.

Each time I used both periods for the lesson, but the use of the audio tape in a previous day lesson and the introduction of part of the vocabulary and the pattern, gave better results.

I found that exposing the ESL 2 students to a completely new Listening situation is premature. They easily get nervous and lose interest. I insist on the necessity of preparing them and teaching in advance the vocabulary and the new pattern they are going to listen to. The audio tape I used for introducing the pattern, gets them used to another voice than their teacher's and the videotape exposes them to several other voices they have to get used to in order to understand the dialogue. The creative part of the lesson will show how well they understood the pattern and how they are able to use it themselves.

PREPARING FOR THE REGENTS EXAM AS EARLY AS ESL 1

It is not too early to start preparing students for the Listening Part of the Regents Exam from the minute they start learning English. Listening is a very important part of understanding and learning a language. Understanding sounds and separate words leads nowhere if students don't get to understand words in context, if they don't learn Patterns and how to use them in Speech and Writing. Ultimately this is the aim of the Regents Exam: students should be able to understand the passage the teacher is reading, take notes and then write an essay based on the topic.

In ESL 1 we start with Dictation which at this stage means filling in a word in a simple sentence. Notes taking is also possible if the students are asked to write down one word they remember out of a three word sentence and then reconstruct the sentence. As they learn more patterns and vocabulary they are going to be able to reconstruct more complicated sentences.

In ESL 2 where students are somewhat more advanced, we are not going to rush notes taking before teaching them the vocabulary, word order, verb tenses, comparative adjectives or the place of adverbs. All this grammar will help them more easily reconstruct the sentences they've listened to

Development and Dissemination Project- Second Year

Sandra Lopez

Research Question- How can I motivate students to reread and correct their work before they hand it in.

Implications Problems/Possibilities

Problems-

- I. I don't have the students long enough to see their long term improvement because of semi-annual programming.
- II. I've had at least half of the students for three out of the last four terms. This year, there as been a big change in them. When they first started this program, they were chosen because of their good attendance. This year their attendance is horrible because they are seniors. It has been my experience that some seniors are afraid to graduate and go out into the real world. High school is a safe haven for them. I had two students failing in the fall of 1998 and now I have thirteen students failing for not handing in their written assignments, homework and/or for their absences and latenesses.
- III. In their junior year, they were interested in correcting the mistakes they were making in work. Now they are just interested in getting out of high school or failing and staying in high school.
- IV. For the most part, they did what was expected to get a grade, but motivating graduating seniors is more than I can do.

Rubric- I tried to use this but students got a false 100 on their writing. Maybe I could use a rubric of some sort to indicate to students what exactly needed to be fixed in their writing and not as a grading tool.

Possibilities- Conferencing would be a great thing to do if time permitted.

Also having the students for an entire year would make it easier to see the progress made using an editing approach.

Treatment-

- I. Outline
 - A. Each composition must be accompanied by an outline.
- II. Steps for Editing
 - A. Write a first draft.
 - B. The next day, read and self correct the draft.
 - C. Then have another student edit your work and have him/her sign bottom of draft.

- D. For homework rewrite this draft and hand in both drafts.
- E. On the new draft, teacher puts a dot for each mistake in the margin of that line. Student then reedits work, has another student help reedit the draft and has the student sign bottom of the draft.
- F. For homework rewrite this draft with corrections. Hand in all drafts.
- G. Teacher does final corrections and students rewrites the final draft.

Student Profile Questionnaire

Name_____

Languages other than English_____

Native Country_____

Age_____

Time in the United States_____

How many years of school did you attend in your native country?_____

How many year of school have you attended in the U.S.?_____

In what grade did you enter the American school system?_____

H.S. Average_____

How many bilingual classes are you in?_____

How long have you been or were you in bilingual classes?_____

Was there any time when you did not go to school other than summers and vacations?

Yes_____ No_____

If yes, when_____ how long_____

<u>Name</u>	<u>(baseline data) first semester</u>	<u>(second phase) this semester</u>
1. A., S.	85	
2. A., J.	85	
3. B., A.	85	
4. B., S.	85	
5 B., S.	85	
6. C., A.	85	
7. G., M.	65	50
8. G., P.	55	45
9. H. M.	65	55
	ETC.	

- D and D project for this school year focused on improving the understanding of English grammar and basic sentence syntax on the part of Chinese speaking ESL students.
- 34 students had been assigned to my Chinese Native Language Arts class for the spring 2000 term at Newtown High School.
- The Chinese school counselor provided me with a list of Chinese students who had received a failing grade in their ESL classes during the Fall 1999 term.
- Examining the list, I found that half of the students in my Chinese Native language Arts class had failed in their ESL classes.
- I obtained a copy of the ESL curriculum for ESL levels 1-4 from the chairperson of the ESL department. The document contained all of the grammatical points ESL teachers were supposed to teach the students in ESL level 1-4 classes.
- During the second marking period of the spring 2000 term, I pre-taught all of the grammatical points to be taught in ESL level 1-4 classes. I taught this content in the Chinese Native Language Arts Class using the native language of the students as the medium of instruction. I also defined and explained how to use the 8 parts of speech.

- For their part, students were to copy down all of the information on a large sheet of white art paper, organizing the information in a clear and logical way, and embellishing the project paper with icons and artistic touches with colored pens provided by the teacher.
- Teacher tried to explain to the students where and how certain grammatical features differ between the two languages.
- Teacher gave in-class exercises to students during the completing of which, students could refer to their grammar chart for reference.
- As noted, the intent of the project was to pre-teach the grammar that the students would see in their ESL language classes. By completing this comparative grammar chart, it was hoped that students would acquire a frame of reference through which to understand English grammar and sentence structure.
- After completing the project, students were to take their charts to ESL class for in-class reference. It was hoped that by referring to the chart in ESL class, students could avoid confusion and misunderstanding with respect to learning English grammar.
- Overall, the results of the project were mixed. Unlike in the mainstream where students can be and are divided into Honors, Regular, and Vocational Ed classes, in Native Language Arts Classes everyone is thrown together. Consequently, in one class you will have Honors, Regular and Voc Ed level students. Their acquisition of new information and class performance will per force vary accordingly.
- In general, the honors students completed the project in an outstanding way. They also showed originality in their design of icons and use of colors. On a subsequent grammar test, the honors students received high marks. I believe that the project helped them organize and frame in their own minds the complex body of information we call grammar.
- With respect to the Voc. Ed level students, the results of the project were opposite from those obtained with honors level students. The Voc. Ed. Level students showed no interest in learning grammar. They copied only some of the information presented on the black board. Their art designs were sloppy; some students project papers were torn; some students lost their papers. On a subsequent grammar test, the Voc. Ed. Students showed little understanding of the content. For these students, teaching grammar proved to be a waste of time.
- The performance on the project and subsequent grammar tests of the regular students fell between that of the honors and Voc. Ed. Students.
- Conclusion. Grammar is an abstract body of knowledge. Grammar is difficult to see. It exists in our minds and serves to glue words together into sentences. The abstract

nature of grammar makes it difficult to learn, especially for middle adolescent students. My experience from this D and D project has been that only academically motivated Chinese ESL students will try to learn English grammar for its own sake. Learning English grammar is made easier when the teacher can use the students' native language to explain it. Regular and Voc. Ed. Level students at this age level do not appear motivated to learn English grammar for its own sake or even when they need to apply its rules when speaking, reading, writing or listening to English.

Development and Dissemination Project – June 2000

Action Research

Tracking of Over-the-counter-ELL's

Terry Paglia
Newtown High School

At Newtown High School about 4, 600 students were enrolled for the academic year of September 1999 through June 2000. Approximately 1,800 of those students are ELL's. As the Assistant Principal Supervision of the DSL Department I witnessed the admission of 500 over-the-counter students. These are ELL's who are admitted throughout the year. As these students passed through my office and were placed in ESL classes by my staff and myself, I wondered what happened to them. I wanted to formulate action research that would help me to be more aware of their progress at Newtown. My research question was, "How can I keep track of ESL students who enroll throughout the year?" "What happens to them?" They do acclimate themselves to the daily routines and schedule of the school. In some cases they do not succeed and fail, only to eventually drop out.

For my project, I took 100 over-the-counter students and recorded information on a database. This information included the ESL class into which they had been placed, section, ESL report card grade of the third marking period, LAB score for March 2000, years of schooling in the home country, and native language. By tracking down the students' sections I could note which grade they were in. Their report card grade in ESL would give some indication of how they were doing in class. For those that had failing or border line grades I could give additional supportive advice. Students at risk might not feel so isolated if another staff member other than the guidance counselor interviewed them on their progress. If I could interview each one of these students perhaps I could keep them from dropping out or help them to improve in some way.

When students enter Newtown High School to be placed in ESL, they are given a placement test. This consists of a short paragraph they write on some aspect of their lives or their former school or country. In some instances they are given a two page placement test. The exercises on this test are rated and each section completed indicates which level a student should be placed in. This placement test was developed by two staff members of the ESL Department. At the end of the year students could be retested by doing another brief writing piece. By contrasting their writing when they entered school and at the end of the year progress could be noted. Students grades and writing progress could reveal improper placement and in some

cases evaluation for student support services. Feedback could be more readily available to the teachers and counselors of these students. Instead of being lost in the grand scheme of things, students' progress could be assessed earlier.

For September of 2000 I would like to include a greater number of these students that I could get information about. At their entry to the school I could get the number of the years of schooling they had in their native countries and their home language. The more information I could get from them at the start of their high school experience the quicker I could assess their progress and keep up with problems they were having in the school. Another question I could add to my research would be to locate them once they had programs. As the marking period progresses their names would appear on the alpha lists and line schedules. I could locate them through their ESL teachers. More information on students that could be included on the database would also be helpful.

Development and Dissemination Project

ESL Students Information

Name	Date Enter	Age	ESL Placement	ESL grade Fall 99	LAB/DRP	Years in School
A., N. 195	10-8-99	16	ESL 1	80	03	Afganistan
A., C. 383	9-24-99	16	ESL 1	55	01	Ecuador
A., M. 185	9-9-99	15	ESL 1	55	01	Ecuador 8 years
A., A. 185	9-10-99	14	ESL 1	45	01	
A., N. 383	9-23-00	19	ESL 1	98	01	Venezuela 10 1/2 years
Etc.						
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