

Ventura College Sabbatical Leave Final Report

Improving Language Instruction for Multilingual Students

Submitted by Karen Harrison

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This report summarizes the sabbatical project I completed during fall semester 2016. I am sincerely grateful to the Board of Trustees for approving my sabbatical. It was with the support of the district and colleagues at UC Davis and Ventura College that made it possible for me to pursue my project to improve language instruction for multilingual students in the ESL/EngM department.

Background of Sabbatical Project

More and more students whose strongest language is not English are entering Ventura College, and they are severely challenged by academic English. These students may be just out of high school looking for a career, or they may have arrived from any one of a number of countries whose native language is not English. Some may come with a college degree and/or career or not. In any case, when they come to VC, it is to get an education that will either help them advance to a college or university or find a vocation that will provide them with a living wage.

The purpose of this project was to advance my education on language acquisition, create course materials, and design a textbook. My focus was to develop a text that would assist high intermediate/advanced students in ESL/EngM V51 with their other academic classes. The goal of this project was to help students achieve language learning success more quickly. I created a text that focuses on preparing students for success in a vocational program or at a college or university in the United States. Success rates among these students will improve if they are provided with language development challenges that focus on reading and writing activities required in courses that they are surely taking concurrently with English, ready or not.

Completed Components of Sabbatical Project

❖ On site Research

Because multilingual English language learners who take transfer classes often do not have the reading comprehension and writing skills required by courses at U.S. colleges, I investigated the types of written assignments that would most often be given to them. I began this project by reviewing materials and information that I had gathered from past research I had done on campus but had not had time to fully incorporate into my courses. To give students a realistic idea of what skills they need to succeed in a college class, I require them to observe courses outside of ESL/EngM and then interview the instructors about course requirements. I also attend the same classes and take notes and record the event. Additionally, I reviewed the notes and the materials from the many reading and writing workshops I had participated in at the CATESOL conferences I

had attended over the years. My review of these notes has helped me create reading and writing activities that support students in their other college classes.

I found that some of the most frequently assigned writing tasks include summarizing and synthesizing reading materials. To achieve this, students need to clearly comprehend what they read, so my academic study began with researching the most current best practices to achieve that end.

❖ **Academic Study and Best Practices**

To start my study of best practices, I read current texts used for preparing potential ESL/EngM instructors/professors, and I also researched ESL and programs for multilingual students at the university level. I read *Teaching L2 Composition* (D. Ferris 2013) and *Teaching Readers of English* (D. Ferris and J. Hedgecock, 2009) and also reviewed notes I had taken at recent workshops presented by both Ferris and Hedgecock at past CATESOL conferences, including the annual conference I attended in San Diego the semester of my sabbatical. I attended several workshops that emphasized reading, writing and college success for multilingual students at the community college or university level.

Of the programs I researched, The University Writing Program (UWP) at UC Davis stood out as the best program to investigate. It serves a similar population of students. The largest multilingual group at UC Davis is Latino and their international students are mostly Chinese. At VC the largest groups of multilingual students are Latino and Chinese. VC has very few International students, or they do not attend ESL/EngM courses. The resident multilingual students at UC Davis had received most of their early education in the U.S., had been in the top 10% of their high school classes, and many had received scholarships to attend. Still, these students could not pass the entrance writing exam and were required to remediate through the University Writing Program because they continue to be academically challenged in reading and writing. Similarly, the students at VC had also been through the K-12 system in the U. S. and whether they had been in the top percentile of their graduating class or not, they, too, need to further develop their skills in reading and writing.

I contacted the director of Davis' University Writing Program, Dana Ferris, and with her assistance, arranged to spend the better part of a week at Davis learning about the program, observing classes and meeting with her and other faculty who teach the courses at the college level and below.

The University Writing Program, like VC, offers three courses for multilingual students: UWP 21, 22, 23 are designed specifically for multilingual and international ESL students. I observed various sections of these classes at all levels of the program and met with the professors. Discussions focused on textbook choices, other materials, demographics, student challenges and activities designed to meet them.

Student textbooks were designed by the program faculty and include a variety of topics that help students be successful at a U.S. university. The text for UWP 21, Reading and Writing in the American University includes readings and grammar lessons centered around college expectations,

including the meaning of a syllabus, plagiarism, and diversity. It also covers writing genres starting at the paragraph level and moving to the essay. The other two texts for UPW 22: Crossing Borders (culturally, internationally, and linguistically) and UWP 23: Higher Education Across Cultures focus on reading, vocabulary building skills, the academic vocabulary and the grammar used in various writing genres required for success at the university. Exercises include summarizing, paraphrasing, and giving and receiving peer feedback. The text designed for UWP 23, focuses on higher level reading and writing awareness, strategies and annotation, rhetorical awareness and considerations, academic writing genres of persuasion and analysis and research in the university. These three courses are designed to prepare multilingual students for the college level writing course and the exit writing exam to receive their Bachelor's Degrees.

❖ **Creating a Textbook: Preparing for Success**

I incorporated the information and materials I had gathered into a textbook for the highest level ESL/EngM course the department offers, EngM 52. The first section includes extensive reading on topics that will help students learn to read more comprehensibly and learn English more quickly and effectively. The activities are designed to build academic vocabulary, use correct word forms and appropriate grammar. The writing component includes synthesizing information from various articles and summarizing the information which will reinforce, not only the information, but also allow students to practice correct grammar use and use the correct word forms that accurately convey their comprehension of what they read. The second section includes intensive reading with an emphasis on grammar for writing, coherence, cohesion, and unity. Students are provided with models for writing in the specific genres of summaries, responses and letters of intent.

My students and I used the textbook successfully the semester I returned. I foresee one of its advantages will be its adaptability to other levels of language instruction.

Value of Sabbatical Project

I will be ever grateful to have been given the time I needed to pursue the important project of improving language instruction for multilingual students. The benefits of this project are invaluable and unending to all concerned: the instructor, multilingual students, the college, and the district. It has equipped me with the knowledge to become a more effective instructor, and that serves all concerned. The textbook, Preparing for Success provides students with empowering information and activities that will help them to more quickly develop the language skills that they need to be more successful in their other coursework as well as increase their employability. Empowered students have more confidence, and that, along with hard skills, is a large contributor to success. The increase in student success rates benefit the college and the district. When students succeed, everyone benefits.

Most respectfully,

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