Professional Development for Educators Teaching English for Academic Purposes to Deaf Students of English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

The development of literacy skills in the spoken languages of their communities is a critical factor determining educational access and success for students who are deaf. As increasing numbers of deaf students enter postsecondary degree programs at colleges and universities around the world, the spoken language literacy challenge extends to mastering English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Despite the difficulty of acquiring spoken language knowledge in the absence of hearing, deaf students must satisfy the same English language degree requirements as their hearing peers. Needs assessments reveal that professionals teaching deaf students in non-English-speaking countries are generally not familiar with EAP best practices and materials. This article describes the development and delivery of a comprehensive workshop designed to satisfy the identified need to provide faculty serving deaf students with intense EAP professional development. Employing sound teacher training principles, high standards of quality, and effective educational technology, the workshop focused on best practices in teaching EAP along with specific strategies for teaching English to deaf learners. Extremely high participant evaluations establish this workshop not only as a highly effective model for EAP professional development for teachers serving a special population in the mainstream, but also for EAP teacher training in the broader context.

Background

Deaf Students as "Second Language Learners"

On the face of it, deaf learners' English language acquisition is quite similar to the acquisition of English by hearing second language (L2) learners. Among other examples, syntactic acquisition orders are similar for the two groups (Berent 1996), and inherent properties of English motivate parallel learning sequences in areas such as infinitive complement interpretation (Berent 1983). The similarities are also quite apparent in students' English language output. English essays written by deaf learners are generally indistinguishable, content and cultural perspective notwithstanding, from essays written by hearing students of English as a second language (ESL) at comparable proficiency levels. Not surprisingly, ESL methods and materials have long been advocated for use in teaching English to deaf students (Goldberg & Bordman 1974) and are employed widely in the field of deaf education.

Despite the similarities between these learner groups, the underlying causality for the similarity is understandably different. With hearing ESL learners, the factors that distinguish first language acquisition from L2 acquisition are the familiar neurobiological, cognitive, developmental, sociolinguistic, and motivational factors discussed in depth in the L2 literature (see Doughty & Long 2003). With deaf learners, however, there is an overriding environmental factor. English language acquisition is modulated by severely restricted auditory access to spoken language input. As a result, the English input available to deaf learners (depending on the degree of hearing loss) comes largely through the visual channel. Although such compensatory visual input induces English language acquisition, the severe restriction on auditory access generally delays English language development and, for the vast majority of severely and

profoundly deaf individuals, translates into a lifelong struggle to attain high English literacy skills.

Given the distinct influences on English acquisition, why does the output of hearing ESL learners look so similar to the output of deaf learners of English? Some models of L2 acquisition stipulate that learners must "notice" the target language input before it can be comprehended, assimilated, and integrated into the emerging grammar (Gass 1997). Assuming such a model, it has been proposed that the observed similarity between hearing ESL learners and deaf learners results from similar restrictions on "noticing" English language input (Berent 2004). Whereas cognitive factors associated with L2 acquisition constrain the process of noticing input for hearing learners, the heavy reliance on the visual channel degrades the spoken language input in such a way as to impose similar constraints on noticing for deaf learners. Under such conditions, the processing sequence from input to output yields a similar product for the two types of learner.

Deaf Students of English as a Foreign Language

In non-English-speaking countries the numbers of deaf students entering postsecondary degree programs at colleges and universities are rapidly increasing. Because of the prominent role of English as an international language, students must satisfy English language course requirements in order to develop the skills to access English-language academic materials, the World Wide Web, and other resources. Despite the obstacles confronting deaf learners of spoken languages, deaf students in most postsecondary institutions must nevertheless satisfy the same programmatic English language requirements as their hearing peers.

For these deaf students of English as a *foreign* language, the language learning challenge is doubly complicated. These students will most likely have acquired some level of knowledge of

the spoken languages of their communities, experiencing the same challenges as described above for deaf students of English in English-speaking countries. At the same time, these deaf students are by definition actual L2 learners of English in terms of their (partial) knowledge of another spoken language, later language learning, etc. However, their L2 acquisition of English will also be constrained by restricted auditory access to the L2 input and the necessity of relying heavily on compensatory visual input. Such complexities present these students with a formidable educational challenge.

The Postsecondary Education Network—International

To help postsecondary-level deaf students around the world to meet their educational challenges and to enjoy educational success, the Postsecondary Education Network (PEN) International (http://www.pen.ntid.rit.edu) was created through the support of The Nippon Foundation of Japan. PEN-International is located at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), a college of the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, New York, U.S.A. PEN-International shares its expertise with international partners that offer postsecondary educational programs to deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Its specific goals are to train faculty for improving teaching and learning (including English for Academic Purposes), to apply innovative instructional technologies to the teaching/learning environment, to provide state-of-the-art instructional multimedia computer labs at partner institutions, to promote program self-sufficiency, and to expand career opportunities for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

One of PEN-International's ultimate goals is to encourage a successful "ripple effect" among its partner institutions. The hope is that, eventually, individuals and the colleges they represent will develop the ability to export what has been learned through PEN-International's projects to other programs serving deaf and hard-of-hearing students in their home countries

(hereafter, the term "deaf" will be understood to include students who are either deaf or hard-of-hearing; the latter are individuals with a mild to moderate hearing loss).

The Need for EAP Professional Development

English language instruction at PEN-International's partner institutions is largely provided by dedicated professionals who have played a pioneering role in the development and expansion of the postsecondary programs that have been created for deaf students at those institutions. The faculty members who teach English to deaf students at those institutions have a variety of academic specialties but often do not have formal English teaching credentials or prior training in teaching English to deaf students. Those faculty whose training does include English language teaching nevertheless quite often lack knowledge of the most current best practices in teaching ESL in general and in teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in particular. The faculty are also frequently unaware of emerging educational technologies that can enhance their students' language learning experiences or do not have access to such technologies.

Fully aware of the critical need for high-quality professional development that would enable them to optimize their students' prospects for academic and career success, faculty at PEN-International partner institutions requested that PEN-International provide them with state-of-the-art English-teaching professional development opportunities.

PEN-International EAP Workshop

Planning and Organization

In response to the request for EAP professional development, PEN-International began the planning of an intensive one-week teacher training workshop, which was scheduled for July 2002. In view of the unique English-language challenges facing deaf students in non-English-speaking countries, the PEN-International workshop developers wanted to provide faculty

serving these students with training that directly addressed students' specific English learning needs and, accordingly, faculty members' specific English teaching needs. Therefore, six months prior to the actual workshop, a detailed questionnaire was developed and sent to professionals teaching deaf students at Bauman Moscow State Technical University (Russia) and Charles University (Czech Republic).

The questionnaire requested information on current program goals, instructional activities, and students' communication and learning characteristics. In response to the question "What are the goals and objectives of your English language program for deaf students?" faculty articulated the following EAP needs for their students: (a) reading comprehension skills for general academic texts and authentic journal articles, (b) reading skills for specific content areas (e.g., deaf culture and history, computer engineering, information science), (c) academic writing skills, (d) basic and advanced grammar skills. This and other detailed information that these faculty provided guided the planning of the EAP workshop.

The workshop developers were committed to providing participants with training in both best practices for teaching EAP in general and for teaching deaf students in particular. In association with the process of deaf learners' acquisition of spoken language knowledge discussed above, there are complementary educational issues to address that relate to students' communication needs, learning styles associated with visual processing, access to instruction, and classroom management.

The workshop developers also opted for exposing participants to a large number of EAP skill areas and topics rather than targeting a small number in greater detail. One reason for this approach was to familiarize participants with a broad range of EAP topics with the expectation that they would subsequently pursue the topics most relevant to their individual needs through

further professional development. Another reason was to determine how much information could be covered in a one-week EAP workshop with the expectation that participants' evaluations would guide the planning of future workshops that had narrower, in-depth coverage of a smaller number of topics.

Participants and Presenters

The weeklong EAP workshop was held in July 2002 at NTID and attended by nine faculty members from four of PEN-International's partner institutions: Bauman Moscow State Technical University, Charles University, Tsukuba College of Technology (Japan), and De La Salle University—College of Saint Benilde (the Philippines). The NTID presenters of workshop topics included two English language researchers and five NTID English-teaching faculty members. Six of these seven individuals had also worked in the past teaching ESL or EFL to hearing learners. Thus, workshop presenters were highly experienced in the broad areas applicable to the teaching of English to deaf students in other countries. Many other NTID and PEN-International staff members contributed significant time and energy to the planning and preparation of the workshop and to the provision of support services during the workshop.

The workshop conformed to sound principles, strategies, and innovations in English language teacher education, as discussed, for example, in Johnson (2000). Although the workshop was developed to address the needs of specific programs involving particular faculty members teaching a special learner population (i.e., teaching in a "situated experience"), the workshop developers applied a broad teacher training perspective that fosters partnerships, reflection, research, vision, culture, and diversity. Rather than a "craft model," which requires teacher trainees to imitate the experts' techniques, or the "applied science model," which offers research solutions to teaching challenges, the workshop developers employed the "reflective

model" of teacher training (Wallace 1991), which gives teachers control over their professional development and makes them partners in instructional innovation. This model gives equal weight to teachers' prior experiences and current research.

Within the broad perspective of the reflective model, workshop activities consisted of lectures, demonstrations, discussions, critiques of instructional methods and materials, demonstrations of web-based instructional technologies, examination of online resources, hands-on practice, individualized guidance, development of lesson plans, prioritization of program standards, and evaluation of workshop activities and organization.

For the purpose of illustrating EAP and other ESL best practices, a variety of books from the "New Ways Series" published by Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages were used as resources. These books address specific English skill areas (e.g., Nation 1994), specific target learners (e.g., Lewis 1997), and specific types of English (e.g., Master & Brinton 1998).

EAP Workshop Sessions

The PEN-International EAP workshop consisted of six half-day sessions focusing directly on English teaching topics related to learner characteristics, program standards, specific English skills, teaching methods and materials, educational technologies, and lesson planning. In addition to the EAP-related sessions, four additional half-day sessions covered supplementary educational topics: "What We Know About Deafness," "Classroom Communication, "Introduction to Online Learning," and "Pedagogical Considerations for Online Course Delivery." This article focuses on the six EAP-related sessions, which are summarized below.

SESSION 1: Program Goals, Student Characteristics, and Instructional Approaches. Participants will share information about their own English language programs for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, and they will receive an overview of English language instruction at

the National Technical Institute for the Deaf and the nature of NTID students' English language knowledge. In addition, they will observe and discuss a videotaped demonstration of NTID English classroom activities.

SESSION 2: *Teacher Competencies and Academic English for Adult Students.* Participants will learn about competencies of effective ESL teachers and will evaluate their own strengths as ESL teachers of deaf students. They will then learn about principles of individualized instruction in an academic setting, including the involvement of NTID peer tutors in tutoring their fellow students. Finally, participants will receive an overview of methods and materials used in teaching EAP, Content-Based Instruction, and English for Specific Purposes.

SESSION 3: *Teaching Grammar and Writing.* Participants will receive overviews of approaches to teaching grammar and academic writing to deaf students at different proficiency levels, including the use of dialogue journals. Participants will also view demonstrations of ESL methods and materials for teaching grammar and writing. In the area of grammar, participants will learn about aspects of English that are particularly problematic for deaf students. In the discussion of dialogue journals, participants will practice responding to students' dialogue journal entries. Participants will receive an assignment to critique selected ESL grammar and writing materials.

SESSION 4: *Teaching Reading and Vocabulary.* Participants will receive overviews of approaches to teaching academic reading and vocabulary skills to deaf students, including the use of a computer program for teaching vocabulary. Participants will also view demonstrations of EAP methods and materials for teaching reading and vocabulary. Participants will receive an assignment to critique selected reading and vocabulary materials.

SESSION 5: The Use of Web-Based Technology for Teaching Deaf Students. Participants will receive an overview of "Ideatools," a web-based instructional development tool created at NTID for course building and management. Participants will also receive a demonstration of the use of the World Wide Web for teaching English to deaf students and as a professional development resource for teachers. Participants will also locate, examine, and critique specific ESL web sites.

SESSION 6: Lesson Planning and Program Standards. Participants will review guidelines for ESL lesson plan development and will develop and share their own lesson plans for addressing specific academic English skills. Participants will also view, discuss, and prioritize program standards for adult education ESL programs for possible incorporation into their own programs.

A more detailed description of a workshop session is provided in Table 1, which lists the subtopics covered in Session 2, along with the target goals and learning outcomes of each subtopic. Table 1 shows that, in Session 2, participants learned how to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses as teachers. To gain perspective in this area, each participant completed "The YOGA Form" (Fantini 1993), which was developed specifically for ESL teachers' self-assessment. In this session, participants were also introduced to the strategy of using peer tutors (students with relative higher English skills) to help students with lower English skills. This strategy has been used quite successfully at NTID.

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Insert Table 1 here

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Session 6 was also the session that formally introduced the ESL domain of EAP, along with English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and content-based instruction. Methods and strategies

from these areas were illustrated and discussed, and specific materials were evaluated for possible use in participants' programs. To help participants orient themselves better toward their own programmatic English teaching charge, they were introduced to the distinction between "BICS"—basic interpersonal communication skills—and "CALC"—cognitive academic language proficiency (Cummins 1984). Discussion of this distinction helped participants to see their students' English learning needs as primarily in the CALC domain.

Another useful distinction for workshop participants was the division of EAP made by Jordan (1997) into English for *General* Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for *Specific* Academic Purposes (ESAP). Discussion of this distinction helped participants to recognize more precisely the balance between general and specific English skills that their students need for success. In addition to their students' ESAP needs for studying deaf culture and history, computer engineering, information science, etc., participants appreciated the importance of the EGAP domain for supporting English skills development for academic discourse and style, study and reference skills, academic writing, and so on.

Notice that EGAP listening and speaking skills are not mentioned here. Although many deaf persons do develop listening and speaking skills, depending on degree of hearing loss, personal (or parental) preference, skill at lip reading, and cultural orientation, the primary modality for English reception and production is reading and writing. Therefore, the basic skills covered during the EAP workshop were reading and writing and the associated skills of vocabulary and grammar.

EAP Workshop Accessibility

To provide participants with fluid access to the EAP workshop, the workshop developers designed a PEN-International English teaching workshop web site

(http://www.pen.ntid.rit.edu/ESL_July_15_19.php). Participates were able to visit this web site before, during, and after the workshop to access pre-workshop readings, all materials used during the workshop, and follow-up materials posted after the workshop. The web site remains posted for participants' continued access and has been used as a teacher training model for subsequent PEN-International outreach activities, for example, at Ratchasuda College, Mahidol University in Thailand.

<div align="center">Workshop Evaluations</div>

Session Surveys

At the end of each workshop session, PEN-International staff members asked participants to complete an anonymous session evaluation survey. Participants were instructed emphatically to respond honestly and critically. It was emphasized that frank evaluations of each session were essential to determining which topics, activities, methods, materials, and other session characteristics were the most relevant, informative, and effective. With critical assessment, PEN-International would have the necessary feedback to revise and refine future EAP professional development programs.

Each session survey contained the following six statements for participants to respond to using a 5-point opinion scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree":

1. The content of this session was well-organized.

2. The presentations were clear and understandable.

3. Information from this session will help me in my teaching.

4. The use of media, materials, and handouts was effective in supporting the information presented in this session.

5. The pacing and amount of information covered in this session were just right.

6. I felt comfortable asking questions and interacting with the presenters and the other participants.

Additionally, participants rated each session's subtopics on a 5-point scale (from 5 = "very much" to 3 = "a little bit" to 1 = "not at all") according to how much each subtopic contributed to the participant's own professional development. Participants also provided open-ended responses to the questions, "What did you like best about this session?" and "How could this session be improved?"

Averaging across all six sessions and across responses to all six statements above, participants selected "strongly agree" 85% of the time and "agree" 15% of the time. This proportion was fairly constant for each of the six sessions. Participants' evaluations of the contribution of session subtopics to their professional development produced virtually identical proportions. For all 25 subtopics collectively, 84% of the ratings were 5 ("very much"), and 15% of the ratings were 4. Thus, the nine participants were extremely positive in their ratings of all six workshops. Their open-ended responses strongly supported their high numerical ratings. Regarding how sessions could be improved, several participants referred to the need for more time ("By giving the presenters more time" / "If you can give us more time to ask questions…" / "We should have been given more time to explore the web sites").

Final Evaluation

In addition to the six session surveys, participants completed a final evaluation at the very end of the weeklong workshop. The final evaluation included seven statements to rate on a 5-point scale. These statements pertained to how positive the professional development experience had been, whether an appropriate number of topics was covered, whether learning outcomes were achieved, and so on. Interestingly, despite comments on the session evaluations referring to

the need for more time, on the final evaluation all participants selected "strongly agree" to the statement, "This workshop covered an appropriate number of English-teaching topics." From other comments reflecting participants' views that *all* workshop topics were very valuable for their professional development, it appears that participants would prefer a longer workshop over a reduction in topics as a solution to the need for more time per topic (several participants stated this explicitly).

One statement on the final evaluation form elicited less agreement than all the others: "The English-teaching methods, materials, and technologies that I learned about this week can be used to teach deaf students in my own program." Responses were "strongly agree" (56%), "agree" (33%), "no opinion" (11%). These slightly lower percentages most likely reflect the fact that some participants find it difficult to effect change within their own programs because of currently limited resources or because it is often difficult to alter long-standing pedagogical traditions within one's own culture. PEN-International's ongoing outreach efforts on-site at its partner institutions are targeting these obstacles by providing equipment and teaching environments that will empower local faculty to implement new teaching methodologies and educational technologies.

The final evaluation form also asked participants to provide three ratings for each of the workshop's six sessions. Participants were asked to rate each session according to (a) how well the session was organized and presented, (b) the degree to which the session contributed to the participant's personal knowledge, and (c) the relevance of the session to the participant's own program and teaching needs. Table 2 focuses on participants' collective responses showing their top two choices in each of the three rating categories.

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Insert Table 2 here
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Ratings for best organization and presentation were obviously guided by participants' opinions regarding the topics chosen, the quality of the presentations and materials, and the nature of the activities. As for greatest contribution to personal knowledge, the highest rating assigned to the web-based technology session is to be expected given the fact that participants' institutions do not have the kinds of technological resources and related training that are available to teachers and students at a premier institution such as NTID. As for sessions having the greatest relevance for participants' own programs and teaching needs, it is not surprising that professional development related to the basic skills of reading, vocabulary, grammar, and writing would be highly valued. In order to succeed educationally, the students in the participants' programs must first and foremost develop advanced skills for comprehending academic and technological English materials and for communicating their knowledge clearly in written academic English.

Conclusion

This article has described the needs of teachers serving a unique group of English language learners who have both the traditional challenges confronting all ESL students as well as the special challenges of a population struggling to learn a spoken language under conditions of highly restricted access to the spoken language input. The weeklong PEN-International workshop for faculty teaching postsecondary EFL deaf students received extremely high evaluations.

The workshop's success can be attributed to the application of sound principles of English language teacher training and to the high standards of relevance, quality, currency, variety, and

access: a pre-workshop assessment of participants' precise English teaching needs to guide

workshop planning; the selection of timely and proven EAP best practices and materials;

presenters who were highly experienced in teaching English to deaf students as well as ESL to

hearing students; presenters who have proven expertise in the skill areas that they covered;

highly motivated and dedicated participants; clearly articulated goals and learning outcomes;

balanced coverage of educational and presentation variables (e.g., research/practice,

general/specific, basic/advanced); variety in presentation techniques, activities, and materials;

training in the use of state-of-the-art educational technologies; and online access to pre-, during-,

and post-workshop materials.

The success of the workshop validates the success of PEN-International in contributing

directly and meaningfully to the satisfaction of goals established for it by The Nippon

Foundation of Japan: to train faculty for improving teaching and learning, to enable the

application of innovative instructional technologies to the teaching/learning environment, to help

partner institutions move toward program self-sufficiency, and ultimately to expand career

opportunities for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

This article began with a discussion of the similarity between deaf learners of English and

hearing ESL learners. Despite different causes for the similar L2 output, it should be very clear

from this article that the English teaching/learning needs, challenges, and goals of deaf and

hearing learners are virtually identical. Put simply, EAP is EAP in any setting. Thus, the positive

principles and high standards that guided the development, delivery, and accessibility of the

PEN-International EAP workshop, along with the extremely positive evaluation that it received,

establish this workshop as a highly effective model for EAP teacher training in any educational

setting.

Acknowledgements

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Table 1. Details of Session 2: Teacher Competencies and Academic English for Adult Students

TOPIC	GOALS	LEARNING OUTCOMES
(A) Competencies of Effective ESL Teachers	Participants will receive an overview of six competencies of effective ESL teachers and in small groups will identify their own current strengths in select competency areas.	Participants will learn how to evaluate their own teaching competencies in several areas of teaching skills, knowledge, and professionalism.
(B) English for Academic Purposes and the Needs of Adult Students	Participants will receive an overview of English for Academic Purposes and a demonstration of ESL methods and materials for teaching adult students.	Participants will increase their familiarity with the principles of English for Academic Purposes and with ESL methods and materials that address the unique needs of adult students.

(Table 1 continued)

(C) Individualized Instruction and Peer Tutoring	Participants will receive an overview of individualized instruction for deaf students, including tutoring provided by teachers and by student peers; perspectives will be shared in group discussion.	Participants will assess the practicality of ESL tutoring for their own programs and determine the practicality of using peer tutors (deaf and hearing) for their own students.
(D) ESL Content-Based Instruction and English for Specific Purposes	Participants will receive a demonstration of selected ESL methods and materials for content-based instruction and ESP, and they will critique selected materials in small groups.	Participants will be able to evaluate the appropriateness of selected methods and materials of content-based instruction and ESP for use in their own programs.

Table 2. Participants' Top Ratings of Sessions According to Three Criteria

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CRITERION	SESSION
Best organization and presentation	3. Teaching Grammar and Writing
	2. Teacher Competencies and Academic English for Adult Students
Greatest contribution to personal knowledge	5. The Use of Web-Based Technology for Teaching Deaf Students
	3. Teaching Grammar and Writing
Most relevance to participant's program and teaching needs	4. Teaching Reading and Vocabulary
	3. Teaching Grammar and Writing

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