

Private Sector VESL: Some Sources
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As a graduate student in the Linguistics department at San Diego State University for the past several years I have noticed that nearly all of my fellow students only think of an English as a Second Language (ESL) career in the public sector: high school, adult or university teaching. The field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) however, is an area that most linguistics students should at least become familiar with, since the need continually is growing in that field, and the potential economic benefits have a much greater potential. Not only can a good private sector Vocational ESL (VESL) teacher earn two to three times the income of an average institutional school teacher, there is more freedom both in terms of personal time and ability to develop innovative approaches to teaching. This paper provides a review of several sources of information to help a novice to ESP become familiar with the major steps in developing a workplace ESL program.

Dudley-Evans, Tony and St. John, Maggie Jo, 1998 *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A multidisciplinary approach*. Cambridge University Press.

This textbook provides a comprehensive description of the theory and practice of ESP. It is based not only on extensive research, but, more importantly, the actual experience of the authors. The data in each chapter is both informative and practical; it not only makes you think, it shows you how to apply the ideas through real world tasks. I would evaluate this work as an excellent resource for students wishing to familiarize themselves with ESP, and an absolute necessity for any practitioner involved in program design, implementation or evaluation. The research is extensive, with over 300 citations in the bibliography. Dudley-Evans argues that the approach to teaching reading and writing in ESP programs is significantly different from school based approaches in that its focus is on providing immediate, practical and measurable outcomes in occupation specific areas. The major topics are similar, but the instructional materials and methodology is quite different. According to Dudley-Evans there are four major stages in designing and implementing ESP programs: *Needs Assessment, Course Design/Materials Selection, Teaching/Learning and Evaluation*. The following articles in this paper parallel of each of these stages.

Stage One: Needs Assessment.

West, Linda

1984 Needs assessment in occupational specific VESL. *English for Specific Purposes Journal*, Vol. 3, pp. 143-152.

This is a very practical approach to short term, occupation specific VESL training. The gist of West's message is, "In ESP there is no room for 'self-discovery' or development of a 'personal voice.'" She recommends a two-pronged approach to conducting workplace needs assessment: Use of specialized references such as the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* and actual workplace observation.

The first step is analyzing how written material such as instructions, job procedures, memos, etc. are used on the job. Once the language materials are identified she recommends organizing them into *Content Areas* (equipment, safety procedures, and quality control) and *Language Requirements* (vocabulary, situation, function, structures and register.) She concludes that a careful needs assessment *prior to* initiating training will avoid many problems down the road and ensure that the training focuses on what the students need to perform successfully on the job. Data is based on two sources: U.S. Department of Labor and other job market reference books and workplace observation.

Stage Two: Course Design/Materials Selection.

Litywick, David M.

1979 Procedure: The key to developing an ESP curriculum. *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 383-391.

According to David Litwick textbooks are not available "off the shelf" to provide specific ESP. Instead, it is up to the employer to design specialized curriculum that meets his/her particular needs. His suggestions concur with the recommendations of West: "...analyze trainee and job needs and detail specific performance objectives to meet these needs." He also concurs with other authors I cite in this review regarding classroom materials: "...they should be based on authentic workplace documents and procedures...and adapted into exercises to teach vocabulary, grammatical structure and rhetoric."

A complete lesson, for example will have a pre-reading stage which teaches vocabulary, grammar and rhetoric taken from authentic workplace materials, and the post-reading stage will evaluate student acquisition in the same areas. The final component, "Pilot and Revise Material" should contain a feedback loop so that the material can continually be revised and updated to improve the effectiveness of the instruction.

Stapp, Yvonne F.

1998 Instructor-employer collaboration: A model for technical workplace English. *English for Specific Purposes Journal*, Vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 169-181.

This is a case study which focuses on how actual workplace materials were successfully used as the “textbook” for ESL reading and writing instruction. It describes how a course to train refugee immigrant workers was designed in a printing company around a “job ticket” which was used by the company to list all the details of each job. Key to the success of this program appears to be the cooperation/collaboration of the employer, the dedication and enthusiasm of the trainees and their fellow workers, and the creativity of the outside training staff. Again, authentic workplace material was the textbook for the course.

Vivian, Sigrid

1984 ESP for nursing assistants and home health workers. *English for Specific Purposes Journal*, Vol. 3, pp. 165-170.

Vivian describes a community college based VESL program to train limited English refugees with a 90 hour intensive program designed to qualify them for employment upon completion of training.

The program operated in two phases:

A Preparation Course to teach general medical English with emphasis on technical vocabulary, and

A Language Support Course which provided vocational technical vocabulary, listening proficiency, and study skills.

It is interesting to note that all three of the training programs described above had the same emphasis: curriculum designed around *authentic workplace materials* and employer involvement in the design and implementation of training.

Stage Three: Teaching/Learning

VanDuzer, Carol

1999 Reading and the adult English language learner. *National Clearinghouse for Literacy Education*. ERIC Digest: ED433729

This article is a brief but well balanced review of the history of first language literacy research combined with specific suggestions to help ESL learners develop reading proficiency. Although it is in digest form, it covers all of the major approaches to reading instruction and suggests some excellent methods to help develop reading proficiency in ESL students by paralleling the characteristics of fluent readers.

VanDuzer begins by reviewing the history of first language literacy research and the various reading approaches that have emerged from it. Briefly they are:

Phonics. The predominant approach to reading in the 1950s and 1960s was "bottom up," based on the "phoneme" or smallest meaningful unit of sound.

Psycholinguistics. Through the late 1960s and 1970s, the psycholinguistic or "top down" approach to reading (where meaning takes precedence over structure) became dominant.

Interactive. Approaches that draw on schema or interactive theory: the reader and text interact as the reader uses prior background knowledge to derive meaning. Other variations view the reading process as the interaction of both bottom up and top down skills. They focus on word recognition, eye movement, and background knowledge.

Critical Literacy. In the 80s and 90s reading is seen as a social process that takes into account the interaction between author and reader. Meaning flows from an understanding of the cultural, social, and political contexts in which the reading takes place.

VanDuzer argues that rather than agonize over which theory is correct, ESL teachers would be better off becoming familiar with the characteristics of fluent readers and tailoring their instruction around these principles. Fluent readers:

- read with a purpose and understand the purpose of different texts.
- read quickly.
- interact with the text.
- evaluate the text critically.
- expect to understand the text.
- usually read silently.

She then provides specific suggestions to help ESL learners become proficient readers:

- Learners should read texts that meet their needs and are interesting.
- Teachers and students can choose texts that are relevant to the learners' lives.
- Exposure to texts that students will encounter in everyday life: newspapers, memos schedules, instructions, magazines, etc.
- Teach strategies such as skimming for the main idea, scanning for specific information, predicting.
- Teach pre-reading activities that encourages learners to use their background knowledge.
- Evaluate texts for implicit values and assumptions.
- Encourage extensive reading for a sustained, uninterrupted period of time.

VanDuzer concludes that by following the suggestions detailed above, teachers can tailor reading instruction to meet the needs and goals of adult English language learners regardless of their background.

Stage Four: Evaluation

Lazar, Meryl K. Lazar, Bean, Rita M. and Van Horn, Barbara. 1998. Linking the success of a basic skills program to workplace practices and productivity: An evaluation. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, Vol. 41, no. 5. pp. 352-362.

This article is also in a “case study” format, however the evaluation design was based on extensive research. In conducting this research the outside evaluators found that most evaluation programs of workplace literacy projects were seriously deficient and were based primarily on surveys and anecdotal reports. She cites one research report of federally funded workplace literacy programs which found that only six out of 29 met good evaluation criteria.

The evaluation design described in this article describes how a hospital, with the help of outside evaluators, designed a workplace literacy program which included evaluation criteria based on standards used by the hospital to evaluate job performance levels. All phases of the program design included stakeholder collaboration. As a result, the program met its goal of upgrading both employee literacy and job performance, particularly those job tasks that required literary skills. The design described in this article and the numerous references on which it is based is an excellent place for persons researching ESP evaluation to begin.

Conclusion

My original goal in writing this paper was to research the field of ESP in order to find articles I could use to design a model program in private industry. To that end I was successful, however by the time I was finished I realize I had only scratched the surface and discovered many additional resources I could have included. Just as in ESP program development, this is a circular process. Needs Assessment and Evaluation provide additional information, and this feedback continually changes the program and improves the outcome. So, although the articles I reviewed in this paper were beneficial, they really only provide a foundation for further research.