Title

Establishing Partnerships: San Diego County ESL Articulation Group

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1g23q92w

Journal

The CATESOL Journal, 9(1)

ISSN

1535-0517

Author

Ediger, Anne

Publication Date

1996

DOI

10.5070/B5.36536

Peer reviewed

Establishing Partnerships:
San Diego County ESL Articulation Group

A Simple Beginning

The San Diego County ESL Articulation Group traces its origins back to a San Diego regional CATESOL conference where its members first gathered in an informal get-together of ESL professionals working at the high school, adult education, community college, and university levels. It was a gathering for the discussion of common issues, a relatively unstructured meeting organized by two community college faculty. We met this way two years in a row at the regional conference, with a surprisingly large group of participants from all of these segments. Most of our discussion was informal, focusing on the problems our students had when they went on to the next level; we were trying to find out more about what other levels did in their ESL classes. Eventually, a small, dedicated, core group of ESL faculty from most of the area's seven community colleges (CCs) and one person each from the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and San Diego State University (SDSU) began meeting regularly[1]. Since then, the San Diego County ESL Articulation Group, with representatives from nine area institutions of higher education, has gained a few visitors and lost a few members, but now, nearly five years later, it is still in action, meeting monthly, with a strong sense of purpose and a feeling that we have already accomplished important things.

The basic group came together informally at first, with such goals as to share information on how we ran our programs, to problem solve on various issues, to commiserate over ESL teachers' difficult lot in life, and to ask the advice of others teaching and working in programs similar to ours who might already have been through situations we were beginning to face. We also wanted to investigate issues such as the barriers preventing students from progressing through our sequences of required courses, the unaccept-

ably large number of transfer students who were failing to pass competency exams at the four-year universities, the inconsistent course numbering systems that existed from college to college, and the gaps in curricula at our respective institutions.

Among the other issues that our mostly CC-level members were having to deal with at this time included:

- the recently instituted requirement that all CCs meet state-mandated placement standards in ESL, English, and math, as handed down by the state CC chancellor's office, and particularly the requirement that we validate our placement instruments within a certain allotted time period,
- the constant barrage (we felt) of problems from our institutions and our administrations, including the lack of funding, the extremely large ESL classes (often 30 to 40 in a composition course), and the undefined relationship between ESL and developmental English courses, and
- the lack of clear guidelines for establishing the credit status of ESL courses from among noncredit, nondegree-applicable credit, associate degree credit, and transfer credit (see Garlow, this volume, for further descriptions of the differences among these types of credit).

Needless to say, we felt that we faced many difficult problems, and we saw this articulation group as a place where we could meet with others like us to seek solutions.

Articulation Group Projects
A Chart of ESL Course Equivalency

One of the first projects of this group was to compile a chart showing equivalencies among levels of ESL writing courses offered at each of our institutions[2] (see Appendix A). While this did not initially seem like such a complex task, we soon realized that we didn't even have a system for comparing our different courses from institution to institution. Finally, after much confusion of terms and course numbers, we determined that the most useful way to do this was according to (a) the level of the course in relation to freshman composition, and (b) the type of credit each course offered. The wide variety of credit types assigned to various ESL courses at our schools is indicative of the lack of uniform treatment of ESL courses and content from institution to institution (see also Garlow, this volume). To our knowledge, the resulting comparison chart was the first attempt to determine approximate course equivalencies for our area's ESL programs.

A Survey of ESL Transfer Students

Our articulation group became more formally organized when we decided to conduct a pilot survey of ESL students at our local CSU (California State University; in this case, SDSU) and discovered that a very large number of the ESL CC transfer students were being placed back into developmental or prefreshman ESL writing courses, even though many had already taken freshman composition, and in some cases, had even taken the sophomore writing course at local CCs (see Ching, McKee, & Ford; Lane, Brinton, & Erickson; and Murray, this volume, for similar findings). In other words, many of these students had already taken transfer-level writing courses at the local CCs, but when tested after transferring to SDSU, they were judged as unable to meet the lower division writing competency requirement, and were put back into prefreshman writing courses.

The Establishing Partnerships Grant

In the fall of 1993, our articulation group applied for and received a small grant[3] to work on these issues. The proposed work included conducting a more complete survey of ESL transfer students in our region and obtaining a countywide writing sample for the purpose of determining whether the one-level-below-freshman courses at each of our institutions truly represented similar writing competency levels. Although we had been meeting for the previous two years on our own time and at our own expense, we had hoped that the grant would provide a small amount of compensation for the significant amount of effort we were making on top of full-time teaching loads. Ironically, when we were awarded the grant, the small amount we had requested as compensation for our time was deleted from the award amount because the grant committee felt that this was work we should be doing as a regular part of our jobs! We were chagrined to learn this because, as far as we were aware, we were the only such group meeting countywide at the time. Nevertheless, the grant spurred our efforts on significantly.

A Countywide Sample of ESL Student Writing

In an effort to make further comparisons of the course content, exit standards, and overall expectations in equivalent courses at our different schools, we decided to administer a writing sample to students across the county. Thus, we searched for a prompt which would:

(a) be culturally unbiased,

(b) allow either a personal or impersonal (general) response,

(c) offer some basic guidance to students on how they might develop an essay in response,

(d) elicit some analysis of ideas, not just an enumeration of facts or opinions,

(e) ask for information from the students which would not require speculation, and

(f) be a topic on which students could comfortably write an essay of significant length.

We initially wrote two prompts which fulfilled our criteria, field-tested them, and finally settled on the one that seemed best suited for our purposes (See Appendix B).

After pilot testing this prompt at several of our institutions, we administered it to ESL students in two one-level-below-freshman composition classes at each of the schools represented in our group. On some campuses, the prompt was also given to students at other levels for purposes of comparison. Then, a scoring rubric was designed and, with input from all of our articulation group's members, a selection of benchmark essays was identified from the essays collected. These benchmark essays represented the range of student competencies at this level.

A Revised Survey of Transfer Students at SDSU

Our articulation group also revised the survey instrument used for our initial pilot study at SDSU. We administered it again in a more comprehensive manner to all of the ESL writing courses at SDSU during the fall semester of 1994. These comprised a total of 13 classes, distributed across the developmental, lower division, and upper division levels in the following manner:

Type of Course	Classes	Classes
Developmental	RW 94 (3 sections)	RW 95 (4 sections)
Lower Division	Linguistics 100 (1 section)	Linguistics 200 (2 sections)
Upper Division	Linguistics 305W (3 sections)	

Students who transfer to SDSU must fulfill a lower division writing competency requirement. Typically, they take SDSU's Writing Competency Test (WCT). Students who do not pass the WCT are referred to a developmental writing class in the department of rhetoric and writing (RW)

studies. ESL developmental students are asked to produce a brief writing sample to determine whether they would benefit from a writing course designed for second language learners. Such students are then advised to enroll in RW 94 or 95. Once the lower division competency requirement is fulfilled, students have the option of taking subsequent writing courses for ESL students (Linguistics 100, 200, & 305W) to fulfill the freshman composition or upper division writing requirements.

Results of the survey

Table 1 (below) indicates that an average of 61% of the students enrolled in the two developmental ESL classes (RW 94 and 95) had transferred from a CC.

Table 1
History of Community College (CC) Transfers to SDSU

	Developmental ESL RW 94/95	Freshman composition Ling. 100	2nd semester composition Ling. 200	Upper division Ling. 305W
Percentage of Transfers	61	4	25	68
Total no. responding	104	25	28	59

Of those transfer students, virtually all (98.4%) had already completed the first semester composition requirement, as shown in Table 2. Since the RW 94/95 sequence, however, is designed to precede the RW 100 or first semester (freshman) composition course, this indicates that these students were put back into developmental writing after arriving at SDSU. In addition, nearly half (46.8%) of the transfer students enrolled in this level had also fulfilled the critical thinking or second semester composition requirement (RW 200, also indicated in Table 2).

Table 2
Percentage of CC Transfer Students in Developmental Writing With Prior Freshman Composition Credit

Student history	Percentage
Had fulfilled RW 100 (freshman composition)	98.4
Had fulfilled RW 200 (2nd sem. writing and critical thinking)	46.8

In contrast to the developmental classes, a much lower proportion of students enrolled in the lower division ESL courses (Linguistics 100 and 200) were transfers.

The data collected in the upper division classes yielded similar results to those obtained for the lower division students. Of the students enrolled in upper division ESL composition, 68% had transferred from a community college (Table 3).

Table 3
Upper Division ESL Students

Student history	Percentage
Transfer	68
Had taken 1st sem. freshman comp. at CC	75
Had taken 2nd sem. freshman comp. at CC	69

Note. Total = 59

Among the transfer students, 62.5% had already fulfilled the freshman writing requirement before transferring, but then had to take a developmental writing course (Table 4). Even more surprising, 55% had fulfilled both the 100 and the 200 level requirements *before* transferring but still needed to take developmental writing because of their inability to pass the WCT.

Table 4
Upper Division Transfers

Student history	Percentage
Had taken 1st sem. comp. at CC and then took developmental writing	62.5
Had taken 2nd sem. comp. at CC and then took developmental writing	55

The information obtained from the survey indicated that a large proportion of ESL students who had transferred from a CC to SDSU had had to backtrack and take developmental writing even though they might have completed transfer-credit-bearing composition courses before entering SDSU.

Clearly these data indicate a problematic transition to the CSU for many ESL transfer students. They strongly suggest the need for continued articulation efforts between the CSU and the CC systems, particularly with respect to the competency levels required for students having completed lower division writing or GE requirements.

Academic Histories of ESL Students at SDSU

The broad academic histories of students in the various levels (Table 5) indicated that the transfer students who needed to backtrack when entering SDSU had had relatively less schooling in the US than those who did not. For example, of the RW 94/95 students, only 58.7% had attended a U.S. high school, compared to 84% of the Linguistics 100 students and 92.9% of the 200 students. Similarly, 32.7% of the RW 94/95 students had attended a U.S. junior high school in contrast to 68% of the Linguistics 100 students and 71.4% of the 200 students.

Table 5
Levels of Schooling in the U.S.[a]

	94/95	100	200	305W
Preschool	1	20	10.7	6.8
Elementary	17.3	56	46.4	30.5
Jr. High School	32.7	68	71.4	50.8
High School	58.7	84	92.9	62.7
Adult Education	5.8	4	0.0	5.1
Comm. College	63.5	24	71.4	94.9

[a]Percentage of total responding for each course.

Table 5 also shows that 94.5% of the upper division ESL students (i.e., those enrolled in Linguistics 305W) had fulfilled some requirements at a community college, even if they were not officially transfer students. The data in Table 5 indicate that ESL students rely heavily on CCs to fulfill language and other requirements. Moreover, CCs bear the particularly heavy burden of offering language instruction to students who arrive relatively late in their academic careers.

Individual Interviews of ESL Transfer Students at SDSU

The results of the SDSU survey indicated that, of the ESL students who had transferred to SDSU, many had taken their language courses at a CC before they transferred. In an attempt to follow up on these findings, the articulation group decided to conduct personal interviews with a number of the students in the ESL writing courses at SDSU. Ten of these interviews were conducted in December, 1995, and members of the group are now engaged in analyzing them to identify what factors contributed to the

students' passing freshman- and sophomore-level writing courses at the CCs (often with grades of B and C), but later being required to take developmental writing upon transfer to SDSU.

Preliminary evaluation indicates that ESL students have been placed in developmental ESL writing courses via several avenues. Some reported that they took ESL placement tests and consistently followed their placement counselors' and instructors' advice in making their way through the ESL course sequence in a community college before transferring to SDSU but still ended up needing additional (developmental) ESL instruction. These students said they felt they had done everything right along the way and were never told by their instructors that their English skills were lacking. If they had been, they would have studied even harder or sought other remedies to make sure they were ready for university-level writing courses.

Other students reported that they were in a hurry to complete their ESL requirements and had bypassed several required courses on the way through the ESL and developmental sequence at the community college they had attended. (When further questioned, they reported that no one had checked to see if they had met the prerequisites for these courses.) Along the way, in order to pass their courses, students of both groups reported that they had obtained a significant amount of help from tutors and friends and that they had often had their papers "corrected" by tutors before handing them in. Thus, some of them believed that their instructors often had had no idea of their inadequate writing skills while they were in their courses. In this manner, they had managed to pass through sophomore-level English courses at the community college before being put "back" into developmental courses upon transfer to SDSU. While these reports are still preliminary, they offer us a glimpse into some of the problems that ESL and English faculty can begin to address.

An ESL Student Textbook List

The articulation group also put together a preliminary list of the ESL textbooks being used at each of our institutions. While no additional work has been done with this unedited list, the group hopes to make this the focus of future meetings.

Other Important Outcomes of the Articulation Group's Efforts

Many of the projects of the San Diego County ESL Articulation Group are still underway. We hope to complete the holistic evaluation of the ESL student writing samples that we gathered from each of our institutions and from which we have developed our benchmark essays. It is our hope that they will ultimately lead to a system for comparing standards and expectations for the prefreshman level. We are also in the process of analyzing the oral interviews conducted at SDSU, and we hope to make our preliminary textbook list into a reference for choosing and evaluating future texts in our programs. However, we have already seen many important accomplishments, including:

(a) an increased understanding of issues in the teaching of ESL at levels other than our own,

(b) more confidence in the way we are each developing our programs, including less reinventing of the wheel in terms of program administration and new course ideas,

(c) increased respect for our plans for future ESL program development from many of our colleagues in our respective departments (e.g., from having seen the results of our survey),

(d) personal support from other members of the group for job-related problems, and

(e) increased awareness of statewide (legislative and other) ESL issues affecting the CC/College/University levels.

Future Plans for the Articulation Group

Our hope is that the continued collaboration of our articulation group will lead to more sharing of techniques, policies, and standards which will contribute to more coordination and better sequencing of ESL course outlines, better conformity to the state-mandated validation of ESL assessment and placement instruments, better standardization of placement procedures for ESL students, improved ESL curricula, more consistency and standardization of supplementary ESL textbook and multimedia selections, and the linking of our courses to statewide ESL proficiency level descriptors (See Browning, this volume).

It is also our hope to generate a document which will compare what students need for (a) placement into our different CC ESL courses, (b) the successful completion of writing requirements, so that accurate information can be given to students while they are in the CC ESL course sequences, and even before they transfer, and (c) a description of the writing competency standards expected of students transferring to the CSU. Finally, we would like to produce a handbook containing the results of our efforts and a chart comparing course equivalents of all ESL courses and other documents, to be disseminated in handbook form to counselors and other staff who work with ESL students at our own and other CC, CSU, and UC institutions.

The work of the San Diego County ESL Articulation Group is far from over. As observed by Flachman & Pluta and Murray (this volume), future financial support to provide release time for our members would contribute significantly toward facilitating the work of this group. Nevertheless, a general enthusiasm about working with others like ourselves and a strong belief in the value of this work keeps us going. ■

Endnotes

1. The core members of the group, which has met for much of the past five years, include:

   Virginia Berger/Patricia Bennett, Grossmont College
   Katheryn Garlow, Palomar College
   Anne Ediger, San Diego City College
   Myra Harada/Neva Turoff, San Diego Mesa College
   Clara Blenis, San Diego Miramar College
   Suzanne McKewon, Southwestern College
   Deborah Poole, San Diego State University
   Margaret Loken, University of California, San Diego

2. Although we initially started out to determine the equivalency of the ESL courses we offered (including courses in such areas as grammar and oral skills), we soon found that the task was much greater than we had originally thought and not every program offered the whole range of courses. Thus, we decided to first address writing courses since we all offered them.

3. The grant was funded by the Establishing Partnerships Joint Project Grants through the California Community Colleges Academic Senate and Chancellor's Office for projects coordinating activities between the CCs, CSU, and the UC.

Appendix A—Comparison of ESL Writing Courses at San Diego County Community Colleges and Universities

College Name	SDCCD (City, Mesa, Miramar)	Grossmont	Southwestern	Palomar	Mira Costa	SDSU	UCSD
Upper Division	None	None	None	None	None	Ling 305W (3) NNS	None
Transfer Credit —GE (as Foreign Lang & Culture)	None	None	None	ESL 103 (5) CSU Cred ESL 102 (5) CSU Cred ESL 101 (5) CSU Cred	None	N/A	N/A
Transfer Credit —Electives	None	ESL 103 (3) UC & CSU Credit ESL 102 (3) UC & CSU Credit	None	ESL 103 (5) UC Cred ESL 102 (5) UC Cred	None	N/A	ESL 10 (4 Qtr. units) (May repeat once for elective credit & once for work load credit)
Transfer Credit —English (Freshman or Sophomore Level Composition)	ENG 208 (3)[c] ENG 205 (3) ENG 101 (3) ENG 105 (3)	ENG 124 (3) (Lit.) ENG 120 (3) ENG 110 (3)—SDSU only; meets Eng. 100 req. if part of 39-unit pkg. (NS & NNS Sections Avail.)	ENG 116 (3)	ENG 203 (4) UC & CSU Credit ENG 202 (4) UC & CSU Credit	ENG 202 (4) ENG 201 (4)	NS: RW 200 NNS: LING 200 (3) each	CollegeWritingReq. (4-5 Qtr. units)— 2-3 Qtr. Sequence
			ENG 115 (3)	ENG 100 (4)	ENG 100 (4)	NS: RW 100 NNS: LING 100 (3) each	
AA Degree-Applicable Credit	ENG 51 (3)	NS: ENG 103 (3)	ENG 105—Voc. (3) ENG 114—Acad. (3) ESL 45 (4)	ENG 50 (4)	ENG 803 (4)	N/A	N/A
Non-Degree-Applicable Credit (Financial Aid/ Workload Credit only)	NS[a]: ENG 50 (3)	NNS[b]: ENG 10 ENG 09 ENG 08 ENG 07 ENG 06 (6) each (Wrt & Rdg)	NS: ENG 95/ 96/97 (1, 2, 3) (variable unit workshop)	NNS: ENG 96/ 97 (3) ESL 94/95 (3)	NS: ENG 105—Voc. (3) ENG 114—Acad. (3) ESL 45 (4)	NS: ENG 65 (3) ESL 35 (4) ENG 60 (3) ESL 25 (4)	NNS:	NS: ENG 10 (4) NNS: ESL 1 (4) (12 hrs/wk) Levels 1-7 (Cr/NC rog/ Lee/Lab)	NS: ENG 802 (4) ENG 850 (gram) NNS: ESL 803 (4) ESL 802 (4) (repeatable) ESL 899 ESL 898 (non-cred) Depts.	NS: RW 92A/B (3) NNS: RW 94/95 (3) (Repeatable) *Courses in dept. of rhetoric & writing studies, formerly under English or acad. skills	ESL 10 (4)—May be repeated a 3rd time for work load credit ESL 11 (2)—Grammar Workshop

Source: San Diego County Community College/University ESL Articulation Group, May 12, 1996.
Note: [a]NS=Native speakers (of English); [b]NNS=Nonnative speakers (of English); [c]( ): Indicates number of units of credit When not identified specifically as NNS or ESL, all courses are for mixed NS/NNS students.

Appendix B

Instructions for Administering the Countywide Writing Sample of the San Diego ESL Articulation Project

Remind students—during the class period before the sample is to be done—to be on time so they can use the full class period.

When the writing sample is taken:

1. Distribute the writing prompt sheet. Write the class section numbers on the board.
2. Ask students to fill out the bottom portion of the sheet.
3. Say: "This is a timed writing. Consider it as representative of the best writing you are capable of doing at this point in the term."
4. Read prompt aloud to the students.
5. Ask: "Are there any questions?"
6. Answer all questions as time permits.
7. Say: "You will have 50 minutes to write. Write in ink, skip lines, and write on only one side of each page. Begin."

At the end of 50 minutes:

1. Say: "Time is up. Put your pens down and hand in your papers. Staple your prompt sheets to the back of your papers."

Prompt Sheet

Topic: *What is a hero? Most cultures have heroes who represent qualities (such as courage or wisdom) that people admire most. Heroes can be found in areas such as education, religion, government, science, entertainment or sports. Select someone that many people think is a hero and discuss why they admire him or her. Name the person, describe what the person has done, and explain what qualities have made him or her a hero.*

Write an essay in response to the above question. Make sure your essay is well organized and the points you make are well developed. Information may come from a variety of sources: personal experience, movies or TV programs, class discussions, observations, or materials you have read.