LITERACY ASSISTANCE FOR ESL SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS: THE MICMAC INDIAN EXPERIENCE

Ann F. V. Smith, Dalhousie University

When planning the Micmac Bachelor of Social Work program, the Nova Scotia Micmac community gave ESL literacy low priority. However, when the students were admitted, two thirds spoke but did not write Micmac as a first language, and educational levels ranged from grade nine upwards. Therefore the new policy gave priority to spreading ESL across the curriculum.

All social work courses emphasized students' writing, reading, public speaking, and study skills. They adapted a process approach to meet the needs of Micmac ESL students. In particular, course assignments frequently formed the basis of functional writing activities and the revision component stressed affective feedback from peers and the instructor. Students were encouraged to develop their own style and voice in harmony with the program's philosophy which combines the self-directed learning of Knowles and the empowerment of Freire.

After an initial literacy assessment, students received feedback through their course assignments. Professors graded for course content and the instructor reviewed the style, content, structure, and syntax. Ongoing individual and small group tutoring or counselling followed as appropriate. Teachers developed a handbook and an assessment form.

As the program draws to a close, the community sees many advantages to this approach. It provided ongoing literacy development, rather than crash course remediation, and it recognized the effects of outside pressures on school performance. In addition, the real assessments and assignments enhanced student motivation. However, certain disadvantages dull the glow. Writing Skills was a noncredit course, and relied on the cooperation of professors, which varied considerably. Some viewed literacy as less valid than content and a challenge to academic freedom. Some students found the combination of upgrading and social work content overwhelming and dropped out.

Others found the skills sessions frustrating in the multilevel group.

Academic ESL across the curriculum has provided an exciting and innovative approach to Native students' literacy development. It can also provide a thought-provoking alternative for writing teachers in postsecondary education.

THE GRAIN OF SAND IN THE OYSTER: COMPETENCY TESTING AS A CATALYST FOR ATTITUDINAL CHANGE AT THE UNIVERSITY

Laurence Steen, Laurentian University, Sudbury

In their preface to Writing Assessment: Issues and Strategies (1986), Karen Greenberg, Harvey Wiener, and Richard Donovan observe that "Often only the reality of an imminent test has been able to force dialogues that ultimately produce a consensus on goals and standards on a particular campus." Laurentian University instituted an Arts graduation competency test in September of 1985, and over the past three and a half years faculty have engaged in dialogues, sometimes willingly, sometimes reluctantly, and a consensus is emerging. They have moved from a largely ad hoc and departmentally localized testing situation prior to 1985 to the present environment, which includes the Arts graduation competency requirement mentioned above; a thriving Language Centre; a Senate Committee on Writing Competency; a Writing Across the Curriculum Programme; competency requirements in the schools of Translation, Social Work, Physical Education; plans to introduce requirements in Nursing, and in Science and Engineering; writing competency given a university priority two years running by the Academic Planning Committee; and fruitful and ongoing dialogue with the Sudbury Board of Education and its secondary school English heads.

The consequences of our stringent competency requirement have cast a wide net. We have been brought face-to-face with the administrative and pedagogical, and on a higher plane, the political and moral implications of our policy of accessibility into Arts. The issue has become one of educational responsibility—ours as well as the student's. At each widening of the net of
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