

USING TEXTBOOKS IN ENGLISH: ACTIVITY FOR ESP COURSES

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The implementation and frequent use of library tasks as part of a pedagogical reinforcement of knowledge items and/or study skills to be acquired from classroom performances has been a serious concern to all those interested in exploring widely the many possibilities of successful work such interdisciplinary activities may offer.

In fact, the idea of interdisciplinarity has come about due to the fact that library tasks should affect the organization as well as demand cooperative efforts from at least two segments of the faculty body: in this particular case, from the teacher who have devised the program of activities (the project) and from the librarians whose adequate orientation "in locu" to the students is just as relevant for the right performance of the tasks.

The ESP team of teachers at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul has for many times thought of these considerations with great zeal, having always in mind the peculiarities of the disciplines under their responsibility.

At present, the situation of teaching English for Specific Purposes at UFRGS has come to a quite definite state of affairs. We dare say that "transfer of power" phase of the National Project claimed by Prof. Widdowson to be set up as soon as possible through local coordinances is already on its way.

There has been many undergoing sub-projects, such as the Extension Courses offered to high school teachers as well as to specialized clerks from specific Departments, which aim not only at teacher training but also at the development of adequate curricula to satisfy

the clientele's needs.

The regular ESP disciplines, namely LET 268, 269, 720, 721 and PROP 03, have been offered to undergraduate and graduate students, respectively. In some courses, they are compulsory (e. g. the library and the Computing Sciences Course). Nevertheless, the majority of the 400 students enrolled at the beginning of each semester still take them as an optional course. A strong feature of the latter group is that it congregates students having experiences in the most varied knowledge fields, since they belong to the several different courses formed at the Federal University. Consequently, the groups are not homogeneous.

This has obviously brought both advantages and disadvantages. One concern, however, has been paramount: the desire, from the teacher's part, to meet students' needs and expectations. To face such challenge, the group has been using a rationale which was already exposed and commented about in previous seminars - that which underlies the communicative approach.

If we consider communicative any task that is as representative as possible of the real life situations the students are likely to encounter, the use of library services for teaching purposes has produced rewarding results.

The first work using the library at UFRGS was carried out in 1982, together with the collaborative team of the reference librarians. It consisted of a guided visit around the Reference Library, the exhibition of an audio-visual and some pertinent tasks devised by the ESP team, reinforcing some important reading strategies already presented in classroom: scanning, skimming, critical reading.

An evaluation of the activity was done both by the librarians and the students, and the results were so positive that it became part of the normal curriculum activities of the ESP disciplines.

A thorough report of such an experiment and its subsequent adaptations was the object of a communication last year in S. Maria (MARMET, 1983).

As a continuation to this first activity, a visit to a specialized library was then programmed. The group chosen to test such possibility was composed by the Computing Science students, because of their peculiarities as a fairly homogeneous one, as far as knowledge of English and academic interests were concerned.

The activity involved a visit to the Course Library, under the orientation of the specialized librarians in order to find adequate material so as to successfully manage with a group of five tasks elaborated by the ESP teachers. The tasks were all related to texts somehow pertinent to the student's specific academic interest and once more emphasized reading strategies (e. g. different reading procedures; the importance of typographical clues for reading; different texts to be read).

The project of such an activity, which took place in August, 1983, was the object of a communication during last year meeting in S. Maria (FLORES DA CUNHA, 1983).

It was evident in both activities the student's deep interest and high level of motivation whenever they had opportunity to deal with materials significant to their academic studies.

Besides, the importance of considering and using library services as an efficient Resource Center as well as an effective help for improving, if not carrying out, one's progress still during the undergraduate level was strongly emphasized by most students in their final comments.

Having this in mind, and trying to congregate the two aspects mentioned - interest and relevance - in some sort of learner-orientated activity, a new task was devised using textbooks in English.

It is not rare to find English books listed in the recommended bibliography of other academic areas of the student's course. It was with this idea in mind that the final task of term was thought of. "Using a textbook" involved the student in a series of activities in which he could demonstrate how he had incorporated and developed the reading skills trained in class.

The handout consisted of a series of instructions combined with an explanation and exemplification of how to list bibliographical references according to ABNT. It has been a concern in the ESP course at UFRGS to call the student's attention for the correct writing of bibliographies.

The instructions can be summarized as follows:

- a) choose a textbook about a topic of the student's interest;
- b) prepare a bibliographical reference for the book chosen according to instructions given in the handout;
- c) observe the parts the book consists of (preface, summary, footnotes, tables, etc);
- d) decide on a chapter to read and explain reason;
- e) read the text for general idea;
- f) observe the organization of chapter, extract examples of different discourse functions (classification, definition, etc);
- g) summarize the text;
- h) evaluate the reading.

All the instructions of the assignment were in English but students were supposed to write the paper in Portuguese. Besides, there were instructions for the correct presentation of the paper: attention to margins, spaces, arrangement of title page, number of pages, etc. All these aspects would count on the evaluation.

As a matter of fact all the steps followed in

the elaboration of the work were no more than an application of the skills trained in class.

Students were given one month for the preparation of the task and were reminded of the importance of doing it properly for it was part of the semester assessment.

The results were quite satisfactory. Some neat and thorough pieces of work were done for the surprise of the ESP teacher. There were groups where 100% of the students did the task. On the other hand, not more than 10% of students in some groups failed to take part in the activity.

The immediate interest students showed for the performance of the task was due to the fact that they saw it as an opportunity to read English works which were assigned by teachers of other subject matters. In reading the English textbooks they were at the same time preparing examinations in other areas of study.

The idea of using such materials can be a support for the implementation of team-teaching work. If the ESP teacher could use material the student is actually wanting in his studies, the English course would certainly be viewed as something of immediate utility.

The second version of the handout has already been prepared to be used next term. Some points in the previous version needed to be reviewed and modified, chiefly the instructions, which were a bit confusing for there were some explanations mixed with them to test the student attention while reading. But it proved inefficient because students with a not very good knowledge of English were discouraged to work on their own. Thus, due to the good results obtained, it was decided that the activity should be used with other groups in the future.

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APPENDIX

USING A TEXTBOOK

As a final task of this semester you are asked to prepare a paper that will show how you have incorporated and developed the reading skills aimed at in our classes. Survey the exercises done and the reading activities carried out to review the most relevant aspects you should have in mind when applying your own reading technique.

You will write your paper in Portuguese but you will read the instructions in English because it is an important part of your task to understand details and to follow instructions.

Choose a study topic you are interested in.

Choose a textbook on this topic in your specialized library.

Take notes in your own words in Portuguese. Do not try to translate the authors' words.

1. Write the following information:

- 1.1 the call number of the book:
- 1.2 the name of the library where the book is located:
- 1.3 the name and code number of the discipline that asks for the book or that is related to the book:

2. Prepare the bibliographical reference for the book you have chosen. (Consult the instructions on the separate sheet 'Bibliographical References').

3. Look through the book and check any of the following aids used in it:

preface	bibliography
subheadings	assignments
summary	graphs, charts
footnotes	pictures

4. Tell what the intended audience of the book is. (Whom was it written for?)

5. Decide which chapter of the book you will read. Write down the title of this part according to the 'Bibliography References'. The chapter chosen must be a complete one: with a beginning, a development, and a conclusion.

6. Write down the reason why you want to read the text and five questions you hope to be answered by reading it.

7. Read the text quickly to get a general idea of it.
8. Observe how the chapter is organized: see if there is an introduction, a development, and a conclusion. Locate them on the text.
9. Locate and extract from your text at least one example of a definition example, classification, analogy, contrast, and for and against arguments.
10. Check if the conclusion comes back to the idea introduced at the beginning. Does the conclusion actually conclude?
11. Summarize the text. You may follow the outline suggested below or you may try another one of your own.
 - I - Introduction: General idea of the text.
 - II - Development:
 - a. Main idea
 1. Supporting ideas
 2. Examples
 - b. Main idea
 1. Supporting ideas
 2. Examples
 - III - Conclusion
12. Evaluate your own reading.
 - 12.1 Was the text relevant to your needs? Justify.
 - 12.2 How good was your reading? Too difficult, difficult, easy, too easy?
13. Guides for preparing your final paper.
 - 13.1 Use standard size (about 21cm x 31cm) white sheets.
 - 13.2 Leave a 3,5cm margin at the left hand side, a 2cm margin at the right hand side of the page, a 4cm margin at the top, and a 3,5cm margin at the bottom of the page.
 - 13.3 Write on one side of the page only.
 - 13.4 Type your paper if possible, or write neatly in black ink.
 - 13.5 If you are typing the paper, use double spacing.
 - 13.6 Number all pages consecutively in the center, 2cm down from the top of the page.
 - 13.7 Prepare a separate page which will carry the title of your paper, written a little above the center of the page. Your name will appear below the title, and below that the name of your course. (The title page has no number).
 - 13.8 The first page of your paper is counted but it is not numbered. The second page carries the number 2.
 - 13.9 Your paper should be handed in until.....