



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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A RESOURCE FOR OUR GREATEST RESOURCE: ADJUNCT FACULTY

Adjunct faculty are an essential resource for colleges. In the American Language ESL Program (ALP) at our college, we hire adjunct faculty to teach approximately 60% of our classes. By definition, adjunct faculty members are not able to focus solely on their teaching because most have full-time positions elsewhere; hence, they approach classes in disparate fashions. In an effort to minimize disparities between and among different sections of the same course, we created the Resource Envelope (RE) for adjunct faculty—to make their jobs a little easier and establish a unified approach to achieving program goals and objectives.

The Resource Envelope

The ALP Resource Envelope is an on-line (WebCT) collection of worksheets and class activities created by the ALP full-time faculty and available for immediate use by ALP adjunct faculty. Faculty use the computers in the faculty lounges to scan through the Resource Envelope's table of contents, find an appropriate worksheet for an upcoming class, and print copies—all within about 20 minutes. Each RE worksheet is labeled with the course, level, content, author, and approximate time it will take for students to complete it in class.

Ours is an academic ESL program, so the worksheets stress production of language and integration of skills—two factors that set them apart from exercises in textbooks. Our students come from diverse backgrounds. Some are full-blown professionals while others are nearly illiterate. If students work with textbook exercises only, their production of English does not develop as rapidly as when they are asked to integrate skills and respond in depth to situations. For example, students might read a short narrative on “Sam”—a young man who has run into debt—and then compose sentences about Sam's situation, with each sentence demonstrating the student's ability to use a recently learned grammatical structure. Students might be asked to write

these sentences on the board, becoming the authors of model sentences and seeing the models produced by colleagues with more developed literacy skills.

Use by Adjunct Faculty

We have exit tests from the reading and writing classes at the intermediate and advanced levels, and our adjuncts frequently solicit advice and guidance while preparing their students to take these tests. Many of the worksheets in the Resource Envelope support our exit-test goals, targeting the structures and skills that test-readers expect to see mastered on the exit tests. These worksheets illustrate the level of expectations students will encounter in the exit tests and help adjunct faculty prepare students for these tests.

In addition to establishing unified expectations in our courses and providing concrete illustrations of the skill levels we expect students to demonstrate on the exit tests, the Resource Envelope can offer new dynamics in the classroom. For example, one of our adjuncts reported that she uses worksheets designated for other courses at her level:

I was even able to “cross-over” and incorporate [a] sentence-combining exercise within my Writing II class at the beginning of the semester. It was an excellent springboard class work activity.

Changing the focus in a writing course from the whole (paragraph or essay main idea) to a discrete element (sentence, phrase, or clause) or in a reading course from “reading” inference to “reading” syntax can engage students' minds at different levels and in different ways in one class period.

The Resource Envelope also offers a time during class when both the teacher and the textbook can be “off stage” for awhile. Using a freshly minted worksheet creates a different class dynamic than the dynamic created by completing exercises in a textbook. It offers faculty and students a time for quiet, productive focus on the material.

One of our adjuncts reported using the Resource



Envelope as a teacher-training tool, as well as a classroom activity tool:

...going over [the worksheets] before I start teaching a topic is very helpful. The way the questions are framed [on the worksheets] gives me another angle that I can use in my explanations. The exercises act as a mini-guide.

New Directions

We have found the Resource Envelope to be a unifying force in our program, an aid to the preparation of our exit tests, a method for focusing students on language production, a refreshing element of classroom work, and a teacher-training tool.

We are discovering that it might become a way to create links with faculty in other disciplines. Some of our colleagues recently studied the language-minority, crossover student population—a group whose placement falls somewhere between ESL and basic skills. We are beginning to create Resource Envelope passwords for some basic skills faculty who have crossover (Generation 1.5) students in their courses and have requested access to this valuable resource. Interestingly, they feel that the worksheets will help their skills students, as well.

As those of us in these distinct, but related disciplines share worksheets, we generate valuable dialogues about the program outcomes we aim for and hope to achieve. Eventually, the Resource Envelope might serve to better illustrate the nature of our work with the ESL population to composition and basic skills faculty. Moreover, it might help us establish outcomes that can integrate the goals of the composition, basic skills, and American language (ESL) programs.

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