Real Reality Revisited:  
An Experimental Communicative Course in ESL

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This article describes an experimental oral communication course (OCC) offered at Passaic County Community College in Paterson, New Jersey, and reports the results of a pilot study to evaluate its initial success. The OCC was designed around weekly, structured field trips to sites where students typically need to communicate in English. Each field trip unit consisted of three related classes. In the class prior to a trip, students listened to tapes, practiced functional language, and decided on what information they wanted to obtain. The trip consisted of a tour of the site, followed by a discussion with a resource person. In the subsequent class, students evaluated the trip and reviewed the new language used and the information gained. Students taking the OCC were also enrolled in a required, grammar-based ESL course. They were compared with a control group taking only the required course. In general, the area of greatest improvement of the OCC group, as compared with the control group, was grammatical accuracy. In addition, a significantly larger number of OCC students passed the component ESL course. Learners evaluated the OCC experience favorably.

The primary objective of a communication-oriented second language program must be to provide the learners with the information, practice, and much of the experience needed to meet their communication needs in the second language.

(Canale 1983:19)

Advances in the fields of linguistics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics have caused us to expand our view of the rule-governed nature of language. We now realize more fully that discourse takes place according to sociolinguistic conventions (Richards 1980) and
that language choices in any communicative event are dependent upon mode (spoken, written, read aloud), topic, participant relationships (age, sex, status), and purpose (Ervin-Tripp 1966, Brown and Yule 1983). Studies of adult second language acquisition show that English learners do not naturally acquire the ability to use language appropriate to communicative functions and contexts (Rintell 1979, Scarcella 1979, Bodman and Eisenstein 1984). What a learner needs to know is how to apply lexical, phonological, and grammatical information to perform particular functions in real settings. Since students have divergent needs, courses must be tailored to the situations and settings in which they use language. In a real sense, then, each ESL class must be an ESP class—some purposes will simply be more specialized than others.

At the same time, affect has been found to be a crucial component of successful learning. Krashen (1978) notes that the emotional state of the learner can be a critical factor in determining whether or not language is acquired. According to the affective filter hypothesis, defined by Dulay and Burt (1977), negative feelings can interfere with or block successful acquisition. Stevick (1980) asserts that course content and methodology should ideally be derived from students' needs, interests, and goals, and that there must be self-investment on the part of the learner. This investment will promote the positive motivation associated with improved retention. In her aptly titled book, *Caring and Sharing in the Foreign Language Class*, Moskowitz (1978) reminds us of the benefits of integrating humanistic activities into the ESL curriculum. She outlines many ways in which students can share values, likes, dislikes, experiences, and feelings through the second language. Maley and Duff (1978) stress the importance of the emotional component through drama and role play. Curran (1976) tells us to create a sense of community in the classroom—one in which teachers are not judges but are counselors or helpers. In the cooperative effort to learn a new language, content for learning is drawn from the students themselves—what their concerns are and what they want to express—rather than being prescribed externally by teacher or text.

For these reasons, there has been a movement toward incorporating realistic language use into the English as a second language curriculum. As Taylor (1982) puts it, we are "in search of real reality" for our students. In saying this, Taylor is advocating going beyond preplanned classroom exercises, such as simulated dialogue, to engage students in genuine communication that is contextually rich and meaningful to both speaker and hearer. Traditional methods
present the lexical, syntactic, and phonological aspects of the target language. Widdowson (1978) maintains that this narrow approach allows ESL students to become proficient in the "usage" of English, but in most cases, not in what he calls its "use," that is, the language needed for the various real-life roles the learner plays.

How to accomplish this is still being debated. A very serious question is to what extent metalinguistic facts should be presented explicitly to a class. This issue is not limited to presenting grammar rules; conceivably, functions could be explicitly presented and discussed, along with differences in register and problems in pronunciation. Krashen's (1978) distinction between learning and acquisition is relevant here. In Krashen's view, explicit presentation would result in learning, a process he and many others have come to consider less and less important for language use. How to handle error correction, or whether any kind of correction is even helpful, is another related and hotly disputed question.

THE OCC PROGRAM

At Passaic County Community College in Paterson, New Jersey, the chiefly Hispanic LEP population, which is mainly working class, now comprises more than one quarter of the total enrollment. Many of these LEP students lack literacy skills in their native languages. Although a required, intensive grammar-based ESL course is offered, the opportunity for these students to use English out of class is minimal, and more than 60 percent typically drop out or have to repeat their ESL course. Success in content-based English courses has been limited; the transition to courses taught in English is formidable.

To give students a greater opportunity to speak English, an additional ESL course was designed to reflect the students' needs to communicate orally on campus, in the community, and at work. The experimental oral communication course (OCC) was developed along the lines advocated in the recent literature previously discussed. The OCC revolves around a weekly field trip which serves as a focus for the oral communication that takes place both in and outside of the classroom. This article describes the program and reports the results of a pilot study to evaluate its initial success.

The three 3-hour classes each week are designed around a planned field trip to a site where adults routinely need to communicate in English. Sites are chosen to reflect the expressed needs and interests of the students, as assessed by a questionnaire which students complete at the beginning of the course. The emphasis of the course is to build fluency and social competence in English.
Therefore, there is virtually no error correction except in cases of severe communication breakdown. Such an approach is in keeping with an important tenet of current language teaching theory. Brumfit (1980:117), for example, states that while some work should concentrate on accuracy, opportunities are needed “to talk or write in quasi-realistic situations without technical accuracy being a main concern.”

The first class begins with a tape recording related to the focus for the week. This is presented as a listening comprehension exercise and used as motivation and stimulus for student-generated ideas, questions, and information. Students are asked to share information on the topic as it relates to their native cultures and discuss differences which they have observed or which might exist in the target culture. They are aware that some of the expressions they are learning will be used in subsequent communication with native speakers. Students also learn compensatory strategies, such as asking for clarification or repetition and paraphrasing.

After this introductory session, the class divides into small groups and works on a written transcript of the tape, which may or may not have blank spaces for students to fill in. A variety of oral exercises ranging from controlled to open-ended practice is done at this point. Then, the following techniques are used to elicit information from the learners: 1) Students are asked specific questions to reveal what experience or knowledge they can bring to the topic from their personal lives; 2) they are asked to indicate what they would like to know as a result of the upcoming trip; and 3) the class develops possible questions to elicit the desired information, with the teacher helping when appropriate. Students work on the questions in a variety of ways. For example, they may classify or arrange them in a logical sequence, practice asking them, and/or write them down. Peer correction is encouraged in this activity.

These questions lead to the development of a task for the field trip, such as to test a hypothesis, interview an individual, diagram a floor plan, or gather evidence for a debate. In English, the class arranges the time and place to meet, the materials to be brought along, the transportation (if necessary), and the route to be taken. The work in the class is goal-oriented; activity is purposeful and directed toward preparation for the upcoming trip. Learners are not merely manipulating language but are actually using it.

The second class is the trip itself. To prepare the resource person, the teacher speaks with this individual beforehand. Since resource persons vary in their ability to make the conversational adjustments appropriate for the learners, each resource person is made aware of...
the special needs of LEP students and is given suggestions to enhance communication, such as using visual cues, limiting idioms and jargon, and pausing frequently for student feedback.

During the walk or ride to the site, students are encouraged to speak English and practice some of the prepared questions. On a long bus trip, relevant materials may be read or reviewed. The travel time is utilized for informal conversation in English. Language games are sometimes played, but the emphasis is on the creative, meaningful, and spontaneous use of language by the students.

Upon arrival, the class is greeted by the host or hostess. At first, the teacher, and later in the term, a student, introduces the class. Then, during a tour, the students’ attention is directed to particular aspects of the location. Each student has been asked to think of questions which will be discussed later or in the next class. During the tour, students normally hear a range of natural language. The amount of comprehensible input received varies with the speaker, the students, and their mutual sensitivity.

After the tour, the class retires to a conference area, where the resource person is asked questions, some of which have been developed in class and others of which have been generated by the tour and the learners’ impressions. Students have a copy of the prepared questions with them and jot down answers and other items of interest as they go along. If communication breaks down, the students help each other and may ask the resource person for repetition or clarification. During this discussion period, the instructor does not intervene at any time; the goal of this completely student-centered period is to engender the positive feelings that result from successful transactions in the second language.

After the discussion, students complete an evaluation form designed to determine how much they understood, to help them crystallize information gained, and to express reactions to the place and people encountered. In the final segment, time is allowed for the students to express their appreciation to the host or hostess. Before leaving the site, the class members note relevant information so that they can renew their contact with the agency and/or resource person in the future.

In the third class, the questions and answers for the field trip are reviewed, and the trip is evaluated in terms of enjoyment, usefulness, and ease of communication. Students also write individual thank-you letters to the resource person. Follow-up activities often include role plays (sometimes videotaped), debates, or the development of a plan of action to address a particular problem. Most of the follow-up activities are done in small groups, with each group making a
presentation to the whole class. The question of cultural overlap, or
dissonance, is also addressed here.

A TYPICAL OCC UNIT

The following is a description of a typical unit in the OCC curricu-
lum. The first two weeks of the course were devoted to conversa-
tional skills, the next ten to the field trips, and the final two weeks to
follow-up activities and testing. The unit under discussion was the
fifth field-trip unit of the course.

In the needs assessment, students had ranked banking high on the
list of situations in which they strongly needed to communicate in
English. A particular bank known to be community-minded was
contacted, and a spokesperson agreed to a class visit structured
along the lines the instructor had conceived. A letter confirmed the
dates and times and included a list of guidelines for the resource
person who would work with the OCC class. This trip would be videotaped.
(When this was not possible, audiotape was used.)

The First Class

A few students were asked to describe their experience with
banks in their own countries as well as in the United States. Many
said they did not have checking accounts because they thought that
they “were for people who didn’t need all their money.” However,
after discussing the advantages of paying bills by check, the students
agreed that they would in fact like to know how to open a checking
account. Some students did have savings accounts but also needed
to cash checks and send money to relatives in their native countries.
Others wished to obtain car loans. Therefore, the class decided to
practice language and seek information relating to checking, savings,
and loans.

At this point, an audiotape, “At a Bank,” from Around Town
(Ockenden and Jones 1982), one of the students’ texts, was played to
help introduce relevant expressions and vocabulary. The conversa-
tion was presented in four parallel dialogues. Oral exercises from the
text were then done to practice some of the more important
constructions.

Next, the class was divided into three groups, with one student
designated recorder for each group. Each group was given a set of
realia which included checks, deposit slips, savings passbooks,
savings account deposit and withdrawal slips, and a loan application.
The students in each group were instructed to talk for two to three
minutes about their own banking experiences and to examine the
realia and note terms requiring explanation, which the recorder would list. (Some words suggested were *interest, certificate of deposit, overdraw/overdraft, direct deposit, collateral, liable, credit, and co-sign*).

After the class reassembled, the recorders read their lists. The words were pronounced by the teacher and repeated by the students. They were defined by the teacher, and both the teacher and students used them in sentences. Students were encouraged to look up words they were still unsure of in their dictionaries after class.

Next, students formulated questions based on the information they most wanted to obtain at the bank. Each set of questions was written on the chalkboard. Once redundant questions were omitted, the class worked together to group the questions into categories of Checking, Savings, and Loans. Some fell into a Miscellaneous category.

Each group was then assigned a category and asked to check the wording of the questions and to order them from general to specific. This task proved to be challenging, and there was animated disagreement in some cases. The following are a few of the questions generated for the category of Checking:

1. How do I open a checking account?
2. How much money do I need to start?
3. Is there a monthly service charge? If so, how much is it?
4. What happens if I overdraw my account?

The edited lists were given to the instructor, who would type them for distribution on the day of the trip.

During the last part of the class, travel arrangements were made. The instructor ascertained which students had cars, and groups were formed to travel together. The instructor announced the time and place students were to meet.

**The Second Class**

When students met at the designated place, they were given a copy of the questions developed in class, a field-trip evaluation form, and a map of the route they would follow. In this way, passengers could help the driver navigate (using English, of course).

On the class’s arrival at the bank, the hostess, who was the bank’s public relations assistant, met the students at the door and escorted them to a meeting room, where they introduced themselves and met other bank personnel participating in the tour. The assistant cashier gave a brief orientation and then accompanied the students on an hour-long tour of various departments within the bank. This was the
bank's headquarters, so in addition to the usual consumer activities
conducted at a branch bank, the learners also toured six administra-
tive departments. At each stop, the head of the department spoke
about the operation of that department. Many of these speakers
were rather difficult for the students to understand, but in all cases,
students commented and asked spontaneous questions.

The students were then guided to the boardroom—which they
found quite elegant and impressive. A fluent student was in charge
of thanking the bank for the invitation and beginning the discussion.
The question-and-answer session was conducted entirely by the
students, who, taking turns, directed their questions to the host and
hostess from the bank. The resource people had been previously
instructed not to give the students any information unless they asked
for it and to keep their answers short to encourage student initiative.
Interestingly, while the students came with 15 prepared questions, a
total of 55 questions were asked. An unexpected area of interest for
the students concerned the security of the bank. Security guards had
not been in evidence during the tour. Since the class members found
this environment very attractive, they also asked questions about
employment opportunities. When a student's question was occasion-
ally misunderstood, the resource persons restated what they thought
had been the question, giving the student the opportunity to
paraphrase or clarify. The teacher did not intervene at any time,
except to give visual encouragement to two or three more reticent
students to venture a question. When it was time to leave, the
teacher and the students once again expressed their thanks and
indicated that the experience had been worthwhile.

The Third Class

The class members first reviewed their evaluations of the trip
orally, as a group, with special emphasis on the ease or difficulty of
communication they experienced. In this case the students had
found it easier to talk with the host and hostess than with the
department heads, perhaps because of greater preparation by
students and resource persons for the interaction. Also, the discus-
sions with the host and hostess had provided greater opportunity for
student control.

Students felt they had learned a lot and expressed regret that they
did not live closer to this bank so that they could use it. The class
reviewed the information gained, focusing on the prepared ques-
tions. Selected portions of the videotape were shown and analyzed
by the class for instances of faulty communication. The tape was
later placed in the library so that students could view it in full on their own.

As an application of the knowledge they had gained, the students engaged in a values clarification exercise from The Non-Stop Discussion Workbook (Rooks 1981), a text they were using. In this exercise, they had to act as the board of directors of a bank and approve or refuse loan applications. The activity was done in groups, which then compared their decisions for accepting or rejecting particular applicants.

Finally, for homework, each student wrote to the resource persons, using a model business letter given to them in class. These letters were not corrected by the instructor and were sent, along with her letter, to the resource persons. The latter wrote back to the students and included a press release they had written about the visit and a photograph for each of the students showing the class at the bank.

The sample unit described is generally representative of the others, although there was considerable variation from week to week, depending on the nature of the trips, students’ interests, and background knowledge. In all cases, however, realistic language use was emphasized in the classroom through student-centered activities as well as on the trips themselves.

Littlejohn (1983) argues that increased learner involvement in structuring formal language learning experiences will bring about greater motivation and more effective language acquisition. As he suggests, this was done gradually as the term progressed, since many learners come to the classroom with differing expectations of the respective roles of student and teacher.

In the course of the field trips, students had the opportunity to interact with native speakers whose language reflected differences in regional background, ethnicity, social status, and sex. Since students had to conduct the question-and-answer sessions without assistance during the trips and constantly needed to communicate with each other to resolve various issues, they had to understand and use a range of discourse rules as well as perform a variety of language functions. They exchanged greetings, opened conversations, introduced and changed topics, handled turn taking, negotiated meaning, and closed conversations. They experienced several interlocutor relationships: with peers, teachers, and others of various professional status.

There was always an element of unpredictability in that the class
could not anticipate entirely what topics would be introduced on the tour or, for that matter, in class. Language was used in authentic contexts with accompanying background noise, visual cues, and nonverbal signals. The imperfections of real communication were present with pauses, hesitations, false starts, verbal fillers, overlapping speech, occasional misinterpretations, and repairs.

The trips proved to be especially successful on the affective level. The students and teacher got to know each other in less formal circumstances than would have been possible in the classroom alone. Also, on the trips students were treated as important guests, in many cases a new experience for them. Most interactions in the urban setting fail to emphasize the human element because of the time constraints and complex demands of city life. Due to the open-ended nature of the course (DiPietro 1982), students had the opportunity to express their unique personalities. One student, for example, often found humor in situations in a way that relieved tension for the class and put everyone at ease.

**EVALUATION OF THE OCC PROGRAM**

Students taking the OCC were concurrently enrolled in an intermediate-level intensive ESL course, which met for approximately nine hours per week. The syllabus was essentially grammar-based, with considerable practice devoted to sentence-level drill. While students also wrote essays and read selections which they discussed in class, there was on the whole limited opportunity for students to comprehend and produce connected discourse. Classroom tests were exclusively written and emphasized discrete, decontextualized grammar items.

The ESL section also met for an additional hour each week in a "lab" setting, in which the instructor was aided by a tutor. In the lab, students could work individually on written assignments, which consisted for the most part of lists of sentences to provide practice on grammatical items. There was a small amount of practice on the discourse level also, usually written (controlled writing) and occasionally oral. Here again, the aim was to develop grammatical accuracy.

A total of 28 students were included in the evaluation, 14 of whom participated only in the traditional ESL class and 14 of whom participated in both the ESL and OCC programs. (The number of students varies in the following analyses because of the withdrawal of some students from the programs and because of absences on days when the evaluation instruments were administered.) All of the subjects were full-time day students who lived in L1-speaking
enclaves. In responding to a questionnaire which assessed their communicative needs, students reported that their out-of-class input and use of English were very limited.

One ESL student was selected to match each OCC student on several criteria, including proficiency in English, as determined by an initial oral interview; native language; length of time in the United States; and socioeconomic status. The sample for the study included 20 Hispanic students, 4 Asians, 2 from the Middle East, and 2 Haitians. The students were about evenly split between working class and lower-middle class families. They had a mean age of 26 (with a range of 19 to 38) and had been in the United States an average of 3 years (with a range of 6 months to 13 years). All had attended high school, and most had a regular or equivalency diploma.

It was expected that the OCC students would surpass the ESL-only students in the development of listening and speaking skills. This kind of comparison can be described, using Long's (1983:360) system, as:

\[ \text{Instruction}_i \] versus \[ \text{Instruction}_i + \text{Instruction}_j + \text{Exposure}_j \], where
\[ \text{Instruction}_i = \text{the ESL course and} \]
\[ \text{Instruction}_j + \text{Exposure}_j = \text{the OCC course}. \]

This is a comparison of two groups, each with ESL instruction and one with an additional component combining exposure and instruction of a different kind.

Since it was not possible for practical reasons (e.g., university restrictions and program needs) to balance the additional time spent by the experimental group on the OCC course with a filler activity for the ESL-only group, there is a twofold danger in the interpretation of results. First, any additional exposure to and instruction in English would have been likely to result in some improvement of the OCC group as compared with the ESL-only group. Second, the OCC students' knowledge that they were participating in a special class, whatever its nature, could have affected the outcome. The study, therefore, should be viewed as hypothesis-generating rather than conclusive in any way. Mere improvement on the part of the experimental group is not as meaningful as the nature of any particular group differences that might appear.

Each student was administered an oral interview, which was rated on a scale (see Appendix) adapted from the Foreign Service Oral Interview Rating Scale (Oller 1979). Students were interviewed once at the beginning of the semester and again at the end of the semester. Three raters independently scored the taped interviews after the term was over. Tapes were presented in random order to
raters who were not acquainted with the students. Thus, the raters
did not know whether a particular tape was a pre- or post-test, or
from an ESL-only or OCC student.

Inter-rater reliability was evaluated by computing Pearson prod-
uct-moment correlation coefficients for each pair of raters—that is,
for Rater 1 with Rater 2, for Rater 1 with Rater 3, and for Rater 2
with Rater 3. These correlations, all of which were statistically
significant ($p < .01$), were obtained for the total score on the rating
scale, for pretest and post-test combined. The fact that the correla-
tions were all .70 or higher indicates an acceptable level of inter-
rater reliability for the use of the Oral Interview Scale in the
evaluation of the OCC program, especially since the correlation is
based on only five test items. Because all three raters were at a
comparable level of agreement, further analyses based on the Oral
Interview Scale report the average of the ratings given to a student
by the three raters.

The pre- and post-test ratings given to the OCC and ESL students
were compared. The scale includes five separate items, one each for
accent, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Pre-and
post-test scores were available for a total of 13 matched pairs of
students. Means for the pre- and post-test ratings and the mean
change in ratings are presented in Table 1 for both the OCC and
ESL students.

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<tr>
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<th>OCC</th>
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<th>ESL</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>Gain</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>Gain</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Accent</td>
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<td>2.65</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>.21</td>
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<td>2.10</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>.25</td>
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<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>.35</td>
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<td>Fluency</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>.22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>.32</td>
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The mean gain by OCC students was compared with the mean
gain by ESL students using t-tests for matched pairs (dependent
samples). In these analyses, the independent variable was program
placement and the dependent variables were gain, from pretest to
post-test, in each of the five Oral Interview Scale items. As Table 1

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shows, both the OCC and ESL groups improved their ratings from the pretest to the post-test in all cases. The improvement in ratings ranged from one fifth to almost one half of a scale point. On the accent ratings, the OCC group improved by almost half a scale point; the difference in improvement on ratings between the two groups, although not statistically significant, clearly favored the OCC students: $t(12) = 1.50, p < .09$. Interestingly, in terms of statistical significance, the area of strongest improvement for the OCC students, as compared with ESL-only students, was in grammatical accuracy: $t(12) = 4.16, p < .001$. This is surprising, since there was no formal teaching of grammar in the OCC course and minimal error correction. One possible explanation is that the OCC program enhanced the acquisition of English for the learners. Krashen (1978) defines acquisition as an unconscious process which occurs when the learner's focus is on meaning rather than on linguistic form, exactly the case for the OCC students. All students in the evaluation were exposed to a formal linguistic environment providing rule isolation and feedback. The data indicate that for the OCC learners, however, a combination of form-oriented and meaning-oriented language teaching was more beneficial than form-oriented teaching alone. An experience such as that provided by the OCC may be particularly crucial for the development of grammatical accuracy in individuals who have little out-of-class contact with English.

In addition to increasing language skills, an objective of the OCC was to increase the number of students successfully completing each required ESL course in one semester. Final grades were available for 14 pairs of ESL/OCC students. Table 2 shows the specific

| TABLE 2 |
| Final ESL Grades of ESL and OCC Students |

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>Total No. Passing</th>
<th>Total No. Not Passing*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OCC</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Students made some progress, but not sufficient for promotion to next level.

grades received and compares the number of OCC and ESL-only students who passed and failed the ESL course. Eighty-six percent of the OCC students passed, compared with only 57 percent of the
ESL-only group. The relative success of the two groups in their traditional ESL courses was further compared using a chi-square test adjusted with the Yates correction factor (Hatch and Farhady 1982). Results showed that students in the OCC course passed their ESL component in significantly greater numbers than the corresponding ESL-only learners: \( \chi^2 (1) = 4.375, p < .05 \).

It must be remembered, of course, that the greater improvement of the OCC students cannot be interpreted as unambiguous evidence on behalf of the specific course which these students had in addition to the ESL grammar course. That any additional course, involving instruction only or, as was the case in the OCC, a combination of instruction and exposure, might have produced similar or even more positive results is a possibility that cannot be discounted. The most conservative interpretation of the data is that the difference in improvement between the OCC and the ESL-only students was in the expected direction and that offering the OCC experience again seems warranted. Further research is needed to confirm the pedagogical usefulness of the OCC and to determine how such a course might be altered to produce even greater gains in various areas of second language development.

Data which may be useful for that purpose and which offer additional reason for optimism about the value of the OCC come from student evaluations of the OCC experience, which were elicited by means of a questionnaire. Results, reported in Table 3, were overwhelmingly favorable, with an average of 85 percent positive responses for the items asking for a general assessment of

<table>
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<th>OCC Component</th>
<th>Questionnaire Responses</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Positive</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Negative</td>
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<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>8.0</td>
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<td>Large-Group Activities</td>
<td>96.8</td>
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<td>Text Materials</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>8.2</td>
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<td>Homework Assignments</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>27.6</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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the course. Students seemed to value in particular the large-group activities and the topics covered.

SUMMARY

In assessing the results of this pilot study, we must limit our claims, since a much larger sample and a more rigorous experimental design are clearly needed to confirm these initial findings. An important question which remains is the contribution of the traditional ESL course to second language acquisition. Future studies of the program should include a third group, comprised of students who are not undergoing formal ESL training while they are enrolled in the OCC course.

The effectiveness of the OCC program in developing listening and speaking skills in English is evidenced by gains in accent and grammar and by a greater percentage of students passing the ESL course in a single semester. At least equally important is that the OCC students reported extremely positive attitudes toward the OCC program.

Students want and need real conversation. Even if a curriculum designer decides that correct grammar is the primary goal, the results of this preliminary research suggest that language use will enhance progress in this area and that the teaching of grammar does not need to be restricted to formal rules or pattern practice.

The OCC approach could also be tried with children learning English as a second language. While the need of young learners for language experiences focused on meaning is well-established, we are not aware of the existence of any programs that are carefully designed to utilize community-based experiences in an integrated way, such as has been described here.

Both adults and children need learning experiences which present language as a means of satisfying their everyday needs and interests. Many classroom teachers probably share this view and are developing innovative ways of maximizing learner involvement and learner investment. It would be valuable to a very large number of ESL

1 The five-page questionnaire administered to the OCC students contained a number of items for each of the categories listed in Table 3. For example, the following statements, to which students answered "Agree," "Disagree," or "No Opinion," were used to elicit reactions to the category Field Trips: The field trips helped me learn new English words and phrases; they helped me to better understand spoken English; I gained some useful information by going on the trips; I felt well-prepared for the trips; there was enough discussion in class after the trips; in general, the hosts or hostesses were friendly and helpful; I enjoyed the trips; and I plan to return to some of the places we visited. Table 3 presents the percentage of positive, neutral, and negative responses to each category, averaged for all items relating to that category.
professionals to learn of other examples of programs or courses which have responded strategically to the needs of a given group of learners by utilizing the resources in communities to create links between classroom learning and real life. To be sure, such a methodology requires a good deal of time and flexibility as well as a certain amount of risk taking. But our preliminary findings indicate that the endeavor to implement a communicative approach can yield gratifying results.

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REFERENCES


APPENDIX
Oral Interview Scale

Accent
1. Pronunciation frequently unintelligible.
2. "Foreign accent" requires concentrated listening. Mispronunciations lead to occasional misunderstandings.
3. Occasional mispronunciations which do not interfere with understanding.
4. No conspicuous mispronunciations.

Grammar
1. Almost entirely inaccurate except in stock phrases.
2. Frequent errors. Some minor patterns uncontrolled.
3. Occasional errors.
4. Few errors, with no patterns of failure.

Vocabulary
1. Vocabulary inadequate for even the simplest communication.
2. Choice of words sometimes inaccurate. Prevents discussion of some common topics.
3. General vocabulary adequate to discuss any nontechnical subject.
4. Broad and precise vocabulary.

Fluency
1. Speech is so halting and fragmentary that conversation is virtually impossible.
2. Speech is slow and uneven except for short sentences.
3. Speech is occasionally hesitant with some unevenness.
4. Speech is effortless and smooth.

Comprehension
1. Understands too little, even for the simplest type of conversation.
2. Understands only slow, very simple speech on common topics.
3. Understands normal conversation quite well, but requires occasional repetition or rephrasing.
4. Understands everything in normal educated conversation except for very colloquial or low-frequency items.