

Teaching and Learning Project: Assessment Report English 90 – Fall 2005

College Wide SLO's addressed/background information:
Developmental Education : English 90

English 90 Outcome: *“Compose essays with sentences which display a developing syntactical maturity and whose meaning is not impaired by excessive grammar, usage and proofreading errors.”*

Research Question:

- I. How effectively are we teaching students to master the grammar concepts listed in the English 90 Course Outline?

- II. What does research in the field describe as best practices for grammar instruction?

Study design

I. How effectively are we teaching students to master the grammar concepts listed in the English 90 Course Outline?

- **Method:** In the eighth week of the semester, all Teaching Community participants were asked to pilot a test-based grammar assessment which included all grammar concepts listed in the English 90 course outline

- **Sample:** After the assessment was administered, participants scored the assessments. The facilitator scored sections deemed too lengthy or complicated to complete by the group in one scoring session.

Scoring Technique: We used an answer sheet to score the assessments.

Description of Proficiency: A score of 70% is considered passing. Therefore, all students scoring below 70% are evaluated as not having mastered the grammar skills being assessed.

Results: from Fall 2005

☐ 0-9% 0 students

| | | |
|----------|-------------|-----|
| ☐ 10-19% | 2 students | 4% |
| ☐ 20-29% | 2 students | 4% |
| ☐ 30-39% | 7 students | 16% |
| ☐ 40-49% | 13 students | 29% |
| ☐ 50-59% | 12 students | 27% |
| ☐ 60-69% | 8 students | 18% |
| ☐ 70-79% | 0 students | |
| ☐ 80-89% | 1 student | 2% |

One student scored an 84% on the assessment. No students scored higher than that score.

Since 70% and above is considered a passing grade,
1 student out of 45 received a passing grade on this assessment.

Meaning or Analysis

We learned a great deal from this process, debriefing as a group afterward.

- 1) Although four instructors (besides the facilitator) participated in the Teaching Community, the facilitator only received 45 assessments to score. One instructor was not teaching an English 90 course at LMC that semester. Another instructor abstained from administering the assessment, stating the effect such an assessment would have on her students' confidence.
- 2) The nature of the assessment is that it may be testing students on material they may not have yet learned, so it must be administered very carefully, so as to assure students that they are not personally being evaluated.
- 3) The results of test-based assessments may be skewed for a number of reasons: reading skills; narrow parameter for "correct" and "incorrect" answers; text anxiety, etc. Additionally, students may score well in sections in which they can determine how to fashion the "correct" answer by reading the example, rather than by understanding the concept.
- 4) Student scores were pretty consistent across test categories. In other words, there was no one section of the assessment in which student scores revealed a tremendous disparity in correct answers, with the possible exceptions of run-on sentences, and sentence combining using subordinators.

- 5) Even considering all possible reasons why students may score poorly on such an assessment, a 1 in 45 proficiency rate leaves a great deal of room for improvement.

Use of results:

Action Plan:

I. Continue to pilot grammar assessments, with the following changes:

1. Elicit greater participation from Teaching Community instructors, to get a wider range of assessments to evaluate
2. Administer the test-based assessment in the third as well as the fifteenth week of the semester, so that we can see any change in scores over the semester.
3. In addition to the text-based assessment, administer a parallel assessment that evaluates student writing samples, so that we can start to evaluate syntactical maturity in student writing at the beginning and end of the semester, as well as what gaps in syntactical maturity are present in English 90 students.

Study design

II. What does research in the field describe as best practices for grammar instruction?

- **Method:** Teaching Community participants picked a research focus, based on grammar skills taught in English 90, as well as knowledge of LMC student population. The goal was for participants to research solutions to pedagogical questions, and create research summaries and bibliographies. Participants were also asked to create one lesson plan based on the research results, and evaluate student samples.

Results: Participants created summaries and bibliographies of their research, and applied their research to grammar instruction in the English 90 classroom.

Samples of participant research and student work are posted on the English Department website.

No one theoretical model was believed to be sound enough to adopt wholesale by the department. Participants discovered that the articles often focused on the problems involved in grammar instruction rather than on solutions.

Participants did agree on the efficacy and pedagogical soundness of two theoretical models read by the group: rhetorical grammar, and using sentence-level templates (such as used in sentence combining).

Meaning or Analysis

1. The desired goal for this Teaching Community was a broad body of pedagogical research on successful approaches to authentic grammar instruction; research that all English 90 instructors could avail themselves of in future semesters, and which would reveal a theoretical foundation for future grammar instruction in the English/ESL department.

Such a lofty goal might be more easily reached with a greater number of participants, a streamlined structure within which the participants could focus and report on their findings, and a preliminary group of articles, or perhaps a preliminary tutorial on where to find the appropriate resources. A research-based agenda for the Teaching Community needs a great deal of initial research on the facilitator's part before the semester begins, and a constant monitoring and encouragement of participant's research efforts.

2. Perhaps due to the reality of work demands for part-time instructors, much of the participants' research was not greatly helpful for future use by English 90 instructors. Some of the research was dated and some stemmed from instructional materials rather than research sources.
3. Since participants had a difficult time finding solution-focused research that spoke to their questions, they had a difficult time applying their research to classroom application.

Use of results:

Action Plan:

I. Use rhetorical grammar and sentence modeling pedagogies in continued focus on grammar instruction.

II. Create tighter structure for participant results, and improve facilitator support for participation.

III. Develop materials for participants that help translate theoretical models into practical classroom application.

Timeline for Implementation: Spring 2006

Responsible Parties: Joellen Hiltbrand

Respectfully submitted: Joellen Hiltbrand, Fall 2005