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Exploring the content-based ESL program: a case of research-conscious pedagogy

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Exploring the content-based ESL program: A case of research-conscious pedagogy

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
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Major Professor: Roberta Vann

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Jessica Elaine Mercer

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the people responsible for getting me this far. To my parents, Paul and Ouida Mercer, I owe a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid. Because of my mother, I cannot remember a time when I could not read. My father is the source of my love affair with words. They equipped me with the basics of my education before I could tie my shoes.

I must also recognize my grandparents Tressie Mercer, who is the strongest woman I know, and James “Red” and Theda Slaughter, who will not be satisfied until I can put Ph.D. behind my name. And to the memories of my grandfathers Jesse Mercer, who was a master storyteller and wordsmith, and L.C. Knight, whose reputation as a good teacher lives more than 30 years after his passing, I honor their legacies.

All have contributed to the process that brought me here. From an early age they encouraged me to have an inquisitive mind, a healthy work ethic, and a respect for all I have yet to learn. “Use your head for something besides a hat rack” was my Daddy’s constant command. Everyone else advised, “Get your education because no one can take that away from you.” Doctor. Engineer. Teacher. The profession didn’t really matter. The education was paramount. And they all did whatever was necessary to insure that I earned my degree.

Frankly, I know they all secretly wonder exactly what I’m going to do with an MA in English. But I know they couldn’t be more proud. Even my father has to admit that I’ve finally used my head for something besides a hat rack.
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ABSTRACT

A small liberal arts college in the process of developing the curricular framework for a new ESL program with an intensive element provides the setting for this qualitative study. Practicing a research-conscious perspective, the extent to which the content-based approach to English language instruction is pedagogically appropriate for a small program housed at a liberal arts college is discussed. After examining both the theoretical underpinnings of the content-based approach and the application of content-based instruction in selected college settings, the adoption of a content-based approach for a small program focused on preparing non-native speakers of English for continued academic study at the university level is considered. Throughout the discussion, this study also seeks to emphasize the importance of thoughtful consideration of curricular decisions from a balanced perspective of theory and practice.
CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Rationale for the study

Educators and administrators at colleges and universities have come to recognize the value of a multicultural and international perspective in the college classroom and in the social dynamics of the campus. Such an interest in not only racial and ethnical diversity from within our own borders, but beyond is no longer the concern of deans and provosts of only large state schools. Smaller colleges want to expand their student body to include international students as well; however, smaller schools, especially small colleges in the liberal arts tradition, may face many challenges in drawing international students to their campuses. Even once a college has outlined a plan to recruit international students to its campus only part of the challenge is over. Designing a program of study that best meets the language needs of non-native speakers of English is the next challenge.

Curriculum development is a complex process that must account for student needs, program goals, practical constraints, and to some degree pedagogical methods. As recently as the late 1980’s, Rodgers (1989) deemed that curriculum design, as opposed to syllabus design, was still somewhat in its infancy for second language teaching. Yet Rodgers also stated that second language professions remained unaware of the great wealth of resources and research available on curriculum design and language education programs. This
is a problem that remains unresolved in the field of second language teaching. Becoming more intimately aware of the research related to second language teaching including curriculum design, cognitive development, and especially second language acquisition (SLA) and reflecting on the research in light of experiences of program administrators and teachers, seems to be the logical starting place for curricular planning. Research provides insights into the language learning process from a more scientific frame of reference. The reflections and observations of teachers provide insights that short-term, isolated research projects cannot match. Together, the two components balance each other and provide an interface between pedagogy and theory that is not always self-evident. This interface is referred to as a research-conscious pedagogy for the purposes of this study, and it is from this perspective that this thesis is written.

Specifically, this study examines the problem of Louisiana College (LC), a small liberal arts college, in the process of developing a language program for a projected enrollment increase of non-native speakers of English seeking full admission into degree programs at the institution. In the following chapters, this thesis will address the following points:

- the consideration of context in curricular decisions
- the theoretical considerations of one current approach to language instruction called content-based instruction (CBI)
• a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of CBI as reported by experienced educators and administrators

• the advantages and disadvantages of a content-based curriculum for Louisiana College

While this paper focuses on the situation at one site where I had the privilege of working on a feasibility study of increasing international student enrollment through special programs, this study provides a point of reference for any college of similar scope and size that may be implementing or considering implementing an English as second language program.

Profile of Louisiana College

LC, a private liberal arts and sciences college with an enrollment of approximately 1000 students, recently decided to take active measures to attract more international students. According to the statistics reported to *US News and World Report*, only 1% of the current student body of LC is international.

Despite its small size and low international enrollment, LC has demonstrated sensitivity to the benefits of global perspectives in education. For example, it supports two study abroad programs, one to London and the other to Hong Kong; it encourages short-term international volunteer learning projects, such as the Department of Nursing’s 6-week volunteer program to aid villages in Mexico and the interdepartmental program to teach conversational English skills in China; and it acknowledges the importance of understanding a global society
in its goals for student attainment. However, the number of international students on campus is traditionally low, and the college would like to see the campus population reflect a more global society.

Over the years many international students have expressed interest in attending LC; however, when non-native speakers of English discovered little to no English language support, the students usually decided to go elsewhere. After some deliberation among administration and faculty, the college decided to follow up on a question that it had often heard from international students or potential sponsors inquiring about the college through the years, “Do you have English language support?” This repeated inquiry prompted the college to carefully study the feasibility of operating some type of an English as a Second Language Program (ESL).

Despite the apparent confusion in naming and defining various types of ESL programs (Carrasquillo, 1994), the college discovered two main categories of English language programs, intensive English or English support. An intensive English program serves students whose language proficiency is not at a level to begin academic work as a degree-seeking student in the mainstream college or university (NAFSA, 1981). Carrasquillo (1994) further defines the purpose of an intensive English program as providing “immediate academic language to be able to function as quickly as possible in the mainstream English-only classroom” (p. 111). There is no one model for the structure of an intensive English program; however, intensive English programs do, as Carrasquillo points out,
tend to serve students who wish to earn degrees from an American institution or who wish to improve their English proficiency for professional reasons.

The second main type of program is defined by the National Association of International Educators (NAFSA) as general ESL or English support programs. These programs generally offer additional or supplementary language work for students with an acceptable level of English for beginning some mainstream academic work at the university. Recognizing that their program would likely be small, especially in the first few years, the LC faculty ultimately approved an ESL program that would incorporate both types of students by providing some intensive, full-time language study and transitioning ESL support classes. The college has set its minimum TOEFL requirement at 560 on the paper-based test (PBT), a requirement that could be waived after successful completion of the ESL program.

The administration found that the campus community was generally supportive of the idea of an ESL program, but this support did come with one condition. The faculty believes that the program should operate with the understanding that retention of students from the ESL program into a degree-seeking program is a paramount goal. Thus, English for academic purposes and interpersonal communication skills are strong factors in the curricular decisions LC will make since the academic success and the emotional well-being of the students will influence individual decisions to remain at the college.
Motivated by both the accreditation self-study process, which required LC to review its current situation in light of its own mission statement and the standards for institutions of higher education as outlined by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association for Colleges and Schools, the faculty acknowledged the need to increase efforts to recruit international students to the campus. After several meetings and careful consideration, the faculty voted to create an ESL program. However, the faculty clearly envisioned the ESL program as an integrated part of the academic program of LC and not an isolated language school housed on the campus. Although admission to the ESL program would not imply admission to the college, the faculty agreed that the ESL program would focus on academic English, and it should prepare non-native speakers of English for full-time academic study at LC. Among the many looming questions for LC is a deceptively simple one: What type of ESL curriculum would best utilize the unique setting at LC and provide the best environment for non-native speakers of English to develop their English language proficiency and prepare for an academic career at LC? This issue of curriculum development is where the current study begins.

Significance of the setting

The setting of LC’s program is particularly significant because of the intimate nature of the small liberal arts campus. LC’s student-to-faculty ratio is approximately 16:1. Of the faculty, 72% hold terminal degrees, and no classes
are taught by graduate assistants. Faculty frequently meet with students. This frequency of contact between professors and students suggests that successful non-native speakers will need to acquire basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) as well as cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP). According to Cummins' (1981) delineation of the two components of language proficiency, basic interpersonal communication skills would give the students the necessary skills to communicate effectively under a variety of social situations found in a college setting. Cognitive/academic language proficiency would move the students toward participating freely in the academic world. Such a view of language recognizes that the language that speakers need for communicating in interpersonal relationships is very different from the type of language students need to access for academic lectures or for writing academic papers.

Moreover, this distinction between communication skills and academic literacy becomes increasingly significant as a component of a language program at LC. Because of the college's philosophy of a liberal arts education, the students must be able to discuss and write fluently within many content areas, not merely the specific field in which the student wishes to major. LC requires that all degree-seeking students follow a central curriculum in addition to the curriculum set forth for each major or pre-professional degree program. The central curriculum consists of a fixed core totaling 42 credit hours of required course work that may not be applied to a student's major, minor, or concentration and a flexible core totaling 12 credit hours of restricted electives that may not be
counted toward a student’s major. A breakdown of the requirements within the central curriculum reveals that a student must be able to negotiate the target language across a complete range of genres. For example, a student must select core courses from the following areas of the college in order to complete a degree program:

- 15 hours of communications, including composition, media communications, literature, and foreign language.
- 12 hours of humanities, including art, music, religion and philosophy
- 10 hours of natural sciences, including biology, chemistry, earth science, or physics, and mathematics plus lab hours
- 12 hours of social sciences, including history, psychology, sociology, political science, and economics
- 5 hours of education, including freshman orientation and health/PE

As evidenced by the central curriculum requirement of the college, non-native speakers of English completing a degree at LC must be prepared to use English in a variety of academic contexts in addition to the social context of the college campus.

Finally, retention of students cannot be ignored. Since LC’s goal is for non-native speakers of English to use the program as a springboard from language student to degree-seeking student, then LC must consider the non-native English speaker’s satisfaction with life at the college both socially and academically. A strong ESL curriculum, therefore, must strike a balance
between communicative competence and academic English. The direction the program takes should not only fulfill the social and academic needs of the students, but it should also ideally motivate the students.

Conventional models of instruction

A curriculum may include a variety of techniques to teach language; however, the skill-based approach seems to account for the structure of most IEPs (Hafemick, Messerschmitt, & Vandrik, 1996) and ESL programs. Traditionally, language is conceived as a summation of 4 parts: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. These four skills can be further divided into sub-skills. In order to teach the target language, instructors break the language into manageable components within the four skill areas. IEP and ESL course offerings reflect this four-part division of language. Choose any language program at random and you will likely find course titles such as “Beginning Listening and Speaking” or “Advanced Writing.”

In the skill-based curriculum, teacher's might center on the language learner's mastery of a certain task or function. The notional-functional syllabus, which still appears as the organizational structure of teacher syllabi and listening textbooks such as Strategies in Listening: Tasks for Listening Development (Rost & Uruno, 1995) reflects the concept of functional language development through specific tasks. For example, curricula might be organized around topics such as greetings, invitations, requests, advice, interruptions, or gratitude.
(Brown, 1994). Each of the topics represents task, or sub-skill, from a communicative perspective. The strength of the notional-functional syllabus, even within a skill-based curriculum, is its emphasis on functional language, language for communication (Richard-Amato, 1996). Viewing language as a defined set of components does not guarantee, however, that students who master the isolated tasks will achieve the desired level of competency in the language (Richard-Amato, 1996).

The sub-skills of the notional-functional syllabus acknowledge the need for students to function in contextualized situations, yet it does not make an important shift in perspective from learning language skills from a manipulated context to acquiring language as it is experienced in content. The components tend to be “an artificial breakdown of communication into discrete functions” (Richard-Amato, 1996, p. 17) instead of a mirror of the real function of language.

For this reason, many IEPs and ESL programs seek to utilize a communicative approach within their curriculum. In fact, Brown (1994) identifies communicative language teaching as the overwhelming approach to instruction. Nunan (1991) describes the distinctive markers of communicative language teaching as follows: (1) emphasizing interaction in the target language, (2) introducing authentic texts into the classroom, (3) giving some attention to the process of learning (metacognition), and (4) attempting to connect what is learned in the language classroom with real-life language beyond the classroom.
The communicative approach also encourages tasks that foster negotiation of meaning within a situational context (Richard-Amato, 1996).

Many IEPs and ESL programs continue to operate within a skill-based curriculum, while recognizing the importance of communication and context in their choice of communicative, and even notional-functional, approaches in the classroom. Yet some programs are exploring a type of instructional curriculum that emphasizes the integration of skills in a discourse context and fosters language acquisition from the study of content. Content-based instruction expands upon the notional-functional syllabus and communicative language teaching and shifts the perspective from establishing a context to teach the language skills to utilizing the discourse of sustained content to acquire a language.

Content-based instruction

For approximately the last fifteen years, the idea of content-based instruction (CBI) has been part of the discussions on communicative competency and the student's ability to use the language in a functional way. Of concern to ESL instructors and administrators in higher education is the ESL student's competency in academic discourse, which concerns itself with the language of the academic world. CBI may provide the balance between communicative competency and academic literacy, which requires one to master both the language and the conventions of academia. Such mastery is the goal that LC
has set for its second language students. Simply stated, CBI assumes content material is the medium for language instruction. According to Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (1989), content-based instruction is the "integration of content learning with language teaching aims." That is to say that the acquisition of a target language takes place within the context of meaningful, authentic language presented through specified content matter. For example, an ESL student might enroll in a course where the content area is literature. As the students seek to understand and respond to the literature presented in class, the language teacher addresses the linguistic needs of the students. The content might as easily be biology or mathematics as long as the content is the means by which ESL instruction takes place and the outcome is language learning.

A content-based approach to language learning also seeks to incorporate the learners' needs and interest into the language classroom, and the content-based approach takes an integrative approach to language methods. For instance, some instructional approaches perpetuate a very narrow view of how a learner will ideally learn a language. A program could adopt a purely communicative approach, which emphasizes communication as the key to acquisition, or it may use grammar-based methods, which emphasize understanding of linguistic structure. The content-based approach welcomes a balance between use and usage (Widdowson, 1978). It also allows educators to address both communicative competence and academic literacy within the medium of one's second language.
Kasper (2000) agrees with Brinton et al’s definition of content-based instruction, and continues the discussion of content-based instruction by pointing out the link with English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movements in colleges and universities. Like English for Academic Purposes and Writing Across the Curriculum, content-based language instruction recognizes the advantages of contextualized learning where students are expected to apply and to adapt skills and proficiencies in a number of situations. An overview of CBI includes the following primary assumptions:

1. Contextualized language learning is better than language learning in isolation.
2. Language learning employs the use of at least two domains, cognitive and affective
3. Language learning occurs on at least two levels or in at least two dimensions simultaneously, communicative and linguistic
4. Language naturally functions as a tool for the exchange of knowledge

While the philosophy driving all models of content-based instruction may be the same, CBI usually falls in one of three groups on a continuum. Theme-based, sheltered or self-contained, and adjunct or linked classes all fall under the heading of content-based instruction; however, the implications of each model may differ. For example, a theme-based class may follow multiple units organized around a central interesting idea. That unit may last weeks or days depending on the learners’ interests and the teacher’s planning before a new topic or unit will introduce more ideas (content) and linguistic features. Theme-
based CBI is probably the most familiar of the three models and probably the easiest to adopt (Johns, 1997).

On the other extreme are adjunct or linked courses. Here the idea is to have language students enroll in both a mainstream content course and a coordinated language course in order to improve the target language and cover, or reinforce, content from the mainstream class. Somewhere in between these two approaches is the sheltered or self-contained course where language teachers provide the content to a segregated group of non-native speakers of English.

The possibilities for application of content-based instruction may seem endless; however, the key components to content-based instruction are its commitment to developing both use and usage of the target language and its commitment to authentic material and authentic language as the primary medium for language learning.

**Purpose of this study**

In trying to develop a curriculum for a new ESL program, one may face a mountain of frustration. The temptation to simply model the new program after an existing one is strong, yet so is the pull to understand from a theoretical perspective if a particular program's approach is truly advantageous. This study seeks to understand this initial stage of curricular development as teachers and
administrators make decisions about the goals of the program and the ideal curricular framework for achieving those goals.

By examining a current trend in ESL instruction, CBI, through the lens of second language acquisition research and then analyzing it in light of the experiences of other teachers as documented in case studies, the intersection of research and pedagogy become clearer. Factoring in their unique situations, goals, and learners, teachers and administrators can arrive at curricular framework with a balanced perspective between applied linguistics research and pedagogy. While much work has been done individually by both researchers and teachers to understand and promote language learning, more work needs to be done that applies and acknowledges the research conscious-perspective that drives our decisions. Additionally, for teachers and administrators exploring curricular options, the literature concerning CBI concentrates primarily on practices at larger institutions such as UCLA. More needs to be written on ESL programs of varied scope and size. In response to this need, this thesis contains an immediate, two-fold purpose: to examine the important area of second language learning theory and how it upholds the content-based approach and to conceive how CBI might be adapted to a small ESL program.

In a larger sense, this thesis seeks to draw attention to the crucial areas of policy writing, curriculum planning, and course planning for ESL in higher education. It is hoped that the long-term impact of this thesis is to encourage thoughtful, careful consideration and planning by college administrators prior to
ESL program implementation as American institutions seek to achieve multicultural environments.

Research questions

Using the setting of LC as the basis for discussion and in order to exemplify a process of making theoretically and pedagogically sound curricular decisions and to meet the goals of this thesis as stated above, the following questions will be addressed:

1. What are the appropriate theoretical foundations supporting content-based instruction according to second language acquisition (SLA) researchers?

2. In what ways and to what extent is the content-based approach pedagogically appropriate for LC?

3. Are there other ESL programs at colleges of similar scope and size that have adopted content-based instruction? What specific problems have they encountered? What types of courses appear in a content-based college ESL program, and on what levels?
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Content-based instruction and the role of research in pedagogy

As a teacher or language program administrator, one will usually have a preference for one method over another or one approach to language learning over another. These preferences are often the result of years of experience and intuitive knowledge about the nature of language learning and language teaching. However, professional ethics would, I think, dictate that teachers and policy decision-makers understand and acknowledge the theoretical principles underlying our philosophies, our intuitions even, about language learning.

As explained in Chapter 1, content-based instruction in the language classroom has received growing attention in the last decade. It seems to combine the best of an immersion situation with formal instruction as it provides for language learning through the medium of authentic subject matter. The question of what constitutes authentic needs to be addressed at this point. Although the idea of authenticity warrants a much greater discussion, for the purpose of this paper "authentic" will refer to language or language materials that carry meaning, free of stilted language, and context embedded (Brown, 1994).

This view of language and instructional approach is in direct contrast with the all too usual approach to language instruction that places language skills in isolation from communication or content (Brown, 1994). Moreover, Adamson (1993) contends that CBI not only places language skills in their appropriate
context, but through the content chosen additionally supplies the background knowledge, schema for academic study at an American college or university that non-native speakers of English might otherwise lack. For example, a non-native speaker of English might not have sufficient background knowledge of American politics to comprehend a lecture in a political science course, a course that many college students take. Brown (1994, p. 82) explains that in a content-based classroom “language takes on its appropriate roles as a vehicle for accomplishing a set of content goals.” This view of language as authentic, context dependent, and informational raises some important considerations for language program curriculums.

While CBI seems logical, is it enough for instructors and program administrators to simply follow trends in language education? Continuing the discussion from Chapter 1, I would argue that a blind following of trends and the “everybody’s-doing-it principle” only works if the leader’s reasoning is solid and valid. More often than not, it is the blind following of pedagogical trends which leads to the pendulum swings in education. It is this switch from one extreme approach to the next that purist researchers point to as evidence for their claim that research in second language acquisition (SLA), for example, should be viewed and considered separately from research, not as a definitive foundation for pedagogical practices (Ellis, 1994).

In response to the purist researchers, I maintain that instructors and administrators need to be aware of the current research and the theory behind
curricular frameworks and classroom methodology, such as CBI related issues, in order to make sound judgments in each of these crucial areas. By taking time to examine new approaches to language education from a theoretical perspective, instructors give greater credence to their pedagogy and curricular decisions. Accordingly in this chapter I seek to answer the following simple, but important research question:

What are the appropriate theoretical foundations supporting content-based instruction according to second language acquisition (SLA) researchers?

Second language acquisition

In the 1980s, Krashen’s monitor theory (Krashen, 1981; 1982; 1985) emerged with its five hypotheses of language learning and promoted the spread of the Natural Approach to language teaching (Markee, 1997). In these five original hypotheses are the roots of current SLA issues such as focus on form and negotiation of meaning. Krashen, although a somewhat controversial researcher and theorist, provides an important departure point for this discussion on the theory-conscious pedagogy.

Here one can begin to see the theoretical reasoning behind the now generally accepted idea of authentic material and meaningful communication. Ironically, Krashen dismisses formal instruction as an avenue for mere learning not for acquisition, which he distinguishes as two distinct processes (Krashen,
As Krashen defines it, acquisition is a subconscious, natural process similar to that of the L1. Learning, however, is a conscious process involving formalized instruction, and learning does not aid acquisition (Markee, 1997). However, a comparison to other SLA studies such as Ellis’ “Consciousness-raising” (1994) and even Prabhu’s (1987) case study of the Communicational Teaching Project in southern India, suggests that Krashen’s dismissal of formal instruction may have been premature, and that formal instruction in a meaningful context can indeed have a positive impact on acquisition of grammar for example. In fact, Prabhu (1987) claims that the best way to learn grammar is to focus on meaning; however, he is not suggesting that formal instruction cannot provide a means for learning grammar. The details may be debated but the theme is evident: issues of authenticity and meaningful instruction are important to the current SLA school of thought.

While not everyone agrees with Krashen’s five hypotheses of his Acquisition Theory as a viable explanation of language processes (VanPatten, 1994; Shannon, 1994), there is a general acceptance that parts of Krashen’s Acquisition Theory, particularly the Input Hypothesis, do have some merit as a descriptive metaphor for what seems to be happening in the language classroom (Krahnke, 1994). The central tenet of Krashen’s Input Hypothesis relates directly to the assumption made by content-based instruction that contextualized presentation of language features is preferable to an isolated presentation. This concept is directly related to Krashen’s comprehensible input.
Comprehensible input, by Krashen's accounts, is the catalyst for language acquisition. Without comprehensible input, according to Krashen, language acquisition cannot and will not take place (Krashen, 1985). It is important to note that the exact meaning of comprehensible input is a bit fuzzy, and for lack of precision Krashen has taken his share of criticism. However, the idea that language learning, or acquisition as Krashen would carefully delineate, occurs when the input is comprehensible and slightly above our current level, \( i + 1 \) (Krashen's notation), coincides with themes in numerous studies summarizing teacher talk (Chaudron 1988, cited in Ellis 1994) in which the speech was slightly modified to accommodate the level of the learner and with Vygotsky's description of the Zone of Proximal Development (Lantolf & Appel, 1994), which will be considered later in this review.

The idea of comprehensible input can also be tied to negotiation of meaning, a point where communication ceases and the participants must make clarification of the intended meaning and mutual understanding. In fact, Ellis (1992), building from Long's work, suggests that negotiation of meaning is an essential component of acquisition. There are other more indirect means of supporting Krashen's idea of comprehensible input such as occurrences of caretaker talk (Snow & Ferguson, 1977; Waterson & Snow, 1978). Researchers found that caretakers tended to adjust their speech when talking to children who have yet to acquire their first language. This talk is sometimes called "baby-talk" or "child-directed language" (Ellis, 1994, p. 247) A similar adjustment has also
been identified in second language acquisition. It is called foreigner talk (Ellis, 1994; Freed, 1981). Foreigner talk refers to the modified speech of native speakers when communicating with non-native speakers of the language. Both caretaker talk and foreigner talk exemplify an attempt to make the input comprehensible although it is likely still to be slightly about the learners level. The presence of a silent period (Ellis, 1994; Saville-Troike, 1988; Rodriguez 1982), which describes the stage that all first-language learners and many second-language learners go through, is also indirect evidence to support Krashen’s theory. During the silent period the learner defers speaking for a time in favor of listening. The emphasis on immersion programs as quality language learning environments and the delayed first and second acquisition when both parents are deaf and unable to provide comprehensible input (Ellis, 1994) are also cited as indirect evidence of Krashen’s ideas. It should be noted that there is another underlying assumption emerging in this list of indirect and related evidence.

SLA research relies heavily on its understanding of L1 acquisition to predict and understand the second language acquisition process. The L1 process thus provides a starting point for L2 educators and researchers and further supports the role of comprehensible input. Even Ellis (1992) who disagrees with the assertion that simplified input alone explains acquisition must admit that his apprehensions do not diminish the notion of simplified or comprehensible input.
Although the exact role of comprehensible input in language acquisition may not be in consensus (Ellis cites Long, a peer of Krashen's idea, as disagreeing on exactly what constitutes comprehensible input), the research suggests an advantage to providing students with comprehensible input. While some experts disagree, Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (1989) directly link the idea of comprehensible input to CBI, citing CBI's medium as contextualized information profitable for both language and informational (content material) learning.

For many researchers, what is noticeably missing from Krashen's discussion acquisition and the role of input is the place of learner output in the language acquisition process. Krashen (1985) claims that what the learner produces has no bearing on language acquisition, and that input alone is sufficient for language acquisition. According to Krashen, the Output Hypothesis would require every component of language to be tested separately by the learner, and Krashen could not imagine that extensive hypothesis-testing taking place in the brain (Krashen, 1985). One might argue the point of output preceding or marking language acquisition, yet output in the target language is a desirable and component of second language proficiency.

Using Swain's work on communicative competence and the roles of both comprehensible input and comprehensible output (1985, cited in Ellis 1994), Ellis suggests that output is a necessary component to achieving grammatical competence and that output in the form of hypothesis testing by the learner
promotes a more bottom-up, inductive approach. Swain and Ellis are not alone in their thinking that output does indeed have a place, but it is important to see the link between output and other learning concepts already mentioned in this brief review. Swain suggests that this output burst occurs when the learner is pushed into production. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) assumes that the expert, or teacher, is pushing the student just beyond what he or she is capable of reaching alone in order to acquire that next developmental stage (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). Content-based approaches incorporate both comprehensible input and output into their approach assuming that the content provides important clues for the learner as well as exposure to higher cognitive skills that may fall into the Zone of Proximal Development.

Vygotsky's notion of scaffolding also provides theoretical support for content-based principles (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). Scaffolding is closely related to the Zone of Proximal Development discussed above. Scaffolding acts as a cognitive stepladder for learners. The idea is to build on prior knowledge and for the expert, or teacher, to provide enough support that the student can move beyond his or her current developmental level to the next. Scaffolding is structured and planned based upon a series of cognitive steps. Clearly, content-based instruction uses the material being taught as a way to build knowledge in the learner and through formal instruction to provide the "hooks" on which to hang the new language skills. The idea of scaffolding returns us to the idea of contextualized, or authentic meaning, that seems to aid acquisition (Ellis, 1994).
Clearly there is another emerging pattern that argues for expert formal instruction and meaningful context simultaneously, which would combine the presence of comprehensible input and scaffolding.

This link between comprehensible input, the Zone of Proximal Development, and other cognitive influences on second language acquisition are not surprising. Bialystok (1978, cited in Ellis 1994) suggests that the interplay between explicit and implicit knowledge must be considered. Bialystock agrees largely with Krashen; however, she argues that explicit knowledge in the sense of conscious linguistic understanding can become implicit with structured practice. Bialystock seems to be drawing from the idea that learned features can be developed to a level of automaticity over time. Here in this slight deviation from Krashen one can see an even greater case for the type of balance between a natural approach and a formal approach to language learning. Bialystock, however, is not alone in examining the relationship between implicit and explicit knowledge.

In explaining the model of proficiency that content-based instruction follows, Kasper (2000) turns to the work of Cummins (1981). Cummins makes a distinction between basic interpersonal skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). This model of language proficiency suggests that learners, especially those enrolled in colleges or seeking enrollment in colleges where the medium of instruction is entirely in the target language, must develop both communicative skills and linguistic know-how. Bardovi-Harlig’s (1996) study
on the specific input from an academic advising session underscores this idea of basic interpersonal communication skills acquisition and cognitive/academic language proficiency acquisition and suggests that students often lag behind the development of this kind of pragmatic competency. Furthermore, Cummins maintains that conversation alone cannot account for the acquisition of academic literacy in the target language. Kasper (2000) sees this model as the basis for the task-based learning associated with multidisciplinary content-based instruction.

Another important distinction in language learning is somewhat related to these two views argued by Cummins. Many SLA researchers try to distinguish between implicit knowledge and explicit knowledge (Ellis, 1994). To return to Krashen and his Acquisition Theory, one could also view this distinction in conjunction with acquisition versus learning. The research goes back and forth between which is better and what implicit knowledge of a language means, etc. However, more important is the prevailing concept that there are both internalized, unconscious aspects of language development, even in the L2, and that there are external, conscious aspects of language development. The research cited in Ellis (1994) reaches no definitive conclusion, but it seems that both aspects are worth some attention both in the research field and the classroom. The implication is that the second language learner benefits from access to both implicit and explicit knowledge and that an acquisition-rich learning environment accounts for this. Leaving room for both inductive and
deductive learning, the content-based approach can meet both of those needs. Perhaps even more to the point, literate adults often prefer a deductive approach to an inductive approach, and CBI can accommodate both of these.

Turning to the affective domain, Ellis (1994) cites motivation as the “key” to second language acquisition even though there is no consensus on what one really means by motivation or to what degree motivation affects the L2. Ellis reviews several types of motivation such as the Internal Cause Hypothesis, which describes the motivation the learner brings to the learning situation; the Intrinsic Hypothesis, which describes motivation springing from the learners inherent interest in the task at hand; and the Carrot & Stick Hypothesis, which describes motivation in relation to external influences and incentives associated with the learning situation (names borrowed from Skehan 1989). While the Internal Cause Hypothesis has received most of the attention in the research, and unfortunately it is the Intrinsic Hypothesis and the Carrot & Stick Hypothesis that would seem to hold the greatest promise for explaining the principles of motivation in content-based classrooms. However, the patterns in Ellis (1994) suggest that researchers agree that motivation is crucial. Linking language learning to content is a clear attempt to make the classroom more motivating and relevant to the students as evidenced by content-based instruction’s shared philosophy with English for Specific Purposes.

In short, the patterns in SLA research lead one to believe the following principles that underlie content-based instruction have been applied to a
reasonable degree:

- the context of authentic language affects the way that language is processed and more closely mimics eventual language use better than isolated linguistic examples.
- for lack of a complete model of L2 acquisition, L1 acquisition can provide some insight.
- comprehensible input is necessary for second language acquisition, although if it is sufficient for acquisition and what constitutes comprehensible is open to interpretation.
- both cognitive and affective domains influence learner language although the exact role and the degree of influence may be debated.
- purely communicative language is different from the language of the academic world, and both functional and academic literacy should be taken into account.
- both implicit and explicit knowledge of a language exists and must be factored into our ultimate view of proficiency.
- motivation is an aspect of language learner that cannot be ignored.

However, the most important point to take from the SLA research is that no single method or theory has yet to satisfactorily explain how a person acquires or learns a language. This frustrating reality may actually grant more freedom for
individual teachers since it places more emphasis on creating a flexible curricular framework, such a content-based approach, allowing for multiple methods tailored to the general needs and cognitive styles of the learners at any given time.

**Content-based approaches and English for Academic Purposes**

Content-based approaches have been around in different forms for over twenty years, but only in the last ten years has CBI begun to receive great attention. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the growth of programs such as Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and the recognition of English for Academic Purposes (English for Academic Purposes) naturally lend themselves to the content-based approach. Although many ESL and intensive English programs remain in the skill-based tradition, it is not entirely uncommon to find some programs utilizing one of the following prototypes of a content-based approach to some degree: theme-based, sheltered, and adjunct models.

To understand the merits of CBI, it is important to understand the concept of academic literacy. Johns (1997) uses the term academic literacy in her book *Text, Role, and Context* to refer to "ways of knowing particular content, languages, and practices. It [also] refers to strategies for understanding, discussing, organizing, and producing texts. In addition, it relates to the social context in which a discourse is produced and the roles and communities of text readers and writers" (p. 2). Johns goes on to say that achieving academic
literacy is really a matter of gaining multiple literacies and that such an achievement is a continuous, complex process. Later as Johns makes her argument for the teaching of academic literacy, she equates CBI with Language-Across-the-Curriculum (LAC), and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). This assumption that CBI is synonymous with English for Academic Purposes is an important one for ESL programs in higher education, which often cater to university-bound students and accordingly tend to focus on English for Academic Purposes.

As a proponent of academic literacies, Johns (1997) views CBI as favorable for students. Good CBI teachers, she proposes "make use of content experts, and they integrate language, reading, and writing, concepts, and critical thinking" (p. 86). Although Johns demonstrates a clear preference for the linked, or adjunct model of CBI, she admits that "the other CBI models [sheltered and theme-based], if well executed, can also be effective in advancing student literacies" (p. 86). Furthermore, she acknowledges that sheltered and theme-based models are easier to implement and administer then linked (adjunct) courses. Johns' insights and assertions come from both her understanding of the theoretical underpinning of academic literacy and from her experience at San Diego State University's Integrated Curriculum (IC), which has incorporated linked (adjunct) courses into its program since 1985 with phenomenal success (Johns, 1997, pp. 81-87).
Fortunately for those trying to assess the value of content-based instruction and compatibility with a specific environment, teachers can look to those instructors and directors who have documented their experiences with CBI, like Johns, and use these as guides. Examples of these cases from reputable programs such as UCLA are reviewed in the section that follows.

**Content-based models**

Through the examination and discussion of specific content-based programs, answers to the final two research questions are sought:

1. In what ways and to what extent is the content-based approach pedagogically appropriate for Louisiana College?

2. Are there other ESL programs at colleges of similar scope and size that have adopted content-based instruction in? What specific problems have they encountered? What types of courses appear in a content-based college intensive English program, and on what levels?

First three different programs will be reviewed, each representing one of the three types of content-based instruction: theme-based, sheltered, and adjunct (linked). Then a specific theme-based approach targeting lower level students will be considered.

The University of Arizona’s Center for English as a Second Language (CESL) provides a model of theme-based content instruction (Adamson, 1993).
The program is intensive in nature, and like most intensive English programs it has students from a variety of backgrounds who have not yet entered the university as a degree-seeking student. Some of the students will ultimately continue as degree-seeking students at the University of Arizona while others will attend university elsewhere. There are a few students in the CESL program that will complete their English language studies only to return to their homeland. The CESL program operates seven levels of proficiency, and on the two most advanced levels three theme-based courses have been offered in the past. Adamson, 1993) describes three such courses: A news magazine course in which students used *Time* magazine as the text, a literature course in which no specific textbook was assigned, and a planned academic reading class in which the text *Reading at the University* by Linda Harbaugh Hillman (1990) would be used.

The news magazine course met daily for two hours, and the students voted on the class theme for the week. The selected theme would then dictate the readings from *Time*. The students also completed personal readings based on a self-selected theme. Using the content from the magazine, students practiced skimming and scanning skills, developed vocabulary, and practiced various types of writing. Speaking and listening skills were integrated into the class through debates and required oral reports that grew from the content presented in the magazine.
The literature course also meets each day, but for only one hour. The eight-week session was divided in half with each half adhering to a theme such as “Decisions.” Using a variety of genres including poetry, short stories, and even an abridged novel, the teacher selected the literature based on the theme. The teacher was careful to relate the theme to the students’ own experiences in making important decisions such as their decision to study English in the U.S. As in the news magazine course, the teacher elicited various language skills such as writing, pronunciation, and obviously reading through the medium of the literature. For example, pronunciation practice came through oral readings of poetry.

Finally, the academic reading course in the planning stage would focus on the type of reading that students would encounter in college textbooks across a range of disciplines and genres. The emphasis of the class will be to introduce students to the types of reading demands, including research training, and subsequent questions they will discover as a degree-seeking university student.

Adamson (1993) acknowledges that the content-courses described above do not completely utilize authentic texts. Previously, the problem of authenticity in a classroom was addressed, and if authenticity this conceptualized on a continuum, then the texts in these courses, especially the news magazine course and the literature course, were more authentic than those of a skill-based language class using textbooks written only for the purpose of eliciting specific language forms. And as Adamson points out “this type of course [theme-based]
is appropriate for students who are not ready to handle the intensive study of authentic material" (1993, p. 124). Yet Adamson also warns that such classes should not be considered complete and full preparation for the mainstream curriculum of colleges and universities. Instead Adamson argues that adjunct models of content-based instruction provided the best preparation for the university’s academic demands. However, the adjunct model also has its disadvantages.

Before the adjunct model is considered, the sheltered instruction model of content-based programs needs to be examined. First, it is important to remember that sheltered courses enroll only ESL students in credit-bearing content, or subject, course at the college level. At the University of Ottawa, an introduction to psychology course was offered as a sheltered course for French speaking students. Because one of the biggest challenges for the ESL students is simply to comprehend the subject matter, the instructors adopted a more accessible style of teaching for the ESL students. For example, the instructors built more redundancy into lectures. In short, the instructors modified their teaching style to accommodate the non-native speakers. However, Adamson (1993) concludes in the modified delivery of material speed was sacrificed; therefore, the ESL students were unable to cover the same amount of material as the English-speaking psychology class. This is an important consideration for both ESL instructors and for college administrators who must decide if the
college will accept sheltered courses as being the equivalent of mainstream, non-ESL, college courses.

Finally, adjunct courses offer the ultimate content-based approach to language learning. Adamson cites the Freshman Summer Program at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) as the primary example of an adjunct content course. In this program ESL students who have won admission to UCLA enter an intensive seven-week program to hone their English skills prior to beginning full-time academic work. The program consists of a single credit course and a linked ESL course. UCLA offers a variety of courses from across the disciplinary board. The primary goal is to develop academic strategies such as note taking, reading, and writing while building background knowledge. The advantage of the adjunct course is that students have a real stake in developing skills like note taking, dictionary usage, and writing because they see an immediate need and purpose in the credit course. A problem in the linked ESL course is staying focused on the linguistic needs of the students. The ESL component of the adjunct course could easily become focused only on the content material; however, the students at the adjunct level, although quite advanced, still need language help.

Additionally, Donna Brinton (1997) discusses the challenges of selecting content for yet another UCLA program utilizing CBI. In UCLA's summer adjunct program for visiting international students who are not admitted to the university, ESL students attend two linked courses. The courses selected for the summer
adjunct program were Economics; Psychology; Western Civilization; American History, 1900-present and Communication Studies. One of the problems that Brinton and her colleagues did not fully account for was the required background knowledge that the students would need to successfully participate in the chosen content areas. When students began falling behind in the content because of the overwhelming amount of new information, they simply gave up, and consequently, the content-based approach to language instruction failed to adequately meet the students' language needs.

In this case, motivation, which should ideally increase in a content-based program, lagged. In fact, several of the students even stopped trying to understand the content of their chosen course. Ironically, this is a first-hand example of why CBI should be a primary consideration for programs that promote English for Academic Purposes. If the students do not have sufficient background knowledge to function fluently in a content area in the target language under the guidance and care of language teachers, then how much more will their motivation lag in the mainstream classroom?

The reasoning behind adopting CBI should be fully disclosed to the student, however, if the students' perceptions and expectations are to match the program's approach. In the case above, one student seemed to understand from the beginning the philosophy of the content-based approach, and that one student was the most satisfied with the course. Other students ultimately
admitted that the course ended better than they thought, but they still felt that the aspect of language study was somewhat lost in the content.

Insuring that the language study focus is not lost in the content is a valid concern, and at the lower levels of study, this concern takes an even greater importance. Kasper (2000) admits that many lower level ESL programs take a skills-based approach. The reasoning behind such an approach is that lower level students are still in need of basic syntax and vocabulary not content. However, Kasper points out that these lower level students often have the same goal, study at a US university, as the advanced students and are ultimately in need of the same competence in academic discourse, and Johns (1999) would add academic literacies, as the student at the advanced level.

But how can students with limited language access the content presented as the medium of language instruction? Kasper (2000) proposes that with inventive thinking, teachers can make CBI materials comprehensible to lower level students. She relays her experience with short stories and lower level students. Short stories, Kasper (2000, p. 108-09) maintains, are “especially useful as a starting point because they are authentic literary texts written for a native-speaking audience. Using short stories in a lower level ESL course exposes students to the real-life English that they can expect to read and hear in their mainstream college courses and in the process builds vocabulary, enhances fluency in reading, and engages students actively in learning.
Kasper cites her successful experience using short stories in a theme-based CBI situation with students scoring as low as 350 on the TOEFL. The apparent success of Kaper's use of CBI at the lower levels relies on her sensitivity to scaffolding. For example, Kasper takes what she calls a multimedia approach incorporating a variety of activities that appeal to a student-centered classroom and multiple learning styles. She specifically cites tools such as advanced organizers to activate schemata and thus "bridging the gap between the knowledge the ESL student already has and the knowledge he or she needs to comprehend the text" (Kasper, 2000, p. 109). Recall that Adamson (1993) and Johns (1997) both recognize background knowledge as a key to academic success for the non-native speaker of English in an American university. In fact, Kasper (2000) reports that lower level students from the CBI classroom did score higher on both reading and writing assessments administered by the department and by the college than did their non-CBI counterparts. The intuitive judgments of many teachers, myself included, that would reserve CBI for the advanced level ESL student deserve to be reconsidered in light of documented cases like this one.

The examples described above are examples of content-based instruction that have been successfully implemented in several settings. Each is a unique setting, and admittedly UCLA's setting is completely different from the environment embodied in LC that anchors the perspective of this study. While these case studies may not be able to predict perfectly what one might expect to
happen at LC, these cases can be used to predict possible pitfalls and project likely benefits of content-based instruction in general. It also complements the concept of research-conscious pedagogy, which seeks to honor the collective, practical experiences of successful programs and respected teachers with the emerging understanding of second language learning from diligent researchers.

The application of these two valuable perspectives hold important implications for colleges like LC, which is anticipating an increased enrollment of non-native speakers of English and which seeks to prepare those students for full-time academic study at their institution. Following a brief discussion of the methodology of this study, chapter 4 discusses the possible application, limitations, and adaptations of CBI at LC.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

An overview

Before discussing the methodology followed by this study, it is important to review the specific research questions outlined in Chapter 1. The questions are listed below.

1. What are the appropriate theoretical foundations supporting content-based instruction according to second language acquisition (SLA) researchers?
2. In what ways and to what extent is the content-based approach pedagogically appropriate for Louisiana College?
3. Are there other ESL programs at colleges of similar scope and size that have adopted content-based instruction? What specific problems have they encountered? What types of courses appear in a content-based college ESL program, and on what levels?

Questions 1 and 2 were investigated by consulting the relevant literature in SLA, English for Academic Purposes, content-based instruction, and second language curriculum development in order to delineate the general assumptions and accepted practices in the related areas. For question 2, the anticipated needs or demands of non-native English speakers from the perspective of the faculty and administration were also considered and those needs were compared to the strengths of a content-based approach to language education.
For Question 3, programs documented in the literature that utilize content-based instruction in their language programs were examined in order to provide concrete models of how this approach has been implemented.

**Approaching the research**

Since the mid-1980s the idea of content-based instruction has been a topic of great interest to ESL and EFL teachers. Several publications have included SLA principles in their discussions of content-based classrooms and programs. For example, Kasper (2000) and Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (1989) provide a summary of theoretical foundations and an extensive reference list. Both through reading their understanding of the theory behind the pedagogy and by their use of bibliographies as a suggested reading list, one can begin to get a broader picture of content-based instruction.

Perhaps the most difficult part of synthesizing the SLA material was deciding exactly which material to include. Because SLA theorists tend not to arrive at a single Truth, but tend to reflect the complex intricacies of language acquisition and learning, a clever reader and thinker could take almost any isolated body of research and use it to argue for or against a particular view. Deciding how to categorize and limit the information became of utmost importance. When even experts like Ellis can become entangled in a web of claims and counterclaims when wading through a multitude of SLA studies, it was decided that an approach that looked for broad accepted patterns would be
the most beneficial. Arguing that teachers and administrators should be aware of new findings in SLA research and considering their pedagogy in light of that knowledge, this paper looks for patterns throughout the research, which probably parallels the approach that busy ESL teachers would take.

As discussed in Chapter 1, narrowing the major assumptions of content-based instruction into the following assertions focused the review of the literature to aid understanding of the interface between research and pedagogical practice:

1. Contextualized language learning is better than language learning in isolation.
2. Language learning employs the use of at least two domains, cognitive and affective.
3. Language learning occurs on at least two levels or in at least two dimensions simultaneously, communicative and linguistic.
4. Language naturally functions as a tool for the exchange of knowledge.

The SLA literature was then reviewed in light of these assumptions to see how well-supported each of these assertions are according to what one can reasonably say about second language acquisition. In addition to SLA theory, the literature specifically targeting content-based instruction (CBI) was consulted to find the related threads in both areas.
Finding the models

Originally, profiles of ESL and IEPs at other colleges of similar size and scope as LC were to be included. Initially, programs were selected using the online college rankings of *US News and World Report* as a baseline for quality and similarity. Those colleges ranking in the top 25 Southern liberal arts colleges were then examined in order to keep a close comparison to the size and scope of LC. For a broader perspective, the top 25 liberal arts colleges in the nation were also considered. The profile search on-line at USNews.com allowed me to sort the selected colleges by those having an ESL program or special classes for ESL students. Furthermore, by accessing the web sites of each college with intensive English or ESL programs, mission statements and course offerings of each intensive English program were studied for evidence of theme-based, sheltered, or adjunct courses that would indicate a content-based approach as the primary structure for the intensive English or ESL program.

However, it soon became painfully obvious that smaller (less than 2000 students as defined by *US News & World Report*) liberal arts colleges have not yet adopted the content-based approach as their curricular structure. Of those selected colleges identified through the *US News & World Report* rankings (see Table 1), only Ouachita Baptist University showed any indication of including a content-based perspective; however, the content-based selections such as “American Culture,” “American History,” and “Computer Skills” were offered on a rotating basis as elective courses. The curriculum at Ouachita Baptist University
Table 1. Selected colleges examined for content-based approaches

<table>
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<tr>
<th>College Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mary Baldwin College (VA)</td>
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<td>Eastern Mennonite University (VA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ouachita Baptist University (AR)</td>
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<td>Union University (TN)</td>
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<td>Davis &amp; Elkins College (WV)</td>
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<td>Maryville College (TN)</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Brown University (AR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coker College (SC)</td>
<td>SC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bryan College (TN)</td>
<td>TN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warren Wilson College (NC)</td>
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remains largely in the skill-based tradition offering courses in grammar, pronunciation, reading, and writing on three levels of instruction. Through email correspondence with the international recruiter at Ouachita Baptist University, it was learned that the ESL program was in a period of transition as the new program director was waiting to be appointed. More specific information about the program’s curriculum could not be obtained.

Adopting only part of the content-based perspective, as Ouachita Baptist University has, echoes a 1996 survey by Hafemik, Messerschmitt, and Vandrik that found theme-based units within the skill-based structure accounted for 61% of the content-based course work reported. The same survey reported ESP courses, including TOEFL preparation classes, as making up 42% of what IEPs consider content courses. Like the programs considered in the survey, the IEP and ESL programs included in the initial search for content-based models continue in the skill-based tradition to second language learning as evidenced by their course listings: grammar, listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Although the content-based approach is not limited theoretically to larger universities, it was realized that finding the number of complete CBI models
needed to survey current programs housed at colleges similar to LC. The reasons for this apparent limitation will be discussed in the next chapter. While apparently few content-based ESL programs currently exist on campuses similar to LC, a fair number of content-based programs do exist within the general field of ESL. Programs recognized by the professional community and often cited in the literature by the leading experts on the content-based approach, such as Kasper (2000) and Brinton (1997), were chosen as an alternative means of obtaining a working model of CBI in higher education.

Without question there is a limitation to using these models as a heuristic for the specific context and needs of a small liberal arts college like LC. The dynamics of ESL programs are complicated, affected not only by the choice of curriculum but the current student enrollment, the instructors, the environment, and the goals of the program. However, even with the acknowledged limitations, these models, examined against all language educators' plumb line of theory, allow one to conceive how content-based approaches to second language education could be beneficial and even preferable for even the most modest of college intensive English or ESL programs.
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

The research questions

In the previous chapters, the first research question was addressed by reviewing the content-based approach from a SLA perspective and found that content-based instruction is a theoretically sound approach to language instruction. Models of CBI including one example of theme-based CBI employed at the lower levels were reviewed. In this chapter, the reasonable application of these models to the specific setting of LC will be considered in an effort to show how a small program might adapt a content-based curriculum. The discussion will also consider the choice of content for CBI and the administrative limitations of CBI in small programs.

What the models teach us

The adjunct model, being the more logistically complex of the content-based models, provides several examples of potential difficulties for a new program. For example, from the study of UCLA's ESL Service Courses advanced level content-based model it was learned that the perceived gap between learner needs and curricular emphasis, especially in the areas of grammar and vocabulary, seemed to have more to do with students' misunderstanding of the content-based approach than from an actual oversight in the curriculum (Valentine & Repath-Martos, 1997). This is valuable knowledge
for a new program like the one being developed at LC. To avoid misunderstandings and to promote learning, the ESL instructor(s) at LC could either spend some time initially explaining how the content-based approach works and explicitly discussing why the instruction will follow a content-based format. Or the instructors may wish to modify the content-based model so that some explicit instruction of grammar, for example, is included in the classroom. Both Valentine and Repath-Martos (1997) advocate meeting student expectations in such a way in order to promote a favorable learning situation.

Related to student expectations is the student's perception of relevant content and how to choose content so that it is not only relevant, but also accessible to the students. SLA research supports the idea of authentic language, and as discussed in Chapter 2, content-based instruction's emphasis on "real" language situations is a valid approach. However, Brinton's experience forces us to consider what happens to their language studies when students cannot relate to the chosen content. From an administrator's perspective, Brinton warns that adjunct models at the college level require "a high level of student proficiency" (1997, p. 344). For LC, this has important implications on the type of content-based instruction adopted on each level and the attention given to scaffolding on the advanced level where the adjunct model could be adopted.

Based on the experiences of ESL programs at the University of Arizona, the University of Ottawa, UCLA, and additional insights from various other programs with the three different types of content-based approaches, theme-
based, sheltered, and adjunct, important implications for curriculum planning at LC can be drawn.

**Choosing the content**

When considering a content-based approach, one must decide on the specific content to be used. In a recent end-of-the-semester discussion with one of my intensive English classes, students expressed a desire to be exposed to more in-depth and varied content matter in the target language. I listened carefully as one student explained how he missed learning about politics and history and science while he was improving his English. Other students admitted that they were tired of textbooks that began with what they perceived as the same lessons again and again such as asking directions or greeting a stranger. These interactions, the students explained, were easily learned and practiced daily as part of living in the target language. What these perceptive students wanted was more exposure to material in the target language that they will encounter after gaining admission to either undergraduate or graduate programs.

In the previous discussion describing the various kinds of CBI, several different types of content were discussed. Current events and short stories introducing various thematic units were just two of the examples given. Brinton (1997) relates her experience in choosing content for CBI and notes that one needs to factor in background knowledge and interests when selecting content.
Are there certain types of content that make better mediums for language instruction than others?

Hilles and Lynch (1997) discuss culture as shared understanding and a logical choice for a CBI classroom. However, Hilles and Lynch point out the culture goes beyond food, music, and dress to include the ways in which people interact and the values that govern their actions. For example, plagiarism is often a cultural misunderstanding instead of an act of academic dishonesty. Hilles and Lynch maintain that the focus of content-based instruction is that "students will learn the target language better and more efficiently if they are taught not the language directly but other subjects in the language" (p. 373) and they argue that "culture, particularly its moral status and its invisibility, is a critical topic which should be addressed in content-based teaching" (p. 373).

I agree with Hilles and Lynch. In my experience with intensive English program students in a listening and speaking class composed largely of men, I recognized a need to discuss the politically correct climate of the American university and to discuss sexual harassment policies. These are invisible cultural topics such as Hilles and Lynch discuss. Understanding these cultural implications hold important implications for language use and usage in the university environment and academic discourse community, which these students seek to enter. If ESL teachers do not discuss these issues with students, then who will?
Another possible source of content is literature. Holten (1997) describes literature as a “quintessential part of content-based curricula and methodology” (p. 387). She begins her argument by acknowledging a noticeable absence of literature from the ESL curriculum. Her personal experience using literature in the classroom is that students’ academic language improves because they begin to use the language in an authentic way instead of concentrating on discrete skills. She maintains that literature as subject matter is accessible to students because literature contains the universal themes of the human race and no special background knowledge is necessary. Holten adds that this is an essential motivating factor to the ESL classroom. Literature is also by its very nature a wealth of grammatical structures and vocabulary. It can also be an excellent model for composition exercises. Perhaps most importantly, Holten argues that literature exposes students to language in a broader and deeper context. Furthermore, literature can also prepare students for the amount and level of reading that they will be required to do at the university, and if the college has literature requirements as LC does, then it seems only logical to expose ESL students to this genre. Choice of content for CBI must take these many factors into consideration; however, the focus should remain on content as a medium for language instruction, not as an end in itself.
Implications for Louisiana College

Because the acquisition of a second language is a complex process that researchers and teachers are only beginning to understand, ESL professionals must keep abreast of new studies and findings in order to make informed decisions about language programs. With a reasonable degree of confidence, LC can proceed with program planning if it keeps the following basic SLA principles from Chapter 2 in mind:

- authentic, contextualized language is preferable to isolated linguistic examples.
- L1 acquisition can provide some insight, but L1 acquisition and L2 acquisition are not the same.
- comprehensible input is necessary, but not explicitly sufficient for second language acquisition.
- both cognitive and affective domains influence learner language to some degree.
- the language of communication is different from the language necessary to achieve academic literacy.
- both implicit and explicit knowledge of a language must be factored into proficiency.
- motivation is an important aspect of language.
For the context at LC, this means that guiding principles such as the
dynamics between Cummin's (1981) cognitive/academic language proficiency
(CALP) and basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) are significant. In
order to create an ESL program that meets the expectations and standards in
place by organizations such as Teaching English to Speakers of Other
Languages (TESOL) and University Consortium of Intensive English Programs
(UCIEP) and that adheres to the overall mission of the college itself, any program
and approach must consider the whole person. Consideration of the whole
person implies attending to the development of language so that academic
literacy is developed alongside communication skills. Consideration of the whole
person includes acknowledging language as a tool of both intellectual gains and
social development.

This dual perspective is especially important to the program goals of LC.
Because it hopes to retain these language students as matriculating college
students, academic English obviously is paramount. Classes at LC are English
language intensive. For example, most follow a lecture or discussion/seminar
format for the class meetings. A successful student cannot "get by" with only
reading skills. The non-native speaker will need to reach a level of language
usage where he or she is comfortable participating in class discussions, small
group work, and listening to lengthy lectures while taking notes.

As one might imagine, knowing how to use the language in a polite and
socially acceptable way is also an important concern for a non-native speaker of
English on a small campus setting like LC. Non-native speakers of English should leave the ESL program with a reasonable degree of awareness of the pragmatic use of the English language. This pragmatic knowledge will be especially important in two likely scenarios, professor–student interactions such as advising sessions where the social distance is greater and the consequences of violating pragmatic conventions is high, and casual/conversational interactions such as roommate situations, where the social distance is less. A high degree of comfort in using the language’s social and pragmatic nuances may help ease the stress of being in a new country by decreasing the frequency of miscommunications. And interaction with native speakers cannot be avoided. Again, because the campus is small and because the number of non-native English speakers is likely to be small, ESL students will likely find that he or she is the only fluent speaker of his or her first language. It is unlikely that non-native speakers will find a social haven in a sub-community of speakers of his or her native language as one might find on larger campuses like UCLA for instance. One begins to see that the ESL program at LC cannot ignore basic interpersonal communication skills if it is to truly prepare the student for life at LC.

With these considerations in mind, one can begin to evaluate how well content-based instruction will meet the anticipated needs of students and how well it merges with the philosophy of the specific college setting. What’s more, one can begin to ascertain on what levels it would be most effective to use a content-based approach and to what extent the curriculum should focus on
content. Should the program design classes that follow thematic units, classes that follow a single theme of particular interest to the ESL student such as culture as proposed by Hilles and Lynch (1997), classes that offer sheltered instruction, or classes taught as adjunct or linked courses, which Johns (1997) argues is the ideal structure to promote academic literacy?

In an article by Hafernik, Messerschmitt, and Vandrik (1996), a survey listed several examples of course offerings in intensive English programs. The courses ranged from subject matter offerings such as U.S. history and U.S. literature to courses in U.S. culture, study skills, and orientation. However, theme-based content units within a skill class accounted for 61% of the reported content-based course work. The same survey reported ESP type courses, including TOEFL preparation courses, as making up 42% of what intensive English programs consider content courses.

Obviously, the survey of intensive English programs differs slightly from what the models seen at universities like UCLA and Arizona have attempted to do within a CBI framework. It suggests that although the idea of a content-based curriculum has been around for many years, few intensive English programs are actually capitalizing on the approach. Many, 61% as reported by Hafernik, Messerschmitt, and Vandrik (1996), still consider themselves primarily to be a skill-based curriculum although the literature indicates that the content-based approach to language instruction has distinct advantages for students preparing for further academic work in the target language. If LC were to develop a
content-based approach as its framework for the ESL program while capitalizing on its strengths such as small class sizes and frequent contact with professors and native speakers of English, LC may be one of the few programs of its size to offer content-based instruction.

However, there are additional issues that LC must consider. For example, how much of the curriculum should be or can be content-based. The degree of application of CBI is an important step in outlining a framework for LC. Should LC design a program that incorporates a combination of all three types of CBI? Idealistically, a decision of this type begs for a trial run, but realistically it will have to use its understanding of the current research to make these decisions initially. Once a model has been chosen consistent program evaluation will need to be an important part of shaping the curriculum over time.

Based on the observations and on the discussion thus far, one can see that theme-based CBI is the easiest to implement. It is an attractive choice for many reasons. First of all, many textbooks have recently adopted a theme-based content organization, so it is potentially easier to find texts with academic themes and language focus, which would potentially save teachers enormous amounts of time on curricular design and material development. Also, if the class is a multiple-themed class where the student advance through two-week units on biology, history, and politics for example, it may not hold the same expectation to replace credit bearing subject courses at the university level, which may be an issue for sheltered courses. Because theme-based courses do not require
coordination efforts with multiple professors in other departments as adjunct or linked courses do, theme-based is also an attractive choice for a new program with limited instructors and no precedence within the college.

Sheltered courses, at least in certain subject areas, would likely be the next most feasible type of CBI for a new ESL program. Because it is self-contained, the ESL program can again avoid tricky and time-consuming coordination with other departments. However, several limitations immediately emerge. First, sheltered courses may carry the expectation that the material covered will satisfy graduation requirements at the college. For example, if the ESL program offers the equivalent of the first-semester of composition as a sheltered course, then students may expect the grade earned in that class to satisfy the core curriculum requirement set by the college. However, getting the college administration to view ESL courses as credit bearing may prove difficult. Also, is this segregation necessarily the ideal situation, especially for a college that wants to create more interactions between non-native speakers of English and native speakers of English? Also, will the ESL program have instructors qualified to teach a range of sheltered courses to sustain a program's full-time course offerings? The courses an ESL professional would likely be most qualified and comfortable teaching would be composition, various linguistics offerings, and perhaps an introduction to literature. Are these the content course offerings that ESL students will want to take, especially if they are attempting to earn credit to apply toward degree course requirements? More attractive
sheltered courses might be in the fields of business and science. For LC, it is unlikely that the small program can attract or support enough ESL instructors to offer that kind of variety. Finally, doesn't sheltered instruction, especially those courses applying toward a degree, imply higher level students? What then should the program offer to lower level students?

The last model to consider is the adjunct model for CBI. Intriguing for several reasons, the concept of linking an ESL class with another university course accounts for many of the fundamental principles of SLA discussed throughout this paper. First of all, it allows the students to see a direct relationship between the language they are learning and the material, the content, they are studying. Suddenly, the L2 is truly a tool of learning and communication as the L1 is. Considering both the cognitive and affective domains, the adjunct model allows for change and variety that could keep both teachers' and students' motivation and interest high. Problems though are obvious. There is a question of coordinating efforts with another university instructor whose schedule is likely to be in conflict with the linked ESL instructor. Much more time would be required to set up the linked course, and the ESL instructor may still find it difficult to use the content as the medium of language instruction if he or she is learning the content with the students. As Brinton (1997) pointed out from her experience, students need a great deal of background knowledge to participate in content courses. Providing this will be challenging and time consuming. Other problems include evaluation, making
sure that the ESL component of the adjunct course truly evaluates the students' language, and disinterested students who simply give up.

However, these are not insurmountable challenges. At LC the adjunct model has potential, if given time. For example, the intimate nature of the college lends itself to collaboration. The faculty are more likely to know one another across departments, and many have successfully worked collaboratively in the past via team teaching situations for required interdisciplinary student course work such as Philosophy 300 (Values Study) and Education 100 (Freshman Orientation). These professors might find it rewarding to work collaboratively in conjunction with the ESL program. This combination of established rapport and prior collaboration would promote better communication between the two instructors and better access to notes and syllabi, a problem cited by Brinton (1997) as a pitfall of the adjunct classes taught in the ESL Service Courses of UCLA.

Limitations of the content-based approach have already been discussed in reviewing the possible models of a content-based curriculum at LC. The most problematic issues seem to be CBI at the lower proficiency levels, teachers sufficiently qualified in the content areas above and beyond the Teaching English as a Second Language/Applied Linguistic qualifications, and the perennial problem of time to develop the details of the curriculum and course materials when necessary.
As detailed in Chapter 3, the majority of colleges of similar scope and size to LC often did not have intensive English programs, and those that did usually followed a skill-based model rather than a content-based model. Why do small programs despite promoting academic English fail to adopt a content-based curriculum? Nothing in the theoretical foundations limits CBI to larger institutions. Even from the experiences of teachers and administrators familiar with the difficulties of CBI, no caution was mentioned for specifically for small programs. For these reasons one can conclude that content-based instruction is pedagogically appropriate for a program like the one being developed at LC and that the absence of content-based programs instead rests in administrative related restraints.

Given the situational context and the college's pre-existing philosophy of educating the whole person in a liberal arts context, a content-based curriculum would provide a medium for both the acquisition of the target language and a continued commitment to learning across a range of subjects that results in a well-rounded individual. Although a content-based curriculum might be more difficult to implement at the zero or beginning level, LC could implement a modified content-based curriculum that included an intensive block incorporating theme-based units at the lowest level. A combination of special content courses designed to provide background knowledge, both cultural and discipline specific, for future mainstream academic course work could form the framework for CBI at the intermediate and advanced levels.
Advantages and disadvantages

As argued throughout this thesis, it is not enough to simply implement a program based on a specific approach without understanding the underlying theoretical assumptions of the approach. It is also important to ask why the approach would be advantageous for a given program. In this case there are several reasons why the content-based approach would be advantageous for LC. One reason has already been mentioned, the relationship between the content-based philosophy and the liberal arts philosophy of educating the entire person. The other reason for LC to adopt such an approach is student-centered advantages.

Because LC is a small, liberal arts college, students are less able to stay within their language comfort zone since there will likely be only a few students from each language group represented on the campus or the community at large. Also, courses are never taught by graduate assistants, a common situation at larger institutions, but are taught by professors. There is an incredible need for non-native students to be able to negotiate not only the classroom lectures and group discussions, but also the interpersonal interactions between peers and those at a great social distance. Also classes on American university culture or the history and culture of their new home develop schema for the principles and pragmatics of cross-cultural communication while continuing to develop the target language. These learning situations would be ideal for accounting for development of interpersonal communication, motivation, comprehensible input,
and the like. Likewise, content courses introducing American and British literature for which the literature professor assumes prior knowledge, for example, provide the confidence that non-native speakers need to interact in a small class of Americans who have a perceived larger body of shared cultural references. Also, for non-native speakers of English from foreign language curriculums where literature was not studied, an ESL content course on literature can provide some exposure to subject matter that most native speakers of English gain through their high school curriculum.

Admittedly, content-based instruction has its limitations. For theme-based units and special content courses, it is important to consider options that allow for flexible content selection in case ESL students need to repeat a level of the ESL program. While the student may need to repeat the level for linguistic development, to repeat the content could send the wrong message to the student that mastery of the content is more important than mastery of the language. Also, a student would be likely be bored in a content-based class covering exactly the same material again. Consequently, motivation might lag, which is the antithesis of what CBI ideally promotes, and students could retreat from the language study that they need to complete. In the sample framework included in the appendix to this work, the choice of content attempts to strike a balance at all levels between simply being interesting and providing beneficial background information for living and learning at an American college. It also tries to remain
broad enough in scope to allow instructors room to adapt the course to each
group of students and tailor it to their needs and interests.

There is also room to change the content sufficiently if several students
are repeating a course in a given level. For example, one proposed special
content course on the intermediate level is titled “American Popular Culture: TV.”
It is up to the instructor to decide the specific topics and themes within that
subject matter, and with fifty years of television and access to cable television,
the possible specific content is limited only by one’s imagination. Of course, this
again brings up the time commitment required to develop a content course, and it
is an important consideration, although one should be hesitant to call it a
limitation. Developing materials for content-based courses will take time, but
there are ways to manage the problem. For example, for at least the first two
years, the administration at LC anticipates offering ESL courses only for the nine-
month academic year. Summers will remain free for teachers to re-evaluate the
program, make necessary changes to the curriculum, and to develop materials or
courses for the following year. Careful planning and a team approach to the
details of curriculum development and materials development can help make the
burden manageable during the semesters.

Another consideration for immediate application at LC is the newness of
the program. Even given the time for advanced planning anticipated by both the
college and the ESL teachers, it is possible that it would not be able to offer a
wide range of adjunct courses until the ESL faculty has been in place for a
couple of years and is able to identify 1) what adjunct courses ESL students are most likely to see as beneficial to their comprehensive plan for academic study 2) which faculty members from the identified courses will be willing to work jointly with the ESL program.

Finally, all ESL programs operate with real-world constraints such as persistent enrollment worries, limited budgets, and inadequate numbers of qualified teachers. While this paper acknowledges that these administrative concerns are important considerations and that these issues unfortunately impact all parts of a program, including the curriculum, these administrative concerns and the specifics of program implementation are beyond the scope of this current study. Appendix A contains a discussion and a basic outline of a content-based curriculum for LC. The content of the appendix is meant to aid the discussion in this chapter, and while the framework does anticipate certain limitations such as time commitments and staffing, it should be viewed as an ideal of how the ESL program at LC, or a similar college, might adopt a content-based curriculum to meet the linguistic and academic literacy needs of its non-native speakers of English and capitalize on the strengths of its unique setting.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Summary

Three questions were posed in this thesis. 1) What are the appropriate theoretical foundations supporting content-based instruction according to second language acquisition (SLA) researchers? The current accepted findings in SLA (see Chapter 2) support content-based instruction as a means for ESL students “to develop and refine [the] necessary literacy skills” (Kasper, 2000), a way of promoting language learning in a meaningful sociolinguistic context, and as an avenue for developing academic English. This approach allows educators to view language as more than a summation of discrete skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), but as an integrated body of linguistic understanding and pragmatic proficiency allowing for both the exchange of information and the intake of new knowledge.

2) In what ways and to what extent is the content-based approach pedagogically appropriate for LC? After exploring the theoretical foundations of CBI, the question of CBI’s appropriateness for LC was discussed. No pedagogical limitations on CBI were found to exclude it from being implemented at LC. However, recommendations for using theme-based and adjunct (linked) models of CBI instead of sheltered instruction were made since sheltered instruction isolates the non-native speakers of English from the native speakers of English. This separation is counterproductive to the goals of the college to
increase contact between a more diversified student body. However, the concept of CBI does mesh remarkably well with LC’s commitment to a liberal arts education, its move toward a collaborative environment, and its desire to see non-native speakers of English begin in the ESL program and move with ease into the world of academia. Any restraints on CBI stem not from a pedagogical inappropriateness but from administrative real-life constraints such as budget and time.

3) Are there models in place which can be adapted to LC’s needs? The real-life constraints mentioned above are likely to account for CBI’s near absence from colleges of LC’s size. The final question of this study asks if there are other ESL programs at colleges similar to LC who have adopted CBI, what problems have been encountered by such programs, and what courses offerings appear. What was discovered is that colleges of LC’s size often do not have an IEP or ESL program. Those that do, like Union University, Ouachita Baptist University, and Maryville College, have not yet adopted CBI as the structure for their curricula. Ouachita Baptist University does offer rotating content course as electives, but the curriculum remains grounded in the skill-based tradition.

Due to the overall lack of experience with CBI among colleges like LC, UCLA, the University of Arizona, and the University of Ottawa were chosen as an alternate means of examining CBI in action and of understanding the types of problems content-based programs might encounter. Because CBI requires content to be the medium for instruction, instructors and administrators at UCLA,
the University of Arizona, and the University of Ottawa discovered that the students’ were sometimes confused about the focus of the class. Other problems included students not possessing the necessary schema to comprehend the content and teachers not possessing the necessary knowledge to teach content beyond the field of linguistics or applied linguistics. Add these difficulties to small staffs with little time to develop language their own materials to accompany a linked course such as psychology 101, and the reasons for CBI’s absence from colleges like LC are not difficult to imagine.

Yet when colleges like LC attempt to incorporate CBI into their programs, the courses offered are not unlike those offered at larger programs. For instance, Ouachita Baptist University offers “American Culture” to its ESL students in the fall semester. Hafernik, Messerschmitt, and Vandrik (1996) found that content courses range from American history and culture to literature and even academic study skills. The content seems to be chosen by student need and interest or perhaps teacher capabilities.

While the types of course content are highly variable, the CBI model and the levels on which it is applied are more consistent. Theme-based models enjoy the most popularity because they are the easiest to adapt and implement. On the contrary, adjunct or linked courses are the least common because they present the most difficulty to coordinate and implement. Presupposing that a content course in the target language supersedes a beginning student’s
functional level of comprehensibility, CBI courses also tend to be reserved for the intermediate and advanced levels of ESL programs in higher education.

**Being research-conscious**

In the curriculum decision-making process, professionals do not need to constantly re-invent the wheel. Teachers must be committed to reading new studies in SLA research, to applying the insights of other teachers who publish their experiences with various methods, and most importantly, to actively contribute to the professional literature by conducting research in whatever capacity possible and then sharing those observations through publications and presentations. Only then can professionals confidently begin to bridge the world of research and classroom application to establish an environment where solid foundations consistently govern our decisions, our pedagogy, and our philosophy on language learning. It is tempting to subscribe to the perceived quick fixes of the latest study or to the default tradition or to the relative ease of following a textbook. Ultimately, these practices rarely benefit the students.

**From theory to application**

For some the world of theory and the world of pedagogy will never meet. However, for those educators committed to excellence of education, the success of students, and the professionalism of their field, theory’s application to the curriculum and classroom is paramount. Being involved in the feasibility study and the initial stages of program development as LC begins its ESL program has
provided ample opportunity to ponder this tension between theory and practice and has been the basis for this thesis. It has also provided an opportunity to ponder directions of future research.

Suggestions for further research

The need for research in all facets of applied linguistics continues. Certainly researchers will continue to seek a greater understanding of the second language acquisition process. Likewise, teachers will continue to experiment formally and informally with new methods and approaches in order to give each student the best environment in which to learn the target language.

One area of particular interest to researchers and teachers alike is the effect of individual learners on the acquisition process. Ellis (1994) identifies this area as one that is without much research. This may not be so surprising when one thinks of the multiple factors that learners introduce into a study.

However difficult it may be, the interface between individual learners and the instructional approach is fascinating. Specifically, one might consider the following types of questions: What effect does the content-based curriculum have on individual learners? How does the individual learner shape the focus of the L2 instruction in a content-based classroom? Does the individual perceive the content-based classroom as more suited to his or her needs or less suited? In addition to the student perceptions of the content-based approach to language learning, more research validating the merit of the approach is needed.
Specifically, the need for longitudinal studies on content-based instruction’s effectiveness would greatly benefit instructors and program directors. Following an ESL student from a content-based program through matriculation would provide valuable insights, especially if the student would keep a reflective journal on his or her own language learning, academic development, and personal communication skill development. Asking to what degree does CBI enhance long-term academic performance in the target language, one of the presupposed pluses of CBI, is also an important question. GPA comparisons between students who followed a content-based approach and students who followed a more traditional skill-based approach could provide useful testimony to the effectiveness of CBI. In order to gather information from multiple sources, interviews with mainstream instructors and professors of non-native speakers of English who experienced CBI and those who did not could be conducted. Without question, a qualitative study of this nature is a huge undertaking and would require careful coordination and a long-term commitment from both teacher/researchers and student participants, but it is not an impossible study. In fact, the intimate nature of a college like LC might provide a setting where this would be feasible.

As a future teacher who has considered the interaction between research and pedagogy, I can think also of several areas in which I might employ action research in my classroom. I might investigate the interplay of language testing and SLA in a content-based classroom or the effect specific-content matter has
on the affective filter. I might conduct this research as part of a growing number of teachers contributing to the areas of SLA, or I might conduct this research as a personal check of my methodology. Whatever the case may be, practicing research-conscious pedagogy is both essential for students and paramount to the professionalism of ESL teachers everywhere.
APPENDIX: A SAMPLE CONTENT-BASED FRAMEWORK FOR LC

Proposed program summary profile

Type of program: ESL with an intensive component; English for Academic Purposes; content-based structure

Content-based models: theme-based and adjunct (linked)

Target audience: NNSE preparing for full-time university course work

Number of instructors: 3

Instructor qualifications: minimum MA in TESL or closely related field

Number of levels: 3 - low (intensive); intermediate; and advanced

Placement: TOEFL scores

Minimum TOEFL: 400

Exit Criteria: minimum of C+ in ESL courses; exit interview

Sample ESL program mission statement

Recognizing that language is a tool for learning and acknowledging that language proficiency includes both linguistic components and interpersonal communication components, this ESL program seeks to provide a language learning environment where students can develop all components of the target language. Keeping with the tradition and vision of the host institution, this ESL program also recognizes the importance of study in a variety of disciplines and contexts in order to educate the whole person. Courses in the ESL program reflect this by utilizing various content subjects from both traditional disciplines and innovative subject matter to cultivate language in context and to activate and establish the background knowledge that will promote success in future academic work done at the university level.
Considerations for goals & objectives

Linguistic Competence

The courses on each level should have clear, specific objectives for each level that allow students and teachers to track a student’s emerging control of the target language. These objectives would include development of grammatical structures, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, speaking proficiency, composition skills, and intelligible pronunciation for each level. Pragmatic concerns might also be addressed.

Academic Literacies

The program should establish a structure that supports the development of English for Academic Purposes by exposing students to the types of content and academic situations that they can expect in the mainstream university classroom. The structure and content of the program should address students' need for background knowledge and students' need for academic strategies in their emerging target language. The latter might mean explicit teaching of new strategies or raising awareness of strategies that might be transparent in the first language and transferring them to the target language. Related to the general pragmatic objectives, academic literacy should also address the students' need for proficiency in academic discourse situations such as participating in large academic discussions and successfully negotiating a student-teacher conference. Promoting understanding of culture and culturally motivated interactions should also be considered in the choice of content.

Sample course offerings

I. Low Level (approximate TOEFL of 450 or less): Theme-based content class with intensive emphasis. 2, 2-hour blocks. 5-day/week.
Theme-based CBI focusing on language development and background knowledge for subjects students will encounter in the mainstream required
curriculum at the host institution such as sociology, literature, earth science, physical science, mathematics, and history. Integrated skills presented within carefully chosen content. Content may be arranged in 2-week units or 4-week units as deemed by the teacher or interests of the students.

II. Intermediate: (approximate TOEFL of 460-490) Students continue language work through 3, 50-minute content courses meeting 5 days/week. Course developed around a special theme to promote cultural understanding and build schemata. ESL Content courses integrate reading, writing, grammar, listening, and speaking in an authentic context. One adjunct course offering. Adjunct courses selected from College Algebra, Finite Mathematics, Personal Fitness, Introduction to Computer Science, or other general curriculum courses deemed non-language intensive. ESL component of adjunct course meets 1 hr/day.

A. American Popular Culture: TV

Students hone language skills while acquiring a greater understanding of the impact of TV on American society. TV shows that make up part of American's collective knowledge such as “Ozzie & Harriet,” “The Andy Griffith Show,” “All in the Family,” and “ER” as they document changing values and beliefs about gender, race, and social scripts. Advertising also considered.

B. Introduction to the History and Culture of the American South

Content would include folklore, music, architecture, and food. Special attention given to the civil rights movement because of its impact on the relations in the region and the impact on US history as a whole. 5
C. Truth is Stranger than Fiction: Exploring the World through Non-Fiction Writing and Film

Content might include politics, economics, famous people, documentaries, and current events. Content focus on understanding the genre of non-fiction writing and film.

III. Advanced (approximate TOEFL of 500-550): Students continue also language work through 2, 50-minute content courses meeting 3 days per week. Courses developed around a special theme to promote cultural understanding, build schemata, and perfect academic study skills and strategies. Supplemental ESL Content courses integrating reading, writing, grammar, listening, and speaking in an authentic context. Two adjunct course offerings meeting 1hr/day. Adjunct courses selected from Western Civilization I, Biology I, Introduction to Public Speaking, Introduction to Political Science, Introduction to Sociology or other general curriculum courses deemed language intensive.

A. Orientation to the American University

Course content includes structure of university system, discussion of the deceptively informal environment, academic study skills, test taking strategies, time management, political correctness at the university, sexual harassment training, and plagiarism.

B. Selected Readings form British and American Literature for NNSE

Course content designed to sharpen language skills while supplying background knowledge assumed in required introductory literature courses in the host institution’s general curriculum. For example, students will read selections typical of college-bound American high school students, especially short stories.
Sample new course proposal

The following section is an outline example of the type of information that the curriculum committee at LC might consider before granting full approval and permission to appear in the catalog as part of an ESL program.

1. Identification of Course
   a. Title: Selected Readings from British and American Literature for NNSE
   b. Prefix and number: ESL 110
   c. Credit: three hours
   d. Prerequisites: English placement test or successful completion of ESL intermediate level courses
   e. Instructor: ESL staff
   f. Special information: An ESL content course designed to develop English proficiency and establish a background in British and American literature.
   g. Frequency of offering: F/S
   h. Catalog description: Course designed to develop English proficiency while supplying background knowledge assumed in required introductory literature courses in general curriculum. Reading selections typical of college-bound American high school students, especially short stories. Selections from Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, John Bunyan, Robert Louis Stevenson, and others.

2. Rationale
   a. Relationship to courses now offered: These courses continue to develop the target language in an authentic setting. NNSE are better prepared for the literature requirements, which are language intensive, of the core curriculum at LC.
   b. Relationship to courses offered in other departments: Not only does this course prepare students linguistically and academically for their literature
courses in the general curriculum, this course also provides the foundation in critical reading, writing, and semi-formal speaking that is a component of almost every mainstream academic course. The course also provides NNSE with important vocabulary needed to participate fully in academic classes.

c. Relationship to courses offered at other institutions: This ESL course is similar to other ESL courses at other institutions in its ultimate goal, producing successful students; however, this course is unique in recognizing the importance of developing schemata that aid comprehension in the target language.

d. Relationship to central curriculum guidelines: see above

3. Student Expectations and Requirements

At the end of this course sequence, students should be able to read and comprehend a variety of British and American literary texts. Students should also be able to employ a variety of strategies to cope with the reading demands at the university level. Daily reading assignments, reading journals, unit exams, student-lead discussions, vocabulary exercises and exams, and a final library project/analysis paper will be required.

4. Texts


Any single novella, novel, or collection of short stories of the teacher's choice.

Suggestions include Twain's Tom Sawyer & Stevenson's Dr. Jekel and Mr. Hyde

5. Bibliography/Teacher’s Reference


Brown, Douglas H. Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to

6. Budget Implications
   a. Instruction: workshop
   b. Special equipment: none
   c. Expendable materials: none
Notes

1This framework assumes a staff of three instructors although this might not be possible for the first year the program is in place. This is an implementational constraint to the curriculum (Markee, 1997) that the college administration and the program director must consider. If the college administration and the program director so decide, this framework can be viewed as a strategic plan for the future. For instance, the program might be implemented in stages by admitting only advanced level students the first year or perhaps two, intermediate level students the next, and low level (intensive) students the next. This would allow the program to add teachers as the enrollment increased, and it would allow more time to develop the specific syllabi and course materials for special theme-based courses on each level. Unfortunately these types of program restraints curb or temporarily postpone even the most innovative of ideas. Although it is important to recognize that limitations of this type exist, a more detailed discussion of program implementation and syllabi construction are beyond the scope of this discussion.

2The TOEFL scores for each level follow a recommendation by Haas (1990) who states that students "scoring in the 560-590 [PBT] range will be able to handle a minimum full-time load of academic work; those in the 500-550 range should have a program of half-time academic work and half-time supplemental English; those in the 460-490 range may be able to handle one academic course if the rest of their program is in supplemental English; and those in the low 400's or below are in need of full-time intensive English" (p. 13). These ranges and correlating estimates of academic course work are based on Haas's experience as an admissions officer at Indiana University. To date TOEFL is strictly a norm-referenced test and no research has been done to correlate academic ability with TOEFL test scores.
The minimum of a 400 TOEFL score requirement for participation in the ESL program at LC has been adapted from Haas’s recommendations and comes from a recognized limitation of the new program. Especially in its infancy, the program will be small, and it is unlikely that the teachers could adequately attend to the needs of zero level students.

The exit criteria for the ESL program waive the university’s minimum TOEFL requirement of 560 (PBT) for full admission.

This is a content class that can be adapted to fit any cultural region. The idea is to take advantage of setting, explore regional differences, and conduct field learning when possible.
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