

SELF-ORGANIZED MULTILEVEL DISCUSSION GROUP IN A UNIVERSITY MASTER'S PROGRAM SETTING

GRUP DE DISCUSSIÓ AUTOGESTIONAT I MULTINIVELL EN UN PROGRAMA DE MÀSTER UNIVERSITARI

JOAN CATHERINE PLOETTNER

jploettner@uic.csc.es

SERVEI D'IDIOMES

UNIVERSITAT INTERNACIONAL DE CATALUNYA

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1. Point of departure

Evidence-based health care has represented a paradigm shift in the research and practice of the health sciences. A basic working knowledge of professional English is a fundamental tool for all health professionals, given that a substantial amount of research is published in the English language. Researchers must understand both written and spoken English in order to read research, participate in international research groups, present research at congresses, and understand presentations.

A CLIL-oriented English language program consisting of 3 independent subjects was designed for the first year curriculum of the Master's in Nursing Science Program at Universitat Internacional de Catalunya (UIC). The content focus of the three subjects was: Nursing Theories and Models, Basic Concepts in Research Study Design, Research Article Structure and Function. Throughout the program an integrated skills approach was used. Heavier emphasis was placed on receptive skills, although productive speaking and writing skills were also practiced.

The need for continuing training and practice in oral expression in English for the second year students in the Master's in Nursing Science Program was subsequently identified.

2. Objective of the experience

Offer a multi-level group of Master's in Nursing Science students the opportunity to organize, participate in and lead a group discussion on professional topics related to their field.

3. Context

The students who enroll in the Master's in Nursing Science Program at UIC have varying levels of previous experience with the English language, yet are highly motivated to improve their abilities in English as they recognize the importance of English for research. During the two-year program the students are required to read large amounts of research literature, the majority of which is published in English. At the end of the two-year Master's program the students present and defend their project proposal. Once approved, the students carry out their project, which culminates in the defense of their Doctoral dissertation. Many students subsequently present their research findings at international nursing congresses, where English is the principal language of communication.

4. Development

The discussion groups with the second-year Master's students began four years ago. The development of the discussion sessions has occurred gradually over the last four years, incorporating new materials and objectives based principally on previous experience.

The first year, teacher-led conversation classes were carried out. The teacher proposed topics and student participation was variable, but satisfactory.

Throughout the second through fourth years, several changes have been incorporated.

Currently, the discussions are student-organized and student-led. The discussions are led in pairs. The students announce the topic one week before they lead the discussion, to allow for preparation on part of all the group members. The group leaders introduce the topic, including appropriate vocabulary, usually with a power point presentation. Discussion leaders receive immediate feedback regarding their performance and are evaluated based on the following criteria:

- 1) Participation in the sessions: participating and ensuring that all students have the opportunity to participate (0-10)
- 2) Pronunciation, particularly of key vocabulary (0-10)
- 3) Application of concepts and vocabulary reviewed in class (0-10)
- 4) Communication skills (listening, turn-taking, using appropriate language, clarification) (0-10)
- 5) Preparation (both organization of the sessions they moderate as well as preparing to discuss the topics of the sessions which other students organize) (0-10)
- 6) Coherency (well-organized and clear presentation of ideas, appropriate and relevant interventions) (0-10)
- 7) Global improvement (0-10)

The teacher's role is to correct pronunciation and vocabulary, take notes of errors made, and type up and present a document of 5-15 pronunciation and vocabulary errors made during the discussion. This list is revised at the beginning of the following session and is used to prepare a revision activity at the end of the course.

At the end of each session, all students fill in self evaluation sheets regarding their performance that day. These sheets are not used to determine final marks. The purpose of these evaluations is principally to make students reflect on their performance, and identify areas of improvement.

5. Evaluation and conclusions

Evaluation of the experience has been subjective, on the basis of teacher evaluation and student evaluation at the end of the course.

This approach has successfully allowed students of all levels to lead and participate in professionally-oriented group discussions. It is easily adaptable to discussion groups from other professions.

6. Proposals for future

Future action research should be developed to objectify the results of this classroom experience. Future program changes should include immediate written self evaluation obtained from the discussion leaders. Immediate written feedback could be a useful tool for increasing self-awareness, as well as for evaluating the student's ability to reflect on and improve discussion leading techniques.