# ❄ INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

## The "Three Language" Class

Your mission: Teach a bilingual computer class of mostly Spanish students with limited English-speaking skills. The lecture shall be primarily in English, and you will offer individual help with translation to Spanish when necessary.

Textbook: The same text used for the regular class.

Length: The same as other credit classes.

Handouts and lab assignments: Whatever you wish.

The introductory computer course at Mattatuck Community College includes hands-on instruction on the IBM disk operation system, word processing, spreadsheets, database, and as many general computer principles as possible in order to give students a comprehensive background. It includes one lab assignment per week, several written tests, several laboratory hands-on tests, extra projects, etc. When another experimental class was opened, to be taught in a bilingual mode, I was concerned! This approach would require, in a manner of speaking, using three languages.

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**Pedagogical Concerns**

This class was not remedial, and the content was to be the same as that in the regular computer class. This was achieved by using additional one-on-one help, extra handouts to clarify material, two bilingual tutors, translations of the hands-on computer lab tests, and oral translations of the written tests.

Technical terms were translated into the students' native language; however, they remained English language terms, and explanations for the terms were made in English.

**Methods and Procedures**

I modified some methods and procedures to accommodate the students:

• Class was held in a small room which had an ample supply of computers, one per student plus spares. This proved essential because it turned the lecture into a hands-on session.

• I used a projection unit connected to my computer so students could see what I was doing in my demonstrations. This was not unusual in a computer class, but it was *essential* in this class.

• Some students, seizing the opportunity to use the computer in front of them, took class notes using the word processing package we were learning and printed the notes at the end of class.

• The lectures and presentations were made in English with immediate Spanish translations. This, of course, was for the benefit of students whose English was poor. However, I found that the slower pace and the reinforcement that the repetition provided helped learners who were fluent in English.

• I constantly evaluated the potential reasons for any deficiencies, to determine whether they were due to language deficiency, lack of previous academic preparation (such as poor reading comprehension), or lack of class preparation. Soon, this mental evaluation became second nature.

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**Observations**

I can make some interesting and significant observations from having taught this course:

• Tenacity: Advance warnings—even repetitious at times—were provided about the deadline for student withdrawal, including a handout to each student with grades and averages to date. Yet, even those students who were in danger of failing did not drop the course.

• Social aspects: Many of these students knew each other before the class; some were from the same neighborhood. This proved to have positive and negative effects, since some students helped each other outside of class and others had personal problems with class members. Even though the students felt supported by college staff, personal comments and class questionnaires told us that they felt more comfortable with peer help.

• Academic preparation: Some students were academically deficient in their native language. This deficiency should be a major consideration during the placement or advising process, since an academically deficient student who also has a language problem requires extra attention and resources, as was evident

in the quality of questions and necessary amount of repetition.

• Teacher communication: I had to be careful not to take some things for granted. For example, the correct spelling of commonly used words in the Spell Check word-processing feature was not always obvious to some; this was especially true of the spelling feature that offered alternatives for misspelled words. Also, I had to explain or refrain from using English idioms.

• Outside concerns: These students faced considerable outside personal problems. For example, there were many single mothers with several children, serious conflicts with neighbors, transportation problems, etc. These problems came to my attention because I emphasized that absences would be detrimental to classroom performance; the excuses for absenteeism reflected these problems.

Teaching this course was interesting, challenging, and rewarding; the students appreciated the additional help and special opportunity that this class offered. The experiment appeared to work.

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# Two-Minute Scramble

For a long time I have been a proponent of collaborative learning; almost all of my classes use some form of group learning in daily assignments or in testing. For example, in literature classes I use group testing; in Interpersonal Communications I use dyadic or triadic testing, and in Composition II the students set their own semester learning (course) agenda. Despite this position, until recently I still held on to some old philosophies—e.g., that information is a "secret" kept behind closed doors for which the teachers hold the only key. Students must suffer before they can have access to information and generally are never given the key. Access is only through the teacher. Consequently, students never learn how to use the key (to find information on their own).

I had read "Who in Their Right Mind..." [*Innovation Abstracts*, Volume XV, Number 16] about giving essay questions to students prior to exams so that they could compose well-developed answers. I liked the idea and subsequently tried it with pleasing results. The two-minute scramble is my latest attempt to encourage collaborative learning.

The two-minute scramble is not entirely my idea; it was suggested (with modifications) by students during a group literature examination. As a whole, students were doing fairly well on the exam, but as I walked around the room, I discovered areas where student recall was poor. One student whimsically asked if she could look in her notes or book for just a minute. She said she knew the answer and could almost see it on the page. All eyes turned pleadingly to me; I thought,

"Why not?" Toward the end of that exam, I allowed one student in each group to look at the text or notes (it did not matter whose notes) for two minutes. What a scramble!

*What did they learn?* They learned to access information efficiently, enhance teamwork skills, increase communication skills, practice time management, and evaluate and synthesize information quickly. Most student groups chose to leave questions they could not answer for the two-minute scramble. There seemed to be increased self-esteem ("I knew that answer was there") and decreased frustration.

*What did I learn?* How to access information can no longer be kept a secret; teachers can no longer be the sole key holders. Students must learn they can be in control; they can be the "key" to their own learning.

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