
A pan-university open online course approach to EOL academic literacy for tertiary students

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Résumé

Canada and the academic world have changed dramatically since the Bilingualism and Biculturalism Reports and the implementation of French immersion programs in Canada a half century ago. From the original theme of bilingualism, equality and the balancing of French and English in Canada, globalization and immigration have produced a different model of bilingualism in a multilingual and multicultural Canada situated in a global English dominant academic network. This paper addresses the academic world dominance of English and the necessity of the majority of the world's English speakers, who are not native speakers of English but speak English as an "other" language (EOL), as well as the minority of English speakers for whom English is their dominant language, to attain higher levels of academic literacy for the globalized world of academia. All of the approaches for EOL online immersion instruction proposed here can also be exploited to raise the French academic literacy of French immersion students and faculty for tertiary education.

Résumé

Le Canada et le milieu universitaire ont énormément changé depuis le Rapport sur le bilinguisme et le biculturalisme et l'introduction des programmes d'immersion au Canada il y a cinquante ans. Du thème original de bilinguisme, d'égalité et d'équilibre des deux langues officielles, la mondialisation et l'immigration ont produit un différent modèle de bilinguisme dans un Canada devenu multilingue et multiculturel et inséré dans un réseau académique global où la langue anglaise est dominante.

Cette communication discute de la nette prédominance de l'anglais dans les milieux universitaires et de la nécessité, de la part de la majorité des locuteurs de l'anglais dans le monde, qui ne sont pas locuteurs natifs de l'anglais mais qui la parlent comme langue "autre" (ALA), ainsi que de celle d'une minorité de locuteurs pour qui l'anglais est la langue principale, d'atteindre des niveaux supérieurs de littératie dans un contexte de mondialisation des milieux universitaires. Toutes les approches pédagogiques pour l'enseignement en ligne de l'ALA par immersion peuvent également être exploitées pour améliorer la littératie académique du français des étudiants en immersion ou des enseignants de niveau universitaire.

Introduction

Canadian French immersion programs which were first implemented in 1965 in the era of the Federal Bilingualism and Biculturalism Reports almost a half-century ago have continued to be successful in producing students who are functionally capable in French as a second language (Carey, 1991; Genesee, 1994; Cummins, 2000). However, the various immersion programs from grades 1–12 were not intended to universally produce the high levels of academic literacy necessary for students to continue on in French tertiary education. Nevertheless, they can be supplemented by additional programs to produce high academic literacy. Similarly, a wide variety of ESL programs in Canada and throughout the world do not produce a high level of academic literacy in English even though students may study English in schools abroad for more than a decade. While it is well known that there are more people in the world who are bilingual or multilingual to some degree than are unilingual and that more people speak English as a second or other language than as a first language; these are only two of the many factors that contribute to the enormous and growing need globally for many to improve their academic literacy in English due to the global move, in the last 50 years, to a more unilingual English world of publication (Carli and Ammon, 2007). While the number of people who have high academic literacy in both English and French is small in Canada, this is also true of the majority of the world's bilingual population in any country. High academic literacy is also a challenge for many even in their first language and is an often insurmountable barrier in their second language, due to limited immersion and sociolinguistic opportunities for academic literacy. Yet academic literacy in English for the world's EOL population has spread beyond its original identity within a few countries to be fully recognized as the world language of business, government and academia (Canagarajah, 2002a, 2002b; Crystal, 2001). As a world language English is no longer affiliated with any specific culture or nation but permeates and has been permeated by all cultures and nations, thus producing a variety of Englishes (Canagarajaha, 2007; Crystal, 2001). English continues to increasingly dominate the knowledge economy and academic publication globally, with over 80% of academic publications in the humanities and social sciences worldwide published in English (Carey, 1991b; Hamel, 2007) and over 90% of academic publications in the natural sciences published in English (Ammon, 2006; Hamel, 2007) thus necessitating English academic literacy for students and faculty worldwide to study or publish internationally at the tertiary level. However, a large proportion of the world's students and faculty, due to inadequate academic literacy in English, are denied access to the English knowledge economy and the English speaking universities essential to their professional academic advancement. As Flowerdew (2001, 2007) argues, this leaves many scholars worldwide who are not academically literate in English on the periphery of scholarly publi-

cation because of the worldwide requirement that university scholars publish in English for academic recognition. These global inequalities of access to knowledge and education for those not academically literate in English cause pervasive constraints on the economic and educational development and dissemination of knowledge and thus contribute to the perception of poverty and ignorance in many developing and developed countries (Guardiano, Favilla and Calaresu, 2007). Consequently, for those millions of scholars who are limited in their English academic literacy, the cost to global knowledge generation is increasingly staggering to the world economy. In addition, countries around the world from China to France value academic publications in international English journals to a greater degree than in Mandarin or French respectively, in terms of university tenure and promotion. In spite of this threat to the academic well-being of many universities internationally, there are few, if any, proposals that deal with this predicament of academic scholars worldwide who lack a venue in which they can realistically improve their English academic literacy in their discipline and area of publication in a manner that is efficient and highly motivating and that does not involve expensive travel, tuition and time away from their employment and families.

In this paper I propose a tested pan-university model of online immersion seminars that can allow EOL students and faculty from developing and developed countries to jointly advance their academic literacy in those academic areas that are of paramount importance to their academic career advancement. The model evolved after many years spent teaching academic content to either French or English immersion university students and directing more than 100 graduate theses for students who struggled to attain higher academic literacy in a second language after studying in French or English immersion for 12 or more years in that second language.

In Canada this model could also be used for French immersion students to gain a higher level of academic literacy in French which has sometimes proved elusive for French immersion students. I have replicated this pan-university online immersion for EOL undergraduates, graduates and faculty. This model builds on the OpenCourseWare (OCW) movement, which provides access to thousands of university courses without requiring students to pass English literacy access tests such as TOEFL or pay tuition at many of the world's leading English speaking universities. At present the OCW movement receives expression in the OCW Consortium which consists of hundreds of online courses contributed from more than 200 of the world's leading English speaking universities (see www.ocwconsortium.org and openlearn.open.ac.uk). These Open Educational Resources (OER) which are freely available to the public constitute vast stores of public knowledge. However, this open access to such academic riches has not included mechanisms for how EOL students could improve their English or gain credit for studying these hundreds of open access

courses. This paper reports on the successful attempts to overcome these inadequacies for EOL students worldwide by exploiting the best principles of online EOL immersion in academic courses and by combining that with open online courses. These courses were developed consistent with principles of socio-cultural theory, Lantolf (2000), new literacies (Street, 1984) and current theories of language acquisition within a Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004) that incorporated both dilemma theory and activity theory as well as the social and cognitive presence perspectives of Anderson (2004). In designing critical discussion of research articles, questions were posed that dealt with the dilemmas and contradictions that diverse ethnic groups were faced with in their particular knowledge ecology. The collaborative socio-cultural approach to critically examine diverse cultural perspectives was promoted to push the expression of conceptual distinctions in order to develop new vocabulary, technical terms and expressions in their second language. The combined approach of the merits of each of these theoretical orientations produced an online socially constructive community which was socially and intellectually both challenging and supportive. This online community valued highly the diverse cultural, language and knowledge ecologies that each member could contribute both in terms of their individual prior knowledge and aspirations. The online discussions via the WebCT discussion forum also encouraged the collaborative critical thinking and analysis of academic papers that would promote intellectual growth. By requiring students to push their capacity to express abstract theory, concepts and dilemmas in their second language, academic literacy was both encouraged and required. Thus concepts of social presence and cognitive presence were combined with principles of intellectual and social contradictions or dilemmas to foster academic literacy development.

For any academic immersion program, in order to produce highly motivated student participation of communication in the target language, it is essential to have high rates of actively motivated communicative interaction on topics of high interest that produce academic and communicative dilemmas in appropriate language registers. The communicative approach to academic language acquisition requires that students use the language for communication for areas of high academic interest. In this immersion model the active participants are highly motivated to explore and engage in the course topics because the students' present and future employability depends on their improved ability in academic literacy in English in order to write and publish their research theses and further publications for career advancement. Further, these online seminars provide the requisite experience in academic technical language vocabulary and register that is so rare to find outside of discipline specific courses for academics. Finally, these are credit courses so students are also highly motivated to master content.

The replications of this model of pan-university credit courses with diverse global audiences of EOL and English first language students and faculty from universities in developed and developing countries has produced impressive self reports for improvement in academic literacy in specific academic areas of interest as a result of the focus on intensive and sustained scholarly online immersion in communication and debate on topics of high interest to individuals who are extremely motivated to improve their English academic literacy for publication and academic advancement. These replications have included universities as diverse as the Yakutsk State university in Russia, the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM) in Mexico, the Ritsumeikan University in Japan and finally the University of British Columbia in Canada where international students with more advanced EOL from 14 countries and first language English speakers participated.

In addition, this approach offers a solution to the enigma that while the OCW movement has been instrumental in providing widespread access to public academic knowledge through the publication of university courses, it has not been proposed how accreditation could be obtained by the large proportion of the world's students and faculty in developing and developed countries who now have access to the open courseware, but for economic, geographical or reasons of English academic literacy limitations, cannot receive credit for such courses. The tested and replicated model described here effectively promotes English academic literacy for students and faculty, in their chosen discipline courses, through a common pan-university electronic forum that provides full academic credit for participation from each of their home universities, which may or may not, be English speaking universities, while also providing for the professional academic development for all participants through online discussions with colleagues from other universities around the globe. Further, by including such a broad spectrum of EOL students in the online discussions all students benefit from an enriched diversity of viewpoints and educational backgrounds of the other students. This potential for greater discipline knowledge also helps create an enhanced academic environment for developing academic literacy and all students receive full academic credit from their home universities.

This paper also highlights the need to go beyond current models of international online communication at all levels of university education, including the post doctoral level and stresses the point that we need to implement the concept of a global university that includes the viewpoints and situations from numerous universities around the world in order to rapidly communicate and educate all students on such global crises as sustainability and global survival (see openlearn.open.ac.uk and www.ocwconsortium.org). This concept also entails the understanding of English as an international language which has local variations from standard English (Canagarajah 2002a, 2002b, 2007) and which

includes exposure to different variants of English. The Open Education Resource (OER) movement has to date largely focused on promoting and enabling the creation and distribution of educational resources and OCW to a global audience. While there is much to be gained through the open sharing of content being created across global education systems, in particular where access to education presents a challenge, the next step is to examine how adopting open course models in traditional universities can offer benefits to the institutions and the open education movement itself.

Background to the need for online collaboration for a world academic language

Huijser, Bedford and Bull (2008, p. 2) raise the issue that, “everyone has the right to education” as described in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which also states that “higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit”. At a local level, access to education has been the goal of the distance education agenda in Canada (Abrioux, 2004) and is a founding ideal of the Open University system (Bates, 2005). However, in Canada at least, there is some evidence that the social agenda of distance education has been eroded with the increasing adoption of Instructional Computer Technologies (ICTs) and educational technology in dual mode institutions (Bullen, Belfer, and Burkle, 2008) where ICT uptake is viewed as enhancing campus face-to-face (f2f) courses. Additionally, there is an increased emphasis on an internationalization agenda at Canadian higher education institutions (AUCC 2008a, 2008b) resulting in the development of jointly offered programs, partnerships and study abroad exchanges.

Current models have not addressed how international participation can occur in these institutions and programs without the longstanding barriers of entrance requirements, including academic English literacy tests, tuition fees and the financial ability to travel and stay at the host institution, while being sensitive to issues of social and cultural capital, language and academic literacies.

Current Open models

Since MIT’s highly acclaimed move to make its educational resources freely available, the number of open learning initiatives has continued to grow (see www.cmu.edu/oli, en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Wikiversity:Main_Page). There has been considerable effort on the part of international organizations such as UNESCO, Open Universities (see openlearn.open.ac.uk), and public and private institutions to make educational content and courses freely available through the internet. In particular, at the time of this writing, the OpenCourseWare Consortium (www.ocwconsortium.org) has brought together more than 200 universities and organizations providing open educational resources. What began

as an effort to provide content has inspired the development of OER course models, ranging from largely self-directed/access-on-your-own style learning to open-course-with-open teaching without credit.

Therefore the great potential of Open Course Ware is not realized because registration with the host institution is required (and is not possible for EOL students internationally) in order to receive credit; thus representing the traditional model of attaching course participation with credits from a host institution.

Language, culture, and academic English literacy

While the challenges to access education are often identified as economic, geographical and cultural; language, and in particular English, is also a subtle yet powerful gatekeeper.

D'Antoni (2007, p. 5) has stated:

in terms of using OER, the content must be appropriate, and that raises the issues of culture and language if you are considering content from another institution . . . content needs to be culturally and linguistically translated. And localization means that it has to be accessible to the learner in his or her own setting. In Europe, this is not an issue, but if you are trying to reach people in a developing country, it is.

In this pan-university approach this means that all international students can gain knowledge about the ecologies of Englishes in a global world and the ecologies of knowledge approach in developing countries. Just as a knowledge and appreciation of the diversity of English speakers and their local languages is important the application of global knowledge to local ecologies is critical.

The barrier here is that there need to be resources to ensure this happens (Huijser, Bedford and Bull, 2008).

From another perspective, dos Santos (2008, p. 7) cautions that there is a perception that access to knowledge provided by the web is free to everybody, when in fact it is limited to a certain learner profile:

There is no consideration of the resources and skills that are essential at the very minimum to benefit from OERs, such as the access to a computer connected to the internet and the level of computer literacy that would enable the individual to search for these resources on the web. . . OERS might have the potential to open up access to content to a number of learner profiles, but contrary to what the institutional discourse tends to portray, not necessarily to all of them.

Furthermore, the majority of the world's English speakers speak English as an "other" language, and many EOL students and scholars struggle at all levels of their education and professional careers to gain academic writing proficiency. This inability to write well in academic English constitutes a barrier of immense proportions to academic and professional advancement since the attainment of English academic literacy can take many years to achieve and

is very often never attained. The number of undergraduate and graduate students who are denied access to higher education due to low TOEFL or IELTS scores over the last few years would be in the hundreds of thousands internationally in spite of the extensive industry that exists to help boost TOEFL, TOEIC and IELTS scores. New Literacy Studies (Street, 1984) have identified a nuanced view of academic literacy from a sociocultural perspective, going beyond interpretations of simple skill development and into a realm of academic socialization. For example, a study on academic writing from student and staff perspectives (Lea and Street, 1998) revealed the contrasting expectations of various modes of writing present at one higher education institution. The study of literacy as situated semiotic practices has further exemplified the complex nature of academic literacy. Similarly, Duff (2007) highlights the complexity of academic discourse socialization regardless of whether native or non-native speakers of English. In the context of OERs, this research suggests that the accessibility of OERs, in particular where accreditation is needed, is challenged by academic literacy components, especially when participation in English is required. The current practice in scholarly publishing, where, as Flowerdew (2007, p. 14) has pointed out, the combined pressures of “globalization and marketization of the academy” has created a situation where more and more scholars need to write in English for international journals and one where writing in English is perceived as “a sort of ineluctable necessity (related to both international prestige and editorial needs) rather than a matter of free choice” by non-Anglophone scholars (Guardiano, Favilla and Calresu, 2007, p. 34).

Reconceptualizing course delivery

This open model for cross-institutional collaboration is sensitive to concerns of local/global knowledge and reduces the barriers presented by higher education institutions that require international students to already possess high levels of academic literacy in English to become admitted and registered in their institutions to participate in courses. This model provides an opportunity for international students from developing and developed countries to efficiently develop their EOL academic literacy, now essential to provide access to reading and publishing research in the international academic community (Carey, 1999b; Carey and Morgan, 2005; Thorne and Black, 2007) and academic tenure and advancement (Flowerdew and Yongyan, 2007).

Both components of the international OER/OCW and academic literacy in EOL agenda can be facilitated through the adoption of this open course model. This paper describes the model, its implementation in a course with undergraduate students located in universities in Canada, Mexico and Russia, and outlines its benefits and challenges. Graduate courses on Asia Pacific Cultures which enrolled international students in universities in Russia and Canada are also presented. Another purpose of this paper is to stimulate thinking about

how OERs and internationalization can converge in a way that addresses the challenges and the opportunities created by the rapid expansion of internet capabilities and the necessity of further developing EOL academic literacy.

It is critical to address two issues related to OERs:

1. how an open model can take advantage of existing university structures and their attributes (quality control, access to instructors, credential systems) and allow students globally to participate in a more open environment; and
2. how EOL students can develop their academic literacy at English medium institutions.

In this respect, an open model can capitalize on existing institutional structures and what they offer (credential systems, instructors, infrastructure, students) through reconceptualizing course delivery. Both online and blended modes of delivery can provide an opportunity to enable global participation and to greatly increase access for students from developing countries. For example, there are opportunities to share academic interaction components where students would be able to interact in an online forum for the sections of content that are shared, or perhaps meet in an online forum periodically to engage in cross-disciplinary activities such as discussion, debates or joint projects. Reconceptualizing course delivery in this way has the benefit of not only exposing students to a worldwide spectrum of perspectives and expertise through contacts with international Englishes from diverse cultures and settings and engaging them in a larger community of practice, but also facilitates the integration of various topics across diverse contexts. The challenge for instructors is to think of how the collaborative and constructive interaction component of the course can be intensified while ensuring that individual student needs are being enhanced through a greater access to expertise including academic language development.

Evolution of the model

The implementation of this model, in effect since its first iteration in 2000, has been motivated by a desire to advance the academic literacy of EOL students within a supportive and motivating social structure. Because it is recognized that social interaction is a critical component of most learning, including EOL academic literacy (Carey, 1999b, 2002; Carey and Guo, 2003) much of this research is grounded in the social constructivist principles of Vygotsky (1978, 1986; Lee and Smagorinsky, 2000) and the sociocultural perspectives of Lantolf (2000). Recognizing that discussions are such a critical activity for EOL learning, particular attention was paid to promote collaborative critical thinking and writing through the use of an asynchronous discussion forum between

English first language and EOL students. This form of immersion in a community of scholars and an online community, due to its asynchronous nature, makes it possible for students to play the role of both teacher and student in a reciprocal nature that can produce levels of knowledge creation and sharing that were superior to some conventional face-to-face courses. Comments such as “I acquired more academic English literacy in this course than in the decade I studied ESL” or “I came to know my colleagues in this course and to critically discuss knowledge to a much greater degree than in any previous university course I have taken” were examples of the advantages of the collaborative nature of the online forum. Again, because of the asynchronous nature of the immersion, there is a greater chance of more thoughtful and well constructed communications than would be possible for EOL students in face-to-face courses with native speakers. Further, striving to critically think about complex ideas was instrumental to developing technical vocabulary, phrases and content.

Having pioneered the implementation of online WebCT discussion forums to supplement my campus courses (Carey and Crittenden, 1998; Carey, 1999a, 1999b) I also observed that EOL students were much more engaged and contributed to a higher level of discussion in asynchronous online courses than was possible for them in regular face-to-face traditional courses. The asynchronous forum allowed EOL students time to compose their messages before posting (Carey, 1999a). Furthermore, EOL students consistently reported that their academic English improved more from the online than the traditional live face-to-face components in these mixed-mode classes. This was consistent with their more active online collaboration in the online component of the course when compared to the face-to-face component. In 2001, in order to further enrich the perspectives and engagement in this online discussion, students enrolled in a graduate course at Yakutsk State University in Russia were invited to participate in the online discussions of my graduate course, *Asia Pacific Narratives as Inquiry on Intercultural Aspects of Language Education*, at the University of British Columbia. This led to the development of a research program that sought to explore the intercultural collaboration among EOL students who were enrolled in credit courses at diverse universities but could participate in a common online discussion forum in English. All students received academic credit for their participation in the international online forum via their credit course graded by their respective professors in their home university either in Russia or Canada. In an initial study a detailed analysis of the forum protocols (Luo, 2004) from a systemic linguistic perspective yielded insights into the intricacies of how interrelated the conceptual development in course content was related to EOL literacy development and further supported the utility of the asynchronous online forum for enhancing academic literacy as predicted by social practice theory and the sociocultural perspective (Lantolf,

2000). The recorded histories of all students' online participation provided a corpus to study the interplay of sociocultural factors and discussions on the academic conceptual development of course content promoting EOL academic literacy. This permitted us to complete an analysis from a systemic functional perspective on comparing native English and EOL students participation in this online graduate seminar. A detailed account of this research is found in the dissertation of Luo (2004). This recorded corpus of all communication in these courses also allowed us to contrast this approach with that of studying the corpus from the perspective of the roles of cognitive and social presence (Gunawardena and Zittle, 1997; Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer, 2001; Anderson, 2003, 2004) as important perspectives for understanding language acquisition as we report in the doctoral thesis of Liang (2006). In independent research we then analyzed these online forums from the related perspective of the social presence and cognitive presence (Garrison and Anderson, 2003) and activity theory (Engstrom, 1999, 2001) in the dissertation of Morgan (2008). This extensive research gave us insights into the value of online forums for generating collaboration and debate between students and thus promoting EOL academic literacy.

A more detailed analysis (Gallant, 2009) of the same set of online course protocols from these graduate courses examined how the tensions and conflicts pertain to the interactions between dilemmas and learning in an online community and illustrate some of the sociocultural and discursive features of the online academic discussions. By examining the discursive data and looking at the conflicting exchanges in this qualitative case study we explored the dilemmas or contradictions in the students' reflections and their negotiations by using attribution theory. In addition, we studied how students use referencing as a linguistic strategy to open up dialogic possibilities to promote interaction in asynchronous academic discussion from a Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective which views language and its context as socially situated and functionally interconnected.

The dilemma approach also provides another effective metaphor for the liaison between teaching academic content through presenting course content in terms of dilemmas and problem solving through conceptual development and the role that academic EOL plays in achieving deeper understandings and the succinct communication of those ideas in a second language.

Briefly stated, whether we approached the online corpus from a Dilemma approach within Systemic Functional Linguistics or other sociocultural approaches (Lantolf, 2000) that view language as social practice, our joint research consistently supports online asynchronous communication as an effective venue within which to provide the academic content for English as another (EOL) academic literacy development (Carey and Morgan, 2005).

In order to further explore the asynchronous online forum as a venue we

asked the question of how is teaching presence (Garrison and Anderson, 2001, 2003) negotiated in online contexts and what are the constraints and affordances that influence this negotiation. In this research we adopted activity theory as a framework to investigate how instructors position themselves and are positioned by their teaching presence and cognitive presence (Garrison and Anderson, 2003). Again this research highlighted the powerful role that the professor plays in course design and teaching presence in promoting academic literacy development in online asynchronous forums. A detailed account of this research is found in the doctoral dissertation of Morgan (2008). The combination of these research projects analyzing graduate level EOL students' postings have shown that analyzing the online discussions data from a variety of theoretical perspectives has consistently shown how productive the venue can be for promoting academic literacy for EOL students.

The model was also adapted to engage undergraduate students for whom English was a second language in another global forum. This project involved undergraduate students at three different universities: Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM), Yakutsk State University in Russia and Ritsumeikan University, where students from Japan were on a one-year exchange program at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Canada. All students were enrolled in credit courses taught in English at their three respective universities and as part of their course requirements participated in an online discussion forum involving a total of 123 students from the three universities. The content in all three courses at the three participating universities was focused on intercultural understanding and socio-political issues and were conducted both face-to-face and online exclusively in English. Three English language instructors (two of the instructors had EOL histories) located in Mexico, Russia and at UBC were looking for an opportunity to engage students who were learning in an online dialogue about global issues including EOL from a sociocultural perspective. For six weeks students discussed a variety of issues as part of their course work at their host institution. Each institution allocated and assessed this activity differently and separately, according to their own course syllabus. Students received credit for their participation towards the established requirements of the course that they were enrolled in at their particular university. In this way, considerable institutional red tape was avoided and students appreciated the discussions across country borders (Basharina, 2005, 2007; Basharina and Carey, 2007; Basharina, Guardado and Morgan, 2008; Carey and Morgan, 2005). Research on these online forums also assumed an activity theory as a framework for investigating how the activity system will influence and be influenced by a teaching presence. A detailed analysis of this research is described in the doctoral dissertation of Morgan (2008) and in Carey and Morgan (2008). A comparison of entry and exit scores showed enhanced TOEFL scores relative to other years for the cohort of Japanese students at

UBC but this enhanced EOL performance cannot be attributed exclusively to this model since there are other simultaneous influences that could influence TOEFL scores. Other evidence for the utility of this model comes from the students' online protocols as well as the interviews of students and instructors. We also conducted a study that asked how teaching presence was negotiated in these online courses and what were the constraints and affordances that influenced this negotiation. These case studies (Morgan, 2008) found that even though online courses may share common design features, ultimately the instructor's conceptualization and implementation of the design will influence how the instructor creates online instructional space in this community of enquiry. The combined research dissertations by Morgan (2008), Gallant (2009), Basharina (2005) and Luo (2004) all elaborate how dilemma theory, activity theory and functional systemic linguistic analyses when combined with concepts of social, cognitive and teaching presence can guide curriculum design for optimizing EOL academic literacy.

Benefits and challenges

There have been numerous positive results from this model as expressed by both undergraduate and graduate students and instructors in questionnaires and interviews, and online comments (Carey, in press; Carey and Morgan, 2005; Basharina, 2007). In particular, students found that discussing online the topic of intercultural understanding from the perspective of different academic disciplines and cultural backgrounds was particularly productive in understanding intercultural perspectives and developing their EOL academic literacy. Specifically, EOL professors and students reported that due to the intense interest in the communicative activity on the discussion forum, they gained English academic literacy, particularly in their domains or disciplines of interest for research, as well as gaining general literacy in diverse areas and registers. This was a valuable feature because professors related how difficult it was for them and their students to have such extended professional experience in English outside of limited opportunities at short academic conferences (Flowerdew, 2007). This seminar provided professors and students with the context to develop their academic literacy in the genres and registers that were appropriate to their discipline and area of publication through the extensive communication with colleagues in the online forum. This was more effective than commercial software because they guided and chose the content and there was no associated expense. They communicated with whom they chose, when they chose, on a topic they chose. Furthermore, viewing academic literacy from the perspective of a situated semiotic practice and recognizing the importance of practice in communicating in the appropriate genre and register (Carey, in press) for scholarly publication in their interdisciplinary area of academic interest, this extended forum provided a much appreciated opportunity for the development

of their academic literacy.

Beyond the development of academic literacy for EOL students and faculty, the model allowed for other benefits, which are also transferable to other disciplines.

1. *Ease of international course transfers*: While universities are making progress in establishing course equivalence and credit transfers across universities within countries, admission procedures, transfer credits and advanced standing on an international level involve complex and time-consuming bureaucratic barriers. This model obviated such complexities by maintaining the specific course requirements and course credits within each course and its home university while simultaneously allowing international collaboration of students and professors across universities. Thus, each professor determined the proportion of their course grade that the shared component represented and each professor was responsible for grading their students within their particular course at their university. Consequently, the model allowed all participating faculty members and institutions to greatly enhance the academic depth and effectiveness of their courses at no expense.
2. *Breadth of professorial exposure for the students*: Instead of a single professor, students can have access to collaboration with two or more professors, each with different cultural perspectives and domains of research backgrounds and academic expertise. In implementation, the varied backgrounds and perspectives promoted an appreciation for intercultural understanding and provided a rich interdisciplinary English learning experience for the professors as well as the students.
3. *Breadth of background of international students from different institutions*: The highly varied backgrounds and training as well as educational and professional experience of the diverse students provided an unprecedented opportunity for each student in each institution to selectively engage in a discussion in English with students from a myriad of different perspectives.
4. *Flexibility of this approach*: It allows for different professors from different geopolitical co-ordinates to be recruited for successive academic terms or years in an academic program. Thus each professor can cover a much wider range of subjects in a given program. In turn, the enhanced development of the cooperating professors in their fields of interest and expertise through online discussion with other collaborating international professors can constitute a major motivation for professors to participate in these online collaborations and improve their academic literacy in their discipline and domain.

5. *Course credit for participation:* Most importantly, students were receiving credit for their participation in the discussion forum in the context of their local courses and programs at their home universities. Thus collaboratively edited assignments, term papers and subsequent theses could focus on local issues that were of most interest to individual students and provided maximal breadth for the enhancement of academic literacy.
6. *Opportunities to develop academic literacy in specific genres:* While most researchers, particularly in developing countries, do not have the time/resources to spend on the variety of commercial software available (which may be of dubious value), this approach using WebCT online discussion forums provides rich immersion opportunities to develop academic literacy in the specific genre of expression and technical vocabulary in the individual's specific interest in the academic field and at their level of need. Enriched editing components can easily be added to the course for collaborative research assignments and posted critiques. Unlike face-to-face immersion this asynchronous forum provides for less proficient students to have sufficient time to compose their communications and thereby increase their participation and improve their academic literacy. In addition, to be constantly immersed in reading and composing academic communications with time to access technical dictionaries, writing manuals and academic texts, the constant immersion in the reading of native speakers' communications provided a rich and continuous exposure to academic literacy which was greatly appreciated by the EOL students and faculty. This value was greatly increased due to the students' high interest in the content and being able to communicate with who they wanted, when they wanted on topics of their choice.

Future directions

From this experience of implementing variants of the model, it is evident that there were considerable advantages to an approach that benefited the instructors, students and institutions, but also that much is to be learned from its challenges to further our understanding of language acquisition (Basharina, Guardado and Morgan, 2008; Gallant, 2009). All of the diverse analyses of the online communication that were performed in the several theses served to further our understanding of how academic literacy can be productively promoted by creating online environments that immerse students in communication that pushes their needs to express complex academic written critiques and thinking in a second language. By creating online communities where the students are intensely involved in collaboration and knowledge generation the students can more efficiently advance their academic literacy in their second language. Although the use of this model has centred on international discussions using

asynchronous technologies, it could be applied to students working together on research such as case studies or joint projects using a much wider selection of available technologies. In particular, the benefits are evident when applying this model to courses in implementing international aid and disaster relief research, world health, global warming issues, pandemic emergencies or any topic where rapid international and intercultural cooperation is required or where local concerns of developing countries need to be addressed. The model could also be applied within a bilingual university, professional faculty or any tertiary institutions with programs that are looking for ways to be more inter-disciplinary in their content and approach to second language acquisition. Therefore, the model could facilitate both inter- and intra-university exchanges between developed and developing countries where promoting academic literacy in a world language is important.

Conclusions

This flexible model is particularly appropriate to the majority of EOL students in developing countries who lack TOEFL entrance scores and who cannot afford the luxury of travel and tuition for expensive exchange programs. Unlike conventional immersion programs where less proficient students are denied participation in the discussion, this asynchronous forum allows all students to have sufficient time to compose their messages and collaborate, thereby allowing exposure to increase their academic literacy. Hopefully this model will also encourage institutions to think differently about how their students can engage in global collaborative academic conversation that benefits both the local and international partners and breaks down the barriers to participation faced by EOL students in academic contexts. This model provides a context in which OCW cannot only be adapted to local situations and contexts, but can also provide a far more integrated and scholarly venue for academic discussion through the inclusion of scholars from a wide diversity of expertise and professional viewpoints. Perhaps in conjunction with the well-established open education and research resources as well as OCW initiatives, it will help contribute to a shift towards a culture of openness in the academy (Wiley, 2006). Finally, this pan-university course may well provide the means for EOL students to enhance their academic literacy to allow their subsequent access to leading universities and provide faculty members the means whereby they could publish in international journals which is requisite to their academic career advancement and promotion (Flowerdew, 2007). In this sense it is one of the few venues available for EOL students to attain high levels of academic literacy in appropriate genres and registers for academic publication which have been such a difficult barrier to overcome.

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