

Hot Topics Session Report: Proposing an English Think Tank for Summer 2000

Facilitated by Paula George
Pikes Peak College, Colorado Springs, CO

and Linda Marie Allington
Salt Lake City Community College, Salt Lake City, UT

The Western Region Outreach Center and Consortia (WROCC), supported by the PEPNet regional center directors, proposed to host an English Think Tank during the summer of 2000. This "Hot Topics" session focused on the proposal to bring together instructors from all over the United States who teach English to Deaf and Hard of Hearing students (hereafter D/HH students) through ASL in the postsecondary environment. Initially, it was also proposed to bring in mainstream teachers who are quite successful with Deaf students, but that has been postponed to a later time. The purpose of this meeting, or "Think Tank," is to form a network of instructors who are willing to share successful strategies, methods and practices. It is hoped that participants can also eventually develop some written recommendations for curricular scope and sequence, as well as achievable standards that Deaf and Hard of students can be expected to reach in terms of English writing proficiency.

Concerns brought up by the participants in the Hot Topics Session included:

- Justifying programmatic modifications/accommodations to administrators
- Justifying separate needs to administrators, including: Why D/HH students have literacy issues, why they still "belong" in the postsecondary environment, and why teaching English through ASL in separate classes is most effective

- Finding sufficient time and resources to develop such courses
- Running and funding courses with very few students
- Teaching multiple levels of students to achieve numbers
- Developing professional roundtables or networks to provide peer feedback
- Collecting ideas from each other and developing best practices
- Creating an e-mail listserv and a web page
- Collecting videos of professionals working and discussing ideas
- Developing models to demonstrate reasonable and achievable goals for students in reading and writing
- Identifying salient features of grammar that students can and should master
- Addressing testing and assessment issues

In light of these and other concerns addressed at this session, the first English Think Tank will be hosted in Salt Lake City, Utah on July 18-21, 2000.

Reports of recommendations and work products will be made available through PEPNet. At this writing, it is expected that there will be about twenty participants forming a core group and that there will be future annual conferences and an effort to build and reach all who are interested in this effort. The proposal for what is to be accomplished at this first Think Tank follows.

Statement of Need

Literacy is a common barrier to Deaf and Hard of Hearing students in postsecondary education. There needs to be a coherent approach to teaching literacy skills across the nation. There needs to be a logical, standardized scope and sequence of training to which students can have access anywhere in the country where Deaf classes are provided. Teachers need guidelines to follow when designing curricula for Deaf and Hard of Hearing adults.

Proposal

We propose to convene a Think Tank which comprises Bilingual teachers who are currently using or have in the past used ASL to teach English literacy skills to Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH) adults in postsecondary education, other directly concerned parties, and consultants. This group will focus on developmental English and pre-developmental English. It is anticipated that we will expand our scope in subsequent years to include English as a Second Language, College English, Community-based English Programs, and English for Specific Purposes.

Follow-up Report: "PEERS" is Born

Eighteen dedicated instructors from all over the United States met by invitation in Salt Lake City on July 18-21, 2000. This meeting was sponsored by the Western Region Outreach Center and Consortia (WROCC) and hosted by the Rocky Mountain Connections Center, a hub of WROCC. Paula George of the Southwest Regional Resource Center and Linda Marie Allington of the Rocky Mountain Connections Center were the co-chairs. There was tremendous energy and excitement as each participant shared successful practices and experiences, as well as concerns and frustrations, from their own programs. Many issues were discussed and plans of action started taking shape to create a website and work products that may later benefit others in our field. Realizing that there is so much to do and that as instructors, there is a real need for ongoing support and contact,

this group formed a new organization: PEPNet Postsecondary English Educators Resources and Support network, or "PEPNet PEERS." The following identity statement and objectives were formed:

PEPNet PEERS

Postsecondary English Educators Resources and Support

We are a group of postsecondary language (Sign and English) educators who work with students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, founded in July 2000 and sponsored by PEPNet. Our purposes are:

- To promote educationally and linguistically appropriate, accessible classroom environments;
- To provide resources to educators which encourage the development of student competencies in American Sign Language and English literacy;
- To develop techniques for students to achieve literacy competencies supporting their academic, social, vocational/career, and personal goals.

PEERS Objectives:

- Develop a professional network of instructors teaching English to Deaf students, including a listserv, website and annual faculty institutes.
- Share curriculum ideas, strategies, materials, best practices and teaching tips.
- Develop suggested scope and sequence for each level of English course targeted to Deaf students.
- Develop recommendations of best practices and suggested evaluation tools for content area and English mainstream instructors.
- Provide outreach and technical assistance to postsecondary institutions and K-12 instructors through PEPNet.

The website will soon be up and linked to the PEPNet website <www.pepnet.org> and the WROCC website <wrocc.csun.edu>. Individuals engaged in teaching English to Deaf and Hard of Hearing students who are interested in joining the listserv may do so at:
<<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PEPNetPEERS/join>>

For further information, please contact Linda Marie Allington <allingli@slcc.edu>, Paula George <paula.george@ppcc.cccoes.edu>, or Gary Sanderson at WROCC <gary.sanderson@csun.edu>.