

CHAPTER SIX

FINDINGS: PROPOSITION 2

The previous chapter provided a description of the conditions under which ELICOS teachers have to work in order to teach students the body of SMK stipulated in the syllabus. The conditions are far from perfect given the very limited amount of time that teachers have to teach their students, the patterns of enrolment, the lack of homogeneity among the students in terms of proficiency, knowledge about English and reasons for studying English. In order to teach what is stated in the syllabus within the ELICOS context, solutions have to be found to deal with all the constraints that are brought about by the organisation and operation of the ELICOS program. To this end, all ELICOS teachers adopt a teaching approach with strategies, which take account of these constraints. Thus, the second proposition of this thesis is concerned with the fact that the role of the ELICOS teachers requires them to develop teaching strategies that accommodate the constraints posed by the way the ELICOS program at DoLIE is organised and operated.

Proposition 2

TESOL teachers see their role as ELICOS teachers is to develop teaching strategies that accommodate the constraints posed by the way the ELICOS Program at DoLIE is organised, managed, and operated. Fours sets of strategies have been identified. The strategies which the ELICOS teachers have developed may be grouped under four headings, namely, strategies to maximize time utilisation in the classroom, strategies to address the lack of homogeneity among students, strategies of working with co- and parallel teachers, and strategies to prioritise the SMK to be taught.

This proposition outlines four groups of strategies. Each of these groups will now be considered in turn.

Strategies to Maximise the Use of Class Time

Owing to the fact that time is such a limited commodity, teachers try to maximise the time they have with the students. Several strategies have been employed to do this.

The first is to commence teaching the SMK in the syllabus as soon as possible. For all the teachers interviewed, actual teaching of the syllabus generally begins in the second lesson and this may be regardless of whether all the students for the class have arrived as seen in the following comment by Leanne:

Unfortunately, my new students did not come until Thursday (her second lesson with the class). So they missed out again and really, I'm not going to have time to do it again". (Leanne, intv0.1)

Teachers do not always know if the student numbers in their class are fixed until the end of the first week of the module. Thus, many teachers start teaching the syllabus in their second lesson and students who join class late may have to miss out on the instruction on some of the SMK. Most teachers perceive that there is no choice because of the amount of work, which has to be covered in each module.

As well as that, teachers tend to look for materials that can address several needs at one time. For example, Leanne taught listening note-taking by selecting texts that were clearly signposted so that her students also had a model to use for their oral presentation. On her choice of materials, Leanne had this to say:

It's fairly well structured. It can be a model in a way for speaking as far as things like signposting, transitional phrases and so on are concerned. (Leanne; intv0.1)

Similarly, Anna picked reading articles that could demonstrate certain text organisations that she wanted to teach in her writing. In this way, she was able to teach skills related to reading while exposing students to the way information was organised in written texts. This is demonstrated in the approach she took to prepare her students for their writing assignment. Her students were supposed to write an essay on “*any genre or integration of genres*”. To teach this, Anna’s plan was to look for articles that “*lend themselves to either cause and effect or argument or something*”. As a result, while the main purpose for the articles and texts was for teaching reading skills, Anna also intended them to serve as models of writing, which her students could follow in their own essay (Anna, intv0.1).

One other strategy for maximising time was to select activities that allowed the practice of several skills simultaneously. The teachers usually like to start their class with a ‘warmer’ that gets the class into the mood for the work planned for the day. When looking for such an activity, the teachers usually look for one where the students can practice a few areas of language at the same time. An example of one such activity is the running dictation where a piece of short text is posted on one of the walls of the classroom. The students work in pairs with one student going to the wall to read a bit of the text and then running back to their desk to repeat what they have read to their partner until they have the whole text copied down. The value of the activity lies in the fact that the students have to comprehend the text that they are reading so that they can repeat it to their partner in meaningful chunks. Furthermore, by committing the segments to memory, they are also learning to internalise the grammatical structures. To be understood by their partners, they also have to pay attention to their speech, making sure that it is intelligible to their partner as explained by Laura here:

I think it's a very good skill. They've got to – one person had to memorise what's on the wall and dictate it clearly to the other person; the other person has to ask for clarification. (Laura; intv 2.1).

Other activities, which allow the practice of several skills at one time and which the teachers frequently utilise include discussions, writing group compositions, and group problem-solving.

The third strategy employed by teachers in the morning classes is to integrate several teaching points in one activity so that the students can be practising a new skill while revising something they have learnt earlier, or they may be learning a few skills at one time. Many teachers reinforce what they teach in one macro-skill when they are teaching the other. For example, when teaching Reading, teachers may bring their students' awareness to the way the author had organised his/her text, and in doing so, are reinforcing what they have taught the students in their Writing class and vice-versa. This is evident in Anna's rationale for asking her students to critique a piece of written text based on the principles of good writing, which she had taught them. According to Anna:

Actually, for me, seeing them feedback to me what I taught them or what they've been taught as far as the structure goes and watch them apply it and not taking something in print and thinking it's in print, it must be perfect, but actually looking at it critically, the structure of the argument – I think it's valuable. ... Hopefully, my ideas are going to help them in their reading – to be able to evaluate somebody's arguments and text as an argument, not just swallow the whole thing as gospel... . (Anna; intv0.1)

By using one activity to teach a few language points, teachers make maximum use of the student contact hours.

Yet another strategy employed by the teachers is to focus on common problems in class rather than problems of every individual in class. As the teacher responsible for Speaking and Listening in Ac1, Leanne was aware that it was not possible to address the different pronunciation problems specific to the different nationality groups at any one time in her class. Therefore, her solution was to give the class a diagnostic test at the start of each module to find out the problems that were common to all and focus on those problems. Recalling what she did in the first module, Leanne said:

The first module started with a diagnostic test on pronunciation. We gave it to them just to have a look at if they're having problems that are pressing. At this level, I just try to just focus ... because it's very difficult with different nationalities to focus on any one particular sound, for instance. So I focus on things like stress – sentence and word stress – really important... (Leanne (intv 0.1)

Like Leanne, many teachers concentrate on the common problems rather than individual problems although these are not entirely neglected especially when they are related to the students' major assignments.

Finally, some teachers try to squeeze in some form of language teaching wherever they can. For example, Rosa believed that her students in Ac2 needed more work on vocabulary building but that had not been built into the syllabus. To help them expand their vocabulary, she decided that she would revise new vocabulary with her students who arrived on time, so that the time they spent waiting for the others to arrive was used constructively. In Rosa's words:

I don't know where I've read it It probably takes five lots of exposure to a word before someone remembers it. ... So, I just try to keep throwing them words by highlighting them and then they come across them in their reading and I thought, well, if I then dash them out on the computer as a handout sheet and literally it will be something for the people who arrive on time to start with and no waiting for latecomers. So that will be something they'd do. If people come in late, they won't get it. I hope that would encourage them to come on time and that will be like the third time they'll be seeing it and if by chance anyone's looked at it at home- the fourth time. (Rosa; intv2.1)

Anna had another strategy for making the most of her class time by ensuring that students were learning some things about language or were practising the language even after they had completed their assessment tasks. From experience, she knew that the students in the Academic English classes would not be in the mood for serious study after they had submitted their written assignment and given their oral presentation. Thus, to keep them focused on language learning, she asked the class to suggest some fun but language related activities that they would like to do for the last week of the module and she would prepare the lessons accordingly. As Anna explained:

I said today I wanted to make the next two weeks productive but enjoyable, so it they've some ideas of the types of activities that they'd want to do, they could tell me. Monday – I brainstorm the activities. If they tell me games, they're going to be out of luck unless I can find grammar games. (Anna; intv 0.2)

By insisting that all class activities involve language learning, the teachers exploit class time to the fullest.

In summary, the ELICOS teachers use the limited time they have with their class to the fullest. They do it in many ways. They start teaching early with most teachers beginning the work of the module in the second lesson. In trying to maximise their time, they also usually select materials and activities that serve several purposes. Next, they sometimes integrate the macroskills they are responsible for teaching as they are complementary. Another strategy to maximize class time is to spend more time addressing the common language problems the students have rather than individual problems. Finally, they seldom waste any time in class. Thus, time in class with the students is well accounted for by all the teachers.

Strategies for addressing the lack of homogeneity of students’ knowledge and goals

As explained in the first proposition, students in each class come from a variety of language learning backgrounds. Some students in the class may be doing their second module at that level while some may have been promoted from the level below; yet others are new to the ELICOS program at DoLIE having only recently arrived from overseas or having come from another ELICOS college. Therefore, what the students know about the language may vary quite a lot. In addition to the lack of common knowledge about language, there is also the possibility of a wider than expected range of language proficiency within the class. Consequently, in terms of knowledge related to language, teachers have two types of problems to manage. The first is finding strategies to bridge the knowledge gap about language, while the second is to find solutions to how to teach a class with a wider than normal range of proficiency.

Concerning the first problem, individual teachers have their preferred strategies. Anna gave the new students a handout, which gave them the essential information on the essay structure. She also paired her old students with the new ones so that the new students could learn by observing the old students performing the task and interacting with them. Anna explained that:

Because of time constraint, I can't go over in detail the essay structure again; so, what I've said I would do is to give them a handout which illustrates the structure of an essay basically, and as we work on a daily basis, hopefully I'll have time to go to them and clarify points such as topic sentence, thesis statement, introduction, body and conclusion; and during class, for example this morning, I put the new students with the old students who've been there previously from the previous module, so they could take their lead from them. (Anna; intv 0.1)

Anna counted on her new students catching up on their own with the notes she gave them and also learning through being in that classroom environment. Underlying such a strategy is the assumption that adult students have the ability to do some learning of their own by reading the notes given to them and by making sense of what takes place in the classroom.

In assisting the new students to find their feet in the class at the start of Module 2, Theresa's strategy was to ask her old students to tell the new students what they knew about the topic based on their understanding of the same topic covered in the Module 1. Recounting her first lesson with the class at the start of Module 2, Theresa remarked:

I just went into a revision and used all those (old) students and (said), "Okay, we've all these students here. What can you tell these students about what we've learnt on Friday?" So, try and get them to share their – lead the way and encourage the new students to be part of the learning process. (Theresa, intv 0.1)

In this way, the new students learnt about the subject matter and the extent to which it was covered by the class prior to their arrival. At the same time, the old students were engaged in a meaningful activity since they had to recall what they had understood of the previous lesson.

Rosa's strategy was to establish a common knowledge base by going through, with the whole class, the key aspects of SMK which she considered were crucial to know before the class could begin their work for the module. In consequence, before teaching a 'compare and contrast' essay to her Ac2 class, she planned to go through with the class the structure of an academic essay that was in the Ac1 syllabus. It would serve as a form of revision for the students who had completed Ac 1 and as a new lesson for the students who were new to the ELICOS program. Rosa's strategy was somewhat similar to that of Theresa's except that hers was more teacher-directed.

Laura, however, expected new students to work hard to catch up with the old students because she felt that she could not spend time on going over material that the other students in the class already knew:

Well, unfortunately they (newcomers) have to do their best. I can't go back to the beginning completely for them (Laura; intv2.1).

As can be seen, the strategies employed to deal with uneven knowledge about the language depend on individual teacher preference. Some teachers like Anna and Laura expect their students to exercise greater initiative by catching up on lessons that they

have missed while others like Theresa and Rosa prefer to go over some points with their students.

In terms of addressing the different levels of language proficiency among the students in the same class, teachers tend to look for a level to pitch their materials and teaching. Many teachers form an impression of their class on the first day by gauging how well and how quickly their students respond to them and the activities given to them. For example, Emma quickly formed an impression of her class level by observing the way the students were interacting with her, with each other and the activities she gave them on the first day. After observing the way they went about an ‘ice-breaker’ activity, she concluded that “*their level is higher than what (she’d) taught before*” (Emma; intv 1.1). As a result, she felt that some of the activities, which she had prepared for her DE2 class the year before, could not be used because those activities were too simple.

Theresa adopted a more holistic way of assessing the level of her class. She said that the first week was “*much into the adjustment stage – getting to know (the students) and ... really ...know the level of the students and try to pitch (the lessons) correctly*” (Theresa; intv 0.1). Her strategy was to get the students to bond as a class so that they were able to work in small groups and be unafraid to ask questions. From the questions they asked her, she decided that her students were “*intelligent – they wanna analyse, they wanna get in there to grapple with the language*” (Theresa; intv 0.1). It is interesting to note that while teachers are concerned with establishing the right language level at which to pitch their teaching, the assessment of this level also seems to include learning behaviours as illustrated in Theresa’s assessment that her students “wanna analyse” and Emma’s conclusion that her students liked learning and were “switched on”.

In regard to differences in goals for studying English, the issue is applicable mainly to the Academic English classes. Sometimes the Academic English classes have students who have applied to study general or professional English. These are students who have opted to go into the Academic English class rather than transfer to another ELICOS college when the ELICOS program cannot offer them a G/P class that is appropriate for them. The ELICOS teachers also have to have strategies to deal with such students. In this regard, Rosa’s strategy was to create a less ‘serious’ tone in the class:

I might try and just lighten it up a little bit, like try and do more warm ups into the topic – so like if we’re going to talk about clothes, I might, in brief, chat about clothes first – just soften it up because I’m aware that probably half the class isn’t really going on to academic work. ... (Rosa; intv2.1)

By spending more time talking about the topic rather than going directly to practising the various reading skills, some allowance was made for the non-academic students in the Academic English class.

Laura’s strategy was to focus on the goal of the individual students and make sure that the students with intentions to pursue further study chose topics that she considered were more academic for their oral presentations. The students who were not planning on studying in Australia were allowed to choose topics that she believed were more general in nature. Laura explained:

What I do is when they do their major presentation, when they look at a newspaper article, I will make sure that the postgrad students pick something that’s appropriate and challenging, difficult and I will not worry that the Japanese girls choose something that’s easy. (Laura;intv.0.1)

Laura was able to cater to individual student’ goals because of the nature of the task. In her case, the students had to each produce a presentation of their own whereas in the case of Rosa who was talking about how she handled the diverse aspirations of her students in a Reading class, individual differences could not be accommodated to the same degree.

To summarise, in their attempts to address the lack of homogeneity among students in terms of knowledge about the language, language proficiency and goals for studying English, the ELICOS teachers aim to create a common base from which they can then carry out their teaching of the SMK in the syllabus. They employ various strategies to achieve that common base. Differences in knowledge about language among the students are dealt with in the following ways: making use of old students as a resource; integrating important aspects of SMK which the old students have been taught into the new lessons; revising important aspects of SMK with the class as a whole; and expecting new students to catch up on their own. To solve the problem of disparity in

language proficiency, most teachers look for the ‘right’ level to pitch their lessons. Some of the ways they do this include observing student’s interactive behaviour while performing their tasks, diagnostic testing, and logical deduction. Finally, in terms of addressing the problem of students with different goals for learning English, the teachers adjust their lessons according to the goals of the students in their class. As it has only been a case of students with non-academic goals studying in an Academic English class, one strategy used is to make the class less academic in tone. Yet another strategy is to accept less academic topics from students who are not planning on pursuing tertiary study.

Strategies to Deal with Co- and Parallel Teachers

Working as a team is an important feature of teaching in the ELICOS program at DoLIE. Each morning class teacher has to work in tandem with the other teacher to ensure a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of lessons. There is a need for the two teachers to be informed of what the other person is teaching. This is particularly important in the Academic English classes where students have to write an essay for one teacher and produce an oral presentation for the other using the same text organisation. For example, in Ac 2, the students have to write a ‘cause and effect’ essay for Rosa, and at the same time, they have to give a ‘cause and effect’ presentation for Leanne. If the teachers are not in communication with each other, it is easy for students to prepare one piece of work and give it to Rosa as an essay, and to Leanne as an oral presentation. To prevent this from happening, the teachers have to liaise with each other. Working as a team is also seen as necessary in that each teacher needs to know how their students are doing in the other teacher’s class and if special attention has to be paid to specific students.

However, meetings with one’s co-teacher are not always possible if both teachers work part-time and their days of work do not coincide. Most teachers have simple strategies to make sure that they are kept informed of what is happening in the other teacher’s class. For the Academic English teachers to ascertain that their students are not duplicating their work in Writing and Speaking, they meet at the start of the module to select from a list of topics the ones they wish to use for Writing and those they want to

use for Speaking. By selecting different topics for each of the macro-skills, students will not be able to use the same piece of work for the two teachers. In addition, teachers record what they do in the class roll after each lesson. The record is very brief but it gives enough information to the other teacher regarding what has been taught the day before. This is particularly important for the teachers of the DE classes as the coursebook is used by both teachers. Occasionally, teachers leave notes for each other in the roll. In most instances, the notes are usually regarding administrative matters such as collecting forms from students or reminding students of a change in venue and other similar matters. In extraordinary situations such as when there are problems with any aspect of the teaching, a meeting is usually arranged to resolve the problems.

Overall, liaising with the co-teacher is not regarded as a difficulty. In fact, opportunities to develop an effective teaching program are great especially when the two teachers work very well together and both are fulltime. This is evidenced in the successful partnership between Joanne and Rae. Joanne taught three terms of G/P classes with Rae. They both agreed on the activities, which they would teach the class and their practice was to meet weekly to decide what each would do. Therefore, there was constant liaison between the two teachers. According to Joanne, her teaching dovetailed that of Rae's. For example, in the module before this interview, Joanne asked the class she was sharing with Rae to produce a class newspaper. Rae's project for the class was to produce a soap opera that was then reviewed by the same students for the newspaper:

... Rae – we complement. We talk to each other all the time – that what one could do in writing, the other one could do in action. So she – Rae – did soap operas. They wrote a soap opera and it was videoed and then there was a review of the soap opera in the newspaper and things like that. ...So it was all sort of linked up. We were reinforcing each other. (Joanne; intv1.1)

Commenting on how interlinked the activities between the two teachers were, Joanne explained:

Well, I think it's because Rae and I get on so well we can pre-empt what the other's doing because we've discussed it the week before, and so we've already said what she's worked out – what she would do – and fit in. We try – so there's a flow to it. So we're not independent of each other. We actually support each other. (Joanne, intv.1.2)

Although most relationships between co-teachers are not as close as this one, they are still close enough for the teachers to be well informed of what the other teacher does with the class and how the students are performing for the other teacher.

In terms of working with parallel teachers, the situation is different. With parallel classes, there is a need to standardise the materials, activities and assessments. For this to happen, the solution on which most teachers have agreed, is to meet weekly to discuss their plan for the following week. In the main, this works well with teachers sharing materials, which they have prepared themselves. For example, Rosa used an essay, which Ben wrote for his class. Rosa felt that it was a good piece of work in that he deliberately included weaknesses, which he wanted students to identify. Rosa used it as a revision of the essay structure and organisation. While teaching on Ac1, Leanne also reported that the Speaking/Listening teachers “*showed each other ... ideas*” (Leanne; intv0.1).

In working together, a degree of accommodation is required by all concerned. According to Laura, she “*negotiate(d) with Claire (her parallel teacher) all the time*”. For instance, she did not object to the mini-tests, which Claire wanted to give the students even though Laura herself did not like such tests. Laura also acquiesced to Claire’s suggestion to giving students more time for their listening test. Laura commented that Claire liked to be “*very generous*” (Laura; intv2.1) whereas she liked to challenge her students more.

However, accommodation does not mean merely allowing the other person to have her/his way all the time. It depends on the personalities involved. Rosa found it frustrating to work occasionally with Ben because he was also a part-time student at another university. Therefore, it was difficult for them to find time to meet. The solution that Rosa found was that she would prepare her lessons ahead and then show Ben when they met. If there was no objection from Ben, she would proceed with the lessons as she had planned them. Explaining her actions, Rosa said:

I’m the sort who likes to plan ahead and I know that’s probably me being anal but I like to see the week ahead; so, I tend, in the end, out of frustration, plan things myself and photocopy it and get it all ready and then it feels like I’m being a bit bossy when that teacher then comes and

says, “Oh, what are we going to do?” and I say I’ve already got it ready and planned. (Rosa; intv. 1.3)

This arrangement worked because Ben was happy for Rosa to take the lead. In cases where both teachers have strong ideas about what to teach, the teachers set aside regular meeting times to discuss and prepare teaching materials for each week.

In summary, ELICOS teachers are able to find ways of working as part of a team without upsetting each other. In working with their co-teacher and their parallel teacher(s), they make sure that their channels of communication are open and there is a willingness to accommodate the other person. With the co-teacher, the ELICOS teacher has to be careful with not doing materials and activities, which ought to be done by the co-teacher, and he/she always keeps the other informed about important developments in his/her class. In regard to working with a parallel teacher, there is a need to be tolerant of views that are different from one’s own and to accommodate those within one’s teaching.

Strategies for Selecting the SMK in the Syllabus to be Taught

The greatest concern for the ELICOS teachers is to be able to equip their students with the knowledge and skills of language in order to fulfill the objectives of the unit outline to a level deemed satisfactory. One way of ensuring that the students are able to meet the unit objectives is to prioritise the teaching of the SMK in the unit outline so that what is viewed as most important gets the most attention. The first priority is given to teaching the language and skills which the students need to complete assessment tasks as these tasks are usually considered to be an indication of the students’ level of accomplishment for the module.

The manner in which the teachers prepare the students for the assessment tasks depends on whether the class which they teach is an Academic English class, DE class or a G/P class. In the Academic English classes, knowledge of the skills and language deemed important for successful completion of the assessment task becomes the main focus of teaching for the duration of the module. In this regard, greater emphasis is given to

language the students have to produce themselves. Thus, the Writing and Speaking components which stipulate an essay and an oral presentation respectively as tasks for assessing the students' performance receive greater attention than the Reading and Listening components. Consequently, greater effort is spent on planning and devising strategies to teach the various sub-skills and aspects of language needed by the students to complete the assessment tasks for Writing and Speaking than Reading and Listening.

Even before the commencement of the module, Rosa's first concern in planning her teaching of the Writing and Reading components was how to approach the teaching of Writing so that her students could do the assessment task. She planned what she wanted to do for Writing first and then she fitted what she had to teach for Reading around her plans for Writing. She commented on this thus:

Okay, what I've concentrated on mainly is the writing because half the lesson is reading and half is writing but the students have a writing assignment that they have to give in beginning of Week 4, so beginning of Week 3, they have to be ready to write and it only gives us a couple of weeks, so I've picked out things that relate to writing... (Rosa, intv1.1)

Although Rosa was just as concerned about the teaching of Reading, she attended to the planning for the teaching of the writing assignment first. Her first concern was to identify the micro-skills the students need to complete the writing assignment and to schedule these skills for teaching so that the students would have sufficient time to learn and practice the skills.

It is also the case that most Academic English teachers give their students the assessment task on the first day of the module so that they have adequate time to produce a good piece of work. This is illustrated by Anna's account of what she did on the first day she met her class. This happened to be on a Wednesday of the first week as the Monday was a public holiday:

It's a short week. On Wednesday, ...I told them what type of essay they'll be doing (in) this module, when it's going to be due and how long it is. (Anna; intv 0.1)

Thus, students know from the first lesson, what they are expected to produce for the module.

Preparation for the assessment task usually begins in earnest when the teacher meets the class for the second time. Continuing with her account of what she did with her class in the first week, Anna said that she organised a brainstorming activity whereby her students were asked to think up ideas for their essay in her second lesson with the class. This was to be followed up with a lesson on narrowing the essay topic in the next lesson. She recalled:

Friday -...And the last thing we did was to brainstorm some topics for their own essays which I'll follow up on Monday when I know I'll be teaching them, hopefully, giving them ideas on how to narrow a topic.
(Anna; intv0.1)

Anna was very focused on the assessment task throughout the whole module.

The same was observed in Laura who taught Speaking and Listening in Ac1. The assessment task for Speaking in Ac1 was to select an article from the newspaper, summarise it orally and give an opinion of the article. When she met the class for the first time on Tuesday, Laura, for homework, gave them a newspaper article, which she wanted to use as a text to teach her students how to structure their presentation scheduled for Week 4. On this, she stated:

On Thursday – their homework is to read a newspaper article (that) I've given them about polygamy – about an American man who had five wives with a lot of difficult vocabulary and they have some questions – comprehension questions on that, and we'll use that to talk about how you analyse a newspaper article in English and how you can use that as a structure as a presentation ... (Laura, intv1.1)

In Laura's case, preparation for the task began even earlier. The students were already given homework related to their oral presentation in the first lesson.

In the DE and G/P classes, the approach taken by the teachers towards preparing their students for assessments is slightly different because the goals of the students are less specific than those who study Academic English. In the Academic English classes, the

majority of the students' aim is to undertake further study in Australia. There is, thus, a greater obligation to help students achieve this goal. On the other hand, the students in the DE classes are not at the stage where they are ready to proceed to further study and some of them may not be interested in further study just like those students in the G/P class. They are not as anxious as their fellow students in the Academic English classes to do well in their assessment tasks. Therefore, assessments are not viewed with the same seriousness for these students.

This has an impact on the way the teachers prepare the students for the assessment tasks. While the SMK related to the assessment tasks is still a priority, the preparation for these tasks is approached in a more relaxed manner. The students are not told what their assessment tasks are on the first day. Preparatory activities for the assessment tasks are treated as normal classroom activities. This can be seen in the way Emma prepared her DE2 students for the assessment task for writing, which required the production of a narrative. She began by teaching the unit in the *Headway* textbook on ghosts and supernatural happenings in Week 2. After reading some parts of the unit in the book, she asked the students to discuss and share their knowledge on supernatural events. The students were given activities where they talked about something unusual that had happened to them or they had heard about. In expressing their ideas, the students were, in fact, practising the structure of a narrative. However, she did not tell them that those activities were preparing them for the story they were going to write. Attention was not drawn to the assessment task until two lessons before the assessment was due for submission. On this, she reflected as follows:

I think they've got a writing assignment due next Friday – a story, so I think maybe next Monday or Wednesday, I'll talk a bit more 'cos I want to read their stories and we've been working quite a bit on their stories.
(Emma, intv2.3)

A less urgent tone is noted in Emma's handling of student assessment. While taking steps to ensure that students know how to write a narrative, the assessment writing task, Emma treats the preparation more as basic skills which the students have to practice in order to learn the language.

In the case of the G/P class, Joanne also did not tell the students that the activities which they were doing and the language which they were being taught were to equip them for the assessment tasks, which required the production of two letters, one formal and one informal. Her strategy was to get her students to practise the letter genre from the very start of the module. In fact, all the writing that she gave her class was letter writing.

Referring to the writing test she was going to give, Joanne explained:

Basically, they do letters for everything. They don't have any other sort of writing. ... (T)his one is still going back over the job business. It will be exactly like the last one but they just have to produce another piece that's acceptable. (Joanne; intv1.3)

She had spent two weeks of the module on the theme of work and she had taught them how to write a job application letter. In Week 3 of the module, she gave them an in-class assessment, which was also on a letter of application for a job. Therefore, her students had had adequate preparation to write a job application letter for the test.

As can be seen from the examples given, the ELICOS teachers give priority to teaching students the SMK they are required to know in order to do their assessments. It follows then, that the teaching of tasks and skills not required for the assessment task takes place only if there is extra time available. If time is short, these other tasks and skills may not be taught. Rosa illustrated this scenario. One of the topics in the Ac2 syllabus which she had to teach her class was summary writing. However, only half an hour of class time was available for her to cover the topic. In consequence, she decided against teaching it because summary writing was a difficult skill for students to learn, certainly within the time available to teach it. She felt that unless the work which the students had to do at the next level required knowledge of summary writing skills, that half hour was better spent on doing something else. In her words:

I'm not quite sure why we have to squeeze that in. It should be a whole morning but I might not do it. I don't think it will be a cause for revolution. ... Yeah, and it's kind of separate from everything else. So what I thought I might do is talk to the Academic 3 teachers and see if it's absolutely necessary that we do something because in the file, we've got to cover summary writing and plagiarism and paraphrasing. (Rosa; intv2.2)

She concluded by saying that, generally, the teachers “try and put too much in”.

In addition to focusing on what students need to complete their assessment tasks, some attention is given to subject matter which is likely to help students to achieve their own medium to long term goals. This is regardless of whether or not the subject matter is found in the syllabus. For example, when teaching a DE class, the teachers are mindful of what their students will need when they go to the Academic English classes. Thus, Joanne selected reading passages, which she felt demanded a lot more from her DE4 students. Her rationale for doing this was because:

It's a huge jump between DE4 and Ac1. So, I'm trying to get them into more demanding reading tasks and developing that. When the reading becomes more demanding – challenging – they've got more strategies to approach that reading, be it skimming, scanning, pre-reading, looking at clues, jumping the words – guessing them – things like that. (Joanne, intv0.1)

With Writing, Joanne directed her students' attention towards the structure of the paragraph, a topic taught in the Academic English classes. She gave her students practice in writing topic sentences, supporting sentences, linking sentences, and using connectives. Joanne's reason for her actions was that she wanted to get her students better prepared “for the next step” (Joanne; intv0.1). Joanne did this by focusing on text cohesion and unity when teaching her students to write the genres stipulated in the module outline.

In the Academic English classes, teachers are concerned about the skills students will need when they commence their study in mainstream courses. From their experience of teaching ELICOS students, the teachers find that there are areas of knowledge about studying in Australia that the ELICOS students need to note. These are related to teachers' own ideas of what the typical Australian university student is like and what knowledge such a student is assumed to have. Most teachers believe that the average Australian student knows what is acceptable and appropriate behaviour in an academic setting. This includes knowing what is considered as academic honesty and integrity, the importance of evaluating information critically, and being informed about issues that are considered to be of general interest to everyone. In regard to academic honesty and integrity, a topic that is covered in all the levels of academic English is plagiarism.

Many teachers are of the opinion that the students are unaware of how unacceptable plagiarism is in a Western university context and that it is easy for students to plagiarise as they have ready access to a lot of materials from the internet. As Anna explained:

They plagiarised mainly because part of the problem is that they could go to any internet site and just plagiarise from what's on there or just take an essay that was there already. ... So, this module, I've told them today again that I'm going to go over the whole issue of plagiarism. (Anna; intv1.1)

To address this need, teachers not only point out to students that it is wrong to plagiarise but they also equip students with the strategies to help them to use other people's ideas and words in a manner that is considered to be acceptable and appropriate. Referencing, summary writing, synthesis and paraphrasing are some of the study skills which are taught to students so that they know how to acknowledge the work of other people in appropriate ways.

Another area of subject matter covered by the Academic English class teachers is what they refer to as 'critical reading', which is simply the practice of giving a personal opinion on a piece of text. The purpose of introducing critical reading is to help the ELICOS students to develop a more questioning attitude towards the written text and also to help them to practice giving an opinion. Both Leanne and Laura observed that their students from certain countries avoided giving an opinion if they could. Leanne's observation was as follows:

Yes, some of them are better than others at giving opinions. I found the Indonesians and Thais are more forthright – not afraid to give their opinions but the Chinese students find it more difficult. ... Again the Koreans too. ... They will give like the set opinion that is generally believed in Korea but not their own personal opinion which is hidden and perhaps not meant for talking about in public. (Leanne, intv1.3)

Laura's experience was almost the same as shown in the following quote:

Also, when they do their presentations, I make sure that they can give a sensible conclusion – they can give a point of view verbally and I did that in the same class. Last term, I had a lovely Chinese girl who's in her late twenties who's going into master's study and she talked about divorce but she would not give her own opinion about it. (Laura, intv1.1)

Her solution was to insist on the student giving an opinion on the issue before she could go back to her seat.

Finally, the ELICOS teachers also feel that the students come with little general knowledge. This is a disadvantage when they go into mainstream study because university students in Australia are expected to have some knowledge of issues that affect society. In Laura's opinion:

The lecturers will assume that they've got this cultural information about this country and an awareness of the social justice issues and an awareness of some of the geographic issues and regional issues – things like global warming. It will be assumed that like Australian Year 12 students, they do have a general knowledge and a lot of Asian students don't. (Laura, intv1.1)

Therefore, the ELICOS teachers see it as a part of their responsibility is to equip their students with some knowledge on issues of importance to Australia.

To summarise then, one of the ways by which ELICOS teachers deal with the issue of limited time is to prioritise the SMK to be taught to students. There are two areas of SMK to which teachers pay particular attention. The first is that which is related to the assessment tasks found in each module. This is especially the case with the academic English classes where almost all the planned activities revolve around the assessments. The second concerns equipping students with the knowledge and skills they require to achieve their medium and long term goals for studying English.

Conclusion

This chapter developed the second proposition, which was that in order to teach the body of SMK stipulated in the syllabus, the teacher has to find strategies that allow them to work around the constraints posed by the structure of the ELICOS Program at DoLIE. The strategies, which teachers use in order to teach their students can be placed under four groups. The first is strategies to maximise the use of class time. The second is strategies to address the lack of homogeneity among the students in terms of knowledge about the language, language proficiency and goals for learning English.

The third group of strategies which teachers use are those that relate to working with one's co- and parallel teachers. The final group is strategies for selecting the SMK from the syllabus to be taught.