

ELT

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SCANS Plans: Integrating Language, Employment, and Culture in the ESL Classroom (taken from *Compass Points 2*)

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Here's today's multiple choice test:

What is the focus in adult ESL classrooms in 1998?

- ☐ Learning English
- ☐ Acquiring workplace skills
- ☐ Developing cross-cultural awareness

The answer should be, of course, all of the above.

Welfare reform and the accountability requirements of GPRA, the Government Performance and Results Act, link funding for English Language Training to learner outcomes which are employment-related and performance-based. Performance measurement is not new to refugee ESL programs. We have worked with the Mainstream English Language Training (MELT) competency-based curriculum since the early 1980's. Through the ELT/TA Project, this curriculum for survival and employment has recently been updated. (*Performance-Based Curricula and Outcomes*, ELT/TA 1997. See p. 4.)

Currently, this renewed emphasis on employment-related ESL has created growing interest in the competencies of the SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills). What are they? What benefits are there in using the framework for designing ESL curricula? What are the possible drawbacks? In this issue of *Compass Points*, we are introducing the **SCANS Plans Portfolio**, a set of articles and sample lesson plans which will, we hope, provide the answers to some of these questions and give you an opportunity to try SCANS in your own classrooms.

SCANS SKILLS - WORKPLACE KNOW-HOW

In 1991, a group of business and education leaders issued a major report (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991) which identified five workplace competencies and three foundation skills needed for solid workplace performance. The commission members assumed that all workers, native or non-native speakers of English, and at all levels of education, need to have these skills. (Grognet, 1997).

The competencies "define the know-how American students and workers need for workplace success" (U.S. Department of Labor, 1993). The competencies are necessary for solid job performance across employment categories and beyond entry-level jobs.

In California, the push is on to infuse the SCANS into ESL classrooms. Brigitte Marshall-Mingkwan (1996) writes that SCANS has a natural affinity for effective, established ESL techniques: content-based instruction, student-centered organization, and cooperative learning, among others, along with the "affective-humanistic activities" which foster strong interpersonal skills. Job performance is more than teaching work-vocabulary. The skills to succeed on the job are important for self-sufficiency outside the workplace as well, making SCANS relevant for the learner whose goals are not employment-related.

Note that the SCANS competencies were developed for native English speakers. Grognet (U.S.

Department of Labor, 1993), who states that the SCANS report is “a huge step forward in connecting schools and workplaces,” points out the following:

Students born in the United States who are native speakers of English already have the “tools”—English language and U.S. culture—with which to learn the foundation skills and master the competencies. Language-minority students usually do not. To illustrate, learning to read and write in English assumes one speaks English and needs only to add literacy, and allocating time resources assumes that everyone has the same cultural concept and value of time.

This highlights the added responsibility for ESL teachers in incorporating SCANS into their classrooms. We must make sure students possess the basic skills - in English - along with the cultural awareness of what is expected in the American workplace. This must be concomitant with learning to work in teams, do group problem-solving, and organize information.

SCANS: PROCess and CONtent

Many educators in California, where cooperative learning is a focus in education, utilize cooperative learning strategies to promote development of the competency areas and foundation skills called for by SCANS. They emphasize SCANS as a PROCESS, a way of organizing a class to teach students to work on teams, teach others, and negotiate. Barbara Birch (Marshall-Mingkwon, 1996) states that:

it is important for educators to recognize that while an obvious employment connection can be made by using work-related content material, it is the instructional methods used by the teacher and learners that get to the heart of workplace readiness and know-how. In other words, “how” tasks are performed and language is used is often as important or more important than “what” the specific language or content of the task is.

Ann Marie Damrau and Donna Price-Machado, San Diego Community College Continuing and Adult Education, have done ground-breaking work in classroom design and structures built on SCANS. Donna presents 10 simple ways to incorporate SCANS into your own classroom. (See “SCANS: The Missing Link,” pp. 7-8.)

Erik Erikson, Emily Griffith Opportunity School, Denver, looks to collaborative learning as the vehicle for preparing students for job acquisition and success. Drawing on models from Total Quality Management, the aim of student collaboration is to create a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts. By incorporating functional vocabulary and the language of negotiation into tasks, students interact in ways which mirror workplace situations. (See “Is That All There Is? Allocating time, materials and staff,” p. 7)

Advocates of competency-based learning who focus on learner outcomes may draw on SCANS as a guide to workplace CONTENT, stressing the need for specific workplace information (how to write a memo, read a flow-chart, decipher a manual); functional/notional considerations (how to disagree with the boss, handle complaints, respond to criticism), and cultural understanding (knowing what an American employer expects and values in a worker.) It is still clearly SCANS, and at the same time has a strong ESL focus. Such a focus frequently produces task-based teaching materials. (See Brod, “Cooperation and Team Building,” p. 7.)

Classroom projects are an excellent way to integrate a number of SCANS competencies. They may also be used effectively with classes which are not strictly job-oriented. Teachers at the International Institute of Metro St. Louis incorporated SCANS into projects related to the winter solstice. Teachers had to come up with two or three possible projects and target the language skills that they would teach within the project. The students had to work in groups, select their project, work together to solve

problems, develop lists of needed materials, and then come up with a final product for display in the Front Hall of the Institute. (See Silver, “SCANS using The Winter Solstice and Divali: asking the right questions below) Here’s another test question: Which SCANS competencies were incorporated into these projects? (There’s no answer key. Problem-solve with a colleague!)

In the excitement over innovative projects, creative processes, and myriad classroom reconfigurations, we must not lose sight of why our students are in class: to learn English. SCANS as Process, SCANS as Content, and conscious instruction in English all need to be addressed in the true integration of SCANS competencies and foundation skills. This illustrates a long-standing dictum of successful ESL educators: students have different learning modes and styles. Methods and materials which employ a variety of approaches give our students maximum opportunities to learn and succeed.

Regardless of your viewpoint, SCANS can be a valuable new tool among the old-reliable instruments in our ESL toolbox.

WORKPLACE COMPETENCIES. Effective workers can productively use:

- **Resources:** allocating time, money, materials, space, staff;
- **Interpersonal Skills:** working on teams, teaching others, serving customers, leading, negotiating, and working well with people from culturally diverse backgrounds;
- **Information:** acquiring and evaluating data, organizing and maintaining files, interpreting and communicating, and using computers to process information;
- **Systems:** understanding social, organizational, and technological systems, monitoring and correcting performance, and designing or improving systems;
- **Technology:** selecting equipment and tools, applying technology to specific tasks, and maintaining and troubleshooting technologies.

THE FOUNDATION. Competence requires:

- **Basic Skills:** reading, writing, arithmetic and mathematics, speaking and listening;
- **Thinking Skills:** thinking creatively, making decisions, solving problems, seeing things in the mind's eye, knowing how to learn, and reasoning;
- **Personal Qualities:** individual responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management and integrity.

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