

## Is ESL Helpful?

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America, known as the land of freedom and opportunity, has attracted numerous immigrants since the beginning of its history. Recently, statistics have shown that during the ten year period from 2000 to 2009, nearly 14 million foreigners immigrated to America. I, as one of the fourteen million immigrants, have so much to say about the life of a foreign student in this broad land. One of the main issues I want to address here is the ESL program that I was required to attend when I first moved to America. ESL, stands for English as a Second Language, and like many other language programs, such as ESOL and ELD, is designed especially for non-native English speakers. Students in the ESL program take the same classes, besides English, with their classmates on a regular basis. Its purpose is to serve as a buffer for new students to adapt to the new environment. Based on two years of experience in the ESL program, I say, objectively, the ESL program not only defeats its original purpose, it also delays the opportunity for foreign students to catch up with their English-speaking classmates.

The main drawback of the ESL program is the sense of exclusion felt by the ESL students. During winter 2006, I landed in Los Angeles, California. When my parents registered me to attend local middle school, the very first thing my counselor asked me to do was to take a test that determines my English language ability. Later, I was notified that I was put into the ESL program. At that time, I had no clue about ESL whatsoever. The only thing I knew was that I was separated, separated from the rest of English-speaking students. When normal students took grammar and writing lessons in normal English classes, ESL students were reading children's books. The reading

assignment of the class was degrading to ESL students. I remembered clearly the first required reading assignment in ESL class was One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish by Dr. Seuss. At the same time, regular students were reading Uncle Tom's Cabin. The purpose of creating ESL program is to help people who speak English as a secondary language. However, it achieves no more than separating the non-native English speakers from the rest of the students.

Another main defect of the ESL program is that the program delays students from actually adapting to the new environment. ESL was divided into three levels. Students are required to spend one year in each level. I was a lucky ESL student. When I was first introduced in to the program, I was alerted to the inefficiency of the class. My main goal in middle school was to skip one level of ESL and attend at least one year of normal English class and I did it. At the beginning of eighth grade, my first year of sitting in a regular English classroom, I had a hard time in the class. It was bitter because the two years of ESL training seemed to be useless. During the year, I could clearly sense the improvement of my English skills. At the beginning of the year, I was still reading One fish Two fish Red fish Blue Fish. After one year of receiving regular English lessons and having middle school level reading assignments, I was able to receive an A in the class and was able to read and fully comprehend Uncle Tom's Cabin for outside class reading. This clearly shows that taking a normal English class can help foreign students adapt faster than separating them apart to the ESL program. I have always believed that ESL students would be better off if they could attend regular English class instead of wasting three years in ESL.

Even when I was writing this essay, I can still sense my anxiousness about the ESL program. I do appreciate people who came up with the idea of providing convenience for foreign students. However, my experience of being in the ESL program and that of many other ESL students that I have talked to show the ineffectiveness of these programs. I hope that someday non-native English speakers can receive the same opportunity to sit in the regular English classroom with their classmates instead of being separated into a different classroom.

