

## **Introduction**

This portfolio is a reflection of what I have learned through my studies in the Master of Second Language Teaching (MSLT) program at Utah State University. Participation in this program challenged my identity as a teacher, made me more aware of how I teach, and taught me how to formulate research questions and pursue the answers to them. The main focus of my studies was to articulate a Teaching Philosophy Statement (TPS) that incorporated a balance between my personal beliefs about language teaching and research in the field of language acquisition. As I developed my TPS I had multiple opportunities to teach courses in intensive English and Spanish where I was able to sharpen my skills as a teacher and become a facilitator in the classroom. My TPS evolved as my priorities in the classroom shifted and I adopted perspectives that improved my teaching and empowered my students. This portfolio contains work that I completed in the MSLT program that best reflects my current beliefs about teaching English as a Second Language and Spanish as a Foreign Language.

The core of this portfolio is my Teaching Philosophy Statement. The topics found in my TPS include the teacher's role and meaningful communication in the classroom, teaching culture and pragmatics, and my introduction into Sociocultural Theory. The artifacts that follow the TPS explain these topics in great detail and provide lesson plan ideas that I have successfully used in courses that I taught during my graduate instructorships. The themes contained herein outline my current beliefs on language teaching.

## TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

### **Apprenticeship of Observation**

I remember deciding on my first day of first grade that I wanted to be a teacher when I grew up, just like my father, who was a Spanish/Linguistics professor at the university near our home. I knew that he loved his job. When I met my first grade teacher I found that she was cheerful, kind, enthusiastic, and intelligent and appeared to love her job as well. I assumed that if I became a teacher, I would love my job too.

As a young child, before I started school, I had opportunities to go to work with my father and see university life. I also watched him work from home and saw his dedication to teaching. I learned how much hard work, dedication, and love for the subject is required in this profession. He demonstrated that teaching is not a regular “nine to five” job. Outside of class, countless hours are necessary to prepare for future classes, grade assignments, and plan the curriculum not only to meet the needs of students, but to meet the curricular demands. Most of this work is done without praise, gratitude or pay. Having an interest in the subject matter is not enough. A great deal of passion, background knowledge, and understanding of the content is necessary to personally connect with it. An ideal teacher is concerned with the students’ understanding as well as their growth, and creates opportunities in the classroom for students to demonstrate that understanding, simultaneously providing opportunities for growth.

I entered elementary school with a genuine love for good books, which at that time was anything I could get my hands on. My teachers told my mother I was a “fearless reader” because the big words never discouraged or frightened me. I had wonderful parents who introduced me to reading at a young age and I was in the top reading groups all through elementary school even though reading was always challenging. I have

always been and still am a slow reader. I always remember more when I read out loud to myself. I cannot skim materials and glean any valuable information. I quickly learned how to dissect and analyze and make flashcards, charts, and other graphic organizers so that I could actually remember what I read. From my elementary school teachers I learned that it is okay if I have to read something more than once to remember it; they actually encouraged me to do so. They taught me study skills that I have applied to my learning and comprehension skills which gave me a strong foundation to begin a lifetime of learning.

At the age of ten I was introduced to the Spanish language. Even though my father was a Spanish professor, I had not shown much interest in acquiring a second language. In fact, when my parents wanted to have a private conversation and the children were near, they often conversed in Spanish. Most of those private conversations had to do with Christmas presents and other topics that are not for children's ears. My parents were the only people I knew who spoke Spanish and in my childish perspective, it was for secrets and grown up things. My opinion of the Spanish language quickly changed when I arrived in Granada, Spain, for a semester abroad with my family and a group of thirty-five college students.

I loved the food, the smells in the air, the parks, and the shops by *La Catedral*. I met *los Reyes Católicos* at their sarcophagi and stood in the room where they signed the papers for Columbus' journey to the New World. I bought *pan* and *pasteles* from the *mercado* beneath our *piso*. And I even started to insert Spanish words into my sentences where I could. I was oblivious to structure of the language and did not know why I should say '*un pastel*' instead of *una pastel*, but I learned how to ask for it and how to read the

signs for pricing. At church I made friends, read scriptures, and even sang songs. I knew some words and could pick them out here and there. I was careful to not pronounce the ‘h’ in a word and to roll my ‘r’s in the right places.

During that semester I knew that when I became a teacher I wanted to teach Spanish like my *Papi*. I wanted to show pictures of the places we travelled to in Madrid, Granada, Nerja, Toledo, and Córdoba to my friends and tell them about what I learned in the museums and on tours. My parents never forced me to learn the language and never hesitated to answer our questions. They also stopped ordering my *pasteles* and let me talk to the clerk in the shops near *La Catedral y La Alhambra* if I had questions about prices or wanted to see something behind the glass. At the time I did not realize this would be one of my greatest lessons in becoming a teacher.

When we returned from Spain, I entered junior high and had little exposure to Spanish. For six weeks, two of my father’s graduate students came and taught Spanish to students as part of an after school club, but after that, I had to wait until high school to take Spanish courses. However, the courses that I enrolled in were not what I expected.

My Freshman English teacher taught me how to work any word like *mutton* or *indulge* into my daily conversations (i.e., when upset we could call someone a “mutton head”). My teacher knew his content and was great at providing comprehensible input to the class. However, he was at times disrespectful and unprofessional towards students. I learned from this that just because someone knows how to get information logged into the learners’ long-term memory does not mean that instructor is a good role model for how teachers should behave and conduct their classroom discussions.

My Freshman Spanish course began with excitement as I chose a Spanish name (Magdalena) along with my friends. We sang along to Ricky Martin, Luis Miguel, Enrique Iglesias, and Emmanuel each day and wrote sentences about the things we liked to eat and where we lived. We learned how to ask *¿Dónde está el baño?* but not the directions we would need to understand the given response. The teacher used hand motions and TPR to teach us new words and we often played games using Spanish. I learned a lot about the grammar and structure of the language and did endless drills to practice and solidify that knowledge.

The next year in Spanish II, I had a new teacher who had previously been a social worker and was a native Spanish speaker from the Dominican Republic. In a ninety-minute block we did not do much work. She filled up both whiteboards with notes written in English and required us to copy them down. We took notes on different tenses for conjugating verbs, sentence structure, and syntax. Once we finished copying notes from the board we had only to study a list of ten vocabulary words for our Friday quiz. We watched the movie *Selena* three times that semester and many *telenovelas*. The *telenovelas* did not have subtitles so my classmates and I would make up what we thought the characters were saying. Occasionally, we guessed right or could pick out words that we recognized.

At the time, I did not mind the lack of language use and instruction, because as a student enrolled in honors courses and involved in extracurricular activities it was nice to have a break during the day to catch up on homework from other classes or just ‘hang out’ with my friends. I initially hoped that this course would help prepare me for another semester in Spain with my family, but as a teenager I was more concerned about

spending time with my friends than acquiring a second language. As I prepared to leave for Spain in January of my sophomore year, I asked many of my teachers if they would be willing to do an independent study with me so that I could still graduate with my class. I offered to write papers about the culture, take pictures of the sites, and correspond via weekly emails. I even volunteered to prepare and narrate in Spanish a slide show of the places I would visit over the semester. Unfortunately, neither Spanish teacher in my high school wanted the extra load of an independent study.

As a sophomore, I visited Spain for a second semester, with another was exciting and filled with learning opportunities but it took a few weeks for me to recognize and appreciate them. At first, I struggled to understand the accent of the people in Andalucía and I became frustrated with my own low proficiency. When my parents tried to teach me and help me communicate with teenagers at church or students in the program, I became easily frustrated and distracted by other things. I knew all the right phrases for getting around town and shopping and I initially thought that was enough until I realized that I had no friends and no one to talk to outside of my immediate family. For me, as a fifteen-year-old, this became a major crisis. Four weeks into the semester, I came home from church one day, threw down my scriptures and told my parents, “I’m sick and tired of not being able to talk to anyone. This is the worst vacation ever. Are you going to teach me some Spanish, or what?!”

From that point on I was motivated to learn Spanish and my father was finally able to teach me. He taught me about the sentence structure and the grammar, but in ways that supported communication with others. He did not have me memorize vocabulary lists, conjugate verbs endlessly, or practice drills. We discussed different topics and how

to communicate them and we co-constructed meaning in the language. Soon I started making friends at church and planning dates with them to go to the park, shopping or visit the countryside. I was surrounded by the language and finally began taking advantage of that.

I returned home with a strong foundation in Spanish and was excited to maintain the language skills that I had developed. When I addressed my high school Spanish teachers and administrators about continuing my Spanish studies I realized the curriculum had nothing left to teach me. What I had learned in a semester abroad far exceeded what high school could offer. I offered to do a presentation in the Spanish courses to share what Spain is like and teach my classmates about the history and culture that I had learned about and experienced in my time abroad. Neither of the Spanish teachers were interested in my offer.

It was discouraging to know that the second half of my high school career would not get me any closer to my life goals. Perhaps there were circumstances I was and still am unaware of about why they were uninterested in what I had to offer. I thought that my Spanish teachers would be excited to add an aspect of culture to the class. When they rejected it I was confused because since the culture is what made me want to teach Spanish, I thought it should be a key component of the curriculum. I considered testing out of the 'advanced' courses at my school but decided against it when I learned I would receive no credit towards graduation for doing so. My high school did not offer an AP Spanish course and there were no concurrent enrollment options for college level beginning courses. As I expressed my frustrations to my parents and took no language courses in my junior year, my father offered a possible solution. After discussing his idea

with the administration, my father volunteered his time to teach an AP Spanish course during his sabbatical in the fall of my senior year.

In this course we learned a lot about the language and my father pushed us to improve. We narrated stories about picture sequences, performed skits, talked about things that were going on at school, and occasionally took field trips to our house to cook Spanish food with my mom. We did it all in Spanish. At the end of the semester in lieu of a final exam, we put on a Cultural evening for our parents. We used a kitchen inside the school to host a Spanish dinner, performed skits, sang songs, and shared with our parents what we had learned over the course of the semester.

At this time, I decided to pursue a career in teaching high school Spanish. While some teachers were not ideal examples of how a course should be taught, other teachers exemplified model behavior while employing effective strategies. I loved it when my teachers had engaging and interactive activities during class. Providing peer feedback on papers, dissecting animals, or reenacting scenes from *The Crucible* are not things that I could apply to my daily life, but I still remember those activities after ten years as they helped me to understand the content more fully.

In college I learned that while activities can be exciting, engaging, and memorable and should be employed often, lectures can also be necessary and equally engaging. During my second semester in college I took a psychology class with the most amazing professor I have ever listened to. For seventy-five minutes twice a week for fourteen weeks he talked and talked and talked as I sat on the edge of my seat during each lecture, scribbling down his every word as fast as I possibly could. I remember the stories he told, the theories he explained, and the way he walked back and forth on the stage yelling

sometimes because he was so passionate about psychology. He made me excited to learn and interested in listening to him because he was animated, lively, and entertaining.

I also enjoyed being enrolled in Spanish courses again. I spent the next four semesters at the University of New Hampshire where I began reading and writing in Spanish. One of the most memorable activities during my low-level Spanish courses was a murder mystery audio tape. Each Friday we discussed what had happened in the most recent chapter of the mystery. We discussed the book in Spanish, not in English. The professor did not nit-pick our grammatical mistakes, but encouraged us to do our best to explain what we understood and make predictions for what would come next. Grammar was not the main focus of the course, but it was taught regularly and explicitly. We also read a series of short stories and often rewrote their endings and gave them new titles.

During these semesters I had the unique opportunity of taking a Composition and Conversation class from my father. I had watched him carry out the work of a professor all of my life, however, I had never attended one of his classes or seen him actually teach. My dad, Professor Chaston, made us write one-page compositions every week and spend most of a class period sharing them in small groups with our peers. We wrote about personal topics so that when we studied abroad in Spain we would already have stories about ourselves, our family, interests, traditions, and life that we could share with our *señoras* and the families we would stay with. As a class we became a family and overcame our anxieties and fears of speaking in a foreign language because we had constant opportunities to share the stories we had written about our personal interests and experiences. Since this class, I have not been afraid to share what I know and make mistakes as my communicative skills in Spanish continually grow. This became

increasingly important when I transferred to Utah State to complete my university studies.

I arrived to my first class on the USU campus unprepared for the higher level of language proficiency that existed due to the high number of students that had spent two years in Spanish speaking countries prior to studying Spanish. I went from discussing short stories to analyzing *El Mío Cid*, *El Conde Lucanor*, *San Manuel*, *Bueno*, *Mártir* and everything in between.

My professors expected a much higher proficiency and deeper understanding of the language. Language was no longer part of the content of the course but was the medium for understanding the content. It was in these courses that I learned the true value of using the target language in the class. I had always considered Spanish the content of the course prior to these advanced courses. My eyes were opened as I realized that none of my professors taught grammar and that my skills were still improving, just like when I was in Spain.

When my Spanish courses were complete I was finally able to enroll in teacher training courses. My time in these courses provided me with a new perspective on teaching as I began understanding the teacher's perspective. I took methods courses for Spanish, ESL, and secondary education. I learned to write exams, create rubrics, modify lesson plans for students pre-emergent through advanced, differentiate between formative and summative assessments, introduce vocabulary without using definitions or translations, and most importantly, how to implement those concepts and practices into the foreign language classroom. During this time, I spent countless hours on the phone with my parents, sharing every new thing with them. My dad would give me advice for

my lesson plans and brainstorm with me as I discovered my identity as an educator. My mom would help me find just the right words to express my ideas. As I finished my projects and unit plans and began compiling my first portfolio, I enlisted their advice for what would be most helpful in my teaching career.

These materials did not prepare me for my student teaching as much as I envisioned they would. Even though I knew how demanding life as an educator can be, I was surprised to find that as prepared as I was to take the reins in a real classroom – not the sheltered classroom where my peers pretend to be high school students who have just the right amount of background knowledge to understand and participate in the lesson that I have so carefully prepared – I was quite unprepared for the reality of what goes on in the classroom.

As a student, I had always been punctual, hard working, and dedicated, making an effort to think about the teacher's point of view if I did not understand the purpose of an assignment. I noticed, even in elementary school, that not all of my peers shared my excitement and vigor for learning; however, I never considered that my future students may not share those feelings with me either. Though I had taken an entire course in classroom management, I found myself wondering how to get some students to arrive to class on time and prepared, complete their homework assignments in a timely manner, study for their exams, and share in my enthusiasm for the Spanish language and the cultures that accompany it.

As I grasped the reality that not every student in a language course enrolls for the purpose of strengthening communication skills and embracing foreign cultures, I felt helpless. I soon realized that I had mistaken my role as an educator. In my education, I

felt enriched through the courses I took. I noticed when teachers took time to prepare and be creative. I appreciated knowing that my teachers valued my participation. I had believed that part of teaching was to enrich students' lives and reach their potential.

I have since come to know that not every student enrolled in foreign languages is harboring a burning desire to acquire a second language, and that is okay. As I employ the values and lessons that I learned from my teachers and use current research to plan activities that reflect my teaching philosophy, I will be an effective teacher. I will create a classroom environment where learning can take place, linguistic mistakes can be made, and communicative growth can take place. In my experience I have seen that what students take away from a course depends on what they are willing to put into it, which is a factor beyond my control. What I can control is the effort that I put into the courses I teach and I have had many great examples of that throughout my education.

Through my years in the public education system I paid close attention to the way my teachers taught, making mental and written notes about what I would include in my teaching and what I would avoid. In high school and college whenever I had an assignment that I felt was pointless or irrelevant to my development in the course, I tried to put myself in the teacher's shoes. Focusing on the teacher's motivation for assigning the homework helped me to have a more positive attitude and open mind towards my assignments as well as patience with the teacher when I became frustrated.

Observing my teachers taught me many important things that have helped shape my teaching philosophy and work ethic. The three most influential lessons I learned are a) "practice makes permanent, not perfect." I heard this phrase almost every school day in band between fourth grade and my senior year of high school. Dr. Tully taught me that if

I practiced poorly, I would perform poorly; not only in band but in every aspect of my life. b) “a writer’s work is never finished.” This lesson came from my senior English teacher, Mr. MacKenzie. No one ever received a perfect score on a paper in his class. If we thought our work was perfect we might not take opportunities to improve it and a writer (and learner) is never finished because writing evolves through life experiences. As writers and learners develop new ideas and have new experiences, their perspectives are bound to change. c) Consistent practice and opportunities for presentational and interpersonal communication increase confidence in speaking.

Through the years I have had many average teachers, several inadequate instructors, and few phenomenal educators. They have not all made lasting impressions, but they have all shaped who I am as a student and as a teacher. I am here because I fell in love with Spanish. I want to share the language and culture that I love with others to show them how wonderful the world is outside of what we know and are used to. Gaining an understanding for foreign traditions and customs can open one’s eyes in a way nothing else can. This new perspective can aid in developing not only a tolerance for what is different and unknown, but also a healthy curiosity and respect for things that are foreign or misunderstood. Raising awareness of cultural differences has the potential to cure such things as bigotry, racism, and ignorance.

As a teacher, I hope to change the way some students think; to provoke them to act outside of their comfort zone and think outside of the standard box they are accustomed to. When students leave my classroom, I hope they will be more proficient than they were when they entered. Mostly, I hope that when I teach, I will emulate the

admirable qualities of the teachers who have made a difference in my life, because they were willing to dedicate their lives to teaching students like me.

## **Professional Environment**

I knew at a very young age that I wanted to be a teacher when I grew up, but it took many years before I settled on a subject area. When I was ten years old my family had an opportunity to spend a semester in Granada, Spain, while my father directed a study abroad group for the University of New Hampshire. When we returned home, I informed him that I wanted to be a Spanish teacher just like him; but at a high school rather than a university. He was delighted to hear this news but made it very clear that as a high school teacher I could maintain proficiency in Spanish only to a certain extent because a) there are limitations to teaching foreign languages in American high schools and b) there is not enough time in high school, nor are the students advanced enough, to study the target language at an advanced level.

I have since set goals to actively improve my Spanish abilities by reading daily, seeking opportunities for oral communication and continuing to study the language so that I can maintain a higher level of proficiency than may be necessary for teaching high school. I also acquired a BA in Spanish Teaching from Utah State University to understand the language better and learn effective methods for teaching Spanish for communicative goals.

During my studies at USU, I was introduced to teaching English as a Second Language which, at the time, was a completely foreign concept to me, having grown up in a primarily white, English-speaking community. As I learned more about teaching ESL, I decided to declare it as my minor because it complimented my main focus of Spanish Teaching. I have since had opportunities to teach ESL to elementary and secondary students as well as adults. Through the MSLT program I have had tremendous

opportunities for growth as a teacher as I have taught both Spanish and ESL. Many of the examples and lesson plans that I provide throughout this portfolio are from those experiences, but they could be easily modified to fit the needs of high school students. I still maintain the desire to teach Spanish and ESL in secondary education in the United States. Therefore, this portfolio will present artifacts focused on teaching high school students Spanish as a Foreign Language and English as a Second Language.

## Teaching Philosophy Statement

**Introduction.** I entered the Master of Second Language Teaching (MSLT) program at Utah State University with a lot of baggage from my two short years of teaching ESL to elementary school students. My school district favored direct instruction and evidence-based programs that required more student regurgitation than critical thinking. I found it challenging that both the teachers' and the students' parts were scripted. When students did not respond in line with the script, the activity was repeated until the desired results were achieved. Einstein referred to performing the same action over and over but expecting different results as insanity, and some days, that is exactly how I felt.

I began my job with a strong foundation in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and found direct instruction not only contrary to my training, but ineffective as a means of engaging students in meaningful communication. My training felt useless because I did not understand how to apply what I knew in an environment that was not designed to foster meaningful communication and language acquisition.

Through the MSLT program, I have learned that perhaps I did not understand the deep structure of CLT. I knew how to be the architect of the classroom (Lee & VanPatten, 2003), provide comprehensible input (Krashen, 1981), implement communicative activities, scaffold instruction, use the target language appropriately (ACTFL, 2010; Clifton, 2006; Cullen, 2006), and avoid an Atlas Complex (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). I knew how to modify activities and lesson plans according to students' needs and proficiency levels. However, these skills were only useful to me in an ideal situation that allowed me to use curriculum founded in interpersonal

communication. In a non-communicative environment I was unable to exercise my teaching skills effectively if at all.

This teaching philosophy statement (TPS) illustrates who I have become as a teacher through the MSLT program. During my studies I experienced a brief identity crisis as I searched to discover who I am as a Graduate Instructor. I knew who I was as a K-12 instructor and, even though my father is a professor and I was raised on a university campus, I had never considered teaching university level courses before. Later, I was introduced to Sociocultural Theory (SCT) which challenged everything I knew about effective language teaching. In this TPS I share my journey of becoming a classroom facilitator and expanding my horizons in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). A teacher's role in the classroom is explained in the first section. Second, meaningful classroom communication and student participation are explored. Third, teaching culture and pragmatics in FL/L2 courses are discussed. Finally, SCT and its implications for language teaching and acquisition are presented.

**The Role of the Teacher.** Alcón Soler and Martínez-Flor (2008) argue that teachers “cannot teach in a value vacuum. Therefore, it is best to be aware of our own values and beliefs concerning the nature of language, language acquisition, and the language learners we teach” (p. 37). First and foremost, teachers must know who they are as educators and what is most important to them in teaching their content. Thus, a teaching philosophy statement is absolutely essential.

Keeping a written teaching philosophy can help keep teachers stay on task and remember what their goals and ideals are in regards to teaching in their content area. A teaching philosophy constantly changes and evolves as teachers grow and develop. It

keeps teachers grounded in what they know is important and reminds them of their professional identity and their role in providing a classroom environment that invites learning and participation and allows them to keep the class student-centered.

The controversial topics “what are you teaching your students?” and “what have your students learned this year?” are frequently discussed among teachers (Kohn, 2011). The responses to these questions often evolve into an argument or defense involving topics such as over-sized classes, lack of parental and administrative support, insufficient means of assessing student growth, etc. (Kohn, 2011). In the past, I found myself caught up in these discussions with my colleagues and became preoccupied with determining how to accurately assess and evaluate what had been “learned” as a means of justifying what I did in the classroom.

**The teacher as a mediator.** Vågan (2011) argues that “learning is a process of becoming” and I have found this idea liberating. Viewing learning as a process of beginning rather than being measured only by a standardized test or well-written examination returns agency and control in the classroom to the teacher. Duranti (2004) describes classroom agency in three parts “1) control over one’s own behavior; 2) producing actions that affect other entities as well as self; 3) producing actions that are the object of evaluation” (as cited in Lantolf & Poehner, 2008, p. 163). When teachers are in control of their own behavior, they can monitor their own speech to keep students on-task, adhere to the curriculum, maintain a pace that fits student needs, and act as a coach to help students in the process of becoming people who can use the target language in meaningful contexts. Each component of agency requires some level of mediation. Lantolf and Thorne (2006b) state that “language use, organization, and structure are the

primary means of mediation” (p. 197) which involves thinking about how to perform an action. In the classroom, teacher and students alike use the language and structure of the classroom to mediate their interactions and behavior with each other as they decide which words to use and what to do. In a classroom where the target language (TL) is used exclusively, the rules, or structure, of the classroom mediate students’ word choices and behaviors.

When the teacher acts as mediator in the classroom, there is an end to what the teacher can do in each situation. Teacher “mediation continues until the learner either overcomes the problem or until the final hint is reached, which usually includes the solution to the problem and an explanation of how the solution was reached” (Poehner, 2008, p. 35). Once a solution has been found or a new concept has been introduced, and the students understand the process of how the solution was found or how to apply the new concept in meaningful communication, the teacher as mediator is no longer needed (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008).

At this point, students are able to self-mediate and negotiate meaning with their peers. A cycle begins where new concepts can be introduced with the teacher acting as mediator, and eventually students no longer require this mediation as they internalize aspects of the language and their proficiency increases. As teachers understand that learning is indeed a process of becoming rather than memorization of facts or concepts (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008) the focus transforms from “what do I want my students to learn from this lesson or activity” to “who does this activity help my students become and how does that relate to my ultimate goal in executing this lesson or activity?”

**The teacher as an assessor.** This new perspective on learning leads to a new perspective on assessment. In authentic assessments teachers use a variety of tests to collect “information about and measure a learner’s level of knowledge or skills” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 394). A test is merely a tool that provides students with an opportunity to demonstrate what they know (O’Malley & Pierce, 1996; Shrum & Glisan, 2010). However, authentic assessments provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their language proficiency in a variety of ways and through multiple modes of communication including reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

In authentic assessment, students may certainly take written exams or compile a portfolio, but in addition to other opportunities that allow them to engage in meaningful conversation with classmates, demonstrate their proficiency through a performance, and most importantly, reflect the goals and objectives of the course (O’Malley & Pierce, 1996; Shrum & Glisan, 2010). After assessing students in a variety of ways, an evaluation may be made as the information collected for each student is interpreted (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008; O’Malley & Pierce, 1996). Thus, in language classrooms, teachers write and administer exams, assess student performance and understanding of the language, and evaluate student progress by formative assessment throughout the entire course and summative assessment at the end of the course to “determine what the learner can do with the language at that point” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 401) and if the learner is sufficiently prepared to move on to the next level.

**The teacher as a facilitator and architect.** Maintaining a classroom environment in which the students and teacher use the target language as much as possible and in ways that are meaningful to students as individuals is the best way to

increase student proficiency and promote their success at more advanced levels. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2012) recommends that FL teachers employ the TL at least 90% of the time. For a typical fifty-minute course, this means that *at least* 45 minutes are completely conducted – by the students and teacher – in the TL. In my experience this has been simple because English is my native language and I have spent many years studying and using Spanish in personal and academic settings. However, the challenge was minimizing my own speech and becoming a facilitator rather than an instructor (Alvermann, Swafford, & Montero, 2004; Clifton, 2006).

Clifton (2006) defines a facilitator as “an instructor who empowers his or her learners and gives them more initiative and responsibility” (p. 142). Facilitators provide students with maximum opportunities for communication and avoid the Atlas Complex cautioned by Lee and VanPatten (2003) in which teachers spend too much time lecturing and students are left with few if any opportunities for participation or interpersonal communication. Rather, the facilitator acts as an architect in the classroom by planning activities and providing students with structured opportunities to use the language, but the students are the ones performing the tasks and completing the work through interpersonal communication (Alvermann, Swafford, & Montero, 2004; Lee & VanPatten; Shrum & Glisan, 2010).

The architect empowers students to accept responsibility for their own learning and allows them to rely less on the teacher (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). The facilitator enables students to negotiate meaning in authentic ways that are neither scripted nor predicted prior to engaging in conversation. Clifton refers to this as “self-selection” as

students “share the responsibility for initiating and developing topics” (p. 143). As students engage in meaningful conversation with each other, the facilitator reinforces their efforts with feedback and questions that provoke further discussion between students (Alvermann, Swafford, & Montero, 2004). However, facilitators do not take over or monopolize the conversation between students because they understand the need for students to interact with each other to develop their skills.

Thoms (2011) adds that not only amount and purpose of language, but also “the way in which [a facilitator] interacts with his/her students in the L2 classroom can be very powerful and influential with regards to how much language students are exposed to” (p. 322). With learning as a process of becoming, the information conveyed by the facilitator and architect of the classroom, should build upon itself throughout the entire course and the facilitator should remember that students “benefit from reminders and revisits” (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001, p. 40) of previous material throughout the course.

The way in which the language is presented and meaning is co-constructed should be done respectfully and in a way that demonstrates students “are able to freely practice with and express themselves in the L2” (Thoms, 2011, p. 322) without fear of having every mistake pointed out. Determining which mistakes should be corrected was one of the most difficult tasks for me as a teacher, however, as I discovered how language is used in the classroom, I found ways to help students improve their language skills without diminishing their interest in using the TL.

**Classroom communication.** In language teaching it is common for the classroom to focus on “language, either as *input*, the language that is presented for learning, or

production (output), the language that learners produce in answers to teacher questions, in drills and exercises and sometimes in tasks” (Van Lier, 2008, p. 180). Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, and Mandell (2001) recommend a third purpose for language that acts as a stepping stone between input and production; recognition. They claim that students need repeated opportunities to comprehend specific language features without having to produce them. After students have had exposure to the language in meaningful contexts, only then can they begin to make meaning with it as they begin producing phrases and sharing ideas in the TL. Students need to learn in an environment that allows them to learn from their mistakes and so that they can focus more on meaning than on form (Krashen, 1982).

On the first day of class, as part of introducing the course goals and syllabus to students, I tell them that they will make mistakes. I tell students that sometimes I still make mistakes in the language and speakers will make mistakes at many different levels (Krashen, 1982). I stress the importance of both accuracy and fluency and tell them that they will gain an understanding of the grammar and structure of the language (accuracy) along with consistent practice in using fluid and natural speech (fluency) (Brown, 2001). I do this in an attempt to create an environment that is conducive to language learning.

Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, Mandell (2001) caution that *communicative activities* should not be mistaken for *conversational activities* which pay little, if any, attention to the accuracy of the language used. Their concern continues as they explain the dangers of valuing comprehensibility too far above accuracy in activities. They caution against this because it allows students to achieve success “as long as [their] message is understood or conveyed [...] regardless of grammatical accuracy” (p. 33). Gil (2002) adds to this

argument offering that while it is important for students to be accurate in their language use, the classroom facilitator should correct student errors “only when the mistakes hinder comprehension” (p. 274), rather than highlighting each and every mistake or overlooking mistakes as long as students employ the TL.

I would add that it is equally important to correct students when they repeatedly make the same mistakes, even if those mistakes do not hinder comprehension, in order to prevent students from internalizing inaccurate patterns of the language structure. For example, an English language learner who says, “I went to bowling over the weekend” or “I played bowling yesterday” will certainly be understood by interlocutors, but is practicing incorrect patterns of speech. Shrum and Glisan (2010) state that “practice does not make perfect, but rather permanent” (p. 78) which is certainly true in language development. If students continually practice making mistakes, thinking either that it is okay or that the mistakes are in fact, not mistakes, learners will develop language habits that are inaccurate.

Communicative language classes require a great deal of student participation and facilitator preparation. Sometimes as a topic is introduced students have questions that take the lesson in a new direction. On several occasions I have thrown out my intended lesson plan to let my students take a direction based on their interests. I arrive to class prepared every day, but flexible to change activities according to student interest and needs. If I notice students are not connecting with a certain activity, I will cut it short and move on to a new topic or add a modification to increase student interest. Other times, I will extend an activity if students are on-task and engaged, but not so long that students lose interest.

While engaged in communicative drills, students obtain information from their classmates. There must be a culminating goal that requires them to use the information they have obtained for a purpose. Once students have the information they should do something with it like write an essay, narrate a story, compare students in the class, etc. A culminating activity in which students use the information they obtained for a specific purpose creates opportunities for students to use communicative language as they remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create topics and ideas in the target language (Bloom's Taxonomy, Eduteka, 2010).

“For students whose goal is to learn to speak the language, building their confidence and experience through classroom communication is bound to bring satisfaction and the desire to learn more” (Ballman, Lisking-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001, p. 16), but these students will learn the language based on their intrinsic motivation. For other students, interest in the culture and pragmatics may provide motivation to acquire the language and provide opportunities for making personal connections (Alvermann, Swafford, & Montero, 2004).

**Pragmatics and Culture in FL/L2 Curricula.** An essential part of language acquisition is coming to understand the culture associated with the target language. I pursued a career in Spanish teaching because at the age of ten I had an opportunity to spend a semester in Spain while my father directed a study abroad program. It was not the language that captivated me, but the food, dance, holidays, and other superficial aspects of Spanish culture. These topics can also be a hook for beginner students, some of whom may only be enrolled in the course to earn credits that count towards graduation.

Along with teaching about the target culture, students can develop the vocabulary necessary for explaining aspects of their own culture and customs to native and fluent speakers of the target language (Michael & Shannon, 2008). When students eventually use the TL outside of class they are likely, at some point, to encounter problems with native speakers that lie “below the conversational level, in the kinds of assumptions each person [makes]” (Fantini & Alvino, 1997) about what is actually meant by what is said. Michael and Shannon (2008) add that “in order for communication to be successful, language use must be associated with culturally appropriate behavior” (p. 59). If students are already aware that cultural and pragmatic differences exist, they will be more likely to identify them and recognize them as they are experienced (Michael & Shannon, 2008).

Since my first trip to Spain, I have returned on three other occasions, and each time I found opportunities to discover new details about the culture that are less superficial. I began developing an understanding of the pragmatics. Pragmatics can be defined as “the study of people’s comprehension and production of linguistic action in context” (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993, p. 3), or what people say in comparison with what they really mean to communicate with the words or gestures that they use.

It is possible to understand the words that are said without understanding the true meaning behind them. For example, when I was in Spain as a teenager, I was eating lunch at a restaurant with my Spanish friends. It was warm outside and as I filled my cup from the dispenser, I added ice to my drink. My friends looked very concerned when I returned to the table and informed me that putting ice in my drink would give me a cold. At first, I was unsure if they were asking if I had a cold, or if my drink was cold, or telling me that the ice was bad. After several minutes of negotiating meaning together, I

finally understood what my friends were telling me, but I still did not understand the connection between the ice in my drink and the cold I was apparently about to come down with. While this misunderstanding was relatively harmless and caused more confusion than humiliation, misunderstandings in a professional or academic setting could have more serious consequences.

Gaining an understanding of the culture and pragmatics that accompany the target language can prevent miscommunications or “stumbling blocks” that are often caused not by “the words that are said... but the (usually unconscious) expectations underlying the words” (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001, p. 59). Providing students with an understanding of culture and pragmatics helps them to understand what is meant but not said. For example, American English speakers use the phrase ‘how are you’ as a greeting like ‘hello’ or ‘good morning’ (Tatsuki & Houck, 2010). Nonnative speakers (NNSs) who are unaware of this may take offense if they interpret it as a query on how they are feeling and yet the speaker does not appear to have an interest in their response about how they actually are. To help NNSs minimize misunderstanding and misinterpreting interactions with native or fluent speakers in the target language, role play, storytelling, projects or exhibits, experiments, or oral interviews can be implemented as authentic assessments allowing students to demonstrate their understanding of culturally and pragmatically appropriate interactions and receive feedback.

When culture and pragmatics are incorporated into the language curriculum, students may recognize that “language is more than a representation of the objects of the world, and words carry a power with them that goes beyond the description and

identification of people, objects, properties, and events. [That] language is a tool through which our social and cultural world is constantly described, evaluated, and reproduced” (Lund, 2006, p. 75). If language is a tool that is used to describe, evaluate, and reproduce our social and cultural world, then students should learn how to do so in language classes.

Authentic materials are an excellent way to introduce culture and pragmatics to students. They are materials that are created by speakers of the target language for speakers of the target language (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). They are not simplified or modified to fit student needs and they demonstrate the culture to students in a way that inauthentic or semi-authentic materials cannot. Video clips can help students see how meaning is negotiated in specific situations and allow students to hear what conversations with native speakers will be like rather than the “contrived and specially composed [reading and listening selections]” (Chaston, 1999, p. 18) that may accompany the established curriculum.

Fairy tales, fables, myths, and legends can introduce students to ideas and concepts they may not learn through everyday conversation, but may help them understand specific customs or practices. Advertisements, movies, music, newspapers, magazines, restaurant menus, travel brochures, photographs, etc. contain rich examples of popular culture and current events that may be referenced in everyday speech but that students may not be familiar with (Chaston, 1999; Michael & Shannon, 2008). Chaston’s (1999) research offers clear instruction for how to collect interviews and use them as authentic materials in the classroom for varying levels of student proficiency.

Although authentic texts in the classroom can be helpful in modeling the language to students, they can also present challenges and difficulties to both the student and the

teacher when they are too difficult or used improperly. Shrum and Glisan (2010) offer the idea of “edit the task, not the text” (p. 196) when using authentic texts that are above the linguistic abilities of the students. Through formative assessments, such as listening to students interact with each other and monitoring comprehension during reading activities, teachers can identify students’ capabilities in the target language and plan future activities accordingly (O’Malley & Pierce, 1996).

Authentic materials model natural and authentic communication to students. However, assessing student understanding is especially important when using authentic materials. “Merely because a student can recognize a word or structure does not guarantee he understands its particular use or meaning in that context” (Musumeci, 1988, IN Chaston, 1994, p. 48). This transfers to recognizing pragmatically appropriate responses in context as well. Just because a student can recognize which responses may be appropriate or inappropriate in a given situation does not mean that is a reflection of the student’s ability to create an appropriate response when that situation arises.

Tatsuki and Houck (2010) argue that a prerequisite to teaching pragmatics is to first understand “the strategies and the grammatical forms generally employed, as well as how the social context has been found to affect the choice of strategy or form and modifiers” (p. 2). Tatsuki and Houck stress the importance of the teacher’s own awareness and understanding of “variations in appropriateness norms among speech communications in general and in particular situations” (p. 2). The teacher must not only be familiar with, but truly understand the pragmatic concepts before introducing them to students. The teacher must also make sure that the tasks are appropriate for the student level and know what competence is required for understanding specific pragmatic

features (Shrum & Glisan, 2010; Tatsuki & Houck, 2010). This allows students to use the language meaningfully to participate in classroom communication.

**Sociocultural perspectives.** Focusing on language as a tool rather than as a content area is an important tenet of Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and crucial for understanding what it has to offer to the field of language acquisition (Van Lier, 2008). Even though research in SCT is founded in Vygotsky's work from the early twentieth century and researchers have been interpreting it for decades, it is still a relatively new topic in the field of language acquisition. At a conference I recently attended it became apparent that its perspectives have not yet become widely accepted.

SCT challenged my identity as a teacher as I read articles that argued how and why cognitive methods including CLT are not only failing but insufficient means of instruction (Magnan, 2008; Zuengler & Miller, 2006). At first, this made me defensive and resistant towards SCT. As I wrestled with SCT's unique and contrary ideas, I struggled to see the differences between Sociocultural perspectives and what I understood about Communicative Language Teaching. Studying SCT and its perspectives has led to internalization of concepts and tools that have become fundamental to who I am now as a facilitator. I have become more aware of the facilitator's role in student development and how the tools that students appropriate mediate their understanding of the world around them.

**Accepting SCT.** Haught and McCafferty (2008) alleviated my aversion to SCT in their explanation of it, not as a "competing theory of language acquisition, but a theory of mind, or perhaps more accurately, a theory of person, which argues that [...] we are shaped through cultural-historical contexts by our interacting with one another and with

cultural-historical artifacts” (p. 142). SCT is founded in the idea that through activity (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978) we interact in and experience the world; first, on an interpersonal plane and later on an intrapersonal plane, so it seems natural that our interactions with each other and the world shape who we are. SCT examines the context on and below the surface of activity in the classroom as language is viewed not as input, “but as a resource for participation in the kinds of activities our everyday lives comprise” (Zuengler & Miller, 2006, p. 37).

CLT encourages teachers to engage students in communicative activities using the TL after they have provided students with *comprehensible input* (Krashen, 1982) in the TL (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). Sociocultural perspectives focus more on student development through co-construction of meaning with more advanced peers or the teacher (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008). Rather than a focus on instruction that leads students to interact with one another in the classroom in seemingly meaningful communication, SCT views the target language as the tool or medium for furthering individual development as students and teacher work together. In this way, teachers become facilitators as they provide students with tools necessary to accomplish tasks.

In an intensive English course that I recently taught, my students began the course unable to produce a graphic organizer, identify a main idea or topic sentence, write a summary of an academic text, or use context clues to help them understand unknown words as they read. Throughout the course we practiced each of these skills on a variety of short readings. I internalized the significance of modeling and how at first, it felt like modeling an activity was time-consuming and unnecessary because the students acted as though they understood everything I said and did. However, as I observed them while

they worked together, I noticed they had either misunderstood my instructions or not understood them at all. It was not long before I transformed my modeling to co-constructing meaning with students as we would practice with a new reading strategy or graphic organizer together, discussing the process that we used to identify and organize information. As we practiced and worked together, I learned quickly what my students could do on their own, what they could do with each other, and what guidance and assistance they needed from me to accomplish course assignments.

The course transformed from a communicative student-centric environment to one built around Sociocultural perspectives once I acknowledged that “the instructional focus should not be on either the teacher or the learner” (Magnan, 2008, p. 354). Rather, the focus should be on “the activity of teaching-learning itself” (Magnan, p. 254). In this context “teaching and learning [became] more reciprocal” (Magnan, p. 254) as I began working with students, each in their own zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD is simply the difference between what students can do without help and what they can accomplish with help (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008; Shrum & Glisan, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Paying attention to how my students were developing throughout the course and which strategies and skills they had internalized allowed me to identify the ZPD of each of my students.

When students did not understand a concept, we discussed the process of what they did versus what they could have done in order to identify where the misunderstanding occurred. Poehner (2008) states that “without understanding the reasons learners failed to solve the problem, the mediator cannot appropriately guide their development” (p. 39). This led me to teach my students how to ask questions about the

texts they were reading. Vygotsky (1978) wrote that “by asking a question, the [student] indicates that he has, in fact, formulated a plan to solve the task before him, but is unable to perform all the necessary operations” (p. 29). Knowing how to ask questions and which questions to ask empowers students to take control of their own learning (Alvermann, Swafford, & Montero, 2004). I have always viewed questions as an indication that the wheels in the mind are turning as students try to connect the dots between one idea and another.

Understanding a variety of theories, methods, and perspectives in the field of language acquisition is essential for deciding which of those will help each facilitator find their own identity and develop their own teaching philosophy. Sociocultural theory still holds many ideas that I have yet to understand; however, I am certain that as I continue to grow after completing this program, sociocultural perspectives will prove to be an influential factor.

**Conclusion.** Shortly after I entered the MSLT program, my mentor told me that participating in the program would not necessarily teach me new things, but it would teach me how to use what I already knew in more effective ways as I added depth and dimension to my understanding. I did not enter this program to learn how to teach. I entered this program to further develop and hone my teaching abilities; to perfect my method and learn the tricks of the trade from more experienced professionals.

I was born with a natural talent and love for teaching and knew early on as a child that I wanted to teach for the rest of my life. I had already taught my younger brother to read as I shared my love of reading great literature with him, including the works of Dr. Seuss, P.D. Eastman, and Stan and Jan Berenstain. What I needed to learn was how to

use what I already know about great teaching in situations that extend beyond the safety of hypothetical lesson plans I execute as my peers assume the role of engaged high school students who have just the right amount of background knowledge and a long enough attention span to yield positive results.

This program taught me that the physical tools and resources that I have to use and work with (mandated programs, little flexibility in curricula, over-sized classrooms) are less important than what I bring to the table (understanding of methods and strategies that can be modified to fit dynamic and challenging situations). With that understanding, I can modify any prescribed activity to fit the needs of my students. A great teacher doesn't need small class sizes and the freedom to dictate her own curriculum. A great teacher does the best she can with the tools she has and knows that there is no one right way to teach anything because each student is different and each class is different. Great teachers know how to change with the times, try new methods, and self-reflect on where they need improvement.

**LEARNING THROUGH OBSERVATION**

My studies in the MSLT program provided me with experiences and knowledge that fundamentally changed who I am as a teacher and who I will continue to be as I have future opportunities to teach, facilitate and grow in the profession. I entered the program thinking that I knew the research in the field and that what I was doing in the classroom was brilliant yet unorthodox. I had been teaching ESL to elementary students and found better results through what I was doing than the district mandated curricula and battled to prove to my administrators that the methods and tactics I was using in the classroom were in fact as effective as I believed them to be. And after only one year of teaching at my school, fifty percent of the students were exited from my ESL and successfully attending a full day of mainstream courses with their peers.

This experience boosted my self-efficacy and left me feeling somewhat superior to some of my colleagues in the field. The following school year, I was humbled as my position was cut due to budget cuts and I lacked seniority. As I struggled to find another teaching job, I settled as a Reading Aide in the same elementary school while I searched for something full-time. It was during this time that I was finally convinced by my undergraduate advisor, now Co-Director of the MSLT program, that it was time for me to get a Masters degree.

I was amazed to find people just like me in the program; peers who believe in using the target language in ways that are meaningful, providing students with background knowledge necessary to understand new material, modeling what students should do before requiring them to work on their own, and most importantly, peers who love teaching just as much as I do who are still new enough to the profession that they have not yet grown jaded or weary.

As I observed my peers teaching and giving presentations I quickly realized that I was out of my league in the group because there was so much I did not know. I was unfamiliar with the terminology being used and some of the methods and theories as well. I entered the program as a young and arrogant student with only a Bachelors degree and Teaching Certificate and thought I was the 'bee's knees'. I am now leaving the program having taught five undergraduate courses, earned a Master of Second Language Teaching degree, acquired a new set of skills and tools I know how to implement, and received a serious reality check.

I owe much of my learning and growth to the opportunities for observation that I had in the program. I was able to observe my colleagues and peers teach courses and each time I learned or noticed something new that allowed me to reflect on my own teaching and make improvements to my mannerisms, word choice, visuals, body language, and use of questions during class time.

I identified ways in which the personality of the teacher was evident in their teaching style and how it sometimes benefitted and other times detracted from the task at hand. As I observed new and experienced instructors, I developed a habit of constant reflection and became more aware of what I do and say when I am teaching. This awareness led me to take greater care in preparing my lessons as I realized I was not always using all fifty minutes of class time in the most efficient ways. Observing my colleagues gave me ideas that I could use with my own students and showed me what I did not want to do with my students also. For example, I implemented more realistic visuals during my lessons rather than using cartoony drawings and I decided that I prefer to let students work on their own outside of class rather than during class.

As I observed other teachers I learned many valuable lessons. Following many of my observations I was able to briefly discuss the class period with the instructor. This allowed me to ask questions and provide feedback to my peer. I did not realize how helpful that feedback is until I had an observer in one of my classes. I had been reflecting on each lesson and making notes in my lesson plans about what went well and what I would change about the lesson, but I had not had much feedback from my peers. Most of the feedback I received about my teaching was from my mentor and advisors who all have PhDs and a lot of experience. Even though their feedback was helpful, it was also overwhelming at times.

The feedback from my peers was encouraging because we are all at different places in the program and we have all entered the program with different experiences. We have different ideas, strengths, and weaknesses and often times, rather than focus mainly on what I did and why during the lesson, we would find ourselves exchanging ideas for future lessons or modifying the lesson plan to fit the needs of other students or another course.

Observing my peers in the program helped me get to know them better and provoked us to brainstorm ideas together. It required me to see what was happening in other courses of languages that I do and do not speak. It pushed me to be prepared because I did not want my peers to see me fail. It strengthened my character when students did not react to or participate in an activity as I had planned or hoped. It made me appreciate the opinions of my fellow MSLTers and eager to hear their suggestions for improvement. It opened my ears, mind, and heart to constructive criticism and above all, it made me a better facilitator.

**ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION OF TEACHING VIDEO**

This recording was made during my first semester teaching IELI 1260, Reading II. It was my second semester in the MSLT program and I was teaching a small class of only six students. I found observing and reflecting on this video helpful in improving my teaching during this course and courses that I have since taught. As I watched the recording of my teaching, it became clear to me how much time I spend talking to my students. Shortly after I made this recording, I began researching teacher-talk in the classroom in an effort to minimize my own speech and provide my students with more time to participate in activities and share their own ideas.

Watching this video caused me to reflect on and make changes to my teaching philosophy and demonstrated the importance of the teachers monitoring their own speech and only speaking for certain purposes. I had never before considered the words that I use, but had focused on the amount of the target language that I used. Out of the twenty minutes on the film, I spent almost half of that time giving directions, providing explanations and feedback, or asking and answering questions. Students did have opportunities to speak and when they did, their questions and comments were related to the lesson or activity.

I also noticed a lot about my mannerisms and body language. I often run my fingers through my hair or move it behind my ears. When I was not writing on the board, I made eye contact with each of my students while I spoke and during pauses of 'wait time' after asking a question. However, sometimes when students answered a question, I would modify their answer as I repeated it to the class. Through research that I have read, I know this can be helpful to students, especially in modeling grammar that it accurate.

Sometimes, I modified the answer so severely that it became my own rather than reflecting what the student had offered.

Some of the things that I did that reflect my current teaching philosophy were that I created opportunities for students to reflect on and consider their own culture in relation to the topic discussed during the lesson. The questions that I asked students throughout the lesson elicited thoughtful answers. They also required students to reflect on what they already knew and apply it in this new situation.

As I modeled what students should do in partners or alone, it appeared that we were co-constructing meaning together. I did not simply provide an explanation to students on what they should do and turn them loose. I guided them through each step as we did a mini-activity together and then I let them ask questions to see if my directions were clear. They did not have questions so I instructed them to begin the activity. As they worked they developed questions to clarify my expectations and the directions. I was less aware of this at the time, but in the future I became clearer in providing directions and I always provided written instructions to accompany my oral directions. This allowed students to refer back to the written directions if they forgot what they should do next.

Although I know that my teaching has improved significantly since this video was made, I believe that it reflected my teaching philosophy at the time. I believe who I am now as a teacher reflects my current teaching philosophy and while there were some things that I noticed needed immediate improvement including the amount of time I spent talking and the clarity of my instructions, I was not a model for poor teaching. Watching this video brought my attention to things how I actually in comparison to how I think I teach. For the most part, I was teaching how I believed I was teaching, but without sitting

down and actually watching a video of how I taught, I may never have realized the two areas where I needed the most improvement. Ultimately focusing on those two areas has helped me become a facilitator in the classroom.

**RESEARCH ARTIFACT**

## Introduction

I wrote this artifact during LING 6010 *Research in Second Language Learning*. Shortly after I recorded myself teaching a lesson, I needed to choose a topic for a research proposal. As previously stated, my teaching video showed me that I spend more time talking than I should. I had recently discussed with my mentor that I was trying to be more aware of what I am saying and if it is necessary to the lesson's goals and objectives. He suggested also not telling my students things that they can figure out on their own or with a partner, that I should not take that learning opportunity away from them.

After narrowing down the topic for my research proposal, I came up with the question: *for what purposes does teacher-talk occur in the classroom?* As I searched for articles and books that would help me answer this question, I became increasingly aware of my own use of language in the classroom. I quickly began minimizing my speech as I refrained from sharing anecdotes that were unrelated to lesson objectives, I let students discover more on their own as I guided them but allowed them to ask the questions. I began providing more meaningful feedback as I learned the difference between communicative and non-communicative feedback. I began my journey to become a facilitator as I empowered students to take on more responsibility in the classroom.

Once I relinquished some of my power to students, they became new people who were curious, opinionated, and outspoken. In reality, I do not know if they already had those characteristics and I was speaking so much that their opportunities for showing curiosity, sharing opinions and speaking freely were insufficient or if they developed those characteristics as I quit monopolizing class time. However, I do know that once I began acting like the architect and facilitator in the classroom, I saw the process of

learning a language and acquiring reading strategies in action. I saw my students express frustration about the text and ask questions about how they could find the main idea. They learned how to formulate and ask questions and even how to find the answers to their questions without me.

At the end of the semester, it was clear what strategies they had internalized and who was ready to move on to the next level in the intensive English program. It was challenging for me to monitor my own speech and find a balance between knowing what information students needed me to provide and what they could find on their own. Sometimes I still spoke more than I probably should have, but I often recognized it and was able to quickly turn time over to students.

Writing this paper fundamentally changed what I do in the classroom. I am more aware of the feedback that I give and I provide more meaningful feedback to students now than I did before. I use more higher-order questions than I used to in an attempt to provoke deeper thought and elicit open-ended responses from students. I pay attention to what I say and why I say it and make a conscious effort during each class period to co-construct meaning with students rather than to provide them with answers. I do my best to act as a facilitator in the classroom and give the reins to my students.

## **Teacher-talk in the Communicative Classroom**

**Introduction.** As a second/foreign language (L2/FL) teacher in training I have been taught to use the target language in the classroom at least 90% of the time. When I began teaching, I was successful in using the target language according to that requirement, however, I remained more focused on the amount of TL that I used rather than the purposes for which I was using it. I thought that providing a correct model of speech in the TL in my feedback and instruction was sufficient. However, I have recently become more aware of what I am communicating in the TL and realized that sometimes a teacher can be talking without actually communicating with students. It was this realization that led me to develop the research questions discussed in this paper in an effort to discover how teachers can most efficiently use class time in regards to teacher-talk.

### **Literature Review**

Discourse in a language classroom is extremely complex because it is “both the medium of instruction and the content of instruction” (Edmondson, 1985). A long-standing debate and source of disagreement among language teaching professionals is the use of the students’ native language (L1) in the classroom. According to the standards published by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2010), second and foreign language teachers are required to use the target language (TL) 90-100% of the time in the classroom, using the students’ L1 only minimally. According to this standard, even ACTFL recognizes the potential need for teachers to use students’ L1 on occasion.

Language teachers are encouraged by Lee and VanPatten (2003) and Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, and Mandell (2001) to use the communicative approach by providing

students with meaningful opportunities for authentic language use in the classroom. In order for students to have their own opportunities for meaningful and authentic communication, teachers must relinquish some of their power over speech in the classroom and share “discursive resources” (Clifton, 2006, p. 143) with their students. It is also necessary for the instructor to prepare activities in which students can communicate with each other to build and strengthen their oral skills along with their confidence in using the language. The more class time is filled with teacher-talk, the less time will be available for interpersonal student communication. The opposite is also true.

Teachers can maximize communication in their classroom when they are aware of why they are speaking. As teachers guide students in producing the language on their own, they begin to act more as facilitators than instructors (Clifton, 2006). Clifton (2006) describes the facilitator as “an instructor who empowers his or her learners and gives them more initiative and responsibility” (p. 142). Distinguishing between the instructor and the facilitator is the first step towards teacher awareness of which messages are necessary and meaningful and which are not. During class, facilitators need to be aware of what they are saying and whether they are communicating purposefully with students.

**Types of teacher talk.** A teacher may speak for a variety of purposes in the second/foreign language classroom (L2/FL). Some of those purposes are relevant and meaningful for the acquisition of the target language and some are not. Two major categories of teacher talk that assist in language acquisition include feedback (Clifton, 2006; Cullen, 2002; Viiri & Saari, 2006; Moorman, 2003) and instruction (Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Kraemer, 2006). Both of these categories can be broken down into sub-categories. In this paper, feedback related teacher-talk is divided into three subcategories

including the *initiation-response-evaluation* sequence versus the *initiation-response-feedback/follow-up* sequence, correction of students' mistakes, and the use of display and referential questions. The discussion on instruction related teacher-talk revolves primarily around grammar instruction and the use of the L1 versus the use of the TL.

***Instructor vs. facilitator.*** Two distinct types of teacher-talk are “instructor talk” and “facilitator talk”, as introduced by Clifton (2006). Instructor talk does not empower students or allow them to share responsibility in the learning process. Facilitator talk differs from instructor talk in that its primary focus is on the “facilitator-learner interaction, which implies that each has equal responsibility” (p. 142). It is equally as important to understand what varieties of teacher-talk are helpful in language acquisition as it is to understand how factors such as “instructional materials, departmental policies, and course participants’ [contributions]” affect teacher-talk (Chavez, 2006, p. 50).

***Communicative vs. non-communicative talk.*** In order to determine the purpose of teacher-talk in the communicative classroom, it is necessary to identify the various types of communication initiated by the teacher. Gil (2002) compares the difference between natural and pedagogical speech as she offers the idea that a balance can be found between “focus-on-form” and “communicative talk”, which is addressed in the next section. Gil explains communicative talk as that which represents how language is used in natural and authentic situations and non-communicative talk as speech that represents language that learners are unlikely to encounter in authentic interactions. An essential form of teacher-talk that can be communicative or non-communicative is feedback.

***Feedback in the communicative classroom.*** Feedback is a crucial aspect of any classroom and appears in a variety of ways including the IRE/IRF sequence, correction of

learner mistakes, and questions. The *initiation-response-evaluation* (IRE) pattern is initiated by the instructor, followed by a student response, and terminated by teacher feedback typically in the form of a response such as “yes”, “good”, or “that’s incorrect” (Cullen, 2002; Shrum & Glisan, 2010). Shrum and Glisan (2010) suggest that the *initiation-response-feedback* pattern would be more helpful in students’ language acquisition because the feedback “stimulate[s] meaningful conversations and push[es] learners to perform at higher levels” (p. 257). Rather than simply providing students with an evaluation of the correctness of their response, the feedback invites students to expand on their ideas. This not only models a more authentic variety of communication but empowers students as it “fosters interpersonal communication” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 257) by allowing them the power to guide the conversation from that point on.

Clifton (2006) shares another version of the IRF sequence: *initiation-response-follow up*. He lists three ways in which this IRF pattern takes the power and responsibility of learning away from students. First, he claims teachers are seeking a specific response to a question because there is a particular answer that is correct and the topic is not necessarily open for discussion. The IRF pattern clearly keeps the topic under the teacher’s control. Second, the teacher is expected to provide an evaluation in the third turn which again takes power away from the student. Students are not expected to evaluate themselves in this paradigm. Third, because students are merely responding to the teacher, and immediately receiving an evaluation of their response, the teacher gains complete control over who speaks and when (Clifton, 2006).

Another form of feedback includes correcting mistakes. Gil (2002) argues that correcting learner’s mistakes is most appropriate “when [the] mistakes hinder

comprehension” (p. 274). This suggests that the appropriate place and time for learner correction in the L2/FL classroom is when it prevents understanding. Form-focused feedback, on the other hand, includes feedback that focuses specifically on the “correct formation of the learner’s contribution” (p. 274) regardless of the learner’s ability to be understood. In my own teaching, I have wondered which mistakes are worth correcting and which are not. Implementing Gil’s recommendation that a balance can be found between the two helps me prepare students for natural and authentic communication with fluent speakers of the target language. When grammatical and/or syntactic mistakes occur in natural conversational settings, interlocutors may not always correct each other because there is no miscommunication. However, when semantic mistakes are made or lexical differences are introduced, additional negotiation of meaning will take place to ensure that all interlocutors are able to continue participating in the conversation.

The strategies for negotiating meaning mentioned by Gil (2002) include the “use of speech modifications, hesitations, and rephrasing to facilitate learners’ comprehension” (p. 274). When speakers employ these strategies to negotiate meaning, they “make adjustments and modifications [to simplify]” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 31) what they are trying to communicate. Using negotiation of meaning strategies while teaching and interacting with students can demonstrate how to negotiate meaning and encourage students to develop the habit of using the strategies themselves. Facilitators may utilize these strategies to increase student understanding, introduce new vocabulary, or introduce new TL features through TL use. Rephrasing questions or statements with new vocabulary can assist students in following the teacher’s comments without having to translate into the student’s L1 (Alvermann, Swafford, & Montero, 2004).

Two types of questions that are commonly used by instructors are display questions and referential questions (Gil, 2002). Display questions ask for factual recall or recognition (Brock, 1986). These questions tend to have one right answer and do not require the student to reflect on prior knowledge. Gil (2002) indicates that their excessive use is characteristic of non-communicative language, but does not discourage their use in general. Referential questions ask for an evaluation or judgment on a topic (Brock, 1986). These questions often require reflection and thought from the students along with a deep understanding of concepts rather than a superficial one. These questions demonstrate communicative language because they are characteristic of natural, authentic speech (Gil, 2002).

Feedback, in all its forms, can empower students when it gives them control over their utterances and communication (Clifton, 2006). When the teacher acts as a facilitator, students share responsibility in the process of language acquisition (Clifton, 2006). Communicative activities in the classroom should reflect this and allow students opportunities for interpersonal communication. As students have the freedom to discuss topics in natural ways, the facilitator can circulate around the classroom observing students' interactions and providing appropriate feedback to individuals, partners or groups as it becomes necessary, using communicative language and focusing only on those mistakes which obstruct interpersonal communication and mutual understanding.

***Instruction in the communicative classroom.*** The majority of target language exposure that most students receive originates inside the L2/FL classroom, necessitating that facilitators demonstrate communicative language. Non-communicative language is not helpful for students' acquisition of the language because it does not represent

authentic speech. If the ultimate goal in a L2/FL course is language proficiency, communicative language ought to be maximized, allowing students sufficient time and opportunities during class for meaningful oral communication and feedback on that communication. The facilitator is already proficient in the language and therefore does not need to monopolize class time by displaying an Atlas Complex (Lee & VanPatten, 2003).

The facilitator in the classroom must plan activities that “offer learners greater participation rights which give them the potential to take more initiative and hence responsibility for their own learning” (Clifton, 2006, p. 143). When teachers provide instruction it is important that they remember the purpose of their speech. De la Campa and Nassaji (2009) found in their research that during instruction, teachers and facilitators may use teacher-talk for “grammar instruction, classroom management,... activity instructions, [to explain] abstract or culturally specific words,... provide explanations, manage the lesson and build rapport with the students” (p. 744). Even though this kind of talk can be essential in the classroom, it should be minimally used and then reinforced with activities that allow students opportunities for internalizing the information.

Providing explicit grammar instruction is widely discouraged by SLA experts today (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001; Lee & VanPatten, 2003; Shrum & Glisan, 2010). Research shows that explicit grammar instruction in the classroom does not help students acquire the language (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001; Lee & VanPatten, 2003). Lee and Vanpatten (2003) discuss three types of drills that can be used as a means for teaching grammar: mechanical, meaningful, and communicative. For mechanical drills, students do not need to understand what is being communicated such

as when they replace a direct object (DO) with its direct object pronoun (DOP). In mechanical drills, the student must understand the question being asked, however, “there is only one right answer” (p. 121) that is predictable or understanding its meaning is not essential in completing the drill.

For example, in the following drill, students replace a DO with a DOP:

*A: ¿Vas a mirar la televisión después de las clases?*

*a: Sí, voy a mirarla después de las clases.*

*B: ¿Puedo prestar tu libro?*

*b: Sí, puedes prestarlo.*

In this context, students are able to complete the drill regardless of their understanding of what they are saying. This practice is not likely to benefit their language skills in the big picture.

On the other hand, communicative drills require students to understand the content of the question and the answer; however, those who ask questions receive unpredicted answers because there are a variety of responses. However, even communicative drills do not accurately simulate real-life conversation because they do not provide students opportunities “to work at expressing, interpreting, and negotiating meaning with another person” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 55). Although communicative drills may be helpful for reinforcing grammatical features and engaging students in conversations in the target language, they should not be the only mode of communication used in the classroom.

Using communicative drills as a component of communicative activities may come closer to natural speech. Following the drill where students exchange and obtain

information, they must have a purpose for using or interpreting the information for it to truly be communicative (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). Any grammar instruction that takes place in the classroom must be accompanied by communicative activities to allow students a chance to acquire that feature of the language by making meaning with it (Lee & VanPatten, 2003).

Magnan (2008) states that classroom communication has “its own unique discourse and its own interactional norms, an authenticity grounded in the worldview of students who [are], for the most part, if not exclusively, monolingual and monocultural individuals” (p. 358), indicating that classroom communication is perhaps less authentic than most teachers think it is. Van Lier (1996) agrees with the idea that foreign language classrooms, even ones that claim to be communicative, do not often provide as much authenticity as teachers believe they do. In fact, “Instructed conversations in US classrooms and the meanings they generate likely remain essentially American although the words are foreign” (Lantolf & VanPatten, 2008, p. 358).

Even though communicative classrooms where teachers minimize unnecessary teacher-talk, employ facilitator talk, and allow students to use the language may not immerse students in the target culture, they can still provide a safe, student-centered environment where students can use the language in ways that are meaningful to them as individuals. Research in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has suggested that teachers can take a top-down approach to teaching grammar by providing students with a text and discussing the main ideas presented in it. This discussion can be followed by a conversation about the text drawing on students’ prior knowledge and combining it with their new knowledge from the words of the author (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). In this way,

students can pick up on grammatical features as they are exposed to them through authentic materials which are created by fluent speakers who belong to the target culture for speakers of the target language (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). As students use authentic materials they are able to “indirectly learn vocabulary and grammar that can later become the focus of more directed and personalized practice” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010).

In a study conducted by Lapkin, Swain, and Knouzi (2008) to determine students’ understanding of voice (passive, active, middle) in French, the researchers met with eight French L2 language learners. Each participant was asked to use his/her strongest “language” (p. 231), resulting in English-only communication, aside from the example sentences that were presented in French. At the end of the study, the researchers had students reflect on their experience with verbalizing their thought processes as they explained the active, passive, and middle voices, why they were used in specific sentences, and what their use meant in that context. One student’s reflection response included the following statement, “it’s nice to talk about it in English, actually. Like, I think I can understand a lot better if we’re starting off in my native tongue” (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008, p. 248). Although 90%-100% of class time should be in the target language, there are rare times when the native language may be appropriate, even essential for comprehension.

Often, when students attempt to describe or discuss a topic that is difficult for them to talk about in their native language, (e.g., defining varieties of voice), they are unable to provide a sufficient explanation of that topic in the target language. When facilitators allow minimal but necessary L1 use in the classroom for specific purposes – clarification, brief explanation, reflection – students may feel more comfortable and

confident in their language skills. In time, this may lead students to demonstrate a more complete understanding of the language and its use (Lapkin, Swain, & Knouzi, 2008). Allowing students to use their L1 occasionally in the classroom may increase aspects of their comprehension, but is it appropriate for instructors to use the students' L1?

De la Campa and Nassaji (2009) recently conducted a study on the amount of L1 that instructors used. They observed that a novice teacher (during student teaching) and an experienced teacher (more than twenty years of experience and a doctorate) used the students' L1 for almost the same amount of time indicating that experience had little effect on the amount of L1 use. However, they discovered the L1 was used for very different purposes. The novice teacher translated twice as much as the experienced teacher while the experienced teacher made almost five times the number of personal comments in the students' L1. This information led me to formulate my research question: *for what purposes does teacher-talk occur in the classroom?*

## **Methods**

**Context.** The aim of the study is to determine the purposes of teacher-talk in the communicative classroom at the secondary level. Therefore, my first objective is to identify L2/FL teachers who use a communicative approach. To do this, I will contact secondary teachers who teach a foreign language or English as a Second Language (ESL) and invite them to participate in my research study.

After receiving confirmation of interest from potential participants, I will explain that I am conducting a study that looks at teacher-talk in the classroom and ask potential participants what kind of methods and strategies they use, how often their class meets,

and for how long. Provided they are still interested, I will then request to make a classroom visit to observe whether the teacher's methods are in fact communicative.

**Determining a Communicative Classroom.** To determine if the classroom is communicative, I will look at three key factors. First, the teacher should not exhibit an Atlas Complex (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). This will be easy to determine because a teacher with an Atlas Complex will spend the entire class period lecturing or instructing and students will not have opportunities to practice the language or participate in classroom discussion, because there is no discussion (p. 8). Second, students should have several opportunities throughout the class period to interact with each other using the TL. Third, the activities should be clearly structured and planned with communicative goals in mind.

**Participants.** Facilitators who participate in this study will be aware of how they provide instruction in regards to grammar and will utilize authentic materials in their preparation of communicative activities in which students may interact with each other to practice meaningful communication in the target language. Based on the frequency and length of class sessions as well as the teachers' use of communicative teaching I will select twelve participants to observe. The length of each class session must be identical to provide consistency in recording teacher-talk. I speak only Spanish and English, so if French, German, Chinese or another language course is selected I will need access to someone fluent enough in those languages to transcribe and translate the recordings. If those resources are not available at the time of my research, I will be limited to Spanish and ESL teachers only. In this case, I may choose fewer instructors to observe because my participant pool will be reduced.

**Data Collection Procedures.** This study will focus only on the purpose of the teacher-talk that occurs in the classroom, not on effects of the teacher's body language, gestures, or attitudes. Eliminating the latter factors from the data collection will keep the data analysis focused on the specific research questions. Four class sessions of each course will be audio recorded, transcribed and analyzed with regard to teacher-talk. The teachers will wear a recording device and additional recording devices will be set up around the classroom to record student utterances, as well as teacher utterances. This will help determine what kind of response the teacher is providing and whether the teacher is using negotiating of meaning strategies with students or merely echoing student responses. Follow-up interviews will be done with participants to determine what their perceived uses of teacher-talk are in the classroom. Following data analysis of each teacher utterance and identifying its purpose, teacher perceptions of teacher-talk will be compared with the observation data.

**Data Analysis.** Once the data has been collected, it will be transcribed and coded for teacher utterances and the preceding student utterance. After these utterances have been identified they will be coded according to purpose. They will then be organized to demonstrate how many utterances were made under each purpose and percentages will be attached to each to show how teacher-talk was used among individual teachers and overall, including all teachers.

**Contributions to the field.** The main contribution that I hope to make with this study is to raise awareness and understanding of teacher-talk in the classroom and its purposes. The teacher is typically the person in a classroom responsible for keeping students on task and for setting the pace, however, the teacher does not have someone whose purpose

is to keep him/her on-task. Through my research on appropriate and helpful teacher talk that encourages and nourishes language acquisition, I have become more aware of what I am saying during class. Personal anecdotes and tangents that are not relevant to lesson or course goals have significantly decreased and I have found that I am able to use my time in class more efficiently. I hope that the results of this study will inform teachers by making them more aware of the purpose for their speech and that they will be better able to use class time to accomplish course goals while fostering student language acquisition and development.

**LANGUAGE ARTIFACT**

## **Introduction**

This artifact was written in an effort to discover how I could make classroom communication more meaningful for students. Once I realized the purposes for the facilitator to speak during class time, I began focusing on student communication. I often planned information-gap and task-based activities that required students to talk with each other and those activities even led up to a culminating activity where small groups or the entire class used the information gathered for a specific purpose.

In my second semester as a graduate instructor I taught IELI 1230 which is Cross Cultural Talk for international students. It was a five week summer course that met four days a week for two and one half hours. I noticed early on in the course that even though the communication between students appeared meaningful it was not always as meaningful as I wanted it to be. I realized that my some of my students were very good at completing an exercise or activity and mimicking the pattern from the model. However, those same students were barely intelligible when I attempted to converse with them before or after class.

I began experimenting with different topics and activities to see what engaged my students the most and that would also provide opportunities for making personal connections with the material. As I continued planning goal directed activities and lessons that would maximize students' interpersonal communication in small groups, I kept my course objectives at the center of my focus. I then began observing my students with a specific purpose in mind which increased my awareness of their purposes for communicating as they worked together to complete assignments. I decided to research classroom communication and how to make it more meaningful so that I could enrich

students' experiences in that course specifically and also in future courses that I may teach.

What I discovered while I researched for this artifact was that students are sometimes quite skilled at participating in goal directed activities even when they lack the ability to perform at the same level spontaneously or outside of the classroom. As my eyes were opened to this idea, I realized that just teacher-talk and student-talk are not so different. Just like I need to be aware of what I say during class because my exclusive use of the target language does not ensure the quality or meaningfulness of my communication with students, I need to be aware of students' communication with each other as well. And students need to be aware of their own communication.

Since I have written this artifact, I have tried to focus more on comprehensibility than perfection of the language structure. I have never before realized how much of the language students can use without knowing what they are saying. Patterns become easy to follow, especially with good modeling and practice. Unfortunately, familiarity with patterns does not ensure acquisition or appropriation of a language.

## **Making Classroom Communication Meaningful**

**Introduction.** Magnan (1986) explains “the process of language learning is a continuum on which learners progress at different rates, regardless of course boundaries” (p. 432). In this continuum speakers can move back and forth between advanced and novice depending on how actively and frequently they engage in using the target language (TL). Language learners learn at their own pace and in different ways, according to their individual background knowledge and pre-existing language skills. This is why it is important to differentiate instruction and use different teaching styles, methods and strategies to help students understand the course material and the interactions between student and teacher are not scripted, but carry meaning that is based in the context of the situation (Van Bramer, 2011).

The more that learners practice, the closer they will move towards the fluent end of the continuum, but the same is true for the opposite. When learners (and teachers) fail to practice and use the language those skills become dull and more difficult to use in the future. Language proficiency in the TL can be maintained in a variety of ways that include listening to music, watching television or movies, reading, and writing letters and emails but most importantly, using the TL to engage in meaningful conversations with native or fluent speakers.

I have heard it said that “if you’re not moving forward, you’re moving backward by default.” If a conscious effort is not made to maintain or improve language proficiency, language skills will become rusty and words that were once easily recalled may be completely forgotten. When students first embark on the journey of acquiring another language, it is essential they understand that language learning is a life-long

process (even in the L1) and they should not expect to have it mastered after only a few class periods or even courses. Pieces of the language can perhaps be mastered, but language as a whole is too large to master without dedicated and devoted hard work. Errors, which are to be expected for at least several years, are a natural part of the learning process.

**Student identity in language learning.** Van Lier (2008) claims that “language learning... is the process of finding one’s way in the linguistic world, which is part of the semiotic world (i.e., the world of sign making and using) and taking an increasingly active role in developing one’s own constitutive role in it” (p. 177). Just as “learning is a process of becoming” (Vågan, 2011), so too is language learning a process of finding one’s way. As a facilitator in language courses, I create conditions where students are empowered to take responsibility for their own learning (Clifton, 2006), so that they can develop new identities and take on new roles through their increased familiarity with the target language and its accompanying culture.

Van Lier states that “learning an L2 and becoming engaged in a new culture thus involves adjusting one’s sense of self and creating new identities to connect the known to the new” (p. 177). Learning a second language is something I have been doing since I was a child. Speaking Spanish has become part of who I am and how I define myself. Students’ identities will shift as they add new tools, understanding, and perspectives to their prior identities. “Information is not passively received by the learner; rather affordances are actively picked up by a learner in the pursuit of meaningful activity” (Van Lier, 2008, p. 176). Through meaningful activity in language learning, students will begin to “[perceive] the language as it relates to [them] and at the same time [re-examine

their] sense of identity in the light of the meanings perceived” (Van Lier, 2008, p. 177). As students acquire more language features by increasing their vocabulary and knowledge of the language structure they will begin making personal connections in and with the target language.

As personal connections begin to form “between the words and the self and its emerging L2 identity” (Van Lier, 2008, p. 178) students begin to find their voice. Their new identity(ies), which are created through second or foreign language acquisition, “infuse [their] words with [their] own feelings, thoughts, and identity, investing [themselves] in [their] words” (Van Lier, 2008, p. 178). In students’ journeys to acquire a new language, they may develop more than one new identity as they discover who they are in using the TL. These new identities do not replace the old ones that existed before, but enhance them as new depth and dimension magnify their understanding of the world around them. In this journey of language learning and identity formation a concrete knowledge of grammar is an essential stepping stone towards using the language meaningfully.

**The role of grammar in language teaching.** Shrum and Glisan (2010) explain that researchers over the last two decades have observed that “...grammatical structures take on meaning only if they are situated within a context, within people, and within connected discourse. They become internalized only if the learners are placed in a situation in which they need to use the structures for communication and participation in communicative events” (p. 218). This reinforces the idea that language instruction should be contextualized in order for students to make connections with the language, internalize its features, and employ their skills beyond the classroom. Thus, course goals and

objectives should focus on useful and meaningful vocabulary and grammar that students will encounter and use in real-life situations.

The teacher, as architect of activities and classroom structure, plans opportunities for students to practice and use the target language in ways that individualize their learning according to what is important and relevant to them, in addition to the course content and objectives. This can be done as students communicate with the world outside of class through journals (Mahn, 2008), instant messaging, emailing, phone calls, texts, or personal meetings/interviews (Chaston, 1999).

In my experience, vocabulary journals have been successful. They are used for students to keep track of new words they discover when they are reading or practicing the TL outside of class (listening to music, watching television, listening to native speakers, reading, etc.). Figures 1 and 2 depict two variations of word journals that students can use. Specifications and categories may be determined by the teacher according to the goals of the course and needs of the student.

*Figure 1 Vocabulary Journal Example for Spanish learners*

Word	Part of Speech	Definition/ Translation	Illustration	Variations/ phrases/idioms	Gender	Example sentence
Equipaje	noun	Conjunto de cosas que se llevan en los viajes		* hacer el equipaje * facturar el equipaje	M	Tengo que hacer el equipaje antes de ir al aeropuerto.

As the grammatical features of the language are contextualized, students will begin making personal connections with the language. Figure 1 contains one version of a

vocabulary journal that can be used by language learners. Although the word recorded in this figure is easily illustrated, many new words that students encounter will be less tangible. The format and structure of the vocabulary journals may be decided by the instructor to meet the needs of the students and the vocabulary they find. The structure of the class and requirements outlined by the teacher should provide students with a wide variety of sources to turn to in their search of new vocabulary. As students become familiar with and gain a grammatical understanding of the language, there may be other factors that hinder their opportunities or ability to make meaning with the language in the classroom.

*Figure 2 Vocabulary Journal Example for learners of English.*

**1. word** : definition

**Part of speech** : noun ( ), verb ( ), adjective    **Source** : where you found the word

**Source sentence** : Write the entire sentence from the source that contains the new word.

**Example** : Write your own sentence using the new word.

*Example:*

**1. decreed** : *commanded, ordained, or decided by decree*

**Part of speech:** *verb, noun (decree), adj(decree)*    **Source:** *Quest 2*

**Source sentence** : *Who had much control over the art, established this figure type and decreed that it be maintained for the sake of continuity.*

**Example** : *The government decreed a state of emergency during the war.*

**Challenges in language teaching and learning.** Teaching foreign and second languages presents many challenges that include finding a balance in teaching grammar, implementing authentic texts, identifying what pieces of the culture and pragmatics are level appropriate for students, maintaining advanced proficiency while teaching low level students, etc. Gil (2002) explains why these challenges occur. “In order to understand the

complexity of the foreign language classroom, it is important to take into account the essential fact that in this setting, language is both the medium of instruction and the content of instruction” (p. 274). In language courses the tools used for teaching the target language are the target language. Beginning level students often become frustrated that they have many ideas they want to express but cannot because they lack the skills to do so in the TL.

One of the most challenging parts of speaking a foreign language is communicating the ideas that exist within the mind with accuracy using the words and structures of the TL. In order to communicate our thoughts accurately we need to access our working vocabulary. Sometimes it is difficult to find words in the foreign language that express what we mean to communicate, however that cannot be blamed on inadequacy of the language to communicate our thoughts, but our own language gaps (Pullum, 2006). Language is a tool and the more languages we acquire, the more fully we can come to understand our own (Lund, 2006; Lantolf & Poehner, 2008).

It has been said that Shakespeare had a working vocabulary of more than 25,000 words (Craig, 2011). The average person in the United States today may know several thousand words, however, he or she only uses 2,000 - 3,000 words of those words regularly (Harris, 2011). Learning a new language not only increases the ability a person has to interact in the world and with the world, but also enlarges and enhances the vocabulary with which one can interact. As learners acquire a larger vocabulary and begin to use the language with greater proficiency, teachers ought to focus on what kind of language students are learning.

**Classroom limitations.** Bateman (2008) explains that although the field of language acquisition has seen a variety of methods and theories come and go, presently, “the language teaching profession has underscored the importance of learning language through real communication, implying that the classroom should provide an environment in which both instructors and students use the target language much of the time” (p. 11). However, not all communication that employs the target language is meaningful communication. Sociocultural perspectives in the field of language acquisition have clarified for me the definition of meaning-making in language teaching.

Zuengler and Miller (2006) explain that “[sociocultural perspectives] focus not on language as input, but as a resource for participation in the kinds of activities our everyday lives comprise” (p. 37). The communicative approach to language teaching deems it is absolutely essential for students to have opportunities to *use* the language, and recommends that the best way to accomplish this goal is through communicative activities in the classroom (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001; Lee & VanPatten, 2003; Shrum & Glisan, 2010). However, are all instances in which students use the target language instances of authentic communication, or even genuine communication?

Magnan (2008) argues that teachers who use a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach may not be fostering the authentic communication they claim. Magnan discusses student identity and how that affects classroom interactions, stating that “the classroom can be authentic only within the identities of the learners and the socially situated school setting” (p. 355). So what does this mean for teachers who are doing their best to create opportunities for authentic communication in their courses?

It means that teachers need to be aware: aware of what students are saying, aware of what language is being used, and aware of the fact that authenticity in the classroom has limits. Ludwig Wittgenstein, an Austrian-British philosopher, is quoted saying, “the limits of my language are the limits of my world”. I agree with Wittgenstein and Magnan. The classroom is not meant as a substitute for authentic and spontaneous communication with native or fluent speakers. However, the classroom is often where foreign and second language learning begins for most learners.

Magnan’s (2008) argument questions the authenticity of the classroom environment with American teachers in American institutions, teaching American students, asserting that students are most likely to become engaged in American manners of learning, interacting, and communicating. According to Magnan, teachers must ask “how much of what is learned [or taught] is truly foreign and how much remains American?” (p. 355). Having clear objectives and realistic goals for each activity can help teachers answer this question. Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan, Reynolds (1991) suggest that “language learners... must be exposed to language samples which observe social, cultural, and discourse conventions – or in other words, which are pragmatically appropriate” (p. 4) if they are expected to acquire the proficiency and ability to communicate with native speakers. After students have been exposed to accurate and fluent models of speech, they need opportunities to produce, practice and use the target language to demonstrate what they have internalized in their process of becoming multilingual (Fantini, 1997).

Chaston’s (1999) research with oral interviews offers a wide range of ways to use them as authentic materials in the classroom as a means of providing students with

examples of how native speakers use the target language and preparing them for communication beyond the limitations of the classroom:

Authentic materials can be used to teach, practice, or test one specific grammar concept; some can be used for listening practice, models of pronunciation, or phonetic study and evaluation; and others may make connections with cultural insights into history, geography, gastronomy, sociology, literature, political science, psychology, economics, sports, and more. (p.18)

In addition to oral interviews, television sitcoms or soap operas, movies, music, etc., from the target culture may also be implemented. When working with authentic materials in the classroom, it becomes very important to ensure the task required of students is appropriate in regards to their proficiency level and communicative abilities (Chaston, 1999; Shrum & Glisan, 2010).

Authentic materials can provide students with opportunities for making cultural connections with the history, art, and anthropology that exists within the target culture along with the political, social, and economic issues the target culture faces (Chaston, 1999). Students may also make cultural connections with the weather and geography of the area discussed or presented in the authentic materials used (Chaston, 1999). A colleague of mine who is originally from Alaska studied abroad in Argentina, and while there were many differences between the two places, she stayed in an area with similar weather and topography as her home in Alaska. This allowed her to feel at home, at times, in a foreign land thousands of miles away from her home and family. Not all

students may be able to study abroad, and certainly not in high school, however, using materials that give students a feel for what it would be like if they had chance to go can only help further their interest.

**Bringing authenticity into the classroom?** When language is viewed as a resource for participation (Zuengler & Miller, 2006) it is no longer viewed as a topic to be taught. I think one of the crucial differences between how language tends to be taught and how it ought to be taught is that the former views language as a topic or content area, like science or math. The latter, however, views language as a tool or means for teaching content. Students can learn about something via the target language. The purpose should be communicative competence which necessitates the *use* of language in the classroom. Lund (2006) explains that “language is a powerful instrument. If you do not speak the target language, you do not have access to networks, to forming relationships, or to participate. Language is a social practice, and language mediates the interaction between human beings and the social world” (74). Real, authentic communication “involves personal expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning where information, feelings, and ideas are exchanged in various forms of human interaction” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 217). However, not all activities lend themselves to student interpretation and personal expression.

Communicative drills often engage students in practicing grammatical features of the language as they exchange information with or obtain information from their classmates (Brandl, 2008; Lee & VanPatten, 2003). Although these drills may be helpful in getting students to use the target language, they do not require students to make connections or use the language meaningfully. Communicative activities on the other

hand, focus on developing communicative skills and using the language meaningfully rather than practicing the grammar (Brandl, 2008). Implementing a combination of these drills and activities provides students a well rounded and balanced use of the language accurately and fluently.

Recently, as part of a Spanish course that I am teaching, my students spent an entire class period learning about and discussing the furniture, appliances, rooms, and other items that are located in or part of a home. The following is the lesson plan and an explanation of each activity and what students did during each stage of the lesson.

### **Mi Nueva Casa**

Objectives:

1. Students will look identify what is missing from a floor plan for their ‘new home’ to help them know what furniture and appliances they will need when they move in.
2. Students will decorate their ‘new home’ using the vocabulary from the chapter.
3. Students will practice the vocabulary as they describe the location of items in their ‘new home’ to a classmate.
4. Students will compare and contrast their own home with their classmate’s home.
5. Students will discuss their homes with a classmate

In this lesson, students will use the floor plan of a home to describe a new home that they will move into. Four different floor plans are used to allow for students to compare and contrast their homes later in the lesson. When I have used this activity in the

past I have had students discuss their own homes or apartments, but this semester this lesson followed a series of lessons that focused on speaking in the future using the *ir + a + infinitive* pattern. A modification that I made to this lesson plan was to have students talk about their future home to reinforce and practice the material from previous lessons.

After the teacher uses pictures to introduce the new vocabulary, students will be divided into partners to complete *Part 1* and *Part 2* of the worksheets in Appendix A. For this part, students with the same floor plan will be paired together. Students will engage in meaningful communication as they work together to answer the questions and decorate their 'new homes'.

For *Parts 3-5* students will switch to a new partner who has a different floor plan to discuss the location of items in their home. They will also compare and contrast layout of their homes how they chose to decorate and arrange the furniture. All of this will take place during a fifty minute course.

*Part 6* will be completed as a homework assignment. The following class period will begin by having students share their essays with their classmates. Students will share their essay with five different students in the class, without reading the text, but referring to it if needed. Then, as a class we will compare student responses to determine which items are most necessary to obtain before settling in and which items can wait.

## **Conclusion**

Sometimes in language courses it becomes difficult to engage students in truly meaningful conversation when the curriculum requires that students learn about specific topics. In the lesson plan that is provided here, I had to stretch the content to fit a topic that would be meaningful to my students. Many of my students are from out of state and

move several times each year as they return home for the summer and then back to school in the fall. Even though most students live in apartment complexes and not actual houses, I liked being able to provide students with a floor plan rather than having them create their own based on their current living situation. Students practiced vocabulary from the text, prepositions that express location of objects, *ir + a + infinitive* pattern, and using and responding to interrogatives through written and oral speech. It may not seem natural or meaningful to some students to discuss their new home when they are not in fact moving to new home. However, at some point, each student in my class will move again and the goal of this lesson was to not only have them practice communicating a variety of important ideas from our current chapter in the target language, but also to provide them with tools and language skills that they will undoubtedly find a need for beyond the classroom and this course.

**CULTURE ARTIFACT**

## Introduction

This artifact was written during a course on pragmatics. At the beginning of the course I thought that pragmatics could be easily taught and I disagreed with some researchers who argue the teachability of pragmatics. I soon gained a great understanding for what pragmatics is and unaware I was of the pragmatics of my own culture. Even though I was familiar with my own cultural norms, I did not know how to identify them or teach them to outsiders.

I chose the topic for this paper after spending an evening with my husband at a friend's home. We spent the afternoon cooking and chatting and then sat down for a meal together. I had homework to complete and was concerned that the later we stayed, the longer I would have to stay up. I began subtly gathering my things. Once all of my things were gathered in one place and arranged neatly by my chair, I slipped on my shoes. My husband and friend barely seemed to notice.

After several more minutes, I stood up and put on my coat. I remained standing for a few minutes as the conversation lagged on and on. My husband remained seated and engaged in conversation. Finally, I grabbed our frozen ingredients and placed them quite obviously on top of the pile by my chair. Surely they would both notice that frozen things should move quickly from one freezer to the next, but to my dismay, the conversation continued still. Finally, after a few more minutes, I interrupted the conversation, apologizing that I had work to do at home, offering that we should get together again soon, thanking our host for a lovely evening, and finally, saying good-bye. We chatted all the way out to the car, and finally, eventually, said our good-byes.

On the way home, my husband mentioned how chatty my friend is and how we could have been there all night but he did not know how to end the conversation without being rude. He apologized that we stayed so long because he knew that I had homework to complete. It was the first time my friend and husband had met, but after spending years hearing about each other, from me, it was like they were old friends. The next day at work, my friend made almost identical comments about my husband talking so much and she apologized for keeping me, when she knows I am busy with school.

After spending several weeks studying pragmatics, I realized that even a lifetime of interactions with native speakers of my native language did not prepare my husband, my friend, or I for closing a conversation without fear of being rude. How could this be? In an attempt to avoid such situations in the future, I began pursuing an answer in the professional literature.

What I found taught me to recognize phrases that shut down topics and provide an out for an interlocutor who does not have time or interest in continuing the conversation. Even though I already knew all of the phrases that signal a pre-closing, I had never recognized them as a means of terminating a conversation. I began searching in text books and found that many of them do not include closings, but they focus on the middle of conversations, perhaps with topic shutdowns.

In the time since I learned about the pragmatics of closing conversations I have made an effort to include them in class activities and assignments. Rather than have students end a conversation with a classmate by saying 'thank you' (if information was gathered) or simply ending the conversation by moving on to a new partner, I encourage students to use closing phrases. After several weeks of this, topic terminations, pre-

closings and closings become a habit and students are not only able to perform those speech acts with pragmatically appropriate phrases and body language, but they can recognize when interlocutors use those phrases and are signaling to end the conversation.

In this paper I specifically focus on English language learners and the importance of their being able to recognize and execute appropriate closings in English. When I wrote this artifact I was teaching ESL and focused my research on how I could help them understand the pragmatics and language of closing a conversation.

## **Closing Conversations in English**

**Introduction.** If the phrase “how to close a conversation”, or a variation of this phrase, is typed into a search engine on the internet, the search will yield a long list of articles on the “how to’s” of closing conversations appropriately in American culture (Brenner, 2008; Marshall, 2008). There is also a significant amount of self-help literature that provides explicit directions on closing conversations in the work place, with acquaintances, and in different social situations without compromising the “face” (Brown & Levinson, 1978) of either interlocutor. By its very nature, “closing a conversation is a face-threatening act, in which interlocutors cooperate to maintain face” (Takami, 2002, p. 67). Therefore closing conversations can be awkward and difficult even for native speakers, who are assumed to understand the pragmatics of their own culture at some level of consciousness.

It also demonstrates that native speakers are not always sure how to properly perform this particular speech act to prevent them from appearing rude or uncooperative (Bardovi-Harlig et al, 1991) to members of their own culture in a variety of situations. Thus, it is important that learners of English understand polite and appropriate ways of ending conversations so that they are not perceived as rude and to prevent unintentional misunderstandings or offenses. Part of understanding the pragmatics of the situation involves reading body language, familiarity with the other interlocutor, and understanding the context of the situation.

**Knowing when the conversation is over.** Schegloff and Sacks (1973) suggest that interlocutors may cease speaking without having brought the conversation to a close. These interruptions or pauses in speech may be interpreted differently by interlocutors

based on the content of the situation. However, without specific elements of closings and leave-takings, the conversation can end without having actually come to a close (Yuka, 2008). To help learners “notice the move and cooperate to finish the talk” (Yuka, 2008, p. 115) the different parts of closings are described in the following sections.

**Parts of Closings.** Since the early 1970s, researchers have explored what closings are, how they are employed, whether they consist of multiple elements, and how they can be executed politely. Research and studies done by Schegloff and Sacks (1973), Clerk and French (1981), Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1989), Okamoto (1990), and Takami (2002) identify either two or three components of closing a conversation and what each component entails. Schegloff and Sacks claim that “a conversation does not simply end, but is brought to a close” involving two steps; first a pre-closing and then a closing (Yuka, 2008, p. 115). Other pieces of a “closing section” (Schegloff & Sacks) that have been identified include topic termination and contact termination (Clerk & French), leave-taking (Clerk & French; Okamoto; Takami), terminal exchanges (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig; Takami, 2002) and shut downs (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig). Table 1 shows which parts of closings were identified by which researchers. Most of them are discussed further in this paper.

**Pre-closing.** Pre-closings are expressed through words and phrases such as “ok”, “all right”, “great”, “see you then”, and “that’s fine” (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1989, p. ??; Yuka, 2008, p. 115-116) as the listener communicates that the speaker has finished. Bardovi-Harlig et al. (1991) identify two main purposes that interlocutors may have for employing a pre-closing. First, the pre-closing signals that the speaker plans to close the conversation (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991). Second, the pre-closing allows the listener to

“continue the conversation if desired”. The pre-closing is an important part of the closing section because it politely offers the other interlocutor(s) an opportunity to leave or return to what they were doing before the conversation began. Speakers should understand that the function of a pre-closing is to “verify that no additional business remains to be negotiated” (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991, p. 8).

*Table 1* Parts of Closings

Researcher (Year)	Sections of Closings		
Schegloff & Sacks (1973)	Pre-closing	Closing	
Clerk & French (1981)	Topic termination	Leave-taking	Contact termination
Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig (1989)	Terminal exchange	Pre-closing	Shut down
Okamoto (1990) (Japanese closings)	Pre-closing	Leave-taking	
Takami (2002) (Japanese closings)	Leave-taking	Pre-closing	Terminal exchange

Therefore, a proper response to a pre-closing is to either move on to a necessary topic that has not yet been discussed or to take care of any unfinished business (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991, p. 8). If both speakers desire to continue the interaction they may carry on with new or previously discussed topics. In any conversation between native speakers, pre-closings are inevitable and will occur again when interlocutors are ready to shut down a topic or end the conversation.

**Topic terminations and Shutdowns.** Topic shutdowns are another way to signal that a speaker intends to either move on to a new topic or end the conversation (Bardovi-

Harlig et al., 1991, p. 7). Topic shutdowns may either precede or follow a pre-closing and are signaled using phrases such as “got it”, “ok”, “that sounds great”, and “well, next time...” (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991, p. 7-8; Yuka, 2008, p. 115) and often occur multiple times in a single conversation. They may be initiated by either interlocutor. Bardovi-Harlig et al., (1991) argue that, “it is important for learners to recognize the function of these particular turns, because it is only here that they may extend the conversation without appearing rude” (p. 7). Thus, topic terminations and shutdowns are an essential piece of closing a conversation that NNSs should be able to recognize and respond to appropriately. Throughout the course of a conversation many topics may open and close, but eventually, the conversation must come to an end.

**Terminal Exchange.** Terminal exchanges are considered to be “the bare minimum” (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991, p. 6; Yuka, 2008, p. 114-115) for closing conversations in English. They typically consist of pairs of words that clearly terminate a conversation, such as “good-bye”, “see you”, and “bye” (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991, p. 7-8; Yuka, 2008, p. 114-115). To effectively close a conversation, speakers must know that “all terminal exchanges have two parts: an initiation and a response” (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991, p. 7) and be able to identify and execute each part appropriately. Terminal exchanges always convey that the conversation is over and speakers are about to part ways.

**Closings and Leave-takings.** Button (1987, 1990) strengthens Bardovi-Harlig et al.’s (1991) claim that terminal exchanges have two parts, with his research that states closings “consist of four turns, organized in two adjacency pairs” (quoted in Pavlidou, 2010, p. 79). Richards et al. (2002) define adjacency pairs as “a sequence of two related

utterances by two different speakers” (quoted in Takami, 2002, p. 71). As interlocutors negotiate meaning to end the conversation (Button, 1987, 1990 quoted in Pavlidou, 2010, p. 79) the following must occur:

1. pair:            first turn offers to close (first close component),  
                         second turn accepts the offer (second close component),
2. pair:            third turn is the first terminal utterance (first terminal component),  
                         fourth turn reciprocates (second terminal component).

According to these research-based claims, speakers need instruction and practice in closing conversations in the target language combined with an understanding of appropriate pre-closings, topic shutdowns, and terminal exchanges in the target culture. This will enable nonnative speakers to recognize when a closing component occurs and offer an appropriate closing in return or to initiate the closing themselves and properly end the conversation. Teaching pragmatics along with conversational skills helps prevent nonnative speakers from seeming “either abrupt or hard to ‘get rid of’” (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991, p. 6).

**Importance of understanding L1 and L2 pragmatics.** To avoid miscommunications, language learners need to understand the pragmatics of their L1 and L2 and the differences between them in regards to specific speech acts so that “breakdowns [that] occur through the misinterpretation of cultural values as they are revealed in communication” (Marsh, 1990, p.189) can be avoided. Understanding the pragmatics of other cultures can decrease the risk of appearing or acting rude as speakers come to understand that “the way in which termination and parting is achieved varies within and across cultures” (Takami, 2002, p. 67).

**Pragmatics of closing conversations in English.** It is essential for English language learners (ELLs) to be familiar with the pragmatics of American culture in order to use the language appropriately and avoid offending interlocutors unintentionally, or experiencing a “misfire” (Tatsuki & Houck, 2010). For ELLs to execute closings properly, they must “become familiar with the many parts of the closing of a conversation in English (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991, p. 7)”. Bardovi-Harlig et al. (1991) discuss the importance of English language learners being able to understand and identify situations in which native English speakers may intend to close the conversation and take leave. Once learners have become familiar with closing patterns in English and learned how to successfully close a conversation as a listener *and* a speaker, they will have fewer miscommunications with native speakers.

Yuka (2008) states that with “explicit instruction about pragmatics of a target language, learners can improve their skills effectively” (p. 113). Often, when ELLs develop conversational skills, there is negative pragmatic transfer from their native culture to the target culture. Examples of negative pragmatic transfer from Japanese learners of English (Okamoto, 1990) include that Japanese speakers “do not express joy, such as ‘it was nice talking to you’, which is often found in American data” (p. 148-149 quoted in Yuka, 2008, p. 116). In Japanese classes of English, explicit instruction should be provided to teach students to express joy when conversing with native English speakers so they are not perceived as “uncooperative, ill mannered, rude, or a combination of all three” (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004, p. 244). This makes students’ native culture a key part of pragmatic awareness. Students must understand how the

exchange would take place in their home culture, how it takes place in the target culture, and identify any differences that exist between the two.

Furthermore, in a survey given to native Brunei-Malay speakers learning English, asking about the manner in which native English speakers greet and take leave of conversations and situations, the native English speakers were considered to “be more short and abrupt in their greeting and leave-takings than in [Brunei-Malay]” (Marsh, 1990, p.187). In interactions with native English speakers, speakers of Brunei-Malay may seem to carry on unnecessarily and be hard to get rid of. When students learn this is how they are perceived, they can change their conversational tactics to avoid frustrating their interlocutors.

**Textbook conversation vs. natural speech.** Textbooks are often criticized for their “failure to replicate natural conversation” (Grant & Starks, 2001, p. 39) and their tendency to “provide insufficient information as a whole” (Yuka, 2008, p. 112) as they do not often include full conversations complete with closings. Bardovi-Harlig et al., (1991) state that textbook “dialogues often [end] before reaching the closing section” as their purpose is to “introduce new grammatical structures, not to provide a source for realistic conversational input” (p. 8). Thus, many textbook conversations end in the middle of a conversation or provide a topic shutdown, but an actual closing is never negotiated.

Figure 3 is a typical example of a textbook conversation. It begins with a salutation and is followed by a topic or grammatical feature to be practiced. The topic is shut down and then students may practice again or move on to a new, similarly structured conversation. However, this approach ignores the turns required to close the conversation properly.

*Figure 3 Model Textbook Example vs. Natural Speech*

**Amber:** Hi Jeff.

**Jeff:** Hi Amber, how are you?

**Amber:** Do you have plans tonight?

**Jeff:** I have class until 4:30pm, but after that I am free.

**Amber:** Do you want to go to the movies?

**Jeff:** What movie are you thinking?

**Amber:** I haven't seen The Avengers yet, have you?

**Jeff:** Not yet, that sounds great! (Shutting down the topic)

Further investigation by Yuka (2008) identified the quality and quantity of closing sections presented in Japanese high school English textbooks and compared them with closings in natural speech. Overall, the quantity of textbook examples was very low. In terms of quality, the examples found were not helpful models for natural speech because they did not accurately represent authentic language that students may hear in genuine conversations with native speakers.

In the identified textbook models, the “closing pairs ‘thank you’ and ‘you’re welcome’ almost always appeared” (Yuka, 2008, p. 114), but in natural conversation, “more than half (56%) of the [speakers] did not respond to [the interlocutor’s] ‘thank you’ in the experiment” (Yuka, 2008, p. 114). This evidence clearly shows that what students are exposed to and practice in the textbook is not the same as what they will hear and be expected to produce in real-life conversations.

Textbooks often lack examples of what communication is like among fluent or native speakers. This is why it is so important to use authentic materials in foreign and second language classrooms. Radio shows, watching video clips, and personal interviews

(Chaston, 1999) can demonstrate to students how to use the language appropriately while showing them the pragmatics of certain speech acts. For example, Figure 4 contains the following exchange from a popular television show, *Gilmore Girls*, demonstrates a natural conversation and closing:

*Figure 4* Television Phone Conversation

Lorelai: I miss you

Rory: I miss you too. I'm so glad I only have one more day here.

Lorelai: Me too. What do you have on your agenda for tomorrow? Or, today actually?  
*Shutdown*

Rory: We have, a breakfast mixer with members of Congress and the Senate.

Lorelai: Cool, see if you can steal me something off of Tom Dasher's fruit plate.

Rory: I'll see what I can do. *Pre-closing*

Lorelai: I'll see you Friday, doc. *Terminal exchange*

Rory: See you Friday. *Terminal exchange*

(*Gilmore Girls*, 2002, Episode 1)

Transcriptions of audio materials could be provided to students to help them follow what they are hearing.

**Application in the Classroom.** Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, and Mandell (2001) argue that before students can produce the language, they must be exposed to the language in ways that are meaningful to them. They must first recognize aspects of the language and then begin producing that aspect, beginning with structured and guided activities. As students gain familiarity and competence with the language through the guided activities, they begin to require less structure and can eventually produce the language on their own.

First, students must be exposed to conversation closings in English. As previously explained, textbooks are not often effective at demonstrating this speech act

because they often feature fragments of conversations, rather than entire conversations. Authentic materials, such as video clips, can be implemented to provide students with authentic input in the target language. Television sitcoms and movies depict countless situations of short yet complete conversations that demonstrate to students how to close a conversation appropriately or inappropriately in the target language and culture.

Choosing clips where interlocutors are unaware of the pragmatics of their own culture can be helpful to students because the clips may emphasize or exaggerate the lack of pragmatic awareness which is helpful for students who may identify with that character.

The activity in Appendix B is a recognition activity in which students watch video clips in English to identify different components of conversation closings.

### **Recognizing Closings in Video Clips**

Objective:

1. Students will identify pre-closings, shutdowns, terminal exchanges, and closings in a series of video clips they are shown.

**Instructions:** During class, students will use the handout in Appendix B to complete the following goal directed activity. The main goal of this activity is that students will be able to identify the components of closings in natural conversation as demonstrated in the video clips that are provided by the teacher.

Students should read through the instructions of the worksheet together as a class before listening to the video clips so that they know what they are listening for. As students watch and listen to the video clips, they should make a check or tally mark in the correct box each time they hear one of the components of closing a conversation. They may view the clips more than once if necessary. For this activity it is best to not play the

subtitles or provide a transcription of the dialogue to students until after they have completed the worksheet. This activity provides practice listening to native and fluent speakers of the target language converse at a natural pace. Following the activity it may become appropriate to provide students with a copy of the transcription to keep in their notes.

After the clips are over, students will work through the different levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, create) through activities as they move from recognition to production. First, students will discuss their results with a neighbor as they discuss what they heard and identified with their neighbor. This will allow students to see if they missed any of the closing components that were used in the video clips. This activity will help students identify the parts of a closing while others are speaking in order to help them recognize appropriate closings in their own conversations.

Using the different components of closings that they heard in the video and following the same model, students will practice shutting down topics and closing a conversation with a partner. Next, students will practice the closings with a partner. For this part of the activity, students will have a series of topics that they may choose from. They will discuss one topic at a time, including openings and closings to begin and end the conversation. Students will adhere to the model they have been provided with during this activity. This structured activity will provide students with sheltered practice of closing conversations where they can choose from the list which components they will use in following a four part closing.

Following the partner work, students will think about their own culture and experience with closings conversations. With the same partner, students will talk about similarities and differences in closing conversations in their own culture/language. There may or may not be any differences that students can identify so this part of the lesson may not take much time. However, it is important that students have the opportunity to compare and contrast closings between their culture(s) and American culture to raise their awareness of the pragmatics of the speech act.

Next, students will evaluate and critique situations that are provided by the teacher. This activity can be done in two ways. Students may either role play or read the situations that are provided to them by the teacher. If students role play the conversations, the teacher will give each partnership a conversation that they act out in front of the class. Depending on class size, the class may be divided into two separate groups, or they may remain together. Students will role play the conversation in front of the class. Following each role play, the class will judge whether or not the conversation was closed appropriately (pragmatically and linguistically speaking). To help students understand and identify inappropriate closings, the teacher should include a variety of scenarios that include both appropriate and inappropriate closings.

This same activity can be executed without role play. The teacher can use the same scenarios but include between five and ten on a handout. The handout can be distributed to students and they can read through and discuss each scenario in small groups. After the groups have had time to discuss most or all of the scenarios together, the class as a whole can evaluate which scenarios were appropriate and which were not. Any questions or misunderstandings about the scenarios can be addressed at this time.

Finally, as a homework assignment, students can talk with two or three native or fluent speakers and pay attention to how the conversation ended with each of them. Students should take some notes on their experience and what they noticed. During the next class period, students can get into groups and report about their interactions. As a class, students can reflect on how easy or difficult it was for them to recognize or initiate a closing sequence in natural conversation.

### **Producing Closings**

Once students are able to produce, the simplest way to provide them with experience closing conversations is to have them include openings and closings each time they engage in conversations in class. Encouraging or requiring students to begin with a greeting and end with a closing during their practice conversations in class. Recently in a University level beginner ESL course, my class spent one week discussing and practicing making invitations. The following conversation in Figure 5 occurred as part of an activity I created in which students were instructed to invite a classmate to a Homecoming activity and include a greeting and closing in the conversation.

The conversation in Figure 5 may resemble natural and meaningful speech to high school students looking forward to the Homecoming dance, however, the exercise is not flawless. Student B responds to each question with a short answer. This could be for many different reasons including low language proficiency, memorization of appropriate responses for accepting an invitation, or that Student B is not very talkative. Some students may be very talented at recognizing nonverbal cues and responding appropriately to them but not understand the verbal exchange that is taking place. The

facilitator must be careful, because students may participate in an exchange without comprehending the exchange.

*Figure 5 Classroom Conversation Example*

A: Hi, how are you?

B: Fine, thanks. And you?

A: I'm good, I wonder if you like dancing.

B: Yes, I do.

A: Well, are you free Friday night.

B: Yes.

A: I am going to the Homecoming Dance with some friends? Would you like to come too?

B: Sure. I would love to.

A: Can I pick you up at 7:30? The dance is from 8:00-11:30pm.

B: Sure, that sounds good. *Topic termination*

A: Okay. *Pre-Closing*

B: I will see you then. *Terminal Exchange*

A: Bye, have a good day. *Terminal Exchange*

Role play in different situations can be an interactive and entertaining way to engage students in using the target language. If students develop a habit of closing conversations in class and receive feedback on the appropriateness of the closing, they will be more likely to do so outside of the classroom. Closings are important because they are one of the speech acts that we execute daily in a variety of contexts and situations.

**Conclusion.** Every time we communicate with another person, whether it is by phone, the internet, or face to face, the conversation must come to a close at some point, which means that countless times each day, we open conversations, carry them on, and close them. The people we converse with may be store clerks, cashiers, customers, a boss,

peers, colleagues, children, parents, family members, associates, friends, acquaintances or strangers. Conversations can be closed in different ways depending on a variety of factors. Through practice in the classroom and explicit instruction of how to negotiate meaning, recognize body language and distinguish the other speaker's interest, students will be more prepared for and aware of how to appropriately participate in conversation closings in their daily lives.

**LITERACY ARTIFACT**

## Introduction

This artifact is a result of my journey to make sense of Sociocultural Theory and what it has to offer to second language teaching and acquisition. In my studies the topic of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) kept coming up and I thought that I understood what it is, but I did not know how to reference the ZPD or use it in a sentence. I also failed to understand its role in the classroom and why it was something I should know about and be familiar with.

As I listened to my peers and instructors use this term, my confusion only increased. The verbs that accompanied the term did not seem to make sense in the way that I understood the ZPD. This idea of a Zone of Proximal Development worked its way into many classroom discussions; and not only in my course on Sociocultural theory. In an effort to learn how to properly use the term and concept of the Zone of Proximal Development in a coherent sentence that related to students and teachers, I decided to research this topic and its role in literacy development.

At the time that I wrote this paper, I was teaching a Reading II course in intensive English. I hoped that understanding the ZPD would benefit me and my students during the course. Unfortunately, I struggled to see the connection during the majority of the course as I worked with students and wrestled with comprehending the Sociocultural perspectives that envelope Vygotsky's ZPD. After spending several months reflecting on and soaking in the relevance of the ZPD in language literacy, I think the most powerful idea that I gained from writing this paper is that students and teachers should co-construct meaning together.

Teachers are not meant to transmit information into students' minds, but when they work together, true meaning and understanding can be found as students develop their skills and progress. I still have a long way to go in understanding SCT as a whole, however, slowly but surely, pieces of it are beginning to make sense.

## **Exploring the Zone of Proximal Development in the Second/Foreign Language Classroom**

**Introduction.** In the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), there are many approaches, theories and models that professionals can use and follow to help students acquire language skills. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), however, is not an approach, theory, or model. In this paper I discuss Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD, how it is viewed according to sociocultural theory (SCT), how to identify it, and what that means for language teachers. I also discuss common misconceptions of the ZPD, thus providing a more complete understanding of this concept to those with little or no background in SCT.

**Defining the zone of proximal development.** The Zone of Proximal Development is a term coined by Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, in the early twentieth century Soviet Union, whose work involves the areas of child development and developmental psychology, and seeps into education. Research on this topic defines the ZPD simply as "the difference between what a child can accomplish alone and what he or she can accomplish with the assistance of a more experienced individual" (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2008, p. 100). Or in Vygotsky's own words, "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). Vygotsky expands upon his own definition with the statement that "the ZPD defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

In other words, the ZPD is the area that exists between what learners can do on their own, based on what they have already internalized or mastered, and what they can do with the guidance of someone who has already internalized the tools necessary to perform a specific action or task that is unfamiliar to the learner. Thus, students are able to perform at a higher level when they work with others who are more advanced than they are, than they are able to perform on their own because the skill or process is still in an “embryonic state” but will mature through practice and increased familiarity with tasks in the classroom. This points to the importance of collaboration and goal directed activity in the classroom so that students can work together to accomplish a common goal and promote students’ acquisition of concepts (learning). Based on these ideas it becomes clear that teachers should identify students’ individual zone of proximal development in order to provide meaningful instruction to students at an appropriate level to aid in students’ development and learning.

**Identifying students’ Zone of Proximal Development.** Sociocultural theory is grounded in the idea that people learn by doing – through activity – rather than mere exposure to a concept, rules, language, etc. This is an essential fact for understanding the ZPD because it involves teachers and students working together to “co-construct contexts in which expertise emerges as a feature of the group” (Lantolf, 2000, p. 17). This understanding necessitates evaluating students based on their activity with others rather than their memorization of facts. Language classrooms ought to be communicative by their very nature because students must use the language to acquire the language, and students must use that language with others to internalize its features (Shrum & Glisan, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978).

It is important to know students' individual levels of development and mastery of concepts before they are paired together, which is typically determined through traditional assessments (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008). Identifying students' zone of proximal development is more complex than traditional testing and it begins with finding what students can do on their own. The purpose of traditional testing is to see what an individual has mastered, using a standardized measurement. Dynamic Assessment looks at what an individual can do alone (the individual's ZPD), but focuses on what that individual can do with assistance and measures what he/she can do with some help to see what he/she still needs to learn to function independently (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). One way to identify students' ZPD is through Dynamic Assessment (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008) which is committed to "uncovering abilities that typically remain hidden during [traditional] assessment by requiring the assessor to abandon his/her traditional role as a dispassionate observer in favor of collaborating with learners to actively intervene in development" (p. 16). As the teacher works with students to co-construct understanding of concepts, the teacher witnesses what students can do on their own and what students can do with help (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008). Once the teacher has identified the students' developmental levels, they can be grouped appropriately to accomplish tasks and participate in classroom goal directed activities.

**Grouping students.** There are two ways that students can be grouped in the classroom; heterogeneously and homogeneously. Echevarría, Vogt, and Short (2008) suggest "partnering or grouping students for [...] activities, with more experienced [peers] assisting those with less experience" (p. 101), or grouping students heterogeneously. Heterogeneous grouping puts students with different levels of

understanding and development together. This provides those students who have internalized the material an opportunity to provide explanations and assistance to others who have not yet. Lantolf and Thorne (2006a) describe internalization as “the means of developing the capacity to perform complex cognitive and motor functions with increasingly less reliance on externally provided mediation” (p. 266). Once a concept or psychological tool has been internalized, students no longer require external mediators to perform a task or find a solution on their own.

If students are homogeneously grouped (similar developmental levels together), they should still be able to work within their ZPDs because no two students have the exact same experiences or developmental levels. However, when they are homogeneously grouped according to development, there may not be a more capable peer in the group, which could hinder the group’s ability to solve a problem with the aid of a more capable peer. Thus, students should be observed and assisted if they demonstrate poor understanding that could result in the internalization of misunderstood psychological tools or concepts.

For example, in a class that I recently took on sociocultural theory, the professor allowed the majority of class time for discussion of the readings in which students could share their understanding of and questions about the readings. The professor allowed us to guide the discussions and lead them according to our own interpretations. Sometimes we misunderstood what was truly meant and we were oblivious to deeper, underlying meanings. The professor, or more capable “peer”, could at this point enlighten the class to what the author meant to convey. Without his guidance and intervention into our discussion, we could have continued down a path of misunderstanding and confusion that

prevented us from truly grasping what was meant and applying it to what we already knew. Regardless of how students are grouped, the instructor must always be aware of what students are internalizing and how they are interacting in groups to ensure that students are in fact performing tasks appropriately.

**Learning and development.** Vygotsky's (1978) work demonstrates that learning is clearly separate from development but that they are both necessary processes in student growth. He clarifies that learning and development are different processes, "however, properly organized learning results in mental development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning" (p. 90).

Vygotsky continues that the ZPD is created by the phenomenon that "the developmental process lags behind the learning process" (p. 90).

Vygotsky states that it is learning that creates the zone of proximal development and that the ZPD can only be created when and where learning takes place because learning "awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the [learner] is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peer" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90). Vygotsky's explanation of the relationship between learning and development indicates that a) learning must come first and b) that learning and development are part of a cycle in which neither can continue without the other.

To accurately determine students' levels of development, teachers must understand what the zone of proximal development is and how it can be identified. This knowledge provides teachers with an advantage and allows them to implement Vygotsky's belief that "learning should be matched in some manner with the [learner's]

developmental level” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85). Shrum and Glisan (2010) clarify that even when a student is working with a more capable peer, if the task is too difficult, the ZPD is not created because learning is not taking place. If learning is not taking place, both student and more capable peer are likely to become frustrated.

Planning and preparing tasks that are appropriate to students’ developmental levels is absolutely essential in the classroom, especially where the ZPD is concerned. “The notion of a ZPD enables us to propound a new formula, namely that the only ‘good learning’ is that which is in advance of development” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 89). When students are engaged in developmentally appropriate activity, they are bound to learn something new. This learning will lead to development as students internalize the concepts and information as it becomes part of their actual developmental level. Eventually, they will no longer need external mediation to perform the same task again. For example, when students first begin reading in a foreign language, they may use dictionaries and outside sources often to help them understand new vocabulary and surface structure of the language. As students receive more exposure to the language and begin using it themselves, previously unknown words and structures will become so familiar that they are understood without the aid of a dictionary, indicating that those features have been internalized because they are understood with automaticity.

**Working within the ZPD.** Lantolf (2000) identifies mediation as a “key ingredient” to consider while working within a learner’s ZPD. Vygotsky (1978) identifies three different kinds of mediation; object, other and self. Mediation involves the regulation of a person’s thoughts and behaviors by another object or person (Vygotsky, 1978). It is a process that leads to internalization as the mind continually evaluates and assesses what

is happening and why; attempting to determine how to most efficiently perform an action (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006b). When teacher and student collaborate to work within the student's ZPD, "[other] mediation continues until the learner either overcomes the problem or until the final hint is reached, which usually includes a solution to the problem and an explanation of how the solution was reached" (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008, p. 35). The use of the word "hint" in the quote is significant because the teacher does not provide answers for students in this process, but acts as an external mediator to answer questions and co-construct meaning when the task requires a skill level beyond what the students can do on their own, but within the range of what they can accomplish with assistance.

According to Vygotsky, learning takes place on two separate planes; first on the interpersonal plane, and second on the intrapersonal plane. The interpersonal plane involves interaction or contact with other people or tools while the intrapersonal plane occurs within oneself. Vygotsky (1978) claims that learning occurs between people on an interpersonal plane before internalization of concepts occurs; learning occurs outside before it develops inside. Learning occurs on the interpersonal plane through interactions with others, as communication and negotiation of meaning take place to reach a solution, mediated by external means, as in the ZPD. The intrapersonal plane exists within a person and, in this case, psychological tools that have been internalized are used to mediate thoughts and behaviors. The tools that students use when they are learning within their zone of proximal development, psychological and material, can be internalized (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). As students co-construct

meaning with a more competent peer or instructor, they learn to perform a new task or understand new information.

When ELL students begin reading for academic purposes, they can become overwhelmed by new vocabulary, the style of the text, and the organization of information. In order for students to internalize the tools necessary for understanding academic texts, they must have repeated exposure to the tools. Reading strategies are examples of physical and psychological tools that students use in academic reading. For example, the physical tools are graphic organizers students use to organize the information in a text. The psychological tools are strategies such as skimming, scanning, identifying topic sentences, etc. While students are still developing the skills of identifying important details, learning to scan for key terms or skim for main ideas, the tools they use to accomplish these tasks exist within the interpersonal plane (Vygotsky, 1978).

Once the tools have been internalized, or are understood well enough to be employed with automaticity, they move to the intrapersonal plane which occurs within an individual allowing them to access the tools without conscious thought and processing (Vygotsky, 1978). When this happens, students can access these tools without external mediators and perform tasks with automaticity.

I experienced this with a class that I recently taught. We spent the semester learning about different strategies for understanding and organizing academic texts. The semester was full of formal and informal assessments to see what students had mastered and what areas still needed to be addressed. In the last week of classes the students were free to choose which reading strategies and graphic organizers they preferred to use with

the assigned readings. They were required to write a brief explanation for why they chose what they did. In my experience, I have never seen clearer representation of students' internalization and their awareness of it.

Anderson (2009) states that “a skill is a strategy that has become automatic” (Quoted in Grabe, 2009, p. 221) which reinforces the idea that as students become familiar with new concepts or strategies and learn how to use them within their ZPD, those concepts and strategies will become automatic as they are internalized. For example, when students first acquire new language features (grammar rules, vocabulary, and so forth) they may consciously think about what they will say as they are saying it. When the teacher asks a student, “*¿Cómo estás?*”, (how are you) the student may focus on the appropriate response; what is the first person singular of the verb *to be*, do I use *ser* or *estar* in this context, and finally the answer to the question – *bien, mal, así así, fantástico, etc.* Beginning level students may need to consult a dictionary or even ask the teacher to repeat the question. However, after the students have practiced this exchange several times with the teacher and classmates and become more familiar with the uses of *ser* and *estar* (which both express the verb ‘*to be*’), they will be able to form an automatic response to the question based on how they feel at the time when they are asked the question again.

**Common misconceptions.** Some misconceptions of the ZPD exist because it is a concept that is “divergently understood” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006a, p. 264), or understood differently by various people from diverse perspectives and fields. It is important to discuss common misconceptions of the ZPD to provide an accurate view of this key concept of sociocultural theory.

One of the most common misconceptions about the zone of proximal development is that it is either the same as or related to Krashen's  $i + 1$  concept (Krashen, 1982). Krashen's idea suggests that students should always be presented with language at a level slightly above what they can do on their own (Krashen); The  $i$  in this sequence "refers to the current competence of the learner" (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 15) and the  $1$  represents "the next level of competence that is a little beyond where the learner is now" (Shrum and Glisan, p. 15). According to Krashen's idea, students must receive comprehensible input that is slightly above their existing competence (Krashen; Shrum & Glisan). Krashen's ideas are widely accepted in Communicative Language Teaching which is largely a cognitive approach to teaching language.

Vygotsky does not indicate in any way that students should be presented with information and/or required to accomplish tasks beyond their means, but rather claims that students can achieve more when they work in collaboration with someone else who is more skilled and advanced in a particular area.

Other misconceptions I have heard from my peers are evident when they refer to using communicative activities to "create, improve, or activate students' ZPD". None of these verbs accurately describes Vygotsky's idea of students' zone of proximal development. The ZPD is not something that teacher and students can create, a skill that can be improved, or an innate ability or knowledge that can be activated. When professionals in the field talk about the zone of proximal development using the acronym 'ZPD', it becomes easy to forget that it is an area of development and not an object, teaching method, or learning strategy. Lantolf (2000) reminds educators that the "ZPD is

not a physical place situated in time and space; rather it is a metaphor for observing and understanding how meditational means are appropriated and internalized” (p. 17).

Shrum and Glisan (2010) explain what happens in the zone of proximal development: “through interaction with others, the learner progresses from the ‘potential developmental level’ to the ‘actual developmental level’” (p. 24). When I was first introduced to the concept of the ZPD, I had interpreted this backwards, thinking that learners move from their actual developmental level (ADL) to their potential developmental level (PDL) which becomes their new actual developmental level. I had envisioned the zone of proximal development as a slider on a slide rule that moved back and forth between the levels of actual and potential development. As learners and teachers worked within the ZPD, the slide rule would move closer to the potential development until it reached that point and would then return to a space between the ADL and PDL but closer to the potential side.

However, I now understand that when learners and their more capable peers/teachers are working together within the ZPD, they are working at their potential developmental level (Shrum, & Glisan, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). If they were working at their actual level, the learners wouldn’t need any help and would not have opportunities for growth because they would be practicing a skill they have already internalized and can perform with automaticity.

For example, if learners have already internalized the vocabulary and language structure necessary for talking about the weekend and can perform this task free of errors without the help of a dictionary, when this task is repeated, students will not be working within their ZPD if they are grouped homogenously. However, if the student who has

internalized this aspect of communication is grouped with another student who has not, the former plays the role of more capable peer and increases his/her understanding by teaching while the partner has an opportunity to gain more understanding and internalize the tools necessary to accomplish this task, including an understanding of the language structure and the vocabulary required to explain their weekend activities. I had misconceptualized what the ZPD is and what happens when teachers and students work together within it, but through this research I have developed a clearer understanding of what the ZPD is, which has led to the internalization of this concept. As I have internalized what the ZPD is I have been able to focus on identifying my students' ZPDs and how to work within them in my lessons and goal directed activities.

**Practical Application.** In the classroom, identifying students' individual ZPDs begins with recognizing what students already know and building upon that throughout the course (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). Once students' abilities are known by the teacher, scaffolding is possible. The teacher must first draw upon the background knowledge of students and then build upon that knowledge step by step until language and course goals and objectives are met and students can perform the tasks on their own, without assistance.

In the Intensive English Language Institute at Utah State University I taught a Level 2 Reading course for two consecutive semesters. During this time I found ways to identify students' levels by leading class discussions and activities, modeling what I expected students to do, asking students to perform tasks alone or in small groups, and teaching them to ask questions.

To determine what students already knew, we discussed the course readings. As we reviewed the main ideas and supporting details, the discussion turned to how the information could be organized and what graphic organizers would be helpful. At the beginning of the course, students were unfamiliar with creating tables, charts, Venn diagrams, concept maps, outlines, and most other graphic organizers. Many students were unable to fill out a partially completed graphic organizer alone or differentiate between main ideas and supporting details. However, leading and being involved in the discussion provided enough structure and help that students were able to recognize how to effectively organize the information from the reading. Based on these discussions, I determined what students already knew and where they needed further instruction and practice.

Over the course of the semester, students were introduced to a variety of reading strategies to use before, during, and after reading. They practiced scanning, skimming, summarizing, asking questions, making personal connections, and rereading, followed by a discussion of which strategies texts lend themselves to. These strategies were typically modeled and opportunities for co-construction (when appropriate) were provided before students were asked to work in small groups or pairs. Written instructions were often provided as a guide for students to refer. I circulated around the room listening to students' discussions, providing input and redirecting the conversation as needed.

One specific lesson aimed to show students how to create a timeline. None of the students had ever created one before which meant none of them knew what to look for in a text or how to organize the information. The follow lesson plan outlines what was done in class.

## Egyptian Timeline

### Reading strategies/Objectives:

1. Students will practice scanning a text for specific information (dates).
2. Students will identify specific information (dates/importance).
3. Students will learn to create a timeline from a text.

### Read pages 118-119 *Egyptian Civilization: A Brief History* in the book.

1. The first time you read, look at the headings. How many are there? What do you think this text will be about? Think about what you already know or what you would like to know about those topics.

2. The second time you read, look for all of the dates/years, i.e, 3100 B.C.E. and **highlight** them. Don't forget to read the captions too.

3. The third time you read, look for what happened during that year. Find one important reason that date is important and underline it.

The steps above listed will be done in class together to model what students should do on their own. The teacher will place the text under the document camera and have students identify each of the three headings. Students will then share what they know about the topics already or if they do not understand the headings, they may ask questions.

Next, the instructor will circle the first date shown in the text. Students will then take turns coming to the board and circling a date they can see. Once all eight dates have been identified, each class member will look at the first dates. As a class, students will read the text around the date as a class to identify the importance of that date. If

necessary, the class will discuss why some information is not relevant to determining this.

Next, the students will be divided into groups to repeat the previous step for each of the other dates. Each group will do one or two dates, depending on the class size. The students will then put the information on the board, share their findings out loud, or write on their own worksheets depending on course goals and time constraints.

When the class regroups, students will receive the first handout in Appendix C and will complete that worksheet together in small groups. If time allows, students will complete the second worksheet in class. If not, they will complete it for homework.

The students are already familiar with this graphic organizer and have sufficient practice with answering questions from the text that they should have little difficulty filling in the chart.

**Conclusion.** This lesson plan demonstrates the teacher's understanding and awareness of student levels of development through the implementation of scaffolding techniques including modeling, questioning, and graphic organizers. The lesson plan was executed to introduce timelines to students and determine their actual level in using a timeline to organize information in a text with many dates and where sequence of events was important from the reign of one pharaoh to the next, and the rise and fall of the Egyptian Kingdoms. During this lesson, the teacher will observe students and notice if the activity appears too difficult and frustrates students, or if they accomplish the tasks with ease and little effort.

In future lessons, students will participate in activities that require effort, discussion with peers, and feedback from the teacher. Students will be presented with

texts that lend themselves to a timeline, but they will create their own timeline without the structure provided by the handouts and the teacher's modeling. As students become familiar with the strategy for organizing the information in a text, they will eventually no longer require the structure and scaffolding the instructor provides. Students' ability to create a timeline will have moved from the interpersonal plane where structure and discussion with others was necessary for completion of the task to the intrapersonal plane where task completion becomes an automatic response to viewing certain texts and recognizing that a timeline would effectively organize the main ideas.

**LOOKING FORWARD**

As I move on from the MSLT program, I have many goals in mind; some personal and some professional. Completing the MSLT program is only a stepping stone in my journey of pursuing a career in teaching. I have always hoped to have opportunities for teaching in secondary education; however, I now have other options open to me beyond public education. With this degree I may find opportunities to teach beginning level college courses or even concurrent enrollment and AP courses in a high school. Prior to entering the MSLT program I did not know if I would ever be qualified to teach those courses in secondary education. I can now apply for those jobs with confidence and a resume that reflects my competence and excellence in language teaching.

More than anything, I want to teach. In my seven years of teaching experience, I have taught Spanish or ESL to students between the ages of three and sixty-five whose native languages include English, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Cambodian, Tongan, Korean, and Portuguese. I have taught from specific and mandated curricula in some positions while in others I have had opportunities to create my own curriculum based on the needs of my students in conjunction with the course objectives of the institution, state, and/or nation.

Each teaching position that I have held has presented its share of challenges and opportunities for growth and learning for me as a teacher. I look forward to teaching Spanish or ESL in the future to secondary or university students. In the past eighteen months, I have found a home in university teaching and although I will likely move on from teaching at Utah State in the years to come, I have enjoyed my time teaching at USU and plan to pursue adjunct and lecturer positions here in Utah.

The greatest lesson that I learned during this program is how to formulate a question and discover the answer. As I continue to teach in the future I will find questions to pursue. I will improve my teaching as I search for answers and find ways to incorporate what I learn into lesson planning and delivery, classroom activities, or wherever it is appropriate to make changes. Now that I know how to do the research and apply it, I will take that with me into the field of language teaching and my teaching philosophy will continue to evolve as I grow as a teacher.

One question that I have as I leave the MSLT program concerns authentic materials. The week after my defense I began reading *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett. It is an authentic material, as it is written by a native speaker for native speakers. However, the language used in this book does not model “correct” grammar usage or typical language that would be found in the Western United States. The vocabulary used in the book reflects Mississippi culture in 1962 and contains culturally rich phrases and expressions including ‘Law, do that room get quiet’ along with the repeated use of ‘ain’t’ and ‘Lordy’. Though I would never use this book in a course that teaches academic English to international students (because it would not be helpful in increasing students’ academic language), it has caused me to reflect on the authentic materials that I have used and search through to find useful bits and pieces of written or spoken language that would reinforce the curriculum that I base my lessons on.

As a facilitator in language teaching, I look forward to further pursuing the use of authentic materials in language teaching and learning. I hope to discover answers to my question: *which materials (magazines, newspapers, video clips, songs, books or excerpts from them, etc.) are most helpful in aiding students’ acquisition and appropriation of the*

*target language and the underlying reasons for why those materials are helpful.* As I search for answers to this question, I also hope to build my current library of authentic materials that are useful in my teaching and to also increase their use in my courses.

**ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **Introduction to the Annotated Bibliography**

This annotated bibliography contains a short summary and personal reflection of the most influential books and articles that I read during my time in the MSLT program. The following sources inspired me and answered questions that I had as I researched the topics for my TPS and artifacts. The themes found in the following annotations include assessment, authentic materials, communicative classrooms, culture and pragmatics, language use and purpose, literacy, Sociocultural theory, and teacher-talk.

**Assessment**

O'Malley, J. M. & Pierce, L. V. (1996). *Authentic assessment for English language learners: Practical approaches for teachers*. Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc.

**Summary**

This book is a resource not only for planning, but also for understanding the purpose of a variety of assessments in the classroom. The authors explain authentic assessment and offer examples for implementing it as a means of assessing English language learners growth and language development. Detailed instructions for how teachers can create their own authentic assessments to fit the needs of their curricula and students are provided, complete with examples to help teachers in a step by step process. Portfolios as a form of assessment are discussed in depth and advice for teachers interested in using portfolios is given. Assessment in spoken language, reading, and writing is addressed along with the importance of addressing each mode of communication throughout a course to gain the most accurate understanding of students' language proficiency, including their strengths and weaknesses in using the language. For non-language teachers, assessment ideas are provided for content area instruction. The book concludes with a chapter full of classroom examples of assessment that cater to all three modes of communication and language use previously mentioned. O'Malley and Pierce provide teachers of all age levels and disciplines a variety of examples of authentic assessment accompanied by complete explanations for each assessment and directions for creating one's own authentic assessment.

**Reaction**

This book is a wonderful tool for any teacher who is looking to accurately assess and evaluate student proficiency and understanding in the language classroom. It also contains lessons for content area teachers working with language learners. The examples contained in this book are very clear and the explanations for each example are complete and provide deeper understanding for how and why to assess students. This book taught me that it is possible to assess students without a rubric. By following the structures and models in this book I have been able to provide my students with forms of assessment that are more relevant to their language learning experience than only using written exams.

### **Authentic Materials**

Chaston, J. (1999). In D. Alley, & C. M. Cherry (Eds.)(1999). Beyond the foreign language: Making connections through recorded oral histories. Selected proceedings of the 1999 joint conference SCOLT & FLAV: *Dimensions* (pp. 13-28). Valdosta, GA: Southern Conference on Language Teaching.

### **Summary**

In this article, Chaston describes how “recorded oral histories” can be used as authentic materials in the foreign language classroom. He begins by explaining how to set up and organize the interview including preparing what to discuss. The author gives instructions for carrying out face to face interviews. Specific questions that can be asked to interviewees are provided to direct interviewers through the interview. The author shares what he learned from oral interviews conducted in Spanish to give the reader an idea of what stories and ideas they can expect from the interviews they will conduct.

Chaston lists activities and exercises that students can participate in that use the finished interviews as a tool to learn grammar, practice listening skills, become familiar with and understand foreign cultures, and answer questions. The author suggests that transcriptions of interviews may be prepared for students to help them recognize specific sounds and words. Topics the author has compiled from interviews include “history, geography, gastronomy, sociology, literature, political science, psychology, economics, and sports” (p. 18). Many of these topics are discussed by the author briefly in regards to what can be done in the classroom with each topic.

**Reaction**

The use of authentic texts is important in the foreign language classroom. Current research advises teachers that authentic texts should be used over semi-scripted and inauthentic texts. This article illustrates how authentic texts and materials can be implemented in the classroom as well as how they can aid in teaching grammar and culture. Students will be exposed to authentic usage of the language while simultaneously learning about target language cultures. I have learned from other research how to obtain authentic materials and that I should “edit the task, not the text” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 196) and this article introduced ideas I have not thought of or seen in other research yet. I will use it as I plan lessons using authentic texts.

## **Communicative Classroom**

Ballman, T. L., Liskin-Gasparro, & J. E., Mandell, P. B. (2001). *Professional development series handbook for teachers K-16: The communicative classroom* (Vol. II). Boston, MA: Heinle-Heinle.

### **Summary**

*The Communicative Classroom* is filled with activities that can be used in foreign language classrooms to promote interpersonal communication. Many of the examples are in Spanish but could be adapted for any foreign language class. Task-based activities and the use of Total Physical Response to teach grammar and vocabulary are discussed and examples of each are provided. One of the main focuses of the book is the teaching of grammar and avoiding teaching “grammar for grammar’s sake”. Suggestions are provided for assessing students’ oral communication and rubrics are supplied as an aide for teachers in creating their own. An emphasis is placed on building sufficient background knowledge so students’ ability to understand the context of a situation can improve as they engage in meaningful and coherent conversation.

Many of the activities and suggestions offered by the authors can easily be integrated into language classrooms. The practices of introducing language by exposing students to meaningful input, allowing opportunities for guided practice and offering structured output tasks are all effective in a foreign language classroom.

### **Reaction**

This book contains some outdated suggestions for language practice. Current research has identified activities and assessments that include fill-in-the-blanks and isolated verb conjugations as decontextualized language use, to be and are discouraged in language

classrooms today. In reading this book I developed a clear understanding of how to construct communicative activities that will be meaningful to students while improving fluency and understanding in the target language. Sometimes, the most difficult part of creating an activity or lesson plan is appropriately planning for the level of the students. This book contains good direction in recognizing what students are capable of at different levels.

Lee, J. F., & VanPatten, B. (2003). *Making communicative language teaching happen* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

### **Summary**

Lee and VanPatten describe how language teaching should be carried out. Though the book was published in 2003, the information and concepts that are introduced and explained in this book are just as effective and appropriate today as they were nine years ago. Lee and VanPatten describe concepts such as Krashen's comprehensible input and build upon it to include communication in the classroom. Emphasizing the need for students to practice communicating in the classroom to develop their language skills, the authors share ideas for making goals that are based on language proficiency rather than memorization of vocabulary words and grammar drills. Other topics discussed in this book are guidelines for preparing "structured input activities", challenges that arise in teaching and understanding of grammar, ideas for evaluating grammar, listening comprehension, and oral communication. Instructional advice is given in the book along with challenges that teachers will face as they change from the older, more traditional

modes of teaching to these new modes whose focus is primarily on getting students to participate and use language meaningfully in the classroom.

### **Reaction**

*Making Communicative Language Happen* is a helpful resource when planning communicative activities, lessons, and assessments. The authors describe interactive activities and compare them with more traditional activities and manners of teaching, enabling readers to come to their own conclusions based on what they read. From this book I learned how necessary it is for students to communicate in the classroom and effective ways to make it happen. I learned the basics of how a course should be organized and how to choose goals and objectives that help students achieve proficiency in the target language. This book helped me shape my teaching philosophy years ago when I was working on my bachelor's degree and has continued to be a useful resource as I continue my studies in the MSLT program.

Echevarría, J., Vogt, M. E., & Short, D. (2008). *Making content comprehensible for English learners: The SIOP model* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

### **Summary**

This book provides a clear framework for teachers of English learners but the contents can all be modified to fit the needs of other language learners as well. The *Sheltered Instruction Operation Protocol* (SIOP) Model is presented as an option for teachers of English language learners. Structured models for planning and preparing lessons are included in this book. Entire chapters are devoted to topics including *background knowledge, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction,*

*practice/application, lesson delivery, and review and assessment.* Explicit directions for how to teach English language learners are spelled out from the conception of ideas for lesson plans through every lesson delivery. The authors predict complications that instructors may have with language learners and offer ideas for how to address those situations as they arise. A chapter on teaching students with disabilities is also included. Finally, the book concludes with a chapter on using these methods effectively and efficiently to aide students in the language acquisition process.

### **Reaction**

This book is a helpful for novice or experienced teachers. I have used this book many time to help me plan and execute lessons in language courses. The ideas presented are founded in ideas of communicative language teaching. The framework provided by the SIOP Model is an effective one that would fit the needs of students of all levels of language proficiency. Such fundamental ideas as building background knowledge and providing comprehensible input are important factors in implementing this model. The SIOP Model also provides a good pace for introducing content and catering to student needs. Teachers who use this model know that all content throughout a course should be relevant and each new topic should build on the previous topics. This model helps to keep that as a focus.

Shrum, J. L., & Glisan, E. W. (2010). *Teacher's handbook: Contextualized language instruction* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Heinle Cengage Learning.

### **Summary**

In the *Teacher's Handbook*, Shrum and Glisan present current methods of teaching, assessing, using technology, and organizing content through contextualized language instruction. The authors provide a complete introduction of key concepts by including modern research and older foundational research that paved the way for the evolution of teaching languages. This allows the reader to develop a firm understanding of what has been done in the past, what is being done now, and strengths and weaknesses of both. Each chapter is organized to be reader friendly and contains case studies designed to illustrate how concepts from the chapter can be implemented in the classroom. A comprehensive reference list concludes each chapter to direct readers to sources on the topics that were introduced. Shrum and Glisan incorporate standards articulated by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) in each chapter. The authors describe in depth how teachers can improve how they teach to make language learning more accessible to students through comprehensible input, meaningful activities, and varied use of instructional strategies. This book demonstrates various ways that teachers are using technology in foreign and second language classrooms. It is intended for beginning as well as experienced teachers.

**Reaction**

The *Teacher's Handbook* has become my greatest resource in teaching. It is easy to navigate and presents a wealth of information that has been helpful in forming and articulating my personal teaching philosophy. The goals presented in the chapter are realistic for a teacher to achieve and they make sense to me. The empirical evidence that accompanies the ideals and strategies in the book reinforce that these methods work and ought to be implemented. I gained a greater understanding and more holistic view of how to be an effective teacher and will continue to use this book as a reference throughout my teaching career.

## **Culture and Pragmatics**

Shannon, J., & Michael, M. (2008). Teaching culture in a learning-centered language class. *Connections*, 2, p. 59-65

<http://www.swcolt.org/CONNECTIONS/200805Michael.pdf>

### **Summary**

*Teaching Culture in a Learning-Centered Language Class* focuses on teaching pragmatics to students through authentic texts accompanied by explicit instruction. This combination helps students relate to the target language by learning about and understanding the target culture. The authors list different “rules” that are followed by interlocutors in conversational exchanges and point out that these “rules” may vary across cultures. They list several examples of certain cultural norms that are widely accepted in one culture but offensive or rude in another culture. Shannon and Michael offer several examples of authentic texts that can be used in the classroom to teach the pragmatics of the target language and culture. There are also examples for follow-up assignments or discussions to help students grasp the new ideas and reflect on what they notice in the authentic texts (videos, newscasts, websites, magazines, video clips, etc.). The authors point out that some objects and ideals belong to certain cultures and do not exist within others. They give the example of a spaghetti claw and ESL students; if the students have never seen one before or never eaten spaghetti before they may not understand the purpose of the spaghetti claw. Though, this example may easily be remembered after seeing the spaghetti claw used, other cultural practices are not so easily explained or demonstrated. These are things that instructors *must* be aware of in teaching to provide

students with comprehensible input in the target language and familiarity with the target culture.

### **Reaction**

This article reinforces what I have been learning in all of my linguistics classes thus far. The teachability of pragmatics has been emphasized as well as a teacher's ability to raise students' pragmatic awareness. This article provides examples and guidelines on how pragmatics can be taught in the classroom. It has helped shape that area of my own teaching philosophy. In addition, it has helped me to understand exactly how I can implement the teaching of pragmatics into my own classroom to suit the linguistic capabilities and understanding of the students.

Tatsuki, D. H., & Houck, N.R. (Eds.) (2010). *Pragmatics: Teaching speech acts*.

Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

### **Summary**

*Pragmatics: Teaching speech acts* is one book in a TESOL series on teaching English language learners. This book demonstrates how the pragmatics of a culture can be taught in coordination with specific speech acts. A variety of speech acts are presented in this book including requests, advice giving, sharing opinions, providing feedback, and refusals. Each chapter discusses a speech act and the steps that can be taken by the instructor to help students understand the corresponding pragmatics in the target culture and how that differs from or is the same as in their native culture. Each chapter concludes with a full lesson plan, instructions, and answer keys for activities that students can do on their own or with their classmates. The lessons provide concrete examples of which

pieces of pragmatics can be taught and explicit instructions for how to implement them. The book begins by sharing certain aspects of American pragmatics that students may or may not already be familiar with. Throughout the book there are more examples and scenarios that students can respond to. Discussions on cross-cultural similarities and differences can accompany the lessons in the book.

### **Reaction**

This book has been a life saver in teaching Cross-Cultural Talk in the Intensive English Language Institute (IELI). It has provided me with a guide for teaching students about pragmatics and engaging students in discussions about the differences between their own cultures and the American culture that they are currently immersed in. The topics in this book are easy for students of all proficiency levels to discuss because they can express their understanding and ideas comprehensibly using the models and examples provided. The book has provided situations and ideas that have allowed me to create my own materials to use with my students.

Alcón Soler & Martínez-Flor (Eds.) (2008). *Investigating pragmatics in foreign language learning, teaching and testing*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

### **Summary**

This book includes a variety of studies on investigating pragmatics in foreign language learning, teaching, and testing. Each chapter in this book is devoted to a different study in which students are observed or work with researchers in various stages of language acquisition. Each research study examines students in the classroom as they become aware of the pragmatics of their own and other cultures. As learners become

aware of the pragmatics they are assessed on their ability to employ what they have learned in certain contexts and situations. The teachability of pragmatics is examined in several studies as researchers investigate whether or not pragmatics can be learned, taught, and tested in foreign language contexts. The studies in this book focus on students with a variety of native languages as well as several different target languages those students are learning. The variety in native languages provides a well-rounded presentation of learning, teaching, and testing pragmatics in a many cultures to students of many different cultures.

**Reaction**

I found this book helpful in teaching pragmatics in my intensive English courses. It complements the book by Tatsuki and Houck and clarifies how to assess students' understanding of the target culture and pragmatics. The examples provided in the book include students from a variety of backgrounds and native languages. Each chapter contains a different study of pragmatic understanding in the classroom and provides a clear example of how students can be taught and assessed. I was able to take ideas from the studies to apply in my language courses as I taught and tested students about the target language.

Bardovi-Harlig, K., Hartford, B. A. S., Mahan-Taylor, R., Morgan, M. J., Reynolds, D. W. (1991). Developing pragmatic awareness: Closing the conversation. *ELT Journal*, 45, 4-15.

### **Summary**

This article contains a detailed explanation of the pragmatic knowledge and speech that are required for closing conversations in English. Examples of complete closings as well as the different parts of closings are included in the study that was conducted to compare authentic closings with text book closings. The results indicated that English-language text books are insufficient sources for models of proper closings or even the parts of closings. The authors present culture and pragmatics as an essential part of teaching closings because the way that conversations are closed are “culture-specific” (p. 6). Along with the parts that comprise a closing, the authors include four steps for incorporating “pragmatically appropriate language” into the curricula of language courses. The steps include a) identification of the speech act, b) data collection and description, c) text and materials evaluation, and d) development of new materials (p.5). The study performed in this article demonstrates the need for teachers to supplement textbook materials with outside sources when teaching students about certain topics. It addressed the fact that some speech acts are well represented in academic texts and students become familiar with them quickly. However, some speech acts are either underrepresented or absent from texts altogether.

### **Reaction**

As I researched closings for my culture artifact, this article was cited in almost every article that I found. That was an indicator to me that this article was fundamental to

my topic. The information in the article was clear and concise and provided excellent examples for me as I created lesson plans on this topic and searched for other articles on closings. This article cites a wealth of older sources that studied closings as well and became my greatest resource in research closings because I was able to use the reference list to direct my course of research.

**Literacy**

Grabe, W. (2009). *Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

**Summary**

*Reading in a Second Language* is a resource for teachers of English as a second language or mainstream reading, specifically those teaching reading for academic purposes. The author uses a cognitive approach to introduce reading as a complex series of processes that occur simultaneously when readers interact with a text. He offers definitions of the processes involved and strategies that can be used in the L2 classroom as well as concrete examples of how and when they are appropriate or occur in the classroom. He provides a framework for understanding the foundations of reading in an L2 and the motivations students may have or difficulties they may encounter during reading. Grabe also discusses the development of reading in a foreign or second language, the effect of L1 transfer on L2 reading, and several aspects of reading development that are universal. Throughout the book, Grabe states characteristics of good readers and offers an “implications for instruction” section at the end of each chapter. This section demonstrates how one can take the information presented on reading strategies or processes, present it in meaningful ways to students, and integrate it into the curriculum.

**Reaction**

This book helped me understand *how* to teach reading for academic purposes. The strategies that I use when I read vary according to my purpose for reading and though I do not consciously change from one mode of reading to another, I regularly use a variety

of strategies in my daily reading. In academic reading, students must be capable of reading large amounts of material in a relatively short period of time. This book has shown me how and when certain processes and strategies are used during reading. Understanding how students read will help me teach them more effectively and pinpoint where and why they are struggling and help them improve in those areas.

Alvermann, D. E., Swafford, J., & Montero, M. K. (2004). *Content area literacy instruction for the elementary grades*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

### **Summary**

While its title conveys that this book on content literacy is intended for teachers in elementary grades, many of the strategies, methods, and concepts presented can be modified for secondary classes. Comprehension, vocabulary, and literacy each have entire chapters devoted to them. Expository texts are defined, introduced, and accompanied by directions and strategies for navigating through them. In addition to demonstrating how to teach students, the authors also specify what can be done to assist struggling students to build understanding of the content area and its associated texts. The evidence-based research and models that are presented in this book contain clear examples with guided steps to help readers apply what they learn and integrate it into their curriculum. The authors supply ideas for incorporating technology into the classroom as well as websites that teachers can visit to find additional help in planning engaging activities. Detailed examples for practical application are a part of each chapter. The authors also have reflections as a recurring feature throughout the book.

Opportunities for reflection and answering questions that may have arisen while reading are outlined and encourage the reader to pause and ponder the content.

**Reaction**

My favorite aspect of this book is that it presents evidence-based strategies that can be used in the classroom to integrate reading into the content area. One difficulty that I have had in my limited teaching experience is incorporating reading into the mandated curriculum. Each day is packed so full that the thought of adding anything else becomes daunting. In this book, examples are provided of how to include outside readings that complement the curriculum and use them in meaningful ways to improve student literacy and encourage intrinsic motivation to continue reading and learning.

## **Sociocultural Theory**

Lantolf, J. P., & Poehner, M. E. (Eds.)(2008). *Sociocultural theory and the teaching of second languages*. Oakville, CT: Equinox.

### **Summary**

In this book, editors Lantolf and Poehner have compiled chapters from researchers at universities in the United States, Canada, and Brazil. In the book, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is related to application in the classroom providing a more practical rather than conceptual explanation. Some of the primary concepts that are presented include mediation, the zone of proximal development, dynamic assessment, agency in the classroom, internalization, concept-based instruction, and service learning. The authors of each chapter incorporate perspectives on how sociocultural theory is relevant, even necessary, for second and foreign language acquisition. The role that Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development plays in student learning is demonstrated by the authors throughout the book by the research and case studies provided. The book concludes with a sociocultural perspective on Communicative Language Teaching and its incomplete approach to teaching language. Examples of how sociocultural activity gets students involved and actively participating in the class is provided in each concluding chapter.

### **Reaction**

This book served as an important resource after I was introduced to Vygotsky's work and struggled to discover how I could apply his work in the classroom. The case studies, examples, and explanations provided in this book have helped me to understand concepts and terms such as mediation, the zone of proximal development, agency, and

internalization. I now see not only how these concepts are relevant in any classroom, but specifically how they contribute to language acquisition. I have realized that understanding sociocultural perspectives and their role in the language classroom offers teachers an understanding for the underlying cognitive and psychological processes that allow students to acquire or not acquire the language. The ideas presented in this book challenged everything that I know about language acquisition through Communicative Language Teaching. Understanding the differences between CLT and SCT and how each is implemented in the classroom has helped me develop my own identity as a facilitator in the language classroom.

Vågan, A. (2011). Towards a sociocultural perspective on identity formation in education. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 18, 43-57.

### **Summary**

In this article, the author discusses the concept of identity formation among students. He encourages teachers to keep sociocultural perspectives in mind as they observe student identities forming in the classroom. Figured worlds and the identities that are shaped within them are a main focus of the article, which is based on research that followed medical students as they evolved from mere students to doctors. The figured world is determined by each individual's interpretation according to his/her culture and life experience. In the examples from the text, the students are practicing medicine and pursuing a career in that field. The students find themselves in a middle situation where they are stuck between two worlds; they do not fit in the world of students, because they have experience and knowledge and have completed their studies, nor do they fit in the

world of doctors because they are still apprentices in the field. As students' knowledge mediates their actions in the professional setting, they internalize more and more and become more experienced at playing the role of doctor which will someday result in their actually becoming a doctor. As students progress through the program they assess and evaluate themselves and it is evident from the personal experiences shared in the article that student perceptions of who they are and how they are perceived affects the role in which they position themselves.

### **Reaction**

This article helped me comprehend practical uses of sociocultural theory and perspectives. The author brilliantly explains how teachers mediate student learning and discusses the sticky topic of positioning theory, which I had never encountered before. One of the primary themes of this article was the importance of teachers looking through a sociocultural lens as they incorporate those same perspectives into their teaching and view "learning as a process of becoming". As students internalize information and act within their chosen identity, they become the person they are acting like. With this in mind, teachers should keep a focus on who they are helping their students become rather than what their students have "learned".

Van Bramer, J. (2011). Teacher talk and assistance and self-regulated learning within the context of RtI and explicit and systematic teaching. *New England Reading Association Journal*, 46(2), 40-44

### **Summary**

This article has a strong foundation in sociocultural theory and the work of Vygotsky. It is focused primarily on mediation and ZPD, specifically in regard to the role of language in the classroom. Van Bramer describes language as a tool for cognitive functioning as well as a tool which mediates student learning. He then discusses how language is viewed as a tool for mediated learning and the role of self-regulation in student learning. Another main topic of the article is differentiated instruction. The author encourages educators to differentiate instruction by using a variety of methods, activities and responses to help mediate students' understanding and progression through the course. When teachers take the time to differentiate instruction, efforts are made to give students what they need to become independent learners who can self-regulate using primarily language as a tool. As students are able to self-regulate it becomes evident to the teacher what the students' actual developmental level is and what each student can accomplish on his/her own. This is the first step in being able to identify a student's zone of proximal development (ZPD). Once the teacher identifies what a student can do with help, the student can be taught within his/her ZPD. As students are taught within their ZPD, they will continue to self-regulate and increase their ability to work and accomplish tasks on their own.

**Reaction**

This article was especially helpful because it put some of the ideas from the Sociocultural Perspectives course into terms that I understand. I was able to make connections with what I have read and discussed in class and how to apply those concepts and relate them to teaching in the classroom. I especially appreciated the author's descriptions of the purposes that language serves in the classroom. A quote that I like from the article says that "language is the bridge between human's social and mental worlds." Language is a tool for mediation in everything that we do; whether it is rules mediating moves in a chess or sports game or knowledge of social norms and customs mediating our behavior around others or the teacher's hints mediating the process of solving a problem, language is at the base of all mediation.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cole, M., John-Steiner, V., Scribner, S., Souberman, E. (Eds.)(1978). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

**Summary**

This book is a compilation of essays written by Vygotsky in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which, the editors have translated from Russian into English. The book opens with an introduction that explains the history of the world Vygotsky lived in as he pursued his research and ideas, which were very different from other studies and research in the field at that time. Vygotsky explains primary differences between humans and animals by presenting themes and concepts such as mediation, the role of speech in learning, cognition and development especially in young children, internalization, the use

of signs and tools, the process of perception, memory, and thinking. These topics are explored and discussed throughout the first part of the book which is based in theory and data. The second part of the book contains Vygotsky's idea of the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) and is focused on implications for the classroom. The role of imitation in learning, the differences between learning and development, and the role of play and rules in learning and development are discussed by Vygotsky. Finally, the book concludes with the editors' thoughts and reactions to Vygotsky's work as they have translated and understood it.

### **Reaction**

This book is extremely dense. It should be approached with a few things in mind. First, one should not try to sit down and read with the expectation that the ideas and concepts will make sense, at least not the first time and realistically, for me at least, not even the second time. The topics are best understood through discussion, further reading/research, and reflection. Second, this is the type of literature that ought to be taken in small doses, pondered, and reread. Third, the reader should have patience with the topics and be willing to take time to understand them.

Zuengler, J., & Miller, E. R. (2006). Cognitive and sociocultural perspectives: Two parallel SLA worlds? *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1), 35-58.

### **Summary**

The authors discuss the differences between the cognitive and sociocultural perspectives in relation to SLA, providing references to landmark research for both perspectives and briefly explaining the evolution of each perspective. The majority of the article is focused on “the arrival of sociocultural perspectives on SLA” and how they have been received in the professional world (p. 37). A large portion of this argument includes positive and negative responses to conference presentations by Alan Firth and Johannes Wagner in 1996 that criticized “the field of SLA for its overwhelmingly cognitive orientation in defining and researching the learner and learning” (p. 45). Topics including Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, language socialization, the dialogic perspective, and critical theory are also discussed briefly by the authors. The article covers a lot of material in a short amount of space, providing an overview of the topic to readers and sufficient references for further reading. Implications for application in the classroom are found at the close of the article as an aid and guide for those interested in developing sociocultural perspectives of their own and integrating them into the classroom.

### **Reaction**

This article was very interesting to read and contained many wonderful ideas concerning SLA. A great quote from the article is “the ‘cake’ of SLA is cognitive, while its ‘icing’ is the social” from Sharwood Smith (1991). Because the authors have compiled a marvelous reference list, this article is the perfect resource for anyone who is studying

sociocultural perspectives and how they have changed how second/foreign languages are taught in the classroom. I would recommend this article to anyone who is unfamiliar with sociocultural perspectives because of the ground this article covers in relation to the topic. However, I would discourage drawing any personal conclusions about sociocultural perspectives based on this reading because I found it to be somewhat biased in its support of sociocultural perspectives and lack of enthusiasm for the cognitive perspectives.

**Teacher-talk**

Cullen, R. (2002). Supportive teacher talk: The importance of the F-move. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 56(2), 117-127.

**Summary**

In this article, Cullen discusses the results of a study that he conducted in Tanzania about feedback as supportive teacher talk. The article begins with a discussion of the I-R-F (initiate-response-feedback) pattern which is the main focus of the entire study. Cullen argues that 'F-move' has two major roles in the classroom. The first role of purpose is evaluation of the students response, and the second role is *discoursal*. In this study Cullen examines a several "features of effective follow-up" including reformulation, elaboration, comment, repetition, and responsiveness. These features are defined and examples for each one are provided based on the I-R-F patterns of exchange between teacher and students that were collected during the study. The circumstances that elicit each feature of follow-up are also discussed. Any feedback that did not follow the I-R-F pattern was not collected as data for this study.

**Reaction**

This study was helpful in examining teacher talk in the classroom. The clearly defined purposes for teacher talk supported other research that I found on this topic. Cullen also provided a different perspective on the I-R-F model that was more positive than other articles I read. Cullen's article demonstrates the importance of providing feedback to students and doing so in ways that are not only meaningful to them, but also in ways that are supportive and constructive to their progression. Follow-up as a

‘discoursal move’ was also part of the discussion on this study. This view of follow-up provided a different perspective that I had not encountered in other research.

De la Campa, J. C., & Nassaji, H. (2009). The amount, purpose, and reasons for using L1 in L2 classrooms. *Foreign Language Annals*, 55, 742-759.

### **Summary**

In this article, the authors observe two separate second year college level German classes at a Canadian university. The purpose of the study conducted was to discover how much of the students native language (L1), English, was used by instructors and for what purpose teachers were using the L1 in the classroom. Class sessions were recorded, transcribed and analyzed for L1 uses, primarily by the first author, and reviewed by the second author. In addition to the researchers identifying reasons that the L1 was used in the classroom, the instructors were interviewed and asked about the purposes that they were aware of for L1 use. The purposes provided by the instructors were compared with the researcher’s findings. The results revealed that the preservice teacher completing a master’s degree and the experienced teacher with a doctorate and twenty years of experience used the native language of students about the same amount of time throughout the course. However, the breakdown of purpose used showed vast differences in the purposes of L1 use by each instructor. This article provides thirteen different purposes for not only using the native language, but also purposes for teacher talk in the second/foreign language classroom.

**Reaction**

This article is one of the foundational pieces of literature for my research paper on teacher talk in the communicative language classroom. The thirteen different purposes for teacher talk provided me with topics to pursue. The conversation analysis is a helpful model for what I would and would not replicate in a similar study to find answers for the questions that I have in regards to how much a teacher should be speaking in the communicative classroom. This article also provides a helpful list of sources that argue the various positions on the use of L1 in the second/foreign language classroom.

Clifton, J. (2006). Facilitator talk. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 60(2), 142-150.

**Summary**

Clifton presents a new perspective on teacher talk in the classroom as he differentiates between what he calls “teacher talk” and “facilitator talk”. Clifton describes the facilitator as “an instructor who empowers his or her learners and gives them more initiative and responsibility” (p. 142). Based on this definition, the author describes specific characteristics of facilitator talk as opposed to teacher or professional talk. Clifton holds up facilitator talk as a means for increasing and encouraging student output. Rather than discussing the role of teacher-talk in the communicative classroom, Clifton focuses on the “facilitative classroom”. In the facilitative classroom teachers are responsible for regulating their own speech and interactions with students in order to provide students with more opportunities for speaking and interacting in the classroom. A common pattern of classroom interaction known as initiation-response-follow-up (IRF) is also argued by the author as a form of teacher-talk that disempowers students. The ideas

presented in this article support the empowerment of students as they are expected to share responsibility in classroom interaction.

### **Reaction**

I have found this article particularly helpful primarily because it addresses one of my primary concerns as an educator: Do *I* talk too much? The term facilitator as defined by Clifton brings a refreshing perspective to the idea of being a teacher, instructor or educator. This is a new perspective that I have not seen much of in the teacher-talk research that I have collected thus far. The author is positive about the teacher's role in the classroom and centers the idea of teacher-talk on whether it empowers students as opposed to other goals or purposes that teacher-talk may fulfill.

Gil, G. (2002). Two complementary modes of foreign language classroom interaction. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 56(3), 273-279.

### **Summary**

Gil discusses the difference between communicative and non-communicative language in the classroom as she compares natural and pedagogical discourse. She argues that communication in the foreign language classroom ought to be or resemble natural conversation to facilitate and foster language acquisition. As students interact using the target language in the classroom, their communicative skills will improve. Gil includes examples of speech that is communicative including asking questions to find answers the speaker does not have and non-communicative speech such as repetitive asking of questions when the answer is already known. She defines non-communicative speech as that which does not represent language as it is used outside of the classroom setting. As

Gil discusses these topics and provides examples of each concept or idea, she explains that interaction in the FL classroom is quite dynamic and complex. She expresses the importance of using pedagogical and natural discourse together as they are both necessary to students' development of language acquisition. She presents the case that “‘communicative talk’ and ‘focus-on form’ talk have to be understood as complementary rather than opposite terms” which is an idea that is somewhat contrary to typical literature regarding speech and interaction in the FL classroom. She continues on to talk about what classroom discourse is and identifies two modes of this discourse – pedagogic and natural – and provides examples of overlap between the two, thus supporting her argument that they are both necessary and complement each other.

### **Reaction**

I have found this article to be exceedingly helpful in my research of teacher-talk in the classroom. I had never thought of language as non-communicative, however, using the ideas from this article I have begun to analyze my own speech in the classroom to see how much non-communicative language I am using and then reflecting on why I am using it. If my primary goal for students is to be able to communicate outside of the classroom, my speech in class should reflect that goal. Gil also provides helpful insights into finding a balance between ‘focus-on-form’ and ‘communicative talk’ which is very helpful because that is one of my primary questions and motivations behind the research I am doing in this area.

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**APPENDICES**

## Appendix A

### Parte 1: Contesta las siguientes preguntas sobre tu nueva casa.

¿Cuántas habitaciones hay en la casa?

---

¿Cuáles son?

---

¿Qué tienen los baños?

---

¿Qué tiene la cocina?

---

¿Qué necesitan los dormitorios?

---

Añade estas cosas al dibujo.

¿Qué necesita la sala?

---

Añade estas cosas al dibujo.

¿Qué necesita el comedor?

---

Añade estas cosas al dibujo.

¿Qué necesita el garaje?

---

Añade estas cosas al dibujo.

### Parte 2a: Decora tu nueva casa con las siguientes cosas que ya tiene en tu apartamento o casa ahora. Puede escribir la letra en vez de dibujar o escribir la palabra entera.

C = la cafetera

L = la lámpara

U = el cuadro

M = la mesita

E = el espejo

O = el sillón

HM = el horno de microondas

A = la alfombra

P = la planta

T = el televisor

S = el sofá

R = el estéreo

**Parte 2b: Haz una lista de las cosas que todavía necesitas para tu nueva casa.**

**De estas cosas, ¿cuáles son las cinco cosas más importantes que debes comprar?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**Parte 3: Con una pareja. Contesta las siguientes preguntas en oraciones completas.**

**Usa las preposiciones en las respuestas.**

Modelo: A: *En tu casa, ¿tienes una lámpara?*

B: *Sí, tengo una lámpara; Sí, la tengo; No, no tengo una lámpara;  
No, no la tengo*

A: *¿Dónde está (la lámpara)?*

B: *(La lámpara) está al lado de mi cama.*

--En tu casa, ¿tienes un(a) \_\_\_\_\_? ¿Dónde está...?

la cafetera \_\_\_\_\_

el cuadro \_\_\_\_\_

el espejo \_\_\_\_\_

el horno de microondas \_\_\_\_\_

la planta \_\_\_\_\_

la estufa \_\_\_\_\_

el sofá \_\_\_\_\_

la lámpara \_\_\_\_\_

la mesita \_\_\_\_\_

el refrigerador \_\_\_\_\_

la secadora \_\_\_\_\_

la lavadora \_\_\_\_\_

la alfombra \_\_\_\_\_

el televisor \_\_\_\_\_

**Parte 4a:** Comparen sus casas. ¿Cómo son diferentes? ¿Cómo son similares?

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**Parte 4b:** Comparen sus listas de cosas que necesitan comprar. ¿Cómo son diferentes? ¿Cómo son similares?

---



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**Parte 5:** Con una pareja. Pregunta a tu pareja sobre su nueva casa. ¿Cómo es?

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**Parte 6: Ensayo.** Escribe una carta a tus padres o un amigo. Vas a mudarte el semestre que viene y encontraste (you found) la casa perfecta. ¿Cómo es tu nueva casa? ¿Qué tiene la casa? ¿Qué muebles y aparatos necesitas? ¿Qué más necesitas? ¿Qué vas a comprar primero y qué vas a comprar después? ¿Tienes suficiente dinero para sacar las cosas que necesitas? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Appendix B

<p>Use this chart to identify Closings in the following video clips.          Check off the items each time you hear them during the conversation.          How many topics are shutdown? Does a 4 part closing occur?</p>			
Part of Closing	Example		
Pre-closing	Okay.		
	Alright.		
	That's fine.		
	Great.		
	See you then.		
Topic termination/Shutdown	Got it.		
	Okay.		
	Sounds great.		
	Well, next time.		
Terminal Exchange	Good-bye.		
	See you.		
	Bye.		
	Later.		
Closing/Leave-taking	4 part interaction – 2 closing exchanges from each speaker		

**Students will listen to another clip from *Gilmore Girls*.**

**Scenario 1: Television Phone call (*Gilmore Girls*, 2002, Episode 1)**

E: Now I assume we'll be seeing you and Rory for dinner tomorrow?

L: Um, you'll see me, but Rory doesn't get back til Saturday.

E: Oh! What a shame. I thought she was getting back tomorrow.

L: Nope! She's coming back Saturday.

E: Well I'm very disappointed. I had it written down for tomorrow.

L: Well, you must've written it down wrong, Mom. She's coming home Saturday.

E: Your father thought it was tomorrow also!

L: See ya at seven!

E: Hold a moment Lorelai. Do you know where Christopher is?

L: Um, why?

E: We wanted him to come with you and Rory tomorrow, even though *apparently* Rory's getting back Saturday. I could've sworn it was tomorrow.

L: Christopher's away on business, but I'll tell him you invited him.

E: And tell him to come with you and Rory next week. I wanna see the three of you together.

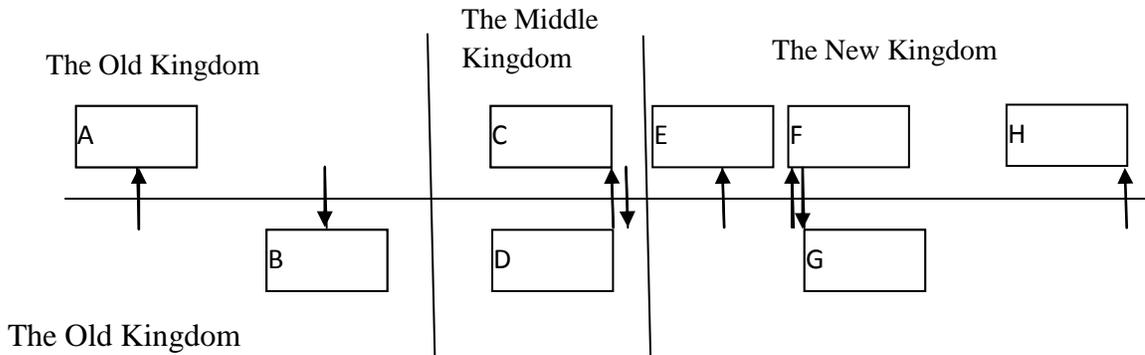
L: Yes, that would be a nice picture.

E: Alright! See you tomorrow.

L: Yes you will. Bye.

### Appendix C

Fill in the dates from the reading in the boxes below. Then write why that year is important (what happened in that year) on the lines below.



The Old Kingdom

A. \_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

The Middle Kingdom

C. \_\_\_\_\_

D. \_\_\_\_\_

The New Kingdom

E. \_\_\_\_\_

F. \_\_\_\_\_

G. \_\_\_\_\_

H. \_\_\_\_\_

As you read, think about the following questions:

- Who was in power?
- How long were they in power?
- What were religious beliefs of the time or what was the religion like?
- Were there changes to the art or religion?
- What kind of art was produced?
- What was the capital city?

Think about the following questions:

- Did the Egyptians live peacefully?
- Was life easy or difficult for the Egyptians?

	Old Kingdom	Middle Kingdom	New Kingdom
What dates are important and why?			
Who was in power?			
What kind of art was produced?			
What was the capital city?			
What were the religious beliefs? What was the religion like?			
How was art influenced by the ruler?			
How was religion influenced by the ruler?			