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Janae Suzanne Hollenback  
*Utah State University*

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TOWARDS A CLASSROOM COMMUNITY:  
INTERACTION, CULTURE AND MINDFULNESS IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

by

Janae S. Hollenback

A portfolio submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

Approved:

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Dr. Karin deJonge-Kannan  
Major Professor

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Dr. Bradford Hall  
Committee Member

---

Dr. Jim Rogers  
Committee Member

---

Dr. Bradford Hall  
Department Head

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, Utah

2012

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## ABSTRACT

Towards a classroom community:

Interaction, culture and mindfulness in Second Language Learning

by

Janae Suzanne Hollenback, Master of Second Language Teaching

Utah State University, 2012

Major Professor: Dr. Karin deJonge-Kannan

Department: Languages, Philosophy, and Communication Studies

This portfolio is a compilation of the author's works while a student in the Master of Second Language Teaching Program at Utah State University. The core of this work is the Teaching Philosophy, which is prefaced with the author's observations of "what works" and "what doesn't work" in education based on her experience as a student. This is followed by a brief description of the author's intended professional environment. The Teaching Philosophy itself explores various research and other influences which have inspired the author's direction and preferences for effective language teaching. The three artifacts in this portfolio constitute the author's research in the areas of culture, language, and literacy. To conclude an annotated bibliography reviews sources that have influenced the artifacts and teaching philosophy.

(155 pages)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Janae S. Hollenback

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## INTRODUCTION

My Teaching Philosophy begins with an Apprenticeship of Observation, which is an overview of my “career” as a student, spanning some 20+ years. Students, being the direct recipient of instruction, are in some ways a better judge of a teaching method’s effectiveness than a professional study would be. My experience has shown that the best classrooms are those in which the students are active participants in the learning process. The Personal Teaching Philosophy is a deeper exploration of my beliefs on what constitutes effective teaching. I developed this work around four tenets which I consider to be the most important: standards and research, meaningful interaction, cultures, and community-building. Drawing on research old and new, I review theories on language education and identify the practices with which I feel most aligned. I am drawn to Sociocultural Theory and methods which place emphasis on student collaboration and an open, community-like environment. I would also like to seek out ways to integrate culture, as I believe culture to be inseparable from language. Throughout my Teaching Philosophy are short quotes from a book on Zen meditation titled *The Beginner’s Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki. I included these references as I consider personal philosophy to be connected to teaching philosophy. Although I do not practice meditation or Zen teachings as often as I would like to, I believe the principles are relevant to both everyday living and in the classroom. A teacher who is mindfully present ‘in the moment’ is able to give focused awareness, compassion, and guidance to students. My hope is that I will inch closer to becoming such a teacher one day.



## APPRENTICESHIP OF OBSERVATION

As a student of public education, I have been subject to a somewhat inconsistent and varied system of instruction. A montage of my experiences would include everything from mindless worksheets and textbook copying to hands-on geometry games and student-generated science experiments. The montage has blended over time to form a prism, with *teacher-centered* and *student-centered* being on opposite ends of the spectrum. I feel this variety has helped to provide me with an idea of “what works” and “what doesn’t work” in the classroom.

From most students’ point of view, there is comfort in the old-fashioned lecture/drill style of teaching. It is the environment that many are used to. But these same students will likely also admit that a learning environment centered on listening, reading, and memorization is not the most effective in producing long-lasting knowledge. The result of such classrooms left me de-motivated and feeling very separated from the excited and curious student I had once been. The transition from elementary to middle/high school was startling to me as a student. Whereas my K-5 classes fostered imagination, creativity, communication, and interaction, my 6-12 grade classes seemed to take us in the exact opposite direction. It was as though an invisible authority had declared, “now that we have built up their spirits, let us crush them into working drones.” Written work became formulaic and structured. Textbooks morphed into increasingly monotonous and authoritative volumes of pure fact. Teachers, however, were more varied than their subject material. Some were very enthusiastic and tried new things, and others were more set in their ways and stuck in routines. This is not to say that the routine methods

were ineffective. However, the education field is always shifting, with new, innovative ideas being introduced on a constant basis. Thus I believe it is important for teachers to stay abreast of new ideas and to practice new methodologies in the classroom. Teachers who are involved in this sort of dialogue are usually more interested in best practices for guiding students' through learning experiences. The purpose of education is not to pass the test, pass the class, or even to graduate. The real, original purpose of education is to learn. It is my core belief and experience that in order to learn, students need to be as involved as possible in the learning process.

Retracing my experiences in the second language classroom, I find very little remains in my memory. The teacher of my 12<sup>th</sup> grade Spanish class was a native speaker who used a variety of methods, some communicative – many not. Likely due to lack of use, the only Spanish I retained was the single phrase: “me gusta andar en bicicleta.” A semester of French in college produced similar results: “J’aime chanter sous la douche.” Years after taking Japanese (levels 1 - 4) in high school, the written hiragana/katakana and many words and phrases remained with me. But even while living on a military base in Japan, I was unable to have conversations with my Japanese neighbors. My communication skills were limited to basic expressions and requests. The teacher during those four years, also a native speaker, relied heavily on the textbook. She spoke to us in English even in the higher level courses. It wasn't until I returned to Japan five years later and was completely immersed in the culture that I acquired the language. The short preparation course prior to my return to Japan was very helpful—I became more proficient in those three months than I'd

ever become through my four years of high school Japanese instruction. The instructors broke down the language into very simple and structured grammatical blocks and used many real-world applications. Although strong motivation to learn was likely a key factor in my quick acquisition of the language, I believe it was this simple foundation laid by the instructors that helped me make progress.

Until my immersion in Japan, my outlook on language learning classes had been gradually turning pessimistic. I felt disappointed by instruction that was enjoyable but ultimately unhelpful in fostering any long-lasting communicative ability. However, I believe it is possible for students to become proficient language users through foreign language courses that stress communication within sociocultural frames of interaction and practice.

Dan Lortie, who coined the term “apprenticeship of observation”, writes that the student “sees the teacher frontstage and center like an audience viewing a play” and such a perspective is limited to the lecturing and activities that take place in the classroom. Students do not have opportunities to view the “backstage” preparations, analyses, or goal-setting that constitutes a large portion of the teacher’s work (Lortie, 1975, p. 62). As a result, student teachers often assume an “intuitive and imitative” style of teaching based on their observations, despite having acquired contradictory beliefs.

I hope that by practicing mindful reflection of my teaching, I will be able to adopt effective habits as an instructor of my own class. Drawing on my experiences of “what works” and “what doesn’t work” in education, I am dedicated to making my teaching beliefs and philosophy inherent in my teaching methods.

## PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT

I anticipate earning the MSLT degree at USU will open many doors for me in the professional world. I am interested in teaching in a variety of environments, but am especially excited to teach Japanese at a community college. One of the strongest motivating factors which inspired me to earn a graduate degree was the prospect of teaching a foreign language and being involved in a study abroad program at a college or university. I hope to improve my Japanese proficiency in order to achieve an advanced level on the ACTFL scale so that I will be qualified to teach. I am also interested in teaching English as a Second Language to adults through refugee programs or other non-profit organizations, either locally or overseas. Ultimately I anticipate spending several years working in other countries and learning new languages, building on my multicultural experiences and skills.

## PERSONAL TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

*In Japan we have the phrase **shoshin**, which means 'beginner's mind.' The goal of practice is always to keep our beginner's mind. Empty mind and ready mind. Open to everything. In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind there are few. (Suzuki, 1970, p. 21)*

I am still very much a beginner. My teaching career is fresh. I am equipped with theories and observations, but minimal experience. To give direction to my teaching I will be relying on the research of other professionals and on my own background as a student. My mind is open to exploring new ideas and trying different methods. As I progress in the field, I hope to be able to maintain a beginner's mind in order to adapt to an ever-changing world, improve my practice, and continually seek ways to encourage my students.

Being a student for many years has shown me that the best teachers are those who place students' learning as their top priority. These teachers approach each class not with the question "what will I *teach* today?" but "what will my students *learn* today?" Therefore, mine is a student-centered classroom above all else. In this teaching philosophy, I will elaborate on methods which I believe can engage students directly in the learning process, in order to encourage development of long-term skills, knowledge, and experiences. This philosophy is established on a foundation of research and language education standards and is supported by the three pillars of interaction, cultural exchanges, and community-building.

A good teacher stays up-to-date with current research methodologies, and sets clear objectives for the classroom based on this research and on the goals students are meant to achieve. Objectives should then lead to creation of assessment

and activities. My activities encourage collaboration and interaction, giving students the opportunity to facilitate one another's learning process. By working with others, students gradually internalize language skills to the level where they are able to perform tasks independently. Both activities and assessment should reflect tasks students will encounter in the outside world. Such authenticity is interwoven into my classroom, along with frequent exposure to the source culture. Students participate in activities and discussions that encourage analyzing, observing, and thinking critically about their own and others' cultures to expand their cultural awareness. To encourage student involvement and creative use of the language, I will create an environment which eases anxiety, increases motivational factors, and helps students to feel included as part of the larger language community.

### **A Foundation of standards and research in language instruction**

*"That everything changes is the basic truth for each existence"*

*(Suzuki, 1970, p. 102).*

Teachers set the intention of their class with objectives. Beginning with a set of objectives can allow teachers to identify assessments and desired outcomes, which should then lead to creation of activities (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). Many of the goals set for my class are based on standards centered on what students will be able to do with language. I incorporate nationwide standards as frameworks within which to guide my classroom practice. The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1999) drafted by a collaborative board of teaching associations, provide a curriculum for K-12 schools and higher education. The standards clearly show a shift towards an approach which allows students to

“interpret, to express, and to negotiate meaning in real-life situations” (Savignon, 1997, p. xi). Implied in these standards is a promotion of sharing, exchanging, participating, and understanding other cultures. There is also a heavy emphasis on communication strategies and critical thinking skills.

A unified standard in language education is in part a reaction to the need for students who are able to communicate in more than one language. Learning a second or foreign language grows in importance as the world in which we live becomes more connected. Technology and communication are expanding our connections across borders and cultural boundaries. Warschauer (2000) states,

As a result of changes in globalization, employment, and technology, L2 speakers [...] will use the language less as an object of foreign study and more as an additional language of their own to have an impact on and change the world. (p. 530)

I believe language instruction should be adjusted to reflect this globalization.

Current trends demand a classroom experience that will provide students with the confidence and ability to communicate in the target language in various settings.

Rivers (1992) states: “Students sense the need to be able to mix freely and easily in social and professional settings with people of other cultures, many of whom have been learning languages since their elementary school days” (p. 2). I hope to continually motivate my students by stressing the benefits of learning a language. In addition to the reasons listed above, learning languages can also contribute to enhanced understanding of general language structure and can improve overall intellect (Rivers, 1981). Students’ efforts in the classroom can lead to the ability to read and comprehend literature, communicate with others, and understand different cultures and ways of thinking (Rivers, 1981).

Students will have their own individual goals for learning the language.

Cortinez (1992) writes: “In order to help students learn, teachers need to have some basic information about them as soon as possible. In preparing the course, we will have clarified our goals; it is now essential to find out about theirs” (p. 252).

Interacting with students from Day 1 allows me to better guide them based on individual needs.

Understanding the different philosophies which have shaped the field of language education will help establish groundwork for my teaching. In preparing my classroom, I will need to not only know *why* language learning is important, but also have knowledge of *how* language learning happens. Research from both the past and present offers many useful insights.

Instructional theories and methods have changed over the years to become increasingly student-centered and communication-based. Until around the 1950s, language teaching was predominately based on the Grammar-Translation method, which consisted of learning vocabulary and grammar rules and performing text translation activities (Fromkin, Hyams, & Rodman, 2011). This method was replaced in many schools by the Audiolingual Method (ALM), which had a strong base in the theory of behaviorism. The focus of ALM classrooms was on habit formation, correct usage, memorization, and drills. Although there was more emphasis on oral and aural development, students were not encouraged to use language in contextualized or creative ways. In the past few decades a push for a more meaningful language environment has led many teachers to favor the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). Communication-based teaching was



founded on Hymes' (1972) model of communicative competence, or the ability to use grammatical competence in a variety of communicative situations. Savignon (1972) further defined this communicative competence as "...the ability to function in a truly communicative setting—that is, in a dynamic exchange in which linguistic competence must adapt itself to the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic, of one or more interlocutors" (p. 8). To develop communicative competence, students use their linguistic knowledge and skills to expand beyond the ability to express themselves orally, and to negotiate meaning among communicators.

### **Meaningful interaction and creative use of language**

*The best way is to understand yourself, and then you will understand everything. So when you try hard to make your own way, you will help others, and you will be helped by others. (Suzuki, 1970, p. 111)*

Rivers (1992) asserts that "use of language is creative, not imitative" (p. 381).

I heartily agree with this statement. Inviting students to use the language as a creative tool for learning and constructing meaning will be my core focus. Group and pair work activities form a large portion of my language classroom, as they give students opportunities to produce and improve output and to mediate learning through collaboration. I guide students' interactions by creating scenarios and themes based on real-world topics. Students are given the tools and background knowledge needed to construct their own individual dialogue, as opposed to relying solely on robot-like sentence recitation and drills (Lee & VanPatten, 2003).

Exchanges with the teacher and fellow classmates allow students to develop skills

such as listening comprehension, the negotiation of meaning, and using context cues.

Task-based activities require students to use the language towards completion of a communicative goal (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001). Rather than learning grammar rules in isolation, students should learn practical ways to apply the language towards tasks such as asking and giving directions, planning, and making requests. Knutson (1997) claims students are more engaged and more likely to understand text when they read to accomplish a task. Tasks can incorporate more than one mode of communication and range from retelling the story to a partner to creating a map or chart as a group.

Skills in interpreting text, audio, and video are important for learning a language and can be combined with interactive activities. To assist students with building their interpretive skills, it is important to preview new text, audio, and video with relevant contextual discussion to activate students' prior knowledge. The teacher can also model strategies such as predicting, skimming, and guessing to encourage successful interaction with the materials (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). By using a "story-based" approach to learning grammar, the teacher focuses students' awareness to grammatical structure within a larger context of language as a whole. Shrum and Glisan (2010) write: "Storytelling is a natural activity that is socially mediated on a daily basis outside the walls of the classroom" (p. 223). Using authentic materials as a tool for discussing and interpreting the language can be a useful way to mirror the classroom after real-world interactions. To use these materials effectively, Adair-Hauck and Donato (1994) recommend using the PACE

story-based model. In a PACE (Presentation, Attention, Co-Construction, and Extension) lesson, the teacher begins with presenting the story or other real-world context such as radio clip or newspaper article. This presentation should involve the students as much as possible through questions and actions. Following this, the teacher brings students' attention to specific language use through scaffolding and using guiding questions. The teacher and students then engage in collaborative talk about the target structure. Finally, students are given chances to extend use of the new grammar skill in creative ways such as games and role-playing. The PACE story-based approach seems to be an effective method for teaching grammar, as it relies on guided participation rather than teaching isolated rules or expecting students to "pick up" on the grammar implicitly. Collaboration seems to be a very natural way to promote creative exploration with a language.

Through producing output during interaction, students are able to notice gaps in their existing system (Swain, 2000). Students also need output during collaborative dialogue to test their hypotheses about the way the language works, experiment with new grammar, improve fluency and automaticity, request feedback, and enhance communication skills. Collaborative activities engage students in problem solving, and allow them to learn both "strategic processes as well as grammatical aspects of the language" (Swain, 2000, p. 100) thus challenging their minds to develop and grow in both language and cognitive skills.

Collaborative dialogue and exchanges transform the language classroom into a dynamic and meaning-based environment. Vygotsky (1978) and proponents of Sociocultural Theory (SCT) place high value on collaborative exchanges between

mentor and novice. SCT is based on the idea that humans learn and develop through interactions with their external environment. Like using a shovel as a tool to excavate dirt, we can use objects or social interaction with other people as tools to learn from the world. These tools can be used as mediators to help filter outside stimuli to knowledge that is internalized within us. Language itself is a tool used to mediate our connection with the world and each other, allowing us to think and discuss concepts and ideas beyond our immediate environment. Within the classroom, it is the teacher's role to provide students with the proper tools needed in order to accomplish language tasks, whether it is individual work, group tasks, or teacher-student collaboration.

Of particular interest to me within the field of SCT is the concept of play. Vygotsky (1978) claimed that the imaginary play engaged in by children is a crucial vehicle for social development. Within the classroom, play allows students to create worlds and identities beyond the confines of their everyday lives. They are able to adopt roles that they would not otherwise have the ability to experience. Through role play and theater activities, I provide opportunities for students to experiment with actions and language beyond their current state, thus guiding them towards development. Swain (2000) lists one of six important components of language learning as 'theater arts.' This can relate to any type of role-playing, both scripted and non-scripted. When students participate in role-playing and theater, they are given opportunities to imagine new scenarios for language creation.

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a key tenet of Sociocultural Theory, is described as the distance between a student's actual development, or

independent problem solving, and potential development observable while receiving assistance towards problem solving (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words: “what one can do today with assistance is indicative of what one will be able to do independently in the future” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 210). Students can develop to their potential through working with others, as well as through assistance from the teacher (Poehner & Lantolf, 2010). By working with assistance, students gradually internalize skills to the level where they are able to perform tasks independently. Teachers can provide scaffolding to help students progress to the independent level by focusing learner attention to certain features of the task and modeling behaviors for the student to imitate (Hall, 2001).

This same concept of the ZPD can be applied to assessment purposes. A “dynamic assessment” (DA) is an interactive process wherein the teacher works on a task with a student in order to find the root cause of difficulties a student may be experiencing. Teachers are able to gauge student progress based on feedback during interaction, and are also able to provide instruction which guides the student toward independent work (Poehner, 2011). For example, I intend to provide DA sessions to help students improve their writing. This might consist of meeting with students individually to discuss common errors in their papers and help guide them towards self-correcting. Although one-on-one dynamic assessment procedures can be time-consuming in a large classroom, I would like to research ways to apply its principles as often as possible.

In general, I use classroom tasks as assessment opportunities and incorporate authentic assessments to ensure that testing reflects instruction.

Authentic forms of assessment can include portfolios, oral interviews, genre writing, and role plays which better reflect the types of activities students will encounter in the outside world. Ishii and Baba (2003) write: "The move toward more communicative language classrooms has shifted the focus not only of teaching methodologies, but also of assessment approaches" (p. 80). Assessment should be an ongoing process, one in which the student and teacher are both involved in tracking the student's progress in the language (Ishii & Baba, 2003). To ensure progress of each student, I monitor student participation and completion of group activities informally during class interactions and through oral, writing, reading, and listening activities. Oral assessments, for example, enable me to evaluate students based on their ability to perform tasks such as summarizing, explaining, describing, persuading, and informing within situated contexts and settings. I establish rubrics based on standards for what the students should be able to do with the language. Using a variety of assessment modes can help to accommodate students with different learning styles. Such assessments are also considered more authentic as they provide a better representation of students' "learning, achievement, motivation, and attitudes" (O'Mally & Pierce, 1996).

In this section of my philosophy, I discussed various methods for improving student interaction in the classroom and the purposes for such activities. I contend, however, that creative construction of the language is insufficient without a cultural foundation from which students can build. In the following section, I will explain the importance of cultural context and in providing students with authentic experiences of the language.

## **Sharing cultures in the classroom**

*“Sometimes we think it is impossible for us to understand something unfamiliar, but actually there is nothing that is unfamiliar to us” (Suzuki, 1970, p. 85).*

I believe language and culture should not be separated. Lund (2006) states, “...cultural conventions are expressed through language, and the way you communicate is influenced and shaped by the culture in which you live” (p. 76). Culture plays an integral role in shaping students’ communicative competence (Berns, 1990). Incorporating culture in the classroom includes instruction in pragmatics, or the “communicative functions of language in use” (LoCastro, 2012) such as implicature, formal and informal speech styles, honorifics, terms of address, rituals, routines, and other devices (Taguchi, 2012). As pragmatic misuse of second language is more often attributed to impoliteness than grammatical, phonological, or lexical errors, it is especially important for students to understand ways to avoid miscommunication in these areas (LoCastro, 2012). Pragmatic knowledge of the culture can be taught as a way for students to increase their awareness of how to employ language in real-worlds settings, rather than relying on canned textbook interpretations of language use.

I believe it is important to extend the role of culture to include training in intercultural competence in order to prepare students for successful interactions with new cultures. Byram (1997) defines intercultural competence as developing attitudes of openness, knowledge of social interactions, skills in interpreting and relating to new cultures, and critical cultural awareness. Through activities and discussions, students in my classroom can develop skills such as analyzing,

observing, and thinking critically about one's own and others' cultures in relation to the other. Such skills are especially pertinent in the language classroom. Young and Sachdev (2011) write:

An important motivation for the advocacy of interculturality are perceptions that intercultural contact and interchange are greater than ever, necessitating approaches to understanding and brokering difference through effective communication. From this position, language learning is the best place within the educational field for the learning of and about culture, reflecting powerful interrelationships between language and culture (p. 82).

Developing intercultural communication skills involves learning more than just the target culture's habits and customs. It involves an understanding of culture in broad terms, and the deeper reasons why people behave and interact the way they do. As students learn about different cultures, they likewise are better able to understand their own. With this pragmatically-based knowledge, students will be better prepared to communicate with speakers of the target language in appropriate and meaningful ways.

The issue of culture becomes more complicated when teaching English as a Second Language. As English is used as an international language by people around the world, I believe this carries implications for how it should be taught. Students from foreign countries are learning English to communicate in a variety of settings with others who speak English as a first or second (or third, fourth, etc.) language. The ownership of English is shifting from native speakers in countries such as Britain and the U.S. to non-native speakers of different nationalities (Graddol, 1997). Because of this shift, I believe teachers' emphasis should be less on correct pronunciation and more on comprehension in communicative settings. It is also important for teachers of English to not only understand their students' motivations



for learning the language, but also to expose students to a variety of World Englishes (Deterding & Kirkpatrick, 2006) while promoting cross-cultural understanding.

The use of authentic materials can help to expose students to language use that is a more accurate reflection of the target culture, and help students communicate in ways that better reflect the contemporary use of the target language. I do this by adding up-to-date audio, print, video, and realia to the classroom materials that are “originally produced by and intended for native speakers of the target language rather than for learners” (Frye & Garza, 1992). Peacock (1997) recommends teachers use authentic materials to increase students’ on-task behavior, concentration, and involvement. Lund (2006) writes: “Individuals are context dependent persons whose social roles within their social networks crucially affect their opportunities for language learning, and their willingness to take up those that become available” (p. 60). Exposing students to cultural items such as radio broadcasts and videos, as well as planning visits by members of the target language and field trips, can help to connect students to the language and provide sources of personal motivation.

Study abroad can be the ultimate source of authenticity for students. When participating in study abroad programs, students have the opportunity to extend themselves beyond their perceived boundaries of self and construct a second culture in the L2 (Aveni, 2005). For this reason, they may experience setbacks such as threats to self-esteem, self-image, and sense of security. In any change of environment, we normally undergo a series of emotional changes as we become accustomed to the new setting. Helping students know what to expect will not

prevent these emotions from occurring, but can provide students with “resources for making sense of these experiences in positive, patient ways” (Hall, 2005). It can also lessen the chance they will have negative culture shock, develop incorrect assumptions about the culture, and improve their ability to interact effectively with the new cultural community. A study by Brown, Dewey, and Eggett (2012) found that the more social groups to which students belonged, the greater their gains in proficiency while studying abroad. Students should be given assignments that encourage them to interact with native speakers to help them become integrated into the community. This allows them more opportunities to practice negotiation of meaning with native speakers and improve their language abilities.

### **Fostering a classroom community**

*“Concentration should be present in our thinking. This is mindfulness. We just think with our whole mind, and see things as they are without any effort”*  
(Suzuki, 1970, p. 115).

Students construct L2 identities in the classroom just as they might do during a study abroad experience. While the classroom setting is more structured than the environment of the target culture, students will still find themselves pushed within the boundaries of their identity. For this reason, fostering a supportive classroom environment is one of my top priorities. I encourage the building of social bonds among the students and provide them with the knowledge and skills to participate in social activities in the classroom (Hall, 2001). Through familiar daily activity structures, regular roles, and inclusive participation opportunities, students will be able to feel included as part of the larger language community.

If the atmosphere of the classroom is non-threatening and cooperative, students and teacher will be able to use the language more authentically through allowing their natural personalities to emerge (Rivers, 1992). Anxiety can be a significant obstacle of learning (Arnold & Brown, 1999). For this reason, I prefer not to restrict use of students' L1 entirely. Small doses of L1 in the language classroom can be beneficial for explaining difficult concepts, giving instructions, providing feedback, and generally helping students feel at ease (Zacharias, 2003). Furthermore, a purely monolingual environment is not reflective of the outside world. In other words, "...banning the mother tongue creates an artificially constructed environment in the classroom, which disregards the bilingual reality that surrounds it" (Zacharias, 2003, p. 34).

I believe student anxiety can also be eased by avoiding over-corrections, and instead provide input that more closely resembles conversational exchange. The focus should be on 'instructional conversations' (ICs) or teacher-student interactions that help students improve their ability to express concepts and ideas (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). ICs include modeling the target behavior for student imitation, providing feedback that guides students to self-evaluate, and directly affirming student contributions. As students will naturally make mistakes as they are attempting to form language, I focus my instruction on errors that affect understanding or may indicate lack of linguistic knowledge about a particular structure (Corder, 1967). Students will often refer to their first language when attempting new forms of expression in the target language, especially at beginning proficiency levels (Chan, 2006). I believe it can be useful for teachers to be aware of

possible language transfer from students' L1, and the socio-cultural influences which may impact their academic progress.

Many topics previously discussed, such as creating a relaxed atmosphere and introducing source culture materials, have been shown to enhance student motivation (Dörnyei, 2004). Gardner (1985) identified two main categories of motivation: integrative motivation, or the desire to develop relationships with target language speakers; and instrumental motivation, such as the desire to pass the class. Although these are general and possibly not all-inclusive, I have found Dörnyei's (2004, 2008) work, based on a synthesis of research, provides excellent examples of specific ways to improve motivation in both areas. Dörnyei compiled an extensive list of strategies, such as encouraging students' positive attitude towards the source culture (integrative), and discussing the role of the L2 in the world and the benefits of speaking it (instrumental). I have selected additional recommendations as follows (from Dörnyei, 2004):

1. Develop student self-confidence through praise and experiences of success, and highlight what students *can* do rather than what they *cannot* do.
2. Help students reach goals by teaching strategies for problem solving, setting realistic expectations, creating obtainable sub-goals, and promote autonomy by allowing students to find alternative ways to reach their goals.
3. Introduce instructional material that is relevant, challenging, and varied enough to rouse curiosity, while involving students in course planning.
4. Provide sufficient guidance as facilitator and not authority figure, model interest in the L2, and build rapport with the students.

5. Promote group cohesion through class goals and sharing of ideas and feelings.

Each of these features point to a classroom which promotes cooperation among students and teacher and a high level of self-motivation. I hope to be able to promote enthusiasm for the target culture and language through my own example, while helping students to be optimistic about their progress and direction.

One additional way to form a student-centered and supportive atmosphere is through cultivating mindfulness. Teachers who are mindfully present are able to give more focus to the mood of the classroom and the individual needs of their students. Tremmel writes: "Mindfulness in simplest terms means to pay attention to 'right here, right now' and to invest the present moment with full awareness and concentration" (1993, p. 443). I would like to incorporate mindfulness principles in all aspects of my life, especially in the classroom. It is possible to also encourage students to become more mindful in their studies through encouraging thoughtful self-reflection and meta-cognitive strategies.

## **Conclusion**

*We should forget all about some particular teaching; we should not ask which is good or bad. There should not be any particular teaching. Teaching is in each moment, in every existence. That is the true teaching. (Suzuki, 1970, p. 127).*

I believe it is important as a teacher to stay up-to-date with the latest research in order to adjust to the changes in society, in technology, and in our students. Teachers should also be adaptable in their daily instruction to meet the needs of the classroom. I hope to teach 'in the moment' daily, foster a supportive

learning environment, and create interactive lessons that involve students in the meaning-making process. The classroom should reflect the outside world as much as possible through communication-centered activities based in real-world contexts. My goal is for students to be able to interact across cultures with confidence, thus preparing them for encounters in a globally connected society.

## REFLECTION ON TEACHING OBSERVATIONS AND TEACHING VIDEO

I have been able to observe several different teachers during the 2012 academic year, in both English as a Second Language and foreign language classrooms. Each of these classes can generally be classified as communicative, sociocultural, or workbook-centered. Overall, the best classes were those with a clear objective, easy-to-follow structure, and several interactive activities.

From my interpretation, the sociocultural-centered classes were focused primarily on providing students with tools for accomplishing a task and guiding them towards development of skills. For example, in an ESL class I observed, the objective was for students to be able to express their opinion in class. Students took turns giving a 3 minute speech based on their opinion of a particular news topic. Students in the audience were then given the tools of sentence starters such as “Did you know that...” and “Have you thought about...” in order to express their disagreement with the speaker. In a separate class, the teacher provided students with the tool of a Venn Diagram to help find differences between two separate articles, and had them work in groups to discuss their findings.

In observing a few other ESL classes, I found the instruction centered mostly on workbook activities. The interactive activities in this class were those in which students worked together to complete information gaps in the textbook, such as filling in a schedule based on their partner’s responses. Such activities allow for a small amount of creativity, but they were mostly scripted. During the half-hour set aside for “conversation practice”, students were able to construct original utterances and share in meaningful communication. Students were provided with

interesting prompts such as “What would you do with a million dollars?” to facilitate conversation. These practices seemed effective, but could possibly be improved upon by extended teacher facilitation.

For Theory and Practice course during the 2012 semester, I observed my fellow MSLT students give short mini-lessons on foreign languages. Each of these lessons was conducted entirely in the L2 and seemed to follow the communicative approach. Understanding instructions can be very difficult if you’ve had almost no exposure to the target language. Since I know a little Spanish (and many words are similar to English), I was able to follow the Spanish lessons fairly well but had a difficult time responding in a timely manner in response to the teachers’ prompts. The lessons on unfamiliar languages left me very confused as to what the teacher wanted me to do and also unsure of the meaning of words and phrases. I imitated the teachers according to their models but had no idea what I was actually saying! It seems the teachers did not use enough visual aids, gestures, and other input enhancers to facilitate comprehension.

Because of the frustration I experienced during these lessons, I was determined to make my own teaching very simple and easy to follow. My mini-lesson was a beginner’s class in Japanese. This was one of my first experiences teaching Japanese as a foreign language. When planning my lesson I unfortunately fell into the trap of making assumptions about the students’ ability to understand me; blinded by my own knowledge of the language. I did start very simply with basic greetings but did not provide enough visuals or connections to ensure students understood the difference. Then, I drew pictures on the board that represented



noon, morning and night and expected students to “guess” which greeting corresponded to each picture. The students were obviously confused about this.

Next, I moved to “jiko shoukai” (self-introductions). I reviewed the phrases “nice to meet you” and modeled formal vs. informal. I think the students understood the difference, as I used visuals, gestures, and students themselves as examples. When I introduced the phrase “my name is...” students were again confused as I tried to explain the male and female form of “I” (self) = “boku/watashi”. I pointed to males in the room and said “boku”, and then pointed to females, saying “watashi.” It seemed students assumed “boku” literally meant male, and “watashi” female. So, I modified my input; labeling the females as “onna”, boys as “oto”. Another error here was that I provided two different ways to say “my name is” and did not clarify with the class. One student asked afterwards about this.

The next activity was reviewing the Japanese alphabets. I showed the kanji, hiragana, and katakana alphabets and tried explaining how they differ. The students seemed to really enjoy singing the alphabet song. I had them practice writing the word “good night” in hiragana after first modeling. I then challenged the class to write their own name in katakana, using the alphabet chart on the board. In a longer class, I would definitely take more time giving examples and helping students become familiar with the pronunciation before asking them to do this.

Overall, I learned many things about the difficulties of providing the proper input during my experience teaching. Although I was able to negotiate with the students to provide better instructions, this might not be so easy with a larger or less vocal class. The experience of observing fellow teachers and teaching my own

lesson placed several doubts in my mind about the communicative method.

Although I do think it is important to expose students to as much of the target language as possible, there are setbacks to teaching entirely in the L2. I think some communicative methods also do not provide students with sufficient time and exposure to process the language. I would like to observe more classes, especially Japanese, to gather more ideas for effectively using L2 in the classroom and for creative effective interactive activities.

LANGUAGE ARTIFACT

*The influence of the L1 and socio-cultural factors on L2 acquisition:*

*A case study of an English language learner from China*

## INTRODUCTION

The following artifact was an assignment for a Linguistic Analysis course, taught by Dr. Joshua Thoms. As a case study, I recorded an interview with a student from China who was enrolled in USU's Intensive English Language Institute (IELI). From the interview and subsequent analysis, I learned new skills both at the academic and interpersonal level. I had never analyzed and categorized linguistic data before and the process was enlightening. During the conversation, the two of us were focused on meaning and not on grammatical correctness. However, analyzing her utterances in written form allowed me to observe common errors and areas of miscommunication. The actual interview process itself taught me the importance of establishing rapport and asking the right follow-up questions to encourage interview subjects to elaborate. In the classroom, I will need to use similar skills to help my students feel comfortable enough to express themselves.

A major implication of this article is the importance of being familiar with students' linguistic and socio-cultural background, and of being aware of their preferences for classroom style. I would like to do more research on international students' perceptions of the U.S. education system. My interview subject seemed to greatly prefer her experience in IELI to learning English in China, which made me curious to research the opinions of other students from Asian countries based on their educational experience in the United States.

## Literature Review

Chinese students comprise the largest group of ESL students studying at universities in the U.S. and Canada (Huang & Brown, 2009). Students from China who attend North American universities express several challenges in their education, including inadequate English proficiency, unfamiliarity with US culture, lack of study skills/strategies, academic learning anxiety, and separation from family and friends (Huang & Brown, 2009).

The following is a case study of a Chinese university student learning English as a second language in the United States. Using interview data, the study examines the student's linguistic aptitude and the socio-cultural factors which may have influenced the learner in her acquisition of English. The linguistic analysis includes an evaluation of the grammatical errors and an analysis of common morphemes based on Krashen's Natural Order hypothesis (Krashen, 1982). As a student's first language has been said to impact acquisition of a second language, this student's Chinese language background was also analyzed for instances of morphological and phonological transfer. The interview was further explored for socio-cultural influences such as social support and classroom environment which may have affected the student's capacity to acquire the English language. The results of the analysis show evidence of transfer from the first language and also demonstrate that the student's socio-cultural environment has mostly had a positive impact on her ability to acquire English. The data from this study can be useful for English teachers who wish to better understand their students based on first language and cultural background.

### **Language acquisition order**

Children do not acquire their first language through explicit instruction, but learn as they “extract the rules of the grammar from the language around them” (Fromkin, Hyams, & Rodman, 2011, p. 330). In addition, observations have shown that children learn in developmental stages that appear to be universal, regardless of the language. Brown (1973, cited in Krashen, 1982) conducted a study wherein he examined the speech of children at different stages of their development, and reported that children had the tendency to acquire certain grammatical morphemes of English earlier than others. Grammatical morphemes include *the, of, or is*. Children normally omit these morphemes at earlier stages, and appear to acquire them at paralleled stages of development. Krashen (1997) hypothesized that learners of English as a second or foreign language follow a similar sequence of acquiring grammatical morphemes, regardless of their first language. Krashen refers to the concept of acquisition order as the Natural Order hypothesis. Learners will first acquire the progressive *-ing*, followed by the plural *-s*, and the copula *to be*. The progressive auxiliary and articles such as *a* and *the* follow. The learner then usually acquires the irregular past before the regular past, followed by the singular *s* (as in subject-verb agreement) and possessive *-s*.

### **Influence of first language**

Language transfer refers to the influence of a learner’s L1 on acquiring the second language (Chan 2006). One of the first studies to investigate the influence of first language on L2 acquisition order was conducted by Dulay and Burt (1973). Their results showed that among children who participated in the study, only 3% of

language errors were due to L1 interference. However, other scholars have shown evidence that acquisition order does in fact differ according to a learner's first language. Luk and Shirai (2009), for example, investigated data of Chinese ESL learners' morpheme acquisition, according to the Natural Order hierarchy. They concluded that while evidence is still limited, it appears Chinese L1 speakers acquire some features at intervals that differ from the Natural Order. The possessive, for example, is normally acquired after plurals or articles. However, Chinese L1 speakers tend to acquire possessive first. This is attributed to the fact that Chinese has a marker for possession which is similar to English (e.g., Bob *de* bi = Bob's pen). Chinese does not have morphemes for plurals or an article system, which might make it more difficult for students to acquire these two features. In addition, the Chinese language also lacks a marker for tense. Past tense and future tense are normally indicated by tone, context, or by the inclusion of such words as yesterday, now, and tomorrow (Jusoff, Leng, Sharmini, & Singaram, 2009).

A study conducted by Chan (2006) contains evidence of transfer from Chinese to English regarding five specific grammatical aspects. The features Chan investigated were: missing copula, adverb placement, "there be" structure, relative clauses, and verb transitivity.

- *Missing copula*: The Chinese copula similar to the English 'to be' is normally omitted from joining with auxiliary verbs such as 'can' and 'will' (e.g., "He will [be] tired.")

- *Adverb placement:* In Chinese, adverbs are normally placed *before* verbs and auxiliary verbs. In English, adverbs are most often placed *after* verbs (e.g., “I very like swim.”)
- *‘There be’ structure:* The English ‘there be’ is expressed as ‘have’ in Chinese (e.g., “Table on have book.”)
- *Relative clauses:* Relative clauses are pre-modifying in Chinese but post-modifying in English. Chinese does not use relative pronouns such as ‘who’ and ‘which’.
- *Verb transitivity:* Verbs which are transitive in Chinese may be intransitive in English. For example, the sentence “I want to serve the people” in English would become “I want for people serve” in Chinese (Chan, 2006).

If a Chinese speaker were to apply Chinese grammatical structure to English sentences, errors of omission, generalization, and word order would likely occur in these categories. In Chan’s (2006) study, many of the errors made by test subjects were related to transference from Chinese L1 sentence structure. Chan suggests “calling upon the L1 when producing output in the L2 is a fairly common compensation strategy among students of lower proficiency levels to overcome their difficulties in the production of unfamiliar target language strings” (Chan, p. 66). Chan also attributes syntactic transfer to avoidance behavior, in instances when a student may resort to using familiar structures rather than attempting unfamiliar structures in the fear of making a mistake.



Scholars such as Chan (2006) and Luk and Shirai (2009) have argued that the Natural Order hypothesis inaccurately miscounts the influence of a student's L1. While knowledge of such syntactic transfer can be helpful for teachers, socio-cultural factors such as anxiety and cultural background should also be considered when assessing students' linguistic ability. Therefore, instances of possible socio-cultural influences will be explored in the following section.

### **Socio-cultural influences**

Research shows that the cultural differences between the U.S. and China can affect Chinese students' academic performance. China places strong emphasis on respecting parents and teachers. In addition, the Chinese education system is examination-driven and competitive. Good education is synonymous with honor for the Chinese family. By contrast, students in U.S. classrooms are encouraged to challenge the teacher, interrupt the lesson, and ask questions. Such behavior can be viewed by some Chinese students as disrespectful (Huang & Brown, 2009). In an earlier study by Huang (2005), Chinese university students reported their education in the U.S. was negatively affected by excessive student participation, group work, and the teachers' failure to follow textbook or organize lectures in a consistent or traditional manner. Many Chinese students also reported negative experiences during their time in the United States because of their difficulty making friends with Americans due to differences in culture and interests. These students often avoided participating in social activities.

Classrooms in China, including English as a Foreign Language courses, place a heavy emphasis on listening, rote memorization, and teacher instruction (Barley,

2011). Students attending courses that demand much interaction and speaking may experience anxiety, which can also affect their performance. In a study exploring speaking-in-class anxiety, Barley (2011) found several factors leading to anxiety experienced by Chinese learners in the English classroom. These include speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, discomfort when speaking with native speakers, negative attitudes towards the English class, negative self-evaluation, fear of failing the class/consequences of personal failure, speaking in front of the class without preparation, being corrected when speaking, inadequate wait-time, and not being allowed to use the L1 in a second/foreign language class.

Because each individual is different, details of Chinese culture cannot be generalized for everyone. However, information on cultural differences can assist teachers seeking to understand the socio-cultural factors influencing a student's English language acquisition. Using previous studies specifically centered on Chinese speakers' acquisition of morphological features will also aid in understanding learner performance.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were used to guide the analysis of this study:

1. How does the morphological acquisition order of an English Language learner from China compare with that of Krashen's Natural Order hypothesis?
2. How does the socio-cultural environment of English language learners from China impact their progress in language acquisition?

## **Methodology**

This study was conducted using a semi-structured interview with an English language learner. MeiHua (pseudonym) is a 22-year-old female from a small city in Northeast China. Like most Chinese, Meihua studied English through middle school and high school, with some English at the college level. She moved to Utah State University in December 2011 to complete her degree in Human Resources. The college she attended in China—Northeastern Dianli University—has a cooperative exchange relationship with Utah State University. This is MeiHua’s first time in the United States and her first semester at an American university. She is enrolled in two English courses through USU’s Intensive English Language Institute at the third level (out of four possible levels). The first course, IELI 2330 “Spoken Discourse and Cross-Cultural Communication,” pairs English learners with American undergraduate classroom assistants to improve students’ interpersonal communication and prepare them for group work. The second course, IELI 2450 “Topics for ESL,” is aimed at developing students’ ability to read, discuss, present, and write about specific academic subjects.

Meihua was interviewed in April of 2012, near the end of her first semester at USU. The total length of the interview was 45 minutes. In order to assess socio-cultural factors of Meihua’s language learning, she was asked questions about her hometown, family, friends, and her anxiety level in the classroom. The interviewer also asked questions about Meihua’s experiences learning English, both in China and in the U.S. Of particular interest were Meihua’s self-reported preferences for learning English; such as the type of methods that proved most effective in helping

her acquire the language. The interview was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for features of Krashen's Natural Order as well as for the features listed by Chan (2006). Instances of each of Krashen's six morphological features were tallied according to correct and incorrect usage. These totals were compared to the Natural Order sequence. The interview was also analyzed based on content regarding the interviewee's socio-cultural background; including family, social life, and classroom environment.

### **Analysis of Linguistic Ability**

The interview data, although limited, support the study by Luk and Shirai (2009) which suggests that the Natural Order may not account for the L1. From an analysis of the six features listed on Krashen's ranking, it appears that MeiHua is most adept at using the plural -s correctly. There were only four out of 17 times when she omitted the plural -s. MeiHua used the possessive correctly 50% of the time. This might be because the Chinese possessive is similar to the English possessive markers. Instances during this interview where MeiHua would need to use the possessive were rare, however, as were instances requiring the progressive -ing. Her use of subject-verb -s agreement was noticeably less successful. An analysis showed 17 out of 26 instances of incorrect agreement. An example of this is "the teacher spend a lot of time". MeiHua's most significant errors were related to her omission of the past tense. This is in direct contrast to Krashen's morphology order. However, similar to Krashen's model, her use of irregular verbs was better than her use of regular verbs. Examples of misuse include the sentence "when I arrive they rent car to pick me from airport". The meaning of such utterances can usually be

inferred from context, but occasionally they caused some misunderstanding. Most of MeiHua's errors were related to time and tense. As the Chinese language does not have markers for tense (Jusoff et. al, 2009) her errors seem to be caused by L1 transference. A tally of each error and correct usage are included in Table 1. These are compared in Table 2 with Krashen's model. It appears that in general her rank orders did not match up with the Natural Order hypothesis.

**Table 1. Rank Order of errors based on student interview**

Rank Order	Total # of Errors	Correct usage/Total	Rate of Suppliance
-s (plural)	4	13/17	76%
-'s (+possessive)	2	2/4	50%
-ing (progressive)	2	2/4	50%
-s (agreement)	17	9/26	35%
irregular past	4	1/5	20%
-ed (regular past)	5	1/6	17%

**Table 2. Krashen's Rank Order**

Learner's Rank Order based on analysis of linguistic errors	Krashen's Rank Order for adult L2 (1997)
1. -s (plural)	1. -ing (progressive)
2. -'s (+ possessive)	2. -s (plural)
3. -ing (progressive)	3. irregular past
4. -s (agreement)	4. -ed (regular past)
5. irregular past	5. -s (agreement)
6. -ed (regular past)	6. -'s (+possessive)

The linguistic analysis of this interview also included an analysis of the five morphological features listed by Chan (2006). Some instances of each feature are listed as follows:

1. *Missing copula*: No instances found

2. *Adverb placement*: “No, it’s only can transfer the credits”
3. *‘There be’ structure*: “I have in China I have a study... in the US two years I have... ah... Junior? Yeah. Junior.”
4. *Relative clauses*: “I think I like the life of her” and “My roommates, it’s a Chinese girl”
5. *Verb transitivity*: “I need how to learn English.”

In the phrase “it’s only can transfer credits” in #2, she placed the adverb “only” before the verb instead of after, which could be a result of L1 transference. In sentence #3, she seems to be misusing the verb “have” in place of a “there be” structure in conjunction with the noun “Junior”. With both sentences in example #4, Meihua’s errors may be due to the fact that the Chinese language lacks relative pronouns. The error listed in #5 could be a result of confusion with verb transitivity, as it is not clear how she is placing the object and verb.

Although most of the errors MeiHua made were related to those listed in Krashen’s Natural Order, Chan’s listing also helps to account for a few instances of mistakes, especially those related to word order. Possible sociocultural influences affecting Meihua’s English language performance will be explored in the next section.

### **Analysis of Sociocultural Influences**

MeiHua has been enrolled in English classes in China since age 12, but claims in the interview that she was not able to practice much speaking until she moved to the U.S. “Usually in the class only one, the teacher, spend a lot of time writing key points on the blackboard and everybody take notes,” she stated. MeiHua’s English

education was very test-driven. She said “teacher and parents pay more attention to exam and grade.” She described English classes in China as “boring” and teacher-centered, with a strong focus on learning grammar and vocabulary. “A lot of Chinese student good at grammar and reading but don’t well in listening and speaking,” she said.

MeiHua sees a large difference between the Chinese and North American classroom atmosphere, and she generally seems to enjoy the student-centered environment at USU’s English program. While the literature review reported many Chinese students are wary of activities such as discussions and group work, MeiHua appears to thrive in this type of environment. “We can discuss with different country in the world so we can learn about culture and we can practice my... speaking,” she said. When asked which teaching style she likes the most, MeiHua replied “freedom.” She said, “I think I like American courses because it is very relaxed and we can do anything.” MeiHua said she feels comfortable participating and speaking in class. She did not report any significant levels of speaking-in-class anxiety.

Although MeiHua has more Chinese friends than American friends at USU, she lives with American roommates. She said her American roommates talk with her often, giving her both listening and speaking practice, and teaching her slang and more popular English words. MeiHua also said she has a Chinese friend who has provided advice on improving her English. In addition, MeiHua said watching American movies has helped her practice listening and speaking. As the research

data shows that many Chinese students have a difficult time making American friends, MeiHua does not appear to have this problem.

As mentioned in the literature review, family plays an important role in Chinese culture. Children are expected to respect parents and to value family relationships. Education is also of high importance to the honor of a student's family and community. MeiHua reported that while her father was very supportive of her choice to study in the United States, her mother and grandmother were not. This factor could prove a deterrent to MeiHua's language acquisition as well as her potential to finish school. Another possible deterrent could be MeiHua's negative perception regarding her own English ability. She claimed her English speaking was "poor" and more than once mentioned her listening comprehension skills as inadequate. However, considering she has been in the U.S. for only four months, she seems fairly adept at the language. When asked what could help her be more confident, she replied "If my listening is improve, I think I will be confident."

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of this single interview provides several insights into the factors influencing the English language development of a student from a Chinese linguistic and cultural background. The results indicate that acquisition order of grammatical morphemes is dependent on the learner's first language. Additionally, students who speak Chinese as a first language may follow similar patterns of acquisition order. The student interviewed for this study experienced the most difficulty with past tense usage and subject/verb agreement. This is in contradiction with Krashen's Natural Order hypothesis, which assumes that English language learners, regardless



of first language, will acquire English at similar stages. In order to be certain of these conclusions, further study is needed. However, the data from this analysis can be used to focus instruction for Chinese students on past tense usage and subject-verb agreement. Understanding the factors involved in a student's learning process can help teachers provide targeted corrective feedback by focusing on errors of the same category, and can also allow teachers to anticipate potential problems.

The sociocultural analysis demonstrated that this particular student did not experience setbacks like those reported by students in earlier studies. MeiHua did not describe any particular in-class-speaking anxiety or displeasure with the American classroom style. In fact, she seemed to prefer the student-centered and relaxed atmosphere of her English classes at Utah State University to her "boring" classes in China. In general, this student appears to have a positive attitude regarding her U.S. classroom experience. As studies show that many Chinese students find it difficult to make friends with Americans, it seems beneficial to pair Chinese students with American roommates. Socializing with her American roommates seems to have improved MeiHua's experience in the U.S.

The results of this study indicate that there are exceptions to every generalization made regarding a specific culture. Although the literature review would suggest Chinese students have a need for increased structure and teacher-centered instruction, such considerations might not be necessary for students like MeiHua who see the U.S. university classroom as a welcome relief in comparison to their experiences in Chinese schools. Whether this reflects a shifting trend in Chinese student perceptions or whether this Meihua is an exception to the rule

remains to be investigated. MeiHua did show signs of shyness and insecurity in her English speaking ability, as shown in studies to be common traits of students from China.

As Chinese students are the largest group of ESL students at North American universities (Huang & Brown, 2009), English teachers would be well-served to become better acquainted with this population. The data from this study can serve as a starting point to provide teachers with knowledge on first language transfer, in order to anticipate Chinese students' linguistic development and increase students' awareness of the specific structural features which might hinder their ability. Teachers might also choose to discuss students' preferred classroom style and address such concerns with the class to ease potential discomfort with the U.S. educational environment. In anticipation of overall feelings of discomfort and anxiety, English teachers can help students from China by giving encouragement, positive feedback, and by creating an atmosphere where students can feel at ease participating in class discussion.

## APPENDIX

**Interview Questions**

## Set #1:

1. Tell me about your home town and your family.
2. Why did you choose the academic major you are studying?
3. How many years did you study English before coming to the U.S.?
4. How would you describe the teaching method used by teachers in your home country?
5. Can you tell me about a memory you have from your time learning English?
6. Describe some memorable experiences you had when you first arrived in the U.S.
7. What are important goals that you hope to accomplish when you are finished at school?
8. How often do you get to practice English every day?
9. Do you study on your own? What study methods have been the most useful?
10. What English language classroom activities do you remember the most?

## Set #2

1. Tell me about the people you spend the most time with – are they mostly English speakers or friends who share the same native language?
2. What kinds of culture shock have you experienced since moving here?
3. Have you had any negative culture shock experiences that have made it harder to learn English?
4. Who has helped you the most with being comfortable in a new country?

5. Have you felt any negative judgments from people because of your accent?
6. What has been the biggest obstacle to learning English?
7. Tell me about an experience in the classroom where you felt proud of your English ability.
8. What teaching style do you enjoy the most?
9. What kinds of interactions with others have helped you practice English?
10. How often do you participate in the classroom discussion – do you feel comfortable contributing to the class and confident in your speaking ability?

### **Interview Transcription**

Researcher: First of all, tell me more about your hometown.

MeiHua: My hometown's name is Songye (spelling?). It's in the northeast of China. And it's only a little city.

Researcher: Okay. What's your family like?

MeiHua: My family, there are 6 people in my family.

Researcher: Oh, that's a big family for China, I think.

MeiHua: Yeah. My grandma, mother, father, other sister and other sister husband.

Researcher: Ok, so you have one sister and her husband. And you all live together.

MeiHua: Yeah.

Researcher: So this is your first time leaving home?

MeiHua: Yes

Researcher: How old are you?

MeiHua: (coughs/laughs) 22

Researcher: Okay 22. So was your family supportive of you coming here?

MeiHua: My father support me about going abroad. But my mother and my grandpa, I mean grandma rejects.

Researcher: So it was your idea to come here?

MeiHua: Yeah.

Researcher: And your father thought it was a good idea.

MeiHua: Yeah.

Researcher: Do you think your mom and grandma support you more now that you are here?

MeiHua: They think China is far away from American. They want me stay with them all the time.

Researcher: How long do you think you'll be here?

MeiHua: I think 2 years. When I finish my Bachelor.

Researcher: Two years? That's pretty fast.

MeiHua: No, I'm a transfer student here. I have in China I have a study... in the US two years I have.... (laughs) ah... junior? Yeah. Junior.

Researcher: You're a Junior.

MeiHua: Yeah.

Researcher: You went to a Chinese university?

MeiHua: Yeah

Researcher: What are you studying?

MeiHua: Now it is human resource.

Researcher: So you want to work at a big company.

MeiHua: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: Cool. I think jobs like that—I think it helps if you have English.

MeiHua: Now I'm taking the IELI classes.

Researcher: So why did you decide to come to America?

MeiHua: I... there is a cooperation programs between my primary university and USU university.

Researcher: What is it called?

MeiHua: Northeastern Dianli University.

Researcher: So did they have scholarships?

MeiHua: No it's only can transfer the credits.

Researcher: So you didn't exactly choose USU? I mean, did you have choices?

MeiHua: No (laughs). It's only one choice.

Researcher: And why did you choose human resources?

MeiHua: Because (because)... I think... ah, uh... do you know, in China there is a famous movie. Is about a girl, how to become human resource, HR. I think I like the life of her.

Researcher: Oh because of that movie, you wanted to...

MeiHua: Yes.

Researcher: That's interesting. What is the name of it?

MeiHua: Du la la hun da qi

Researcher: Oh okay (laughing) I'll have to look it up. I just watched a movie....

MeiHua: I like horror movie, how about you?

Researcher: You like horror movies? I guess I don't like them so much. I get bad dreams if I watch horror movies.

MeiHua: Oh okay.

Researcher: I watched a Chinese movie the other day. It was called "What Women Want"? I don't know, that's the English name. But it's based on the American movie. It's about a guy who can read women's thoughts...

MeiHua: Ah! I know I know. The actress is Gun Lee.

Researcher: She's very famous?

MeiHua: Yeah

Researcher: So how many years did you study English before you moved here?

MeiHua: Since my... little... about 12 years old.

Researcher: You were 12 years old?

MeiHua: But we only study some the grammar and vocabulary.

Researcher: So is that the same as high school and college?

MeiHua: No

Researcher: Can you describe the difference between school, high school and elementary?

MeiHua: Wow. It's very boring.

Researcher: Do you speak English in class?

MeiHua: No, no. Usually (uyualy) in the class only one, the teacher, spend a lot of time writing key points on the blackboard and the student just take notes. Nobody want to ask questions and... and I think... teacher and parents pay more attention to the exam and grade.

Researcher: So it's mostly learning grammar and vocabulary.

MeiHua: A lot of Chinese student are good at grammar and reading but don't well in listening and speaking.

Researcher: And you write a lot too?

MeiHua: Yeah, before.

Researcher: Was it hard to learn the writing at first, because English writing is a lot different from Chinese?

MeiHua: A little.

Researcher: So was college different from high school?

MeiHua: Similar, in the part... in general, it's similar.

Researcher: So how did you learn to speak it if you never spoke in class? How can you speak so well right now?

MeiHua: We only pay attention to exam so we don't need to speak aloud.

Researcher: How did you learn to speak English then?

MeiHua: Although my speaking is very poor.

Researcher: I think your English is very good. Very easy to understand.

MeiHua: Ah... well, I always watch movie and... talk with my American friends.

Researcher: In China?

MeiHua: No, just here. I use my I-phone download some software to study English.

Researcher: So it's a special program for helping with English?

MeiHua: Yeah.

Researcher: So how is IELI different from school in China?

MeiHua: Woah. The biggest difference I think is the classroom atmosphere. In China is very boring and nobody can eat some food in the classroom. And in ELI class we



have a lot of group discussion and presentation. So I think it is very active, yeah, environment.

Researcher: What kind of activities do you have?

MeiHua: I think it's more group discussion. We can discuss with different country from the world so we can learn more about culture and we can practice my... speaking.

Researcher: So what kinds of things do you talk about?

MeiHua: About... movie, and... some topic we can talk.

Researcher: So just anything.

MeiHua: Yeah, anything.

Researcher: How much class time is just the teacher talking?

(no response)

Researcher: Does the teacher ever just talk while you listen, does the teacher talk very much?

MeiHua: In topic class, the teacher talk a lot. But in speaker class people encourage us to speak a lot.

Researcher: How do you learn the grammar in IELI; does the teacher tell you the rule first and practice? Or do you really learn grammar?

MeiHua: No I'm in level 3 of IELI class and the teachers usually give reading and learn the ac- academic information and the vocabulary (wocabulary). So it's don't have a lot of grammar.

Researcher: Yeah, you probably learned most of the grammar in China.

MeiHua: Oh... (laughs)

Researcher: How many levels in IELI?

MeiHua: 4.

Researcher: So one more level? Do you have a writing class too?

MeiHua: Writing? No.

Researcher: So you're in topics and speaking? So how do you practice listening, is it just from talking to others?

MeiHua: It's a valuable way to practice my listening.

Researcher: After class, how often do you practice English?

MeiHua: After class... I think uh... watch movie... yeah and talk with my American friends.

Researcher: So you get to practice a few times a day?

MeiHua: We talk about anything but they... from them we learn about American culture and traditional... and habits and some slang.

Researcher: What is your favorite slang?

MeiHua: XYZ. Check your zipper (laughs). And make joking with the friends. And ah... let me see... going bananas? And don't have a co... co... it's the meaning to chill out.

Researcher: Oh! Don't have a cow.

MeiHua: Yeah

Researcher: That's an old one, but I like it.

MeiHua: And Reesing and shy... means get up

Researcher: Oh... rise and shine. So do you study on your own after class?

MeiHua: Yeah.

Researcher: How did you study? What kind of methods did you use?

MeiHua: After class I always memorize words and some famous titles. And watch some... newspaper.

Researcher: So you look up words you don't know? How do you memorize the words?

MeiHua: I don't know how to explain in English. We can image the words to other interesting things.

Researcher: So that's what you do on your own? So you draw pictures and things like that?

MeiHua: Yes.

Researcher: That's a good method...so most of your friends here, are they mostly Chinese or American?

MeiHua: Chinese

Researcher: So when you first got here, did you know any Americans?

MeiHua: Yeah.

Researcher: How did you know them?

MeiHua: From the... I don't know... let me check (asks friend in room a question in Chinese) Oh, TV show.

Researcher: Your friends? Before you came here, did you know any Americans?

MeiHua: Yeah, it's a famous...

Researcher: I mean friends, did you have American friends?

MeiHua: In China? No, no. Sorry.

Researcher: So was it hard at first when you got here?

MeiHua: Yeah it's a little hard.

Researcher: What were some big culture differences, culture shock?

MeiHua: Uh... I know gesture about different. In china, this gesture means victory. But I know in America, it's peace. That's very different. But the stop gesture, in China we do this.

Researcher: Oh okay. Did you have a time where you made a mistake or had a misunderstanding because of culture?

MeiHua: I forgot... uh, I don't know... once I wash my underwear in the bathroom, but my American roommates they don't like this behavior.

Researcher: That's true, we don't really do that. It's all in the washing machine. So your roommates are American?

MeiHua: Two American.

Researcher: Did you have problems communicating at first? Understanding?

MeiHua: A little. Because my listening is very poor. So sometimes I don't know their meaning.

Researcher: Have you had any other culture shock experiences that made it harder for you to learn English?

MeiHua: I don't know the meaning of the word. Shuck? Shock?

Researcher: Culture shock? I mean, have you had negative experiences that made it harder for you to practice your English? Anything that made you...

MeiHua: disappoint? Yeah... Hm... I think (unintelligible) so I need to study hard.

Researcher: Are you usually pretty motivated and excited to learn English?

MeiHua: No, I... hm, I'm not excited in the... English, but I need how to learn English.

Researcher: So you're motivated

MeiHua: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: So who has helped you the most with being comfortable living here?

MeiHua: My brother, but...

Researcher: Your brother, here?

MeiHua: But... He's Rocky's friend. He and Rocky gave me a lot of help when I come here.

Researcher: What kind of help?

MeiHua: Because when I arrive they rent car to pick me from airport

Researcher: What other ways did they help?

MeiHua: Let me see... another person, my roommates, it's a Chinese girl but her English is very well so she can help me in English.

Researcher: What has been the hardest part for you learning English?

MeiHua: Difficult part?

Researcher: Yeah. You know obstacle?

MeiHua: Yes.

Researcher: What has been an obstacle for learning English.

MeiHua: I don't know. Maybe listening? Um... I will practice my listening.

Researcher: So the American accent, is it hard to understand? Americans talk really fast... does that make it harder to listen?

MeiHua: Yes, it is hard

Researcher: Do you have an experience in class when you felt proud of your English?

MeiHua: Proud...?

Researcher: Was there a time in class when you felt like, I'm really good at English?

MeiHua: Yeah, three, two years ago I make a presentation and my teacher say well done.

Researcher: That was in China?

MeiHua: No, that's in America.

Researcher: Two years ago?

MeiHua: No, two days ago, sorry.

Researcher: Okay so that was really recently. She gave you good feedback. Do you like IELI better than the English classes in China?

MeiHua: Yes, yes.

Researcher: What teaching style do you like the most?

MeiHua: Freedom (laughs).

Researcher: Freedom? Ok. So that's not hard for you? Because I know in Chinese schools there is not much freedom?

MeiHua: Yeah

Researcher: Was it hard to get used to at first?

MeiHua: I think I like American courses because it is very relaxed and we can do anything (laughs)

Researcher: So you feel comfortable participating?

MeiHua: Yeah

Researcher: So when you first got here were you very confident with your English?

MeiHua: No...

Researcher: Have you become more confident?

MeiHua: No, I'm not confident (laughs)

Researcher: What do you think has helped, or could help you be more confident?

MeiHua: If my listening is improve, I think I will be confident.

Researcher: Okay. Let's see... I'm almost out of questions. So in classes you have discussions and presentations. What other kinds of activities in class are helpful? (pause) What activities do you like the most? (pauses) Can you think of any specific things the teacher does?

MeiHua: Let me see... I like the group discussions more... the teacher often gives some the paper about the content of the discussion and we finish it in class and the students are from all over the world we have a lot of different views. And we can discuss I think it can practice my speaking I think it is very helpful to me.

Researcher: So the teacher gives you something to read first, and you discuss?

MeiHua: No it's only read some articles and do the homework.

Researcher: Newspaper articles?

MeiHua: It's the academic articles, it's about bioluminescence... and ... about like...

Researcher: It's preparing you for other classes, you read these things to prepare you for regular classes?

MeiHua: Yeah, although it's a little hard for me, but I think it's very interesting and I think I can focus on it.

Researcher: Did you learn to write essays in china?

MeiHua: Yeah, I learned.

Researcher: So you already knew how? Is it different, the writing you learned there?

MeiHua: It's a little different. In china, we don't pay more attention to the format but here the professor is very... about the format.

Researcher: So in speaking class, that's mostly discussing and presentations.

MeiHua: Yeah

Researcher: Do you present on a specific topic, or...

MeiHua: Abortion?

Researcher: You presented on abortion? Wow. You have to pick an academic subject?

MeiHua: Yeah

Researcher: What was the... what do you wish you would have known about America before you came here?

MeiHua: Actually America is friendly, very nice and they can smile at everybody.

Researcher: And you said you liked America better than China...

MeiHua: How to answer... yeah. Yeah.

Researcher: But do you want to stay here forever?

MeiHua: No, because I have boyfriend in China...

Researcher: Oh yeah? So you talk on Skype a lot?

MeiHua: Yes

Researcher: Will you get married when you go back?

MeiHua: Maybe

Researcher: Oh wow. Two years...

MeiHua: (laughing)

Researcher: Hm. Do you have any advice for me for teaching English?



MeiHua: I think you will be good teacher.

Researcher: Oh thanks!

MeiHua: Really, really!

Researcher: I don't really like some parts about English, but I really like the international students.

MeiHua: Oh do you speak any language, Chinese or Japanese...

Researcher: I speak Japanese a little.

MeiHua: Oh. Na-ni!

Researcher: Yeah! And I can say ni-how-ma. That's all...

Okay well let's stop the interview there.

MeiHua: Okay

## LITERACY ARTIFACT

*Dynamic assessment for improving literacy in the second language classroom*

## INTRODUCTION

The following artifact was written for a Sociocultural Theory (SCT) course taught by Dr. Jim Rogers. I chose to focus this paper on Dynamic Assessment (DA). The research was compiled from a small sample of articles which demonstrated use of Dynamic Assessment in various classroom settings. DA is very different from what many teachers are used to, as it incorporates active negotiation between student and teacher towards helping the student improve. It is a testing method which more closely mirrors classroom activities than traditional forms of assessment, which is a concept in which I am very interested. Through writing this paper, I was better able to understand how Sociocultural Theory can be applied in the classroom. Although it can be difficult to include DA methods in a large classroom very often, I would like to investigate more ways to assess my students based on DA principles.

### **Abstract**

For language teachers seeking to provide support for students according to their individual abilities, dynamic assessment (DA) is a promising approach for both assessing student progress and for guiding students towards further development. This paper provides a general review of the theoretical background of DA based on Vygotsky's (1987) Sociocultural Theory and his ideas on mediation and the Zone of Proximal Development. In order to further clarify the purposes and uses of DA in the classroom, the theoretical foundation will be built upon with a summary of four studies previously conducted on dynamic assessment strategies for improving reading and writing. Each study shows evidence that DA techniques can help improve student performance and literacy skills. The summaries will be followed by a proposed application of the methods used in each study for implementation in a second or foreign language classroom.

## **What is Dynamic Assessment?**

Dynamic Assessment (DA) is a construct inspired by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT), although Vygotsky never used the term in his writings. A colleague of Vygotsky, Luria (1961) coined the expression when comparing what he referred to as the difference between *statistical* and *dynamic* assessment approaches. Statistical assessment is related to traditional forms of assessment which show the end or cumulative result of a student's knowledge using a psychometric score or grade. The students' grade is seen as a direct reflection of their ability. Little connection exists between instruction and assessment (Poehner, 2011) – in most cases, by the time students receive feedback they have already moved on to the next task or test (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005). Statistical assessment also fails to account for students' individual difference. However, students in a second or foreign language classroom vary widely in terms of language aptitude and language learning motivation (Dornyei, 2008). In contrast to statistical assessment, dynamic assessment can actually improve student ability during the course of the assessment while at the same time evaluating the individual student's potential. In other words, "DA is concerned with promoting development, not just showing results of development" (Poehner & van Compernelle, 2011).

The theoretical foundation of Dynamic Assessment is rooted in Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) defined the ZPD as "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). The level of actual development reflects the abilities and mental functions which a student is able to demonstrate without the help of others. Vygotsky claims that when a student is given assistance and is able to successfully complete a task, this is also indicative of the student’s developmental level. He writes: “what children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even *more* indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85, emphasis added). Learning through collaboration and social exchanges are key components of Vygotsky’s theories. He differed greatly from many of his predecessors who believed learning to be an individually-based cognitive process. According to Sociocultural Theory, human learning does not occur through mental processes alone but through interaction with the outside environment.

Vygotsky demonstrated the concept of ZPD using the hypothetical example of two ten-year old children. Both children are assumed to have the mental capacities of an eight-year-old, in that they can complete tasks independently at the same level as an average eight-year-old child. However, with the assistance of a mentor, one child is able to complete tasks equal to that of a twelve-year-old, while the other child is able to complete tasks only to the level of a nine-year-old. The actual development of the children indicates “developmental cycles already completed” (p. 87) while the potential development can be viewed as “functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state” (p. 86). Through assistance by a more knowledgeable teacher or peer, the difference between students’ abilities emerges.

According to SCT, human mental development occurs as we interact with the world. Objects (e.g. books), psychological tools (e.g. language), or other humans act as mediators to bridge the space between ourselves and the outside world.

As we interact, the knowledge and skills we learn through mediation becomes internalized or transformed into “intramental” processes (Poehner, 2011). We encounter these opportunities for mediation in daily life. We can learn “spontaneous” concepts in environments such as those at work or home, or in the “scientific” concepts in the environments of school (Vygotsky, 1986). Scientific concepts are “systematic, rigorous and open to inspection and reflection” (Poehner & Lantolf, 2010). The classroom environment is an artificial construct wherein abstract activity mirrors real-life activities. It is the teacher’s task to create opportunities within the boundaries of the classroom for mediation among students and for teacher-student collaboration. During a classroom activity, mediation helps students increase abilities that are ripe for development (Poehner & Lantolf, 2010). Students work in collaboration with others using tools already in stock in order to develop new tools for future use. Once students have acquired a concept or skill to the level where they are able to perform a task independently, learning has transformed into development and the task becomes internalized. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is not isolated from developmental processes, but actually precedes development.

When administering a dynamic assessment, the teacher negotiates a task as co-participants with the student (Poehner & Lantolf, 2010). The teacher adjusts the task and the interaction in order to help students within their individual level of

development. As teacher and student work together, the teacher is better able to find the underlying cause of problems which may be hindering student performance. This can be compared to the interaction between a doctor and patient, as the doctor works to determine a diagnosis based on symptoms. As the teacher works to support the student, they alter their mediation according to the students' responsiveness (Poehner, 2007). For example, if the student is unable to solve a problem or formulate correct usage of the language, the teacher can explore the possible reasons for the lack of knowledge by asking questions that become increasingly specific. By observing student responses, the teacher can diagnose development, gauging student proximity to functioning independently (Poehner, 2011). In addition to providing a diagnosis, the teacher is also providing instruction to facilitate the student's growth towards independence. Thus assessment and instruction are "dialectically integrated" (Poehner, 2007) during dynamic assessment. The ultimate purpose of providing assistance to the student is not merely to arrive at the answer or solve the problem, but to guide the student to more independent work. Ultimately, the students are guided to use their internalized knowledge and newly developed tools for future tasks. Development is evidenced in how students solve increasingly more difficult tasks (Poehner & Lantolf, 2010). Examples of this process will be provided in a later section of this paper.

### **How is dynamic assessment different from other types of assessment?**

The theoretical foundation of dynamic assessment is unlike that of traditional types of assessment. Poehner and Lantolf (2005) discuss these



foundations by quoting Valsiner (2001), who claims that most assessments are based on a “past-to-present” view wherein development is rooted in a person’s history, and is progressing to some end result. From a DA perspective, development occurs in a “present-to-future” fashion. The focus is on the process of present development as a means to predict future capabilities. As teachers work with students, they are able to contribute actively to the developmental process, as well as identify the mediation needed to help students according to their potential (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005).

DA differs from both summative assessment, which is meant to measure student achievement, and formative assessment, which in general refers to methods which provide feedback during or after assessment to improve student learning. Formative assessment is an unstructured method by which the teacher intervenes or uses scaffolding techniques to guide the student toward a goal. Although DA is closely related to formative assessment in this respect, DA is based on a pedagogical foundation of mental development and is therefore concerned with impacting the student’s ability to complete future tasks or goals (Poehner, 2007). This concept of transfer or transcendence implies that through dynamic assessment, a student will be able to solve increasingly more complicated tasks.

### **How does dynamic assessment work in the language classroom?**

As mentioned in the above paragraph, DA involves more than scaffolding. Poehner and van Compernelle (2011) claim that “what is missing from scaffolding is a theoretical basis for determining when to offer support and when to withhold it, as well as how to calibrate the quality or degree of support to allow learners some

amount of struggle” (p. 187). Dynamic assessment involves a systematic method for jointly collaborating learning between the student and teacher or tutor and more capable peer. Through observation of student “needs, frustrations, and efforts” the mediator can both alter the mediation/task in order to guide the student towards development and also diagnose potential for future development (Poehner & van Compernelle, 2011, p. 192). For help in the ZPD to be effective, it must be graduated. The teacher offers the minimum appropriate level of assistance to help students function within their own level of ability, gradually offering more explicit help as needed.

Lantolf and Poehner label two distinctive types of dynamic assessment: interventionist and interactionist. Interventionist DA normally consists of pre-scripted hints and prompts that increase in explicitness until the student arrives at the correct answer. During interactionist DA, mediation is not pre-determined but is negotiated between learner and teacher, according to the learner’s needs and responses to mediation (Poehner & Lantolf, 2010). Although intervention methods are more easily quantifiable, interactionist types of DA are generally regarded as being more closely aligned with Vygotsky’s notion of ZPD (Poehner & Lantolf, 2010). The omission of a pre-made script enables the teacher to discover the source of a student’s limitations.

In order to further explore approaches to dynamic assessment, I will review four studies in which interactionist dynamic assessment was used to improve student literacy. The first two studies are closely related and have a focus on reading comprehension strategies. The last two studies, also related, are focused on writing

skills. Following summaries of each study, a classroom application of the two basic procedures for dynamic assessment of both reading and writing will be proposed. In the description of each study, 'mediation session' refers to the interaction between the tutor and learner, wherein the tutor guides the student towards discovering methods for completing a task successfully

### **Study #1: Foreign language text comprehension**

Kozulin and Garb (2002) conducted a study aimed at improving students' reading comprehension through teaching cognitive strategies. The assessment consisted of a test-teach-test model. Students were first given a basic static test, after which the teachers worked with students individually. To help students with incorrect test answers, the teachers targeted the metacognitive strategies needed to successfully complete the task. The teachers then guided students towards building the necessary metacognitive strategies. The re-test showed overall improved scores, thus reflecting students' learning potential to be greater than their initial performance.

### **Study #2: ESL academic reading strategies**

A later study by Kozulin and Garb (2004) followed similar patterns as this 2002 study. Also based on a reading comprehension assessment, this study was aimed at helping immigrant students learning English as a third language with metacognitive learning strategies for reading academic texts. The authors claim that academic text comprehension skills are connected to sociocultural contexts, which may prove challenging for students of different cultural background and learning

history. Kozulin and Garb further assert that academic reading skills are developed as much through cognitive and learning strategies as they are through acquiring the language. The students in the study were administered a standard placement pre-test on reading comprehension. A mediation session followed in which the teacher worked with students to find both the pre-knowledge (such as grammar and vocabulary) needed to answer the test questions as well as the strategies the students could apply. Students were then guided to practice these strategies. Most of the students scored higher on the post-test.

### **Study #3: ESL college-level writing**

Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) assessed level 2 ESL students enrolled in a Writing/Reading course at a university. Students in the test group received weekly mediation sessions with a tutor for help with their essays. During each session, the students began by reading their essay and self-correcting any errors. Following this, the tutor read the essay together with the student and asked guiding questions to help bring errors to the student's attention, moving from general to specific feedback in reaction to students' responses. Prompts ranged from "pay attention to the tense of the verb," to "use the past participle of the verb here." The tutor also provided grammar explanations if needed. For each guiding question provided by the tutor, the mediation was rated on a scale of 0 – 12 from implicit to explicit:

0. Tutor asks student to read, find errors prior to meeting.
1. Construction of collaborative frame prompted by presence of tutor
2. Prompted or focused reading of the sentence that contains the error
3. Tutor indicates that something may be wrong

4. Tutor rejects unsuccessful attempts at recognizing the error.
5. Tutor narrows down the location of the error.
6. Tutor indicates the nature of the error, but does not identify the error.
7. Tutor identifies the error.
8. Tutor rejects learner's unsuccessful attempts at correcting the error
9. Tutor provides clues to help the learner arrive at the correct form.
10. Tutor provides correct form.
11. Tutor provides some explanation for use of the correct form.
12. Tutor provides examples of the correct pattern when other forms of help fail to produce an appropriate responsive action. (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994)

After each session, the students' ZPD was assessed based on the frequency and quality of assistance required from the tutor. Five levels within the ZPD are listed for this study, starting from inter-mental and leading to intra-mental. Levels 1 - 3 represent features which the students are unable to notice independently. Level 4 indicates features the students are able to notice on their own. Level 5 indicates instances where the students are able to correct an error, thus demonstrating automated or self-generated behavior. Students in this study showed progress by beginning to use meta-comments and move toward self-regulation.

#### **Study #4: College-level academic writing**

Coffin and Shrestha (2012) conducted a tutor mediation study with two students enrolled in a college business class. Two interactionist DA sessions were held through Wiki chat and email; the first as a pre-test and the second as a post-

test. For the first session, the students wrote an essay and the tutor provided written feedback using the parameters set by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) and also assigned a set of study activities centered on problems observed in the first draft. The students then completed a separate draft on a new subject using the feedback. The dialogic interactions were analyzed in order to assess student development based on their responses to mediation and the types and amount of mediation needed. This reciprocity was analyzed based on a rubric created by Poehner (2005), as follows:

1. Unresponsive
2. Repeats mediator
3. Responds incorrectly
4. Requests additional assistance
5. Incorporates feedback
6. Overcomes problem
7. Offers explanation
8. Uses mediator as resource
9. Rejects mediator's assistance

In follow-up interviews, both student participants gave positive reactions for the assessment method. They reported the DA increased their confidence and was generally more supportive in contrast to more traditional feedback methods, which normally give little explanation for final grades and focus more on the errors than on expanding development and ability.

Each of the previous studies showed students improved in performance through the DA process. They helped to diagnose problem areas and provide students with direct support in developing strategies, knowledge, and tools for improving performance. The DA sessions also helped teachers understand students' individual learning needs.

### **How can Dynamic Assessment methods be applied to a specific classroom situation?**

Because performing DA successfully can be time-consuming (Coffin & Shrestha, 2012) and usually requires one-on-one interaction between mediator and student, it may not be possible to apply DA methods in the language classroom on a continual basis. In addition, most of the previous studies were not overly explicit with details on the actual DA mediation process. However, the basic frameworks of the activities can be used as a guide for creating similar DA sessions in the classroom using the teacher, classmates, or a tutor as mediator. The example DA sessions are designed for a Level 3 Intensive English as a Second Language course at the college level.

### **Outline for DA of reading comprehension:**

Mirroring studies #1 and #2, a DA procedure for reading comprehension would begin with an initial assessment in reading. This might be a standard reading comprehension test used by the ESL department, a test used for placement purposes, or a sample reading diagnostic test found online or in a textbook. The assessment would contain questions that test students' ability to employ strategies

such as finding the main idea. The teacher would then review the tests to find the areas which students are experiencing the most problems.

During the DA mediation, the student and mediator review the test collaboratively, focusing on incorrect responses on the test. The teacher would begin with implicit questions and proceed to more explicit. For example, when helping students identify the main idea, the teacher could begin by defining the concept of a main idea, and asking the student to reread the passage to find it. An example definition might be: "The main idea is the main reason the author is writing this paper, or the most important point. Usually you can find the main idea if you know what the paper is about. What is the paper about? What is the author trying to tell you?" If the student answers incorrectly, the teacher can provide more explicit guidance by helping the student define key words and pointing out the areas in a text where a main idea is normally indicated. If a student is unable to correctly answer the question after sufficient teacher guidance, the teacher can then explicitly point out the main idea, and explain why it would be considered the main idea.

Through asking about or pointing to key words in the passage, the mediator might also be able to assess whether the student is lacking specific language skills. Gaps in student knowledge can then prompt instruction in important vocabulary or in identifying organizational patterns. As the teacher moves from implicit to explicit questions, the student is guided to focus attention on these key items. For example, the teacher might begin by asking "What do you think is the author's main point in this article? How do you know? What key words show this?" If the student does not seem able or willing to identify the key areas correctly, the teacher can explicitly



point out these components, explain why they are important. For words that are unfamiliar to the student, the teacher can provide a definition with examples. Based on student responses, the mediator would be able to determine whether the student is lacking knowledge of the strategy, has an incomplete understanding of the strategy, or is lacking specific language skills needed to complete the task. The students' responsiveness to support would allow the teacher to determine whether the student is close to mastering the strategy or still requires instruction on the area. Further instruction can ensure the student is able to transfer the same strategic skills to similar assignments.

**Outline for DA of writing skills:**

A dynamic assessment for improving student writing would begin with a writing assignment. Students would write a rough draft on a given topic following guidelines set by the teacher, and submit for review. Before a mediation session, it can be beneficial for the teacher to provide instruction to students on a process for evaluating their own paper and have students review their peer's paper for practice. The teacher would also read student papers and make notes of significant or common errors.

The assessment session would follow guidelines used by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994). During the session, the mediator would begin by first addressing any problems the student encountered during the writing process or any questions they had from peer review. After these issues are addressed, the teacher would bring student attention to a sentence or paragraph which contains an error. An example sentence with an error might be "Yesterday I see a bird fly." If the student is unable

to locate the source of the error after reading aloud, the teacher can narrow down the location or even identify the type of error. For example, the teacher might ask such questions as, "Are you using past tense correctly in this sentence?" In situations where it is apparent the student does not understand the meaning of a grammatical term, the teacher can use this opportunity to explain the definition of past tense. Finally, if the previous prompts are unsuccessful, the teacher will point out the exact error: "You used the word *see* here, which is incorrect." The student will be given a chance to correct the error independently, and the teacher will provide increasingly explicit clues until the student identifies the correct grammatical form. The teacher might ask "Do you know the past tense of see?" and "Why should this word be past tense?" To help solidify the knowledge of the correct form, the teacher will end by providing an explanation of verbs with irregular past tense and further examples of the grammatical concept.

As mediation occurs, the teacher would assess student responses and receptivity. Student responses are ranked from 1 to 9, as outlined by Poehner (2005):

1. Was student unresponsive to mediation?
2. Did student repeat mediator?
3. Did student respond incorrectly to mediator's prompt?
4. Did student request additional assistance?
5. Was there evidence of student incorporating feedback?
6. Was there evidence that student overcame the problem?
7. Did student offer an explanation for how they overcame the problem?

8. Did student only use the mediator as a resource?
9. Did student reject the mediator's assistance?

Answering “yes” to questions with lower numbers might indicate areas where the student will still require mediation, while answering “yes” on higher numbers might show areas where the student is closer to arriving at an independent solution. Through assessing student responses in this way, the teacher will be able to ascertain which skills the student has developed and which skills will need to be fostered through further assistance. If certain skills are predominately lacking among groups of students, the teacher can also provide group or classroom instruction on that specific area.

### **Conclusion**

The preceding outlines for implementing dynamic assessment procedures are meant only to be used as a base for constructing more specific DA activities. Teachers are likely to find that adjustment will be required based on class size, demographic, age, and overall classroom atmosphere. Each class is unique just as each student is unique. A general guideline allows teachers a starting point to more easily create activities for incorporating dynamic assessment principles in the classroom.

As DA is rooted in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, it is based on a series of theoretical foundations of learning that may vary from that of most standard educational foundations. Many of the practices teachers are accustomed to derive from a different set of beliefs about learning and development. The idea of using

hints and prompts during a test seems almost like cheating. It is the antithesis of isolated paper tests performed in the privacy of cardboard cubicles. However, most teachers would agree that the main purpose of education is learning and development, and test scores are a secondary concern. With the appropriate teacher focus, it seems possible to use similar dynamic approaches in a large classroom

Teachers who have re-framed their instructional methods based on SCT principles will find it easier to incorporate activities which support sociocultural development. Dynamic assessment practices can help integrate instruction with assessment, thus focusing the attention on learning rather than merely passing the class. Dynamic assessment sessions can guide students through mediation towards completing tasks, while the teacher is better able to assess their current and potential capacities. Interaction during DA is a collaborative effort which leads to improvement of both the product of development and the process of development itself (Lantolf & Poehner, 2010). The result is that students are not only able to grow as individuals, but the teacher is better able to assess students on an individual basis.

CULTURE ARTIFACT

*English as an international language:*

*Exploring perceptions of English teachers in Japan*

## INTRODUCTION

The following artifact was written for a Research in Second Language Learning course, taught by Dr. Karin deJonge-Kannan. The topic was personally relevant to me and my future teaching career. I had been growing concerned about the way English is perceived to people in other countries. Is English viewed as an imposition, borne from colonialism? Does English threaten the existence of native languages? In my research, I came across the idea of teaching English as an international language. People in other countries need English as a shared language to communicate across countries and cultures, and English instruction can reflect this wide usage. My proposed research plan is to investigate instructional methods in Japan, to discover how English language and culture is presented. I would like to carry out this research in the future. The results might lead to concrete suggestions for improvements in the way English is taught in Japan and other countries.

### **Abstract**

This objective of this proposed study is to assess teacher perceptions of how English is taught in Japan, given its status as an international language. English is used globally among persons of varying first languages and native cultures as a shared mode of communication (Seidlhofer, 2005), and the widespread use of English has transformed the language into a conglomeration of 'World Englishes' (Crystal, 2011). As English use increases in Japan, its influence affects the people's views of language, culture, race, ethnicity, and identity (Kubota, 1998). Teaching English in consideration of its international status thus involves redefining culture, curriculum development, and pronunciation. The insights gained from teachers in both university and adult English language schools in Japan will aid in assessing the current state of English language education and improving pre-service teacher training.

## **Introduction**

This proposed study is based on the following question: If English as an international language is a means of communication among people of various first languages, how does this impact the way in which it is taught as a foreign language? With a specific focus on the teaching of English in Japan, the literature review will provide an analysis of what is meant by the term 'English as an international language', including definitions of native and non-native speakers and parameters of global English use. A brief summary of the consequences of the spread of English will be included. The literature review will conclude with an analysis of the implications for teaching English as an international language, including culture, curriculum development, pronunciation, teacher education, and teacher beliefs. The proposed study follows a methodology of surveys and interviews of English language teachers and classroom observations at various English language programs and universities in Japan. The purpose of the study will be to gather perceptions and experiences of teachers in preparing their students to use English in a variety of international contexts.

## **Literature Review**

### **English as an international language**

English is distinguished as an international language in terms of both number of non-native speakers and the official or special recognition English is granted in many countries (McKay, 2002). An estimated two billion people use English today, of which only 400 million are native speakers (Westcomb, 2011). As native speakers have become the minority, this implies a question of English language 'ownership',



and the dominance of native speaker models in English language teaching (Coskun, 2011). Spoken as a first, second, and foreign language by people all over the world, English can no longer be identified with one single culture or country. The language has developed into regional varieties of 'World Englishes' adapted for use among people of the same culture and for cross-cultural exchanges (Crystal, 2011). The very definition of English as an international language implies that no one group can claim ownership of it. Crystal (2011) writes: "The more a language becomes a national, then an international, then a global language, the more it ceases to be in the ownership of its originators" (p. 69).

To help clarify the definition of native and non-native speakers, many scholars refer to Kachru's (1989) categorization of English according to Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle refers to countries such as England, U.S., Australia, and New Zealand, where English is the first and sometimes only language for the majority of people. The Outer Circle includes countries such as Singapore, India, and Nigeria, where English has spread because of colonization and is spoken as a 'second' or 'additional' language, alongside local languages. The Expanding Circle comprises countries such as China and Germany where English is the first foreign language taught in schools, and is spread as a result of foreign language learning (Kachru, 1989).

Graddol (1997) criticized Kachru's model for giving precedence to Inner Circle speakers and miscounting the growth of English in Expanding Circle countries. He suggested instead a row of overlapping circles, with the influence of English spreading from the Expanding Circle to the Inner. Graddol also renamed the

circle categories as *first language speakers* (L1), or those who speak English as the first and sometimes only language; *second language speakers* (L2), who use English as a second or additional language, and *foreign language speakers* (FL) or those who learn English as a foreign language. These reorganized circles place emphasis on the idea that “those who speak English alongside other languages will outnumber first-language speakers and, increasingly, will decide the global future of the language” (Graddol, 1997, pg. 10). Both Kachru’s and Graddol’s terms will be used in this paper.

More than seventy countries have given English special status by either making it the official language or requiring it as a foreign language in school (McKay, 2002). English is the dominant language of the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, world policy organizations, and most of the world's large businesses (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996). Thus, learning English has become either a necessity for communication in some settings or an asset highly regarded as beneficial in the global economic market.

In 2000, the Japanese prime minister proposed to adopt “English as an official language” as part of Japan’s plan to cultivate Japanese youth who are able to use English in the workplace (Hashimoto, 2009). Included in the proposal document, titled “Prime Minister’s Commission on Japan’s Goals in the 21st Century”, was the notion that a large percentage of the Japanese population possessed inadequate English-speaking abilities. The author of the document further claims that this inadequacy “imposes restrictions on exchanges with foreigners and creates occasions when the ideas and opinions of Japanese people

are not appropriately evaluated” (cited in Hashimoto, 2009). This statement emphasizes the disadvantage Japanese may encounter in globalized settings in which English is the dominant language. In a sense, the Prime Minister’s Commission offers a compromise “between the maintenance of Japan’s cultural independence and the promotion of English as an indispensable tool for international market competitiveness” (Hashimoto, 2009, p. 28). This tension between national identity and the pressure of globalization will be further explored in the following section.

### **Consequences of the spread of English on native languages and culture**

As the world becomes more linguistically integrated, many people view the spread of English and “western-influenced global culture” as a threat to local languages and traditions (McKay, 2002, p. 22). Kubota (1998) writes, “perhaps the most troubling way English exerts influence in Japan is in affecting the formation of people’s views of language, culture, race, ethnicity, and their identity” (p. 296). The influence on Japan by Inner Circle countries is reflected in the way English is taught. According to Kubota (1998), the English teaching materials available in Japanese classrooms present a negative view of non-westerners. Some Japanese have expressed resentment over the perceived Americanization of their society (Kubota, 2002) and others regard the dominance of English in Japan-U.S. relations as an example of unjust linguistic imperialism (Tsuda, 1994).

Teaching English in a way that combats its imperialistic roots entails addressing the power inequality associated with its history. As teachers of English play a role in the expansion of worldwide English, it is important for them to

understand “whose interests this process has served, and what ideologies and structures currently favour the increased expansion of English at the expense of other languages” (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996, p. 441). Canagarajah (2002) states that because “in opting to learn and use English, students are making complex ideological and social choices” (p. 157), it is important for teachers to understand the history and effects of the spread of the English language.

Teachers can also help dispel some of the more negative connotations surrounding English by exposing students to a variety of Englishes from Outer and Expanding Circle speakers (Matsuda, 2003). Currently, English taught in Japan carries a significant Inner Circle-orientation, which is not only inadequate for preparing students for interactions among different types of English users on a global scale but also “fails to empower them with ownership of English” (Matsuda, 2003, p. 721). Details on the inclusion of World Englishes in the classroom will be discussed further in the Pronunciation section of this paper.

### **Implications of teaching English**

McKay (2002) claims that the international status of the English language impacts its instruction differently than the teaching of most other second or foreign languages in terms of culture, curriculum development, pronunciation, and teacher education. Each of these aspects will be explored in detail, with a final consideration addressing the importance of teachers’ beliefs.

#### **Culture**

Even if they are not implicitly aware of their emphasis, EFL teachers promote either assimilation to the target language’s culture or identity with students’ own

culture (Zacharias, 2003). If English as an international language does not belong to any one nation or culture, this implies questions for which culture(s) are taught, how culture is taught, and the role of the students' own culture in the classroom.

In Japan, there appears to be a strong emphasis on teaching English as an international language within the framework of Japanese traditions and culture (Hashimoto, 2009). In addition, many policies regarding English as a Foreign Language associate intercultural understanding with understanding of the western world, or globalization with 'Americanization' (Kubota, 2002). Because Japanese students will encounter English from a variety of cultural backgrounds, this heavy emphasis on Japanese and western culture could fail to provide students with a more inclusive view of the world. Yamanaka (2006) writes, "there is a need to include as wide a variety of cultural elements as possible in teaching and learning English, in order for Japanese students to communicate effectively with people from other countries" (p. 62).

Many scholars recommend teaching intercultural communication skills in conjunction with teaching culture in the English classroom (Bennett, 1998; Byram, 2000; Forsman, 2010; and Young & Sachdev, 2011). Intercultural communication is well matched for the EFL classroom "against the background of today's complex and rapidly changing societies with increasing amounts of linguistic and cultural influences from different sources for students to encounter" (Forsman, 2010, p. 503). Teachers and students with cross-cultural communication skills are able to adapt their interactions based on the culture around them. Byram (2000) has suggested the assessment of such skills be based on competencies rather than

knowledge of facts. He defined intercultural competence as the ability to see relationships between cultures, an analytical understanding of one's own and others' cultures, and an awareness of one's own perspectives. He further categorizes intercultural competence into five assessable elements:

1. *Attitudes*: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own.
2. *Knowledge*: of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction.
3. *Skills of interpreting and relating*: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own.
4. *Skills of discovery and interaction*: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.
5. *Critical cultural awareness/political education*: an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries (Byram, 2000).

Matsuda (2011) claims that development of these competencies is important both in the classroom and in the outside world: "The ability to negotiate meaning and overcome communication difficulties is particularly crucial in EIL settings, where each person brings in their own linguistic and cultural background to approach communication" (p. 336). The competence model subsequently implies

that the language teacher encourage the use of English as a tool for communication rather than the achievement of native-like proficiency.

Nguyen (2011) writes:

If the goal of ELT is to develop fluent speakers of English who are capable of accommodating themselves to a wide variety of cultural perspectives without losing their own sense of self and identity, any decision to include only 'NS norms' in the curriculum is both limited and limiting. (p. 18)

As native-speaker norms are the common standard in most EFL classrooms (Matsuda, 2003), the role of creating a more diversified curriculum invariably falls to the teacher.

### **Curriculum development and standardized English**

Effective teaching of English as an international language implies the use of instructional materials that provide a wide array of language varieties and culture sources (Coskun, 2011). The majority of beginner textbooks approved by Japan's ministry of education are based on American English, with most characters (i.e., people) in these books from Inner Circle countries and Japan (Matsuda, 2003). In a study of both Junior and Senior High School textbooks, it was found that the majority of culture represented was either American or British, despite Japan's political and trading ties with many Inner- and Expanding Circle countries (Yamanaka, 2006). Matsuda (2011) suggests that if students are only presented with one instructional model, "an impression might form that it is the only correct variety" (p. 371). This impression might have negative effects on the students' encounters with other varieties of English users, including attitude, confidence in communicating with other varieties, and ability to understand various Englishes (Matsuda, 2011). Because of lack of representation in textbooks, it is therefore left

to teachers to help students understand that the dominant model of English language is only one of many varieties of English which exist in the world.

### **Pronunciation and Non-Native vs. Native speakers**

Interviews conducted with Japanese students and student teachers showed strong preference for American and British English, as students viewed these Englishes as 'pure', 'authentic', and 'correct' (Matsuda, 2003; Suzuki, 2010). This bias towards first-language speakers is reflected in the demographics of English teachers in Japan. As of the year 2000, 98% of the 5,444 Assistant Language Teachers (AET) recruited by JET, a government-sponsored English teaching program, were from Inner Circle countries (Monbukagakusho, 2001, translated in Matsuda, 2003). Teachers of English from Inner Circle countries have an unfair advantage over local teachers when entering the ELT profession (Zacharias, 2003).

Canagarajah (1999) refers to the term *native-speaker fallacy*, a phrase originally used by Phillipson (1992), in response to the widespread preference for native speaking teachers. Canagarajah further states that more than eighty percent of all English teachers are second or foreign language speakers of English and many benefits are associated with teachers who can speak the first language of the students. For example, such teachers can provide perspectives on local language and cultures (Sowden, 2011). As second or foreign language speakers of English have undergone the process of acquiring English as a second language, it also follows they might be better equipped to understand the needs of their students (Seidlhofer, 2005). Teachers who speak the students' first language also possess the ability to translate difficult concepts, explain the purpose of the lesson or activity,



talk to students one-on-one, assess actual comprehension of material, and also encourage students to be more at ease in the classroom (Zacharias, 2003).

Second and foreign English speaking teachers from outside the students' language background can also provide perspectives on World Englishes, thus preventing students from feeling their own English is unacceptable if not conforming to Inner Circle varieties (Matsuda, 2003). Exposing students to English varieties might help them realize that the success of communication with other English speakers does not necessarily depend on the forms of English they produce, but rather on their communication skills (Suzuki, 2010).

While such considerations as the incorporation of World Englishes and teaching intercultural competence have been proven effective, teachers may or may not have been trained to include these aspects in their classroom. Investigating teacher's pre-service training in this study will aid in the improvement of future teacher education programs.

### **Implications of teaching English: Teacher education**

The majority of programs for pre-service EFL teachers in Japan are centered on the Inner Circle (Matsuda, 2003). Scholars such as Snow (2006) stress the importance of exposing teachers to varieties of English beyond the Inner Circle and "deconstructing the myth of the native speaker" (p. 267). Suzuki (2010), an English professor at multiple Japanese universities, also recommends courses in multicultural education and intercultural communication. These courses would include exposure to non-standard varieties of English spoken by both first and second language users, the observation of interactions between L2 speakers, and

analysis of the communication strategies employed by second language speakers of English (Suzuki, 2010).

Along with courses on World Englishes and communication, Sifakis (2007) suggests that pre-service training include discussions of the English language's history and influence in relation to teachers' own identity and experiences. It is assumed by the author of this study that the English teachers in Japan come from a variety of pre-service backgrounds and training programs. One purpose of this study will be to ascertain the contents of various teachers' pre-service education. As teaching styles and methodologies are based on the teachers' background experiences and beliefs in addition to training, teachers' individual beliefs will also be explored.

### **Teacher beliefs**

Tsuda (1994) proposed the labeling of two distinct language policy paradigms, Diffusion-of-English and Ecology-of-Language, which are reflected in language policies throughout the world and influence the mode and direction in which English is spread. The Diffusion-of-English paradigm to its extreme supports monolingualism, ideological globalization, and the homogenization of world culture. Followers of this paradigm promote the expansion of English as a business tool, or as a doorway to international opportunities. In contrast, the Ecology-of-Language paradigm extreme is associated with multilingualism, maintenance of language and cultures, protection of national sovereignties, and the promotion of foreign language education (Tsuda, 1994). These two extreme positions are endpoints at opposite ends of a belief system.

Teachers of English invariably position themselves on the spectrum between these two paradigms through their beliefs and teaching practice. In addition, the language policy of a teacher's country, culture, organization, or institution will likely affect the teacher's practice. It is therefore important for teachers to be aware of their own perspective and to know "whose agenda we are following" (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996, p. 441). Ricento & Hornberger (1996) place the teacher at the heart of language policy, rather than the player who merely implements what is passed down:

The most fundamental concerns of ESL/EFL teachers—that is, what will I teach? how will I teach? and why do I teach?—are all language policy issues...Teachers have daily opportunities to make small changes in their practices, from the topics they choose for discussion, to how they structure the classroom, to the interest they demonstrate in students' problems. They may reinforce dominant cultural values (to one degree or another), or they may question and even oppose those values, thereby modeling possible alternative views of social reality often unavailable to students struggling to survive in a new culture or acquiring English for instrumental purposes. (p. 420)

Teachers often base their instruction more on beliefs rather than research-based knowledge (Borg, 2011). These beliefs are evident in teachers' behaviors in the classroom through teaching approaches, types of materials, and types of activities used (Seidlhofer, 2005). As teachers play a significant role in the shifting of attitudes regarding English as an international language, studying their beliefs can provide insight for both teachers and scholars in the education field.

Although there has been a great deal of discussion on the issues surrounding English and its implications as an international language, much of this has been limited to the abstract or theoretical. Research for pedagogical practice is still in its infancy and teachers have not been given applicable suggestions for making

improvements based on the need to adapt their teaching (Matsuda, 2011). With this outlook on the responsibility and power of teachers to shape the changing landscape of English education, the following study will provide a glimpse into the current state of the field from teachers' first-hand vantage point. The results will show whether teachers are aware of the implications of teaching English as an international language; their perspectives on curriculum development, pronunciation, and culture when teaching English as an international language; and whether teachers' methodological approach reflects their perspectives. Special attention will be given to discovering practices for teaching culture, as well as investigating whether teachers feel they are provided with adequate instructional materials, strategies, and training for preparing their students to use English in international contexts.

### **Research Questions**

The questions guiding this research are as follows:

1. To what extent are English teachers in Japan aware of the history and implications surrounding English as an international or global language?
2. To what extent are these implications part of the belief system of teachers in Japan?
3. To what extent are these beliefs evidenced in their teaching practice?
4. To what extent have teachers been provided with materials and training to prepare students to use English as an international language?

## **Methodology**

In order to achieve triangulation for this study, data will be collected from a variety of sources and using three different methods: survey, interview, and observation.

### **Participants**

The survey questionnaire will be distributed to a pool of university and adult English language classes within Tokyo, Japan with both Japanese and English language options. The surveys will be sent with the assistance of English language companies such as JET, AEON, and ECC Foreign Language Institutes of Japan, and through individual universities such as McGill University, Temple University, Sophia University International College, and Lakeland College Japan. A request for volunteer teachers for classroom observation and interviews will be included with requests for questionnaires within these classroom spheres. Volunteers will then be narrowed to twenty teachers, with considerations for including a diversity of both native and non-native speaking teachers, as well as a balance of genders, ages, and experience levels.

### **Survey questionnaire**

Survey questions, found in Appendix A, are partially derived from Zacharias' (2003) survey of English teachers in Indonesia.

### **Classroom observations**

The classroom observation will focus on materials used in the lesson, the varieties of English present in the lesson, the use of culture, and preferred source of proper pronunciation. Observations will be based on a rubric listed in Appendix B.

### **Teacher interviews**

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted after classroom observations in Japanese and English, depending on teacher preference. Interviews will be audio-taped, transcribed, and analyzed using comparisons with class observation and survey data.

Questions for guiding each interview can be found in Appendix C.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The data will be analyzed by organizing responses to the survey questionnaire using frequencies and statistical testing; compiling written comments on survey questions, analyzing for patterns, and selecting especially insightful comments for inclusion in the research report; classifying observation data according to areas, and searching for common themes found across classrooms; and compiling teacher responses to interview questions according to topic and general response, sorting into groups according to differences in approaches and beliefs. Trends found from one data set will be cross-examined with other data sets in order to ensure credibility of themes.

**APPENDIX A**

## Questionnaire

1. What do you feel is the general motivation for studying English in Japan?
  - a. (Please pick three most important reasons)
  - b. To access more information
  - c. To study overseas
  - d. To read English books
  - e. To write in English
  - f. To get a job
  - g. To compete with other foreign scholars
  - h. To gain prestige
  - i. To communicate with people from other countries
  - j. Other:
2. What type of materials is most helpful for learning English?
  - a. Published materials from English-speaking countries
  - b. Materials published locally in Japan
  - c. Either
3. Please provide a brief explanation for your choices above.
4. Do you feel it is better to use native speakers to teach:  
(strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree)
  - a. Pronunciation
  - b. Grammar
  - c. Speaking

- d. Writing
  - e. Listening
  - f. Reading
  - g. Culture
5. Please provide a brief explanation for your preferences above.
6. Using the students' L1 (Japanese) is useful for:
- (strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree)
- a. Checking student understanding
  - b. Explaining content of texts
  - c. Giving feedback to individual students
  - d. Explaining grammar
  - e. Explaining vocabulary
  - f. Giving instructions
  - g. Building rapport with students
  - h. The students' L1 should never be used in class.
  - i. Other:
7. I regularly/often/sometimes/never use the students' L1 for:
- a. Checking student understanding
  - b. Explaining content of texts
  - c. Giving feedback to individual students
  - d. Explaining grammar
  - e. Explaining vocabulary
  - f. Giving instructions



- g. Building rapport with students
  - h. The students' L1 should never be used in class.
8. Please provide a brief explanation of your choices above.
9. Do you feel that teachers should include the culture of English-speaking countries, and to what extent? Please explain.
10. How important is cross-cultural understanding in English language teaching?
- Please answer the following questions about your background:
11. Sex: Male/Female
12. Age:
13. Highest academic qualification:
- a. Bachelor's degree
  - b. Master's degree
  - c. Doctorate degree
  - d. Other
14. Number of years teaching experience
15. Would you be willing to participate in a 15-minute interview?
16. Would you be willing to open your classroom to an observation conducted by a researcher?

## **APPENDIX B**

### Classroom Observation Rubric

#### Classroom materials

1. Were instructional materials published locally, in Inner Circle countries, or outside the Inner Circle?

2. What types of materials were used (texts, media, images, other)
3. To what extent did materials include non-native English varieties?
4. To what extent did materials promote English as an international language or inclusion of world cultures?

#### Students' L1 language

1. To what extent, if any, was Japanese language used in the classroom (for clarification, instruction, explaining content or grammar, building of repertoire, etc.)?

#### Culture

1. How was content related to student's own culture?
2. Which culture(s) were included in the instruction, and how were they presented?

#### Teacher's attitude

1. What views on English varieties were evident in teacher's instruction?
2. How did the teacher approach standards of English and pronunciation?

### **APPENDIX C**

#### Teacher Interviews

1. What is your understanding of English as an international language?
2. Based on your understanding, how do you feel English should be taught to reflect its status as an international language?
3. Which variety of English do you think represents the best model?
4. Do you feel that native speakers are better teachers for English? Why/why not?

5. How do you teach correct pronunciation to your students?
6. What do you feel is your student's opinion of correct/standard English and pronunciation?
7. For what purposes do you feel most of your students are learning English? What groups of people do they plan to interact with? Which countries do they plan to visit?
8. Do you feel there is a role for the student's first language (Japanese) in the classroom? Do you include Japanese when teaching English, and in what context?
9. Do you try to include World English varieties in your classroom? Do you feel including varieties is necessary? How do you introduce students to different types of English?
10. What is your opinion of the textbooks and materials provided for your course?
11. Which materials have you found to be the best for your classroom? Do you prefer textbooks from locally-published or from English speaking countries?
12. How do you teach culture in your classroom? What countries do you focus on?
13. Do you teach intercultural communication skills or cross-cultural understanding? If so, what methods have you used to teach these skills/values?

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

## INTRODUCTION

The following annotated bibliography provides a review of the prominent sources featured in my portfolio. Each citation is followed by a summary of the article or book and my personal reaction. I begin with a source on Zen and reflective practice. The bibliography is then organized by theme, and mirrors the order of the teaching philosophy: standards and purposes for language learning, research on effective practices based on communication, Sociocultural Theory and assessment, interactive activities, pragmatics and culture, English as an international language, study abroad, and classroom environment (including anxiety and motivation).

**Source**

Tremmel, R. (1993). Zen and the art of reflective practice in teacher education.

*Harvard Educational Review*, 63(4), 434-459. doi: 9406150116

**Summary**

Traditionally, approaches to teacher education and reflective teaching have been based on a Western analytical standpoint. Drawing on Zen Buddhism influences and Schön's (1983, as cited in article) notion of "knowledge-in-action", the author proposes an alternative method to reflecting on teaching. This type of reflection implies being immersed in the present moment. Zen teaches mindful awareness in all actions, and returning the mind from wandering to the past or future. It involves concentration in thinking, and observing things as they are. It is difficult for most of us to detach from the stream of consciousness and be passive observers of our own thoughts and actions. The author lists strategies for student teachers to improve their attention to the present. The first of these is a freewriting exercise where students write down their stream of consciousness without restraint. This helps to focus attention to the self and the inner mind's monologue. A second method is explicitly discussing the art of paying attention with student teachers. Teachers need to be flexible and adjust the direction of the class based on their observations. A third method is to write about an event that occurred while teaching, and to reflect on their thoughts and emotions both during and after the event. This can help students pinpoint the sources of problems and find solutions.

**Reaction**

I have struggled with attention issues for most of my life, although I have never been diagnosed with ADD. I believe this is a common problem for many people, especially as there are so many things to distract us. Zen and mindfulness are very appealing concepts to me, as I strive to pay better attention to the present moment in all my daily actions. When I teach yoga, I strive to be fully aware of my students and their comfort levels. Language classrooms are much less relaxed, but it can be just as important to be aware of students in a setting that requires interaction and an inviting atmosphere.

**Source**

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

**Summary**

This handbook provides a reference tool for teachers who wish to align their teaching with performance and proficiency standards such as ACTFL. Each section includes reference to the five Cs of Foreign Language Education (from *The Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*). The five Cs are listed as Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. The focus on these areas shows evidence of a shift in language education from grammar and accuracy to communication and context. Providing students with many opportunities to interact in the language in meaningful, task-oriented activities can have a great impact on the advancement of their proficiency. The textbook suggests teachers become very familiar with the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines to help them

get a clear idea of what students should be able to do. Based on these standards, teachers can arrange activities that encourage students to practice the skills they will need to advance to the next level. Students need to not only be exposed to natural conversations in the target language but to also have many opportunities to create their own natural output. This textbook provides ideas for instruction based on research both old and new, centered on the three modes of communication: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational.

### **Reaction**

Standards are important for helping the teacher to plan both instruction and assessment. I would like to stay knowledgeable of ACTFL and other standards in order to ensure that I stay on course and am keeping my students' proficiency in mind. I also plan to have a steady balance of interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational activities. Cooperative task-based activities can result in higher achievement in the language while improving retention and interpersonal skills (Johnson & Johnson, 1987, as cited in textbook). The teacher can prepare students for the task by activating prior knowledge and introducing necessary vocabulary and grammar. Sufficient modeling ensures that students understand what is expected of them.

### **Source**

Rivers, W.M. (1981). *Teaching foreign-language skills* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.



**Summary**

This book is both a collection of references for teachers and an in-depth look at Rivers' personal teaching philosophies. She begins with a look at objectives for language teaching and discusses the benefits and disadvantages of common teaching methods such as the Direct Method, Reading Method, Grammar Translation, and the Audio-Lingual Method. This is followed by an overview of research in language acquisition such as developmental stages and views on how languages should be taught to further reflect the "natural" process that children undergo when learning their first language. The author makes the point that neither systematic rule-memorizing nor free-form communication classes seem to produce optimal language use. She writes that a focus on "manipulation of language elements which occur in fixed relationships in clearly defined closed systems" must be combined with "the expression of personal meaning" (p. 95). The main criteria of activities are thus designed to allow students to express personal meaning in a way that reflects normal use of language in everyday life within the boundaries of the language's syntax and structure.

**Reaction**

Originally published in 1968, this second edition contains useful references and resources for teachers that are still, in my opinion, applicable today. While reading a few of Rivers' articles in a recent collection of essays on college-level language teaching, I found a reference to this book. I was impressed with Rivers' approach and interested in learning more from her. This book provides a comprehensive look at many of the principles of language teaching which I have

encountered, and many which I have yet to research. I am interested in learning more about the stages of reading and writing instruction and best methods for approaching those mediums of language.

### **Source**

Rivers, W.M. (2002). *Teaching languages in college: Curriculum and content*. Chicago, IL: National Textbook Company.

### **Summary**

As technology and communication advance, interest in foreign languages and international studies is expanding. This book contains a collection of articles for teachers and administrators who are interested in promoting foreign languages. The editor states that teachers and administrators should take advantage of this “Sputnik” era of language for students’ needs to adapt to an increasingly competitive and interdependent society. One way to meet this need is by adjusting for a wider and more diverse student body. Language courses should be of value and interest to students at any level. Rivers writes: “A boring language experience for great masses of students develops and perpetuates anti-language attitudes in the adult community” (p. 4). Many of the articles found here provide rationales for language study, which include the development of intellectual powers, understanding how language functions, and the ability to express oneself within another framework. Rivers discusses the need to anticipate the diverse motivations and backgrounds of first-year language students, and to consider offering a variety of courses aimed at different types of students.

**Reaction**

The information and arguments presented in these articles are relevant to both school policy makers and teachers. I find it very interesting that the editor compares the current foreign language field to the space race of the *Sputnik* era. Languages are constantly changing, and the research for teaching language is also advancing. Teaching a language is definitely not a static practice. Teachers must not only adapt to the shifts in pragmatics and use of the language, but also to the advances in methodologies and technologies, as well as new types of students. This seems to be the never-ending challenge for teachers: to transform their classroom into an interesting, interactive environment where students of varying academic levels and backgrounds can feel comfortable, engaged, and also feel that they are progressing.

**Source**

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

**Summary**

To Vygotsky, human development is a process that occurs through interaction between interpersonal (social) physiological factors and intrapersonal (individual) psychological factors. Through outside stimuli (tools of culture, language, etc.), we can regulate ourselves and change our environment. The changed new environment affects our adaptation through interaction with it. In this sense, we and our environment are constantly changing. For example, in every developmental stage, children attain “the means by which they can competently

affect their world and themselves” (p. 123). Vygotsky claims there can be no universal schema for human development because our culture and environment are constantly changing. Because learning is socially facilitated (not just biological/natural), those with more experience can help us speed up our development by teaching us what they know. Vygotsky uses the term Zone of Proximal Development to describe the difference between students’ actual development – what they are able to accomplish independently, and their potential development – what they are able to accomplish with the aid of a mentor, teacher, or peer.

### **Reaction**

This work provides the foundation for Sociocultural Theory (SCT), which is gaining popularity as a teaching theory. SCT carries many implications for the field of education, much of which goes against current standards of traditional schooling. It stresses involvement rather than direct input, and more importantly places emphasis on development and learning processes. There are some similarities and shared values between SCT and the communicative approach to language teaching. Language is acquired through its use, especially when used with others toward completion of a common task.

### **Source**

Lantolf, J.P., & Poehner, M.E. (2005). Dynamic assessment in the language classroom. *Language Teaching Research* (9)3, 233-265.

**Summary**

Dynamic Assessment (DA) is a construct inspired by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. A colleague of Vygotsky's, Luria, coined the term when comparing 'statistical' to 'dynamic' assessment methods. Statistical assessments are based on the idea that students' results on a test directly reflect their capabilities. Dynamic assessments, however, also show students' potential capabilities through a measurement of their performance when given assistance. One of the goals of DA is to actually improve student performance during the course of the assessment process. This article provides a brief historical overview of various theories on human development and describes how Vygotsky's conceptualization differs from others. The authors view dynamic assessment as based on a 'present-to-future' model, as it provides a method for teachers to monitor development that is emerging while actively contributing to the development as it occurs. By working with students, teachers are able to better understand the type of assistance the students will need in order to reach their next stage of development. Teachers act as mediators by filtering and modifying elements of the environment in a way that will help students learn and grow.

**Reaction**

Lantolf and Poehner are significant contributors to the field of Sociocultural Theory and Dynamic Assessment. Their research and theoretical knowledge is helpful in providing further understanding of Vygotskian theories and ideas. This article was one of many by these authors which I used for my final paper on Dynamic Assessment for improving literacy, in which I compared DA to other

assessment methods and ways of viewing development. The authors spent a little time overviewing the difference between DA and Formative Assessment (FA). Although the two differ in many ways, the shared basic core between the two is the idea that one purpose of assessment should be to help students improve their future performance.

### **Source**

Lantolf, J. P., & Poehner, M. E. (2008). *Sociocultural theory and the teaching of second language*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

### **Summary**

Interest in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory has been increasing in the past years. This collection contains both theoretical interpretations and practical applications of Vygotsky's theories in the language classroom. Topics include the Zone of Proximal Development, mediation, Activity Theory, internalization, and verbalization. The content provides a view of the current state of the field of sociocultural learning and the research being conducted based on its tenets. Although researchers differ on their interpretation of Vygotsky's work, the collection is overall comprehensive and helpful for gaining a deeper understanding of SCT, especially regarding its use in the language classroom. Specific classroom studies were conducted on writing dialogic journals, improving listening comprehension through dynamic assessment, concept-based learning and materialization, service-learning incorporating drama for improving the ZPD, and project-based learning. Each article provides a springboard for further research and study.

**Reaction**

While Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory has many implications for education, scholars have only recently begun to explore applications of SCT in the language classroom. Some of the activities explored in this book are more applicable than others, as it seems many SCT-based works would be difficult to implement in a large class but are better suited for small classrooms or tutor-student interactions. However, I believe it is possible to use many of the methods in the classroom to some degree, such as partner and group work. I was especially interested in the chapter on service-learning experiences for students. Service-learning (for study abroad and local service if available) seems to be the perfect opportunity for students to greatly increase their language proficiency, as such experiences are highly motivating, require negotiation of meaning and direct interaction with target language interlocutors, and also have the potential to have transformative effects on participating students.

**Source**

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

**Summary**

While the information in this book is mostly geared at helping K-12 ESL or bilingual students in integrated classrooms, much of the material can be applied to any classroom with students of any age. It includes strategies for assessing oral language, reading, writing, and the content areas. The introduction provides an in-

depth look at the need to provide students with alternative or authentic assessments. The authors define alternative assessment as “any method of finding out what a student knows or can do that is intended to show growth and inform instruction, and is an alternative to traditional forms of testing, namely, multiple-choice tests” (p. 1). Alternative assessments are “criterion-referenced” and usually authentic in that they reflect classroom activities and real-life scenarios. Traditional forms of assessment do not provide a comprehensive view of student abilities, are less helpful in guiding the teacher towards improved instruction, and are sometimes less valid. Traditional assessment also may be unfair to students who are unfamiliar with the test-taking skills or test types. It is therefore important, especially with ESL learners, to provide a variety of testing methods. The book contains useful techniques for applying various assessments in the classroom, including the use of portfolios, self-assessments, and peer assessments.

### **Reaction**

This book contains valuable and relevant information for my practice, both for teaching English or a foreign language. It provides guidelines for creating authentic assessments, including checklists to ensure tests are reliable, valid, fair, measurable, and have a specific learning objective. It also includes both purpose and procedure for implementing various types of portfolios, and creating assessment activities such as oral reports, reading logs, book talks, and interviews. I plan to use some of these activities in my classroom to assess students on their reading, writing, listening, and speaking abilities as well as guide further instruction.



**Source**

Hadley, A.O. (2001). *Teaching language in context* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.

**Summary**

This methods text for language teachers provides an overview of various teaching theories and practices, along with a literature-based critique of each. Krashen's Monitor Theory is compared to cognitive theory; the former placing more emphasis on the similarities between first and second language acquisition. The book also reviews the ACTFL standards, which are increasingly concerned with performing functions or real-world tasks. The author places heavy emphasis on context, which is defined in the text as "circumstances or settings in which a person uses language" (p. 23). Material should be meaningful, in that it is related to students' existing knowledge. Teachers can activate students' prior schema, a term coined by Bartlett (1932), by relating new language items with concepts familiar to students. This can be done through "authentic discourse-length input or through language learning materials that simulate authentic input" (p. 161) or visual organizers. The text also lists practices for the development of proficiency in listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Regarding listening comprehension, the author cites James (1986) who recommended teachers introduce more listening activities early in the learning process to motivate students and help them feel successful. Lund's (1990) functions of the listening comprehension process, accompanied by possible student listener responses, are listed to guide teachers' listening instruction.

**Reaction**

For pre-teachers such as myself who need a review of important concepts and ideas for second language teaching, these types of textbooks can be very helpful. This book provides both the pros and cons of different theories and practices, and each section is solidly based on research. I agree with the author's premise that context should be given high priority in the language classroom. Students should be exposed to the language as it is truly used in the target language setting. Simply learning the grammar and vocabulary is insufficient for students who wish to use the language outside the classroom. Authentic materials are essential for creating an environment that closely mirrors the outside world.

**Source**

Berns, M. (1990). *Contexts of competence: Sociocultural considerations in communicative language teaching*. New York, NY: Plenum.

**Summary**

The push for communicative competence has shifted focus to the contexts and functions of language use. Berns claims teachers should have an understanding of the social and cultural context of the target language and the purposes of speakers in using the language. The cultural setting and personal history of each speaker determines what is appropriate for each situation. Speakers depend on context to make the language intelligible across cultures, and they also depend on an appropriate model as a standard for competence. Berns discusses the use of communicative language teaching to accommodate language use in widely diverse settings. Communicative language teaching should not be defined as one single

method, but should have certain characteristics. These characteristics include recognizing culture for its role in shaping language, assessing competence in relative terms, allowing for diversity, and viewing language as a social tool for making meaning. This book provides samples of communicative language teaching approaches based on Germany, Japan, and India. The example for Japanese is proposed for use in beginning level EFL courses in Japan, using Savignon's interactional approach. Activities include problem-solving tasks, explorations of dialogue, and other tasks such as describing the students' neighborhood. Attention to situation, meaning, context, culture, and both the communicative and symbolic function of the language are considered.

### **Reaction**

The main function of language is the communication of desires, needs, thoughts, and ideas. To reflect this, language instruction should be based on doing things using language rather than on recitation and drills. In addition, activities should allow students to use the languages for their individual social purposes by permitting a range of purposes and target social situations and groups. I think communicative language teaching approaches have much to offer, and I appreciate Berns' listing of the characteristics of this approach. I agree with the considerations for diversity and variety in language, as well as the stress on relativity in terms of correctness.

**Source**

Knutson, E. K. (1997). Reading with a purpose: Communicative reading tasks for the foreign language classroom. *Foreign Language Annals*, 30(1), 49-57.

doi:10.1111/j.1944-9720.1997.tb01316.x

**Summary**

There are many factors which can affect a students' ability to read and comprehend a text. This article is a discussion on the effect of purpose. Knutson identifies two main purposes: reading for pleasure and reading for information. Reading for pleasure is not generally associated with the academic context; however, Krashen (1982, cited in article) has stated that pleasure reading can be an effective source of comprehensible input. Schools can keep libraries with literature in various languages, including short reading such as magazines and children's books. Teachers can also assign students to read a text of their choice and either present the reading to the class or write a report. Reading for interest and reading for a purpose can increase motivation and students' ability to comprehend the text. A study showed that bringing students' awareness to specific information in a text can spur interest, especially if the information is relevant to the student. Teachers can assign students to read a text to fulfill a specific goal, either based on academic purposes or real-world purposes. Real-world purposes include reading travel brochures towards the task of planning a trip. Other tasks can include re-constructing the story with peers or drawing pictures based on the text.

**Reaction**

Pre-reading activities have been shown to enhance comprehension, but they can also provide students with a sense of purpose for reading. Previewing a text as a class can bring students' attention to areas of interest, while eliciting predictions and rousing curiosity. Reading assignments should have relevant meaning to students and should go beyond bland textbook narrations such as "the Johnson family went on vacation..." to which students have no personal connection. My undergrad work was in English education, and I am very partial to language arts. I would like to use my background to provide students with tasks which help them interact with reading assignments at a personal level.

**Source**

Adair-Hauck, B., & Donato, R. (2002). The PACE Model: A story-based approach to meaning and form for standards-based language learning. *The French Review*, 76(2), 265-276. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3132708>

**Summary**

The PACE model provides a way for teachers to use a more dialogic approach to learning grammar, through using authentic text, video, or audio material. PACE stands for Presentation, Attention, Co-Construction, and Extension. During the first stage, the teacher presents the material to the class by building on prior knowledge and involving the students to make the story comprehensible. In the Attention stage, the teacher leads a discussion with students and asks guiding questions to help them focus on a specific grammatical structure. During Co-Construction, the teacher engages the students in collaborative dialog about the structure. In the Extension

stage, students use the target structure in new ways to help them become adept at using the grammar. Through learning grammar in a story format, students are given the whole rather than short snippets of unconnected grammar. When the format includes interesting characters, problems, a climax, and resolution, their interest is piqued and they are better able to recall information later. Collaborative discussions and explaining grammar functions in their own words allow students to take meaning from the language.

### **Reaction**

The PACE model aligns with Sociocultural Theory as it contextualizes the language and shows the “big picture”. During the Attention and Co-Construction phases, the teacher guides and challenges the students towards solving language problems on their own. This naturally leads students to development. Along with these positive results, the PACE method also has the benefit of being motivating and interesting to students. I myself dread the thought of teaching or learning grammar in isolated form. I learned my first language in situated context, and I plan to teach second language within meaning-based contexts as well.

### **Source**

LoCastro, V. (2012). *Pragmatics for Language Educators*. New York, NY: Routledge.

### **Summary**

The study of pragmatics includes a consideration for the social dimension of language practice. This can include everything from the intentions of the speakers, to the situation and the social distance. Cross-cultural pragmatics studies language use of people from different cultural backgrounds, where conflicting values and

worldviews can result in miscommunication. Interlanguage pragmatics refers to the linguistic system which language learners develop as they transfer knowledge from one language to the other. This book advises teachers to teach pragmatic competence in the classroom by having students enact varying social roles. This can be done by allowing students to ask questions and participate in activities such as role plays and simulations. Especially when students live in an area where exposure to the target language community is not possible, it is important for the teacher to have knowledge of the pragmatic features of the second language. While teaching polite grammatical forms appropriate for the culture, the teacher can raise students' awareness by discussing the reasons behind such politeness and its meaning to the cultural community. Providing real-world examples of discourse patterns and allowing students to act out similar situations can prepare them to interact appropriately in the outside world.

### **Reaction**

Human interaction can be very delicate, especially when communicating across cultures. Perceptions of politeness and appropriateness differ greatly by cultural background. Teaching students to navigate these delicate waters involves much more than teaching formulas for saying "thank you" and "I'm sorry" in the second language. I would like to help students understand the core cultural values behind speech acts through reflections and comparisons with their own culture. I would like to also raise students' awareness of how the language is used by exposing them to authentic dialog samples and having them analyze the different factors involved.

**Source**

Taguchi, N. (2012). *Context, individual differences, and pragmatic competence.*

Tonawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters.

**Summary**

Which resources are the most useful in improving pragmatic competence?

The author sought an answer to this question by conducting longitudinal study of Japanese students learning English at a bilingual university in Japan. The author lists pragmatic features as including “speech acts, conversational implicature, formal vs. informal speech styles, honorifics and politeness terms, terms of address, ritual of small talk and other discourse genres, routines and formulaic expressions and conversation management devices” (p. 1). Students participating in the study completed a test three separate times over the course of the year in order to track their progress in developing their pragmatic skills in listening and speaking. The listening test assessed students’ ability to understand “implicatures” (p. 98) and the speaking test assessed their ability to give request and opinions in certain situations of imposition. Eight students were chosen for case studies based on their social activity. Overall, students developed more quickly in their ability to perform low-imposition than in high-imposition speech acts. These types of speech acts are common among friends and repeated often by teachers. Students had much less exposure to high-imposition acts, especially as the teacher did not place great emphasis on pragmatic appropriateness during class communication. However, their competence improved with increased interaction and exposure to different forms of conversation.



**Reaction**

I was interested to learn of the effect that individual differences can have on pragmatic development. Students' motivation, learning style, and personality all have an impact on their progress. Those students who either had more social connections with native speakers or a higher motivation seemed to show more improvement than others. For example, students with more English-speaking friends had more exposure to situations that required sensitivity to pragmatics. In addition, students with a desire to learn would take notes and seek opportunities to enhance their knowledge. The author noted that direct input from teachers was also very helpful – when teachers ignore students' inappropriateness, it can sometimes put those students at a disadvantage.

**Source**

Hall, B. J. (2005). *Among cultures: The challenge of communication*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

**Summary**

This was the textbook required for the Intercultural Communication (SPCH 3330) class I taught as a Graduate Instructor during Spring 2012 semester. It was written by my supervising teacher and the head of Languages, Philosophy and Communication Studies department, Dr. Hall. The book contains many narratives, as it is “grounded in the idea that people make sense of their world through a process of choosing and telling narratives to themselves and others” (Preface, xiv). The narratives are meant to give specific examples that illustrate broad points about culture, providing a comprehensive and objective view of cultural differences.

Communicating across cultures involves an understanding of various aspects that define culture such as worldviews, norms, and values. The content also helps students to identify verbal and non-verbal misunderstandings, stereotyping and prejudice, and types of intercultural conflict as well as tips for managing conflict. Reflection questions, self-assessments and activities allow students to apply the material in their daily lives. Simply teaching students aspects of the target language's culture often leads to stereotyping or generalizing, and may also not be comprehensive as the target language can imply a wide spectrum of cultures. Significant examples include Spanish, French and English: the people who speak these languages are very diverse and live in many different countries. Therefore, teaching intercultural communication skills can prove to be more helpful to students who wish to have successful interactions with different cultures both locally and abroad.

### **Reaction**

I found this book very insightful to read on its own, and it was also very helpful in guiding a classroom towards meaningful discussion and activities. When I first began teaching this class, I did not see a strong correlation between the course content and second language teaching. However, I now see that the content can be applied directly to the language classroom. I enjoyed teaching this class immensely. As a communication-based course, it can be very interactive and engaging for students. I plan to use many of the same text materials and activities in my future language classroom to prepare students for study abroad excursions.

**Source**

Young, T. J., & Sachdev, I. (2011). Intercultural communicative competence:

Exploring English language teachers' beliefs and practices. *Language Awareness, 20*(2), 81-98.

Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2010.540328>

**Summary**

This article is based on a study of teachers in the US, UK, and France who implemented intercultural communicative competence (ICC) components in their English language courses. The incorporation of such competencies in language instruction has been advocated in research literature, but little study has been done of the actual application of such a framework in the classroom. The author writes: "Given the ubiquity of English language teaching and learning, with varieties of the language serving as vehicles for communication between people worldwide, it is argued that it is especially important that intercultural awareness, skills, and know-how are prioritised in the myriad contexts where the 'global' language is learned and taught" (p. The teachers participating in this study used Byram's language-pedagogical model of ICC. Their beliefs and practices were recorded using diaries, focus groups, and questionnaires. The results showed that while most teachers believed in the importance of intercultural competence, this belief was not always evident in their classroom practice. Teachers also reported a limited amount of support in syllabi and textbooks for effectively promoting ICC.

**Reaction**

I am interested in learning more practical ways for teaching culture, as well as researching more about the 'linguistic relativity hypotheses as mentioned in this article. This and other studies stress the need not only to incorporate elements of ICC in pre-service training for language teachers, but also for increased pedagogical frameworks from which teachers can gather activities for fostering ICC development in the classroom. I plan to adopt practical applications from Byram's models when teaching ICC skills.

**Source**

Matsuda, A. (2003). Incorporating World Englishes in teaching English as an international language. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37(4), 719-729. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3588220>

**Summary**

English is seen in Japan as an important tool for entering new fields in the global marketplace and improving opportunities. The author stresses the need to match students' desire to use English in international settings with "pedagogical approaches that teach English as an international language (EIL), in part through inclusion of varieties of World Englishes" (p. 719). Research of English language teaching in Japan shows that English is mainly taught based on American or British English textbooks. Matsuda references previous research she conducted in 2002 to explore current practices and to provide perspective on reasons for incorporating World Englishes in the English language classroom to better prepare students to interact with both native and non-native speakers in any part of the world. The

author further claims that teaching World Englishes involves more than just an aside mention but an entire shift in the way English language is viewed, “a different way of looking at the language, which is more inclusive, pluralistic, and accepting than the traditional, monolithic view of English in which there is one correct, standard way of using English that all speakers must strive for” (p .726).

### **Reaction**

This piece aligns well with my own research paper. The author discusses the issues teachers should consider when teaching English as an international language in Japan. Matsuda has done research and written several articles on the subject, including assessing perceptions of Japanese regarding native speakers and “correct” pronunciation of English and reviewing representations of the English types found in textbooks. The author is a strong advocate for adapting English language classrooms and English teacher training to include a wider variety of cultural representations and World Englishes. I think her writings are especially pertinent since she is Japanese and has access to Japanese cultural perspectives and important academic settings. I hope to be able to communicate with this author someday for advice on teaching and also to possibly collaborate on language policy programs.

### **Source**

McKay, S. L. (2002). *Teaching English as an international language: Rethinking goals and approaches*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

### **Summary**

This work provides an overview of the concept of English as an international language and the implications of teaching/learning English. McKay writes, “teaching

and learning of an international language must be based on an entirely different set of assumptions than the teaching and learning of any other second or foreign language” (p. 6). The current English users are greatly diverse, with a wide variety of first languages and reasons for using English. In the international context as well as in native-speaker societies, the language is changing and some of these changes may affect the intelligibility of English as it is understood among people. The relationship between the English language and its cultures is re-examined regarding teaching of discourse competence, use of cultural materials in the classroom, and cultural assumptions that guide teaching methods. The author argues that the current model of “native speaker” should be revised based on bilingual standards. McKay also argues for redefining the standards of English structure and discourse, and altering teaching methods consistent with the local culture of learning. The book is directed to teachers of English to students who wish “to communicate with those from another culture and to participate in a growing global community.”

### **Reaction**

McKay provides an excellent summary of the issues I discuss in my research artifact. I am interested in learning about the implications of teaching English as a second/foreign language, given its status in the world as an international language. I feel it has provided me with several insights into adapting my teaching to meet the needs of my students. Because I do not want to promote the use of English as a monolingual powerhouse which dominates other languages and cultures, I want to learn ways to reconcile my teaching methods to a non-biased, open, and multicultural environment.

**Source**

Deterding, D., & Kirkpatrick, A. (2006). Emerging South-East Asian Englishes and intelligibility. *World Englishes*, 25(3/4), 391-409.

**Summary**

English is used as a lingua franca or shared language of communication by people all over the world. The authors of this study explored the level of intelligibility during communication among people from varying first languages. Conversations among English language teachers from different countries in South-East Asia were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for instances of a break-down in understanding. The results showed very little problems associated with intelligibility. The authors use this as evidence to show that in some cases it is easier for speakers from similar L1 backgrounds to understand one another because of shared pronunciation features and sentence stress placement. South-East Asian L1 speakers, for example, have common pronunciation of the dental fricative “th” sound with “t/d”, and for the initial “p” sound, which can sound like “b”. Misunderstandings were often caused by unfamiliarity with the content, or by pronunciation features not shared by countries. The authors surmise that as ASEAN countries interact, the emerging English lingua franca will be characterized by many of its own features of pronunciation.

**Reaction**

This was an interesting article which helped me to gain a more in-depth understanding of the concept of lingua franca, as well as other important terms used for linguistic analysis purposes. I presented this article in my research class as a

review and critique. I do think that since intelligibility is so difficult to determine objectively, the authors might have benefitted from post-conversation interviews with the subjects. Overall, they made a sound case for reconsidering the notion of “correct” English. They suggest that learners from South-East Asian countries will eventually no longer need to refer to external norms for their teaching materials.

### **Source**

Zacharias, N.T. (2003). A survey of tertiary teachers’ beliefs about English Language Teaching in Indonesia with regard to the role of English as a global language. (MA-ELT Thesis). Assumption University of Thailand: Bangkok, Thailand.

### **Summary**

Zacharias’ paper is based on four questions: “How should English be taught in light of its role as an international language? What kind(s) of English should we teach? Does the teaching of English mean that we neglect the role of our L1 and our own local culture? Who is the best English teacher (e.g. native speakers or non-native speakers)?” (p. 1) In order to further explore these questions, the author used questionnaires, classroom observations, and interview data to conduct a study of English teachers in Indonesia, with a focus on their beliefs regarding English. The results showed that teachers generally viewed the learning of English as a pathway to better employment, and a necessity in order to compete in today’s globalized era. Most teachers believe that native speakers are ideal in some cases but that nativeness should not be the determining factor for hiring a teacher. In addition, many felt that using English-speaking countries as cultural references was sometimes too distant for students. The classroom observations showed that the



students “responded positively when topics were presented cross-culturally rather than from an Anglo-centric perspective only” (p.96).

### **Reaction**

The direction of my research article on teaching English as an international language was influenced greatly by this thesis paper. I had been interested in writing a paper about the implications of teaching English in other countries, given the language’s complicated history. The focus of Zacharias’ paper was perfect for my intentions. The paper includes an overview of the terminology, which helped to provide many leads for my literature review. I would like to conduct a similar research study in Japan, surveying English teachers and their experience teaching English in Japan.

### **Source**

Aveni, V.P. (2005). *Study abroad and second language use: Constructing the self*.

Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

### **Summary**

Currently there seems to be much discussion among teachers and scholars on the importance of encouraging students’ communicative competence. The author of this book states that competence extends beyond communication and involves the construction of self and second culture in the L2. Both in the classroom and in study abroad programs, students are constantly in the process of constructing the self within the boundaries of the new language. There can be many limitations which prevent students from developing their proficiency in the language, such as threats to their self-esteem, image, or sense of security. The information presented

in this book provides guidance for teachers to better understand the goals which may factor in motivating a student to interact in the classroom, and also give insights into preparing students for the study abroad experience. Proper preparation before study abroad can lessen the chance a student will experience negative culture shock or have incorrect assumptions about the culture. It can also help students feel more confident in their ability to interact with people in the target language.

### **Reaction**

Study abroad programs have great potential to help transform students, but without the right preparation a student's study abroad experience can prove to be useless, uneventful, or even terrible. Unless students feel comfortable using the language and making mistakes, they will likely end up spending most of their time abroad speaking with fellow expats in the L1. If they have not been equipped with the skills to adapt to intercultural misunderstandings, they may reject the new culture or give up on the language altogether. I found it interesting that the emotions students experience in a study abroad program are similar to those experienced in the language classroom. It can be very unnerving to interact in the classroom, especially given the limitations of the early stages of proficiency. This book provides great insights into the mind of the language learner and methods for helping to alleviate some of the feelings of anxiety and lost identity which students may have.

**Source**

Brown, J., Dewey, D.P., & Eggett, D. (2012). Japanese language proficiency, social networking, and language use during study abroad: Learners' perspectives. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 68(2), 111-137. doi: 10.3138

**Summary**

Understanding how and to what extent students acquire language while studying abroad can help program designers, teachers, policy makers, parents, and students involved in study abroad. This study focuses on social interactions and language use of students studying Japanese who participated in study abroad programs in Japan. Students were surveyed on their self-perceived proficiency development over the course of their time in Japan. They reported gaining most proficiency in the intermediate and advanced levels of ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) Speaking Proficiency Guidelines, while they gained the least proficiency at the novice and superior-level abilities. The students were already able to perform at novice levels in many areas because of their education before the study abroad. Students overall reported gains in fluency and vocabulary use, and on tasks at intermediate and advanced levels such as narrations and descriptions. The authors found that the more social groups to which students belonged, the greater their gains in proficiency. The literature review of this study includes a description of Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis, which states that conversations involving negotiation of meaning with more expert target-language speaking helps to facilitate acquisition. The authors of this study agree that language

is not input but a tool for connecting with others. Learners develop in the language through social interaction, and thus are able to increase their ability to interact.

### **Reaction**

The implications of this study provide guidance for teachers. To help students prepare for situations abroad where they can advance at the superior level, teachers should lead activities that expose students to advanced types of exchanges such as debates, arguments, and discussing abstract topics. While abroad, students should be given assignments that encourage them to interact with native speakers in meaningful ways. It has been shown by Milroy (1980) and others that being integrated into a speech community helps to promote language ability. It is also recommended for students to stay in the country for at least a year for optimal acquisition of the language.

### **Source**

Luk, Z. P., & Shirai, Y. (2009). Is the acquisition order of grammatical morphemes impervious to L1 knowledge? Evidence from the acquisition of plural -s, articles, and possessive 's. *Language Learning*, 59(4), 721-754.

### **Summary**

The authors of this article argue that Krashen's Natural Order Hypothesis, while applicable to some languages such as Spanish, does not account for first language transference in other languages. Multiple studies of native speakers of Japanese, Chinese, Spanish and Korean were reviewed for acquisition of grammatical morphemes. The results showed that native speakers of Japanese, Korean, and Chinese usually acquire plural -s and articles later than predicted, and

possessive -'s earlier than predicted by Krashen's ordering. The study provides evidence that acquisition of grammatical morphemes might not be universal as previously predicted by Krashen and many others. Instead, transference from the L1 is significant enough to affect the L2 acquisition order. In some areas where the grammatical structure of the L1 is similar to English, the learner typically acquires the morpheme sooner; whereas structures that are less familiar will normally take longer to acquire. Late acquisition of the plural -s, for example, can be a result of lack of plural markings in Japanese. Japanese learners of English therefore might find it difficult to differentiate between count nouns. On the other hand, acquiring possessive -'s might be easier because the Japanese marker for possessive is very similar to English.

### **Reaction**

An interview I conducted with a Chinese ESL learner supported the argument for L1 language transference. I found that the ranking of this student's errors did not match up with Krashen's natural ranking order. Moreover, her common errors could be traced to structures in English that did not exist in Chinese, such as the plural -'s. This information is relevant to teachers seeking to pinpoint specific areas where language transference is interfering with students' ability to learn the language.

### **Source**

Mak, B. (2011). An exploration of speaking-in-class anxiety with Chinese ESL learners. *System*, 39(2), 202-214.

**Summary**

Anxiety can be a significant obstacle preventing students from learning the language to their best ability. This article summarizes a study of speaking-in-class anxiety of Chinese ESL students in Hong Kong. The author used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to search for factors which contribute to students' speaking-in-class anxiety. The analysis showed that the main factors were fear of negative evaluation by teacher and peers, fear of speaking with native speakers, negative perception of the English classroom, fear of failure, and negative self-evaluation. A survey distributed to students showed additional factors contributing to speaking-in-class anxiety, such as being asked to speak without preparation, being corrected by the teacher, not being given enough wait-time, and not being allowed to use the first language. Speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation were concluded to be more related to personality than test anxiety, which is a temporary reaction to academic stress. To help students who may have anxiety, the author listed several recommendations for teachers. These include providing sufficient wait-time and giving focus to accuracy and fluency at appropriate moments.

**Reaction**

This is an article I used for my linguistic analysis research paper. It provided background for my studies of socio-cultural influences on Chinese student proficiency. In any given classroom situation, it is likely a teacher will have one or more students with speaking-in-class anxiety. I want to be able to help all my students feel included. Negative attitudes towards class can contribute to anxiety.

Providing sufficient preparation time is important in any language class. The author states: “Using the target language in front of the class can be frustrating as the process places linguistic, cognitive and psychological demands on the learner. It is therefore recommended that teachers should ensure that learners are given time to prepare the speech/presentation before being asked to speak in front of the class.”

### **Source**

Dörnyei, Z. (1994). Motivation and motivating in the foreign language classroom.

*The Modern Language Journal*, 78(3), 273-284. Retrieved from

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/330107>

### **Summary**

Discussing the complicated social role that motivation plays in language learning, Dörnyei lists the many roles of language itself. Language is:

- a) a communication coding system that can be taught as a school subject, b)
- an integral part of the individual’s identity involved in almost all mental activities, and also c) the most important channel of social organization embedded in the culture of the community where it is used. (p. 274)

Learning a language involves much more than learning new information, and many factors are involved. In this article, Dörnyei reviews many of the various studies on language learning motivation, providing a well-researched basis. These theories are then synthesized into pragmatic principles, and refined into strategies for teachers’ use. Each strategy can be classified under one of three levels: Language Level, (the language itself), Learner Level (the students in their personal dimension), and Learning Situation Level (the social aspects). There are 30 strategies listed, but I

would narrow them down to about five themes: raise students' self-confidence, help students set and reach goals, incorporate interesting and relevant course material, be a model of motivation for the class, and promote a community-type atmosphere.

### **Reaction**

I consider motivation to be absolutely essential to learning: the greater the motivation, the greater the achievement. I was glad to find Dörnyei's writings and their comprehensible analysis on the research of motivation. While all of the strategies listed in the article are relevant to my practice, a few stood out more than others. The concept of "modeling interest in the L2" was something I had not considered previously, but I think modeling interest involves more than just being an enthusiastic teacher. I believe it could also help to point out interesting aspects of the language to students, share stories about learning the language, and encourage students to be playful with the language. Explicitly teaching students how to set and reach goals is also an excellent strategy which I would like to incorporate on a regular basis.



## LOOKING FORWARD

One of the main reasons I am drawn to teaching is because I love progressing and learning new things. As a teacher, I will have ample opportunities to improve my practice, to become more knowledgeable on the content of my instruction, and to research new ideas in my field. Growing in confidence and knowledge will allow me to focus more on giving personal and focused support to my students. To better serve my target student population, I plan to be an advocate for the importance of learning foreign languages and international studies, and for improving education policies in the U.S. and abroad.

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