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MEETING DIVERSE NEEDS IN THE ADULT ESL CLASSROOM

by

Katie Reynolds Garcia

A portfolio submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Logan, Utah

2016

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ABSTRACT

Meeting Diverse Needs in the Adult ESL Classroom

by

Katie Reynolds Garcia: Master of Second Language Teaching
Utah State University, 2016

Major Professor: Dr. Maria Luisa Spicer-Escalante

Department: Languages, Philosophy, and Communication Studies

This portfolio was written for the Master of Second Language Teaching (MSLT) program. It reflects the author's beliefs on effective methods for teaching English as a second language (ESL) to adult learners. It includes the author's teaching philosophy, which focuses on communicative language teaching, creating an encouraging classroom environment, and providing meaningful instruction. The teaching philosophy is followed by four artifacts. First, the culture artifact is a review of complimenting behavior and how to teach pragmatics to language students. Second, the literacy artifact is a study of effective strategies for improving the writing skills of ESL learners. Third, the language artifact discusses whether listening or reading activities are better tools for teaching vocabulary. After the language artifact is an additional teacher artifact that explains the importance of teacher empathy. Finally, the annotated bibliographies provide an outline of the author's study and research throughout the MSLT program.

(124 pages)

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I would like to say thank you to each of my committee members. First, I would like to thank Dr. Spicer-Escalante for her tenacity and enthusiasm. Her passion for the work she does and her drive to improve language education have inspired me to be persistent in working towards my goals and to realize that I can make a difference to my students. Next, I would like to thank Dr. de Jonge-Kannan for her kind guidance, her willingness to share her knowledge, and her confidence in me. She has helped me to have more confidence in myself and see my potential to be a great language teacher. I would also like to thank Dr. Thoms for his willingness to always be available to answer questions and for his high expectations of me. He has helped me to reach beyond my comfort zone and grow as a student and a teacher. I would also like to thank my classmates for their support and friendship.

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INTRODUCTION

This portfolio is a compilation of what I have learned throughout the MSLT program about effectively teaching English to adult learners. It is supported by four artifacts and three annotated bibliographies that focus on important aspects of teaching ESL. Central to the portfolio is my teaching philosophy statement. It includes what I believe to be the most important aspects of teaching a language and how these aspects guide me in being an effective teacher.

My teaching philosophy includes three main components. First is the use of the communicative approach, in which students are allowed to take an active part in their learning and practice communication. Second, I discuss the importance of creating an encouraging classroom environment. It is important that students feel that they are supported by the teacher and their classmates and that they can practice the language without judgement or reprimand. The final area I discuss is meaningful instruction through the use of applicable, authentic materials and by providing comprehensible input.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

APPRENTICESHIP OF OBSERVATION

Throughout my life, I have had many brushes with language learning. At different ages and through different means, I have had opportunities to learn a little French and some Spanish. Though I am still in the language learning process, I can look back and see what has worked for me and what hasn't and how I can be a more effective teacher.

My first experience with language learning came when I was in the 3rd grade. My teacher, Mr. P., had served as a missionary in France and taught us some French as a fun activity. It was not formal instruction, but to this day I still remember the words of "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" and "Jingle Bells" in French. Although Mr. P. was not trained as a language teacher, some of his methods were effective in teaching us. Using songs was an age-appropriate activity and it was a good way to solidify some French in our young, moldable minds.

My next experience in language learning came many years later when I was a junior in high school. I knew that Spanish might be more useful to me in my life, but I had heard that the French teacher was better, so I decided to take French. My teacher, Mr. N., was a very nice man, but his teaching methods were purely audiolingual. There were very few opportunities to practice communication in French. Every day we would repeat verb conjugations and vocabulary words. I remember doing a lot of fill-in-the-blank type worksheets. I do not remember ever conversing in an open-ended way with my classmates. Also, Mr. N. taught in English, so we were not hearing French being spoken much and didn't have to negotiate the meaning of the French we did hear. I was getting good grades and in fact I was the French club president, so I didn't realize at the time that I wasn't really learning French. I still remember a few words and phrases, but I retained

very little working French. This demonstrates to me that the audiolingual method (Lee & VanPatten, 2003) is not the way to learn a language effectively. Though I was very successful by grading standards, I could never have had a conversation in French and I only remember a few simple words and phrases.

A few more years later, in my senior year of my undergraduate degree at USU, I decided to take Spanish. I was working on a minor in International Studies and I knew Spanish could be very useful to me so I enrolled in the course. To be honest, it was mostly on a whim, but it has been very valuable to me and helped me get on the path towards the MSLT program, although I did not realize it at the time. In my first semester my teacher was, again, quite grounded in the audiolingual method. This class was certainly more communicative than my French class, but I don't remember a lot of opportunities for speaking and I never got to the point that felt comfortable speaking in class. Also, the professor, Profesora B., was not very engaging. She didn't always show a lot of excitement and enthusiasm for teaching, and she didn't get to know her students. I don't know that she ever knew my name. I can say that I did learn a good amount of grammar from her class, but I didn't come out of it knowing how to speak at all. It was my second semester that made all the difference. My professor, Profesora N., graduated from the MSLT program and was a very effective teacher. She was very excited about teaching and wanted to connect with her students. We had many opportunities to speak during her class. We were often split into small groups to do activities and speak to one another. In Profesora N.'s class I continued to learn grammar as well as communication in a useful, realistic way.

Unfortunately, when I graduated from USU in 2011, I did not seek more opportunities to practice my Spanish and what I had learned began to fade. In October 2013 I discovered the English Language Center of Cache Valley and started volunteering there. Simply hearing bits of Spanish spoken by the students began to bring back to mind what I had learned in my Spanish classes. As I heard more and more Spanish I was surprised at what I remembered and could understand. In the following months I made many Spanish-speaking friends that I now interact with on an almost-daily basis. This has been the most effective Spanish ‘classroom’ of all. Hearing them speak to each other in Spanish and being able to practice with them has helped me learn so much. I can ask them questions and they are excited to help me. I go to the store or to parties with them and I am able to hear how Spanish is used in real-life situations, rather than only in staged classroom situations. I am able to use my classroom knowledge of grammar and apply it to conversations. It has been during this time that I have seen my knowledge and command of Spanish increase more dramatically than during much of my classroom instruction.

Because of my many different stages and types of language instruction and with my new perspective on how to properly teach a language, I can see what worked for me and what didn’t. It is clear to me how important a communicative approach really is. It wasn’t until I started actually speaking that I began to retain Spanish and discover how to use it properly. Because of this, I want to give my students plenty of opportunities to speak to each other in class and practice using English. I want to create a classroom environment where they feel comfortable speaking and won’t be afraid of making mistakes. I want to provide them with real, usable input so they can apply what they learn

in class to their lives. I am glad that I have had several different types of instruction so I can see what a difference the communicative approach makes.

I also realize that the ‘middle-ground’ view of grammar instruction, where grammar is taught in support of communication, truly is the best way to learn (Ballman, et al, 2001, p. 34). I believe that if I had not had a foundation of grammar to build upon, I could not have picked up as much as I did in my interactions with my Spanish-speaking friends. Since I had the grammatical knowledge, I could make more sense of what they were saying. It clicked in my brain as I made a connection between what they were saying and why it worked and flowed grammatically. In my classroom, I hope to provide my students with enough grammar to build upon, but not so much that they feel bogged down and constrained by it. I want them to feel comfortable with their grammar and be able to use it to convey what they want to say.

I am very grateful for the language learning opportunities that I have had. I never had a specific end goal in mind while I was pursuing language study, but if I hadn’t had those experiences, I don’t believe I could be an understanding, empathetic, effective teacher. I have been in the role of a language student and I understand how frustrating and overwhelming it can be at times. I also understand what works and the effect a good teacher can have. I hope I can apply my experiences and what I have learned in the MSLT program to my own classroom and help my students be confident and successful in learning English.

PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT

After completing my MSLT degree, I hope to apply what I have learned in an ESL classroom for adults. While I might enjoy teaching English abroad for a time, my main goal is to teach English in the United States to immigrants from all over the world. I enjoy getting to know them and their individual stories and helping them work for success in their lives. I am interested in working in a community English center, but I could also find a career in a university ESL classroom. I want my classroom to be a place of diversified instruction with various types of activities where people of many different backgrounds can be successful in learning English. I hope to help my students achieve their goals of acclimating to life and succeeding in the United States. I want to help create a place where the central focus is serving the students and where the environment is professional and welcoming. I hope to continue studying new research in foreign language teaching and to apply it to my teaching strategies. One of the aspects of my teaching that I aim to develop further is my efficiency in lesson planning. Creating a communicative lesson with comprehensible input and effective group activities is critical in helping my students learn English.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

A few years ago I never would have envisioned myself as a language teacher. I was working on a degree in business and, although I didn't really have a passion for it, I saw myself working in the Human Resources department of a big company someday. A degree in business seemed valuable and useful to me, but I never felt a strong drive to be a business woman. A few years after I graduated, I was looking for volunteer opportunities and found the English Language Center of Cache Valley. Volunteering there, I have met students from all over the world hoping to learn English and improve their lives in the United States. Each has a different story of how they came to be here and many of them have been through severe hardships in their lives. I have enjoyed getting to know each student's personality, background, and needs. Some have had only a few years of school and some have studied extensively. Some are refugees. All are working hard to provide for their families, some of whom are still in their home countries. As I have spent time at the English Language Center, I have developed a love for the work. It is something in which I have much more interest than business. Recently I earned the J. Craig Hale Award for 100 hours of service at the English Language Center. I have met many amazing people throughout my time there and it is extremely satisfying and rewarding to know that I have helped them succeed and to see how learning English improves their lives. The difference I can make in the lives of my students is what drives me and makes me want to be an English teacher. For this reason, I enrolled in the Master's of Second Language Teaching Program.

Throughout my life I have had several opportunities to study and learn Spanish in and outside of the classroom. As I look back, I can see what worked for me and what

didn't. From the classrooms featuring many drills and little communication, I didn't learn anything valuable. From the classrooms offering plenty of opportunities to practice communication, I learned applicable language skills that I could use in real conversations. I can see that practicing communication is the most effective way to learn to communicate. I want to give my students the tools they need and offer them plenty of practice in communication with a solid base of grammar and vocabulary to build upon. The most important thing for me as an English teacher is that my students are successful and that they can use what they learn in their lives. Three principles that guide my teaching are using the communicative approach, creating an encouraging classroom environment, and providing meaningful instruction. I believe that a classroom centered on these three principles will be a place where my students can build confidence in learning and speaking English. I have started to learn how to teach a second language effectively and in the next sections I will explain how these principles can be applied to my classroom.

The Communicative Approach

The use of the communicative approach is vital in acquiring a new language. "Covering grammatical structures without giving students ample opportunity to work with them productively and autonomously can, at best, only familiarize students with them" (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001, p. 25). In the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, the classroom is a student-centered environment, which means that students have responsibility for their own learning. The role of the teacher is to design and implement activities that give students the opportunity to use the language in real-life applications. The students' role is to participate and be active

learners. They “[use] the language to interpret and express real-life messages” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 10). As they work with one another, they are able to negotiate meaning, which means that they are able to ask for clarification or repetition to create a meaningful connection to the speaker’s message. CLT requires comprehensible input. This means that “the learner must be able to figure out what the speaker is saying if he is to attach meaning to the speech stream coming at him” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 26). To create a communicative classroom, I plan on determining the needs of my students and designing appropriate activities to supply them with comprehensible input and opportunities to practice.

One way to make input more comprehensible is to simplify it (Hatch, 1978; Lee & VanPatten, 2003). For example, a teacher can speak more slowly, use simpler words, and emphasize the concepts being taught. It is important to speak comprehensibly, but also realistically. “Spoken texts...can include ungrammatical or reduced forms; are often marked by pauses, hesitations, and fillers; and may feature topics that shift as the conversation is co-constructed” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 186). I think teachers often speak in a way that is over-simplified. Admittedly, it is easier for the students to understand, but is not a form of speech that they are likely to encounter in real-life situations. For example, in English we frequently use contractions. If the teacher is purposely leaving them out of his or her speech, students will not recognize them when they hear them. The same is the case with filler words. They should not be used too frequently, but the teacher should not avoid using them either. If students do not understand them, it is a good opportunity to explain what they mean and how they are

used. It is important for teachers to speak naturally so students can learn how to listen to speech in the real world.

The communicative approach addresses the three modes of communication which are interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational as mentioned in the ACTFL standards (2012). “Performing a communicative function or task [...] requires the simultaneous use of a combination of skills” (Brandl, 2008, p. 190). The goal of the teacher is to give the students opportunities to practice each of these skills. In a good lesson, the teacher uses a variety of activities that employ speaking, listening, reading and writing. For example, the teacher could introduce new vocabulary with a total physical response activity, in which students use body movements to connect meaning to words (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). Activities such as interviews, information-gap activities, or games could also be used. After the activities, students will bring all of the information together to complete a culminating task for which a clear objective is specified. If a class is structured in this way, all of the modes of communication can be utilized.

One of the most important types of activities in the communicative classroom to enable authentic practice is the task-based activity (TBA). In a TBA students use the target language to complete a task. Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, and Mandell (2001) describe them as ‘learner centered’ as opposed to ‘teacher fronted’. The students rely on and interact with one another for completion of the task (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001). For example, at the end of the lesson the students will be able to give directions to a cab driver. They could use directional words, names of places, the imperative verb form and other concepts that they’ve learned through preceding activities to complete the task of telling the cab driver where to go. These types of activities are

very effective in keeping interest and motivation high and they lead to language acquisition. Active participation on the part of the student is essential because the role of the student is to share information and interact with their classmates to complete activities. Each smaller activity should lead to a culminating activity for which all of the information gathered is used. When I use TBAs, I see myself as a facilitator. It is my job to explain the activity and be available for clarification and, while my role is still vital, I am not at the center of the activity. I make sure that directions are clear and concise and that the students understand the end goal of the activity. Through the use of TBAs, I can “create a context in which grammar can be acquired gradually and dynamically while at the same time fostering the ability to use this grammar in communication” (Ellis, 2009, p. 238).

Group activities are also very effective in acquiring a language through the communicative approach. They encourage communication, keep students motivated, and create an environment where students can negotiate meaning through producing and interpreting messages via group work and task-based activities (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001). Group work is a good way to keep students engaged. Throughout classroom activities, the teacher has the responsibility of encouraging communication and helping students to create meaningful connections to new words.

Communicative language teaching fosters learner autonomy. “Learner autonomy is the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (Little, 2007, p. 15). Communicative teaching moves away from the idea that the teacher is the absolute authority and gives students more power to influence what kind of learning happens in the classroom (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). In my experience, when a student has more control over their own

learning, they are more engaged and interested. They are motivated to learn. By encouraging learner autonomy and ownership of the learning process through the communicative approach, teachers can develop a class that is more interactive, engaged, and prepared to apply the material being taught.

Classroom Environment

An important factor in the success of a student is his or her level of comfort and confidence in the classroom. If students feel that they are being judged or criticized, they won't want to speak. It is important for me to communicate to my students that it is normal and perfectly acceptable to make errors. Some students are perfectionists and they are afraid of even trying to communicate for fear of making mistakes. They need to know that they are not being judged for their errors and that the classroom is a supportive environment. According to a study by Dörnyei and Kormos, one factor that has a "powerful effect on the number of words produced... [is] linguistic self-confidence" (Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000, p. 290). A teacher can encourage linguistic self-confidence and help it grow.

One way to ensure that students don't get overwhelmed and frustrated is to scaffold the activities and instruction. This means that each task builds on the previous task and students have the skills and tools necessary to complete the task. The class can break down if "the students [are] asked to perform too many skills at once under conditions for which they [have] not been prepared" (Brandl, 2008, p. 193). This will lead to frustration and decreased motivation. It is also important for the teacher to assess the difficulty of tasks. According to Brandl, communicative stress, linguistic complexity, and cognitive demand are factors that determine the difficulty of the task (2008). If any of

these factors are too high, the activity might be too difficult for the students to perform. This does not mean that teachers cannot provide their students with authentic, applicable material to work with. It is what the students are asked to do with the material that determines the level of difficulty (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). Teachers should also consider the amount of material they are giving to students at one time. Humans have limited capacity for storing and processing information (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). “Given their limited processing capacity, students cannot simultaneously process...different types of information about a new word” (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001, p. 65). When the teacher can assess the needs of students and design a format in which their needs are met and they are provided with the needed materials, tools, and skills, students will have greater satisfaction and success.

As well as being an important part of the communicative approach, group work is also an effective strategy in creating a cohesive classroom. Some types of communicative activities that might be incorporated into the class include interview activities, information activities, and task-based activities (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001). In these activities, students have to work together to accomplish the objectives. If students feel like they are a team and they share a common goal, communicative stress is reduced. Group work creates a bond between students. When they feel more comfortable, they are more likely to bring down their barriers and let communication flow more readily. I want my students to know each other and rely on each other. I believe that encouragement from their classmates can have a strong effect on every student and can encourage the students who are struggling.

An engaging, judgement-free environment is much more encouraging to a student than a strict, error-free environment. Krashen (1982) explains this idea in his Affective Filter Hypothesis. He hypothesizes that student motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety are factors that affect a student's ability to learn, or in other words, create an affective filter (Krashen, 1982). When motivation and self-confidence are low and anxiety is high, students have barriers to learning. "Positive affect can provide invaluable support for learning just as negative affect can close down the mind and prevent learning from occurring altogether" (Arnold, 2011, p. 11). Teachers can help students break through these barriers by fostering a positive, encouraging atmosphere and by giving them the tools they need to be successful. The teacher sets the mood of the classroom and is the example for the students. "Teachers can foster the association of positive emotions with learning when they use humor in the lesson, design and tell stories that enhance understanding [...], incorporate real-world examples, and demonstrate that they really care about their students' learning" (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 78). While observing various classrooms, I have seen what a difference these factors can make. Students learn better when their teacher creates an engaging, inviting classroom. This is especially important for beginning learners who might depend more on gestures or pictures than more advanced learners. Using an appropriate amount of humor can help the students feel more at ease and less afraid to make mistakes. Stories—such as news stories or folk stories—are engaging and motivating when used for reading or listening practice. Real-world examples help students to connect to the material and are useful to them in their everyday lives. Perhaps the most important factor is that teachers demonstrate that they really care about their students. Students can feel when a teacher is invested in their

learning and it motivates them (Chang, Berger, & Chang, 1981). They try harder to participate in class and use the L2 (Arnold, 2011). Also, teachers who really want students to be successful are more motivated to give their students all of the tools necessary for their success.

A good teacher/student relationship is part of the foundation of a classroom where students feel free to learn and grow. A teacher should know and understand each of their students in order to provide them with the tools they need to learn. Freire says that we must, “be aware of the concrete conditions of their world, the conditions that shape them...the realities that our students live” (Freire, 2005, p. 102). Students can feel when their teacher really wants to understand and help them. Students must trust their teacher and feel comfortable in the classroom before they are willing to take risks and open their minds. In Bell Hooks’ words, “A mutual relationship between teacher and students that nurtures the growth of both parties, creating an atmosphere of trust and commitment...is always present when learning happens” (Hooks, 2010, p. 22). The ESL students that I have had opportunities to work with have helped me to understand the needs of diverse learners, become more open-minded to views other than my own, and grow in my capacity to be an effective teacher to ESL learners.

Meaningful Instruction

The use of the communicative language teaching method and an engaging classroom environment create a situation where meaningful instruction can take place and in which students can learn to communicate in the real world. A unique characteristic of ESL students in the United States is the impact that learning English can have on their lives (Ernst-Slavit, Moore, & Maloney, 2002). Some students around the world learn

English for academic or social pursuits, which are commendable reasons, but many of my students also have added economic and real-life, situational reasons for wanting to learn the language. For some of them learning English can lead to better jobs, citizenship, and a better life here in the United States. For these reasons it is very important for me to use authentic, applicable materials and situational practice in my classroom that will prepare them to communicate in North American society.

One way to make instruction more meaningful is to use the content-based instruction approach. According to Met (1999), content-based instruction includes “material that is cognitively engaging and demanding for the learner, and it is material that extends beyond the target language or target culture” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 125). In my classroom this could include subjects such as everyday activities, citizenship, passports, or jobs. A teacher should ask, “Is the content interesting and relevant to students’ interests and instructional objectives?” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 193). It is important to me to get to know my students and their needs individually. I look for opportunities to talk to them one-on-one to learn about their backgrounds and interests. It is also important to understand their goals and learn what they hope to get out of their language instruction. This is crucial in selecting what content is important to present to my class. I want it to be applicable to their situations. When possible and appropriate, it is good to talk about an interest or hobby of each student during class. Students should also talk to each other to find common interests and experiences in an intercultural interaction. This will help them to be more interested and engaged and to feel that they are an important part of the class. In turn, they will have more success.

Teaching and incorporating culture in my classroom is something that I feel is very important. Students need to know more than just the language to fit into North American society. They need to understand the customs, pragmatics, social norms, etc.

Teachers...create tasks that help students incorporate a broader range of learning than just the forms of language. In this framework [of broader cultural learning], learners do not simply master language forms, but lay a basis for successful interaction with members of another culture and a more objective view of their own customs and ways of thinking. (Wright, 2000, p. 332)

Incorporating culture is vital in an ESL classroom in the United States. In most cases, students want to incorporate themselves and be accepted into American culture. It is important for me to give them not only language instruction, but also the tools to navigate between cultures. I want my students to understand how their own culture affects them and to be sensitive to other cultures. This can be accomplished through comparison activities. Students can compare aspects of their own culture to North American culture and to the cultures of other students in the class. Since I am likely to have a diverse classroom, it is important to me to teach and exemplify a respect for cultures different from my own and for my students to know that when it comes to culture, there is no right or wrong way.

Another way to prepare students for real-life situations is to provide them with authentic materials. Some examples include movie clips, news broadcast excerpts, advertisements, magazines, or literature. Shrum and Glisan explain that a teacher should not be afraid to introduce literature to their students. "Teachers should remember to choose authentic texts that are age- and level-appropriate, and to edit the task, not the text" (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 196). What the students are asked to do with the texts

determines the level of difficulty. Not only are authentic texts culturally important to students, but they are also more interesting and engaging. For the most part, my ESL students really want to understand North American culture and be a part of it. They are eager to learn about what is going on here and what is important to North Americans. For this reason, it is important for me to use authentic texts in my classroom. Instead of only using passages from textbooks created for ESL students, I seek out appropriate materials created by fluent speakers for fluent speakers to use in communicative activities.

As I teach my students English, I don't want them to lose sight of the value of their native language. No one language is better than another. There is value in bilingualism. This is a concept I want my students to understand. "Proficiency in multiple languages permits individuals to expand their world because it permits them to communicate with members of other cultural groups" (Hamayan, Marler, Sanchez-Lopez, & Damico, 2013, p. 4). Compared to monolinguals, more opportunities are available to people who speak two languages. I want my students to know that the ability to communicate in two languages is a benefit to them and they should never feel that their L1 is less valuable than English.

Conclusion

Many elements combine to create an environment conducive to learning English. Through the use of the communicative approach, creating an encouraging classroom environment, and providing meaningful instruction, I hope to give my students the tools necessary to be successful learners of English. The force that drives me to be a good English teacher is the impact I can have on the lives of my students. Teachers have the power to help their students conquer their struggles and transform their lives. As Freire

puts is, “Our relationship with the learners is one of the roads that we can take to intervene in reality over both the short and the long term” (Freire, 2005, p. 102). Success in the classroom can lead to success in life. I want to help my students meet their goals and be able to have success in the United States. As a teacher I have the privilege to be an instrumental part of this process. If I am able to incorporate the principles of a good L2 classroom, I can help my students to reach their goals and feel a sense of satisfaction in my efforts as a teacher.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TEACHING OBSERVATIONS

I have had opportunities to observe teachers of English, French, Spanish, Chinese, and Arabic and I have realized through their examples where I stand in my teaching philosophy. Observation is a valuable experience that has helped me to reflect on what is important to me as a language teacher and how I want to develop my classroom. The three principles that guide my teaching are: using the communicative approach, creating an encouraging classroom environment, and providing meaningful instruction. I have observed strategies that support these principles and some that take away from them. I have also seen teaching techniques that I want to apply in my own classrooms and some mistakes I want to avoid. In this reflection I will explain how my observations of other teachers helped me to develop my teaching philosophy.

The first principle of my teaching philosophy is using the communicative approach. Part of a truly communicative classroom is the opportunity for students to work in groups and pairs to practice communication. There is a noticeable difference between classes with many group activities and classes that lack group interaction. I noticed a different feeling in classes where the students weren't given the chance to work together in groups. A class feels so much more open and collaborative when the students are working together. They can brainstorm and share with each other what they have learned. They are engaged and can negotiate meaning. I noticed that the class flows better when there is a balance between instruction and group activities. Through observation of classrooms with varying degrees of group work, I learned how valuable group work really is. It is one of the keys to establishing a communicative classroom.

Another important part of a communicative classroom is the pacing of activities. In a few classes I observed, the teachers didn't keep the activities moving fast enough or they didn't have enough activities planned. I noticed that the students get bored during the down time and start talking to their friends in their L1 or get their cellphones out. I observed that when teachers move the activities along quickly, the students' brains stay in an English mindset and the communication flows better. When there are long pauses it seems like the students have to "warm up" again for every activity. Teachers that follow their lesson plans and keep the class moving have more success in getting their students to speak and stay in English. Keeping a good pace of activities supports the goals of a communicative classroom.

The second principle of my teaching philosophy is creating an encouraging classroom environment. One technique that I saw some teachers use to create an encouraging environment was to take some time to connect with the students. They engaged in real conversations with the students and let them know that the teacher was interested in each student and his or her life. It's not a waste of time to have these conversations with students. It builds trust between the teacher and the student and is also a meaningful exchange in the TL. They feel more motivated and feel comfortable asking questions and practicing the target language. Just a few moments of taking an interest in a student's life can make all the difference to them and can create an environment where students feel comfortable and look forward to coming to class.

Another way to create an encouraging environment is for the teacher to 'be present' in the classroom. In other words, the teacher should be paying attention to the students and not be distracted. In one of the worst examples I saw, a teacher was on her

phone and using social media during her class. It's not fair to the students when the teacher isn't giving them his or her full attention. The students notice and can feel it when the teacher is doing other things or doesn't want to be there. All of the best teachers I observed circulated around the room during activities and interacted with their students. I think part of creating a positive classroom environment is giving the students my full attention and making them feel that I am interested in their education and goals. It is not respectful to the students and is a waste of their time for teachers not to give their full attention to their students. Being attentive and present in the classroom is how teachers demonstrate their dedication to an encouraging environment.

The last principle of my teaching philosophy is providing meaningful instruction. Each class should have a focus or a goal and the students should gain a useful skill. In my observations, I saw a lot of variation in the meaningfulness and applicability of lessons. In the classes where the lessons were disjointed, unorganized, and without a clear focus, the students seemed confused and sometimes uninterested. In the classes where the teachers provided meaningful, purposeful instruction, the students were engaged and active. Lesson planning and including authentic materials for meaningful instruction is more work, but it is the job of the teacher to do what it takes to provide the students with the tools they need to reach their goals. It was always obvious to me which teachers had put time and work into their lessons and which had put their lessons together just before class. The students can tell as well. The students are there to learn and a good teacher needs to provide them with meaningful, applicable instruction.

Through my observations of the other teachers I have seen situations—good and bad—that have given me support and examples for the importance of the principles of my

teaching philosophy. I have learned there are many methods a teacher can use to employ the communicative approach, create an encouraging classroom environment, and provide meaningful instruction. I have also seen that it takes a lot of work, time, consideration, and thought to help all students meet their goals. Through the examples of the teachers I have observed, I have learned what is really important to me in my classroom and how I want to develop and grow as a teacher.

SELF-ASSESSMENT OF TEACHING

I had the opportunity to be observed and reflect on my teaching on two occasions, once with my peers and once with my professor. Watching myself teach was both painful and enlightening. There are some things that I think I did well and other things that I can improve on. Watching the video helped me to see how I teach and how students might perceive me. The comments from my peers and my professor were also helpful in knowing what worked and what I can do better.

The first opportunity was a mini-lesson in a class of my peers. I presented a sample lesson created for adult ESL students about going to the store. We talked about the different sections of the store and finding the best prices with a weekly grocery store ad. Table 1 shows the lesson plan which included the introduction of new vocabulary, an activity in which students looked at a map of a store and asked each other where different items were located, and an activity where they used a store advertisement and to ask each other about prices of certain items.

Table 1. Micro-teaching lesson plan: Going to the store

Activity	Modes	Format
Introduction to the lesson	Interpretive	Whole class
Vocabulary words	Interpretive	Whole class
Activity #1- Practice conversation-Where is....	Interpersonal	Partners
More vocabulary	Interpretive	Whole class
Activity #2- Practice conversation- How much...	Interpersonal	Partners

My peers commented positively on the opportunity I gave them, in their roles as students, to negotiate meaning within the practice conversation. I was also encouraged by their

comments on things they liked about my lesson. They also commented positively on my use of authentic materials. I also thought this was the strongest aspect of my lesson. My classmates thought that the vocabulary words I chose to teach were appropriate. There were not too many of them, they were realistic, and they were presented with pictures of what they mean. They also commented on the part of my lesson where I modeled the activity. As I watched myself, I agreed that this modeling was a good thing to include and I made it fit smoothly into the lesson. My peers thought that my lesson plan was well-organized and included a good variety of activities. As I watched it again, I also thought that my PowerPoint presentation was very clear and easy to process. I came to the conclusion as I watched my micro teaching that the organization and material of my lesson plan were good, but my presentation skills could use some work.

Most of the things I need to improve are related to my presentation of the lesson. I could tell as I watched myself that I need more confidence and command of the classroom. I am naturally a quiet person and it's sometimes hard for me to present in front of a group. I noticed that I don't always make a lot of eye contact with the class and I tend to stay far away from the students. I need to work on having confidence in front of an audience and appearing in command even if I feel nervous. Another thing that I didn't like was that I repeated the vocabulary words a few times. It was too much. But I have noticed that with actual ESL students it usually takes two tries to get the pronunciation right. So even though it felt uncomfortable and excessive with my classmates, it might be appropriate with my ESL students. This is something I'll have to pay close attention to and decide what works best for me and my students. One more lesson I learned is to prepare more than enough material. I thought I had enough, but the lesson went faster

than I thought it would and I didn't have quite enough material to fill all of the time. This also affected how much time I spent on the activity. If I would have had more material, I would have ended the activity sooner and moved on to something else. My classmates also mentioned that my activities need to allow more room for creativity. I need to find or create activities where they can use their own words rather than a formula. If I can use the suggestions and the video of myself to incorporate improvements into my lessons, I think I can become an effective, confident teacher.

The second opportunity for a teaching observation and reflection took place in a class of adult English learners in a computer class at the ELC. I was observed by my professor. In the lesson, I taught the students to make a table in Word and to use YouTube to find videos that are interesting to them. Table 2 shows the lesson plan for the

Table 2. Lesson plan for ELC computer class

Building a Word table and YouTube			
Time	Activity	Modes	Format
12:00	Review how to make a table in Microsoft Word	Interpersonal	Whole class
12:05	Explanation of activity	Interpretive	Whole class
12:08	Activity #1A- Create table & questions	Presentational	Individual
12:22	Activity #1B- Interview partner	Interpersonal	Pairs
12:36	Review of YouTube	Interpretive	Whole class
12:38	Explanation of Activity #2	Interpretive	Whole class
12:40	Activity #2- Find YouTube video	Interpretive/Interactive	Individual/Pairs
12:57	Wrap up, shut down computers, feedback		Whole class

class. My professor mentioned that the lesson had a real-world purpose and was connected to the students' lives. I explained some different ways that they could use YouTube in their lives. I also felt that the lesson was interesting and engaging to the

students. They enjoyed exploring their interests and helping their classmates find videos that were interesting to them. I will continue to seek out relevant topics and activities as I plan lessons for adult learners. Another strength of my lesson mentioned by the professor was that it incorporated communication practice in many ways (listening, speaking, reading, writing). I knew it might be a challenge to incorporate all of these skills in a computer class, so I purposefully planned the lesson to include each skill. I feel that another one of my strengths in teaching is being open and approachable and creating a classroom where students feel comfortable. My professor agreed with this assessment. I noticed in the recording that I did a good job of circulating around the classroom and talking to the students as they worked. I find it easy to interact with the students, I have patience in helping them with their questions and they are not chastised for errors or code switching. Overall, I felt that the lesson was successful and well-received by the students.

I believe that I did improve between my first and second teaching observations, but there are areas where I can continue to improve. I still sometimes struggle with my presentation. My professor mentioned that my demeanor is tentative at times, which is something I also noticed as I watched the recording of myself teaching. I need to be more assertive and not be afraid to speak up. I need to be able to get students' attention and ask them to stop talking when I need them to listen. I plan to be more conscious of my demeanor and I hope that with more time and practice I will become more confident and assertive. Another aspect I felt was weak as I watched the recording was my explanations of the activities, which I didn't think were always very clear. I felt like I had to backtrack because I left out details or steps. My professor also mentioned that more examples and discussion to build background knowledge would have been beneficial in the

explanations of the activities. I think I need to practice or read through the directions for the activities a few more times before class so they are clear and I don't leave anything out. One more thing I could do to improve would be to have more activities or more steps to the activities for the students that finish quickly. The students who finished before most of the others didn't have anything to do when they were done. I don't want my students to get bored and lose focus. I need to consider that not all students will finish at the same time and have something for the faster students to do. While I felt that the lesson went well overall, there are certainly some areas where I can continue to improve and I hope to use my own reflections and the suggestions of my professor to better my teaching.

My teaching does reflect some aspects of my teaching philosophy, but could be more closely aligned in other ways. The use of authentic material is important to me and I have done well with that. Also, I try to center the lessons around real-life, applicable skills, which are important to my students. Another essential part of my teaching philosophy is to connect with students. If it is difficult for me to speak in front of them, it might be hard for me to connect with them. I hope with time, practice, and effort I can become more comfortable and open in front of a class. It will be valuable for me to review my teaching philosophy often and evaluate whether I am practicing the ideals I profess to believe.

I have a lot of work to do before I would consider myself a great teacher, but as I watched myself I could see that I have gained some new skills through the MSLT program. In both of my lessons, I had a clear objective, used authentic materials, and had some communicative practice. I demonstrated that I understand that the goal of CLT is

for the students to be able to use the language in real-life situations. I am confident that I will continue to learn more and will improve my methods of conducting a lesson.

CULTURE ARTIFACT
The Pragmatics of Complimenting
for ESL Students

INTRODUCTION AND REFLECTION

This artifact was written for the Culture Teaching and Learning: Theory and Practice class. It is about the pragmatics of giving compliments. First, it explains complimenting behavior. This includes types of compliments, appropriate subjects of a compliment, who it is appropriate to pay a compliment to, and how to react to a compliment. The paper then features methods for teaching pragmatics, including complimenting behavior.

I was interested in studying the pragmatics of complimenting behavior because it is a speech act that I have seen my students struggle with. Sometimes they don't know how to pay a compliment, what is appropriate to pay a compliment on, or how to accept a compliment. Complimenting can foster rapport between speakers and is a valuable linguistic and pragmatic skill. I want to be able to give my students the information they need to be successful in paying compliments in North American society.

I learned through writing this artifact that giving and receiving compliments are more complex processes than I realized. There are many aspects of a successful compliment. I learned that it is sometimes difficult for students to pick up on the nuances of pragmatic elements of communication, so it is valuable for them to receive explicit instruction in these areas. I also discovered ways to improve my teaching of pragmatics. I hope to include detailed explanations of how to give compliments in my lessons, supplemented with authentic materials that demonstrate appropriate compliment-giving situations.

This artifact supports the meaningful instruction part of my teaching philosophy. Pragmatic instruction is meaningful to students. Students need explicit instruction on

pragmatic elements of language to understand them. They want to be able to interact appropriately and be accepted by people in North American society. Complimenting is a valuable strategy to help students break barriers between themselves and people they might want to get to know better or impress. I hope that with the knowledge I have gained through writing this artifact I can help them to be successful in their endeavors to give appropriate compliments.

Abstract

Appropriately giving and receiving compliments in North American society can be confusing for ESL students. There are several aspects to consider. A compliment can have several forms and functions (LoCastro, 2012). It is important for students to understand what kinds of compliments they can give, when to give them, and who to give them to. Teachers should provide their students with explicit information about complimenting behavior to help them understand it (Abrams, 2014). Authentic examples are also valuable in teaching the pragmatics of compliment giving (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996). Teachers have the responsibility to teach pragmatic skills along with language.

Introduction

Compliments can be defined as “overt expressions of approval or admiration of another’s work, appearance, or taste” (Manes, 1983, p. 97). Being able to successfully execute a compliment can help ESL students meet their goal of being accepted in the community. Giving a compliment acceptably and appropriately requires knowledge of pragmatics. Indeed, “a highly grammatically competent non-native speaker who violates sociopragmatic norms might easily be judged by a native speaker not as linguistically inadequate but as subservient, impolite, or unfriendly” (Bella, 2012, p. 20). If a compliment is given inappropriately or seems to be insincere, the giver of the compliment risks offending the receiver and creating uncomfortable situations. I have noticed that sometimes my students give compliments that seem strange to me or don’t know the appropriate language to use to give a compliment. For this reason, I would like to analyze the pragmatics of compliment giving in the United States and present some effective methods of teaching pragmatics to ESL students.

Complimenting behavior

Gaining a knowledge of pragmatics is a valuable part of language learning. There is more involved in communicative interactions than the words alone. “Pragmatics studies how one form can have several functions and one function can take several forms” (LoCastro, 2012, p. 8). If students don’t understand the circumstances where the words and phrases they’ve learned can be used appropriately and with the right tone, they risk failures in communication and/or offending the person they are interacting with. The pragmatics of compliment giving are especially nuanced and require specific instruction to acquire. There are differences in complimenting behavior between cultures. These differences might include what is appropriate to give a compliment on, who it is appropriate to give a compliment to, the purpose of the compliment, and how to respond to a compliment. Students risk offending someone or creating uncomfortable situations if they don’t understand the pragmatics of giving a compliment. “Paying a compliment can... be quite face-threatening for the speakers themselves since the interlocutor receiving it might not take it as a positive remark to be appreciated but as an unwelcome or embarrassing comment” (Maiz-Arevalo, 2012, p. 980). When students understand the complimenting behaviors of the culture they are in, the risk of offending someone or creating an embarrassing situation is diminished.

Learning how to compliment appropriately can help students build rapport with native speakers and be more accepted into the community, their classes, their work environment, or wherever they are trying to fit in. As Wolfson and Manes (1980) also point out, “compliments serve an important interactional function: offering a topic for conversation while at the same time establishing a point of agreement” (p. 397). They can

serve as ice breakers to help people begin to build relationships with one another. Also, being pragmatically aware can help students avoid excluding themselves from the majority culture. In her study, Bella found that “native speakers exhibit considerably greater tolerance towards grammatical than pragmatic violations” (Bella, 2012, p. 21). It is up to the student whether they want to conform to the pragmatic norms of a society, but they can’t choose the consequences of nonconformance or how people will perceive them if they choose to ignore pragmatic strategies.

There are two types of compliments, explicit and implicit. Explicit compliments directly state the compliment while implicit compliments use other phrases and the hearer must infer what the compliment is meant to be. An example of an explicit compliment might be, “You did very well on your presentation.” An implicit compliment could be something like, “You sing like Pavarotti,” where the hearer must apply background knowledge and inference in order to discern that the statement is a compliment. Maiz-Arevalo (2012) explains that the type of compliment given can depend on the situation and the relation of the speaker and the hearer. Both implicit and explicit compliments can be used to save face.

Whilst going [boldly] on record... seems to avoid ambiguity and entail honesty and directness on the speaker's part, for the very same reasons it can also threaten the hearer's face in certain circumstances (e.g., if the relationship between the interlocutors is distant). On the other hand, choosing the [implicit] strategy poses the problem of risking not being correctly understood, which could be a face-threat for the speaker. (Maiz-Arevalo, 2012, p. 981)

Students must gain a sense of when to use which type of compliment. They must assess their relationship with the hearer and even try to understand their personality to give a compliment that will not cause discomfort for the hearer or the listener.

Most of the time in much of the world, the subject of a compliment is a person's possessions, performance, or their appearance, but this can vary between cultures. As Maiz-Arevalo mentioned in her study, "Spanish interlocutors seem to compliment more on appearances than abilities both explicitly and implicitly. On the other hand, one of the two major patterns of implicit compliments in English [is centered on] achievement" (Maiz-Arevalo, 2012, p. 994). Compliments often reflect the values of a culture (Manes, 1983). Students from different cultures must learn that English L1 speakers sometimes are more comfortable and direct about accepting compliments than people from other cultures and there are many subjects that are appropriate to give compliments about. Generally, American English speakers will graciously accept compliments on ability/work, possessions, appearance, and personality traits (Cheng, 2011).

Also, there are differences in the ways that men and women compliment each other. Rees-Miller did a study on the unique ways in which men and women compliment each other since much of the research on the subject is not very recent. She found that, "While women give compliments freely in both unstructured settings and goal-oriented activities, men are much more likely to compliment each other in goal-oriented activities, particularly in the context of sports. Single-sex compliments in particular reinforce values of femininity and masculinity" (Rees-Miller, 2011, p. 2687). In my experience, this is one of the areas where giving the wrong kind of compliment can cause the most trouble. There are some things that men do not generally compliment other men on (e.g., appearance) and doing so can cause an awkward situation, a confrontation, a bad impression of the giver of the compliment, or other undesirable consequences.

Sometimes “compliments may play...social functions” (Placencia & Lower, 2013, p. 623). They might be used by the speaker to elevate their status with the hearer. They can build rapport and friendship. They can console or give affirmation. Sometimes compliments serve the purpose of validation and are reactionary in nature (Placencia & Lower, 2013). The speaker might perceive that the hearer is seeking validation and can provide it through a compliment. Manes points out, “A major function of compliments is the establishment or reinforcement of solidarity between the speaker and the addressee” (Manes, 1983, p. 97). Compliments can be used as social tools if they are implemented appropriately.

Social distance plays a role in who can compliment whom and on what subject. “A compliment can be interpreted negatively...if it presumes an inappropriate level of intimacy between the participants” (Placencia & Lower, 2013, p. 622). For example, although the relationships between bosses and employees in the United States are often more casual than in other countries, this does not always mean that friendly, intimate compliments are appropriate or welcome. Complimenting someone’s looks is often assumed to be between more casual or friendly associates. “Skills or abilities tend to be considered appropriate topics for compliments to those of different status” (Holmes, 1988, p. 456). Also, in some areas of the United States it is not considered unusual for a stranger to pay another stranger a compliment (e.g., saying to a stranger on the bus, “That is a beautiful coat”), but in other areas it might be considered strange or threatening. The speaker must consider their relationship with the person they want to give a compliment to and the cultural norms. If they are not well acquainted with the person or if the social distance is great, the speaker should carefully evaluate whether the compliment is

appropriate and will cause a good reaction or whether it is inappropriate and might cause an uncomfortable situation.

Occasionally, what sounds like a compliment is not actually a compliment. If it is stated with sarcasm or impoliteness it may, in fact, be an insult. Speakers must be mindful of their tone and timing if their intention is to give a sincere compliment. They must also consider whether what they are saying will be perceived as a compliment by the hearer. If the hearer does not value what the speaker is complimenting them on, or if the compliment reflects a stereotype of a group, the hearer could be offended. “Genuine performance-based compliments that are qualified by the target’s group membership are likely to yield negative reactions... (e.g., ‘You did really well for a woman!’)” (Czopp, 2008, p. 419). Speakers can’t always predict how their compliment will be received, but they should try to make sure that the content of the compliment wouldn’t be offensive to the hearer. Tone can also transform the meaning of a phrase. As Wolfson and Manes observed, “Part of the communicative competence of a native speaker lies in their ability to recognize sarcasm, which changes what might appear on the surface as a simple compliment into a joke or insult. This same mechanism may turn seemingly insulting remark into a complimentary one” (Wolfson & Manes, 1980, p. 392). Sarcasm can be one of the most difficult concepts to learn in a second language, but with careful attention to tone, students can learn to give a compliment without sounding insincere.

Students must also learn what kind of a reaction they might expect when giving a compliment and how to react when given one. It can be difficult to tell how the compliment is received if the hearer does not have a strong reaction. However, in the

U.S., it might be considered rude to unequivocally accept a compliment. Manes explains the process clearly:

The recipient of a compliment faces a conflict in that accepting the compliment and agreeing with the speaker may be seen as self-praise, while at the same time it is impolite to disagree and reject the compliment outright...The most common [strategy] is a simple 'Thank you' which accepts the compliment without explicitly agreeing with its content. Another... is to deny or play down...without overtly denying the compliment. (Manes, 1983, p. 100)

These are the types of nuances that the student must learn to navigate.

“There is not one way to express a compliment, and not everything that looks like a compliment is actually intended as one by the speaker or interpreted that way by the hearer” (Abrams, 2014, p. 56). For this reason, it is important for ESL students to learn the pragmatics of compliment giving. There are many aspects to consider. It is valuable for them to think about how compliments are given in their own culture and what will transfer to the culture of the United States and what will not. They need instruction and guidance from well-trained, knowledgeable teachers.

Methods for Teaching Pragmatics

Since pragmatic details are so hard to pick up on without explicit instruction, students need an engaging environment where they can learn. It is the job of language teachers to provide good-quality, realistic input from which the students can learn the pragmatics of compliment giving. According to Abrams (2014), students who receive explicit instruction develop better pragmatic skills than those who receive implicit instruction or no instruction. Bardovi-Harlig also brings attention to the responsibility of the teacher when she says, “One of the goals in facilitating the development of pragmatic competence is providing pragmatically appropriate input. And classrooms are

indisputably good sources of input. For foreign language learners they may be the sole source of input” (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996, p. 24). In order for our students to become proficient in compliment giving, we have to provide them with good examples, careful explanations, and authentic materials that show them how to appropriately pay a compliment.

One way to show examples of interactions where a compliment is given is to show video clips of a conversation. Obviously videos can't take the place of a teacher but they can serve as supplemental material. Teachers must be careful to choose clips that represent how the pragmatics are actually used. They shouldn't be too dramatic or unrealistic. In her study, Abrams mentioned that some students experienced pragmatic miscommunications because of incorrect information they saw demonstrated in a movie (Abrams, 2014). When used correctly, a video clip can demonstrate the subject, intonation, and body language associated with the compliment. It is also a good opportunity to see the compliment demonstrated by someone other than the teacher. It is important for students to see these interactions rather than just read about them. “By and large, textbooks containing conversations or dialogues do not present pragmatically accurate models to learners” (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996, p. 24). Even great textbooks can't give detailed examples of speech acts through written words. Students need to hear the intonations and see the body language of the participants.

Students need to see authentic speech acts in action, but it's not always easy to find authentic material that accurately portrays the nuances of pragmatic communication. For this reason, it is important for ESL students to interact with native speakers and observe the way they talk to each other. “Lack of interactions with native speakers can

lead to pragmatic failure and communication breakdown” (Farashaiyan, Tan, & Subakir, 2014, p. 62). In my work at the English Language Center, I find it important to have volunteers in the classroom in order for the students to have the opportunity to interact with L1 English speakers one-on-one. Students who might not have L1 speakers available in class will benefit from going out into the community and observing interactions between L1 English speakers. It can be difficult and time-consuming to watch for a compliment-giving situation, but it is valuable for learners to see a real interaction and observe the behaviors of native speakers in a non-contrived conversation. “The bottom line is that we need to observe language use in order to provide reasonably authentic and representative models of language use” (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996, p. 27). With real-life, L1-speaker models of the language, students can apply the examples they’ve seen and have greater confidence as they communicate in their new language.

Since online communication is so common in our society, it is also becoming necessary to teach our students the pragmatics of online communication. It can be difficult to decipher the intended meaning in a text-based digital context since there are no visual or voice cues. It is interesting to see how compliments are played out in a virtual setting. In their study, Placencia and Lower noted that, “Within the [online] compliments themselves, the use of orthographic symbols such as capital letters, vowel lengthening, and multiple exclamation marks can be observed” (Placencia & Lower, 2013, p. 635). Language teachers should consider including some instruction on how to construct a compliment online in print and how the students might get their meaning across clearly without voice cues or body language.

Students also need plenty of opportunities to practice compliment giving in class.

Through group work and role plays, they can test their knowledge and work with other students and the teacher to assess the things they did right and the things they need to improve on. “Addressing pragmatics as part of language pedagogy empowers students to experience and experiment with the language, using the language class as an opportunity for learners to expand their communication across cultural boundaries and to thereby participate in the very purpose of language, which is communication” (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996, p. 30). The English classroom is a language laboratory where students should feel safe to experiment and practice with the language until they feel confident enough to apply it to real-life situations.

Conclusion

Although it is difficult to fully understand the pragmatics of a new language, well-trained teachers can help students to be successful in their endeavors. “Language educators can facilitate linguistic and pragmatic competence development of...students by going beyond the regular curriculum to promote motivation and encouraging further learning of a language” (LoCastro, 2012, p. 181). It is important that students understand that it will take time and practice and most likely a few awkward situations before they become proficient in compliment giving and other speech acts. There are many intricacies that must be understood and not every rule is generalizable to every situation. They should understand that they might not become perfectly native-like, but they can improve and become more confident in their interactions with L1 English speakers. “Measuring their performance between their earlier and later selves instead of against native speaker performance” is a more accurate and encouraging measure (Abrams, 2014,

p. 63). It is the teacher's role and responsibility to help the students make progress in understand the nuances of pragmatics. With the right tools, practice and encouragement, students can gain confidence and reach their communicative goals.

LITERACY ARTIFACT

Improving Writing Skills of ESL Learners

INTRODUCTION AND REFLECTION

This paper was written for the Second Language Acquisition: Theory and Practice class in collaboration with Kim Sorensen. I have since made many revisions on my own. This artifact discusses the importance of effective writing instruction for ESL students. First, it focuses on some of the challenges that teachers face in ESL writing instruction such as understanding the needs of ESL students and lack of specific training. Then, it discusses the challenges that students might encounter including negative attitudes towards writing, insecurities about ability, and unfamiliarity with academic vocabulary. Lastly, it suggests some pedagogical principles for improving the writing skills of ESL students.

In my experiences teaching ESL, writing is sometimes more challenging for students than other skills. At times, even students who are proficient in other skills struggle with writing. I have seen them retake classes for this reason. I wanted to research ESL writing to help my students improve their writing skills and progress in their English learning. I was especially interested in feedback and how to more effectively implement teacher and peer feedback in my classes. The pedagogical aspects of this paper are also valuable in creating lesson plans that address the needs of my students.

I learned through writing this artifact that both students and teachers face several challenges in ESL writing classes. When teachers are specifically trained to understand the needs of ESL students they can mitigate these challenges. I also learned that teacher and peer feedback are important parts of the writing process. Students value and expect feedback to improve their writing, but I am sometimes hesitant to give it. I have learned that although it can be uncomfortable or time-consuming, it is important to give my

students the feedback they need, especially in their writing. I also want to assign peer feedback to help them become more autonomous writers and provide them with a variety of different viewpoints, rather than just my own. My research for this artifact helped me to understand how I can use feedback to teach writing more effectively in my ESL classes.

This artifact supports my teaching philosophy because helping students to improve their writing is part of meaningful instruction. Students will be expected to write well outside of the classroom in community or work situations. My students want to improve their writing skills and instruction in how to do so is valuable to them. I will apply the concepts presented in this paper to provide my students with meaningful instruction in writing.

Abstract

ESL students sometimes struggle with writing. There are challenges for both teachers and students in ESL writing classes. Teachers do not always understand the unique needs of ESL students (Friedrich, 2006) or have the specific training to teach ESL writers (Matsuda, Saenkhum, & Accardi, 2013). Students might struggle with writing because of their perceptions of writing (Ismail, Hussin, & Darus, 2012), insecurities about their ability (Martinez, Kock, & Cass, 2011) or unfamiliarity with academic vocabulary (Macbeth, 2006). Teachers can help students improve their writing by providing them with feedback on their writing and giving them opportunities to give and receive peer feedback (Lee & VanPatten, 2003; Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013; Shrum & Glisan, 2010). Proficiency in writing is an important skill and will prepare students to be successful in higher education or careers.

Introduction

While working with ESL students at adult language learning centers, I have seen a critical need for writing instruction. ESL students of all ages will be required to write well for job applications and work requirements. Even when their speaking skills are strong, some L2 learners lack the skills they need when writing is required. Referring to articles about teaching writing skills to English learners, I will show the need for the teaching of writing. I will focus specifically on the areas of understanding the students and giving corrective feedback.

Preparing teachers with the best approaches for improving writing skills of ESL students is the goal of this review. Best practices include: awareness training on underlying reasons for poor writing performance, adjustments in attitude of both students

and teachers, effective use of corrective feedback for L2 writing, and utilization of peer correction.

Background

At the adult ESL center where I work, many learners who are proficient in speaking retake classes to improve their writing skills. They feel that their writing skills are holding them back and that they are not ready to move on. They need better writing instruction and practice to be prepared to advance.

Challenges for ESL Writers

Teaching Problems

To improve the writing skills of ESL students, teachers first have to become aware of their needs and backgrounds. Many instructional problems stem from a misunderstanding of students' needs (Friedrich, 2006) and inadequate teacher training (Matsuda, Saenkhum, & Accardi, 2013). If teachers can remedy these problems, they can become more effective ESL writing teachers.

First, teachers need to be aware of the distinctions between three types of basic writers—resident ESL writers, international writers, and monolingual basic writers (Friedrich, 2006). It is important to make this distinction because each group has different needs when it comes to writing instruction. “A great deal can be achieved if administrators and faculty work toward a paradigm shift, one in which diverse students are perceived as already engaged in multiple literacies and in which their needs are deemed different rather than greater or more challenging” (Friedrich, 2006, p. 26). Too often the needs of ESL writers are not being met with traditional programs, which can lead to frustration and lack of motivation. Each ESL student has a different educational

history and is at a different point in the English learning process. Resident ESL students have been the most neglected group, according to Friedrich (2006). It has been observed that often these students have picked up English from spoken interactions and might be lacking in formal instruction. Even though they often speak better than international students, they might have fewer literacy and learning skills. Since the needs of each different kind of ESL student are so different, it is important to know who the students are in order to place them in the right class and provide them with the tools they need.

Class placement is important in meeting the needs of ESL students. Each student requires a different educational situation based on their language development.

“Linguistically diverse students...often see educational practices falling short of addressing their individual needs” (Friedrich, 2006, p. 16). It is important that teachers and administrators understand the student’s background thoroughly before making placement decisions and that they are willing to be flexible as they see that changes are needed. They should also take into account the desires and interests of the student.

“Placement preferences are influenced by complex factors, highlighting the need to respect [the students’] own preferences” (Matsuda, Saenkhum, & Accardi, 2013, p. 70).

When students are placed in the classes that best meet their needs, they receive the instruction and classroom setting that help them develop their language skills. Without proper placement, students can fall behind their peers and may never develop proficiency if their path is not changed. “Many...ESL students who needed only specialized attention...fall through the cracks of the track to mainstream” (Friedrich, 2006, p. 26).

Teachers should expect to have many different levels in their writing classes. The reality of ESL writing programs is that many teachers are not trained to teach ESL writers

and are sometimes unaware of their unique challenges. Friedrich emphasizes the need for a greater understanding of our diverse students when she states, “It is our job as instructors to change our own frame of mind to accept the realities of these students’ lives, whatever they may be, and use them to their advantage” (Friedrich, 2006, p. 28). Even when students in the same class are on different levels, they can work together in strategic groups to combine their strengths and help classmates with their weaknesses. ESL classrooms are inherently diverse and it is important to take the background of each student into account to begin determining individual needs. Differences are not necessarily weaknesses and most students already have some experiences with writing that they are bringing with them (Condon & Olson, 2016). There are many factors that influence students’ ability to learn and teachers must take the time to find out how each student learns best. With that information in mind, teachers must incorporate many different modes of teaching into their lessons to accommodate various learning styles (Peacock, 2001).

Many teachers of ESL writers are not specifically trained to help them. “Instead, they come with background in various other disciplines, such as creative writing, literary studies, and formal linguistics, among others” (Matsuda, Saenkhum, & Accardi, 2013, p. 69). Sometimes teachers in regular English composition classes are not aware of their ESL learners and therefore cannot address their specific needs. “Teaching students who come from different backgrounds requires specific skills and abilities, familiarity with features of other languages, and some knowledge of cross-cultural issues” (Friedrich, 2006, p. 24). ESL teachers need to know how L2 acquisition happens and the unique learning challenges that L2 learners face. “There is a very close correlation

between teachers' background preparation, the teaching emphasis in the classroom, and the way that both students and teachers perceive writing" (Spicer-Escalante, 2011, p. 1456). Teachers also need to have a knowledge of the world, other cultures, and the external situations that their students have come from. ESL writing teachers should be trained "to be aware of the presence and needs of various types of students in their classes and be prepared to address those needs" (Matsuda, Saenkhum, & Accardi, 2013, p. 70). To be ready to address the needs of ESL students, teachers should seek out opportunities for more training and development and administrators should offer opportunities such as specialized courses and seminars to teachers with ESL students in their classes.

Problems of students

Attitudes and perceptions of students can affect the development of writing skills. "When learners have positive attitudes about the target language...these attitudes are thought to have a positive influence on learning outcomes" (Murray & Christison, 2011, p. 175). Students have different goals, different feelings about the language and culture, and "different degrees of...desire for acculturation" (Friedrich, 2006, p. 21). Some students do not have a strong desire to learn English and/or do not have positive feelings towards writing. When students have a bad attitude toward writing, it is hard to help them learn and improve. "How the students feel and react towards their writing tasks and activities greatly determine[s] the quality of their composition" (Ismail, Hussin, & Darus, 2012, p. 1099). Thus, students can improve their writing skills and quality of output if they can learn to have a better attitude towards writing. Teachers can have an influence on students' attitudes by demonstrating a positive attitude themselves and providing them with positive writing experiences. "It is important for the teacher to find out what the

students' expectations are and to address areas in which the student's expectations differ from the teacher's" (McKay & Tom, 1999, p. 3). Through a positive example and by providing students with the tools they need, teachers can "enhance [students'] writing ability, improve their writing attitude and increase their writing interest" (Ismail, Hussin, & Darus, 2012, p. 1097).

Sometimes a bad attitude about writing can stem from insecurities about ability. "Perceived self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to succeed, contributes to students' level of motivation, aspiration, and academic achievement" (Martinez, Kock, & Cass, 2011, p. 352). Teachers can have an influence on what the students believe they can do. Whether the teacher has low or high expectations for the students, they are likely to have matching expectations of themselves. Teachers need to know how to address problems with self-consciousness to make sure that students feel sufficiently prepared and equipped to write well. They also need to foster an encouraging environment where students feel like a team and are more comfortable sharing with each other. Insecurities about ability can inhibit participation in the class. "[Students] may feel self-conscious about sharing their work with peers, an attitude which further isolates them and slows down the process of becoming effective writers" (Friedrich, 2006, p. 24). By creating a supportive classroom environment, encouraging students to do their best, and avoiding excessive error correction, teachers can create more positive writing experiences for ESL students. "Truly effective language learning experiences will inevitably have a health influence on learner self-esteem" (Arnold, 2011, p. 16) and higher self-esteem will lead to more confidence in writing ability and better work.

Another challenge that ESL writers encounter is lack of academic vocabulary and the interpretation of instructions from a different cultural perspective. “It is not particularly clear that...students could transform their own writing without an overt acknowledgement of the cross-cultural rhetorical confusion that lies beneath their surface errors” (Friedrich, 2006, p. 20). Instructions and prompts are full of cultural assumptions and novices need training about certain aspects of writing before they are able to address the requirements. Students need to be provided with clear, explicit explanations of what is required of them and definitions of the specialized vocabulary that they might encounter. Macbeth (2006) writes about the assumptions by teachers that students understand academic vocabulary words such as thesis statement, plagiarism, main idea, summaries, and argument. The way in which a student interprets a writing prompt, or the feedback given by instructors, is partly based on the cultural perspective of the student. ESL writers need to know how to judge, surmise, and infer (Macbeth, 2006). Instructors need to provide extensive modeling and explicit instruction. To help ESL writers succeed, teachers need to be flexible and aware of many missteps that occur due to cultural differences and inexperience with English academic vocabulary.

As instructors become informed of what type of ESL learner each student is, the unique attitudes that are brought into the classroom, and the cultural interpretations the student may have, writing instruction can be better tailored to the students’ needs and will be more effective.

Pedagogy on Improving ESL Writing Instruction

Teachers must understand the processes of L2 learning and understand the unique challenges that ESL students have in writing. L2 writers go about the process differently

than L1 writers. It is suggested that L2 writers spend twice as much time trying to formulate meaning than L1 writers (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 304). Often, they do not have an accessible, extensive vocabulary to help them convey the meaning they have in their heads, especially with academic vocabulary. “Written language is not just conversational language put down on paper” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 245). For ESL students, writing can be more challenging when they are unfamiliar with the English words they need to write what they mean. In planning what they want to write, the process differs for L2 writers as they collect and organize words and phrases first that they will need to express ideas and then they can start organizing ideas (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). Another unique challenge for ESL writing students is that sometimes writing “[calls] on learners to produce language that displays their knowledge about the language they are learning” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 244). This is not usually the case in L1 writing. In L1 writing, students focus on the topics and ideas of the paper more than the language. L2 learners, on the other hand, sometimes have to focus on producing the language rather than conveying the exact ideas they prefer to write about. The fact that ESL learners must be concerned with language as well as content creates unique challenges in their writing processes.

Teachers should keep in mind several fundamental aspects in ESL writing instruction. There is a “need to identify a purpose for writing and to include real-world writing tasks and genres in addition to traditional formal composition formats” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 306). Often, ESL students want to learn English that they can apply to their lives outside of school—in the community or in their work. Teachers need to provide writing instruction and activities specific to their needs. Another factor to

consider is the fact that ESL students are learning a language as well as learning to write. Teachers should try to include language instruction and connect meaning to writing. A good activity for including these aspects is journal writing. Writing in a journal can “help students create personal meaning and increase their motivation to write” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 280). Journal writing is a beneficial activity for creating connections to meaning and promoting interest in writing, but students also need opportunities to write for other purposes. “The types of activities that promote writing development are those that involve decision-making writing processes: defining the rhetorical problem...planning...and reviewing” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 254). As teachers plan their writing curriculum, they should include diversified types of writing that include real-life writing practice, writing that helps with language acquisition, and more formal writing assignments.

To become proficient writers, ESL learners require plenty of practice. It has been found that sometimes students feel that they “do not get adequate writing instructions and practice due to the constraints of time and space available for writing instruction in class” (Ismail, Hussin, & Darus, 2012, p. 1096). Often teachers are faced with time constraints and required material that they must cover, but it is important they also try to fit in as much writing instruction and practice as they can. “Instructors need to keep in mind the fact that writing is a skill that improves with practice” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 245). Students can improve and reach their writing goals when they are given plenty of opportunities to practice.

It is important that ESL writing teachers are well-aware of the writing processes of ESL students. They need to be trained in the best approaches to help them throughout

the process. By studying the research that has been conducted on the ESL writing process, teachers can equip themselves to help their ESL student to achieve writing proficiency. ESL students have unique ways of writing that are influenced by their L1 and their L2 (Spicer-Escalante, 2011). Teachers must learn to adapt and realize that their students are in the process of becoming better writers.

Corrective Feedback

Another aspect in helping ESL writers succeed is proper types and amount of corrective feedback (CF). Sometimes, teachers are reluctant to use CF due to beliefs that it impedes communication and induces anxiety. However, it has been found that students prefer CF (Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013). “Students are disappointed when they do not receive feedback since they view it as an important contribution to their goal of producing an error-free document” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 325). On the other hand, when students are given too much feedback on every single error made, they can feel overwhelmed and unsuccessful (Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013). Important considerations are the amount and methods of feedback, as well as providing varied feedback. “Mismatches between teachers’ intentions and learners’ interpretation of those intentions may result in negative effects on learning” (Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013, p. 7). Teachers should make sure that the students understand the feedback they are providing to them, and should also try to tailor feedback to individual learning styles. “The most effective teachers are likely to be those who are willing and able to orchestrate, in accordance with their students’ language abilities and content familiarity, a wide range of CF types that fit the instructional context” (Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013, p. 30).

To help students become better writers, teachers need to understand how to provide feedback specifically for writing. “Feedback on compositions should include responding to the content...whether or not one responds to form” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 269). In writing, form isn’t always as important as content, depending on the focus of the assignment. “Providing content-focused feedback is sometimes difficult for teachers whose attention is often drawn to grammatical or syntactic errors because of the expectations of the environment in which they teach” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 327). When the content and organization of an assignment are the most important aspects, teachers should respond and give more feedback on those items. “Feedback becomes part of the writing process as learners use feedback from peers and the teacher as they revise their work” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 325). Writing and speaking are two very different activities and require different feedback. The writing process has several steps and as students work through these steps, they try to incorporate the written feedback from teachers and peers. It is a slower, less immediate process than speaking and students have more time to process and incorporate the written feedback they are given. Constructive, applicable feedback will help them to improve their writing. “Grammar and content feedback, whether given alone or simultaneously, positively affect rewriting” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 328). Clear, focused feedback and instruction on how to implement this feedback will lead to improvements.

Feedback can be supplied by the instructor as well as by peers. There are many benefits to peer feedback in ESL writing. “Having students engage in peer revision can promote their autonomy as authors, provide them with an audience other than the teacher, and encourage them to work with others during the writing process” (Shrum & Glisan,

2010, p. 331). It can also cause students to think more critically about their own writing. “By giving the students practice in becoming critical readers, we are at the same time helping them towards becoming more self-reliant writers, who are both self-critical and who have the skills to self-edit and revise their writing” (Rollinson, 2005, p. 29). Peers can offer various types of input on papers that teachers might not be able to. Also, individual students might have different insights and opinions about the same piece of writing. “The benefits of peer review...are maximized if students who can offer different interpretations of texts can be paired with one another” (Friedrich, 2006, p. 30). One disadvantage of utilizing peer review is the time it takes to implement it. Another reason it might fail is a lack of trust between students (Rollinson, 2005). One way to address these problems is to establish peer feedback as a regular occurrence in the classroom and create an environment where students feel comfortable with it. As students start to see benefits from peer feedback, they will be more receptive to it. The teacher needs to carefully consider training, setup of the groups, and the process of the peer feedback. Thoughtfully implemented peer feedback in writing can be a very effective way to improve writing skills (Weinstein, 2012).

Lesson Plan

Based on suggestions and findings from research on best practices for ESL writing instruction, I have decided to implement a lesson plan based on the work of Echevarria, Vogt and Short (2008). I developed the lesson plan for a public education eighth and ninth grade ESL writing class, but it can also be adapted for adult learners. It is only one part of an entire unit. This multi-genre writing unit was created with the goal of preparing students to learn to pull useful information from texts and use it as evidence

to support a claim. The final goal is to present their topic to the class in writing through at least two different genres such as a PowerPoint presentation, essay, poem, journal entry, newspaper article, etc.

To begin the unit, students will choose a topic that they are interested in and that they want to write persuasively about. Since students come from diverse backgrounds, and have different interests and unique needs, it is important that they can explore a topic that engages them. If students are given the opportunity to choose a topic they are interested in, they are more likely to be interested in the writing process and have a better attitude about it. In previous lessons, students have practiced summarizing and paraphrasing and have learned about plagiarism. They also understand what primary and secondary sources are. In this part of the unit, the goal is to be able to summarize, paraphrase, and quote information from secondary sources. The students have obtained these sources through online search engines in previous class periods.

For this specific class period, the goal of the day is to gather relevant information about their topic from their sources and organize it in a graphic organizer. First the students will be given a quiz to remind them of the target vocabulary learned the previous day (genre, summarize, paraphrase, infer, plagiarism, primary source, secondary source, references). Next they will be given their graphic organizer. Before the students work on their own, the process will be modeled so they understand it more clearly and know what is expected of them. As they read through their sources and find statements that will support their case, the students will take notes from each source and fill the boxes on the worksheet given. Only one source will be included on each side. Providing students with information about specific writing strategies, such as a graphic organizer, can help to

avoid frustration during the writing process. To assess their work for the day, students will show the teacher their graphic organizer filled with notes. Scores will be given according to the quality and quantity of notes taken during this class period. Throughout the unit, a different type of assessment will be used daily to help ESL learners see success in different ways.

Students will be given clear, specific feedback throughout the process of creating their final written projects. If they have effectively summarized an article in the appropriate level of speech, and not just copied the information, they have accomplished the first step to this project. By the end of the unit, students will have gained valuable writing skills they can utilize in the future. Throughout the unit, I will continually address individual needs, provide corrective feedback, and assign peer feedback.

Conclusion

ESL learners need to become proficient in writing so that they can become career and/or college ready and possibly become future world language educators. “English writing instruction is being integrated into...curricula...as a response to the new literacy demands that are being imposed on the current and future generations of students” (Matsuda, Saenkhum, & Accardi, 2013, p. 82). It is imperative that ESL students have writing instruction. Through the use of uniquely designed lesson plans like the one above for ESL writers, the need for capable writers, not just speakers, will be fulfilled. Also, by training ESL instructors to understand the unique needs and attitudes of ESL students and by using appropriate methods of instruction, the students will be prepared for writing requirements in life and careers.

LANGUAGE ARTIFACT

The Effects of Listening and Reading

Activities on Vocabulary Retention

INTRODUCTION AND REFLECTION

This artifact was written for the Research in Second Language Learning class as a literature review and proposal of a study in the area of vocabulary teaching. It discusses whether reading or listening activities are better for vocabulary acquisition and retention. It covers some of the universal concepts of vocabulary acquisition such as repeated exposure, context, and vocabulary learning strategies. Some of the characteristics of both reading and writing activities for acquiring vocabulary are explained. A study is then proposed to find out which type of activity is better for students.

I chose to research methods of vocabulary teaching and learning since vocabulary knowledge is vital to communication in the L2. Without an extensive vocabulary, students can't always express themselves in the L2, which I have seen lead to frustration. I want to be able to help my students make meaningful connections to vocabulary and be able to retain what they learn. To better understand whether reading or writing activities help students learn vocabulary I proposed a study that can help me to understand which activities are better in an adult ESL setting. By applying these activities I hope to be more effective in teaching vocabulary.

I learned through my study of reading and writing activities that both types of activities have benefits and drawbacks. Some activities work better in some settings than in others. It is up to the teacher to determine what the needs of the students are and to incorporate the types of activities that work best for the class. I also learned that each student has different learning preferences. Even though one type of activity might work better for a greater number of students, teachers still need to take individual preferences and learning styles into account. I also realized through my research that there are several

universal principles I can apply to vocabulary teaching regardless of what types of activities I am implementing.

This paper relates to the communicative teaching and meaningful instruction aspects of my teaching philosophy. The research mentions a need for rehearsal of vocabulary words. Giving students opportunities to practice communication in class also gives them opportunities to practice vocabulary words. The communicative approach lends itself to vocabulary acquisition as well as communicative practice. Effective vocabulary instruction is also a part of meaningful instruction. Students need accessible vocabulary to communicate effectively. Helping them to acquire and retain more vocabulary will help them to reach their goals of being able to communicate in the L2.

Abstract

To be able to communicate effectively in the L2, students have to have sufficient vocabulary. Important aspects of teaching and learning vocabulary include repeated exposure to vocabulary words (Elgort & Warren, 2014), seeing or hearing words in context (Elyas & Alfaki, 2014), and use of vocabulary learning strategies (Zhang & Li, 2011). Vocabulary can be taught through reading and listening activities. Both types of activities have benefits and drawbacks. It is unclear whether reading or listening activities are better for acquisition and retention. A study is proposed to discover which types of activities are better to help students with vocabulary learning.

Introduction

In the ESL classes that I have taught and observed and in my own language learning experience, I have noticed that many students struggle with learning and remembering new vocabulary. The goal of most of my ESL students is to be able to communicate in English and to fit in with American culture. “Vocabulary is central to...language teaching because without sufficient vocabulary, students cannot...express their own ideas” (Elyas & Alfaki, 2014, p. 41). Having an extensive, accessible vocabulary is critical to being able to communicate effectively and with a native-like competence in the L2. Teachers need to understand the process of how students acquire new vocabulary to effectively teach and review it and to inform their students of effective strategies. “Vocabulary knowledge is a complex construct with multiple knowledge dimensions, such as form, grammatical characteristics, and collocations” (van Zeeland & Schmitt, 2013, p. 609). For this reason, it is important to study and understand different methods for teaching and learning vocabulary. Various listening and reading activities

can be used to build vocabulary; in this paper I will address the question of whether adult ESL students show a better retention rate of new vocabulary words after utilizing reading activities or listening activities. I will review some strategies for learning new vocabulary and propose a study to test whether listening or reading activities lead to better retention and recall for ESL students.

Literature Review

Vocabulary Acquisition

In order to determine which method works better for vocabulary teaching, we need to understand some of the ways in which vocabulary is acquired in general. No matter which specific methods are used to teach vocabulary, some factors are universally important and should be understood and utilized by teachers. These factors include repetition and frequent exposure, rehearsal, context, and explicit information about vocabulary-learning strategies.

One of the most important factors that influences the number of words retained is the number of times the students are exposed to the new word in the reading. “Number of encounters with a new word in reading is a major predictor of gain in explicit word knowledge” (Elgort & Warren, 2014, p. 397). Repetition and rehearsal are critical in acquiring new vocabulary words. Students who are “able to rehearse...vocabulary [have] better recall and recognition than [students] who [are] prevented from rehearsing” (Dahlen & Caldwell-Harris, 2013, p. 912). Dahlen and Caldwell-Harris performed a study whose findings suggest that students who were able to rehearse uninterrupted were able to recall more words. Some students hear the words in their head in the teacher’s voice or in an “idealized native accent” (Dahlen & Caldwell-Harris, 2013, p. 902) after

hearing them spoken by the teacher. For this reason, it is important that the student hears the words several times. They are able to recall the word easier and to ‘hear’ the correct pronunciation in their head. Several studies make it clear that repetition and frequent exposure to vocabulary words are important factors in learning vocabulary (Dahlen & Caldwell-Harris, 2013; Reynolds & Wible, 2014; van Zeeland & Schmitt, 2013).

When learning new vocabulary, context is critical. “When L2 vocabulary is learned from sentence contexts, the presence of more contextual clues that make it easier to guess the meanings of unknown words results in significantly higher...recognition and recall of meaning” (Elgort & Warren, 2014, p. 367). It is critical that the students are able to link meaning to the new words. “Showing meaning of words via context is very fruitful, especially when the word in question is [abstract]” (Elyas & Alfaki, 2014, p. 44). Providing the students with meaningful input by presenting new words in context will lead to greater success in acquisition (Elyas & Alfaki, 2014; Webb & Chang, 2012).

Another important factor in learning vocabulary is that students are informed about certain strategies that they can employ to help them learn. According to Zhang and Li (2011), if students have a knowledge of vocabulary-learning strategies, it can be an autonomous process where students can find what works best for them personally. “Adequate knowledge and consistent practice of learning strategies facilitate the usually intimidating vocabulary study task” (Zhang & Li, 2011, p. 153). Sometimes students don’t know how to go about learning new vocabulary. “Individual readers may approach unfamiliar words differently” (Elgort & Warren, 2014, p. 367) and may not know about more effective strategies for their personal learning style. If teachers can inform them about certain strategies and train them in using these strategies, vocabulary learning can

become an easier process for them. “They can also choose the appropriate strategies at each important stage of their word study” (Zhang & Li, 2011, p. 153). By instructing students on learning strategies we help them to personalize, take control, and be an active part of their own education. “Providing instruction that equips students with meaningful strategies for lifelong vocabulary development and comprehension is more valuable than teaching them a large amount of vocabulary” (Liu, 2014, p. 330).

Reading Activities

One way students can learn vocabulary is through reading activities. They are exposed to vocabulary in written form through the reading materials. Reading can be effective for some students, but might also have certain drawbacks. According to some studies, reading seems less effective for lower-level English learners and needs to be supplemented with other activities and instruction. Elgort and Warren (2014) found that “for advanced learners extensive reading may be sufficient for sustained vocabulary development, [but] at lower proficiencies, reading needs to be supplemented with deliberate word learning and vocabulary learning strategy training” (p. 397). Lower level learners won’t simply ‘pick up’ the vocabulary through reading like more advanced students will. “The lower the learner’s lexical proficiency, the more contextual encounters with a new L2 word [are] necessary for the learning to occur” (Elgort & Warren, 2014, p. 383). Lower-level learners need to be given more opportunities for exposure to new words and need more specialized instruction on how to learn new target vocabulary.

Exposure to vocabulary words in reading isn’t always a straight-forward concept. Teachers need to be aware of different forms of a target vocabulary words (*e.g., create,*

created, creating) and pay attention to how they are presented in a text. “There is a need for attention to be placed on the issue of form variation...of target words that appear within texts that L2 learners read” (Reynolds & Wible, 2014, p. 858). There is a question of whether learners “detect these variants as repeated exposures to the same word” (Reynolds & Wible, 2014, p. 844). It is hard to control frequency of exposure and know what students are acquiring if word forms vary. If students are exposed to a vocabulary word in different forms, it can affect the way they learn the vocabulary. The study by Reynolds and Wible was not an in-depth study on the internal processes of acquisition and the authors suggest that more research be done on students’ perceptions of different forms of vocabulary words and their incidental acquisition. “It is worth exploring whether the amount of variation exhibited by target [words] matters to L2 learners and whether this phenomenon exhibits any effect on the incidental acquisition of vocabulary through reading” (Reynolds & Wible, 2014, p. 858). Word form throughout a reading passage merits some consideration when teachers select materials intended to aid vocabulary acquisition.

Vocabulary can also be acquired incidentally through reading. Even if a word is not a target vocabulary word, students can learn it incidentally if they are exposed to it frequently. “Incidental learning occurs when learners acquire new aspects of their L2 without being focused on doing so” (van Zeeland & Schmitt, 2013, p. 609). The knowledge of “how new L2 words are learned incidentally and what factors affect this learning are key in building our understanding of L2 lexical development from reading” (Elgort & Warren, 2014, pp. 365-366). Teachers must keep in mind that students will learn incidentally and should pay close attention to the environments and materials that

help their students the most. If teachers carefully select reading materials that include repeated instances of the target vocabulary and related, important words, students can commit them to memory through explicit direction by the teacher and through incidental learning. “Incidental word learning from reading is a complex process that is affected by lexical, text/context, learner and task factors” (Elgort & Warren, 2014, p. 366). For this reason it is important to vary instruction and provide students with an encouraging classroom environment. Students can incidentally learn more than just the target vocabulary as they are repeatedly exposed to other new words throughout their reading activities.

“Knowing the patterns of a word will ease and facilitate understanding” (Elyas & Alfaki, 2014, p. 42). This means that if a student can understand the different parts that make up a word, they make more connections to its meaning and it is easier to recall. It can also help them to derive meaning from other similar words. “Relatively high levels of morphological awareness may contribute to improved reading comprehension among EFL students with a fairly limited range of vocabulary” (Liu, 2014, p. 332). Liu used an eye-movement test to find that students who had morphological instruction paused longer on the target vocabulary words while reading the text. “The longer participants looked at a word during reading, the more likely they were to recognize that word” (Liu, 2014, p. 334). He argues that morphological instruction has a positive effect on the learning and recall of words. “Manipulation of morphemes increases the ability of students in word decoding, reading tasks, and reading of morphologically complex words, and contributes to reading comprehension through its effect on vocabulary” (Liu, 2014, p. 331). This leads me to believe that using reading activities to teach vocabulary can help students

with recall when they see the written word again, but might not help them when they hear the same word being spoken.

Webb and Chang (2012) studied the effects of assisted and unassisted reading on incidental vocabulary acquisition for beginning language learners. The authors observed through their study that “repeated reading may deserve inclusion in L2 programs” (Webb & Chang, 2012, p. 286). “Unassisted repeated reading involves multiple, successive readings, either silently or aloud, until the text can be read fluently” (Webb & Chang, 2012, p. 268). Assisted reading is also an option for teaching vocabulary. Teachers can consider using audio or teacher read-aloud activities to supplement reading activities. “Assisted repeated reading... involves reading while simultaneously listening to an oral version of the text” (Webb & Chang, 2012, p. 268). Assisted reading provides more comprehensible input than unassisted reading. Teachers can point out meaning and morphology of words, which helps students to make a more meaningful connection with them, which then leads to greater recall. “Listening to texts provides a form of scaffolding for beginner readers” (Webb & Chang, 2012, p. 270), while “association may also create greater memory links” (Webb & Chang, 2012, p. 283).

Listening Activities

Multiple studies address the use of reading activities for vocabulary teaching and learning, but “considerably fewer studies have been carried out in the context of listening than reading” (van Zeeland & Schmitt, 2013, p. 610). More studies are merited in the area of listening activities for vocabulary acquisition.

Van Zeeland and Schmitt (2013) conducted a study on the general effects of listening activities on vocabulary acquisition. They found that “L2 listening is a source of

incidental vocabulary learning” (van Zeeland & Schmitt, 2013, p. 620). Just as reading activities contribute to incidental learning, so can listening activities. Another advantage of listening activities is that “participants may have greater knowledge of the spoken form of some words than they do the written form” (Webb & Chang, 2012, p. 283). In my experience, students often have more developed skills in speaking and listening than in reading and writing. If vocabulary words that students are already familiar with are presented in spoken form and then connected to the written form, students might be more likely to make meaningful connections to both the written and spoken form and remember them better. Also, listening activities can be helpful in pragmatic aspects of vocabulary. Listening “may be particularly useful in learning aspects that concern language usage, such as register characteristic and formulaic sequences” (van Zeeland & Schmitt, 2013, p. 622). These types of pragmatic nuances are better demonstrated through spoken words than through written words.

Listening to the pronunciation of new vocabulary words rather than reading them can also be beneficial to students. Dahlen and Caldwell-Harris (2013) studied the effects of phonological awareness on students’ vocabulary acquisition. Dahlen and Caldwell-Harris define phonological awareness as “an individual’s metalinguistic understanding of the sound structure of language, for example, understanding that a sentence can be divided into words, a word can be divided into syllables, and syllables can be divided into onsets and rhymes” (Dahlen & Caldwell-Harris, 2013, p. 904). According to the authors, “phonological awareness is initially acquired through exposure to language via listening” (Dahlen & Caldwell-Harris, 2013, p. 904). They also state that “the ability to form an accurate phonological representation of a novel word influences effective rehearsal of the

word and eventual recall” (Dahlen & Caldwell-Harris, 2013, p. 904). Since phonological awareness can be an important factor in the recall of words, listening activities are an important part of teaching vocabulary.

Although much has been written on how students learn vocabulary in general, not a lot of specific research exists on whether reading or listening activities are more effective for vocabulary learning. For this reason, I would like to propose a study whose purpose is to discover whether listening or reading is more effective in aiding eventual recall of vocabulary words. Teachers should vary instruction and use several different types of activities, but it is valuable to know what kinds of activities work better for the greatest number of students.

Method

To better understand the relationship between vocabulary retention and the types of activities the students are engaged in, four study groups will be observed. Each group will be comprised of 20-30 ESL students over the age of 18. They come from a variety of cultural and education backgrounds and are all attending the English Language Center of Cache Valley. There will be one beginning group and one advanced group that do the listening activities and one beginning group and one advanced group that do the reading activities. The first step of the study will be a pre-test to discover how many of the vocabulary words the students already know. After the pre-test, the same list of vocabulary words will be presented to both the listening group and the reading group by displaying them with a picture and repeating them as a class. After the words are initially presented, the first group will be given a series of reading activities to complete that contain the vocabulary words. The second group will be given a series of listening

activities where they listen to materials that contain the vocabulary words. Both the listening and reading materials will include stories, news reports, and conversations. The same passages will be used in written and spoken forms. The vocabulary activities will take place over three, two-hour class periods. At the end of the third class period the students will be given a test to determine how many words they remember. They will be shown pictures of each vocabulary item and then be asked to recall the word for that item. The test will be given again one month after the experiment to determine the rate of retention of the vocabulary words and to see whether the reading group or the listening group has a higher rate of retention. The groups of beginners will be compared to each other and the groups of advanced students will be compared to each other. The beginning and advanced students will not be compared to each other.

Conclusion

This experiment can be used to determine which methods work best for teaching vocabulary in a manner that will lead to maximum retention of vocabulary words. All students are different and may require a different approach. Some students are naturally gifted at language learning. “These students seem to recall new words after seeing or hearing them only once, they seem to be able to recognize and pronounce new words that they see in written form, and they are able to extract meaning from what the teacher says in the target language” (Dahlen & Caldwell-Harris, 2013, p. 913). Other students struggle with the language learning process and need more individualized attention from the teacher. No matter the method, “language teachers should spend considerable time on teaching vocabulary in their classroom and examining the relationship between vocabulary teaching and vocabulary learning” (Elyas & Alfaki, 2014, p. 41). It is

important for teachers to find what is best for the greatest number of their students as well as informing each student of individualized strategies that might work for each of them. I realize that this test is limited and does not take into account the different learning styles of students or the effects of conversation practice on vocabulary retention. Both reading and listening have their merits, but this study will be a starting point to determine which type of modality is more beneficial for the greatest number of students. “Word learning is a slow and incremental process” (Elgort & Warren, 2014, p. 396) and students will need to be provided with the resources that are most beneficial to them.

TEACHER ARTIFACT

The Importance of Teacher Empathy
in an ESL Classroom

INTRODUCTION AND REFLECTION

This artifact was written as a reflection on my independent study at the English Language Center of Cache Valley. It addresses the importance of teacher empathy in the ESL classroom. There are many aspects of teacher empathy. ESL teachers should have some knowledge of the world at large to have an understanding of where their students are coming from. They should know about cultures and how a student's culture might affect how they learn or act. This paper discusses the humanistic approach and how it can help teachers see students a whole person. It is important that teachers understand the background and situation of each student and extend empathy toward them.

My experiences at the ELC inspired me to write this artifact. After more than 30 hours of teaching and helping the students there, I observed that teacher empathy is a strong factor in connecting with the students and helping them to open up. When the students see that the teacher understands at least a part of who they are, they create a stronger bond with the teacher. Teacher empathy is a subject that I am very interested in and passionate about. For this reason, I wanted to include this artifact in my portfolio.

Through writing this artifact, I learned how influential teacher empathy can be on students. There are many different aspects of teacher empathy. I learned that learning to be an effective ESL teacher includes more than just the study of language teaching. It includes knowing about the world, cultures, and psychology. I also realized through my research that even though students are affected by their culture and their circumstances, it is important to get to know each of them individually because they all have unique characteristics and might not fit into a cultural stereotype.

Teacher empathy is key to creating an encouraging classroom environment, which is one of the principles of my teaching philosophy. As teachers demonstrate empathy toward their students, they create a safe environment where students know that they are free to express their personalities and cultures without embarrassment or persecution. This sense of security creates a classroom where students' minds are more open, their anxiety is lowered and they are prepared to learn.

Abstract

Teacher empathy is an important part of creating an encouraging classroom environment, especially in diverse ESL classes. Empathy is the ability to understand another person's challenges, thoughts and feelings (Chang, Berger, & Chang, 1981). To understand these aspects of their students, teachers need to have a knowledge of cultural and global subjects. They should also have an understanding of emotional and psychological issues (Arnold, 2011). A humanistic approach encourages teachers to see students as whole persons rather than just students (Mehrgan, 2012; Moskowitz, 1978). Situational factors influence the way a student learns and it is the teacher's responsibility to understand these factors in order to provide each student with the tools and opportunities they need to be successful in language learning.

Introduction

An ESL class in the United State is a unique and diverse environment. The students come from countries all over the world with different cultures, languages, and economic and political situations. A large portion of my students came to the United States for a chance at a different life. Some have fled situations of poverty, violence, war and/or persecution in their home countries. Some might be worried every day for the safety of their family members in a country at war. Some might be sending money home to take care of their children. Even though their home countries are sometimes inhospitable, they still love their counties and their backgrounds have shaped who they are. Teachers should try to get to know their students and understand their backgrounds to be able to assess the needs of each of them. For ESL teachers in the U.S., this includes knowledge of geography, languages, current events, history, cultural norms, and other

subjects relevant to a deeper understanding of their students. An ESL teacher should know what students have come from and what their families back home might be experiencing. A teacher should try to understand what the students might be going through psychologically and economically. Along with an understanding of the backgrounds of each student, the teacher should cultivate an appreciation and respect for diversity. “If we are aware of our students as individuals, each a representative of diversity and having a unique identity, we can communicate to them in subtle ways acceptance of and respect for their individuality” (Arnold, 2011, p. 14). I believe that an understanding of the world and of each student is the responsibility of an ESL teacher and in this paper I would like to explain the importance of teacher empathy and understanding of diverse backgrounds.

Empathy can be defined as “the ability to sense, recognize, understand and communicate the understanding of another person’s problems, feelings and thoughts” (Chang, Berger, & Chang, 1981, p. 22). When applied to a teacher, empathy involves an understanding of how the background and experiences of a student might affect the way they learn and participate in class. Also, teachers need to be able to demonstrate their understanding to their students to help build a relationship of trust. While teachers should not ask for personal information from students, they should create an environment and a relationship where students feel comfortable opening up in class and sharing appropriate information about their backgrounds and cultures. Teachers should put in the effort to get to know each of their students. Empathy in teaching can open doors to a greater learning experience for students and teachers alike.

Knowledge of the World

To begin to have empathy, teachers need to have some background knowledge about where their students come from. In my own experiences, I have seen how far a bit of background knowledge can go. It creates a connection between teacher and student. A small comment such as, “Oh, you’re from Eritrea. Do you speak Tigrinya or Arabic?” or “I bet your family in Michoacan is getting a lot of rain right now,” show that you understand what is going on in the world and help students to feel that you understand at least a small part of who they are. Cultural norms should also be understood and respected. Teachers must have a “flexibility of mind which allows [them] to cross borders and accept differences” (Elena, 2014, p. 113). For example, a male teacher should not be offended and understand the possible reasons if a female student does not want to shake his hand. I have seen students’ faces brighten and their personalities open up when they feel that the teacher knows something about them individually. “The teacher’s personality, style or attitude serves as a powerful influence on the type of learning which can most readily take place” (Chang, Berger, & Chang, 1981, p. 24). ESL teachers can help their students lower their anxiety by letting them know that teacher knows about their country and respects their culture.

ESL teachers have the responsibility to be informed about the world. They should have at least a basic understanding of geography, history, economics and current events of the regions their students come from. For example, given the current numbers of refugees from Syria, the Center for Applied Linguistics demonstrates the importance of understanding the situation of immigrants and refugees and produces materials to help teachers better understand them and be more empathetic. Teachers should seek out

materials such as these in their endeavors for further development. “How important it is to know the concrete world in which...students live, the cultures in which...certain habits, likes, beliefs, fears, desires are formed” (Freire, 2005, p. 129). Knowledge of the world will help teachers connect with their students and understand their needs. “The fact that the nation’s teachers are and will increasingly encounter a diverse range of learners requires that every teacher has sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge...to be able to meet the unique needs of all students” (Samson & Collins, 2012, p. 1). As the classroom becomes more diverse, the task of learning more about each student’s background becomes increasingly more challenging, but also increasingly more important and applicable.

With knowledge of cultures and individuals, the tendency to stereotype decreases. Vollmer (2000) highlights that a bad habit of some ESL teachers is that they tend to group and stereotype students from the same background. They assume that the students have the same stories and the same needs. I found it alarming and offensive that some of the teachers in this study exhibited favoritism and higher expectations for certain groups of students. Expecting some students to do better than others can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. “Research has shown that teacher expectations of poor performance and resistance to assimilation can lead to neglect and indifference...High expectations, on the other hand, tend to result in encouragement and individualized attention” (Vollmer, 2000, p. 64). If the students feel that the teacher has lower expectation for one group than for another or that the teacher favors one group over another, they are likely to feel discouraged and unmotivated. One disturbing view of a teacher in Vollmer’s study is that “the relative success or failure of the ESL student seems to lie completely outside the

realm of the school's educational practices" (Vollmer, 2000, p. 63). In other words, the teacher believes that the educational success of a student can be predicted by the culture they are from. It is troubling that some language teachers still have inaccurate and unhelpful notions when it comes to culture and ethnicity. While it is true that each culture has its own mannerisms and pragmatics that should be considered and respected, the personality of each student can't be assumed based on their cultural background. We must unlearn the "imagined identities" (Stonebanks, 2004, p. 89) that we have assigned to different cultures through misinformation and get to know people on an individual level. While it is important to understand the norms of a culture, teachers must get to know the individual student in order to extend true empathy.

Humanistic Approach

In opposition to the flawed views mentioned in the preceding paragraph is a teaching method described in the literature as the 'Humanistic Approach'. In humanistic language teaching, the learner is seen as "a whole person who has physical, emotional and social features as well as cognitive features" (Mehrgan, 2012, p. 185). From a humanistic point of view, students are more than just language learners or representatives of a foreign culture. They have goals, families, jobs, histories, challenges, and other characteristics that affect their motivation and the way they learn. Moskowitz explains, "Humanistic education...relates to the feelings, experiences, memories, hopes, aspirations, beliefs, values [and] needs...of students" (Moskowitz, 1978, p. 14). Humanistic teaching also focuses on personal growth—helping students to develop their identity and their confidence. Language teachers should consider taking a humanistic approach to open their minds and contemplate factors outside of the classroom that

influence the way a student learns. “Each individual in the class is the bearer and messenger of a different ‘culture’” (Elena, 2014, p. 113). Not only do students carry the culture of the place they are from, they reflect their own individual “culture” made up of their personal experiences. Seeing students as whole persons with their own defining experiences, rather than just the academic aspect of their lives, helps a teacher to understand their motivations and struggles that affect their academic success.

Emotional Well-being

The previously mentioned definition of empathy includes an understanding of feelings. “In teaching we must, of course, never lose sight of the cognitive functions, but we recognize that thinking processes will develop more effectively if the emotional side of learners is also taken into consideration” (Arnold, 2011, p. 14). It is not the place of teachers to act as a psychiatrist or confidante, but it is certainly their responsibility to create an environment where students feel comfortable and safe. Students should learn from the teacher’s example that all ideas are respected and mistakes are not judged. “Teachers should never forget that their mission, both as professionals and individuals, is to model their learners’ values, course of action and perceptions of reality” (Elena, 2014, p. 116). Empathy can be demonstrated through the environment that the teacher creates and encourages. “Teachers...who think that being concerned about what goes on inside and between their learners is not part of their job are not placing learning on the firmest foundation” (Arnold, 2011, p. 14).

A comfortable, safe learning environment affects the emotional well-being of a student, and the emotional security students feel in the classroom affects their learning. When students feel that they can freely express themselves in the classroom without fear

of ridicule, the affective filter is lowered and students have a higher willingness to communicate. Krashen (1982) explains that the affective filter includes motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. When motivation and self-confidence are low and anxiety is high, there is a barrier to learning. “The Affective Filter hypothesis implies that our pedagogical goals should not only include supplying comprehensible input, but also creating a situation that encourages a low filter” (Krashen, 1982, p. 32). When students’ affective filter is lowered, students are more willing to communicate, which is a goal we strive for as language teachers. Willingness to communicate is affected by the same types of factors as the affective filter, as well as other unique, situational factors. MacIntyre et al. point out that it is a teacher’s responsibility to cultivate willingness to speak in students. “The ultimate goal of the learning process should be to engender in language students the willingness to seek out communication opportunities and the willingness to actually communicate in them” (MacIntyre, Clement, Dornyei, & Noels, 1998, p. 547). When teachers extend empathy towards their students, they are helping them to lower their affective filters and to be more willing to communicate and participate in the class. Thus, teacher empathy can have an effect on the students’ ability to get past barriers and learn.

Application

Through my experiences in ESL classrooms, I have developed ideas about how I want my classes to feel and how important it is for me personally to be an empathetic teacher. To help students feel welcome and comfortable in my class, I want to show them that I appreciate and encourage diversity. “The global village is here, and it confronts us with linguistic and cultural differences that can be a source of conflict and

misunderstanding or of celebration and enjoyment” (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000, p. 4). Respect for culture is especially important in my classes because my students come from such diverse backgrounds. They vary in ethnicity, language, socioeconomic background, educational experience, and many other ways. I want my student to feel that my classroom is a place where they will be accepted exactly as they are and they will be free from judgement or racism. I want them to know that not only I accept them, but their classmates accept them. In some of the classes I have observed, I have seen students hesitant to work with classmates from different backgrounds than their own, but as they work with each other more and get to know each other as people, the barriers break down and they realize that they have more in common than they thought they did. “This can facilitate a positive classroom climate and the creation of a well-functioning group in which the learning process can unfold. There, diversity may be seen less as a problem than as a natural part of life, an interesting challenge and a resource” (Arnold, 2011, pp. 14-15). For this reason, I want to give my students plenty of opportunities to work with each other through group work. Group activities can be excellent opportunities for students to practice their language skills while also getting to know their classmates and building camaraderie (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001). Teachers must set the example of equality and also make sure the students understand that they are working together towards the same goals in spite of their differences.

Although I want my students to look past differences, I don’t want them to feel that their culture is being minimized. To paraphrase Freire, students should not be made to feel ashamed of who they are or where they’re from, but should also be able to gain the skills to succeed in their community and escape discrimination (Freire, 2005). I want my

students to know that their culture is beautiful and should not be stifled, but that the same time I want them to feel that they can be accepted into North American culture as much as they want to be. “The ‘intercultural’ teacher must be the one who will guide the learners on the way to...developing the need to know and find out more about other people [and] realizing their own cultural identity and accepting who they are” (Elena, 2014, p. 115). Teachers should encourage respect and appreciation for culture as well as helping students meet their learning goals.

Conclusion

As teachers learn and appreciate the characteristics that shape the worlds of their students and as they develop empathy, they create stronger relationships and a better understanding of each individual student. Thus, they can have a greater influence on students and build trust to help them open their minds to learning. “Our relationship with...learners demands that we respect them and...that we be aware of the concrete conditions of their world, the conditions that shape them. To try to know the reality that our students live is a task that the educational practice imposes on us: Without this, we have no access to the way they think, so only with great difficulty can we perceive what and how they know” (Freire, 2005, p. 102). I want to be a teacher who understands the conditions that shape my students, as well as their individual personalities, and to practice empathy to help them learn.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES

INTRODUCTION

This section contains three annotated bibliographies that I wrote throughout the MSLT program. Each annotated bibliography has a different topic. They outline the main points of several sources and how each source helped me to gain a greater understanding of the topic. The first annotated bibliography is about the diverse needs of an ESL classroom. The second one discusses the communicative approach and task-based activities. The final annotated bibliography is about teaching culture through technology. The last bibliography was written in collaboration with Elizabeth Abell.

The Diverse Needs of an ESL Classroom

My initial interest in being a language teacher began while working with adult students in ESL classrooms. While I interacted with these students, I was struck by the great diversity in their backgrounds and needs. Since I plan on teaching adult ESL, I was very interested in learning how to address the diverse needs of my classroom while also giving every student the opportunity to learn. In this annotated bibliography I will demonstrate how the sources I read helped me better understand how to teach a diverse group of learners.

I had already learned that a successful language classroom is built upon the communicative approach when I read **Lee and VanPatten's (2003)** text *Making Communicative Language Teaching Happen* for my first MSLT course. Lee and VanPatten define the aspects and merits of communicative language teaching as well explaining why language teachers are moving away from the audiolingual method. I found their explanations very thorough and I can see from looking back on my own language learning experiences that the best way to learn is through meaningful, contextualized practice. I agree with their argument that students cannot learn to communicate through drills alone. I learned that every student, no matter their level, needs the opportunity to practice the language for real-world purposes. I need to create an environment where my students feel comfortable using the language with each other even when some might be struggling or have less confidence than others. Practicing communication is the key for successful language acquisition.

Since the communicative approach is the best framework for teaching my students, I wanted to learn more about the elements that make a communicative

classroom. According to **Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro and Mandell (2001)** in their book *The Communicative Classroom*, group interaction is a very important part of the communicative classroom. I learned from them that working in a group can be very motivating for students, but it does require special attention and preparation from the teacher. I also learned from this text that errors are a normal part of the learning process. I want to be able to communicate this to my students and have them understand that even though they might make many errors, they are not being judged and they are still learning.

While searching for more ways to make my classroom a conducive learning environment for all learners, I found the chapter “Instructional Sequencing and Task Design” by **Brandl (2008)** very helpful. He explains the importance of scaffolding tasks so that students are prepared to move on to subsequent tasks. I learned how to prepare a lesson plan in a sequence that is helpful and logical for students. Brandl also explains what elements make a task too difficult for students. He includes factors such as communicative stress, linguistic complexity, and cognitive demand (Brandl, 2008). These are factors that I must bear in mind, especially when my students have differing levels of confidence and anxiety.

In my past experiences, I have seen that many adult ESL students are interested in learning more about the culture of the United States. For most of them, their main goal for learning English is to be accepted and to interact with American people. To help them meet this goal, I wanted to know more about how to incorporate aspects of American culture into my lessons and how to help my students appreciate their collective diversity. I have always considered culture a very important part of ESL instruction, and I pursued

sources that would uphold this view. The Teacher's Handbook (**Shrum & Glisan, 2010**) includes many helpful tips for incorporating culture in the classroom. They stress the importance of using authentic texts and the appropriateness of introducing students to authentic literature in the TL. The Teacher's Handbook contains many good ideas for differentiated instruction, task variety, and anxiety reduction.

As I searched for more information about teaching culture, I found a study done by **Wright (2000)** titled Culture as Information and Culture as Affective Process, in which the author explores the best practices for teaching culture in a language classroom. He claims that simply reading the small section on culture that might be included in a language textbook is not enough to really help a student understand the culture. He maintains that students need opportunities to explore the culture and make cultural comparisons. I learned that students who have a chance to compare cultures and put them in context with their own have a better chance of acclimating to and accepting the new culture. Wright (2000) offers the idea of creating a "culture portfolio" through which students have the opportunity to explore different aspects of the target culture. I think this would be a very effective project and I would like to incorporate it in my own classroom when I have the opportunity.

As I studied the types of approaches that can accommodate a diverse class, I wanted to learn more about what makes some students more successful than others. I found **Shaaban and Ghaith's (2000)** article on motivation enlightening and interesting. In the article, Student Motivation to Learn English as a Foreign Language, they address two types of motivation: integrative and instrumental. They explain that integrative motivation is the desire of students to learn a language in order to integrate themselves

more into the society. When they are pursuing the language for a “practical objective” such as finding a job, this is instrumental motivation (Shaaban & Ghaith, 2000). The authors argue that students who have an integrative motivation have a greater likelihood of learning the language. I agree that integrative reasons are very strong motivators. I have had many students express to me that they want to learn English in order to speak with their children in English or talk to the cashier at the store. In my experience, these students do tend to learn faster. But I also think instrumental reasons can be quite motivating. Many of my students also want to learn English in order to obtain a better job. So, while I do agree that integrative reasons might be stronger motivators, I don’t think instrumental reasons should be considered less important. All motivation is powerful and should be considered when designing activities to meet student’s needs.

Along with motivations, I wanted to find other reasons that some students might struggle more than others. I came upon an article by **Gregersen and Horwitz (2002)** about anxiety and perfectionism. For their article, *Language Learning and Perfectionism: Anxious and Non-Anxious Language Learners’ Reactions to Their Own Oral Performance*, they studied how perfectionism can give students the same inhibitions as anxiety, concluding that perfectionist students need special attention from the teacher. I have seen that perfectionism does prevent some students from wanting to speak. They would rather not speak than make any mistakes. While I agree that perfectionist students may need special attention from the teacher, I don’t think it should necessarily be addressed the same way as anxiety. In my experience, perfectionist students don’t always have a problem with confidence. I think it is important to get to know students’ personalities in order to know what drives their inhibitions.

As I expressed my interest in culture and the diversity of my students to Dr. Maria Luisa Spicer-Escalante, she directed me toward the book *Improving Multicultural Education* (McGee Banks, 2005). It is a historical view of how multicultural education grew and transformed throughout the intergroup education movement between the 1930s and 1950s. From this book I learned how the collaboration of different ethnic groups can have a positive effect on the types of education available to minority as well as majority groups. I learned that it is very important for schools to be connected to the community. This book showed me that when students and members of the community interact with one another, they gain a greater understanding of and appreciation for each other. For this reason, I would like to incorporate service learning in my classroom. Service learning offers a way for students to interact and appreciate their own diversity as well as the diversity of the classroom and the community.

Through studying these sources I have concluded that there are numerous ways to address the needs of diverse learners. It starts with the classroom environment, which must be a place where students feel comfortable and are given opportunities to learn. As I studied ways to create an encouraging classroom environment, I learned that teachers must come to know their students individually. Each student has a unique background, needs, strengths, and inhibitions. Through these sources I have come to see just how different from each other students can be and that there are ways to help each one be successful.

The Communicative Approach and Task-based Activities

As I have studied second language teaching I have come to learn the importance of communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based activities (TBA) in the classroom. The communicative approach is the foundation of effective language teaching. Through my research and my own personal experiences in a language classroom, I have concluded that it is the best way for students to learn to use a language. Since it is important to me as a teacher of English, I have sought out sources with differing opinions to learn more about CLT and TBAs. In this paper I will explain some of the sources I have studied to gain a deeper, better-rounded knowledge of the communicative approach and how task-based activities facilitate learning.

My first encounter with CLT came from **Lee and VanPatten's (2003)** book *Making Communicative Language Teaching Happen*. Before reading this book I was completely new to language teaching and I had never heard of CLT. Lee and VanPatten provided a good introduction. They explained and contrasted the traditional audiolingual method and the communicative approach. I learned a lot about the roles of the teacher and students in both types of classrooms. Lee and VanPatten explained that in the ALM the teacher can be compared to a drill master and the students can be compared to a parrot. The teacher presents all of the information and the students are expected to repeat it without error (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). I learned that in CLT the teacher designs appropriate communicative activities and facilitates their implementation. I hope to facilitate my students' learning like they explained and give them the tools to meet their needs. I also learned from Lee and VanPatten that comprehensible input is a key element of a communicative classroom. When teachers provide comprehensible input to their

students, it is almost impossible for students not to learn (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). After reading *Making Communicative Language Happen*, I had a better understanding of what my role as a teacher would be in a communicative classroom. I agreed with their opinion that CLT is a better approach than ALM and we should continue moving towards making our classrooms more communicative.

As I sought to learn more about CLT and task-based instruction I found more information in *The Communicative Classroom* by **Ballman et al (2001)**. I learned more about the communicative classroom, what a task-based activity is, and the elements that make it truly task-based. Ballman et al (2001) explained the “conduit metaphor” where information is passed from student to teacher like a parcel. This is not an effective way to learn a language. Information cannot be directly passed and absorbed into the brain of the student. According to Ballman et al, teachers should be more like architects. They lay the foundation for the students and design activities that the students can work with and build on. I agree with their views on the role of the teacher. I have experienced both of the methods described above and found that the teacher as an architect is much more effective for me. The authors also stressed the importance of group activities when they described the characteristics of a task-based activity. One of my favorite quotes from Ballman et al stated that when students participate in TBAs they “learn how to listen, to trust their ability to extrapolate and form hypotheses, and to use what they know in novel and creative ways. TBA by their very nature take the expert out of the picture thus setting the stage for students to push themselves to the next level” (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001, p. 15). I agree with this view and I plan on using TBAs to help my students be successful.

Although the communicative approach has been shown to be effective, it can sometimes be difficult for teachers to implement. Ballman et al explained some reasons that teachers might be resistant to use the communicative approach. In general, fears of inaccuracy and inability to cover all of the material underlie the hesitations that some teachers about using the communicative approach. I understand that teachers want their students to have accurate knowledge of the language and that there is rarely enough time to cover everything the teacher would like to cover, but teaching the students to use the language in a realistic way is the most important goal. I learned from Ballman et al that group work and TBAs foster motivation and engagement in students and contribute to a truly communicative classroom. I also learned that I might find myself worrying about student errors and coverage of material, but I need to keep my focus on the goals of my students to be able to effectively communicate in English.

While doing research about TBAs and a communicative classroom, I read a chapter entitled “Instructional Sequencing and Task Design” by **Brandl (2008)**. From this chapter, I learned more about what makes a task communicative. There is more than just the actual words involved when teaching a language. In order to create communicative TBAs for my students, I have to make sure that the activity incorporates “people, activities and descriptions” (Brandl, 2008) and that it “combines cultural aspects with language practice” (Brandl, 2008). Reading this chapter helped me to understand that drills are not communicative. Unfortunately, drills are very common in language books and classes, and sometimes activities that don’t look like drills are drills. I realized that I have to pay close attention to the activities that I’m having my students do and make sure that they aren’t “disguised” drills. This chapter was evidence to me that culture

is an important part of the curriculum. Even before I started to define myself as an English teacher I knew that culture was very important to me and my students. Brandl's chapter solidified my ideas about incorporating realistic, situational material into my classroom activities.

While seeking out more information about the benefits of task-based instruction I found an article entitled "Task-based language teaching: sorting out the misunderstandings" by **Ellis (2009)**. He argues that many of the opinions against task-based learning are based on misunderstandings about what tasks really are. I concluded from this argument that different people interpret definitions and data in different ways and teachers have to find out for themselves what works for them through practice. The author concedes that there are some problems in implementing task-based learning and these problems will have to be addressed if TBAs are going to work in classrooms (Ellis, 2009). I agree with this assessment. Creating a communicative classroom and implementing TBAs takes more work from teachers. They have to assess the needs of students and create activities that are communicative, help the students to learn, and are level-appropriate. Although there are challenges with the task-based approach, this article confirmed to me that there are many benefits of TBAs, including motivation and authenticity, and I want to use them in my classroom.

After reading about the success and efficacy of the communicative approach and reviewing some of Ballman et al's reasons why teachers might not implement it, I wanted to know more about why teachers would reject this method. It seems that there is plenty of evidence to support the implementation of CLT, but some teachers are still averse to it. **Gatbonton and Segalowitz (2005)** published "Rethinking Communicative Language

Teaching: A Focus on Access to Fluency” in which they addressed some of the issues that teachers have with CLT and an approach that might be appealing to teachers that are hesitant to use it. They claimed in their article that the audiolingual method is so engrained in some teachers that even when they believe that their classes are communicative, they really aren’t. When teachers have been taught through the audiolingual method throughout their lives, they will model their teachers and find it hard to stray from “highly structured” activities (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005). I realized through this article that I might see this tendency in myself sometimes. Many of my language learning experiences have been through ALM and I think occasionally I am tempted to play the role of the “drill master” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). I learned through Gatbonton and Segalowitz’s article that there is a method of CLT that includes some of the aspects of the traditional teaching approach and might make it easier for teachers to get away from ALM. The “ACCESS” model includes three different phases in which there are opportunities for teachers to retain the aspects of accuracy and fluency through communicative practice. I thought that this model was an excellent way for teachers to transition from ALM to CLT and it is something I would consider using if I find myself leaning towards an audiolingual style of teaching.

The main goal of the communicative classroom is to teach students the skills they need in order to use the L2 in real-life situations. From the *Teacher’s Handbook* by **Shrum and Glisan (2010)**, I learned more about what constitutes communicative competence. It is related to the same ideas that constitute a communicative task. According to the authors, “students need more than grammatical or linguistic knowledge to function in a communicative setting” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). In order to have a

successful communicative classroom teachers have to understand what makes up real communication. If they don't know what constitutes communication, they can't teach it. I learned that students need to learn skills in discourse competence which is made up of sociocultural, linguistic, and actional competence (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). Students need to know more than simply how to say the words. I read about the need to include instruction about social cues, appropriate respect, and gestures and how to manipulate the language the student does know in order convey their meaning in spite of deficiencies (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). I concluded that sociocultural elements are just as important to incorporate in the classroom as the language itself. My students are interested in being involved and acclimating in American cultures and I want to help them be successful in their endeavors, so it is important that I teach them about these cultural factors.

Many language teachers believe that CLT is the best way to teach their students, but I wondered if students also felt that this was an effective way of being taught. I found **Brown's (2009)** article "Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of Effective Foreign Language Teaching: A Comparison of Ideals" very enlightening. Brown introduced his article by saying that students' and teachers' ideal of effective language teaching don't always align. Teachers might think they are doing one thing while the students perceive their intentions in a different way. This disconnect can lead to frustration and failure. I agree with this observation and I have seen it happen in language classrooms. One interesting finding of Brown's study is that students believe much more strongly that errors should be corrected immediately, while on average, teachers don't believe this to be true. Immediate error correction is a characteristic of ALM. There was also some disagreement on group work and task-based activities. The teachers favored task-based

activities much more than the students, who preferred grammar instruction (Brown, 2009). Although I don't think student's opinions should be dismissed or disregarded, they might not always understand why communicative teachers do what they do. It can be uncomfortable working in pairs or groups, but I believe that when students move out of their comfort zone they can make the most progress. Also, sometimes grammar instruction feels more concrete and visible than communicative activities. Brown suggested that teachers might want to explain the research on L2 acquisition to their students so that they might be met with less opposition. I agree with this. I think students have the right to know why they are being taught the way they are. It could help them to be more open to the communicative approach and motivate them to be more involved.

Since I knew that it is important to give students the maximum amount of comprehensible input and also to keep them involved and informed, I was wondering how effective it really is to stay in the target language throughout the entire class time. I had doubts about whether the students would be able to know what was going on in class and be able to participate. To help me learn more about the roles of the L1 and the L2 in the classroom I read the article "There is a Role for the L1 in Second and Foreign Language Teaching, But..." by **Turnbull (2001)**. He mentions that sometimes students don't have many opportunities to hear the target language and the teacher is the sole model of the TL for the student (Turnbull, 2001). I hadn't thought about this point before even though I know that some of my students don't use English at all outside of the classroom. I feel that it is my responsibility to provide my students with as much input as possible in English. Since English is my native language and I don't speak any other language fluently, I won't have as much of a problem with this as some of my colleagues.

However, occasionally I am tempted to explain concepts in Spanish to my Spanish-speaking students when I can. I learned through this article that there are some instances when using the L1 is excusable. Although Turnbull does support the stance that the TL should be used as much as possible, he mentions that occasionally it is more efficient to use the L1 (Turnbull, 2001). I had never seen this argument before since so much focus is placed on using the L2 at all times. So I realized that even though it is ideal to stay in the L2, it will not cause any major harm to the learning of my Spanish-speaking students if I need to help them with a concept in Spanish, but it is best for me to stay in English as much as I can since helping my Spanish-speaking students in their L1 could alienate my students that don't speak Spanish.

Since I had been reading all about the merits of CLT, I wanted to get a more balanced view of the concept and understand any arguments that might be made against it. While searching for arguments against a communicative approach I found the article "Legislation by Hypothesis: The Case of Task-Based Instruction" by **Swan (2005)**. His was the first article I had read that was against task-based instruction. He argues that the "traditional" methods are tried and tested and are proven to work. He goes as far as to say that task-based instruction is a "damaging ideological [swing] in language teaching theory and practice" (Swan, 2005, p. 376). I think it is wise to question and test any method, but I found his tone condescending. Although Swan's opinion did make me question somewhat if CLT and TBAs are the right approach, I am confident that they are. I concede that pure CLT is somewhat idealistic. It is difficult to maintain through the entirety of the class, but I believe that if a teacher is willing to put in the work, a communicative classroom is achievable even though it might not be perfect. Through my

own experiences in learning a language and observing language classroom I have seen that it works and helps students be successful in being able to use a language to communicate. I came to realize through this article that everyone has his or her preferred methods of teaching, and while I believe in the effectiveness of the communicative approach I must respect the opinions of other teachers who don't support it and let them teach in the way that they believe works for them and their students.

I have consulted many sources in my search to learn more about communicative language teaching and task-based activities. Through the sources listed above, I believe I have gained a thorough knowledge on the subject. I have learned what constitutes a communicative classroom, the elements of task-based instruction, and the benefits and drawbacks of each. Through my research I am confident that I want to employ these methods in my classroom to help me students to be successful and meet their goals.

Teaching Culture through Technology

In this annotated bibliography, I will be focusing on the teaching and development of intercultural competence through technology. I believe this topic merits further investigation because it is often under-addressed in foreign and second language classrooms, yet it is a vital component of language learning, according to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (NSFLEP, 2014). From my own experience, teaching culture can be a difficult and intimidating undertaking for teachers who do not belong to the target culture. Technology, however, provides many tools that can facilitate cultural connections between students and native speakers, as well as other learners of the target language. With increased access to authentic materials via the internet, as well as the means to interact with those materials with Web 2.0 technologies, students have more opportunities for exposure to the target culture without the need to physically be in a target culture community. Teachers can take advantage of these opportunities in their classrooms and direct student engagement to focus on building intercultural competence.

As I began my investigation of this topic, it quickly became clear that I needed to have a solid understanding of what is meant by ‘intercultural competence’. One of the most-cited sources I encountered in relation to this was **Byram (1997)**, who lays out a framework of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) made up of four components: “attitudes, knowledge, skills to interpret and relate, skills to discover and/or interact,” (p. 34) and critical cultural awareness.

By ‘attitudes’, Byram describes cultivating a mindset in which the students not only value the culture and viewpoints of those from cultures other than their own, but

also “relativize” their own culture, i.e., view their own culture in relation to others and not simply as objective, monolithic, and unchanging. In other words, students must move towards a mindset that does not assign values to one culture or another, avoiding both negative and positive stereotypes; they must develop a mindset of “curiosity and openness, of readiness to suspend disbelief and judgement with respect to others’ meanings, beliefs, and behaviors” (p. 34).

‘Knowledge’ refers to both knowledge about the speaker’s own country and culture and those of the interlocutor, as well as knowledge about successful “interaction at the individual and societal levels” (p. 35). Byram describes this first set of knowledge as being “relational” (p. 36), that is, as “acquired within socialisation in one’s own social groups and often presented in contrast to the significant characteristics of one’s national group and identity. For example, knowledge of the history of another country is through the stories from the history of one’s own nation-state” (p. 36). He goes on to discuss how once interlocutors become aware of this socialization (i.e., the inherent bias when it comes to knowledge and perceptions of other peoples and cultures, and in how they are perceived by others) they can apply this understanding to how they approach the processes of interaction. They can better understand the cultural forces at play in any given interaction (e.g., why a person from X culture may be acting in Y fashion) and use them to inform their knowledge of intercultural interaction, which in turn leads to more successful and interculturally competent communication.

From this knowledge of one’s own and other countries and cultures come the next components of Byram’s framework, the skill of interpretation and relation and skill of discovery. The former skill allows the individual to make connections between

“documents” from other cultures and their own, and identify “common ground” or “dysfunctions” between the two groups (p. 37). Byram cites this skill as significant not only for these connections and new understandings that can be built, but also because this skill can be developed without the pressure of another interlocutor and real-time social interaction. The skill of discovery may also be developed independent of social interaction, though social interaction provides the learner with more ‘instrumental’ areas of interest to investigate, ones that have proven to apply directly to their endeavors in successful interactions and relationships with individuals from other cultures. To distinguish this final skill from the skill of interpretation and relation, Byram defines the skill of discovery as “the ability to recognise significant phenomena in a foreign environment and to elicit their meanings and connotations, and their relationship to other phenomena” (p. 38), in other words, being able to put the attitudes, knowledge, and interpretations that may have been developed in the classroom to use ‘in the field’ of intercultural interactions.

Byram defines the final component of his framework, critical cultural awareness, as “[a]n ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries” (p. 53), that is, to participate in interactions as one who can see the values and perspectives inherent in the contributions of both cultures and act as a mediator between these viewpoints. Though this framework is very general, as a result, it lends itself to many different foreign language (FL) teaching contexts, including those that aim to utilize technology to build ICC. With this framework in mind, I move to sources focused specifically on using technology to this end.

One of the first articles I read, by **Guth and Helm (2011)**, gave me a better understanding of how technology can be used to increase intercultural competence by outlining three broad types of activities to engage students with people and materials from different cultures. Since all students have different learning styles, it is important for teachers to be aware of the types of activities available through technology and how to use them. The activity types are: access and produce, communicate and collaborate, and bridge. Access and produce activities entail students accessing a wealth of cultural materials online as well as producing their own materials to share with a global audience. Careful selection of materials and design of activities by the teacher are essential to this type of activity. Also, students should be informed of the risks that come with access to the internet. The second type of activity, communicate and collaborate, includes interaction with distant peers through telecollaboration. Through communication and collaboration, students can have an intercultural experience in the classroom or through their own computers. Bridging, the third type of activity, encourages students to take advantage of technology and online personas that they already use to interact with people from different cultures. Also, students are encouraged to employ “real world” resources to increase their intercultural competence rather than resources created exclusively for students. This article informed me that there are various types of activities through which students can use technology to increase their intercultural competence, bringing to light that even though a new technological tool may seem useful, teachers should focus on how exactly it is to be used and toward what type of learning outcome. Reading this article lead me to another overview article by Godwin-Jones which discusses more

specific ways that instructors can facilitate the development of intercultural competence in the foreign language classroom.

The article by **Godwin-Jones (2011)** is about using technology to integrate the development of intercultural competence with other activities typically employed in the traditional classroom. The author points out that, too often, cultural learning in the classroom is superficial and “tourist inspired”. It only looks at the more visible aspects of a culture and does not include valuable, “culture-general” topics. Students need to learn the skills to adapt to different contexts and interact appropriately. He suggests that teachers move away from textbooks and seek out other sources of cultural information. The author makes a valid, interesting point when he mentions that sometimes teachers might not feel informed enough themselves to be the source of cultural information for the students. In this case, the internet can be a useful tool in accessing authentic materials and language use. Although teachers are not expected to be an all-knowing source of cultural information, it is their responsibility to find materials and design appropriate activities for the students even though it takes more time and effort than assigning a textbook activity. Some of the technological activities and tools the author suggests include telecollaboration, Wordles or word clouds, word association, blog posts, online translation programs, polls and videos. He also mentions utilizing mobile phones to access materials and connect with distance students since they are so common and students use them every day. As do other authors, Godwin-Jones mentions the difficulty of assessing intercultural competence, but he suggests using a combination of assessment strategies rather than only one.

The previous article mentioned moving away from textbooks and using other materials to develop intercultural competence. I wanted to know more about what other kinds of materials I could use. The article by **Gilmore (2011)** is about accessing authentic materials rather than relying solely on a textbook. The article does not focus on technology, but gives helpful insights on the value of authentic materials in building intercultural competence. Here, authentic materials are defined as materials produced by fluent TL speakers for a real-world purpose in the TL community. The purpose of Gilmore's study was to find out how the use of authentic materials affects the factors that make up intercultural competence. The control group used a textbook only and the treatment group used a variety of materials including films, documentaries, reality shows, TV comedies, Web-based sources, home-produced video, songs, novels, and newspaper articles all produced by native speakers. Gilmore found that the students who used authentic materials improved in more areas of intercultural competence than those who did not. Gilmore hypothesizes that the students improved because authentic materials are a richer source of input and because they are more interesting and "real" than textbooks. This is important for me to know from a technology-teaching standpoint because one of the greatest benefits of technology in teaching intercultural competence is the access to authentic materials. Teachers can find a variety of written and recorded materials online that offer students access to real cultural material without having to be physically in the target culture environment. The findings of this study suggest that in order to help students develop intercultural competence, teachers should move away from heavy textbook use and carefully select applicable, authentic materials that are available through technology. As Guth and Helm (2011) illustrate, the materials chosen are only part of the

story—the specific learning outcomes and tasks assigned to the students are of utmost importance when it comes to effectively implementing technology in the classroom for the development of intercultural competence. In the articles I explore below, researchers employ primarily communication and collaboration activities to investigate how intercultural competence can be developed in various foreign language learning contexts.

Schenker (2012) focuses on the development of intercultural competence through telecollaboration, specifically email exchanges between native speakers and learners of the target language (TL). This study underscored the value, but also some of the challenges, in using telecollaboration to help students to increase their intercultural competence. Schenker explains that the research shows many benefits to telecollaboration, but also a few drawbacks. She used the definition of intercultural competence by Byram (1997) to measure whether the students had made progress. These include attitudes of openness and curiosity, interpreting and relating, and critical cultural awareness. Schenker read the students' emails to determine whether their comments and conversations met the criteria for of Byram's definition. She found that all of the objectives were met. This suggests that with appropriate implementation and guidance, telecollaboration can help students develop intercultural competence. Even misunderstandings and problems can be discussed as learning opportunities. The scope of this study was very limited, but it presents a creative, intriguing activity through which language learners can interact with distant students and build their understanding of how another culture views the topics discussed. Although the students did improve their intercultural competence according to the measures the author used, this article demonstrates the difficulty and complexity of assessing the concept, as each interaction

was unique and students displayed cultural understanding in different ways. It appeared that the assessment of intercultural competence in this study was quite subjective, applying only to the specific definition employed by the instructor in this context, and not necessarily applicable to other learning contexts.

In contrast to the interactions between native speakers of the TL and TL learners, **Elola and Oskoz (2008)** examined the use of blog interaction to build intercultural competence between North American students studying abroad in Spain and North American students at home. The study's participants were third-semester Spanish students at two North American universities; one group of 23 students was studying in Spain for the spring 2007 semester and the other group of 15 students stayed at their home institution in the U.S.A. The students were divided into ten blog groups of two study abroad (SA) students with one or two at-home (AH) students. Over the course of two months, the groups discussed various cultural topics through the blogs in the L1 (through posts, comments, etc.). Data about the interactions and students' initial attitudes about culture learning were collected with two questionnaires; blog entries and comments were also analyzed. Elola and Oskoz used an adaptation of Byram's (2000) guidelines for assessing intercultural competence. One aspect of student attitudes examined in the questionnaires was the students' perception of the importance of learning about the Spanish culture; at the beginning of the semester, the SA students found this to be more important than the AH students. At the end of the semester, however, this gap in perception had narrowed significantly: the AH thought learning about Spanish culture was more important than they had at the beginning of the semester. Both groups also demonstrated other aspects of intercultural competence, such as showing awareness of

their own culture and the target culture and developing ways to solve misunderstandings. The authors discuss at the end of the article how this project, though it consisted of learners interacting with other learners, helped both groups. The students in Spain were pushed to articulate and reflect more deeply on their cultural experiences through the blog posts and the AH students were able to ask specific, direct questions of their peers to gain deeper insights into Spanish culture despite not being in the target culture community. I thought this study was valuable to discuss because it demonstrates the value of ‘outsider’ discussions of the target culture, illustrating that even students who are not in-country or interacting with native speakers can still build intercultural competence.

Since several of the sources discussed above mention the difficulty of assessing intercultural competence, I think it is important to understand some methods of assessment that have been tested. This led me to the article by **Deardorff (2011)**. Throughout the article, the author emphasizes that the critical first step to assessing intercultural competence is choosing a definition of intercultural competence based on research. It is impossible to assess progress without a clear definition of what is expected. The teacher must determine what the key elements of intercultural competence are and then create clear, measureable goals for the students to work towards. Since every class is different and has unique goals, it is important for teachers to select the most appropriate assessment tools for their own situation. One method of assessment is “learning contacts”. This would be most useful in a situation where a student is frequently interacting with members of a different culture, such as in a study abroad. In this method, native observers, such as a host family, give their feedback on the competence of the student. Another assessment tool is the e-portfolio. In this method, artifacts that

demonstrate competence, such as term papers or photos, are placed in a portfolio. Students should be provided with clear rubrics for the assessment of their materials. One more approach is self reflection, for which students ponder and describe their experiences and progress. Deardorff suggests a combination of these methods since intercultural competence is a complex idea. Through reading this article I learned that even though assessment of intercultural competence is complex, it is possible. By having a clear definition of intercultural competence and through the implementation of a variety of assessment methods, teachers can assess how their students are doing in their development of intercultural competence and whether this progress is meeting the needs of students and the goals of the instructor. This led me to look at a study which explored one of these methods in more detail, the use of learner diaries.

Helm (2009) examined students' development of intercultural competence during their participation in the Confronti project, which involved personal diary reflections. The Confronti project is based on the Cultura model, where two groups of students, belonging to different linguistic and cultural groups, compare and discuss various topics from their two cultural perspectives. For example, both groups of students might fill out a questionnaire (in their L1s), consisting of word-association and sentence completion items that demonstrate their attitudes towards various things, such as family, money, work, etc. The students then compare their answers with those of the other group and gain more insight into the values of the target culture and their native culture. This particular study looked at the diaries produced by 25 university-level Italian students of English who were participating in the Confronti project. The researcher analyzed the weekly diaries required of the students, which directed them to reflect on the interactions

and discussions of the project, but also asked students about other specific issues, such as “their expectations, the relationship between language and culture, and texts they were given to read about language, culture, and social identity” (p. 94). It should also be noted that the students wrote their diary entries in English, not their L1. Helm first employed a corpus approach to analyzing the learner diaries, which were electronic, to perhaps bring to light certain patterns and “keywords” (p. 95) which might not have been apparent from traditional qualitative analysis. In the second half of the article, the researcher also discusses the qualitative analysis of the diaries for evidence of Byram’s components of ICC and demonstrates that all five components are visible in the diaries of the case study student chosen for discussion. Though the article comes to a conclusion similar to Deardorff’s, that multiple assessment tools should be used to look for evidence of developing ICC as no single method can be conclusive, it also shows how a quantitative approach can be taken to look more objectively for broader themes and high-frequency words. Finally, it also corroborates the positive findings of other research on projects like *Confronti* and *Cultura*, which bring students together through technology to compare and discuss their cultural perspectives and values.

Through the examination of these sources, I have learned that there are many technological tools available to facilitate cultural connections between students and native speakers and to aid in teaching intercultural competence, by facilitating the development of the attitudes, knowledge, and interpretation aspects of ICC (Byram, 1997), outside of social interactions. It was emphasized in most of the articles that is important to have a clear definition of intercultural competence, or which specific aspects will be addressed by the tasks that the students are to carry out. Teachers also must

communicate their expectations to students and implement an effective combination of assessment tools. When technology is used to appropriately incorporate high-quality cultural materials into language classes, students can develop their intercultural competence beyond what might be possible in a traditional classroom.

LOOKING FORWARD

Before I found the MSLT program, I wanted a job where I could make a difference in the lives of people from different cultures and possibly travel, but I didn't know what that job was. When I started volunteering at the English Language Center of Cache Valley and then later when I heard about the MSLT program, I knew that it was a program that would lead me in the direction I wanted to go. I really enjoyed volunteering at the ELC and felt that it was a perfect fit for me. Moving forward, I want to use the skills and knowledge I have gained in the MSLT program to help people learn English as I interact with people from all around the world.

In the foreseeable future, I would like to teach beginning-level English to adults at the ELC. I have grown to love the goals of the ELC and the people I meet there. I feel that it's a good place for me to start as I continue to develop my teaching skills. I currently work full-time at a job other than teaching, but as my life and family change and move forward, I hope to transition away from my office job towards only teaching English at the ELC and possibly online. When I have children, I want to be able to work less than full time and I believe that teaching English is a job where I can have a degree of freedom in the number of classes I teach.

Eventually, I would like to have the opportunity to travel and teach English abroad. My husband is from El Salvador and we would like to be able to live and work there for a time. While we're there I want to work as an English teacher if possible. We would also like to travel to other countries and I believe there are opportunities to teach English in many countries worldwide. It is also a possibility for me to teach ESL at a

college or university. This might be something I'm interested in, depending on where I live, but at this point I am more interested in a community center type program.

My main interest and the area of teaching I'm most passionate about is teaching English to adult immigrants in the United States. I plan on this being my lifetime career. I believe that my years of experience at the ELC and the MSLT program have prepared me to be an effective teacher of adult learners. As I continue my career in ESL teaching I would like to further develop my presentational and lesson delivery skills. I would also like to learn more about recognizing the needs of students. I will seek out current research and stay up-to-date on the newest developments in adult ESL teaching. I would also like to become an active member of TESOL and develop my teaching skills through professional conferences and seminars.

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