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Fostering Student Success Through Meaningful Communication and Positive Connections in Language Teaching

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FOSTERING STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH MEANINGFUL COMMUNICATION AND

POSITIVE CONNECTIONS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

by

Bracken Lind

A portfolio submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

Approved:

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Fostering Student Success Through Meaningful Communication and Positive Connections in

Language Teaching

by

Bracken Lind: Master of Second Language Teaching

Utah State University, 2020

Major Professor: Dr. Abdulkafi Albirini

Department: Languages, Philosophy, and Communication Studies

This portfolio is a compilation of the research I completed during my studies in the

Master of Second Language Teaching program at Utah State University. The research was

informed by my personal experiences as a high school aide to English Language Learners and as

a college-level Spanish instructor, as well as by my coursework throughout the program.

The portfolio is divided into two main sections: teaching perspectives and research

perspectives. In the teaching perspectives, I highlight some of the crucial themes in language

teaching. The section on research perspectives contains two research papers written in support of

my teaching philosophy.

(95 pages)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The people who deserve the most gratitude and have contributed the most to my portfolio are Kristen and Hazel, my wife and daughter. They know more than most what has gone into the completion of the Master's program and this portfolio, and have been nothing but supportive every step of the way. I can't express how much appreciation I have for them. They have kept me going and pushed me forward to the end.

CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS

BICS = Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills

CALP = Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

CBI = Content-Based Instruction

ELA = English Language Arts

ELL = English Language Learner

ESL = English as a Second Language

L1 = First Language

L2 = Second Language

LTELL = Long-Term English Language Learner

MSLT = Master of Second Language Teaching

SIOP = Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol

TPS = Teaching Philosophy Statement

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

This portfolio is a selection of my work in the Master of Second Language Teaching (MSLT) program and represents my individual development and learning as I have engaged in topics that are meaningful to me. The themes that they discuss come from my personal experiences and interests. For this reason, the research that went into this portfolio is significant to me because it represents exploring new ways of how to better serve the students with whom I interact.

There are two main sections of this portfolio: teaching perspectives and research perspectives. The former outlines my personal ideals and beliefs about teaching, and what I believe are important considerations in helping students reach their greatest potential. The central component of the teaching perspectives section is my Teaching Philosophy Statement (TPS), in which I focus on creating positive connections with students, and helping students engage in meaningful communication, or communication that has a personal application to them. The research perspectives section contains papers highlighting different methods for fostering motivation among second language learners. The topics discussed include which factors of resilience and motivation contribute to English Language Learners' (ELLs) academic success, and the benefits of using visual literature (specifically graphic novels) in second language teaching. These main sections are followed by an annotated bibliography which further looks into academic learning for ELLs. More specifically, this paper reviews the challenges that ELLs face in academics and the strategies that could help them develop academic success.

The key themes discussed in this portfolio include 1) helping second language learners develop success and 2) creating environments or personal connections that assist students in

feeling comfortable and capable. I believe these themes are critical in facilitating the language

development and academic achievement of language learners.

TEACHING PERSPECTIVES

PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT

When I first thought of joining the MSLT program I envisioned myself teaching English either as Second Language in the United States or as a Foreign Language in Latin America. In both contexts, I saw myself teaching adults because there is generally more motivation to learn and fewer disciplinary issues. However, as I have progressed further into the program, I have had experiences that have expanded my interests.

Teaching Spanish at the university has helped me recognize the satisfaction I experience as I teach others how to communicate in my own second language. I have realized that there is a part of me that would be disappointed if I no longer taught Spanish as a foreign language.

I have also had instructional experience at the secondary level. Although there are more disciplinary challenges in high school, I have developed a love and appreciation for English Language Learners at the secondary level and can easily see myself teaching either Spanish or English as a second language in high school, or both.

The following portfolio has been written considering both Spanish as a foreign language and English as a second language/foreign language as possible area of emphasis. My interest is mainly in teaching either of these languages to teens and/or adults in the United States or Latin America. I am particularly interested in teaching immigrants and refugees who learn their second language as a means to connect to the new country and the cultures that surround them. That interest is the guide to the principles and philosophies that I present in this portfolio.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

Introduction

My interest in language teaching developed as I came into contact with cultures that are distinct from my own. In high school, I participated in an exchange program during which I lived in Germany for a month; my favorite part was not seeing all the castles and monuments, it was living with the family there, participating in school in Germany, and seeing how they live their lives. This experience intrigued me. The people I met had a culture different from my own, but we were still able to relate to each other in a way that made me appreciate their points of view and the things they valued.

A year later, living in Mexico further opened my eyes to other ways of living. Again, I found myself relating to ideas and viewpoints that I had not considered before. While living in Mexico I learned Spanish and realized that learning a language helps to bridge cultural gaps and allows for communication across cultures. A common language provides access to learning about the way of life in a community and its meaning (Kramsch, 2013). This was a strong motivation for me to learn Spanish and made learning the language personal for me. As a teacher, it is important that I find what makes learning personal and meaningful for my students so they can connect to the language (Musa et al., 2012; Roessingh, 2014). When learning is meaningful for students then their personal experiences, history, and social context are at the center of the learning process (Hanauer, 2012) and there can be a personal application for the student. If a teacher is mindful of why the students want to or need to learn a language, they can better address the students' language learning needs. Each student and classroom is unique. Identifying the needs of the individual students helps a teacher give meaning to language

learning. For example, many language learners (98.8%) find themselves as a racial minority (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), especially if they are immigrants or refugees. It is important to consider how race (Rosa, 2016) and social inequality (Leonardo, 2004) may influence language identity and needs (Peirce, 1995). Heritage learners also pose another set of needs that a teacher should be aware of as they come into classes with language or cultural knowledge that is often more advanced than that of their peers. Teachers should be mindful of students' social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and the type of challenges they may have experienced inside and outside the classroom. Assessing the needs of the students and getting to know each student's background and motivation helps an instructor teach individuals instead of teaching a subject. Taking into account students' diverse backgrounds helps teachers view diversity as an asset in the classroom.

Focusing on the needs of those I instruct is a theme I try to emulate in my teaching. My teaching philosophy has come to embody two general needs I have seen in my students, which I will address in this paper. Prioritizing my students' need to communicate and their need for connection allows me to personalize my instruction to create the conditions in which they can learn best.

Meaningful Communication

I separate my discussion of meaningful communication into two sections, oral communication and literacy development. Shea (1996) states that "in learning, material is meaningful if…the learner has some relevant cognitive structures to which the material can be connected and a disposition to do so." Learners construct meaning as they relate personally to what they learn and anchor new concepts to their individual ideas or thoughts. They interpret meaning as they attempt to understand what another is expressing. Meaning is imperative to

communication, and learning how to navigate its expression and interpretation is an important skill for language learners (VanPatten, 2017). Students should be able to produce meaningful output as well as be able to interpret meaning from the input they encounter (Fang, 2010; Sreehari, 2012) not only in spoken, but in written form as well. It is important for teachers to consider all types and aspects of communication as they attempt to design opportunities for interaction students can relate with, or see a direct application to their lives (Paesani et al., 2016).

Oral Communication

I endeavor to provide as many opportunities for communication as possible in my classes. A main function of language is to communicate, and thus a goal of a language classroom should be to facilitate and practice communication (Sreehari, 2012). VanPatten (2017) defines communication as "the expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning with a purpose in a given context" (p. 12; see also Brown, 2009). This definition highlights three main aspects of communication: expressing, interpreting, and negotiating meaning.

In order to learn to use a language, it is necessary that a learner *produce output*. Swain (1985) stated that "one learns to read by reading, and to write by writing. Similarly, it can be argued that one learns to speak by speaking" (p. 248). If a learner never produces the L2 then they will be at a disadvantage when attempting to communicate because they haven't "learned to speak." A teacher plays a key role by providing opportunities, through written and oral tasks and activities, for students to produce output that is authentic and meaningful.

Another essential benefit of a learner producing output is that they can become aware of current gaps in their abilities (Reinders & Loewen, 2013). When they realize they cannot express themselves as they desire in the L2, they can better recognize what they need to learn in order to improve. Similarly, as they attempt to practice language and fill gaps, they are able to form

hypotheses about the language and then test those hypotheses (Hite & Evans, 2006; Nowbakht & Shahnazari, 2015; Swain & Lapkin, 1998). The forming and testing of hypotheses are important in acquisition because students are able to learn about language from their mistakes and personal experiences.

The second aspect of communication is interpretation, for which a teacher can provide opportunities through *comprehensible input*. The formula *i+1* is used by Krashen (1982, 2002, 2018), who first introduced the idea of comprehensible input. In the formula, *i* represents the level or ability of the student in the L2, whereas *+1* is a level of input only slightly above what the learner knows (Krashen, 1982; Payne, 2011; VanPatten, 2017) and is still understandable. This means that although there may be some aspects the learner does not understand in the input, they have enough context to understand what is being said. The difficulty of this concept for an instructor is knowing the learner's current level, and how much difficulty *+1* implies in order to maximize learner development. Other levels may also be present in what teachers produce (for example, *i+2* or *i-1*), but there will also be input that the student may use for acquisition (VanPatten, 2017; VanPatten & Williams, 2007).

The third aspect of communication is the *negotiation of meaning*. According to Long (1996, see also Cook, 2015), this happens when two speakers adjust the "form, conversational structure, message content, or all three, until an acceptable level of understanding is achieved" (p. 418). When learners and the instructor interact with each other, both input and output are produced, bringing the benefits of both (Sreehari, 2012). However, negotiation of meaning and the interaction between two speakers have more benefits than just those of input and output together. As speakers interact with each other they can provide support and guidance that enable their speaking partner to communicate better than if there had been no interaction. Interaction

and negotiation of meaning then is more than simply sending output and receiving input. There is additional learning that occurs as one speaker supports the other's communication goals (Mitchell et al., 2013). I see this learning in group work and pair work in my classroom.

The interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning together constitute communication. However, it is important to remember that these concepts apply beyond oral communication only. Allen and Paesani (2010) observe that if a classroom develops a "preference for oral language use" it can lead to "limited success in developing students' abilities to interpret and create written texts" and "the exclusion of thinking and intellectual abilities" (p. 122). Just as a student may be well served in learning to communicate verbally, it is equally crucial to realize that the L2 learner will have needs to create and interpret meaning in more than just oral ways.

Literacy Development

Learners can benefit greatly by developing the skills to express and interpret meaning in a variety of contexts beyond oral communication. Indeed, a student's language acquisition needs may not always require an oral focus. Authentic interactions in the target language may also include the use of email, text, social media pages, videos, signs, art, graphic novels, ads, and more. The pedagogy of multiliteracies considers the interpretation of these diverse texts, both written and oral (Allen & Paesani, 2010) and their importance in the L2 classroom. By using a variety of authentic texts in the L2 classroom, learners become more accustomed to encountering different modes of communication, are given more opportunities to practice critical thinking (Cimermanová, 2014), and get more opportunities to acquire the language itself (Griffith, 2010; Yildirim, 2013). Learners also are able to hone interpretive and analytical skills.

While many language or literacy teachers may see the importance of reading and writing about classical literature (Hawkes, 2015; McRae, 1994; Picken, 2007), it is important to note that the way people interpret and interact with the world is changing (Rajendra, 2015; Yildirim, 2013). Whether through emojis, memes, or other visual forms, communication via digital technology is much more visual. Just as interpreting written text is a skill that needs to be learned, other types of literacies need to be learned as well (Paesani et al., 2016; Warner & Dupuy, 2018). Combining different literacies in teaching, such as visuals in conjunction with text, allows language learners to increase their comprehension of the text and language itself (Basal, 2016). As learners analyze and discuss images in the L2, they create their own meaning from the visual and learn to interpret more than what is explicitly stated (Lwin et al., 2010; Merç, 2013). Interactions with the image and text, as well as critical thinking and the discussion of student observations help create both visual and oral stimuli. These stimuli ultimately assist with language acquisition.

As learners interact with all modes of communication (text, images, verbal, etc.), they are able to create meaning from these sources and then communicate with others to make further connections to their personal life in the target language. Students do not just receive input and produce output, but they interpret, analyze, and create meaning in the target language as they interact with the text. Deeper connections can be made as learners express their thoughts and opinions in the target language or develop their literacy in a variety of modes (Freire, 2005).

Connecting with Students

As mentioned in the previous section, a language teacher must consider their student's language learning needs. But just as it is important to consider a student's language learning needs, it is important to consider the student's personal (i.e., psychological and social) needs.

Such personal needs may include how successful they feel (Borrero et al., 2012; Peña et al., 2018), their sense of belonging in the classroom (Este & Ngo, 2011), or their level of motivation (Gardner, 2010; Henry et al., 2015), to name a few. If a teacher can support students in these aspects, they will be more likely to develop academically and in their language abilities (Borrero et al., 2012; Este & Ngo, 2011), and a teacher can better foster inclusivity and show that they value the diversity that each student brings to their classroom. By fostering positive relationships and connections with students, teachers can assist in these and similar areas of development.

Feeling successful

It is important for students to feel successful and come to expect to be successful as they use the language (Dörnyei, 2011). The instructor can develop activities and situations that promote experiences of success and enhance motivation (Kaboody, 2013), as well as make the material relevant to the learner. Teachers can focus on what students can do, rather than things they cannot do, as a way to foster a student's belief in their success. Teachers can use a variety of techniques, such as offer scaffolding, examples, and strategies to students, or clarifying goals to help create and maintain these feelings of success (Anderman & Anderman, 2010; Kaboody, 2013), which in turn fosters self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is when someone believes themselves able to perform a task well, which correlates positively with a students' motivation, confidence, and academic involvement (Suárez-Orozco, 2010). Kormos et al. (2011) identify self-efficacy as being future-oriented, or related to what a learner sees themselves capable of in the future. This realization is significant in considering Dörnyei's argument that "the main driving force of language learning is the students' future self-image" (as cited in Kormos et al., 2011, p. 497). If a student believes they will be capable and successful in the future they can be more motivated to engage in learning.

One way that a teacher can help students feel successful is by providing scaffolding. Scaffolding is a form of guidance or help that a teacher gives a student as a temporary support (Boblett, 2012). Scaffolding can include such things as dividing a large task into smaller, more manageable tasks, drawing students' attention to certain important aspects of the task, or modeling an outcome (McNeil, 2012; Wood et al., 1976). Effective scaffolding should help the student build their own knowledge, not become dependent on the knowledge of the teacher. With scaffolding, a student learns what is expected, develops their skills, and is led toward autonomy (Wilson & Devereux, 2014). Scaffolding can work well with both the communicative language approach and the multiliteracies approach to language teaching.

While there is much to be said for the help a teacher provides, it is important to promote learner autonomy in order to help the student feel more responsible for their own successes and learning (Benson, 2010; Reinders & Loewen, 2013) and boosts their self-efficacy. Teachers can move students toward autonomy by encouraging and providing opportunities for critical thinking, reflection, and independent action (Hui, 2009). When students develop autonomy, they take responsibility for their own learning, give themselves credit for their progress, and feel a level of personal success. When they practice autonomy, learners develop the tools to continue learning on their own. Having the tools to learn can be empowering and motivating for students, helping them see what they are capable of on their own (Próspero, et al., 2012).

Healthy/Supportive Relationships

While a teacher's influence is somewhat limited in some aspects of a student's life, it has been shown that they can work to develop positive relationships with their students and create a healthy relationship for them in an academic setting, which can have a large positive impact on the student (Borrero et al., 2012). Such relationships can put teachers in a position to offer

positive and relevant encouragement and support which helps students feel like they have a place at school (Borrero et al., 2012; Kruger et al., 2016). Behnke et al. (2010) state that some ways teachers can develop these positive relationships are showing respect for, listening to, and having high expectations for their students.

Motivation

As students feel successful and have positive relationships, their motivation can increase (Ng & Ng, 2015; Yunus, 2011). Motivation pushes the learner to exert effort in language learning and has been shown to play a large role in language acquisition (Behnke et al., 2010; Kaboody, 2013). Although motivation is complicated and can be influenced by any number of factors, it is critical for teachers to realize that they can play a substantial role in the motivation of their students.

Conclusion

As a second language teacher, my belief is that I should provide opportunities for communication that are meaningful and relevant to the learner, and facilitate supportive connections. In my teaching philosophy I have chosen to combine aspects of the communicative approach and the multiliteracies approach because I see value in both methodologies and don't view them as mutually exclusive. Meaningful communication can show students how language is used and help increase their motivation as they find a purpose in their language acquisition, but this communication should include reading, writing, textual analysis, and other that literacies students will need to effectively interact in the world. Positive connections with the teacher and peers can also provide motivation to students because they feel like they have support and they belong in their academic setting. If these things are done with an emphasis on promoting

diversity in the classroom and being inclusive of each individual then it can be a powerful

combination for a teacher in helping their students develop success in language acquisition.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

In my time in the Master of Second Language Teaching program, I have had the opportunity to observe a number of language classrooms. These observations have been beneficial in that I could see the classroom setting as an outsider, not a participant. Because I teach beginning level Spanish, I thought I would benefit most from observing beginner level classes with the exception of one high level Spanish course. Though most of my observations were of beginning level classes, the languages taught varied, including Spanish, Arabic and German. Watching colleagues' techniques and interactions helped me see my own practice in light of my personal teaching philosophy. I observed practices that I perceived as effective, as well as things I believed did not contribute to what I believe is important. These observations aided me in articulating my teaching philosophy, which is centered on two themes: helping students develop meaningful communication and developing supportive connections with students. I will now offer some reflections on observing my colleagues in light of these two themes.

One of the most positive patterns I noticed was the way the instructors interacted with their students. When instructors would hold conversations with their students in the target language before class started, for example, it appeared that the students felt more comfortable with the language during class. I saw it as a way for the teacher to boost the students' feelings of success and belonging in the classroom by showing them that they are able to use the language effectively. I also saw a similar effect when instructors interacted with individuals during group activities. I think building trust and confidence between the students and teacher is important and this seemed to be a good way to build positive relationships between teacher and student.

Another important pattern I observed was the interaction of the students among themselves in the target language. One observation I conducted was of a team-taught class, in which one instructor taught for the first 25 minutes and the other one taught for the last 25 minutes. The first instructor had activities that gave the students time to interact, create meaning, and practice the language with each other. All members of the class were speaking and participating, and the students were asking the teacher questions as well. The second instructor had no paired activities and instead used the time for lecturing. It seemed like the participation and motivation of the class went down drastically. The students appeared less willing to interact with the teacher; they didn't ask questions and were less inclined to answer questions. I believe that this ties into the importance of providing opportunities for meaningful communication. As students interact with each other, they can communicate and find purpose in their language use. If there is only a lecture, it is more difficult for students to relate personally to what they are learning; there is no student-centered opportunity to communicate in the target language or work through breakdowns in communication (in which students can often create personal connections to what they learn).

In addition to having communicative activities, I believe it is important to ensure that they are meaningful. In this context an activity is meaningful when it is relevant to the learner, and he or she can interpret input with the intent to produce related output. I observed a number of classes where activities seemed to lack context (with unclear purpose and meaning), which I viewed as a negative pattern. Instructors created activities that were interactive and got the students speaking, but they could easily be completed without understanding what the words meant. These types of activities can be good for practicing grammatical patterns, but I believe it is more beneficial for students to practice creating and interpreting meaning along with the

grammar principles. This caused me to reflect on whether my own activities were meaningful and to be more careful in my planning.

Another negative pattern I observed was time management in relation to the needs of the students. Time is something teachers will always have to balance and something I often struggle with as well. As an observer, I saw the importance of being conscious of time and how best to allocate that time for the benefit of the students. It was easier to see when an activity had run too long. Seeing when and how other teachers transition to new activities, I have better learned how I can monitor when students are ready to keep moving and when I need to take more time to practice or explain a concept.

From the patterns observed, I was able to reflect on my own practices as an instructor and identify two points I should improve. This reflection was the most valuable for me in that I started to see things that I could do to better fit the needs of my students in the classroom. My first point of reflection is in my own personal interaction with my students. I want to improve my personal interactions with students by giving students more individual attention, providing feedback, and establishing trust-building connection. I have developed the habit of standing back as students interact with each other and just listening. I started doing this because I believed it was valuable for the students to negotiate meaning among themselves and work through how to say things for themselves. Now I also see more clearly the value in individual interaction between the instructor and student as well as how building a positive relationship with students can boost students' confidence. Students can still run through similar mental processes as they think about a correction they received and how to respond to the instructor. In addition to receiving more feedback on their language use, these interactions will then help them feel more

comfortable in class, which lowers their affective filter. Overall, with a lower affective filter and more trust, I believe it will help them improve in their ability to acquire the language.

       The second point I learned in my observation is the importance of considering the needs of students so that they can create meaning in the interactions and communications in which they participate. A teacher could learn of their students' needs through simple conversation, projects designed around their identities and interests, surveys, or class discussions. The needs could then be addressed through planning a variety of activities to appeal to a wider assortment of students; it could include providing enough scaffolding for students to complete a task successfully. Sometimes it just means taking sufficient time to plan before class, or perhaps being flexible and changing plans in the middle of class. These examples take into consideration what students need, which can help students better make their own connections to learning. It is important to be aware of the students, be willing to adapt to their needs, and help them see the purpose behind their language use. I think if they don't see how the language applies to their needs it will be hard to find applications that motivate them to keep learning. However, if the instructor can help them use the language in ways that are interesting and relatable to them, it becomes more meaningful and I believe the students' investment in learning will increase.

       In conclusion, these observations have supported my teaching philosophy in seeing the importance of first, building positive relationships with students to develop trust and confidence, and second, establishing opportunities for meaningful communication that is relevant to the learner. According to what I have seen, when an instructor is mindful of the students and prepares carefully, the students will better engage in class and ultimately in the language acquisition process.

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

CULTURE PAPER

Promoting Academic Success Through Resilience and Motivation:

A Review of the Literature for ELLs in Secondary Schools

INTRODUCTION AND REFLECTION

This paper was written for the class Teaching English in a Global Context that I took from Dr. DeJonge-Kannan in Fall of 2019. In the paper I look at a number of factors that influence the development of academic success for English Language Learners (ELLs). This topic is important to me because of my experience working with ELLs at the high school level. Many of the ELLs I have worked with have struggled academically. It's easy to say that they struggle because they are not yet fluent in English. But through my experience, while English fluency plays a major role, I have come to recognize other factors at play in students' academic success. There are students who have acquired a minimal amount of English that seem to excel academically, while there are others who appear much more fluent who have yet to develop their own academic success.

It interested me to see how different students reacted to the challenges that faced them. Many of them faced similar challenges at school, but responded in very distinct ways. Some of the students exceled in spite of the language barriers they faced, while others seemed to lose all motivation in a matter of weeks. I wanted to know what factors led students to build their academic success despite facing difficult things and what kept them resilient and motivated. As someone in a position to influence these students I also wanted to know how I could best support and help these students develop success in school.

In writing this paper I attempted to look at some of the factors that lead ELLs toward building academic success. Identifying different factors that help develop and lead to academic success is important for an English Language teacher because he or she is often the main advocate for the students acquiring English. If a teacher is aware of these positive factors then he

or she can adapt his or her instruction and focus in order to better provide the best support for the students involved.

In my research I learned that the academic success of English Language Learners is a complex topic with many influencing factors. However, I was able to identify some patterns and groupings that I believe can be helpful for teachers as they strive to help their ELLs build their academic success. From these patterns I found that one of the best things I can do to help my students develop academic success is create a positive relationship of trust with them. Once that relationship is built, then a teacher can help a student feel successful and help influence the student in other ways. If the student doesn't feel like they can trust their teacher, then the instructor has very little influence on the student and is very limited in how they can help them build academic success.

Introduction

Immigrants and refugees who enter the United States often come with little to no knowledge of the English language, United States culture, or various aspects of society in general. Because they are not familiar with aspects that are such a big part of life in the country, they often face challenges in adapting. Adolescent English Language Learners (ELLs) face challenges in schools as they confront the complexities of learning English, making friends, and adapting to a new culture while simultaneously holding on to the culture of their own country (Este & Ngo, 2011). The many challenges that face ELLs can make it difficult for them to achieve academic success in school, in many cases they are expected to do twice the amount of work (learn English in addition to schoolwork) as their peers while completing the same academic requirements (Páez, 2009). In spite of the challenges that ELLs face, many of them do experience academic success (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010; Peña et al., 2018; Yunus et al., 2011). This paper looks at the literature in regards to the challenges facing ELLs in secondary schools and factors that have been found to contribute to their academic success. Because the expectation for ELL students (and their native speaking peers) is to attend school, pass their classes, get passing grades, and graduate (York et al., 2015), that is what I take as the definition of academic success.

Identifying factors that correlate with the academic success of ELLs is beneficial because this knowledge can aid teachers and students alike in cultivating and fostering the attributes and characteristics that are most likely to move the learners toward academic success (Este & Ngo, 2011). In looking at academic influences for ELLs, I frequently encountered research on resilience and motivation. Both constructs have been found to be influential in ELLs' academic success (Borrero et al., 2012; Suárez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). Resilience is the

ability to bounce back successfully from distress or hardship, while motivation is the drive that

encourages engagement. Both resilience and motivation are important for ELLs to achieve

academic success.

Challenges Facing ELLs

The challenges of ELL immigrants that enter into secondary schools in the United States

are numerous. It takes them between 2-5 years of explicit language instruction to arrive at a basic

social English (Este & Ngo, 2011), and between 5-7 years to gain a proficiency that is

academically equivalent to that of their native English-speaking peers (Cummins, 2008; Páez,

2009). The work load they face is twice that of their peers, but they have the same level of

accountability (Páez, 2009).

The stress that immigrant children face is often dissimilar to that of their non-immigrant

peers. Many ELLs enter a secondary school with limited schooling in addition to limited

proficiency in English. Secondary schools require more academically complex work and high-

stake assessments than primary schools. This negatively affects ELLs in secondary schools since

they are forced to deal with these complexities immediately after entering the country rather than

working up to these high demands. The students are expected to understand the new school

environment, including class scheduling and routines, responsibilities with turning in

assignments and being to class on time, and the customs of students and teachers, many of which

are completely foreign to them (Gunderson et al., 2012; Páez, 2009; Este & Ngo, 2011). As they

try to meet all these new expectations, there is often little support in helping them process these

changes (Páez, 2009). As a teacher, one needs to be aware of such stresses and challenges.

Aside from the academic challenges, ELLs can have a variety of social challenges as

well. In many instances they are faced with having to decide between maintaining their home

culture, or adopt the culture of the new place in which they find themselves. It is not uncommon to experience isolation as they have difficulty creating cross-ethnic friendships and many of their peers will have already established friendships with others (Este & Ngo, 2011). Power relations between teachers, native-speaking peers, and ELLs can also leave ELLs feeling inferior and may make them shy to speak (Peirce, 1995). Power differences, or how others view the ELL, can limit the effectiveness of communicative opportunities in the target language. Additional barriers can arise if they come as undocumented immigrants, including being unable to obtain academic scholarships, financial assistance or a driver's license, as well as the constant threat of deportation (Peña et al., 2018). The systemic inequality is not only academic.

Challenges such as racism (Annamma, et al., 2016; Carranza, 2007) and structural inequality (Castagno, 2008; Warren, 2005) also add to the negative effects on motivation and resilience that ELLs experience. Recognizing these challenges are a reality for ELLs is important because those with whom they engage in conversation play a huge part in shaping the language learner's experience (Peirce, 1995). It is with this context in mind that I recognize that these and other challenges can negatively affect the motivation and the resilience of ELLs, and this negative influence is seen in the general decline of their academic performance (Suárez-Orozco, Bang, et al., 2010) and their relatively high dropout rates from secondary schools as compared with their native speaking peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). While these challenges create notable obstacles, understanding the hurdles and looking at those students who have achieved academic success can be valuable in helping other ELLs build similar academic achievement.

Building Academic Success

Despite all the challenges facing ELLs in secondary schools, there are those students who effectively build academic success. It is beneficial to look at academically successful ELLs and understand what factors have led them to their achievements. By understanding what factors have guided them to their accomplishments, the success of other students who pursue these same factors can be promoted (Páez, 2009), and teachers can strive to create environments that will encourage the development of these traits in other ELLs.

I will look at motivation and resilience separately in this paper as factors that influence the academic success of ELLs. While there is some overlap between factors influencing resilience and motivation, it is worthwhile to consider both separately to see how a factor may have multiple outcomes or influence individuals in multiple ways. It is also important to realize that individual factors or identities are not static, but are changing as ELLs adapt to new challenges and engage in new contexts (Pierce, 1995). After considering each theme below, I will attempt some final generalized conclusions on building academic success for ELLs in secondary schools in regards to resilience and motivation.

Resilience

Resilience has been defined a number of ways, but each definition seems to capture the idea of bouncing back from adversity. Peña et al. (2018) claims that resilience is the ability to keep performing in a positive way as a person responds to hardship (see also Turner, 2001). Cardoso and Thompson (2010) indicate that resilience is a dynamic process that involves being exposed to risk as well as a positive adjustment of the individual in the midst of adversity. Indeed, resilience emphasizes the ability of the ELLs to effectively cope with all of the challenges they face, both in academics and in life in general, or in other words it is a set of

characteristics that assist a person in overcoming hardship (Arastaman, & Balci, 2013; Brooks, 2005).

An important aspect in considering resilience is that it can be developed over time. The supportive influence of teachers, parents, and others can positively impact a child's resilience (Arastaman & Balci, 2013; Rivera & Waxman, 2011). Este and Ngo (2011) even go so far as to suggest that children are unable to develop abilities related to resilience on their own, putting much of the responsibility of resilience development on those with whom ELLs interact such as family members, teachers, and community members (see also Wright & Masten, 2006). Arastaman and Balci (2013) further imply that as teachers better understand these factors and work to nurture them in students, they can "increase the effectiveness of school services and can serve as a cure for some problems like school dropout and school disengagement" (p 923). While understanding itself isn't enough to solve these problems, it is an important place to begin and helps teachers know how to best take action to advocate for their students and help them.

The idea of resilience is made up of the concepts of protective factors and risk factors. *Protective factors* are those aspects that influence an ELL positively and increase their ability to face challenges. Breaking the concept of protective factors down further, I look at *assets*, those things that are internally possessed by the ELL, and *resources*, the factors which are external (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010; Peña et al., 2018). *Risk factors*, on the other hand, are those things that have a negative impact and pose a risk to an individual's success. A person is said to be resilient when the influence of their protective factors outweighs the influence of the present risk factors (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010). It is also important to realize that different risk factors and protective factors may have a different impact on distinct groups, or individual ELLs, meaning that one protective factor doesn't necessarily cancel out one risk factor, and the weight each

construct plays in an individual's resilience is likely to vary (Gunderson et al., 2012; Páez, 2009). In the remainder of this section I will look at some assets that may affect the resiliency, and in turn the academic success of ELLs, and then I will discuss resources that can have additional influence on these students and their ability to react positively to adversity. Together assets and resources have an overall positive effect on ELLs and contribute to their academic success (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010; Peña et al., 2009).

Assets

An ELL's assets, in terms of resiliency, are the internal factors that encourage positive outcomes when facing hardship. They can originate from a "combination of biological and psychosocial influences, including temperament, intelligence, competence, self-regulation, and self-esteem" (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010, p 259). These attributes are not static, but can change in response to facing challenges and the influences of an ELL's environment. However, the assets a student possesses have been tied to their academic success (Perez et al., 2009). Thus, as an ELL develops assets, they can progress toward higher academic achievements. While the literature mentions many assets that a resilient student may possess, here I will attempt to organize them into three main groups that represent an overview of some of the most influential assets to their academic success.

The first group I identify is the individual's *knowledge of self*. This refers to the beliefs that an ELL may have about themselves and their own abilities. An individual's beliefs may be self-deprecating or confidence boosting, but generally those that qualify as assets are the latter. Resilient ELLs believe that their success comes from their own effort (Peña et al., 2018), they often realize that they need help from others to succeed, but they actively seek out that help rather than expecting help to come to them. These students believe that they can obtain the

outcomes they desire through their own effort, and successful experiences help bolster their confidence (Borrero et al., 2012). In turn, an increased self-confidence helps them trust their abilities to independently navigate situations in the future as well as feel generally competent (Peña et al., 2018). Specific characteristics that fall into this category may include: feeling special and appreciated, having expectations for themselves, believing they possess an ability to problem solve, having positive self-image of their strengths (Este & Ngo, 2011), having an internal locus of control (Peña et al., 2018), and self-competence (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010).

In contrast, if an ELL does not experience success, develops a negative self-view, and is continually faced with failures, their resilience may be negatively affected (Kruger et al., 2016), including their self-perceptions, emotions, and goals. Furthermore, if an ELL is faced with continual failure in assignments, tests, and interactions with others, this affects how they are perceived by others, who may in turn project the expectation that this person cannot succeed (Kruger et al., 2016; Reardon et al., 2010). The self-competence that an ELL can obtain comes from experiencing successes and gaining confidence. If an ELL is not given a chance to succeed nor experiences small successes, then their self-confidence could easily diminish as an asset.

Secondly, a resilient ELL is *future oriented*. This ties into their beliefs regarding self-efficacy and personal ability. Students who are confident in their ability to succeed are goal oriented (Kruger et al., 2016; Peña et al., 2018). The ability to achieve long-term and short-term goals can help an ELL face adversity and succeed academically as they can see a reason for their challenges and develop the determination to overcome these challenges. If they can see why they are doing something, they are more likely to stick with it (Behnke et al., 2010).

Third, resilient students often *seek support*, and at least partially attribute their success to one or more other factors. Numerous ELLs talked about their belief in God and how their faith

increased their confidence in their own abilities (Peña et al., 2018; see also Este & Ngo, 2011).

Other sources of support were teachers, counselors, tutors, community members, and family

(Borrero et al., 2012; Este & Ngo, 2011; Peña et al., 2018). Seeking out help from sources other

than themselves gives ELLs access to the *resource* aspect of resilience. They can use the skills of

others to make up for their own short-comings and to further develop their own abilities.

Resources

The resources of an ELL are those factors that come from their environment. These

resources can come from their family, school, or community (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010). An

individual can't necessarily control the resources that are available to them, but as discussed

above they can choose to seek out and access the support that is available. Even though an ELL

cannot control the amount or quality of resources available to them, resources can still contribute

to the student's positive development (Peña et al., 2018). The responsibility to ensure access to

resources for ELLs falls mainly upon the shoulders of family, school faculty, and community

members. Only after the resources are made available, can an ELL decide to use what is

provided.

Family has a significant amount of influence on overall resilience and academic success

(Este & Ngo, 2011). Cardoso and Thompson (2010) state that "parental involvement is directly

associated with greater academic motivation, higher grade point average, and commitment to

high school completion" (p 260). They suggest that parents communicate with their students

about school and monitor the completion of their homework. Schools can facilitate this by letting

families know what assignments are due soon and what support parents can give in completing

those assignment. The relationship that parents and other influential family members (including

extended family) maintain with students is especially important in high school because ELLs at

this age are particularly vulnerable to influences of peers and social isolation (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010). The personal values of these family members can also transfer to their children through conversations at home; for example, if a family member values education and hard work, those values are likely to be passed to the children and carry over to their academic efforts (Rivera & Waxman, 2011). ELLs who know their families support and expect their academic success attribute their success largely to the involvement of their family (Peña et al., 2018). Parents and family can have more impact on their child's education than others because they can greatly influence the values taught to the child in their home life, the time they have to complete schoolwork, and the encouragement given.

The ELL's *school* also has a large role to play in their potential resilience. Teachers, counselors, administrators, and tutors can all have a lasting effect on ELLs and influence their academic success (Este & Ngo, 2011). A large potential influence the school can have on the ELLs is the creation of positive relationships with teachers, other mentors, and peers (Borrero et al., 2012). Positive relationships help students feel support and gives them a resource that they can trust. When teachers have good relationships with students, they can give purposeful encouragement as well as help students feel like they belong, can succeed, and are cared for by those at school (Borrero et al., 2012; Kruger et al., 2016). The development of positive relationships can also lead to establishing high expectations for ELLs, another factor that contributes to academic success (Peña et al., 2018). As teachers and staff set high but attainable expectations and help ELLs learn skills like problem solving and critical thinking, they feel enabled (Borrero et al., 2012). In addition, schools can connect to the ELL's family, combining two important resources. If schools have a plan to actively communicate with parents on a regular basis (in a comprehendible way) and then follow through, then the ELLs are more likely

to receive support they need from home (Borrero et al., 2012). With frequent school-home contact, parents and students will also have more of an opportunity to understand the school system, which is often foreign to them (Peña et al., 2018). An increased understanding of the school system will help ELLs be better able to navigate the academic system which can lead to more confidence in school and increased participation (Este & Ngo, 2011).

Community resources are another positive influence for academic achievement (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010). A caring community can provide access to mentors, supportive peers, and neighborhood support, thus increasing an ELL's sense of belonging in social networks (Este & Ngo, 2011). Schools can try to involve the community in activities too by simply inviting their participation, again combining two resources in favor of the ELLs (Borrero et al., 2012). Supportive community members can also help by alerting ELLs and their families to cultural differences, co-navigating unfamiliar social systems, and assisting in situations with language barriers. When ELLs have support and continuity in their community, they are more likely to develop resilience and academic success (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010).

Resources can contribute significantly to the development of resilience in ELLs (Este & Ngo, 2011). However, just as the resources mentioned here can have a positive influence and be protective factors, if they do not foster an individual's sense of belonging or belief of success, they can become risk factors instead because they do not have a positive influence on the learner (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010; Este & Ngo, 2011). The goal of recognizing the resources and assets that promote ELL resilience is to be able to foster the development of these assets and the access to resources in order to help ELLs effectively overcome the adversity that they face in their schools. Overcoming hardships and challenges are important skills for ELLs in their

academic endeavors; as they develop this ability they will be closer to developing academic success.

Motivation

While resilience focuses on being able to come back from adversity, motivation focuses on an ELL's drive and desire to engage in the activities needed in order to improve. Gardner (1985) indicates that motivation is composed of effort, attitude, and desire in relation to achieving a goal. Kormos et al. (2011) complement Gardner's definition by describing motivation as the reason why people choose to engage in certain activities over others, how long they will continue in that activity, and how much effort they dedicate to it. Motivation is an important complement to resilience because achieving academic success requires more than dealing with set-backs, it also requires active engagement with new tasks and challenges. Without motivation, an ELL may be resilient, but have little to no engagement or momentum in regards to opportunities that could build academic success (Ng & Ng, 2015).

Motivation, and its contributing factors, is a complex issue that has been studied by many researchers (Dörnyei, 2014; Gardner, 2010; Kormos et al., 2010; Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011). A variety of research has shown that motivation can be linked to success in the classroom (Behnke et al., 2010; Ng & Ng, 2015; Próspero et al., 2012). What follows will look at factors that contribute to ELL motivation in secondary school. It is important to recognize that motivation is often divided into two types, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. *Intrinsic motivation* is a reflection of the innate desire someone has to do something, where learning is a goal within itself (Ng & Ng, 2015). *Extrinsic motivation* comes from sources other than the individual. Promises of rewards, good grades, or high paying jobs can provide learners with extrinsic motivation (Próspero et al., 2012). It has been argued that intrinsic motivation has a higher correlation with

language learning and related factors, and that extrinsic motivators are actually negatively correlated with academic achievement (Ng & Ng, 2015). Próspero et al. (2012) state that "L2 intrinsic motivation involves enjoyment of learning a second language for its own sake without any external pressure" (p. 25). This statement suggests that intrinsic motivation is related to enjoyment and pleasure, whereas extrinsic motivation relates to pressure and obligation. When academic learning is tied to pleasure students are more likely to pursue it; when it is tied to obligation students are more likely to search for topics they find more enjoyable.

The remainder of this section will highlight various factors that can influence motivation by dividing them into two subgroups, individual factors and external factors. The factors mentioned may provide either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, or both. For example, the motivation that a teacher provides may be extrinsic when they give grades, rewards, or punishments, or the motivation may be intrinsic as they influence a student's perceptions of learning and their desire to do well. Just as teachers can provide both types of motivation, such can be the case with other motivational factors mentioned in the following sections. By looking at individual motivational factors and recognizing the potential for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in each of them, ultimately factors can be identified that correlate and contribute to the academic success of ELLs.

Individual Factors

In my review of the literature, I have found two main groups of motivational influences. The first group contains factors that are internal, or a part of the individual. They can be, and often are, influenced by outside elements (including socialization and perceptions others have of the individual), but ultimately on one level they reflect perceptions or attitudes of the individual about themselves.

First, a *learner's beliefs* about themselves can have a large influence on their motivations to engage and participate in academics (Próspero et al., 2012). This includes what a student perceives to be true about themselves from past experiences (self-concept) and what they believe they are capable of performing in the future (self-efficacy) (Kormos, et al. 2011, Suárez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). A learner's self-concept is related to what they believe they are worth. If past experiences have led them to believe their worth is not very high, their motivation to participate in new things will be low because their self-esteem is low. Self-efficacy is equally tied to motivation in that if a student believes themselves uncapable to complete a task successfully, rather than chance failing they will choose to not participate (Ng & Ng, 2015).

Second, *learner autonomy* is correlated with motivation (Próspero et al., 2012). Autonomy refers to when students are involved in making decisions regarding their education; students who choose to be active in making these decisions are autonomous and can in turn perceive themselves to be capable in guiding their learning path. When a learner is autonomous, they are often more intrinsically motivated because they have some control in guaranteeing that their learning aligns with their personal goals (Ng & Ng, 2015) and as a result, generally have higher grades and academic success (Próspero et al., 2012). This is supported by O'Reilly (2014) who found that autonomous support was positively correlated to both intrinsic motivation and GPA in graduate level foreign language college students and intrinsic motivation had a moderate positive correlation to academic success (see also Ogundokun & Adeyemo, 2010; Lemos & Veríssimo, 2014). Autonomous mentors can foster a positive self-concept in students. When students have a say in what they learn, it is easier for them to relate their academic activities to their overall goals. If they are unable to see a relation between their academic endeavors and

their long-term goals, they will be more likely to disengage and lose motivation (Behnke et al., 2010).

While these factors are internal, it is not always easy for an ELL to change their individual motivational factors. There can be many causes behind someone's self-beliefs, or their feelings of autonomy that are not in control of the ELL. But motivation is continually increasing or decreasing (Próspero et al., 2012). Being aware of the links that factors such as a learner's beliefs and their autonomy have with motivation and academic success can help an ELL know where to focus their attention when they desire to improve their own motivation. In addition, teachers can play a role in increasing the intrinsic motivation that an ELL has (Ng & Ng, 2015) and can be intentional in choosing strategies to help their students develop self-efficacy, self-concept, and autonomy. This leads into the second group of factors that can increase motivation, the external factors.

External Factors

The second type of factors influencing motivation is external factors, which act upon the ELL and are controlled by others in their environment such as family, peers, and teachers. These external factors can have a distinct impact on the ELLs in their academic endeavors by influencing both their extrinsic and intrinsic motivations.

A large external motivator is the *family* of the ELL. Parents and other familial influencers can directly influence the child's beliefs about learning and their attitudes can transfer to their children. This can affect their enjoyment of learning and their self-efficacy (Kormos et al., 2011). Páez (2009) found that a parent's level of education can correlate to the performance of their children in school. Her study included students from variety of ethnic backgrounds (Chinese, Dominican, and Haitian) between ages 10-16. In addition to direct influence that parents have on

students, the amount of contact parents have with the school also correlates with students'

academic performance (Behnke et al., 2010). The more involved parents are in the education of

their children, and the more contact they have with the school, the more likely their children will

be motivated to achieve academic success. However, parents of ELLs may be reluctant to

participate in their child's education because they are not familiar with how to navigate the

school system, do not know what involvement is expected of them, or feel intimidated by the

schools and teachers (Behnke et al., 2010). ESL teachers can help bridge this gap by reaching out

to the parents of ELLs, updating them on the student's progress and assignments, and ultimately

involving them in their child's education.

A second external motivator is the influence of the *teacher*. A teacher is key to academic

success (Ng & Ng, 2015) and can provide extrinsic motivation by giving rewards, punishments,

or grades to students (Kormos et al., 2011). They can also create relationships with their students

that can increase intrinsic motivation. A positive teacher-student relationship can increase

student motivation and academic achievement by making the environment more inviting and less

stressful to the students. A successful relationship leads a student to stay focused in class,

participate more, and have better behavior overall (Yunus, 2011). Respect for, listening to, and

high expectations for ELLs are some attributes that help contribute to productive teacher-student

relationships (Behnke et al., 2010). Students who perceive their teachers as letting them be

autonomous in some way had higher grades than those who saw their teachers as controlling

(Próspero et al., 2012). Teachers can help ELLs feel like they belong in a school where many

things are foreign to them and encourage them to work hard. A positive role model and influence

from a teacher that cares can do much to encourage academic success.

Conclusion

There is a great deal of overlap between resilience factors and motivational factors that contribute to the academic success of ELLs. This overlap is not unexpected. Factors such as the learner's beliefs, family, and support from mentors contribute to the learners' response to adversity and desire to engage in school.

In conclusion, when discussing the potential for ELLs' academic success, it is valuable to consider their individual resilience factors and motivational factors, as well as attributes they can foster with the help of teachers and mentors. Associated with the construct of resilience are assets and resources that can help ELLs face adversity. Assets are developed within the ELL, but that growth can be influenced by others. Additionally, ELLs can access resources to build their resilience. As resilience helps ELLs surpass challenges, motivation helps them engage in future opportunities. Similar to how resilience can be divided into individual factors and factors that come from others, motivated individuals experience internal motivational factors and external motivational factors. In general, we might therefore expect that most students that are resilient and motivated have a better chance of achieving academic success than those that are not.

This paper has explored factors that an individual may possess or develop that can foster their academic success. Being familiar with factors that help foster academic success can be valuable for educators who work with ELLs. A fruitful direction for future research would be to look at best practices or strategies for promoting and developing success-related factors in ELLs.

LITERACY PAPER

The Appeal of Graphic Novels in Second Language Learning

INTRODUCTION AND REFLECTION:

I grew up reading and enjoying graphic novels, so as I investigated literacy in language learning my interest naturally turned in that direction. Furthermore, from my previous studies throughout the MSLT program, I knew using visuals in teaching could be a helpful tool. I decided to combine what I was learning about the benefits of literature with what I had learned about visuals and investigate how graphic novels could be beneficial for language acquisition.

In my research, I found many sources advocating for the use of graphic novels in the classroom. Along with carrying many of the benefits of other genres of literature, they offer additional benefits that include providing non-verbal visual context to the written text and increasing the motivation of the students reading them. Moreover, college-level courses on the graphic novel are growing in popularity in English and languages departments today.

As discussed in my Teaching Philosophy Statement, I believe it is important for students to have meaningful communication in language learning. The added visual context that graphic novels provide to students can help make the content more comprehensible and in turn relatable and meaningful. Additionally, it is important for a language learner to feel successful. When reading stories that are textually dense it can be easy to become stuck on what is not understood. In contrast, added visuals can amplify the understanding of a story and increase the feelings of success. Graphic novels may also provide different emphasis in aspects of language such as dialogue and narration while letting much of the background descriptions be accomplished through the accompanying visuals. Finally, finishing a book in the L2 can also offer students a motivating sense of achievement.

Investigating graphic novels has made me excited to use them in my teaching. I have started to implement their use in small ways already. More than just using graphic novels, my research has led me to consider how I use other materials as a language instructor. While it is important to challenge students and use material that will help them learn, it is equally important to choose materials that can excite and motivate them. Graphic novels can provide student motivation and a challenge as they engage in critical thinking, bringing together two important aspects in language acquisition.

Introduction

The use of literature in second language teaching has many benefits for learners. However, as not everyone agrees on what exactly qualifies as literature, McRae (1994) makes the distinction between what he specifies as Literature (with a capital L) and literature (with a lower case l). The first, "Literature", refers to classical works containing language and structure that may be seen by some as more complicated and traditional than normal text, whereas "literature" has a much wider scope. The wider literature includes songs, novels, plays, etc. While these forms of literature may not inherently be any less complex lexically than a classical work, this distinction still often exists in literary studies. However, the multiliteracies approach suggests we broaden the definition of "text." This paper will focus on the benefits of the wider scope of literature in language teaching, including not only well-known canonical works, but also a more inclusive and diverse body of short stories, poems, and specifically graphic novels.

Literature in L2 Learning

Both "Literature" and "literature" share many of the same benefits for a language learner, some of which include, "intercultural appreciation…the development of reading skills…a better conscious understanding of linguistic structures…the development of analytical skills" and a "greater variety of written output" (Hawkes, 2015, p. 1). Parkinson and Thomas (2000) note that the use of literature increases communication, promotes critical thinking, is memorable and motivating for the reader, and provides an authentic source of input (see also Picken, 2007).

This paper will focus on two benefits of literary texts: (1) motivating L2 learners (Picken, 2007) and (2) promoting intercultural understanding (Hecke, 2011). Motivation is often difficult to maintain for L2 learners and hard for teachers to foster in the L2 classroom (Kaboody, 2013). However, motivation is an important attribute for language learners because it can spark their

curiosity for learning and leave them with a desire to learn more. It is argued that literature has the potential to be motivating because: students can relate personally to the experiences expressed in the text, they can become involved in the compelling aspects or suspense of the plot (Picken, 2007), and they can feel a sense of accomplishment when they finish reading a text.

Literature also helps foster intercultural understanding (Arshavskaya, 2018; Picken, 2007). L2 teachers are often keen to help their students develop "positive attitudes toward the target culture and its members and a desire to interact with them" (Bateman, 2002, p. 318). This is achieved when students develop a better understanding of the cultures of the languages taught. Language and culture are connected in inseparable ways, and as texts are studied and used in language classes a wider picture of that culture becomes apparent to the reader (Bateman, 2002).

Many full benefits of literature can be realized as the instructor uses it effectively. The multiliteracies approach to second language teaching includes being effective in the teaching of literature. Texts can do more than simply showing authentic language, they can be used to create and negotiate meaning between the reader and the text itself (Paesani et al., 2016). The student interacts with the text in a way that focuses on making connections and promotes critical thinking. As meaning is constructed by interacting with the text and interpreting it, it is probable that the language and words used throughout it will be better remembered, and as the students make personal connections they will be more motivated to use the language in other contexts. The rest of this paper will look at one part of literature, specifically graphic novels and comics, within the multiliteracies framework and how it amplifies these benefits for the L2 learner.

Benefits of Graphic Novels as Literature in the L2 Classroom

As a specific literary genre, graphic novels have stood out as having a notably positive effect in multiple aspects of language and cultural acquisition. Although it has been difficult for

researchers to agree on a definition of what exactly a graphic novel is, one definition that I will use here is "booklength sequential art narrative featuring an anthology-style collection of comic art" (Carter, 2007, p. 1). In this sense, both images and words are used to tell a complete story. Thus, graphic novels foster language acquisition as learners process pictures and text to interpret meaning (Basal et al., 2016). Learners build vocabulary and interpretive and analytical skills.

Research has shown the benefits of using graphic novels and their rich visuals to help overcome barriers that second language learners may face when confronted with only text (Yildirim, 2013; Yusof et al., 2017). The accompanying visuals and storyline can provide context to the words (Chun, 2009; Basal et al., 2016). Street and Leung (2010) state that "the key to understanding language in context is to start, not with language, but with context" (p. 296), which is what a graphic novel helps accomplish. The visuals create a context that can be partially understood, which the language assists in enhancing. The added context increases what is understood and can provide duplicate information, offering scaffolding (Öz & Efecioglu, 2015) and appealing to both the verbal and nonverbal processes in line with the Dual Coding Theory (Basal et al., 2016; Merç, 2013). Several researchers have studied the effect of graphic novels on the acquisition of vocabulary. According to Griffith (2010), graphic novels can help in developing vocabulary for students with language and learning disabilities, which implies a benefit for language learners as well. Visuals have often been used in language classes to aide in vocabulary acquisition, and graphic novels add clarification to the words presented. The two modalities allow the students to make strong connections between meaning, text, and visuals (Basal et al., 2016) and increased understanding of words in the L2 (Öz & Efecioglu, 2015). Graphic novels may even lead language learners to seek out new vocabulary not used in the text itself (Cimermanová, 2014).

Additionally, graphic novels have been shown to enhance motivation by aiding a reader's ability to visualize what they read in literature. When comprehension of the target language is limited and a reader is not able to form a mental representation of what they read, they are unable to comprehend the story, and are not "drawn into the text in a meaningful way" (Yildirim, 2013, p. 125). A graphic novel can help those who have trouble visualizing in providing them with images to draw upon, thus increasing their comprehension and motivation. L2 learners can use this extra help to make their reading experience more enjoyable and to engage with text in a way that is relevant to them (Brenna, 2012).

Furthermore, language learners report appreciating the level of autonomy that comes with reading a graphic novel, which is a factor that can influence motivation (Ng & Ng, 2015; Próspero et al., 2012). "When you are turning the pages you always imagine your own story…Every detail is important for you. Now you become a creator of your own story" (Cimermanová, 2014, p. 92; see also Chun, 2009). These citations express how students use the images to create the story and fill in details that would be expressed through words in a traditional text, creating a type of autonomy that is different from what would be experienced with traditional text. Students can find extra clues in the images of the graphic novels and some of the mystery of the second language is reduced; students can feel more successful in reading and "believe that they can make competent language learners" (Öz & Efecioglu, 2015). The extra help that the visuals give can help mitigate some of the frustration that L2 learners face in confronting text they do not understand (Hecke, 2011). With a lower affective filter, the student's participation in activities and negotiation of meaning can increase. Studies have found that through combining visuals and text together students became "more active members of [the] learning process" and feel "the joy of creation" (Vassilikopoulou et al., 2011, pp. 121 & 124).

Intercultural learning is also enhanced through graphic novels. The combination of words and visuals provides a deeper understanding of a culture represented in a text. Hecke (2011) states that through the appropriate use of graphic novels "students will arrive at a better understanding of someone else's attitudes and opinions – even when intercultural issues are not directly present in the text itself" (p. 655). Many graphic novels tell stories of people in differing cultures, or experiencing cultures that are foreign to them. These types of stories can help readers address false assumptions and stereotypes (Hecke, 2011). More than words alone, visuals can show cultures in a way that helps students visualize concepts unfamiliar. They can relate with the characters in the story and better understand social issues present. In this way, language and culture can be learned at the same time (Öz & Efecioglu, 2015). As students interact with people from the cultures represented in the graphic novels, they will be better prepared to understand the lives of others. Using graphic novels may help to promote inclusivity and cultural diversity.

Not only do graphic novels enhance contributions of general literacy, they have unique benefits as well. One of these benefits is that they can serve as a bridge to more complex texts (Bridges, 2009; Yildirim, 2013) for language learners that may need assistance in transitioning to literature that is textually dense. Brenna (2012) lists what she calls *master key strategies* that can be learned from reading graphic novels. She defines *master key strategies* as "comprehension strategies suitable for a variety of textual forms" (p. 90). Some of these strategies include predicting, summarizing, making connections, rereading, making inferences, and synthesizing. Dallacqua (2012) found graphic novels to be particularly useful in teaching literary devices or techniques, such as point of view, symbolism, mood, flashback, etc. She asserts that many of these devices are very visual in nature, making it easier to highlight them during the study of graphic novels (see also Brenna, 2012). When a student does transition to more linguistically

dense texts, they will already be familiar with a number of skills and devices used for analyzing and creating meaning from literature. Visual texts thus help improve many literacies and skills.

Considering the large variety of subjects that graphic novels can cover, they may serve as a bridge to other fields of study, for example history and social issues. Park (2016) shows how graphic novels can help language learners develop skills associated with academic reading of historical literature. Skills that the participants of the study developed included referencing, rereading, examining author bias, questioning representations, and seeing history as an interpretation of events. Throughout the study of the graphic novel *Barefoot Gen: A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima* by Keiji Nakazawa (2004), and with the guidance from a teacher, students began to participate in such practices as sourcing, questioning bias, and developing empathy for those involved in the events of Hiroshima. Park (2016) further asserts that these skills promote historical literacy. Christensen (2006) discusses using graphic novels to make conversations on social issues such as racism, social justice, and war more accessible to language learners. Because language learners are better able to comprehend the content of the graphic novels, they become better equipped to contribute to conversations on those topics. This is just one example.

However, graphic novels have much to offer in their own right and need not be principally thought of as a bridge to more linguistically dense topics or forms of literature. Today's world and students in this generation are much more likely to encounter visual media, with little text, than in previous generations (Yildirim, 2013). It is important for students to become visually literate and be able to interpret text that is combined with the different modes they will encounter in their everyday life. They must learn to evaluate how images and text work together. In this sense, graphic novels can be used not to redirect students to conform to a world of text-only, but to expand their literacies in order to deal with written text and images together.

When "students read on the two levels of text and image, they are not only improving their basic reading ability, but also their analytical skills – by evaluating how images work with the text" (Yildirim, 2013, p. 125). The gains in students' analytical skills can help them outside the classroom as they come across images on the internet, in the media, and in interpersonal communications (Brenna, 2012).

Methods for Teaching with Graphic Novels

Certain teaching strategies can make learning through graphic novels more effective. The first is to provide general information about how to read a graphic novel (Yildirim, 2013). Many students will not be familiar with the strategy behind reading graphic novels and can gain more from the story after some instruction in visual literacy, either in the L1 or L2. Graphic novels also have unique vocabulary that needs to be introduced in order to discuss the novel in the classroom. A teacher should be aware that just because there are pictures does not mean they will be self-explanatory; language learners need to be given tools that will help them become visually literate (Chun, 2009; Cimermanová, 2014; Hecke, 2011). It is important to realize that, even with the extra clues and visuals provided by graphic novels, "students can only recognize what they know, and teachers will have to provide key information or ways to find key information so students can come to understand important intertextual clues" (Hecke, 2011, p. 658). If students are not given instruction on how to read this genre or how to extract information from images, reading with graphic novels may be of little benefit to them. Teachers must guide their reading.

In addition to providing information about how to read graphic novels themselves, a teacher can further prepare students to understand the story by selecting purposeful pre-reading activities. Such activities should include contextual information about the story itself to facilitate understanding of possibly complex ideas and topics. The more language learners understand the

context of the story, the more meaningful the novel will be to them and they can better connect with the experiences of the characters. The more connections a student makes to a story, the more invested they will be, which can increase motivation. Also, the more a student understands about the context before reading, the more they can focus on the language being used and notice intricacies they may not have paid attention to if they would have been trying to understand the context. A pre-reading activity could include students doing research on cultural or historical concepts that can then be tied back to the story. They can do prediction activities based on the title or selected panels in the book. Pre-reading activities should help students get curious and excited about the novel itself (Hecke, 2011). They help make a personal connection with a text.

It is also important to consider what students will be doing while reading. During-reading activities should be structured to help language learners stay motivated as they read. Classroom tasks done while reading can help promote deductive reasoning, draw attention to important details in the story, make cultural connections, and clarify meaning. Examples of types of activities could include ordering panels, writing and performing a reader's theatre dialogue, marking details, annotating panels, or connecting personal experiences to the reading, making maps, to name just a few (See for example Chun, 2009; Cimermanová, 2014; Hecke, 2011; Öz & Efecioglu, 2015).

Just as vital as pre-reading and while-reading activities are post-reading activities. It is important to continue exploring the topics and constructing meaning from the input of the graphic novel. Here students can fully react and then provide output related to what they have experienced while reading. Examples of post-reading activities may include cross-modal analysis for which students compare the historical or social context to other portrayals of the same or similar stories (Chun, 2009), students can create alternate panels, discuss themes, or re-enact

parts of the story, (Hecke, 2011). Although meaning should be constructed throughout the entire process, the reflection that takes place after reading is important because it helps the student internalize what they have learned about themselves, the language, and connecting to the experiences shared in the story. Students may also get creative with alternate endings or sequels.

When used with strategies that promote the creation of meaning between the text and the reader, Cimermanová (2014) found that graphic novels have led to higher productivity and critical thinking of language learners. For example, students had to find their own words to talk about the story rather than depend on the descriptions already found in a text. However, if the connections are weak and meaning is not constructed, then graphic novels may not be effective for language learning (Basal et al., 2016). This means teachers must take care to choose age-appropriate graphic novels that learners can relate to in order to create meaningful connections.

Examples of Activities with Graphic Novels

This section will describe various activities with graphic novels, and how they can be used in language teaching. The examples will range in the proficiency levels for which they are intended, including beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Examples of pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities are included (though are of course not exhaustive).

Activities for Beginning Language Learners

With the rich graphic content of graphic novels, beginner language learners have the opportunity to understand a story with fewer of the typical language barriers. Nevertheless, graphic novels themselves can have complex vocabulary and grammatical structures that can be challenging for any level of language learners. One way to mitigate the potential of running into language that is too difficult for the language learner is to use graphic novels without text. This provides language learners the opportunity to understand a story without needing to interpret

language and allows them to develop their visual literacy. Examples of graphic novels without text include *The Arrival*, by Tan (2007) and *Sweaterweather* by Varon (2003). *The Arrival* tells the story of an immigrant father leaving his family to come to a strange land, and may resonate with immigrants and second language learners. *Sweaterweather* is a series of short stories that showcases cartoon animals and their everyday adventures; this gives beginning language learners the opportunity to talk and write about everyday topics that occur in the story.

An activity that students can do while reading textless graphic novels is dialoguing. Because there are no words in the text, students can create simple dialogue themselves to match their proficiency level. For example, in *Sweaterweather* (2003, pp 55-56) there is a racoon interacting with his landlady rabbit. The rabbit relays some news to the raccoon that implies he will have to move out of his apartment. This interaction happens over the span of two pages and a teacher could create speech bubbles showing students where to insert parts of the conversation. As students interpret the pictures, they need to consider visual clues and emotions they see in the characters (just as they need to do in real life) to create a dialogue between the characters that fits the visual story. Teachers can offer specific prompts and give instruction to consider certain aspects of conversation, such as: asking how the characters would address each other in a dialogue and when question marks and exclamation points would be appropriate in a text.

An alternative activity is to have students create a narration instead of a dialogue. A teacher can assign them to describe what is happening in each panel, and require the use of specific grammar points they have been discussing in class. For example, narrations can be done in past, present or future tense, they can describe the emotions of the characters they see, or they focus on what each character is doing and make use of verbs learned in the classroom. These activities can be done with limited language proficiency and catered toward student needs.

Textless graphic novel activities can be modified in a number of ways to accommodate a large span of proficiency levels and learning styles. Narrations and conversations that students produce have the potential to be either simple or complex. Activities can also be done individually or in groups to promote negotiation of meaning and sharing of ideas.

Another option for beginner language learners is to use shorter stories so there are fewer words to interpret at a time. One way to do this is with comic strips. The stories and ideas are generally less complex in a comic than a graphic novel, but this allows a lower-level learner to focus more on the language they encounter. An example in the Spanish language is *Diario de un Solo,* published online and in print (Bu, 2014). The book tells everyday stories in one page each. The protagonist faces problems such as trying to avoid social interactions, lacking motivation to complete homework, and keeping a clean house. The language is simple enough that after minimal instruction language learners can understand the story through the images and text. Teachers can use these small stories to lead into conversations about shopping, hobbies, or household chores, for instance (in order to reinforce vocabulary related to such topics).

A post-reading activity could prompt a student to share personal experiences similar to those portrayed in the comic. For example, one story portrays the protagonist sitting down to study and reading "Mitosis es…" (Bu, 2014) from a textbook, in the second panel he gets distracted by thinking about food. As the panels progress, he continues to put off studying saying that "…es temprano" (Bu, 2014). After a number of distractions, in the last panel he is with his textbook again, realizing that he does not have enough time to study. As students read this, they can most likely relate to their own experiences of procrastination. Even though procrastination is rarely a word used by a beginner, the concept can be understood through the visuals and the class can have conversations about these themes without needing to know the word. The visuals can

help introduce students to a topic that may have been out of reach and participate more fully in a related discussion. Teachers may help students connect with the topic and facilitate discussion.

Activities for Intermediate Level Learners

An additional graphic novel that can be used in a language classroom is for example *Jane, the fox, and me*, by Britt and Arsenault (2013). The book tells the emotional story of Helene in High School and the trouble she has while making friends, dealing with the realities of bullying and low self-esteem. These topics are relatable for many high-schoolers and have the potential to lead to student interest and personal engagement in the story.

The illustrator of the story uses colors to portray the emotions that Helene is experiencing throughout the book. Because emotions are such a critical part of this novel, it makes sense to use it in teaching and learning about emotions in the L2. The activity offered below can be done while reading or post reading. It uses pages 18-19 of *Jane, the Fox and Me* as example pages (2013), but the activity can be expanded to cover more of the story. This activity has students look at the images and write sentences describing what Helene is *feeling*, compared to what she is *doing*. The feelings and actions are related to and enhanced by the colors used in the book. Figure 1 offers students a scaffold to organize their writing.

Figure 1

Jane the fox and me reading activity

	What is Helene *feeling*?	What is Helene *doing*?
Panel 1	1) 2)	1) 2)
Panel 2	1) 2)	1) 2)

To help students get the most out of the story the teacher can review vocabulary related to feelings before the students read. Depending on the level of the language learners, the teacher can introduce simple words such as happy, sad, and angry, or more complex words such as isolated, relieved, and ashamed. This type of activity can give students an opportunity to use such vocabulary in a way that makes sense and is relevant to them, and perhaps connect it to similar personal experiences. There are many possible warm-up and follow-up activities.

Activities for Advanced Level Learners

While some critics may see graphic novels as easy reading that will not properly challenge students in regards to reading, many graphic novels provide complex vocabulary, grammar, and ideas. One example of this is Gaiman's *Marvel: 1602* (2010). This novel takes place in England during the year 1602, when Queen Elizabeth reigned. The story ties historical events related to colonialism and witch hunts into pop culture as Gaiman brings popular superhero personalities such as Spider-man, Thor and Dr. Strange into the past. Novels such as this provide an opportunity for students to learn about history while also involving another topic that they may relate to, in this case superheroes. *Marvel:1602* may contain aspects of history with which students are unfamiliar. Additionally, some students may not be familiar with

specific superhero characters. Students will be able to learn more, both about the themes presented and about the language itself, if the teacher designs an effective pre-reading activity.

The example pre-reading activity outlined here introduces students to some complex themes in this story through Jigsaw Reading. Before students read the novel, the class is divided into groups and each group is assigned an informational text to read. The assigned readings introduce the students to topics or characters that are seen in the novel such as Queen Elizabeth I, witch hunts, Roanoke colony, and King James VI and I. The teacher may also choose to assign readings to introduce the superhero characters that will be in the novel. The students assigned the same reading discuss it together to go over important points and make sure everyone understands the topic. Once the original groups have discussed, then the teacher reforms the groups so there is one person from each original group in the new group. Now, each person shares about the topic or person they studied and each student can benefit from the knowledge of others. This activity can help students prepare for a more complex text and feel more competent going into a reading.

An additional activity using *Marvel:1602*, or a similar historical fiction, is a post-reading activity of comparing characters. After becoming familiar with the characters in the novel and the actual historical characters, students can create comparisons. Lower-level students can use charts such as a Venn diagram as scaffolding to facilitate their comparisons, while higher-level students can create more complex sentences. The character comparisons can relate to physical appearance, how they acted, or apparent ideals they represent. Additionally, superheroes are often represented in a variety of modes, and could be a good focus for comparisons. Students could compare these fictional characters as they are represented in *Marvel:1602* versus how they

are represented in recent cinema or original comic books. Activities may be appropriately leveled.

Conclusion

Graphic novels are a valuable resource for language learning. They connect visual literacy with written text to help students retain what they read, internalize language uses, and increase their motivation. Teachers must adequately introduce themes, topics and visual reading itself in order to best take advantage of the utility of graphic novels as a language learning tool, but properly done they can aid in the production of output and the critical thinking of students. The visual aids along with the text help students think more about what they are reading and engage more fully with the story itself. In lower levels, and especially for students who lack motivation to read, graphic novels provide excellent scaffolding and enable them to be more autonomous in their learning. At advanced levels, students can have complex discussions of textual analysis or may even feel the autonomy and sense of achievement in selecting and finishing graphic novels. Departing from traditional canonical texts, graphic novels may foster a greater awareness of other cultures and promote inclusivity. For these reasons, it is recommended that graphic novels be used in second language teaching to encourage visual literacy as a part of multiliteracies and promoting the creation of meaning.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

ACADEMIC LEARNING FOR SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Introduction

My experience working in a high school as an instructional assistant has had a considerable impact on me in seeing challenges that immigrant students face. While every student has their own personal or family situation that is unique to them, they also share struggles with other English language learners (ELLs) in the school. The languages they speak are numerous, including: Spanish, Arabic, Marshallese, Portuguese, Swahili, Somali, and Tigrinya. They often immigrate to the United States without any knowledge of English and are expected to assimilate into a culture and a new life that is just as foreign to them as English is.

Regardless of the motivation, intelligence, or previous academic knowledge a student may have, their inability to communicate can easily render their assets invisible to monolingual adults when they come to a new school. Teachers expect them to attend mainstream classes, complete the same tests, and acquire the same knowledge as their English-speaking peers, who often struggle with the content even while knowing English. Immigrant students that earned the highest marks in their home country might now struggle to earn even a passing grade. The students end up falling farther and farther behind as knowledge from one class is built upon in another, and they can scarcely understand the language or school system. A student may attend an ELL class for years and still struggle to understand or communicate with their English-speaking peers. This can lead to loss of motivation, dropping out of school, or at the very least not acquiring skills that could help them better succeed in life. Many immigrant or refugee students don't graduate because of factors that stem from their language barrier as well as

systemic challenges. The question considered here is what is missing in their English language education that could help them succeed in school.

Observing the struggle that I have seen in ELLs has led me to look into how these students can best be helped, which strategies school can implement to give them the best opportunities to succeed, and what students can do themselves to best adapt to their new circumstances. I have come to realize that the challenges I have seen in my involvement with ELLs are not unique, but are experienced by many students in similar situations. I wish to explore 1) What are the main factors that contribute to the difficulties of ELLs? and 2) What are the most effective strategies for the school and students to implement, not only in the ELL classroom, but in their mainstream classes as well so that they can develop academic success?

Challenges of the Second Language Learner in Mainstream Classes

Generally speaking, it has been found that students who participate in ELL classes are less likely to graduate on time (Moll, 2003; Roessingh, 1999). A study conducted in Chicago looked at the graduation rates of the Latino population in general and participation in ESL programs. As Moll (2003) and Roessingh (1999) claim, it was indeed found that participants of the program were much less likely to graduate with their peers (Hicks, 2015). Even some students who do well in the ESL courses are seen as at risk of not graduating.

Through my informal interactions with high school ELL students I have come to realize that their struggles are complex and diverse. Sometimes their struggles come from situations outside of school or their lack of understanding. Here I will focus mainly on factors that arise from language learning, although other factors that are closely related may be briefly mentioned as it is difficult to separate language from other related factors. **Echevarria and Vogt (2010)** recognize that a large hurdle faced by these students is the lack of scaffolds that make input

comprehensible. Comprehensible input (i+1) is explained as input that is slightly above the learner's current abilities (Krashen, 1982, see also VanPatten, 2017; Payne, 2011). The input that ELLs generally receive is far above their abilities to understand and as a result the content is inconsequential to them and the learners gain very little from their courses. Echevarria and Vogt say that "for English learners it is critical that teachers provide interesting, relevant lessons that are presented in a way that allows students to participate fully" (Echevarria & Vogt, 2010, p. 8). When mainstream teachers are not trained in teaching ELLs and don't present the content in a comprehensible way, it is difficult for the learner to understand and develop in their English language abilities.

In the literature concerning challenges faced by ELLs in high school, the distinction between cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) and basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) is important. This distinction was first made by **Cummins** (1980, 2008) who explained that CALP "refers to the students' ability to express […] concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school" (Cummins, 2008, p 71), whereas BICS refers to social proficiency, or the proficiency needed for casual interactions.

Cummins found that students were often deemed 'fluent' in a language after one or two years in the country. This meant their conversational skills, or social proficiency, was high enough that they had no trouble expressing themselves. However, their academic proficiency takes much longer to develop, around five to seven years (Cummins, 2008). For a student to be successful in school, they must not only be socially proficient, but also become academically proficient.

Cummins (2016) further argues that if an ELL is put into a mainstream course too early, it could result in academic difficulties because there isn't support in the mainstream classes to

help them further develop their academic proficiency. The assumption seems to be that ELLs will acquire the language solely by hearing it around them. Cummins (2016) argues that when ELLs receive "maximum instructional exposure to English" (p. 942), meaning they are expected to compete academically with their native-speaking peers, they are at a disadvantage because it takes an extensive amount of time for an ELL to catch up academically to their native-speaking peers.

A lack of motivation is another hurdle that ELLs must overcome, which stems from their challenges as language learners. These experiences are explained in part from the perspectives of **Flores et al.** as they look at Long-Term English Language Learners (LTELLs), which they describe as students who have been in English-medium schools for seven or more years and have still not tested out of the ELL status (Flores et al., 2015). On average, these students are about 3 years below their grade level in test results and their average grade is a D+ or 69%. These students are often labeled as "languageless" because they are not academically proficient in their L1 or L2, even if they are socially proficient in both languages. Because they are not monolingual or monocultural they are often made to feel as though they don't have anything of value to bring to school. This mindset and pressure to conform to the "norm," Flores et al. say, can be considered a form of epistemic racism.

Students labelled as LTELLs often feel marginalized and feel that they do not fit into the "norm." This leads to disengagement in classes and school in general. The authors concluded that these students should be seen for their strengths, and encouraged to use their strengths in the classroom. Students should have their cultures accepted, not chastised by the cultural norm. Flores et al. call for a move away from measuring academic knowledge in a monolinguistic way, recommending that students be allowed to use all their knowledge from any language.

An additional challenge is presented by **Baecher et al. (2014).** They investigated the

challenges of content-based instruction (CBI), which they define as "instructional approaches

that make a dual…commitment to language and content-learning objectives" (p. 119). While a

student being in a mainstream course isn't the same as CBI, ideally they will learn English while

the class content is being presented, similar to CBI. Looking at the challenges of CBI can help

uncover some reasons why ELLs struggle in mainstream English courses.

Teachers of CBI courses must use their knowledge of the content area, their knowledge

of language, and pedagogical content knowledge to make lesson plans. Baecher et al. found that

in CBI it is common that one aspect of the course is prioritized over the other (language vs.

content). The study looked at lesson plans to determine patterns that may be helpful for novice

teachers in creating their own lesson plans. It was found that teachers were most likely to focus

their language objective on key vocabulary (50%), then on specific structure like past tense

(30%), and then language functions like justifying, persuading, and describing (20%). It is

difficult for teachers to move to language functions as the focus rather than simply vocabulary.

Baecher et al. found that teachers have trouble differentiating between English Language Arts

(ELA) goals and ELL goals, which detracts from learning the language. Teachers also focused

too much on vocabulary and not enough on other language learning aspects. While this study

focused on novice CBI teachers, it can parallel the reality of mainstream teachers without CBI

training as they attempt to accommodate their ELL students.

The idea of learning language and content together, which is done in mainstream courses

for the ESL students, is criticized by **Roussel et al.** (2017) who say that attempting to 'kill two

birds with one stone' (learning content and language together) can be "very attractive but can

result in unfortunate, unintended consequences" (p. 71). By combining the language and content

learning, as is done with ELLs in mainstream classes, more effort is required on behalf of the student and it can result in less acquisition of both the language and the content than if the two were learned separately.

These criticisms offered by Roussel et al. build on the work of Sweller's (2011) cognitive load theory, which makes the distinction between primary and secondary knowledge. Primary knowledge consists of skills we "have evolved to acquire…" and we "acquire the skills easily, effortlessly, and unconsciously without instruction" (p. 40). Included in primary skills is the acquisition of native language, this is not something that needs to be taught. Secondary knowledge, on the other hand, involves skills that require specific instruction and isn't something acquired without effort (reading and writing, for example). A very different brain process is required to gain secondary knowledge as compared to a primary process.

Learning a foreign language in a classroom environment is secondary knowledge, according to Roussel et al., and the content of a CBI classroom also falls into the category of secondary knowledge. A CBI classroom presents two types of secondary knowledge at once, that of the content of the course, and the language it is being taught in. It follows then that "if learning to speak, understand and read a foreign language as an adult are biologically secondary tasks, the difficulty of dealing with simultaneous content and foreign language learning should be consequently increased compared to dealing with both tasks independently" (Roussel et al. 2017, 73).

While ELLs are learning a second language, it may be said that some of the same principles apply. They may pick up on some aspects of the language without explicit instruction, but the academic terms and demands of the classroom in their L2 fall under the category of secondary knowledge. Roussel et al. conclude that "simultaneously processing content and

language might have put an overload on […] working memory capacity leading to smaller learning gains" (p. 73). The overload on the student's working memory leads to less ability to either learn content or acquire language.

In addition to challenges that face ELLs, there are also challenges facing the teachers of the ELLs. **Khong and Saito (2014)** separate some of these challenges into three categories: social, institutional, and personal. Social challenges facing teachers include the diversity in the ELLs they teach and the attitudes of society. ELLs are diverse and as such have different backgrounds and cultures. This can make it hard to identify and cater towards each individual's needs. In addition, society may have differing attitudes about immigrants from different areas. At an institutional level, teachers may not be educated in how to effectively teach ELLs, and they may not have the resources or tools that are required to do so efficiently. Furthermore, instructional time is limited and often inadequate for language instruction, especially when communication is made more difficult because of language and cultural barriers. Teachers may also have personal challenges that include their own beliefs. They may have misconceptions about attitudes and cultures to which the ELLs belong, including having low expectations for ELLs.

These challenges for ELLs and their teachers make language acquisition and academic achievement difficult in various respects. Knowing these challenges makes it easier to identify strategies that can help in developing academic success for ELLs and to be a better advocate.

Strategies Towards Academic Success

With the language challenges that immigrant students face, attending ESL classes is often not enough to help them succeed academically in the mainstream courses they attend. They do not all have the tools or abilities they need to graduate high school with their native-speaking

peers. The question then becomes: what strategies can be employed by schools, teachers, and the students themselves to better ensure academic success and graduation?

Takeuchi (2015) suggests several strategies to be implemented in the mainstream courses by the content teachers. The study follows newly arrived English Language Learners in a Canadian high school mathematics classroom. Takeuchi shows that more than exposure to the L2 is required to succeed academically. "Because ELLs will not acquire academic language proficiency by merely being exposed to English instruction, ensuring pedagogical opportunities that address ELLs' needs will be essential in developing their academic language in content-area classrooms" (p. 160). It was also stated that mainstream content-focused classrooms do not provide enough opportunities to develop academic language in the content area. Takeuchi analyzes how teachers can maximize the opportunities and resources that ELLs have in the classroom.

Takeuchi performed two types of analysis. The first one focused on discussions about the language, or corrections given to students. The second analysis focused on how their interaction in the classroom was mediated by other symbols of meaning. One particular student, Daniel from Mexico, had a teacher who helped him connect new content with familiar words in his L1. For example, she asked him to provide the word for 'circle' in his native tongue. She had first asked him what the shape was in English, but when another boy answered for him and he simply repeated the answer, she asked "How to say circle in Spanish?" (Takeuchi, 2015, p. 168). In this way, the teacher still allowed Daniel to participate in the conversation where otherwise the other boy would have taken Daniel's opportunity to contribute.

Resources were maximized for Daniel in the classroom. As students who could translate for him were seated next to him, his abilities to participate in class were enhanced. Visual

representations were also used to facilitate his understanding. His teacher was quick to give praise; timely positive feedback is often something that is often lacking for ELLs in a typical mainstream classroom, but can help foster their active participation and lower affective filer.

Takeuchi concludes that a focus on vocabulary instruction can be a start in overcoming language barriers in the classroom. However, students can successfully participate in class through other modalities before their academic vocabulary has fully developed. This study demonstrates that when a teacher encourages the use of the native language in the classroom, along with other available resources, it can validate the students and be a significant benefit for them.

Schleppegrell and O'Hallaron (2011) agree that ELLs need intensive support in the classroom. Because newly arrived immigrants are so often placed directly into mainstream classes, the authors offer additional recommendations for mainstream teachers in working with ELLs. They advise teachers to develop knowledge about language learning in their content area, to carefully plan their units to support ELLs (macro-scaffolding), and to give direct support in the everyday classroom activities (micro-scaffolding).

Schleppegrell and O'Hallaron argue that content teachers are best equipped to help ELLs in acquiring the academic language related to their area of expertise. They have knowledge of the terms and concepts being learned. However, without the proper language training these teachers will not have the strategies they need to affectively implement a course that supports ELLs.

Bunch (2013) supports the claims of Schleppegrell and O'Hallaron in saying that mainstream teachers need to be involved in helping the ELL population acquire language, and the teachers need to know something about language acquisition processes. It can be easy for mainstream teachers to assume that the responsibility for English acquisition should fall only on

ELL instructors. However, if ELLs are to acquire English in their mainstream courses as well, the teachers in these courses must also be involved. In order to do so teachers should have knowledge of strategies or approaches they can use to teach language as well as content. One approach suggested by Bunch (2013) is to focus on grammatical features used in content-related tasks, or systemic functional linguistics (SFL). He also identifies sociocultural approaches, focusing on the participation of students in academic tasks rather than specific grammatical structures. The focus here is on using language to participate in academic practices, because through engagement with those practices, language acquisition will occur. While there are multiple approaches, Bunch argues that all teachers need to be involved in the support of ELLs.

One method used by teachers in supporting ELLs is sheltered instruction, where accommodation and support is given to an entire class. One form of sheltered instruction is the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model, tested in a study by **Echevarria et al. (2011)**. The SIOP model is meant to help mainstream teachers present input in a way that is comprehensible to ELLs. Additionally, teachers help ELLs develop their academic language skills by focusing on eight points: Lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice and application, lesson delivery, and review and assessment. Teachers apply these points to lessons that are taught to all students, language learners and native speakers alike. While Echevarria et al.'s (2011) study shows that using SIOP has positive results, further data is required to reach definitive conclusions.

In contrast to the sheltered approach, support can also be offered through differentiating instruction. **Baecher et al. (2012)** explain that differentiation occurs when instruction is tailored to subgroups of students within a class. This gives ELLs the opportunity to focus more on language development within the mainstream classroom. The authors share several principles in

differentiating instruction for the benefit of ELLs. First, the instructor should be aware of students' strengths and weaknesses in English so as to develop tasks that are appropriate to their level. The instructor should then have a common content goal and differentiate the language goal. This allows for students to be working toward the same goal, even if their language abilities are distinct. It also makes it more manageable for the instructor when students are working on similar tasks rather than completely different assignments. Recommending differentiated instruction, Baecher et al. suggest that teachers can better accommodate for all levels of language learners.

An additional strategy is analyzed by **Kong (2015)**, who discusses a late immersion program, in which students are taught through their L2 with content as a primary focus, rather than being expected to acquire the language through content learning. Kong echoes others who have also concluded that simply teaching content in an L2 is not enough for language learning to occur. Attention must be given to the structure of the language needed to perform the required tasks of the content class (See also VanPatten, 2017).

Kong proposes a pedagogical framework to help support both content and language in a late immersion class. The basic outline of the framework is divided into five parts, which are: 1) Topic, 2) Content objective, 3) Knowledge Structure, 4) Text Structure, and 5) Language Objective. The framework links the content objective and a language objective through knowledge structures and text structures (Kong, 2008, 2015). Linking language and content objectives enables students to benefit in learning both content strategies and language.

Kong noticed a dramatic improvement in the performance of the students using the proposed framework, especially in the structure of their sentences and the comparison relationships used; however, the students' ability to use various aspects of language showed only

minor improvement (Kong, 2015). It was found that no one knew how to structure an essay before, and it was "very useful because knowing how to structure an essay meant that he, [the student] did not have to resort to copying […] from the textbook" (p. 318).

Kong suggested, due to the good results, that the pedagogical framework can be used to create beneficial plans for L2 learners. Creating these lessons requires significant collaboration between the teacher of the ELL course and the content teacher. The collaboration will make the content teacher aware of the language challenges and how those challenges can be best addressed.

Zhang (2004) looks at a different type of support for the ELL, which is given outside of the physical, mainstream classroom. She analyzes the effects of the adjunct model in post-secondary education and how it can help performance in mainstream classes.

The adjunct model implements what is referred to as an adjunct course. The adjunct course is a course that ELLs take alongside their mainstream course, which supports and complements what they learn in their core classes (Roessingh, 1999). An adjunct course would give ELLs time to focus on vocabulary or learning strategies that other students may already be familiar with, and could make the input received in a mainstream course more comprehensible for the ELL.

As is typical of ELL programs, the students in Zhang's study came from a variety of backgrounds with a large range of English abilities and formal education. The goal of the content-based adjunct program is to help all these students transition into college programs and classes. The case study was performed in order to look at the effects of the adjunct program on the participating students.

At the university Zhang observed, the adjunct course was coupled with a mainstream course and was designed to supplement the content for the ELLs. The syllabus of the adjunct course was coordinated with the mainstream class, and the instructors had both formal and informal meetings with each other to coordinate the content of the two classes. There were different adjunct courses for various mainstream courses, and consequently there was coordination between different adjunct instructors so they didn't repeat academic skills taught across the courses.

Students responded with a mix of reactions to the program. Although some students were grateful for the support, they would rather not be a part of it because it alienated them from the rest of the campus. Many felt confident about their abilities after just one semester in the adjunct course and seemed to misunderstand when advisors recommended that they continue with the adjunct courses (Zhang, 2004). Despite the students' desire to be part of 'normal' college life, they all acknowledged how the adjunct model helped them succeed in their mainstream courses.

Similarly, **Peercy and Martin-Beltran (2012)** encourage collaboration between ELL instruction and the content course instructor and assert that research should look more at the collaborative efforts between ELL teachers and mainstream instructors and how such collaboration contributes to language learning. The authors discuss a number of factors that influenced teacher collaboration. The first factor is having common goals in how the teachers envisioned learning or their teaching philosophy. When teachers had the same vision, they could better collaborate. The second factor mentioned is the teachers' willingness to talk about their disagreements. When there is a difference of opinion, it is important for collaborating teachers to discuss and work through those issues. The third factor is acknowledging each other's expertise. Each teacher recognized that the other contributed something important to learning.

Peercy and Martin-Beltran conclude that it is important to include ELL instructors in the mainstream course and have an equal partnership between the two teachers. This collaboration helps give needed support to the ELLs in both language learning and content knowledge.

Conclusion

In conclusion, through even such a brief survey of select studies in the existing literature, it is clear that there are many challenges immigrants face as language learners in high school settings. These challenges include becoming both socially and academically proficient in a new language, not being able to use all their abilities to their advantage in the classroom, lacking sufficient language instruction in their L2, and a heavy cognitive load. Numerous programs are in place to assist these students, but it is difficult to address all the issues that these students face. Many of the existing programs are lacking key components to help ELLs reach academic proficiency, graduate high school, and have the opportunity to move onto higher education.

There is still much uncertainty on the best approach to helping ELLs become proficient in the L2, both academically and conversationally. According to literature reviewed here, strategies that have proven successful are those that focus on: maximizing the resources available to the students (including in their L1), making an effort to continue language instruction even outside of the language course itself, and attempting to support and complement the content in the mainstream. Much research remains to be done in the area of ELLs and their acquisition of English. This research will be crucial in helping these students acquire academic proficiency and gain academic success and in helping their teachers be better advocates for their education.

LOOKING FORWARD

Initially, I entered the MSLT program because of my experiences with ELLs and my desire to support them. The research and study in which I have engaged have developed my understanding of how to assist these students in becoming confident language learners as well as proficient English speakers. Additionally, the MSLT program has given me the opportunity to teach Spanish, which has afforded me another perspective of language learning and teaching, which is extremely valuable as well. Teaching Spanish as a foreign language has helped me better appreciate differences and similarities between teaching a foreign language and teaching a second language.

At the end of the MSLT program, I look forward to the experiences that lie ahead of me. I intend to keep seeking opportunities to support and advocate for ELLs in schools and in the community. My passion for helping immigrants and refugees has been fueled through the knowledge I have gained.

While I have learned much, there is still plenty of room for growth. I recognize that, while my classes, research, and experiences have taught me many things, I can further my knowledge and capabilities as I gain more teaching experience. I want to teach in high schools in order to help youth learn an additional language, adapt to a new culture, and develop as a person. I see the role of a teacher as a significant one as I will be in a position to positively influence young lives and advocate for them to other teachers and administration. I am excited to apply the knowledge I've gained to this role and continue to grow into it.

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