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Authentic Language Use in the L2 Classroom: Building Learners' Motivation and Confidence

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AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE USE IN THE L2 CLASSROOM:
BUILDING LEARNERS' MOTIVATION AND CONFIDENCE

by

Emma Duncan

A portfolio submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of
MASTER OF SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

Authentic Language Use in the L2 Classroom:

Building Learners’ Motivation and Confidence

by

Emma Duncan: Master of Second Language Teaching
Utah State University, 2020

Major Professor: Dr. Joshua J. Thoms
Department: Languages, Philosophy, and Communication Studies

This portfolio is a compilation of work completed by the author while in the Master of Second Language Teaching program at Utah State University. The portfolio contains samples of the author’s writings on various aspects of language learning and perspectives that the author developed through study of language acquisition topics and classroom teaching experience.

Included in the portfolio is a statement of the author’s desired professional environment, her teaching philosophy, and a description of her experiences observing teachers of various languages. Also included is an annotated bibliography and two research papers which detail some of the author’s specific interests within the field of language acquisition and teaching.

(88 pages)
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I couldn’t finish this degree without acknowledging all of the time and effort that has been put in by others to get me here. I would like to thank Dr. Thoms for helping me to build a foundation of knowledge of language acquisition. Your classes provided a much-needed overview of everything the field has to offer and helped me to develop my own opinions in a sea of information. Dr. deJonge-Kannan, thank you for being there during every step of the writing process, as well as always being available to answer any question I had, whether or not it related to writing or the portfolio. Marta, thank you for supporting me in my first teaching role, for talking through ideas with me, for observing and offering feedback on my teaching, and especially for encouraging me to leave my comfort zone when I would have much rather stayed put. I couldn’t have made it through the program without the help and guidance I received from all of you.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CAF = Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency
CLT = Communicative Language Teaching
L1 = First Language / Native Language
L2 = Second Language
SLA = Second Language Acquisition
ZPD = Zone of Proximal Development
INTRODUCTION

This portfolio contains a sample of my writings on the basic components of what I believe to be the most important factors in foreign language learning and teaching. These papers were compiled during the two years I have spent studying in the MSLT program. The portfolio covers the theories, methods, and research that I consider to be especially helpful in the process of learning a foreign language.

The centerpiece of this portfolio is my Teaching Philosophy Statement. In the statement, I summarize my own language learning history, my motivation for becoming a language teacher, essential elements for a successful language learning environment, and my goals as a future educator. The remainder of the portfolio is made up of several papers that go into more detail on theories and methods that I believe to be important in language teaching.

The topics covered in this portfolio include the use of literature in the classroom, the application of sociocultural theory, and the importance of providing opportunities for creativity. My decision to include these specific topics was based on my own experiences as a language learner as well as what I’ve learned during my time in the MSLT program through teaching my own classes, observing other teachers whom I respect and admire, and studying the scholarly research on language teaching and second language acquisition.
TEACHING PERSPECTIVES
PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT

I started the MSLT program with a long-time love of languages and a newfound desire to teach. My goal upon entering the program was to supplement my theoretical knowledge of linguistics with experience and practical knowledge of teaching. Though I’ve studied several languages and would be interested in pursuing teaching them in the future, right now my focus is on teaching English as a foreign language.

Having lived in several foreign countries with a severely limited grasp of the local languages, I learned first-hand the difficulties that come with the simplest day-to-day tasks when unable to communicate with others. Because of these experiences, I would like to teach English to adults, especially to those living or planning to live in an English-speaking country and wanting to improve their English skills for the sake of simply surviving in their new home. I see myself teaching in a classroom environment, either in the USA or in another country.

Regardless of where or whom I may end up teaching, my goal as a language teacher is to create a classroom environment where students are encouraged to use the L2 to communicate about things that are interesting and relevant to them, so that they can see how applicable their skills are to their own lives. I hope to help students have an enjoyable and motivating learning experience that will encourage them to become comfortable and confident communicators.
TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

My decision to become a language teacher was originally driven by my own experiences trying to learn several languages. The varying degrees of success I experienced in each one made me think about the factors that determined that difference – I wondered what variables changed from language to language to make my success in acquiring them vary so greatly. One factor that very obviously relates to language teaching is the different language teachers that I had for each language and their teaching styles. I noticed that when I learned beginning German from a teacher who never once spoke a word of English, the result was that I left that first semester class able to communicate in German fairly well. In contrast, when I learned Swedish from a teacher who almost never employed his native tongue – other than to list vocabulary and occasionally sing us a fun Swedish song – I barely scraped by with a passing grade on the test at the end of the semester.

But I was aware that there were factors apart from teaching style playing into my success, as well – factors such as how much of the L2 I was exposed to, how relevant lessons’ content was to my own life, and how interested and motivated I was to learn each given language. Whether I was frequently faced with a situation in which I wanted to express something important or interesting and the L2 was my only option to do so seemed to be a crucial factor, as well. I started to wonder whether these factors which were so greatly influencing my success and which were seemingly unrelated to the classroom experience – such as degree of necessity, interest, and motivation in using the L2 – could be integrated naturally into the L2 classroom.
With this in mind, my primary goal as a language teacher is to provide my students with the opportunity, motivation, and skills to use their L2 in authentic and meaningful ways. My hope is that my students will leave my classroom with not only knowledge of the L2 and the ability to use it appropriately, but an understanding of and experience with the fact that they can use the language in the real world, with real people, to communicate ideas and messages that are important to them. This teaching philosophy will introduce four of the components that I believe are important for language acquisition: multiliteracies, language as a social tool, literature, and creativity.

The Multiliteracies Framework

Since the 1990s, there has been an increased focus on unifying teaching approaches across language levels. Traditionally, lower-level language instruction has been built around principles of communicative language teaching, while advanced courses focus more on literature and culture. The goal of the multiliteracies framework is to bridge this divide and unite the teaching of form and meaning, communication, and context (Paesani, Allen, & Dupuy, 2016).

In a world where technology, globalization, and linguistic diversity are growing by the day, language learners need the skills to communicate in a variety of different ways, using multiple platforms and media to connect with others quickly and conveniently (Menke & Paesani, 2018). In other words, students need multiple types of literacies beyond more traditional views of literacy, which often involve a learner's ability to simply read and write. Modes of representation “differ according to culture and context, and have specific cognitive, cultural, and social effects” (The New London Group, 1996, p. 64). Multiliteracies is vital in the second language classroom to teach
students to use the L2 to communicate in a world with ever-increasing modes and methods of communication.

In the multiliteracies framework, learning is a process of discovery referred to as meaning design. Meaning design is a process of discovering connections between form and meaning through creating and interpreting different types of texts, such as written, oral, visual, audiovisual, and digital. Making these connections depends not only on the text’s written form, but on verbal and visual forms, structure and organization, and the learner’s own cultural knowledge and experiences.

When engaging in meaning design, a learner draws from Available Designs, which include linguistic, cultural, and social resources, and interprets or creates a text by communicating with others (writing, speaking, etc.) or representing the text to him or herself (reading, listening, etc.). When designing, the learner is accessing and recycling Available Designs in new ways to create new meaning. From a multiliteracies point of view, meaning making is not a simple replication – it is a reworking and transformation of resources (Paesani, Allen, & Dupuy, 2016).

I plan to implement the multiliteracies approach in my own classroom primarily by using the L2 as much as possible (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). When everything takes place in the L2, every moment spent in the classroom becomes an opportunity for learning and practice. Students will learn to use the L2 to accomplish tasks as they use it every day to listen to directions, complete assignments, and communicate with the teacher and with each other. By using the L2 in the classroom as much as possible, I hope to help students to build their linguistic skills as well as their confidence in their ability to use the L2 in real-life situations, communicating information that is important and
relevant (Eun & Lim, 2009; Turnbull, 2001). I also plan to use a variety of materials and resources besides the traditional language textbook to help students achieve literacy not only in the traditional sense, but in the plethora of ways they need to be able to effectively communicate in today’s global, technology-mediated society.

**Language as a Social Tool**

In my classroom, I plan to use the L2 for the same purpose that a language serves in society at large – as a way for people to communicate. In Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, the source of learning and development is not found in the mind of the individual, but in social interaction (Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2015). This means that students learn a language not by being handed information to consume, but by using language for its ultimate purpose – as a social tool for communication with others. According to the theory, collaboration, imitation, authenticity, and integration of culture make social interaction an ideal context for rapid learning and gaining broad competency with the language. I plan to use a sociocultural-informed approach by implementing classroom activities that allow my students to use the L2 for the purpose of genuine social interaction. This will enable them to acquire the ability to use the language under different circumstances and for different purposes, which can be applied to varying situations in the real world (Haught, 2018; Piazzoli, 2014; Sirisrimangkorn, 2018).

Of the many activities that are appropriate for use in the L2 classroom from a sociocultural perspective (Eun & Lim, 2009; Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2015), drama is one that I find especially interesting and applicable. Dramatic activities are beneficial for L2 learners in that they allow for many of the essential conditions for learning. When participating in dramatic activities, learners have the opportunity to imitate those more
advanced than themselves, collaborate with classmates, navigate breakdowns in communication to reach a common goal, and experience unique cultural situations, all of which are useful for learning to think on one’s feet and apply knowledge learned in the classroom to real-life situations using the L2. I elaborate on the use of drama in the context of SCT theory in another portion of this Portfolio.

I plan to use activities that encourage social interaction, such as dramatic activities, in my classroom in an effort to give students opportunities for authentic, realistic language use. I hope that through using the L2 in the classroom as a tool for social interaction, rather than working with content to be learned in order to pass tests and get grades, my students will leave my class better prepared to use the language in the real world.

**Literature**

One downfall of the type of instruction that often takes place in L2 classrooms is the focus on transactional use (i.e., concerned with expression of content) rather than interactional use (i.e., concerned with establishing and maintaining social relationships) (Maiz-Arevalo, 2016). I plan to encourage more interactional use of the L2 through the use of literature and texts (stories, articles, etc.) in the classroom. In the typical L2 classroom, we most often find “teacher initiates – pupil responds – teacher comments” type of communication (Donato & Brooks, 2004; Rolin-Ianziti & Ord, 2018; Sherry, 2019), which alone is not enough to prepare students for meaningful and genuine interaction in the L2. Lengthier conversations concerning students’ real-life experiences
are also necessary in order to prepare students for extended, interactional talk in the L2. Literature is an effective facilitator of this type of discussion.

Besides helping students to build vocabulary and receive extensive L2 input, reading literature is also beneficial in that it provides common ground for authentic and meaningful discussion. One method for using literature in the classroom is literature circles – student-centered discussion groups in which students discuss their personal responses to texts (Daniels, 1994; Hsu, 2004; Kim, 2004). Literature circles can be used at all levels of L2 learning, from beginning to advanced (Kim, 2004; Maxim, 2006). Literature circles promote the active sharing of original ideas and increasingly complex opinions and questions by the students who participate (Daniels, 1994). They also enhance comprehension, increase student enjoyment, and provide opportunities for the free expression of opinions. This type of discussion allows students a chance, rare in most task-based exercises, to practice producing extended amounts of speech in the L2 (Kim, 2004).

Students participating in literature circles have been observed articulating their own personal connections to the text, exploring cross-cultural themes, and arguing for their own interpretations (Kim, 2004). Students also frequently collaborate to negotiate meaning when they encounter something confusing in the text, helping and supporting each other by discussing possible interpretations and backing up claims with background knowledge and context clues (Kim, 2004).

The reading and discussion of literature in the classroom enables students to practice and gain confidence in extended, meaningful, and interactional conversation in the L2 (Hsu, 2004). By analyzing and discussing a text, students are able to extend their
skills beyond the sentence-level abilities with which many students leave the L2 class. The genuine social interaction that takes place in literature circles is focused on the message rather than correct form, just as natural conversation outside the classroom would be. The opportunities this provides for practicing the language in an authentic and meaningful way is an experience which can promote rapid growth in the L2 (Kim, 2004).

**Creativity**

The last component of my teaching philosophy is creativity. The creative task is yet another method that helps students to stretch their comfort zones and expand their abilities. Creativity is important for the L2 learner not only because creative tasks help to keep students engaged in the classroom (Gregory, Hardiman, Yarmolinskaya, Rinne, & Limb, 2013), but because language is used creatively on a daily basis by those who speak it fluently (Swan, 2008). Why then should it not be important for L2 learners to be able to understand and use creative language, as well?

Creative language use is defined by Tin as “the playful use of language to construct new meaning” (Tin, 2012, p. 179). Creative tasks require the use of the L2 to construct new meaning, leading to more and more complex language use, as opposed to communicative tasks, in which language is used to express known meanings and students often opt for the easiest choice, avoiding the use of new structures and forms (Tin, 2012; Turkben, 2019; Wong & Moorhouse, 2018).

According to Tin (2012), to effectively use creative tasks to encourage students to explore more syntactically and lexically rich utterances, constraints must be introduced to keep students from following the linguistic path of least resistance. A creative task
contains two phases: the idea generation phase and the idea exploration phase. In the first phase, students are given a prompt and asked to generate ideas without any knowledge of the final goal. In the second phase, a constraint is introduced, and students must take what they generated in the first phase and combine it in a new way, constructing new meaning within the limits of the constraint.

Creative tasks can be implemented with the use of many different resources, including pictures, text, audio, and comic strips (Kohnke, 2019). I offer a more in-depth exploration of the importance of creativity in L2 teaching in the Annotated Bibliography of this Portfolio. I plan to use a variety of different sources in the classroom to stimulate creativity and introduce challenging, engaging, and creative tasks to my students – the incorporation of these creative tasks will provide me with challenge and motivation as a teacher, as well.

**Conclusion**

There is, of course, no method of language teaching that is perfect for every teacher and every student. However, by implementing teaching ideas such as the multiliteracies framework, sociocultural theory, literature discussions, and creative tasks in my classroom, I hope to equip students with the skills, experience, and confidence they need to communicate and converse in a meaningful way in the L2 in the real world.
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TEACHING OBSERVATIONS

During my time in the MSLT program, I have observed several language classes taught by teachers of different languages and levels. From beginning Chinese to advanced Russian grammar, these classroom observations have allowed me to expose myself to different teaching styles and approaches. Regardless of whether I understand the language being taught, observing other teachers has been a valuable experience that has influenced the way I approach the planning and teaching of my own classes. In the Spring and Fall 2019 semesters, I observed English Conversation, Advanced Russian Grammar, Portuguese 1020 (a second-semester language course), French 1010 (a first-semester language course), Chinese 1010 (a first-semester language course), and English Speaking, all at Utah State University.

One principle that was consistent throughout all of the classes that I observed was communicative language teaching. Though the degree to which students were able to use the target language to communicate with each other varied from class to class, all of the teachers I observed made an effort to encourage students to use the language to talk to each other. Even in the beginning classes, the teachers ensured that students were using the target language to convey the points they were making.

In the French 1010 class that I observed, the first 15 minutes of class were spent on vocabulary. There was an image on the projector of a classroom with all of the items labeled in French. The class went over each item together, practicing pronunciation, using the words in sentences, focusing on the correct article. The teacher asked students questions about each item and the students did their best to answer. Though this was early in the semester of a beginning French class, the teacher was able to conduct this part of
the lesson entirely in the target language. He asked questions and gave hints all in French, and the students typically stuck to French when giving answers as well.

The next 10 minutes were spent on grammar instruction. For this part of the lesson, the instructor did use some English to explain grammatical gender. He laid out some rules of thumb for determining gender based on word endings and explained how to form a plural in French. The language in the classroom then quickly turned back to French as the students paired up to use the new vocabulary, asking each other questions about items in the classroom and responding in French.

For the last part of class, students competed in a game called Kahoot, in which questions are displayed on the screen and students use their mobile phones to submit answers. The game tracks correct answers and speed and ranks participants accordingly. The questions and answers were all in French, and the answers forced students to pay careful attention as there were answers that differed only in article or slight spelling differences. The students were engaged, having fun, and learning a difficult grammar concept all at once.

From this observation, I was very impressed at how often the teacher was able to stick to the target language, with the students able to understand and reply in the target language as well, considering that this was only the second week of their French studies. I learned from this observation that communicative language teaching is possible from the very beginning. It also struck me that while the students were having fun, they also seemed to be learning quickly. Just because they were laughing and having a good time did not mean that they weren’t gaining anything from that part of the class.
This same lesson was reinforced by the Advanced Russian grammar class that I observed. During the class, the students spent time reading Russian books and magazines and telling each other anything new and interesting they learned and how it related to their final projects. The last part of class was spent in a competition in which students worked together in several groups to come up with words that described different vocabulary words. The group with the most synonyms at the end of the allotted time won the competition.

The members of this class were third-year language students, many of whom had lived in Russian-speaking countries. Though they had much more knowledge and experience with the L2 than the students in the French class, the aspects of the lesson that stuck out to me were the same: the class was conducted almost entirely in the L2, and the students were having fun, staying engaged, and learning the language while playing games. This tells me that there are certain components of successful language learning that hold steady across all levels.

About halfway through the semester, I observed a Chinese 1010 class. This lesson was broken up into much smaller parts, each lasting about four to eight minutes. The students learned a new character and practiced writing it, reviewed verbs, learned methods for politely making requests, and used verbs to create their own sentences. They also spent some time in pairs asking questions and providing positive and negative responses.

Again, I was very impressed by how much the students seemed to have learned in such a short time. The students followed the lesson quite easily, while I sat in the back, completely lost. Though more English was used in this class than in other classes I
observed, the students were still able to communicate with each other and with the teacher with the Chinese that they did know. There were only three students in the class, yet nobody seemed intimidated or reluctant to participate and they were still able to accomplish small-group tasks. From this observation, I learned that it is possible to create an engaging classroom experience, even with small enrollment.

The Portuguese class was similar to the Chinese class in that class time was broken up into several short activities. In the Portuguese class, we moved from activity to activity in very small intervals, usually between three to seven minutes. This kept students from getting bored and trailing off into English conversations unrelated to the class topic. Throughout the entire class, students were focused on the task at hand, whether it was practice with vocabulary, grammar, or conversation. From this experience, I learned that an activity doesn’t have to be completed to be useful – it’s okay to cut off an activity early and move on if that is what’s needed to keep students engaged.

The final classes that I observed were English classes: a level three English Speaking class and a multi-level English Conversation class. Since the students came from many different language backgrounds, the classes were conducted entirely in English. For the first few minutes of the speaking class, the students completed a quiz. The remainder of the class was spent reviewing vocabulary, mostly in small groups playing vocabulary games with classroom assistants. Each assistant made up their own games, so students were able to experience a variety of activities to help them learn the vocabulary words. For the last part of the lesson, the whole class played a game on Quizlet. Like Kahoot, Quizlet is a game that displays questions on the screen which
students must answer using their mobile phones. The four groups of students worked together as teams and competed to be the first to finish a vocabulary quiz.

In talking to the instructor, I learned that this is the same basic format that she uses in this class every Monday. Students take a quiz, break into groups to play vocabulary games, and have a small competition at the end. From this observation, I learned that repetition is not necessarily a bad thing. Though the students were doing the exact same activity that they did every Monday, they were all engaged and excited and eager to learn.

I had a similar experience in the English Conversation class. Like the English Speaking class, the English Conversation class focused on repetitive vocabulary games. Though it was an activity they’d done many times before, students of all levels were engaged in and excited about the activity. Observing the English classes taught me not to worry about repeating an activity in my own classroom.

Observing others’ classes has allowed me to reflect on my own teaching practices and what can be done to improve my own teaching. In all classes, I observed the teachers including elements of games and competition – game-based learning fosters agency, allowing learners feel like independent problem solvers as they carry out tasks and motivating pleasure and productive competition (Blake, 2013). This has influenced me to make sure there is at least one fun element in any lesson to keep my students engaged in the class. Because of the French class, I’ve tried to be more aware of the time I spend explaining grammar explicitly. Because of the Chinese class, I’ve made an effort to ensure my classes are still engaging and useful to my students, even when attendance is low. And because of the English classes, I’ve tried not to fear repetition, to pay attention
to when my students are becoming bored or disengaged and not automatically assume they will be if I dare to repeat or even imitate an activity I’ve used before. Through continued observation of other teachers’ classes, I hope to further develop my own skills, expand my knowledge, and continually improve the classroom experience for my students.
LANGUAGE PAPER #1

Enhancing Conversational Skills Through the Use of Literature
Orientation and Reflection

An important part of my teaching philosophy is the use of literature for language learning. As a beginning learner of German, I began reading novels in the target language and was surprised at the speed and ease with which my German progressed. Not only did I learn new vocabulary which I would not have encountered in a beginning textbook nor understood if I’d heard it in daily life, I also found myself effortlessly soaking up the grammar that had been so difficult for me to master when I’d been studying it intentionally. Surprisingly, simply the act of reading books in German, without any formal study or speaking practice, greatly improved my conversational abilities in German. This inspired me to learn more about reading in the target language and its effects on conversational abilities.

In my first semester in the MSLT program, I took LING 6800, Teaching Literature in the L2 Classroom, with Dr. Sarah Gordon. For the class, we read and discussed research that dealt with using literature in the L2 classroom. We covered the theory and practice of teaching with literature, learned about key concepts in literary theory and critical theory, and discussed the methods and benefits of using literature in the second language classroom. Because of my existing interest and personal experience with using literature to bolster conversational skills, I decided to write my final paper for the course on how and why literature can be used to enhance conversational skills within the context of a language classroom.

Through taking this course and researching and writing the following paper, I learned that the benefits of literature in the classroom for conversational skills are significant and diverse. Literature can be used at all levels to help students become
conversationally proficient in the target language. In the future, I plan to use literature in the classroom to increase motivation, build vocabulary, and provide common ground for meaningful discussion, all of which will help students become more competent and confident in conversation.

Because I plan to teach adults, I am especially excited to use literature to foster an enthusiasm for English learning. Many of my students choose to learn English out of necessity – they must use English constantly to get by at work or in daily life. I hope that the use of literature in the classroom may help students to enjoy learning English and increase their motivation to continue, rather than seeing English learning as a chore or a task they’re obligated to complete.
Introduction

Literature, which can be defined as any text “characterized by purpose, imagination, creativity, and an artistic form” (Baqueel, 2020, p. 37) has been used for many years in the second-language classroom. From reading out loud to translation to reading for pleasure, literature in the L2 has been used in many ways to promote language learning. However, opinions and theories differ about how literature should be used in the L2 classroom to benefit students in their efforts to become proficient in the second language.

Several arguments support the use of literature in the language classroom. Some of the reasons why literature has traditionally been viewed as beneficial for the L2 learner include the following: literature provides exposure to authentic language use; reading literature can be motivating; literature forces learners to focus on the form of language and helps them handle linguistic creativity; and exposure to literature contributes to intercultural understanding (Picken, 2007).

Before going into detail on the ways in which literature is beneficial for language learning, it is important to distinguish between two different types – 'Literature' and 'literature'. Literature (with a capital 'L') includes written works that are considered classics, works that are of lasting and recognized value. The other type of literature (with a lowercase 'l') is everyday literature, including genres such as cookbooks, magazines, and popular fiction. This type of literature is read regularly by the general population (McDowell, 2012). The literature I will talk about in this paper includes both capital-L- and lowercase-l- literature – when the distinction between the two is important, it will be indicated.
Literature is an authentic material, which is important in communicative language teaching. Literature is authentic in that it has been produced for consumption by proficient speakers; it was written with normal language use within the language community, rather than created specifically for the L2 learner with the purpose of teaching a language. Because the text was produced for proficient speakers, learners are required to cope when faced with unexpected uses of the language (Picken, 2007). By reading authentic materials, students are able to experience the target language in the way it is naturally used by proficient speakers (Baueel, 2020).

Motivation is another factor that can greatly influence the success of a language learner. The high status held by literature (especially capital-L-literature) in many cultures means that students may get a sense of achievement and motivation from reading a piece of respected literature. Literature can also be motivating because of its tendency to relate to students’ goals and interests, personal experiences, and backgrounds. Because literature usually deals with fundamental human issues that many people relate to, it provides motivation for learners to keep reading for reasons other than for language learning or obligation. The stylistic quality of capital-L literary texts can also contribute to engaging learners and motivating continued reading (Picken, 2007). The use of authentic literary texts in the language classroom has been found to create a learning environment in which students are motivated to participate in class interactions, encouraging positive attitudes toward the target language (Khatib & Askari, 2012).

Literature is also beneficial for language teaching because it causes learners to focus on the form of the language, expose them to linguistic creativity, and promotes intercultural understanding. When learners read literary texts, they often do not have any
prior background knowledge to help them decipher them, as they otherwise may have with a news article or other text. Because of this, readers are forced to pay closer attention to the form of the language than they normally would. Literature also exposes learners to linguistic creativity. This helps them develop their figurative language competence, which is necessary for communicative competence (Picken, 2007). Literature exposes learners to different historical and social settings, improving the ability to interpret discourse in varying social and cultural contexts (Baqueel, 2020).

One area in which the use of literature has not been so closely examined is that of conversational skills – something that language teachers have long struggled to adequately teach in the classroom. Upon completing a language class, students’ conversational competence is often far from satisfactory (Sun, 2014). One reason for this is that the speaking activities typically seen in the language classroom don’t take into account the interactional aspect of conversation (Donato & Brooks, 2004; Rolin-Ianziti & Ord, 2018; Sherry, 2019). Students experience a heavy focus on the transactional use of the L2, the function of which is to express content, rather than the interactional use, which establishes and maintains social relationships (Tsui, 1992). Students often leave the L2 classroom without having had the opportunity to practice interactional language - language during which they are able to share opinions, provide evidence, and raise questions (Kim, 2004). These interactional uses of the L2 are very different in form and function from the transactional language that is normally used during task-based communicative exercises. Students leave the classroom mainly able to produce short answers to questions rather than extended speech. In addition, most of the talk that students experience in the classroom is focused on pedagogical content rather than topics
relating to students’ real-life feelings or experiences (Tsui, 1992). This leaves students without true conversational competence.

At first glance, it may not seem like literature – a mainly individual and text-based medium – should be helpful in promoting conversational skills in the L2 learner. However, for several reasons, reading in the L2 is beneficial for students wishing to improve their conversational skills. Among these benefits are vocabulary development, large amounts of meaningful and interesting input, and common ground for authentic discussion – all vital components of acquiring conversational skills in the L2.

**Vocabulary building**

The first, and perhaps most obvious, area in which reading is beneficial for L2 conversational skills is in the area of vocabulary. Vocabulary is one of the most essential components of language learning, as it provides much of the foundation for how learners express, listen, read, and write (Torabi & Ansarimoghadam, 2019). Much evidence exists that reading is a major contributor to the development of literacy in both the first and second language (Lee & Schallert, 2015). Extensive reading, such as done by a learner reading literature, has been shown to help learners recognize common words more quickly, thereby increasing their ability to both understand and respond to spoken interaction. It has also been found to help learners retain new vocabulary that they encounter in the text, even uncommon words (Horst, 2005). Multiple studies on the effects of reading on vocabulary have found that reading leads to incidental vocabulary learning and an accelerated pace of vocabulary acquisition as compared to traditional classroom learning (Alsaif & Masrai, 2019; Tan, Kasuma, & Akma, 2019).
Engagement with literature improves vocabulary in ways that spoken interaction alone cannot – corpora comparisons have consistently shown that written texts are richer in lexis than spoken dialogue (Horst, 2005). The words that ESL students, for example, are exposed to in a communicative classroom don’t vary much from the list of most commonly used English words. The reading of literature, whether independently or collaboratively in the classroom, provides students access to many more words than they would otherwise hear or notice, and this enables students to infer meaning, retain associations, and gradually build a larger mental lexicon (Horst, 2005; Tan, Kasuma, & Akma, 2019). In addition to learning new words, students who read extensively are able to access previously known L2 vocabulary more rapidly when they encounter it in conversation (Horst, 2005).

One study which looked at a group of adult immigrants learning English in Montreal found that students who spent time reading books in the L2 independently at home gained confidence in their ability to recognize vocabulary. At the end of the study, participants had learned over half of the unknown words they encountered while reading, in addition to increasing lexical access speed for the words that they were already familiar with (Horst 2005). Learning new vocabulary words, as well as developing the ability to quickly recognize the meaning of words used by others, is an important factor in the ability to converse effectively.

Other studies have found that extensive reading is beneficial for students’ vocabulary acquisition because many students find it enjoyable, making them more likely to spend significant time reading not because they are required to, but simply because they find the text interesting (Alsaif & Masria, 2019; Tan, Kasuma, & Akma, 2019;
Research has shown that these same students, when compared to peers who did not engage in sustained reading, achieved significantly more lexical growth (Alsaif & Masria, 2019; Tan et al., 2019).

Free reading, also known as sustained silent reading, self-selected reading, and extensive reading, refers to a model of classroom reading in which students are free to choose what they want to read and are not held accountable for the reading in the form of reports or grades (Krashen, 2004). A number of studies have found that free voluntary reading is related to literacy development, and that it has implications for reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills in the L2 (Cho & Krashen, 2019).

A replication of previous studies was carried out in which English learners in Korea were given questionnaires targeting reading habits and self-assessment of English competence. Questions about reading habits dealt with whether participants read English books for fun in their free time and the frequency with which they read newspapers and magazines in English. Participants were asked to respond using a scale from 1-5. They were also asked to rate their speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities in English. Results showed that the correlation between voluntary reading and competence was consistently positive (Cho & Krashen, 2019).

A case study by Lee (2019) follows the story of Karey, an adult learner of English. Karey was a professor who used English regularly for professional reasons, but found herself struggling to keep up with conversations. She tried various methods, including private tutors and watching TED talks, to improve her conversational skills, but none were successful. Finally, Karey started reading for pleasure. She began with *The Magic Treehouse* series for children, and eventually began to discover more authors and
genres that she enjoyed. She eventually stopped keeping track of the time she spent reading in English, realizing that she really was reading purely for pleasure. Over the course of five months of reading, Karey discovered a gradual improvement of her oral fluency, expressive richness, and listening ability, all of which contributed to a newfound ability and confidence in casual conversation. After several months of free reading, Karey described her experience with an American visitor:

No stuttering, no embarrassment, no frustration! Our conversations at the lunch and dinner tables were full of laughter, pleasantries, and intellectual exchanges of viewpoints on different topics. I owe it all to the stories I have enjoyed in the past few months! (Lee, 2019, p. 7).

Teachers have several options when deciding how to implement free-reading activities into the L2 classroom. One method is to dedicate some class time, which might normally be spent on grammar or vocabulary drills, to free reading (studies have found this not to have negative effects on learners’ test scores (Maxim, 2006). Another option is to assign reading as homework, with an in-class component of discussion.

Several studies have investigated the effects of extensive reading on vocabulary acquisition and conversational skills in the L2. The results of the studies make it clear that literature provides valuable benefits for vocabulary building – learners encounter vocabulary they likely wouldn’t see in day-to-day life, are exposed repeatedly to new vocabulary, and often enjoy the act of voluntary reading, which encourages more input and more opportunity for vocabulary acquisition.
Extensive input

Another reason that literature can improve conversational skills is that reading longer materials provides a large amount of input, which is necessary for L2 learning (Gascoigne, 2006). Exposure to large amounts of meaningful, interesting L2 input in a tension-free environment is an essential component of acquiring competence in an L2 (Krashen, 1985). Literature provides the opportunity for repeated exposure to language forms that otherwise might not be frequently encountered. Repetition builds the saliency of the target language and is a key factor in proficiency (Torabi & Ansarimoghadam, 2019). Literature is also likely the most widely accessible medium of L2 input, and one which can be used regardless of factors such as class size or lack of technology, making it a very practical means for receiving extensive L2 input (Chiang, 2016).

Hafiz and Tudor (1990) found that the integration of a free reading program into a secondary school’s ESL course resulted in significant gains in both fluency and accuracy of expression in participants’ writing. Students who participated in the study took part in a program in which they spent six 40-minute sessions per week reading books of their choice. Students could choose freely from approximately 30 titles and were encouraged to select books that interested them and to change books as they pleased. No language development exercises were carried out; students simply read their books and narrated the stories they had read each week in a relaxed environment where they were encouraged to enjoy and develop an interest in their books. Besides getting very positive reactions from the participants, many of whom had experienced their first chance for interest-driven L2 reading, researchers found that free reading in the L2 helped students to improve their accuracy of expression, fluency and range of expression, and provided learners with a set
of linguistic models of the L2 which they could then incorporate into their active competence in the L2. All of these are important skills for conversing effectively (Hafiz & Tudor, 1990).

Accuracy of expression – in other words, the percentage of student-produced sentences that were free of any syntactic error, lexical or semantic error, or unclarity – improved greatly for the participants in the experiment. By the end of the program, participants produced written language in greater quantity, used a wider range of vocabulary items, and produced more language that corresponded closely to the actual linguistic system of the L2 than they had before the program (Hafiz & Tudor, 1990). Though they were only reading and writing rather than practicing grammar or speaking, students developed skills that are clearly beneficial to a learner’s ability to converse effectively in the L2. Other researchers have found similar effects. For example, Parreren (1983) concludes that through exposure to L2 input through literature, learners’ internal models of the L2 gradually evolve to more closely match the target language itself until learners are able to draw from their own repertoire of expressions and phrases (van Parreren, 1983) – an effect which became apparent upon observation of the grammatical structure of utterances and appropriate lexical choices of participants (Hafiz & Tudor, 1990).

This improved internal model serves learners well when it comes to conversation. At the end of the experiment, subjects showed improved fluency and range of expression, an increased willingness and ability to express themselves in the L2, and a larger range of lexical items at their disposal. Students at the end of the study also showed significant improvement in both ease and range of expression (Hafiz & Tudor, 1990).
In addition to benefits for conversational skills, researchers have found free reading to boost a wide range of skills, such as comprehension, vocabulary, motivation, and theoretical and world knowledge – all of which contribute to a person’s ability to communicate (Torabi & Ansarimoghadam, 2019). After exposure to large amounts of L2 input, learners have been found to improve in grammar comprehension and vocabulary (Motlagh & Nasab, 2015; Rashtchi & Etebari, 2108; Rikhtegar & Gholami, 2105).

The benefit of extensive input for building an internal model of the L2 is summed up by the following quote:

Language production in everyday situations must not be considered a kind of deductive reasoning from rules. For a large part it draws from standard expressions and formulae, either in the original or in a slightly modified form … this means that speaking fluently is only possible when the speaker knows a repertoire of expressions, phrases, etc. currently spoken by members of the language community in question. (van Parreren, 1983, p. 25).

The models referred to are acquired through exposure to large amounts of input, and reading literature exposes learners to repeated encounters with expressive resources in a variety of contexts, which they can then integrate into their own L2 repertoire (Hafiz & Tudor, 1990). These skills can later be used for accurate expression and comprehension in conversation.
Common ground for meaningful discussion

The use of literature in the L2 classroom can benefit the development of conversational skills in that it also provides content for meaningful discussion in the L2 (Baqueel, 2020). Meaningful conversation in the L2 is important for the development of conversational skills for many reasons. Among those reasons are the opportunities it provides for social interaction and extended L2 output, both of which are essential for acquiring conversational competency (Kim, 2004).

Literature circles are a popular approach to using literature in the classroom. Literature circles – student-centered discussion groups in which students discuss their personal responses to literary texts (Kim, 2004) – have been found to promote the exchange of original ideas between students (Daniels, 1994). These types of discussions encourage an active sharing of opinions and questions by students, whose responses and discussions increase in complexity over time (Kim, 2004). Literature circles enhance comprehension, increase student enjoyment, and provide opportunities to freely express opinions.

Assigned roles are one unique feature of literature circles that encourages meaningful and balanced discussion among students. Four roles are required in a literature circle – the discussion director, who starts the discussion with questions and elicits comments from other students, the literary luminary, who highlights memorable passages, the connector, who makes connections between the text and real life or other literature, and an illustrator, who creates pictures or diagrams to go along with the text (Hsu, 2004). In addition, four optional roles may be assigned: the summarizer, who summarizes the reading, the vocabulary enricher, who highlights unknown words, the
travel tracer, who creates a map of the story, and the investigator, who finds background information on the book or its author.

The assignment of student roles takes the responsibility of leading the discussion from the teacher and distributes the responsibilities to start and maintain the discussion among the members of the circles. With this approach, students must come up with their own questions rather than relying on the teacher, which encourages greater investment and re-reading, thus improving comprehension (Handoyo, 2015; McCall, 2010).

One of the main benefits that literature circles have over typical classroom exercises is that they provide students with the opportunity to practice extended output, rather than short-answer responses, an ability which many students lack at the end of their L2 learning experience (Paran, 2008). A study highlighting the benefits of using literature to provide common ground for discussion took place in an ESL classroom that used literature circles as the main component of the class. For the study, students read a 324-page novel over the course of the first half of a semester and met in literature circles three days a week to discuss it. In class, they were divided into small groups of 3-4 with a designated discussion leader in each group. Students discussed the book and participated in engaging activities such as role-play. After the small-group discussions, the whole class met together to participate in further discussion, this time led by the teacher (Kim, 2004).

During these discussions, students were observed participating actively in negotiation of meaning for improved comprehension, making and articulating personal connections to the text, exploring cross-cultural themes, and discussing and arguing for their own personal interpretations. One common occurrence was collaboration for
negotiation of meaning – students would work together to determine the meaning of unclear sentences or phrases, asking each other for explanations, providing correct interpretations, and supporting their claims with background knowledge and context clues (Kim, 2004).

The students also frequently related the novel to their own experiences and shared personal stories as part of the discussion. They discussed the differences they observed between the American culture described in the book and their own home cultures, resulting in an exchange of ideas and turning the discussion into a general sharing of culture (Kim, 2004).

In this example, the use of literature in the classroom helped students improve their conversational skills by reaching beyond sentence-level comprehension and expression to the analysis and deep discussion of a work of literature. The students participated in genuine social interactions, during which they were able to relate to each other and challenge one another intellectually. They practiced extended speech in the L2 and were able to engage in conversations in which their main concern was their message, rather than correct form, just as it would be in natural conversation outside of the classroom. They experienced opportunities to practice the language in an authentic and meaningful way, an experience which is vital to rapid development in the L2 (Kim, 2004).

**The value of literature for various levels**

On a final note, it is worth mentioning that while many of the examples above have dealt with intermediate or advanced L2 students, literature is valuable for language
teaching even at the beginning level. For adult language learners, cognitive maturity makes up for a lack of linguistic knowledge, enabling learners to engage with literature even as complete beginners (Maxim, 2006).

In one study, students in a first-semester German class read a 142-page German romance novel as part of the class. Most of the reading took place in class in pairs and small groups, and once the students became used to the idea of collaborative reading, they began to regularly use the target language during the group readings for negotiation and interaction (Maxim, 2006). Students encountered grammatical structures in the novel that they were currently learning, which helped them see the purpose and use of the concepts, and they developed the ability to comprehend the meaning and purpose of unfamiliar structures (Maxim, 2006). Over the course of the semester, students developed an expanded repertoire of discourse makers, a wider range of vocabulary, and a higher degree of comfort with new grammatical structures. In addition, students in the experimental group performed on departmental exams as well as or better than students who took a regular course without the reading component (meaning those students also spent much more time explicitly learning grammatical concepts), suggesting that implicit learning was achieved by the students reading the novel (Maxim, 2006).

**Conclusion**

As has been reported in the research, literature is a valuable and powerful tool for teaching and learning conversation in a second language. The expansion of vocabulary, the improved internal L2 model (repertoire of phrases, expressions, grammar, etc.), and the common ground for engaged and meaningful discussion are just some of the many
benefits which reading and discussing literature provide to help students become conversationally proficient in the target language.

For my own teaching, I believe literature can and should be used at all levels of the L2 classroom experience. The motivation and sense of accomplishment provided to beginning students realizing they can read a novel in the L2 is invaluable, as is the opportunity to encounter potentially unfamiliar or confusing structures, words, and phrases in a meaningful, interesting context. From a multiliteracies perspective, using literature in beginning-level classrooms also contributes to bridging the gap between language, literature, and culture. And using literature as a foundation for discussions provides an opportunity for students to focus on genuinely communicating a message, rather than providing an expected answer to a given question in perfect form.

For more advanced students, as well, literature provides a means for improving conversational abilities beyond the current level. Students may encounter, in context, advanced vocabulary that they would likely not come across in everyday speech and integrate it into their productive vocabulary. The opportunity that the discussion of literature provides for expression and support of opinions, intellectual challenge and debate offers students practice in producing the longer segments of speech that are, after all, the main component of interactional communication.

After considering the research, there is no doubt that literature should be regarded as an important resource for developing conversational proficiency, no matter students’ proficiency level, strengths and weaknesses, or previously held beliefs about the most efficient way to learn to speak in a foreign language. I plan to use literature in my future
classroom as an engaging and motivating way of teaching new material in the target language.
LANGUAGE PAPER #2

Sociocultural Theory and Language Teaching: A Look at Drama in the L2 Classroom
Orientation and reflection

The main component of my teaching philosophy is my goal to provide my students with opportunities to use the L2 in authentic and meaningful ways. This means that I want my students to be able to use the language not just to convey transactional information, but to build relationships and express their opinions on matters that are important to them.

In Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), learning and development are seen not as processes that occur independently within the mind of an individual, but as social processes that depend on interaction with others. I think that this theory fits in with my belief that a successful language classroom is one in which students are able to learn to use the language to communicate with their peers in meaningful and authentic ways.

In the spring of 2020, I took a class called Sociocultural Perspectives on Language Learning with Dr. Jim Rogers. The focus of the class was on how people learn from the perspective of Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory and what the implications are for language teaching. Over the course of the semester, we covered some of the most important concepts in sociocultural theory and discussed their relevance to teaching language.

For one of our weekly meetings, two classmates and I were assigned to lead the discussion. The topic that week was using drama and play in the language classroom. As we explored different dramatic activities and the ways in which they are beneficial for language learning from a sociocultural perspective, I came to understand that dramatic activities are motivating, interesting, and extremely beneficial for learning all aspects of
the language. I decided to write my final paper for the course on drama in the language classroom, investigating all of the ways in which dramatic activities fulfill the requirements for learning from a sociocultural perspective, as well as learning about some specific activities that can be used in the classroom.

Through researching and writing the following paper, I learned that dramatic activities have multiple benefits for learning, and that there are endless options for implementing drama in the L2 classroom. Though specific dramatic activities are often presented as options for younger learners, I believe they can also be fun, motivating, and helpful for adult learners like those I envision teaching in the future.

I plan on taking what I have learned about sociocultural theory in general, and about drama and play specifically, and using it in my future classroom to enhance the learning experience for my students. As I plan on teaching adult students of English as a Second Language, English will likely often be the only language my students have in common. With the help of dramatic activities, I hope to create a classroom where my students are able to use English to interact with each other in authentic, meaningful ways, building upon what they know and trying new things to communicate information they truly care about in the L2.
**Introduction**

In Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, the source of learning and development is not found in the mind of the individual, but in social interaction (Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2015), meaning that the way that we learn is not through independent study, but through engagement and interaction with other people. An important concept in sociocultural theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is defined as the distance between learners’ level of actual development and potential development – the things that a learner cannot yet do on her own but can do with help from a more capable other (Swain et al., 2015). The ZPD is an activity or activity space; whenever two or more people are interacting, the ZPD is occurring. While in the ZPD, learners are simultaneously who they are and who they are becoming (Holzman, 2018), meaning that they are able to do things they are not normally capable of. In sociocultural theory, time spent in the ZPD is essential for learning and development.

When people interact within a ZPD, those involved are scaffolding each other, or helping each other accomplish things they would not be capable of independently. Scaffolding can be intentional, like during a task designed by a teacher, but it can also happen naturally (Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2015). By working together, learners with different strengths and abilities are able to accomplish more together than they would on their own, learning in the process.

The more capable other in the ZPD does not have to be a person – it can also be a symbolic or material artifact. Sometimes learners use a tool rather than relying on another person to mediate their interaction with the world. Human mediators aside, there are basically two types of tools that learners may use to interact with the world: physical
tools and symbolic tools. Physical tools in the L2 classroom include things such as books, charts, recordings, and other forms of content. These tools act as mediators when a learner makes use of them to increase knowledge and modify the way they interact with the world. Anything can be a tool, but its usefulness depends on its affordances (i.e., opportunities the tool offers to the learner) and constraints (i.e., limitations) (Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2015). The second type of tool, the symbolic tool, is the actual information found inside of books and other resources. After repeated engagement with the information, it becomes internalized. When information is internalized, learners are able to use it as a mediator without referring to the original source (Kozulin, 2003). The learners can now access the information from within themselves.

One approach to language teaching with interesting ties to sociocultural theory is the use of drama in the L2 classroom. Dramatic activities encourage students to be actively engaged in the classroom and with the L2. During the discussion on drama and play in Dr. Rogers’ Sociocultural Theory course, we tried a few different drama activities that could be implemented in the L2 classroom to engage students and get them to interact with the language in a meaningful, contextual way – specifically strategic interaction, improv games, and role playing. In this paper, I will talk about how these and other dramatic activities relate to sociocultural theory and some of the reasons why they are beneficial for learning and development in the L2 classroom. The benefits I will discuss include imitation for development, integration of all aspects of communication, meaningful and authentic use of the L2, and collaboration with others. I will also highlight several different types of dramatic activities, their practical application in the L2 classroom, and some of their benefits.
Imitation

When participating in dramatic activities, it is often necessary to use imitation, which is, according to Vygotsky, a vital element of development (de Guerrero & Commander, 2013; Haught, 2018; Lantolf & Poehner, 2008). Participants utilize imitation when performing a script, following a model of behavior and language to portray a character.

Imitation can be used in non-scripted activities, as well. For example, when my two classmates and I led the class discussion on drama and play in sociocultural theory, we had the class participate in dramatic activities. None of the activities were scripted; our classmates were simply given scenarios and roles and asked to act accordingly. During these activities, we observed our classmates borrowing language, gestures, and tone from one another, following each other’s leads to keep the story going and stay in the character they had been assigned. Imitation is one aspect of dramatic activities that make them so appropriate for the L2 classroom from a sociocultural perspective.

Imitation, in a sociocultural sense, is not simple mimicry, but a goal-directed action during which learners are adopting new personas, operating in the ZPD, and building the foundation to move from what they are to what they are becoming (Haught, 2018). When participating in a dramatic activity, learners are not simply repeating what they hear like a parrot. They are intentionally acting and speaking in a way they have seen modeled. They are operating within the ZPD in that they are using the language at a more advanced level than they would be capable of if they were not imitating a model. During this process, learners are able to perform in ways that they are not currently able to do on their own but will eventually be able to, given continued engagement with the
language in the ZPD. Imitation is a transformative activity involving the intentional reproduction of someone else’s operations and is the chief mechanism of internalization (de Guerrero & Commander, 2013). Through repeatedly utilizing imitation in dramatic activities, the action goes from a conscious act of imitating another person to an internalized, subconscious action that can be performed automatically and autonomously.

The role of imitation in language learning is highlighted by a study carried out by Haught and McCafferty (2008). The study examined six adult ESL students and their participation in an ‘English through Drama’ workshop for which they participated in theater games, improvisations, tongue twisters, and the performance of scripts. Researchers found that participants, without being prompted, asked for instructors to model performance of the script, after which they would imitate the communication that they saw. Over time, students internalized the instructor’s presentation of the script through repeated imitation. The authors concluded that imitation through drama was a transformative aspect of the class (Haught & McCafferty, 2008).

In summary, imitation is one component of dramatic activities that makes them so valuable for the L2 classroom. Through taking on new personas and using models to act in ways they normally would be unable to, learners are able to reach the next step in their development and expand their linguistic repertoire in a fun and motivating way.

Integration of aspects of language

Drama also has an advantage over traditional L2 classroom activities in that rather than focusing exclusively on spoken language, it integrates all aspects of the language in a natural way. We saw an example of this in the strategic interaction activity we used in
class. During the activity, three students were assigned roles in the following scenario: one person was an American student spending a semester in Spain. Her goal was to convince her Spanish classmate to come to her house, as she had a surprise birthday party waiting for him there. In this example scenario, students have the opportunity to learn about a part of American culture (i.e., surprise birthday parties) with which they may not be familiar. Though in this case, the participants were American, this could be valuable exposure to new cultural information in an EFL or ESL classroom.

Dramatic activities are useful not only for exposure to cultural knowledge, but to non-verbal aspects of language. Gesture and body language are important in sociocultural theory in that gesture represents the imagistic and holistic aspects of thought, whereas speech represents the linear and analytic aspects (Haught & McCafferty, 2008). Without non-verbal communication, part of the intended message is often lost. Despite the importance of non-verbal communication, it is often neglected in the L2 classroom, where speech is the main focus. Drama brings together different language skills in a natural way, integrating verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication (Sirisrimangkorn, 2018). During dramatic play, children have been found to hold themselves differently, use different social registers, and make use of greeting and politeness markers, gestures, and paralinguistic cues, showing their growing understanding of the language and social practices (Haught, 2018).

McCafferty (2002) confirms the importance of gesture in language and language learning. This study involved analyzing video recordings of conversations held between an adult Taiwanese student studying English as a second language at a university in the Southeastern United States and his ESL instructor. Results showed that both the student
and teacher used gesture frequently to clarify meaning and transform teaching and learning.

Gesture proved a vital feature of the conversations in several ways: researchers concluded that gesture helped the participant self-regulate in developing and conveying his thoughts, acted as a tool for co-constructing meaning, transformed from an explicit pedagogical tool to a tool with a variety of functions, and contributed to the development of the sense of a shared social space for participants (McCafferty, 2002).

The findings of the study highlight the significance of nonverbal forms in conversation. Considering this, it becomes clear that it is essential for L2 students to be provided with exposure to contexts in which the use of gesture is common, allowing them the opportunity to examine and adopt gesture in their own language use. Dramatic activities are one of the contexts in which opportunities for use of and exposure to gestures abound.

**Meaningful language and authenticity**

Drama provides another great advantage to the L2 classroom in that it makes language learning active, meaningful, and fun, allowing learners to use language in a meaningful context and in interesting ways (Sirisrimangkorn, 2018). As a language learner, most of my experiences learning language in the classroom have been without context, without a real purpose, and without any enjoyment. Often the tasks are to fill in the blanks in a sentence, or create phrases using required vocabulary. During the dramatic activities we tried during our class discussion, our classmates seemed more engaged and motivated than I ever remember being in a language class. The group that participated in strategic interaction, for example, was laughing, arguing, and negotiating. They had a
role to play, a task to complete, and they were using the L2 to do it – the language they were using had meaning and purpose.

In sociocultural theory, the meaningfulness of language is important for development, as it is socially meaningful activities that transform natural behavior into higher mental processes (Eun & Lim, 2009). According to Vygotsky, interest-based instruction is essential for development. Students find interesting what is meaningful to them – that is, content that is relevant, purposeful, and has personal significance (Eun & Lim, 2009).

Some L2 learners feel that they cannot express themselves effectively, which may be due to the lack of opportunities to speak the language in authentic ways (Sirisrimangkorn, 2018). Dramatic contexts offer exposure to a type of authentic, dialogic language that is not often encountered when learning a language within a community where it is not generally spoken (Piazzoli, 2014). Dramatic tasks are valuable in that they require an authentic type of communication that is missing from many classrooms – they often involve problem-solving and using the language in contextual and authentic ways (Haught, 2018).

Using drama in the classroom is an effective way to make language learning meaningful - exploring dramatic contexts helps learners produce meaningful language and develop cultural insights (Piazzoli, 2014). For participation in dramatic activities, the use of language for meaningful co-construction of knowledge is necessary (Haught, 2018). Students are not using language just to check a box or complete an assignment. Participation in drama activities involves teachers and students working together, creating
scenarios and dramatic worlds, and engaging with those worlds through the different experiences, interpretations, and understandings they offer.

**Collaboration**

When we used drama in our class discussion, one component that all of the different activities we used had in common was the element of teamwork. Three groups participated in three different activities with various scenarios and tasks, but from the moment we gave our classmates their instructions to the moment time ran out, all three groups were working and talking together to solve the problem they were facing and cooperatively come up with a solution. Because sociocultural theory is built on the idea that social interaction plays a fundamental role in learning and development, the necessity of collaborating with others in dramatic play and dramatic activities is perhaps the most important component of drama in regard to sociocultural theory.

In a dramatic task, learners must work together with classmates in a collaborative learning context to complete the goals of the activity (Sirisrimangkorn, 2018). The collaborative effort results in the creation of collective ZPDs as learners work together to co-create a narrative (Piazzoli, 2014). This interaction is the strongest motivating force behind development (Eun & Lim, 2009). Vygotsky also believed in working in groups because collective experience mediates the development of the individual (Eun & Lim, 2009). Dramatic activities provide an opportunity for learners to scaffold each other while co-constructing meaning and understanding – it requires meaningful use of the language while collaborating to solve problems (Haught, 2018). Performing in a joint activity with others is a steppingstone to independent creative activity (de Guerrero &
Commander, 2013) – the requirement within dramatic activities to work with others is one of the main benefits for learning.

Swain and Watanabe (2012) examined the ways in which collaboration has proved to be useful for second language learning in a variety of studies. Collaborative dialogue – dialogue between speakers engaged in problem solving and knowledge building – can be about any topic and helps one or more participants refine their knowledge or come to a deeper understanding. Co-construction of meaning, which is often necessary in dramatic activities, is a type of collaborative dialogue.

Researchers studying the use of collaborative dialogue between three university learners jointly constructing a scenario to be performed in the L2 found that the learners offered each other mutual support in order to solve the problems with which they were faced. Although individually, the students were beginners, through collaboration they were able to use more complex language than they would have been capable of producing on their own (Donato, 1994). In addition, a study by Villamil and de Guerrero (1998) found that in collaborative dialogue between adult learners of English, learners moved from other- to self-regulation, becoming more capable of autonomous language use.

**Leveling up**

Though we can distinguish between various aspects of dramatic play and dramatic activities and what makes them relevant in the classroom from a sociocultural perspective, all of them are the same in that they help learners progress as they become capable of activities they weren’t capable of before. When learners participate in dramatic tasks, they are in the process of moving to a higher developmental level. When
learners imitate others during dramatic activities, they are reaching beyond their current developmental levels, creating something new by imitating the words or actions of someone else (de Guerrero & Commander, 2013). The act of adopting another’s persona is believed to help push learners to a higher developmental level than simply engaging with the language would do (Haught, 2018). Over time, students who are involved in dramatic activities have been found to invent scenarios that gradually become more creative and linguistically intricate, going beyond simple tasks to create scenarios in the L2 that are engaging and entertaining (Haught, 2018). As they continue to engage with the L2 using dramatic activities, their own abilities develop to the point where they are capable of creating more complex scenarios and expressing more sophisticated ideas than before.

**Drama in the L2 classroom: Practical applications**

As has been established earlier in this paper, dramatic activities are a useful tool for the L2 classroom, providing several benefits to language students as supported by Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory. In the following section, I will introduce specific dramatic activities that can be used in the L2 classroom, as well as some of their benefits.

*Role Play*

Role play involves giving roles to members of the classroom and assigning a goal or objective for participants to accomplish (Huang, 2008). Role play can take place with a single person, between a pair, or within a group. To create an effective role play, the instructor must select a situation to be played. Dialogues can be created either by the teacher or by the students themselves. Students can practice their roles in pairs or small
groups, then switch roles and practice those. After enough practice, students may also perform the role play for the class. Students can also be asked to modify the roles or situation to create a variation of the original role play (Huang, 2008).

Role play is beneficial to language students in that it provides an opportunity for students to verbalize opinions, think independently, interact with peers, and increase motivation for language learning (Ladousse, 2004). In role play situations, students are able to experience many of the situations in which they can expect to use the language in the real world, helping them to learn to apply their skills to different situations (Huang, 2008).

*Strategic interaction*

Strategic interaction is a teaching method that, like role play, involves the use of scenarios to foster improved competence in the L2. The exercise consists of three stages: planning, performance, and debriefing. During the planning stage, the class is split into groups or individuals. Each of the groups is assigned a role to play within a scenario and allowed time to plan their roles. Several types of scenarios can be used, some of which are more suitable for pairs, and others for groups, and some of which are useful for lessons that span multiple class periods (deHaan et al., 2012).

Strategic interaction differs from role play in that the roles given to each group are unknown to the other groups. The roles differ from each other in focus and goals, producing a conflict in the performance stage. In the performance stage, students begin to perform their roles, but quickly realize that what they had planned to say won’t work as they reach the twist in the scenario. The students’ goal is now to maintain communication in the target language while solving whatever problem has arisen (deHaan et al., 2012).
The debriefing stage begins when the scenario is resolved successfully, time runs out, or communication breaks down. In this final stage, the class regroups and discusses the exercise, including discourse, cultural, or grammar problems that may have appeared. The instructor may also take the opportunity to provide feedback.

Because of the twist, no two scenarios have the same ending. The students must think on their feet in a similar manner to that which they will need to function in a real-life L2 environment. Strategic interaction gives students practice in using the L2 in the face of unexpected events and communication breakdown.

**Improv**

Improvisation, or improv, is a type of theater in which the story and dialogue are made up on the spot. Using a source of inspiration, the actors create a scene and a dialogue with no prior preparation. In an educational context, improv has been defined as a spontaneous set of actions as a response to minimal instructions from an instructor (Dundar, 2013). This helps learners to improve not only their language skills, but their confidence.

Improv can be implemented in the L2 classroom through a variety of different methods. Because improv is unscripted, unplanned, and spontaneous, this allows for flexibility in its application in the classroom. The teacher should provide a situation that is clearly stated and easy to act out, such as the first day at a new job, a hypochondriac at the doctor, winning the lottery, etc. (Dundar, 2013), and students create a conversation around the given scenario. The acting out of the scene includes use of facial expression and gestures and provides students with a means of self-expression.
Improv exercises are beneficial in bringing students out of their shells – they often begin the activity shy and hesitant, but gradually become more enthusiastic and confident in communicating in the L2 (Dundar, 2013). The necessity for students to use several skills at once – listening to peers, awareness of body language and gesture, quick responses, etc. – makes improv exercises especially helpful.

 Readers’ Theater

Readers’ theater involves students turning a story into a script with multiple characters (Dundar, 2013). First, students read the story. Next, they adapt the story into a script with several characters and which may or may not include a narrator. After rehearsing the script, the piece is performed for the class.

During readers’ theater, students have the opportunity to practice repeatedly and convey information using intonation and body language. Students who participate in readers’ theater have been found to experience increased motivation, higher engagement with texts, and improved scores on proficiency tests (Lin, 2015). This exercise is beneficial for students’ understanding of vocabulary, syntax, meaning, as well as the form and function of the use of the L2.

Conclusion

Dramatic activities are ideal for L2 learning for a number of reasons. They provide opportunities for learning through imitation, combine multiple aspects of the L2 in a natural way, and provide context and opportunity for authentic, meaningful language use. They support the idea in sociocultural theory of learning through social interaction by requiring learners to collaborate to solve problems. Overall, they push learners to new
levels and help them develop new abilities by requiring them to act in ways they would not normally be capable of, creating a wide ZPD.

I think that sociocultural theory is an important theory to keep in mind when teaching a second language. A first language is, after all, used primarily for social interaction, so it makes sense that the development of a second language would happen most naturally and efficiently through social interaction, as well. The role of an L2 teacher is to create opportunities for students to act within a ZPD, scaffold one another, and build skills they need to propel their own learning and development forward. In the future, I will keep dramatic play and activities in mind as a method of creating productive and authentic opportunities for students to engage with the language and with each other in meaningful ways.
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Role of Creativity in Second Language Acquisition
**Orientation and reflection**

For the course LING 6500 Second Language Acquisition: Theory and Practice, I wrote an annotated bibliography with a fellow student, Kelly Fu, on creativity in language learning. Since finishing the course, I have made further revisions and included additional sources.

As a language learner, I have often found myself participating in activities and assignments for which the task is simply to fill in information or produce a specific sentence conveying a specific meaning. Rarely have I been expected or encouraged to be creative or use the second language (L2) to express my thoughts in the same way I use English, my native language (L1).

Creativity seems to be an inherent part of language use in the L1, given the fact that fluent speakers are creative when using language to express their thoughts. However, language learning tasks in the L2 classroom often fail to allow room for creativity, focusing on form or on meaning that doesn’t require moving beyond current comfort zones or using the language in new and unfamiliar ways. For this annotated bibliography, I wanted to learn more about the importance of creativity and its application in language acquisition. I examined why creativity is important for language acquisition from a theoretical standpoint and looked at research on implementing creative tasks in the classroom, the correlation between creativity and language skills, and practices for enhancing creativity.
Theoretical Background

The theoretical lens through which I looked at creativity in language learning in this annotated bibliography is an interactionist perspective (Long, 1996). Second language acquisition (SLA) scholars generally agree that interaction and learning are strongly connected. The interaction approach focuses on the importance of input, output, and feedback in SLA, accounting for learning through interactions in the target language (Gass, 2014). This approach assumes that communicative pressures stimulate language learning and highlights the mechanisms and relationship between communication and learning (Gass, 2014). In the interaction approach, linguistic interaction is considered crucially important because this is the context where learners may receive information about the correctness and incorrectness of the language they produce (Gass, 2014).

The three components of an interactionist approach – input, output, and feedback – is captured by the concept of negotiation of meaning, which can be defined as “the process in which, in an effort to communicate, learners and competent speakers provide and interpret signals of their own and their interlocutor’s perceived comprehension, thus provoking adjustments to linguistic form, conversational structure, message content, or all three, until an acceptable level of understanding is achieved” (Long, 1996, p. 418). During negotiation of meaning, a learner’s attention is directed to problems or gaps in linguistic abilities and to new lexical and grammatical constructions, promoting development in the L2 (Gass, 2014).

Within the interactionist framework, optimum L2 acquisition is thought to occur when the ideal environmental ingredients are present (Freeborn, 2015). Ortega (2009) identifies environmental ingredients that contribute to an ideal L2 learning environment,
one of which is pushed output, which is the most important ingredient for the purpose of examining the role of creativity in L2 acquisition.

Output is important to language acquisition in that it forces learners to go from a semantic (i.e., focused on meaning) to a syntactic (i.e., focused on form) use of language (Gass, 2014). This means that learners go from simply understanding the meaning of input to gaining the complete grammatical understanding that is necessary for accurate production. During pushed or modified output, a learner attempts to use the language at a level beyond his or her current knowledge or abilities (Gass, 2014). Output that stretches the linguistic resources of the learner is the most valuable. This is where creativity and creative tasks become important, in pushing the language learner to leave the path of least resistance and use language that may be beyond his or her abilities and comfort zone. In this annotated bibliography, I will look at several studies examining the role that creativity plays in language learning.

Creativity for academic and foreign-language achievement

**Carter (2004)** makes a case for creativity being an inherent, natural part of language (including the L1). The chapter examines spoken discourse and explores the creativity present in examples of everyday spoken English. The author questions whether there are differences in creativity between spoken and written language and whether particular creative patterns can be identified in spoken language (Carter, 2004).

The data from the study came from the CANCODE corpus at the University of Nottingham in the UK. Samples were taken from a corpus totaling 5 million words with data from between 1993 and 2001. In the samples, all of which are examples of casual,
everyday speech, the author finds several patterns of creativity, including puns, plays on words, morphological inventiveness, and repetition (Carter, 2004).

The author concludes that creative use of language is prevalent in casual speech, may be used consciously or subconsciously, and serves multiple purposes, some being non-pragmatic embellishments and some fulfilling fundamental communicative purposes (Carter, 2004). The use of playful or creative language may confer pleasure, display identity, indicate membership in a group, or establish intimacy.

The examples examined in this chapter occur in an informal setting, which is the context encountered by most speakers most often (Carter, 2004). Based on the evidence presented, it can be concluded that creativity is an important and inherent part of language use. It would make sense, then, that creativity is also important for L2 users. Creativity should be a focus of second language teachers, who should make an effort to foster creativity and implement creative tasks in the L2 classroom to encourage the development of creative language use, as this skill is vital to the ability to use the L2 successfully in a natural setting.

Creativity plays a vital role in language learning outside of the formal educational setting. A study by Chik (2017) involved adults who choose to learn foreign languages and the role that creativity plays in their motivation and success. The study investigated the questions of why adults start learning foreign languages beyond the classroom and how they create spaces for their foreign language learning. Such learners often pursue ‘serious leisure’ – leisure activities which are complex, captivating, and challenging (Chik, 2017). The ways in which learners navigate such opportunities for learning are quite diverse, ranging from reading newspapers in the target language to playing
language games to participating in social media in the target language. When looking at how language learners autonomously construct learning opportunities, creativity is a shaping force (Chik, 2017).

The study tracked three undergraduate students who participated in and blogged about a month-long language-learning project. Each participant chose a foreign language with which they had no previous experience and created their own learning plans. Throughout the project, participants updated publicly accessible blogs with their progress. Three interviews, concerning language learning history and learning experiences, were conducted with each participant over the course of the study.

The results showed that the participants all created learning spaces that showed tangible forms of creative ideas, indicating that creativity is a determining factor in whether a learner will stick to a language or give it up (Chik, 2017). The author concluded that to learn a language autonomously, creativity is necessary for constructing the essential language learning spaces.

Creativity is important not only in autonomous learning, but in a classroom setting, as well. Pishghadam (2011) examined the role of creativity in L2 learning achievement. The aim of the study was to test for a correlation between creativity, learners’ general academic achievement, and achievement in a foreign language. The participants were undergraduate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Iran. A questionnaire measuring creativity was administered to the participants and the data were analyzed to determine whether a correlation exists between creativity, foreign language achievement, and academic achievement (Pishghadam, 2011).
The author reported a significant correlation between creativity and academic achievement as well as between creativity and English language achievement. He concluded that language teachers should intentionally provide an environment that fosters the development of creative abilities (Pishghadam, 2011). This can be accomplished by creating a safe environment for asking questions, holding discussions, and solving problems through exploration. To develop creativity, instructors can use activities such as brainstorming, wordplay, stories, games, and puzzles (Pishghadam, 2011). Psychological safety and psychological freedom are essential conditions that learners need to be creative. The researcher concludes that creativity is an important factor in language acquisition. Learners who are more creative are more likely to achieve success in a foreign language, as well as in academics in general.

In summary, creativity plays an important role in the acquisition of an L2. Creativity is used naturally by fluent speakers on an everyday basis. It is also found in the learning spaces of adults learning foreign languages autonomously and in successful L2 classrooms. In the next section, I will cover creating tasks and their implementation in the classroom.

**Creative tasks for the L2 classroom**

*Tin (2012)* investigated what constitutes an effective creative task in the L2 classroom. With the omnipresence of communicative language teaching, choice and freedom in language use have come to be regarded as essential to language learning tasks. Giving students freedom in their use of the target language is thought to encourage real-world processes of language use, causing the target form to emerge naturally as the
learner focuses on meaning and content (Tin, 2012). However, the author argues that too much freedom leads to less creative combinations and a tendency to rely on safe and familiar linguistic resources.

The author claims that most language learning tasks offer a limited range of opportunity for learning novel language. Language is primarily used to express known meaning (i.e., meaning known to self though unknown to interlocutors) rather than construct unknown meaning (i.e., meaning unknown to self) (Tin, 2012). To encourage the exploration of complex language, it is necessary that language learning tasks include certain features – specifically, language must be used to construct unknown meaning and constraints must be used to facilitate creativity (Tin, 2012). In expressing new or unknown meaning, learners must analyze and recombine utterances and structures to express new ideas with unfamiliar forms. The ability to use language creatively to construct new meaning is essential for the use of complex language.

To facilitate the ability to construct new meaning, the use of constraints, rather than freedom, is required (Tin, 2012). In creativity research, a constraint is defined as any limitation on choice (Tin, 2012). In creative tasks with higher constraints, students explore and use more syntactically and lexically rich utterances than they do in non-creative tasks with lower constraints. Constraints in creative tasks serve the purpose of directing learners toward novel solutions and promote the use of the unknown to create new meaning.

The author presents a two-phase process for creative tasks. First, the learner is presented with a problem and must produce ideas without any knowledge of the final
goal. A new constraint is then revealed and forces the learner to interpret the previously produced ideas within the boundaries of the new constraint.

An example of this type of task is to provide students with a picture and ask them to describe what they see (known meaning) using ‘there is/are…’ sentences. After they have generated sentences, students are asked to produce a new sentence combining elements from their previous sentences in an unusual way, describing what is not seen in the picture (unknown meaning). For example, if in phase one students produce the sentences (1) There is a cow chewing grass, (2) There are children playing football (3) There is a cloud hanging over the field, the product of phase two might be “The skin of the cow is as thick as the thick cloud hanging over the sky, but it can produce amazing stuff like leather boots for the children playing football in the field” (combining the elements ‘cow’, ‘children’, and ‘cloud’ from the original sentences) (Tin, 2012, p. 182). The author concludes that limiting choice within a creative task is necessary for creativity. Constraints help encourage pushed output, leading learners away from the linguistic path of least resistance and stretching their language as they put it to use in constructing unknown meaning (Tin, 2012).

Another method of promoting creativity in the classroom is through writing for an audience, which was explored by Wong & Moorhouse (2018). The authors claim that creativity is often neglected in English language writing classrooms, despite its importance to the writing process (Wong & Moorhouse, 2018). Often, students have one shot at writing, under test-like conditions, which narrows the purpose of the writing and shifts focus onto accuracy and away from creativity. Because there is no audience or
social purpose, writing assignments are seen simply as a vehicle for vocabulary and grammar practice without any meaningful purpose (Wong & Moorhouse, 2018).

The authors investigated the use of blogs in a writing class and examined the effect of blogging on students’ desire for creativity and awareness of the audience. Fifth grade English learners in a Hong Kong primary school participated in a year-long blogging project. Comments made by the students on each other’s blogs and pre- and post-surveys were analyzed to determine the effects of the blogging project.

For the project, students published drafts of their writing on a blog which other students commented on. The aim was to heighten awareness of the audience and increase desire to write creatively through feedback from multiple peers, without the pressure of receiving a grade from the teacher. This was expected to help learners reach higher skills, concepts, and levels of understanding (Wong & Moorhouse, 2018). It also allowed students to focus on what they wanted to say, rather than how they should say it.

Results showed that throughout the year-long project, students experienced a shift in desire to share their work with peers, to become more creative, and to elaborate on ideas (Wong & Moorhouse, 2018). This suggests that it is important to create opportunities in the classroom for students to foster their own creativity, which helps them to strive for modified output and expand their linguistic skills.

Arshavskaya (2015) found that creative writing assignments can enhance second language learners’ motivation to improve their writing skills and support their creativity. A study was conducted to test the hypothesis that implementing creative writing assignments in a second language writing class can engage less-motivated students. Three research questions were addressed in the study: “(a) How does the use of creative writing
assignments mediate student development of critical consciousness?; (b) What are the students’ attitudes towards the use of creative writing activities in an L2 writing course?; and (c) What are the students’ perceptions of the use of critical pedagogy in an L2 writing course?” (Arshavskaya, 2015, p. 3). Nine international undergraduate students enrolled in a university writing class participated in the study. Participants completed creative writing assignments such as journals (e.g., A Day in the Life of a North Korean) and letters (e.g., A Letter to an LGBT Friend) as well as completing a survey about their attitude toward creative writing assignments and critical pedagogy at the end of the semester.

Most participants reported enhanced empathy and critical consciousness at the end of the study. All participants found that creative writing is beneficial and engaging, and some noted increased fluency and confidence as L2 writers. Most of the participants agreed that creative writing activities improved their engagement and confidence as well as their attitude toward critical pedagogy. Some of them reported a new ability to see things from a different perspective, which they found helpful, while others mentioned that the topics (e.g., A letter to an LGBT friend who doesn’t get parents’ approval of this friendship) were depressing and they preferred more positive topics. The small sample size (nine participants) limited the study; a larger and more diverse sample is needed for future research. Overall, L2 learners in this study enjoyed and benefited from engaging in L2 creative writing activities.

Creative writing practices not only increase L2 learners’ motivation in writing but also improve their written expression skills. Turkben (2019) conducted a study aimed at comprehending the effect of creative writing practices on the writing skills of upper-
intermediate (B2) level students. The study aimed to determine whether using creative writing activities to encourage students to express knowledge from their point of view would increase confidence and writing skills and reduce writing anxiety in students. Creative writing practices were implemented in an experimental group of 24 students, while standard teaching methods were used in the control group of 25 students. The study took place over an 8-week period during which students in the experimental group were given various creative writing prompts and time to work on them. Students in the experimental and control groups were tested at the beginning and end of the experiment for writing self-efficacy, writing anxiety, and writing skills (Turkben, 2019).

At the end of the experiment, the researchers found that while the experimental and control groups achieved similar results on the pre-tests for writing ability, writing self-efficacy, and writing anxiety, the post-test results in each category differed significantly between the experimental and control groups in favor of the experimental group. This indicates that implementing creative writing practices in the L2 classroom has a positive effect on writing ability and self-efficacy while also lowering writing anxiety (Turkben, 2019). The results suggest that creativity is an important factor in successful L2 learning and could have implications for other areas of L2 instruction.

While creativity plays a role in effective classroom tasks, it also acts as a predictor for individual writing skills. Nosratinia and Razavi (2016) conducted a study on the relationship between EFL learners’ writing complexity, accuracy, fluency, and degree of creativity. There were two research questions: (1) Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners’ creativity and writing accuracy, fluency, and complexity?; and (2) How much can EFL learners’ creativity predict their writing
complexity? The participants in the study were 185 intermediate EFL learners studying English in Tehran. Participants were asked to complete a creativity questionnaire (50 minutes) and two composition writing tests on different topics (50 minutes).

Performance was scored based on accuracy, fluency, and complexity. Pearson's Product-moment correlation coefficient and linear regression were used to analyze the data (Nosratinia & Razavi, 2016). The results indicated a significant correlation between EFL learners’ creativity and writing accuracy, writing fluency, and writing complexity. The findings underscore the importance of creativity in developing EFL learners’ writing skills, indicating the need for EFL teachers to re-design course material and syllabi with an emphasis on creativity in learning activities and materials. Recommended further research includes addressing the relationship between the three dimensions of writing – complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) – and other learner factors (e.g., motivation and critical thinking).

In summary, creative tasks provide multiple benefits to the L2 learner when implemented effectively in the L2 classroom. Providing students with constraints and outlets to share their work with others provides motivation and interest that may often be lacking in traditional L2 tasks. The next section will address the role of creativity in the thinking skills of L2 learners.

Creativity in thinking skills

The importance of creativity in the writing skills of EFL learners raises the question of whether it is possible to enhance L2 learners’ creative thinking skills. Gursoy and Bağ’s (2018) study addressed this question. The purpose of the study was to
determine the effectiveness of improving EFL learners’ creative thinking skills through training with audio and visual stimuli. Researchers also measured participants’ increase in creative thinking subskills (fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration) with training. Because most studies focus on the creative thinking capacity of advanced learners at universities and seldom examine elementary and secondary school students, the current study centered on secondary school students. Twenty-four participants were involved in the study; 12 of them were randomly assigned to the visual group, and the rest were assigned to the audio group. Pretests and posttests were completed by the participants to compare their creative thinking capacity before and after receiving the training. Both pretests and posttests aimed to measure participants’ abilities in figural, verbal, and oral aspects.

Statistical analysis of pretest and posttest data indicated that there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest in terms of the development of EFL learners’ creative thinking skills through training. Results showed that the visual stimuli group achieved higher improvement in creative thinking skills. Findings suggested that the creative thinking capacity of EFL learners can be enhanced through visual and audio training, and that visual stimuli were more effective than audio.

A mixed-methods case study by Sehic (2017) had a similar purpose of investigating “the effects of English learning on creative thinking skills in the domains of fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration as measured with the Alternate Uses Test” (p. 1). In addition to the quantitative data, researchers also collected and analyzed qualitative data for more detailed information about the effects of English learning on creative thinking. A total of 12 participants were involved in the study, six of them
immigrants and refugees enrolled in an ESL program at a community college in the US (the experimental group), and the other six native English speakers and local residents (the control group). Both groups completed pretests and posttests and face-to-face interviews.

The results of the pre- and post-tests indicated that learners achieved higher scores in the domains of flexibility, originality, and elaboration in the posttest than the pretest. However, their scores in the domain of fluency did not increase, which was inconsistent with the results of Gursoy and Bağ’s (2018) study. The data collected through face-to-face interviews suggested that most participants were satisfied with the ESL program and reported improved English skills as a result. These results suggest that the ESL program/English learning had a positive effect on improving L2 learners’ creative thinking skills capacity in domains of flexibility, originality, and elaboration.

The research shows that the creative thinking skills of students can be developed and that this has benefits for their progress in the L2. This indicates that creativity is a factor that should not be ignored by language teachers. The use of creativity in the classroom has implications for students’ flexibility, originality, and satisfaction in learning and using the L2.

**Conclusion**

Creativity in language learning is a topic that has interested me since long before I ever planned on becoming a language teacher, though I may not have recognized exactly what the topic was at the time. As a language learner, I found myself continually frustrated by the expectation to spend class time and homework assignments reciting the
expected answers with no need for genuine interest or expression of new ideas, which left me unmotivated, bored, and stuck in one place in terms of my language skills. The need I experienced outside of the classroom to use unfamiliar language and combine familiar resources in new and complex ways is where I found both my motivation to continue and my most rapid periods of growth. A focus on creativity seems to be key to taking those positive experiences and integrating them into the classroom.

The articles reviewed in this annotated bibliography show that creativity is an important factor in language learning in multiple regards. Not only do the creative thinking skills of an individual influence his or her success in language learning, but appropriate classroom practices can enhance creativity in learners, which in turn may enhance learners’ language-learning abilities. Creative tasks increase learner motivation and build confidence. Creativity is also an important factor for educators to keep in mind when designing courses and activities – when applied properly, creative language tasks require learners to use novel forms of the language, stretching their language abilities and encouraging the use of more advanced forms. The use of creativity in the L2 classroom has the potential to enhance learning and communication.

From an interactionist perspective, the effective application of creativity in the L2 classroom has the potential to increase pushed output, requiring learners to use language that is beyond their current ability. This brings learners out of their comfort zones and forces the use of increasingly complex language, leading to improved abilities in the L2. Creativity is a factor that I believe is important in the L2 classroom and that I hope to continue to learn more about as I continue my studies and career. It is my goal to use
knowledge of creativity in language learning to create a classroom environment with high motivation and potential for growth.
LOOKING FORWARD

Though I have learned much in the last two years from the opportunities I have had to teach English and take courses in the MSLT program, I still have so much to learn and improve upon. One area I would especially like to improve is in creating lessons that are appropriate for students with different levels of English ability. When I taught a multi-level English conversation course, one struggle I had was in teaching lessons that were beneficial to all of the students in my classroom – I often found myself catering more to the more advanced students, and, as a result, the less advanced students participated much less and probably gained less from the experience. In the future, I would like to get better at understanding my students’ abilities and creating lessons that will benefit those at a variety of levels.

I also want to improve my ability to implement ideas and theories about language learning into practical applications. I find the research very interesting and believe the knowledge we have on language learning could be used to make language classrooms everywhere more interesting, engaging, and productive. I would like to further develop the necessary skills to take a theory or idea and turn it into a real classroom activity.

Through continued experience teaching English, as well as continued independent study, I plan to improve in these and other areas. My hope is to always continue to learn, improve, and challenge my existing understanding so that I can help my students achieve their goals and reach their potential in the most efficient and enjoyable way possible. I plan to teach English in an adult education setting, and hope that as I grow my knowledge and improve my skills, I will be better able to assist my students.
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