Motivating Language Students Through a Collaborative, Multiliteracies Approach

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ABSTRACT

Motivating Language Students through a Collaborative, Multiliteracies Approach

by

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Utah State University, 2021

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This portfolio conveys some of the author’s principal views regarding second language (L2) teaching and learning. These views have been developed and informed by studying the research literature, personal language learning experience, language teaching observations, and language teaching experience.

The first section, teaching perspectives, contains an explanation of the environment envisioned by the author while writing this portfolio, his teaching philosophy statement, and a summary of classroom observations. The second section, research perspectives, contains two research papers and an annotated bibliography that support the author’s language teaching philosophy.

(84 pages)
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for the many people who have supported me through teaching, advising, mentoring, and simply being there for me during my time in the MSLT program. The last two years have been important in my career and in my life.

I would like to start by thanking my committee members. I am thankful to Dr. Abdulkafi Albirdi for his teaching, guiding, and mentoring me throughout the program and as I have written this portfolio. Dr. Albirdi has shown me that the most important attribute a teacher can possess is a genuine concern for their students’ wellbeing. I would like to thank Dr. Joshua Thoms for carving out many hours to mentor me and answer my questions about the field of SLA as well as introducing me to the theories and methodologies most relevant to our field. I am thankful to Dr. Sarah Gordon for her willingness to mentor me throughout my time at USU and for providing me with my first experience in the MSLT program. It was in her class that I began to feel that I was pursuing the right field of study.

I would also like to thank Dr. Karin DeJonge-Kannan. She has taught me much about writing, presenting, and teaching. Her teaching philosophy will forever have an impact on me and my students. I am thankful for the unimaginable quantity of time that she has invested in my learning process and my success.

My classmates and colleagues have taught me much about culture, language teaching, and language learning. I am grateful for their wonderful insights and for the camaraderie we have enjoyed. I am especially thankful to Hyrum Checketts, whose
teaching philosophy, lesson plans, and friendship have greatly impacted me and my family.

I am also thankful to Dr. Bradford Hall for the wonderful opportunity to teach Spanish 1010 and 1020 during my time in the MSLT program. And to Kathy Mckee, for helping me obtain larger classrooms, answering my questions, and for many enjoyable conversations.

My wife, Melissa, and my daughters, Ellie and Rosalie, have been some of my biggest supporters. They have patiently accompanied me on this journey every step of the way. They have listened to me and helped refine the ideas presented in this portfolio as well as served me in countless ways as I have written it. Words cannot describe my gratitude to them.

Lastly, and most importantly, I am thankful to my loving Father in Heaven who has answered many anxiety-filled prayers and granted me any and all success I have experienced in the MSLT program.
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

3DE = 3-dimensional Environment
ACTFL = American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
AI = Artificial Intelligence
CALL = Computer-Assisted Language Teaching
CLT = Communicative Language Teaching
ELL = English Language Learner
ELT = Experiential Learning Theory
FSI = Foreign Service Institute
GPA = Grade Point Average
ICC = Intercultural Communicative Competence
KP = Knowledge Processes
L1 = First Language / Native Language
L2 = Second Language
MLA = Modern Language Association
MSLT = Master of Second Language Teaching
OPI = Oral Proficiency Interview
SCT = Sociocultural Theory
SLA = Second Language Acquisition
TL = Target Language
USU = Utah State University
VR = Virtual Reality
ZPD = Zone of Proximal Development
Introduction

This portfolio represents my views regarding L2 teaching and learning. It has been developed during my time in the USU MSLT program where I have studied prominent theories and methodologies pertaining to the field. The perspectives advanced herein have also been influenced by my experiences teaching lower-level Spanish classes at the university, observing other language teachers, and my own language learning process.

The portfolio is comprised of two sections. In the teaching perspectives section, I establish the professional environment in which I envisioned myself teaching as I wrote the portfolio and I present my teaching philosophy which focuses on student motivation, collaborative learning, and the importance of culture. The section concludes with a discussion about practices that I have observed through classroom observations that support my teaching philosophy as well as some that contrast with it.

The research perspectives section of the portfolio contains three papers, based in the research literature, that underpin the views expressed in my teaching philosophy. The first paper deals with teaching culture and language in the undergraduate language curriculum by implementing a multiliteracies approach. The second paper contains a brief literature review on the importance of students’ intrinsic motivation and the negative effects of grades on motivation, followed by a proposal for further research. The final paper is an annotated bibliography that discusses the possibilities for using virtual reality in the language classroom through the lens of sociocultural theory.
TEACHING PERSPECTIVES
PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT

This portfolio takes as its central focus the teaching of Spanish as a L2 in the United States of America. The philosophies, perspectives, and artifacts herein presented are aimed at university-level teaching, ranging from the novice level to the advanced. The perspectives and strategies offered in this work may be applied to the teaching of other L2s in other environments, as well as English as a L2, not just to university students of Spanish.

In my portfolio I hope to convey the importance of fostering L2 students’ intercultural, communicative, and linguistic competence. Language is not merely made up of words and structures, however important those are, but is also composed of cultural nuances. At the root of what we call language is the innate desire to communicate with other humans. When these three aspects of language (linguistics, culture, and sociality) are combined in the classroom, then students may achieve the ability to express themselves and understand others’ expressions in a L2, as well as deepen their understanding of and appreciation for other cultures.
TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

Introduction

My journey through the process we call second language acquisition (SLA) essentially began as a missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Mexico. Having been thrown into the fire, metaphorically speaking, without having previously reached any measurable degree of linguistic or cultural competence, I found myself in, what seemed to me, the position of ‘do or die.’ My two options were simple, I could either learn the language and come to understand what was going on around me or live my next 22 months in confusion.

Slowly, I began acquiring Spanish through both implicit and explicit means. I had been previously taught all the grammar, but it did not take root until I was immersed in a context that allowed me to experience it in everyday social interactions with more proficient speakers of the target language (TL) as well as in interactions with authentic texts.

My language learning experience, as well as my studies in the MSLT program at USU, have led me to favor a teaching approach that guides students through collaborative, social tasks viewed through the theoretical lens of sociocultural theory (SCT) and applied with a multiliteracies approach, without neglecting explicit grammar instruction. I believe that one of the most important factors contributing to students’ SLA is intrinsic motivation; that is, motivation that is born within the learner and includes his/her passion for learning (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Palmer, 2019). I also believe that
the development of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 2013) is an essential element in the path toward overall proficiency.

**Motivation**

Central to the learner’s acquisition of their L2 is their intrinsic motivation (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Nicholson, 2013). External motivators, such as grades, do not provide the type of motivation that propels students from the difficult lower-levels of language learning to the upper-levels of proficiency where students may communicate as they please in an array of distinct linguistic and cultural contexts (Henry, 2017). Students need to be motivated by intrinsic factors, not extrinsic ones, if they are to effectively learn the L2.

Influencing students’ intrinsic motivation can be a difficult task, especially in an academic world that emphasizes standardized tests, course letter grades, and grade point averages. Most students are accustomed to these external measures of supposed success, measures that do not accurately portray their proficiency levels in the L2 (A. Brown, 2013). Even when students are intrinsically motivated, that does not mean they are always willing to participate in the class. To help students engage, I take the time to learn their names in the first few days of class and I give them opportunities to introduce themselves and speak one-on-one with every other student. My hope is that they become comfortable speaking and making mistakes. I also take time to briefly explain my teaching philosophy which includes efforts to deemphasize extrinsic motivators and instill a love for learning the language.
To deemphasize extrinsic motivators, I believe in removing grades from the classroom as much as possible. Kohn (2011) explains that teachers can give students much more useful assessment by providing comments as feedback on each assignment with no number or letter grade. This type of feedback is more useful to students because it directs them in specific ways to the areas they are performing well in and the areas where they can improve, as opposed to a simple percentage or letter grade which does not help students know how to improve. Teachers can also meet with students individually, one or more times throughout the semester to discuss their progress and areas where they may need to improve (Kohn, 2011).

In cases where grades are required to be reported at the end of each term, teachers may counsel with their students, again individually, to determine what final grade each deserves, after having used an alternative method of assessment throughout the term as described above. This can even mean inviting students to assign themselves a letter grade which is to be discussed with or at least reviewed by the instructor and potentially altered before becoming final (Kohn, 2011). Another alternative that does not completely eliminate grades, which I have adopted in my classes, is not basing students’ entire grade on correct answers (Schinske & Tanner, 2014). I give my students full credit for completing their work thoroughly, without skipping steps or questions. Such a grading philosophy rewards students for trying even if they make mistakes, which is an inevitable part of L2 learning. My goals as a language teacher revolve around language acquisition, not grades. I, therefore, have no qualms with assigning all students who complete their
work adequately throughout the semester an ‘A’, even though some may not be as proficient as others.

To help students develop a love for learning the L2 - a strong internal desire to invest a significant amount of time and energy (and even money) into their acquisition process - I believe in teaching the language through the target culture. This contributes to students' intercultural competence, which I will discuss in the following section.

The importance of intercultural competence

I aim to help my students gain an appreciation for other cultures as part of their language learning journey. I believe that intercultural competence is a vital component of SLA (Byram, 1997). As one begins to understand the culture associated with the TL, one begins to understand why the native people communicate as they do. This informs the learner’s speech, writing, and actions when utilizing the L2. Teaching enough L2 knowledge to ‘get around’ is not sufficient. The L2 educator must help students become interculturally competent speakers which in turn will result in a widened understanding of the world and, more importantly, the people that inhabit it.

Intrinsic motivation and intercultural competence - A multiliteracies approach

With hopes of influencing my students’ intrinsic motivation to learn the TL and fostering their intercultural competence, I use a multiliteracies approach where students learn both language and content from the first day of class to the last day of class (Byrnes, 2008). This means integrating real, authentic literature and materials into the
curriculum from the beginning and using this literature to help students learn to interpret and analyze information, not just recall it (Swaffar, 2006). It also means being willing to take the time to explicitly explain grammatical principles that appear in the texts used in class.

I accept literature in a broad sense, meaning any sort of visual (written words, images, videos), or aural (spoken words, music, etc.) text. Using authentic texts in the classroom can be challenging due to the time required to identify specific materials that suit the day’s learning objectives. However, when an authentic text of any sort can be utilized to further the goals for the day, students are able to continue to progress linguistically without neglecting their intercultural competence. This combination of language and content brings the target culture into the classroom in a more constant manner while still allowing the teacher to guide students through learning and practicing a new concept, be it grammatical, lexical, etc.

The consistent use of a multiliteracies approach in the classroom creates excellent opportunities to design group activities that allow students to acquire the L2 through interaction with others. These activities are carried out using pre-, while-, and post-reading/listening/viewing activities that help activate students’ background knowledge (Nassaji, 2007), guide them to focus on a particular grammatical/cultural concept, and help them create their own output in the TL.

During interactive activities, students change partners frequently allowing for more proficient students to work with less proficient students, thus providing important
scaffolding to the less advanced learners as well as opportunities for other-regulation (Vygotsky, 1978). The teacher and teaching assistant (if the class has one) participate in the activities, also changing partners frequently, providing scaffolding for the most proficient students in the class. This collaboration helps the students to accomplish more than they can on their own.

Additionally, as previously mentioned, the use of authentic, cultural resources in the classroom can strengthen students’ intrinsic motivation to learn the L2. Fueled by this motivation, students will be more likely to seek out other authentic cultural materials outside of their classwork and begin mediating their own learning process. I became aware of an example of this during spring semester, 2020. At the beginning of each class, I typically played a different Hispanic song, sometimes as part of the lesson, but usually just to expose students to additional cultural material in the TL. At the end of the semester, one of my students told me that one of her favorite parts of the class was these songs and that she had made a playlist of Hispanic songs to listen to on her own time. Her exposure to authentic cultural materials as part of the class led her to seek out and use authentic cultural materials outside of the classroom. This is exactly the kind of motivation I wish to foster within my students - that which leads them to seek opportunities to study, practice, and acquire the L2 frequently and on their own time. It is thus through the combination of using authentic language in context and helping students focus on acquisition rather than grades that I hope to influence students’ intrinsic motivation to continue learning the TL.
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TEACHING OBSERVATIONS

Introduction

When I started my first semester in the USU MSLT program I had no formal language teaching experience. As far as the classroom is concerned, I had only ever been on the student end. I had done many presentations throughout my undergraduate experience and even had opportunities to teach Spanish grammar principles to my peers on occasion, but I never had the opportunity to teach my own class.

In my first semester in the program, I only participated in classwork - no teaching. I was so nervous about the possibility of teaching a university Spanish course the following semester that I decided, of my own accord, to observe one of my peers teach his first-semester Spanish course. I did not know that in the future I would be asked to observe more teachers and reflect on these experiences through writing. I hoped that by observing a more experienced colleague I would be able to better understand how I, too, could one day teach language students.

Throughout my time in the MSLT program I have learned about theories of SLA and the teaching methodologies informed by those theories. As I have reflected on my own L2 learning process, certain methodologies and theories have risen to the surface as being the most vital to me. I favor a multiliteracies approach to language teaching that is grounded in SCT and emphasizes not only linguistic and communicative competence, but intercultural competence as well. In other words, I guide my students through collaborative, interactive social activities that are centered around authentic cultural materials in hopes of motivating them to seek further learning on their own. I will now
proceed to highlight the aspects that both support and do not support my teaching philosophy in the classroom observations I have done.

**Classroom observations**

In my very first teaching observation I noted a practice that I now use almost every day of class and has become part of my teaching philosophy. I observed a first-semester instructor of Spanish who arrived early to his classroom and played a song, entirely in Spanish, in the minutes leading up to the beginning of class. After class he explained that he does that to introduce students to ways that they can experience the TL outside of class. I believe that an essential aspect of language learning is intrinsic motivation - that is, students need to be sufficiently motivated so that they seek practice and learning opportunities outside of the classroom. In SCT terms, I hope to help students progress from other-regulation to self-regulation, where they will mediate their own learning process and progress more quickly. I have implemented the practice of playing a different song in Spanish (almost) every day of class with hopes of motivating students to seek authentic cultural material both for their study and enjoyment outside of class. I have received positive feedback from some students which has confirmed that this simple practice can contribute to students’ intrinsic motivation.

That first teacher I observed is not the only one who makes a point to arrive to class early in hopes of helping his students progress more quickly. I also observed a third-semester Spanish teacher who arrives early to increase the amount of interaction his students can participate in. As he sets up for class each day, this teacher converses with his students, in the TL, as they trickle into class. Not only does he provide essential scaffolding to these students through the conversations he has with them, but he gets to
know them on a deeper level. SCT views language acquisition as occurring in and through interaction. The extra interaction he has with his students prior to class provides them with additional opportunities for language acquisition. His getting to know them, including their hobbies and interests, allows for him to easily start subsequent conversations on other class days as well as provide scaffolding as he helps them learn to express themselves more fully in the L2. Through these conversations students’ intrinsic motivation can also increase as they have successful interactions with a more proficient speaker.

In an upper division Spanish course, I observed how the teacher used an authentic text to create opportunities for students to interact and think more deeply about the reading they had completed prior to attending class. Authentic texts are naturally replete with elements that accurately portray the culture (or a part of the culture) tied to the TL. In this case, the text was a novel written in Spanish. Utilizing the book brought culture into the classroom, and the teacher required students to design conversation questions around the weekly reading as part of a presentation done in partnerships. As a required part of the presentation, every student in the class used the conversation questions designed by the presenters to discuss the reading in pairs, changing partners frequently. Through these questions, each student had ample opportunity for culturally rich interaction in the L2, facilitating both their intercultural competence and their language acquisition. Although these activities may not have utilized pre-reading activities as I often do, elements of a multiliteracies approach were still present. For example, the discussions that the students participated in with their peers after having completed the
reading were similar to the types of while- and post-reading activities I employ in my classes.

In speaking with the instructor after class I learned that presentations like the one I observed occur once each week in a class that meets twice weekly. On the other class day, a separate presentation, or rather a discussion, takes place on a controversial topic (abortion for example). These discussions are again student-led and highly participatory. The teacher elects which topics will be discussed, intentionally choosing controversial ones to help students participate more genuinely. In addition to the two weekly presentations, the teacher also finds time to provide students with bits of explicit grammar instruction followed by opportunities to practice the previously learned principles. He finds ways to weave additional student-student and student-teacher interaction into these grammar lessons by asking them to work in pairs and guiding a whole-class discussion on the topic.

From this observation, and the subsequent conversation I had with the instructor, I learned that interaction can be made a part of nearly every aspect of a language class. I saw that explicit grammar instruction, SCT, and a multiliteracies approach can all be used in the same classroom and gained ideas of how these can even be combined into the same lesson. I saw that the use of real-world topics held the potential to positively influence students’ motivation to speak up and use the TL. I was inspired by the methods that the teacher used and left with aspirations to lead my classroom in a similar manner.

I also observed a first-semester Chinese class which stood in stark contrast to the Spanish class I observed. This class was largely carried out in lecture format, as opposed to the more student-centered formats of the Spanish classes. Although there were several
opportunities for students to interact and practice the concepts they had just learned, most of the class time was occupied with the teacher explaining new characters and phrases while the students took notes. Most of the instruction was also given in English, whereas in the lower-level Spanish classes, the TL was used upwards of 90% of the time (in the upper-level Spanish course the TL was used 100% of the time). I believe that the difference in approach between the Chinese and Spanish classes was due to Spanish having many cognates to English, making it easier to provide scaffolding to students that helps them understand and speak the L2 from day one. For a native speaker of English, the Chinese learning process is not as easily scaffolded and the students do not possess enough vocabulary to study and discuss texts through a multiliteracies approach in the same way that beginning learners of Spanish do.

The lecture approach combined with the high usage of English did not allow for as much scaffolding and interaction to occur. I did, however, note that the Chinese teacher introduced cultural background to some of the characters she taught. This provided the students with some useful insight to the connection between Chinese culture and the Chinese language.

**Conclusion**

I have benefitted much through classroom observations during my time in the USU MSLT program. I have been able to see how various teachers transform SLA theory into teaching methods, methods that I wish to implement in my own classroom. Through observing fellow teachers, both those who espouse the same pedagogical ideas that I do as well as those who do not, my vision has been expanded and I have found new ways to engage my students and guide them toward the coveted higher levels of L2 proficiency.
RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES
LITERACY AND CULTURE PAPER

One Continuous Curriculum:

Short Stories and a Multiliteracies Approach
PURPOSE AND REFLECTION

I originally wrote this paper in Dr. Sarah Gordon’s class on teaching with literature. In that class we learned methods of teaching L2 literature, not just as a subject in and of itself, but rather as a way of furthering student’s language proficiency. Dr. Gordon introduced me to the multiliteracies approach and types of activities that it often involves.

When I began writing this paper, the focus was on teaching the significance of soccer in Hispanic culture through short stories. As I revised and added to subsequent drafts, I realized that I felt passionately about teaching short stories, and other types of literature, through a multiliteracies approach and that I truly believed that this approach to teaching had the potential to help teachers create one continuous curriculum. I had observed the common, well-documented divide between lower-level and upper-level language courses in universities across the US and wanted to develop my opinion and perspective on potential solutions. I chose to forego the portion of the paper that specifically expounded the importance of soccer to Hispanic culture and opted to view culture from a more general perspective and through a multiliteracies lens. The result is a paper that puts forth one way to use a multiliteracies approach to create a seamless transition from the lower-level to the upper-level courses.

As I continued to explore this topic, I came to believe more deeply that developing a continuous, seamless curriculum was possible. Many ideas flooded my mind, and I became more and more convinced of the benefits of a multiliteracies approach. I hope that if I am ever given the opportunity to help bring about change in a university language program that I can help create a curriculum that does not lead to
discouragement for students when they enter their first upper-level language class, but instead prepares them to interact with higher language registers and literary texts.

For now, I will continue to implement a multiliteracies approach in my first- and second-semester Spanish courses by utilizing activities that revolve around authentic texts.
Introduction

L2 teachers are faced with many challenges in their efforts to guide students through the tough and long process that is SLA. Among these challenges are influencing students’ intrinsic motivation to learn the L2, effectively and consistently bringing culture into the classroom, and preparing lower-level students for the upper-level language curriculum (Allen, 2011; Byrnes, 2008; Kern, 2000; Menke & Paesani, 2018), with the ultimate goal of turning out highly proficient speakers of the TL. Acknowledging the nationwide trend in undergraduate L2 programs in the United States to focus mainly on linguistic aspects of the language in the first two years of study and abruptly change the focus to content, literature, and culture for the last two years, Byrnes (2008) called for a curriculum that includes both content from the beginning and language through the end. While the cultural benefits of an added focus on content (in other words, authentic texts that naturally carry culture with them (Moore, 1996)) in the lower levels of language learning and the linguistic benefits of an added focus on language in the upper levels of language learning may be obvious, the more difficult question is how to accomplish this.

Allen and Paesani (2010) explain that such a call for merging language and content in both the lower-level and upper-level L2 programs was highlighted by the 2007 MLA report which advocated for the abolishment of the two-tiered system. They explain that one of the issues with this traditional divide in undergraduate L2 programs is that literacy, and thus the study of culture, is the primary focus of the upper-level programs whereas the lower-level programs tend to focus on basic communicative skills. Literacy is defined as “the use of socially-, historically-, and culturally-situated practices of creating and interpreting meaning through texts” (Kern, 2000, p. 16). The inherent
problem with the traditional system is that both skill sets, the cultural and the linguistic, take time to develop. Allen and Paesani (2010) also point out that while the 2007 MLA report called for a change in curriculum, it “failed to address how L2 departments might bring about the large-scale changes necessary to develop integrated, text-based curricula or which pedagogical approaches might facilitate implementing such curricula” (p. 120). Their paper then argues that a “pedagogy of multiliteracies” (p. 121), defined as “a theoretical approach reflecting ideological, socially oriented models of literacy” (Menke & Paesani, 2018, p. 36), is one approach that may provide L2 educators with answers as to how to bridge the divide.

Our understanding of the term literature within the multiliteracies framework need not be limited to written texts. Literature can mean nearly anything including children’s books, poems, films, short stories, novels, television programs, images, etc. (Omaggio-Haddley, 2001). Researchers have even found that a focus on visual literacy through memes can positively influence L2 learners’ listening skills (Romero & Bobkina, 2017). In this paper I will focus specifically on the benefits that the short story genre affords to language learners when applied through a multiliteracies framework. Well-implemented short stories have the potential to bridge the language-content divide at all levels of instruction while at the same time motivating students to continue studying L2 both inside and outside of the classroom.

I will now proceed by briefly explaining the importance of culture in SLA, followed by a short overview of the benefits of using literature in general. I will show that the short story has unique characteristics that make it especially apt for language teaching and learning. A discussion on teaching culture and literacies through the
multiliteracies approach will then ensue. Finally, I will show that short stories may be used, at all levels of university L2 instruction, to implement said approach to the elimination of the “language-content divide” (Menke & Paesani, 2018, p. 34).

**Culture in SLA**

L2 learning has long been pursued as a means of bridging gaps, eliminating barriers, and connecting the many different peoples of the earth. SLA is a multifaceted, arduous process - 600 hours or more being required for those whose L1 is English to learn a Romance language, while 1,300 hours or more are needed for languages such as Russian and Chinese (Blake, 2013). One of the many facets of language learning is the development of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 2013). But before we may come to understand the meaning of intercultural competence, we must first determine what culture is. Culture has been defined in many ways by many people. For the purpose of this paper, I adopt the following definition:

> Culture is the evolving way of life of a group of persons, consisting of a shared set of practices associated with a shared set of products, based upon a shared set of perspectives of the world, and set within specific social contexts. (Moran, 2001, p. 24)

These cultural products, practices, and perspectives include the “thoughts, communications, languages . . . beliefs, values . . . manners of interacting and roles, relationships and expected behaviors” of a social group (National Center for Cultural Competence).

Kramsch (2013) explains Byram and Zarate’s (1997) model of intercultural competence as being made up of five capacities: 1. “knowledge of self and other; of
interaction; individual and societal”, 2. “skills to discover and/or interact”, 3. “skills to interpret and relate”, 4. “critical cultural awareness, political education”, and 5. “attitudes: relativizing self, valuing others” (pp. 69-70). It is part of our job as L2 teachers to ensure that we help our students develop these five capacities to become intercultural speakers, that is, mediators “between cultures, able to negotiate in both, but possessing individual identity that is flexible in its ability to combine aspects of multiple cultures in performance” (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 18).

The intercultural abilities that allow a proficient speaker to navigate effectively within each of two distinct cultures have also been referred to as a cultural “third place” (Kramsch, 2009, p. 238). This term takes the language learner’s first cultural place (their native culture) and their second cultural place (the culture of their L2) and combines them into a sort of third area that is neither the first nor the second, but rather a mutually influencing, ever-changing combination of the two (Kramsch, 2009). This means that the exposure to the new culture and language that the L2 learner receives changes them forever. They retain many aspects of their identity that are related to their native language and culture and begin developing an identity related to their L2 and culture. Their understanding of the world and its people expands as they begin to discover cultural products and practices that are new to them and to understand the underlying cultural perspectives.

**Literature in SLA**

An important resource that can be a great aid to L2 students is literature. Students who read more books in their chosen language of study see more rapid improvement in all areas of language, even in speaking (Parkinson & Thomas, 2000).
One reason that literature is a great resource for teaching L2 is that it can provide students with authentic input, which is necessary to gain not only a linguistic grasp of language but a cultural one as well. Polio and Zyzik (2009) state that authentic texts are culturally and contextually accurate. Moore (1996) goes even further in claiming that authentic texts are principal sources of language and culture. Khatib and Seyyedrezaei (2017) argue that literature “can provide the most authentic materials” (p. 191) while Mateos Blanco (2014) adds that literature provides opportunities for students to access the TL in real ways. The meaning of ‘real’ as employed here by Mateos Blanco is meant to contrast with literature written for the purposes of teaching and learning the TL (most often textbooks, especially those filled with extensive grammar exercises). Literature written for the purpose of L2 teaching and learning is oftentimes devoid of any context, especially cultural context. Examples and grammatical exercises are presented in the form of isolated sentences that have no relation to those which precede or follow them.

Authentic texts created by and for proficient speakers of the TL often reflect the two aspects of culture that the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) (1996) identifies in its world-readiness standards: practices and products. Consider, for example, the effect Miguel Cervantes’ classic Don Quixote has had not only on Spanish culture but Hispanic American culture as well. Drawings, sculptures, and other renditions of Don Quixote and his nemesis, the windmill, may be found in homes of everyday people across the Spanish-speaking world. The student of Spanish who studies this great work of literature gains, what is to him or her, a new perspective on a vital product of Hispanic culture.
Authentic materials that are used for language learning purposes carry with them “valuable cultural information” (Khatib & Seyyedrezai, 2017, 191). Mateos Blanco (2014) explains that studying literature can lead to pragmatic gains which in turn are tied to cultural and linguistic rituals. These rituals can include interactions such as greetings, leave-takings, making purchases, apologizing, asking to borrow something, and many other important everyday interactions. When students learn the TL only through inauthentic sources, they may not always learn how these rituals are performed in the target culture. This lack of understanding can lead learners to use the TL in culturally inappropriate ways with potential to result in offending others and taking offense (Checketts, 2019; Pinto, 2008).

Additional benefits that may be derived from L2 learner’s study of authentic texts are related to language skill development. As students study literature and work through well-planned, teacher-guided activities surrounding the chosen texts (more on these activities in the ‘short stories’ section), specific skills may be targeted such as reading, writing, speaking, listening and, again, intercultural competence. Literature may be well applied to the development of these skills (Khatib & Seyyedrezai, 2017). In addition, using literature in the L2 classroom helps students integrate linguistic, discursive, and intercultural skills (Ordoñez Chacon, 2017).

**Short Stories in SLA**

As previously stated, all literature may be useful to the L2 learner, however the genre of short stories lends itself particularly well to SLA. Ghasemi and Hajizadeh (2011) identify four main reasons why this is true: 1. short stories often leave much unsaid, allowing the reader to draw their own conclusions and read between the lines. 2. The
“brevity, modernity, and variety” of the short story “make it appealing and interesting to language learners” (p. 69). 3. The short story provides unique opportunities for initiating the learners’ background knowledge. 4. The fact that students can more easily accomplish the reading of the entire story (as compared to reading a novel) provides them with a sense of accomplishment, which, in turn, can motivate them to continue studying the TL. I will now review the most salient characteristics of short stories and proceed by showing how these characteristics may be utilized to further L2 students’ language abilities.

**Brevity and ambiguity**

Although there is no consensus on the length requirements for short stories, there are several common aspects agreed upon in the literature. Short stories are fictional and narrative (Ordoñez Chacon, 2017; Mateos Blanco, 2014). They are also ambiguous (Ghasemi & Hajizadeh, 2009) and replete with ellipsis (Villegas-Paredes, 2018), meaning that they eliminate the use of non-necessary language.

Short stories provide students with ideal opportunities to participate in negotiation of meaning through the introduction of new sociocultural elements of the target language (Villegas-Paredes, 2018) and through their inherent ambiguity (Ghasemi & Hajizadeh, 2011). This ambiguity forces the students to consider more deeply the events that take place in the story, striving to fill in gaps left by the author and thus drawing their own conclusions. Each student brings to the class a unique set of experiences and perspectives that can be applied to the interpretation of each short story (Villegas-Paredes, 2018). Applying the students’ unique perspectives to interpretation is especially useful for L2 acquisition given that it causes the learners to interact with the text – they gain vocabulary as they look up definitions of key words and phrases needed to understand the
plot, they develop reading strategies that can be used in the future, and they negotiate meaning (Long, 1996) as they engage with other students (Ghasemi & Hajizadeh, 2011) and the instructor). This process of analyzing authentic literature naturally includes learning about culture (Khatib & Seyyedrezaei, 2017), as the students must come to understand not only the definitions of the actual words on the page, but more importantly, what those words mean in the context of the culture in which they were intended to be read.

The ambiguous short story leaves the reader with unanswered questions that the teacher can use to spark discussion, thus not only using the text to provide students with authentic input, but also allowing the students to create their own output. These discussions, as mentioned above, necessarily include negotiation of meaning as students discuss the words they do not understand and have the chance to express their thoughts, ideas, perceptions, interpretations, understandings, and questions – all of which can foster even further discussion of the text, as well as specific linguistic or grammatical aspects therein found. Rich culturally situated interactions such as these also result in language acquisition through scaffolding and opportunities for other-regulation (Vygotsky, 1978).. Less advanced students’ language abilities are improved through interaction with more advanced learners, while the more advanced learners receive scaffolding and other regulation from the teacher and the teaching assistant (if the class has one).

The brevity of the short story attracts the attention of students since it does not feel as daunting to read as a novel and it does not take much time to read (Villegas-Paredes, 2018). This same brevity requires the authors of these texts to express themselves quickly and develop the plot from beginning to end in just a few pages,
engaging the reader in a more gripping experience than a multi-hundred-page novel. Students can read many short stories, gleaning meaning, and creating their own interpretations in a relatively short amount of time.

*Initiating background knowledge*

One advantage of using short stories is that “some pre-reading activities which can be nicely applied to the short story (such as the discussion of the topic and narrative structure) are very useful in” activating students’ background knowledge (Ghasemi & Hjizadeh, 2011, p. 70). Teachers can ask students a variety of questions before reading the story to engage their background knowledge. For example, students can be asked about personal experiences like those the characters in the story had, they can be asked to share with the class knowledge they have regarding the topic of the story or the narrative structure, and a myriad of other possible inquiries. These pre-reading discussions can catch the students’ interest before reading ever takes place and help guide them through a text which may be difficult to understand. Pre-reading activities may also provide students with needed insights into the culture in which the texts were written. Then, while reading the story, they can more efficiently come to understand those cultural aspects.

*Sense of accomplishment/motivation*

Students feel a sense of accomplishment when they finish reading an entire text (Ghasemi & Hjizadeh, 2011). For many, reading a full-length novel in a L2 may appear too large a task, especially at the early stages of language learning. The short story allows readers to feel a sense of achievement upon completing the reading of an entire literary text. In addition, students can also feel a sense of accomplishment when they have not only read the whole story but understood it. Whether this understanding comes to the
individual during their own study and analysis of the text or through interaction with their peers, it is both exciting and motivating. Feeling successful with one short story will lead students to desire to read more and perhaps even inspire them to delve into other genres and forms of literature. Students can become more motivated to learn the L2 and begin to move from a reliance on others to regulate their learning (i.e., peers and the teacher) to regulating their own learning process (Vygotsky, 1978) outside of class.

A multiliteracies approach

As previously explained, a multiliteracies pedagogy can provide a way to bridge the divide between literature, content, and culture (Byrnes, 2008) in the upper-level undergraduate L2 courses and the linguistic and communicative focus in the lower-level courses (Allen and Paesani, 2010). This approach emphasizes bringing content, and thus culture, into the classroom as early as the first semester of instruction through authentic texts (Allen & Paesani, 2010). This can be done through implementation of seven principles of literacy conceived by Kern (2000). These seven principles, which have been integrated into the current understanding of multiliteracies pedagogy (see Allen, 2011; Menke & Paesani, 2018), are: language use, cultural knowledge, conventions, interpretation, collaboration, problem solving, and reflection (see Kern, 2000, for further elaboration on each principle). Menke and Paesani (2018) outline the three dimensions of Kern (2000)’s definition of literacy:

(1) the linguistic dimension involves understanding language forms and conventions and how they are used to convey meaning; (2) the cognitive dimension includes the ability to make inferences, think critically, and reflect on
one’s learning; and (3) the sociocultural dimension entails awareness of the
socially and culturally situated nature of language and communication. (p. 36)

Menke and Paesani (2018) explain that this understanding of literacy can be put
into practice via a framework known as the knowledge processes (KP) framework
(Kelantzis, Cope, Chan, & Dalley-Trim, 2016). The KP framework delineates four ways
of knowing: experiencing, which is subdivided into experiencing the known and
experiencing the unknown; conceptualizing, which is broken into conceptualizing by
naming and conceptualizing by theory; analyzing, which consists of analyzing
functionality and analyzing critically; and applying, which is subdivided into applying
appropriately and applying creatively (Kelantzis, Cope, Chan, & Dalley-Trim, 2016).
This framework is designed to provide “teachers and learners with more control over
their instructional choices and their learning outcomes” (p. 74).

The four learning processes are not sequential and are not necessarily intended to
be used in equal portions. Rather they require that each teacher determine which process
or processes will further their students’ learning outcomes (Kelantzis, Cope, Chan, &
Dalley-Trim, 2016) and that they plan activities and assignments accordingly. Teachers
may utilize this framework to assist them in their efforts to plan activities that implement
one or more of these learning processes and contribute toward achieving their students’
learning outcomes.

Menke and Paesani (2018) argue that the KP framework can be used to bridge the
language-content divide effectively: “multiliteracies pedagogy that engages learners in all
four knowledge processes creates opportunities to explore the human experience through
different cultural lenses and to understand the socially situated nature of language” (p. 45). I will now show how this can be done using short stories.

**Implementing a multiliteracies approach through the use of short stories**

Mckay (2016) summarizes several approaches (taken from Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009; Kern, 2000; Maxim, 2006; Swaffar & Arens, 2005) that may be utilized to help students construct meaning from texts. I will use the terms pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading, taken from Hedgcock and Ferris (2009), to refer to the various types of activities that may be implemented when teaching with a text. I will call all activities that take place before reading a text and that are intended to activate background knowledge pre-reading activities; I will call all activities performed while reading or searching through text while-reading activities; and I will call all activities that take place following the reading of a text and that are intended to help learners produce their own texts post-reading activities.

Pre-reading activities of many sorts may be utilized to guide students through the KP of experiencing the known. This can easily be done prior to reading a short story by asking questions that activate students’ background knowledge relating to the topic at hand. Students may also be asked to make predictions (Mckay, 2016) of what the short story will be about based on the title. This activity prepares them for the KP of experiencing the new, which is explained in the ‘placemat’ tool as “introducing learners to new experiences,” including texts (Kalantzis et al., 2016, p. 76).

During the while-reading phase, students are exposed to a text that they have never read before. This exposure is one form of participating in experiencing the new. To maximize understanding during the while-reading phase, Mckay (2016) suggests
requiring multiple readings of the text. The goal of the first reading is simply to understand the text, to get an overarching idea of the story. Further readings can then narrow in on whichever knowledge processes and linguistic or cultural elements the teacher deems useful. Mckay (2016) explains that while-reading activities can focus on several elements related to the TL “vocabulary, syntax, or style”, the development of reading strategies, and the analysis of “the rhetorical organization of the text and how it contributes to an author’s purpose and a reader’s comprehension” (p. 150). This type of engagement with the short story and its meaning can be approached through the lens of the knowledge process of analyzing. Students can “analyze critically” (Kalantzis et al., 2016, 76) as they seek to uncover the intended meaning conveyed through the author’s intentional selection of specific lexicon. They can “analyze functionally” (Kalantzis et al., 2016, p. 76) as they pick apart the structure of the story and then determine how the author’s choice of grammatical structures convey meaning. Furthermore, readers can engage in another knowledge process by “identifying new concepts/idea/themes. . . and rules” (“conceptualizing by naming”) (Kalantzis et al., 2016, p. 76) and by “making sense of how they contribute to the whole” (“conceptualizing with theory”) (p. 76), in other words, the overall meaning of the text.

Finally, the post-reading activities provide the students with one last opportunity to learn through the final knowledge process in Kalantzis et al. (2016)’s framework, namely applying. Post-reading activities that invite students to apply what they have learned can range in nature just as much as the while-reading activities can. Students can “establish reading-writing connections” (Mckay, 2016, p. 150) by writing an alternate ending to the story or writing their own short story using vocabulary, themes, or
grammatical structures noticed and discussed during the while-reading activities. Teachers can initiate group or whole-class discussions surrounding the cultural products, practices, and perspectives illustrated within the text, comparing the newly gained perspectives to those of the students’ native culture(s) (ACTFL, 1996) and thus helping learners’ construct their own unique third cultural place (Kramsch, 2009, 2013). Then, when students find themselves needing to use the language outside of class, they will be able to continue to apply the new knowledge in everyday conversations or while engaging with additional texts.

Implementing various KPs in a lesson designed around a short story implements a multiliteracies approach by helping students go beyond the words of the text and become literate in more ways than the ability to read words alone. This approach can narrow the divide between the linguistic aspects of FLs that are often taught in isolation at the lower levels of instruction and the content/culture (usually taught through literature) taught in the upper levels (Allen & Paesani, 2010; Byrnes, 2008; MLA, 2007). Such a multiliteracies approach can engage students with content and culture through literature from their first semester of study. This can be accomplished early on by using short stories that are only one or two sentences long (Ordoñez Chacon, 2017). David Lagmanovich (2006) has compiled a corpus of such stories in Spanish that is easily accessible to all teachers with an internet connection.

Mckay (2016) explains that students sometimes become frustrated when they advance to upper-level classes and are asked to analyze literature. However, if they had been engaged with a multiliteracies approach from the beginning of their language program, students would already be equipped with the skills that will allow them to
handle longer and more complex texts in the upper levels. Implementing the multiliteracies approach through the KP framework also provides a way to continue to focus on grammar, syntax, and lexicon at the higher levels of instruction without neglecting culture. The result is a continuous curriculum that does not switch focus halfway through.

**Conclusion**

This paper has discussed the stark contrast prevalent in many university-level L2 programs between the pedagogical focus of the upper and lower-level classes. Typically, lower-level classes focus on linguistic aspects such as grammar and lexicon, devoid of any authentic context and culture. Upper-level courses tend to ignore students’ still developing linguistic abilities and require them to interpret and analyze high-register literary texts to which they have never been exposed. This contrast leads to students who are “unprepared for the intellectually challenging content they will face at more advanced levels” and lack “adequate opportunities to develop advanced language functions” (Menke & Paesani, 2018, p. 34). I proposed one remedy to this problem in the implementation of short stories of varying lengths at all levels of instruction.

I began by reviewing the cruciality of culture to SLA, referencing Byram (1997)’s model of intercultural competence as well as Kramsch (2009, 2013)’s construct of the third cultural place. I then emphasized the utility of all types of literature in language teaching and learning followed by a discussion on the unique characteristics of the short story that can be easily and effectively applied to engage students in the language learning process. I added my voice to the argument that a multiliteracies approach implemented through the KP framework can narrow the gap between upper and lower
divisions. Finally, I showed that short stories are an ideal type of literature for implementing this approach and that by introducing students to this literary genre in the early levels of instruction, our L2 programs will take another step forward in eliminating the “language-literature divide” (Allen, 2011, p. 101).
LANGUAGE PAPER

Grades, Motivation, and Language Acquisition
PURPOSE AND REFLECTION

This paper was written in Dr. Abdulkafi Albirdi’s research in SLA course. In that course, we were required to write a research proposal on a topic of our choosing, pertaining to SLA and teaching. Fueled by my disdain for any negative experiences with grades, I chose to propose a research agenda that investigates whether there exists a link between university L2 course grades and student’s proficiency gains. My perspective on grades stemmed from my own experiences with them as an undergraduate student of Spanish.

As I began to delve into this topic, I was inspired by another professor whose grading system made more sense to me than the traditional method. I asked Dr. Karin DeJonge-Kannan about her grading philosophy and she shared with me some of the sources that I cite in this paper, as well as countless blog posts from teachers and researchers who advocate eliminating grades from the classroom at all levels. As I began to familiarize myself with the literature, I found that grades were detrimental to learning because of their effects on motivation. This led me to read up on the importance of motivation, and more specifically, intrinsic motivation in L2 learning. I learned about the importance of language learner’s motivation and tied that to course and assignment grades in our L2 classes.

As I wrote the various drafts of this proposal, I learned more about alternative grading methods. This added knowledge has led me to grade my students differently than my professors typically grade me. I give my students full credit for all work that they complete thoroughly (I cannot understand why one would punish a language learner for making a lexical, grammatical, or syntactical mistake when proficient speakers still make
mistakes frequently). My goal is that students feel less pressure to focus on putting forth the minimum effort to get their desired grade, resulting more freedom to pursue learning the language in ways that are meaningful and enjoyable to them.
Abstract

While some studies have shown that grades hurt students’ intrinsic motivation for learning in general (Schinske & Tanner, 2014), and that grades are not an accurate predictor of proficiency in the L2 classroom (A. Brown, 2013), research has not been conducted on the effects that grades have on intrinsic motivation in the L2 classroom nor on the effect they have on language acquisition. This study will look at the effects that grades have on L2 students’ integrative motivation (see below) and language acquisition. Sampling will include two second-semester, university classes of Spanish taught by the same instructor. One class will use a traditional grading system and the other will use a pass/fail system. Test scores will be compared to determine which system yields higher gains in acquisition. Students will also participate in a survey to discover whether the pass/fail system led them to have a greater level of integrative motivation than the other class. If the results of the study show that grades hurt L2 students’ integrative motivation and language acquisition gains, then the findings would imply the need to abandon grades within the realm of L2 teaching.

Introduction

As an undergraduate student of Spanish, I remember feeling frustrated because of the hindrance that I felt grades created in my learning process. I had a genuine desire to learn and internalize much of the material being presented in my classes but felt that the emphasis placed on grades got in the way. I prioritized grades over actual learning and language acquisition because I believed that I would need to achieve a certain grade point average (GPA) to get accepted into graduate school. During the moments that I most wanted to delve deeper into a topic that interested me, I found myself pulled away by the
need to work on another assignment, one that would result in a grade. This most often led me to put forth only the minimal effort that I felt was required of me to get the grades I felt I needed, and it prevented me from putting more genuine effort into the topics that I found to be the most pertinent to my education.

Later, when I began teaching a first-semester Spanish course for the first time as a graduate student, I worried that my students’ obsession with grades would hinder their overall language acquisition. I adjusted my grading philosophy and students thanked me for relieving pressure on their grades, which I did in hopes to help them focus more on learning the language.

These experiences have piqued my interest in the link between grades in the L2, classroom and overall language acquisition as well as the influence that these grades have on students’ motivation for learning the L2. As I have familiarized myself with the topics of grades and motivation, I have learned of the important role that intrinsic motivation plays in learning in general and that grades, an extrinsic motivator, tend to weaken this type of motivation (Schinske & Tanner, 2014). The literature on L2 teaching also makes it clear that integrative motivation (an orientation of motivation rather than an additional type of motivation; see literature review) is quite possibly the “most important factor” in SLA (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005, p. 19).

The research literature abounds with findings on the effect of grades on student motivation to learn in general as well as the importance of intrinsic motivation and an integrative approach in language learning. However, there is no research on the effect of grades on students’ integrative motivation in the L2 classroom and on students’ SLA. The present study, exploratory in nature, seeks to fill that gap by investigating the effects of
grades on students’ integrative motivation and SLA in the L2 classroom. What follows is a review of the literature on motivation in learning, motivation in SLA, and the effects of grades on student motivation in general.

**Literature Review**

*Motivation*

Motivation has been defined as “an internal state that arouses learners, steers them in particular directions, and keeps them engaged in certain activities” (Lei, 2010, p. 153). In regard to motivation, Dörnyei explains that it is “one of the most common terms [language] teachers and students use to explain what causes success or failure in learning” (2009, p. 16). On the outset, this explanation sounds simple and obvious: if someone wants to learn, then they will put in the necessary effort and learning will be the outcome. However, the assumption would follow that, if a student has no interest in learning about a given topic, then they will not do so. Research in education and learning in general as well as research specific to the field of language learning has shown that the link between motivation and learning is not quite that simple (see Dörnyei, 2009; Palmer, 2019). Instead, findings in these areas of inquiry have led to the bifurcation of the construct of motivation into two types, one of which constitutes a better predictor for learning (see H. Brown, 2000; Kohn, 2011; Nicholson, 2013; Noels, 2009; Palmer, 2019). The type of motivation that is most likely to push students to pursue learning can then be divided into an additional two motivational orientations, with one resulting in a greater likelihood of learning (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005). What follows is a review of the literature regarding the two types of motivation and which motivational orientation leads students to learn more.
The two general categories of motivation described in the research literature are extrinsic motivation (also called external motivation) and intrinsic motivation (also called internal motivation), in addition to the lack of motivation (Noels, 2009). Extrinsic motivation is understood as coming from factors outside of the learner, such as external rewards, punishments, grades, or praise (H. Brown, 2000; Kohn, 2011; Nicholson, 2013; Palmer, 2019). Noels (2009) adds that this type of motivation “involves any sort of regulation that is external to the enjoyment of the activity itself” (p. 297). Higher education is replete with external motivators such as grades and GPA, competition among students, and praise from the instructor and the institution. These forms of external motivators seem to align with the belief that “students can be motivated to learn almost anything if promised a sufficiently attractive external reward” (Lei, 2013, p. 156-158).

Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is understood to exist within the learners themselves and includes their passion for learning (Palmer, 2019), desire to learn with “no apparent reward except the activity itself” (H. Brown, 2000, p.326; see also Kohn, 2011) and the enjoyment they feel by participating in the task and advancing their knowledge and skills (Noels, 2009). Intrinsic motivation within the realms of higher education is tied more to students’ interest in the subject matter being taught (Lei, 2013) rather than the rewards that they may receive for regurgitating information correctly on a test. Intrinsically motivated students may seek to learn even when their efforts are not recognized by others and their progress is not rewarded. The joy of understanding a topic more deeply or developing their skills more fully is enough of a reward in and of itself.
Palmer (2019) posits that intrinsic motivation best fosters learning, while extrinsic motivation “often weakens student interest in the content” (p. 37). He explains that intrinsically motivated students are typically deeper learners than their extrinsically motivated counterparts. Extrinsic motivation has been found to inhibit intrinsic motivation for learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Kohn, 2011). Lei (2013) adds that “intrinsic motivation is positively correlated with learning, achievement, perception of competence and self-efficacy, and negatively correlated with anxiety, depression, and frustration” (p. 154). He explains that these benefits tend to result in additional motivation to learn. This means that the intrinsically motivated student’s efforts have the potential to create a self-feeding cycle that continues to propel them to deeper levels of learning. Helping students come to participate in this never-ending learning cycle is, according to Csikszentmihalyi (2014), at the heart of the purpose of higher education. He claims that the success of higher education lies not within knowledge transfer, but rather in motivating our students to seek learning on their own.

In addition to the two overarching types of motivation, a dichotomy of motivational orientations that fit within the construct of intrinsic motivation was proposed by Gardner and Lambert (1972) and has been applied in the field of SLA. The two motivational orientations recognized by these researchers were named integrative motivation and instrumental motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Dörnyei (2009) explains that integrative motivation has to do with “the desire to learn an L2 of a valued community so that one can communicate with members of the community and sometimes even become like them” (p. 16), while Nicholson (2013) adds that the reasons behind this type of motivation also include an “interest in foreign languages” and “attitudes toward
the target language community” (p. 277). H. Brown (2000) elaborates further by explaining that this orientation includes the desire to integrate oneself “into the culture of the L2 group and become involved in social interchange in that group” (p. 162). Thus, integrative motivation, although potentially influenced by some external factors, comes mainly from within the individual.

Instrumental orientation “deals with the practical advantages of learning an L2” (Nicholson, 2013, p. 278) and has to do with the “concrete benefits that language proficiency might bring about” (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 16). It stems from “instrumental goals: furthering a career, reading technical material, translation, and so forth” (H. Brown, 2000, p. 162). This orientation does not mean that learners desire to form part of a culture group but rather that they desire to learn the language for “pragmatic gains” (Nicholson, 2013, p. 278), such as “career opportunities” or an “increased salary” (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 16). Though starkly different from an integrative orientation, instrumental motivation still falls within the realm of intrinsic motivation due to its stemming from internal desires to achieve something and not from external enticements.

Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) postulate that integrative motivation, an orientation within intrinsic motivation, “appears to be the most important factor” in regard to L2 acquisition (p. 19). This means that if we as L2 educators want to help our students learn as thoroughly as possible, then we must not only eliminate all the external motivators that we can, but also strive to foster an integrative approach within the hearts of our students. This is not to say that those whose language-learning motives are based on factors other than TL community integration will not or cannot learn the language. It simply means “that learners ranking high on integrative orientation work harder and learn faster than
those who are low on integrative orientation” (Lui, 2007, p. 127). If we can influence students in such a way that their intrinsic motivation increases, then we will be able to help them learn the language faster than they otherwise would have.

**Motivating students**

When teachers want to motivate their students to learn more or perform better, they typically utilize external motivators such as points and grades. External motivators provide clear rewards and punishments and are easy to impose. While recognizing their many drawbacks, Lei (2013) even argues that extrinsic rewards work more quickly than intrinsic ones. These factors make extrinsic motivators a seemingly obvious choice, even for those teachers who genuinely want to help their students internalize the subject matter.

Less obvious, however, are the ways in which educators can influence students’ intrinsic motivation. Some may wonder if it is even possible for someone or something outside the individual to influence a drive that, by definition, comes from within. Csikszentmihalyi (2014) argues that the ability of a teacher to influence students’ intrinsic motivation pertains to the teacher’s outlook on learning. He claims that when students enjoy learning, they will be intrinsically motivated to continue learning and that teachers can help students to enjoy learning simply by enjoying learning themselves. It becomes more about becoming a model of learning for the students, showing them by one’s attitude and enthusiasm that the reward for learning can be the joy of learning itself, not just the good grades, better jobs, or teacher’s praise.

Furrer et al. (2014) argue that the nature of the teacher’s relationship with the students can have an effect on their intrinsic motivation. Teachers who foster positive
relationships with their students and help them to create positive relationships with their peers will influence their students’ intrinsic motivation in positive ways. Admittedly this can be more difficult at the postsecondary level than the primary and secondary levels of education due to larger class sizes. Classes so large that they must be housed in auditoriums or the like make it nearly impossible for professors to even meet, much less get to know, each of their students. Although variables like this may be outside of professors’ control, they can still inspire their students to want to learn by trusting them and believing that they can reach their goals (Nicholson, 2013). Teachers that trust their students enough to grant them as much autonomy as possible within the course curriculum put the students’ learning into their own hands which, in turn, increases intrinsic motivation (Furrer et al., 2014; Nicholson, 2013). Clearly, many decisions for the course must be made by the professor but allowing students to make choices regarding which topics to focus on (in writing assignments, class discussions, etc.) boosts their interest and results in a greater likelihood for self-propelled learning.

Course materials can also affect students’ intrinsic motivation. Nicholson (2013) states that “by selecting materials and activities relevant to students’ interests and needs, teachers can go a long way in shaping students’ attitudes towards L2 learning” (p. 281). Csikszentmihalyi (2014) explains the importance of matching the challenges students are presented with to the skills that they possess. “When challenges overwhelm skills, we feel anxious; when skills outweigh challenges, we feel bored” (p. 182). The key is to help students take on tasks that are challenging, but within their ability to complete. Teachers can help students set intrinsic goals such as learning to talk about a topic they enjoy as opposed to extrinsic ones like achieving a good grade in the class (Lei, 2013). In a L2
class where each student possesses varying levels of proficiency, allowing students the autonomy to set their own goals and pursue their own interests with the language becomes essential in order to create an environment where challenges and skills align for each learner.

Grades

Extensive research has been conducted on the effects that grades have on learning (see A. Brown 2013; Kohn, 2011; Schinske & Tanner, 2014; Palmer, 2019). While I recognize that some may view grades as a worthwhile measure of students’ progress and perhaps even a means through which they can maintain fairness, the literature is replete with reasons to abolish them. The following essential findings in regard to the effects of grades have been shown widely in the research literature, and have gone without contradiction for decades (Kohn, 2011): “grades tend to diminish students’ interest in whatever they’re learning” and “grades create a preference for the easiest possible task” (Kohn, 2011,p. 144). These findings should come as no surprise to those that are familiar with the effects that extrinsic goals in general have on learning and student motivation. Clearly, if our students have diminished interest in learning the language, seek constantly for the path of least resistance, and experience a reduction in the quality of their thinking as a result of our assigning grades to their learning experience, then their acquisition of the language is likely to be significantly hindered. Grading our students’ performance in our classes may in fact be creating a significant obstacle that they must overcome to learn the L2.

Additionally, grades rarely (if ever) recognize important attributes and characteristics that help people succeed in life such as “effort, character, grit, optimism,
determination, diligence, collaboration, empathy, or self-control” and instead “reward those students who do well on tests and exams” (Palmer, 2019, p. 36). The ability to cram for a test in order to get a good grade does not transfer well into the workforce or any other part of life where knowledge, understanding, perseverance, and problem-solving are needed on a regular basis. Grades lead learners to focus on fleeting rewards that hold no real value and are not depictions of any specific attributes. Grades have the potential to lessen intrinsic motivation and replace it with extrinsic motivation (Schinske & Tanner, 2014).

Investigating the relationship between course grades and external measures of students’ L2 ability, A. Brown (2013) found that this relationship “is rather unpredictable” (p. 85). However, he did recognize that “this exploratory study and its preliminary data are indeed only a first step toward empirically examining the relationship between course grades and external measures of language ability” (p. 85), thus acknowledging the need for further studies on the topic. Although the overall effect of grades on learning has been studied much, the effect of grades on integrative motivation in the L2 classroom has not been studied. In light of these two observations, and based on the well-established premise that teachers can influence students’ intrinsic motivation to learn, the present study seeks to further investigate the effects of grading on L2 learning by answering the following research questions:

1. Does a pass/fail grading system in place of a letter-grade system foster students’ integrative motivation in the L2 classroom?

2. Does use of a pass/fail grading system result in greater gains in acquisition among second-semester L2 students than use of a letter-grading system?
Methodology

The target population of this study is second-semester, L2 learners of Spanish in the university setting, whose L1 is English. The sample will be two entire classes, taught by the same instructor during the same semester. I chose this sample because it is the most easily accessible to me. The instructor will be the same for each class to ensure maximum similarity between the two classes’ experiences. The only difference between the classes will be the grading scheme. Students from one class will form the experimental group and students from the other class will form the control group. The experimental group will use a pass/fail grading system where students are either given full credit for completing each assignment or no credit at all. This aims to eliminate the demotivating effects that grades, an extrinsic motivator, have on L2 students. I hypothesize that by removing the pressure of grades in this way, students’ will feel that they are better able to focus on their own personal reasons for learning the L2, improving integrative motivation, and fostering more acquisition of the L2.

The control group will use a typical letter-grade system (A, B, C, D, and F). These students will receive a certain number of ‘points’ that correspond to the total number of questions answered correctly on each assignment and project. Points will also be awarded for class attendance for 50 minutes per day, 3 days per week. Total points achieved on all assignments will then be divided by points possible to determine an overall percentage for the course that will be converted to a letter grade. The highest grade, A, will be awarded to those whose overall percentage in the class is 93 or higher. Lower grades will be assigned based on the following grading scale: 92.99% - 90% = A-, 89.99% - 87% = B+, 86.99% - 83% = B, 82.99% - 80% = B-, 79.99% - 77% = C+, 76.99% - 73% = C,
72.99% - 70% = C-, 69.99% - 67% = D+, 66.99% - 60% = D, 59.99% and below = F.

This system is a traditional grading system in the United States, one that students are familiar with and one that, according to the research, tends to result in reduced student interest in the topic and greater extrinsic motivation (Kohn, 2011; Palmer, 2019).

Quantitative data will be collected in terms of proficiency test scores and qualitative data will be collected in terms of surveys. I will first discuss the gathering of quantitative data.

All students in both the test group and the control group will take the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Test (OPI) before the semester begins. The purpose of the pre-test is to ensure that students from both groups have a similar L2 proficiency when they begin the semester.

The ACTFL OPI will again be administered to each student after the semester ends and the post-test scores of both groups will first be compared to their pretest scores. Post-test scores for the experimental group will then be compared to the post-test scores of the control group to determine whether the pass/fail system yielded greater gains in SLA than the system using traditional grades.

Qualitative data will be collected to understand the nature of the students’ motivation to learn the language throughout the semester. Students will take surveys after the semester ends asking them specific questions to determine whether their learning efforts during the semester were propelled by extrinsic motivation or intrinsic motivation and, in the case of the intrinsically motivated students, whether their motivational orientation was integrative. The survey will consist of both open- and close-ended questions. The open-ended questions, designed to elicit from the students the factors that
contributed to their motivation, will be followed by close-ended questions that ask specifically about certain intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, including integrativeness. The qualitative survey data will then be analyzed along with the quantitative proficiency test data to see if there is a correlation between on integrative orientation of intrinsic motivation and higher proficiency gains over the course of the semester.

**Implications**

My hypothesis is that a pass/fail grading system fosters more intrinsic motivation in students than does a traditional letter-grade system and that this, in turn, yields higher gains in language acquisition in a second-semester, university Spanish course. If this hypothesis is confirmed, the implications will be simple yet profound: letter grades should be done away with in beginning-level, university L2 courses and this type of grading system should be supplanted by a pass/fail system such as the one tested in this study. It would also support the research I have previously cited in arguing that intrinsic rewards provide better motivation for learning.

If my hypothesis is not upheld and the resulting data shows that intrinsic motivation was not increased by the implementation of a pass/fail grading system and that proficiency gains are not greater in a pass/fail class versus a traditional letter-grades class, then the implications of these findings will be that there is no need to replace university L2 letter-grade classes with pass/fail classes.

Regardless of the findings of the study, additional research projects will need to be undertaken to corroborate those findings at various levels of L2 teaching (i.e., intermediate and advanced learners, as well as secondary and primary school students, including those in dual language immersion programs).
While research on grades in education in general and their relationship to learning and motivation is extensive, research on these relationships in the realm of SLA is scarce (see A. Brown, 2013). This study has the potential to corroborate findings on grades in education in general and apply them to field of L2 teaching.
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Virtual Reality, Sociocultural Theory, and Second Language Acquisition
Introduction

This paper was originally written with classmate Spencer R. K. Chun. I have since made changes including: revising the definition of virtual reality (VR) herein used, adding a paragraph that specifically relates to my own teaching philosophy statement, and including an additional source.

L2 learners face many challenges on their language learning journey. These challenges oftentimes include, motivation, confusion, cultural differences, obtaining useful and authentic input, producing unstructured output, and finding other speakers of the TL with whom they may interact. This last point is the one on which I focus in this annotated bibliography.

Most learners are not able to move to another country where they would be immersed and have continuous opportunities for social interaction in the TL. This is true even for those who choose to study language formally in high school or university classes where study abroad opportunities are sometimes offered. Blake (2013) explains that less than one percent of university L2 students in the United States participate in study abroad opportunities. Of this less than one percent who can immerse themselves in their chosen TL and culture in another country, it is likely that most are only able to remain abroad for a few weeks to a couple of months at best. “The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) estimates that anywhere from 700 to 1,320 hours of full-time instruction are needed to reach a level of high fluency” (Blake, 2013, p. 1) in an L2. This data supports the purpose of Blake’s book, which is to justify the use of technology in SLA and teaching. I agree that
technology has a place in both language learning and instruction and herein posit that a specific technology, namely virtual reality, is especially suitable to this end.

Parmaxi (2020) defines three types of VR. Non-immersive VR utilizes a computer system to access a virtual world. Semi-immersive VR is like non-immersive VR, but the system also recognizes some physical gestures performed by the user. Fully immersive VR uses a “head-mounted system where users’ vision is fully enveloped, creating a sense of full immersion” in the virtual world (p. 5). What follows is an annotated bibliography on the topic of VR in the field of SLA preceded by an exposition of the theoretical framework through which I have chosen to view it - sociocultural theory (SCT) (Vygotsky, 1978). While my use of the term VR refers to fully immersive virtual environments, I will also discuss some less immersive environments due to the scarcity of literature on this topic.

Theoretical orientation - VR, SLA and SCT

SCT views learning as being mediated by language (Mitchell, Myles & Marsden, 2013). This naturally implies social interaction with others and learning a L2 is no different in this aspect than learning anything else. “From a sociocultural point of view, . . . having internalized the symbolic tools of the first language system, the L2 learner has further opportunities to create yet more tools and new ways of meaning, through collaborative L2 activity” (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2013, p. 227). I posit that this collaborative L2 activity can be achieved through implementation of VR. Various SCT constructs lend themselves particularly well to this idea. Some of those constructs include mediation, self-regulation, and scaffolding. I will proceed by briefly explaining the potential that exists for the application of each of these constructs in the use of VR in the
field of SLA. The definitions of the following terms have been adapted from Mitchell, Myles, and Marsden (2013).

Mediation

While some learners may have opportunities to practice their L2 through social interactions in their community, many lack such opportunities. If learning an L2 is socially mediated, and through the lens of SCT it most certainly is, then students must continuously participate in social interaction through the L2. Where those chances are limited, VR can help by providing opportunities for social interaction, thus facilitating students’ language acquisition.

Regulation

Using VR to learn a L2 can help students move from other-regulation, where they must rely on others to help them progress through the language-learning process, to self-regulation, where learners are able to regulate their own learning process. Through access to a VR system which immerses learners in authentic social interactions in the L2, learners can easily guide themselves through social interactions and try out new words, phrases, or grammatical structures. Then, based on the responses from the virtual interlocutor with whom they are interacting, they can determine whether the words or concepts attempted were understood correctly, thus achieving self-regulation.

Scaffolding

When learners engage in social interactions with more proficient speakers of the TL, scaffolding occurs naturally. Scaffolding refers to “the process of supportive dialogue which directs the attention of the learner to key features of the environment, and which prompts them through successive steps of a problem” (p. 222). When an L2 learner
(i.e., a novice) interacts with someone more proficient (i.e., an expert), the expert must provide this kind of support to help the learner understand and follow the conversation successfully. VR has the potential to provide scaffolding to learners who seek this type of unstructured, authentic interaction.

Having reviewed some of the key constructs of SCT and the potential that VR has for applying these constructs, I will now review the literature on the use of VR for SLA.

Annotated bibliography

Blyth (2018) explains that immersion is the perception of being surrounded by a substance or liquid. Language specialists employ this term metaphorically, referring to a person being surrounded by language and culture, typically resulting in an enhanced language learning experience. This has given rise to the term virtual immersion, meaning that a person can be present in a non-physical, immersive environment. Presence is important to SCT because SCT views thinking, cognition, and learning as being tied to their socially formed environment.

Before the advent of virtual immersion, the physical presence of the person was required for a learner to be immersed. The author explains that now, thanks to technology, learners may experience a phenomenon known as telepresence, which occurs when learners feel as though they were sharing a “real” space with co-present interlocutors. This has resulted in a shift among language educators’ thinking in terms of what constitutes immersion, which is now simply defined as any stimuli that provides a totally engrossing environment.

The advancements in VR and other technologies such as smart machines and artificial intelligence, offer great opportunities in the field of SLA. This article not only
discusses some of these opportunities and defines some essential terms to our topic, but
the author also discusses other essential considerations. One example is the need for
teachers and researchers to ask the question: what can humans do that smart machines
cannot? The author asserts that smart machines lack the human pragmatic competence to
interpret context. Humans have the capacity to “negotiate meaning on the fly with others”
(p. 229). Therefore, it is not only important to understand the potential benefits of
integrating this technology, but it is also important to understand its limitations and not
present it as a universal and infallible solution.

Chung (2012) studied the effects on students’ autonomous learning motivation
produced by playing the online game Second Life, which is a virtual world where one
may create an avatar and participate in “real-world-like audiovisual simulations” (p. 249).
Although this game is not as highly immersive as other forms of VR, many elements of
the game that contribute to students’ learning are consistent with constructs of SCT. In
light of the scarcity of literature addressing VR in SLA, I argue that VR holds the
potential to create experiences where these same constructs can be applied and even
improved upon due to the increased life-like fidelity of more highly immersive
technologies.

In the study, the experimental group, a university freshman-level English class,
incorporated Second Life into their learning materials while the control group, used the
same materials except for Second Life. Results showed that use of Second Life led the
experimental group to “have a higher willingness to participate in class, and higher
motivation for autonomous learning” (p. 254). Motivation for autonomous learning is
related to the SCT constructs of self-regulation and mediation. When students possess
increased motivation to learn on their own, they will effectively regulate and mediate their own language learning process.

The experimental group also outperformed the control in all three proficiency categories measured: vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension. The authors attributed this to their having received more environmental stimuli and opportunities for interaction. SCT views acquisition as taking place in and through interaction and claims that the environment is instrumental in this process.

For learners who do not have the ability to move to another country, such a game may provide them with crucial, authentic opportunities to immerse themselves in the TL and culture via interactions with proficient speakers of their L2.

Peterson (2011) also researched this type of modified immersive environment which he refers to as, “text-based virtual worlds” (p. 67). These network-based environments facilitate real-time interactions between users in a 3-D environment (3DE). A distinguishing factor of 3DEs is their ability to provide permanent venues for communication, just like in a real-life immersive environment. This accomplishes the same goal of using to establish presence as previously discussed.

While the most common versions of this program use completely text-based communications, newer versions are being utilized to allow users to communicate through auditory means. This combination of different modalities of communication provides more mediums through which users can communicate and easily accessible text communication can help with problems such as understanding an accent. This other-regulation can be an effective means to assist language learning.
Another key feature that can greatly inform VR from this platform is the ability for a user to “teleport” their avatar between the immersive environments known as *worlds*. This allows users to transport their presence instantaneously and seamlessly to any given 3DE that they find will best suit their needs in the moment. In essence, not only does the user have the crucial access they need to an immersive environment for language learning but utilizing the ability to teleport in conjunction with VR technology would allow users to access multiple 3DEs. Teachers can utilize this feature to scaffold the learning of their students, teleporting between environments as needed. This may have the potential to be more useful than being in an actual immersive environment, but that would need to be thoroughly tested in the short and long term. These technologies may be viewed through the SCT principle of mediation, where the learners use tools to mediate their learning.

*Van Kerrebroeck, Brengman, and Willems (2017)*’s study provides data showing that VR can be used to help a stressful situation become less stressful. Subjects in the study reported that the overall stress in a normally stressful situation lessened when virtual reality was used. De-stressing a situation helps with motivation and engagement. The authors conclude that one of the factors that contributed to the reduction of stress was the use of *escapism*, the ability to perceive an escape from the normal pressures of a situation. In the study, subjects used VR to successfully alleviate the effects of *perceived crowding*. Perceived crowding refers to the anxiety felt when a person sees the amount of people around them. Generally, the correlation is that the more people that are immediately around a person, the more anxious they become, especially if they suffer from a social disorder.
Users can also be influenced sensorially, behaviorally, and intellectually. Such virtual scaffolding can help a student achieve their ZPD (i.e., the difference between what a learner can do without help compared to what a learner can do with help from more capable peers) (Vygotsky, 1978) and become more comfortable interacting in a socially oriented activity/process, which, according to SCT, is the context in which language learning occurs. This also conveys the complexity of being in the world, which is important to SCT, which links the nature of thinking to its socially formed environment.

The use of VR can provide instances of authentic other-regulatory occurrences, experiences that would usually only occur if the learner were physically present in another country, being regulated by proficient speakers of the L2. Such other-regulation is essential to SCT. While this interaction can be vocal, VR also allows the user to experience other forms of interaction. The expression on another person’s face can serve as other-regulation. A confused expression while one is talking signals that the other interlocutor did not understand what was said. VR is a medium through which that interaction can take place.

**Mirzaei, Zhang, Van der Struijk, and Nishida (2018)** proposed a VR platform that supports “real-time conversation between learners or with AI” (p. 208) with the end of developing the students’ cross-cultural competence. They conducted a study to test the effectiveness of such a platform and analyzed the results from a sociocultural perspective.

Participants were upper-intermediate-level language learners from various cultural backgrounds. Each was paired with another learner whose cultural background was significantly different than their own. The task of each pair was to role-play an everyday situation (such as a job interview) and then to separately listen to their own
recorded dialogue and analyze it. Everything the students did while engaging in the role-play was mimicked by their avatars in the VR system, gestures included. Following the role-play task, students were asked to watch the recorded interaction and make notes about the meaning that they intended to convey with certain phrases, how they felt when they said certain things, etc. These notes were based off indicators the teachers provided to the students through the VR system about where to elaborate on such utterances. Once the learners had completed this phase, they exchanged notes and read their interlocutor’s explanations. These exchanges revealed stark contrasts in cultural understandings.

The authors found that the activities carried out by the participants “involve collaboration, assistance, and co-construction such as negotiation of meaning, asking for clarification, resolving misunderstandings, and receiving support from more proficient peers, that are conducive to the operation of zones of proximal development” (p. 212). The reference to the ZPD implies that scaffolding took place. There is also potential for students to interact in the VR system with virtual interlocutors, thus promoting learner autonomy, or in SCT terms, moving students from other-regulation to self-regulation.

Berti, Maranzana and Monzingo (2020) researched how “highly immersive VR impact[s] L2 learners’ understanding of environments and people of the studied foreign culture” (p. 48) as well as students’ attitudes toward the use of VR in the L2 classroom. They explain that highly immersive VR allows the learner to walk or look in any direction. Benefits of using highly immersive VR include a more learner-centered, learner-driven pedagogy allowing learners to choose where to focus their attention during the experience.
This study viewed the use of VR in the L2 classroom through the lens of experiential learning theory (ELT). ELT is a learning process in which the student “experiences something, reflects upon it, thinks about the experience in an abstract way, and then acts upon the experience” (p. 49). This series of tasks includes stages where the teacher uses guiding questions (i.e., scaffolding in SCT terms) and group discussions (where interaction takes place and foments language acquisition) to help the students reflect on their learning experiences.

Participants viewed two-minute video clips filmed with a 360-degree camera in various settings in Italy. The students watched each video clip twice under guidance from the researchers to know what things to pay most attention to. The videos were viewed using Google Cardboard which allowed the students to have a highly immersive VR experience.

After viewing the videos in VR, the learners then participated in a group discussion led by a researcher to help them reflect on the cultural experience they had undergone. These discussions were conducted in English; however, this type of reflective discussion could be held entirely in the L2 for proficient students. Such discussions can provide ample opportunity for interaction and scaffolding, especially regarding cultural aspects that may be easily misunderstood. Although only one of the videos used in this study contained oral language that was discernible by the participants, there is clearly much potential to use this technology to allow learners to interact in the L2 with others during the experience as well.

Researchers found that through the VR experience and the reflections that followed, participants were able to expand their understanding about the target culture.
Data also showed that the participants generally believed that there is a place for VR in the L2 classroom. The main limitation acknowledged by the authors was the lack of interaction in the VR experience, although will be mitigated as technology advances. VR has much potential for providing students with meaningful interaction and scaffolding. This study also shows the potential of VR to support self-regulated learning.

Considering the “lack of a rich cultural learning environment” (p. 407) present in L2 learning, Shih (2015) also studied the effects that virtual immersive environments can have on students’ acquisition of L2 culture. Four students of English in Taiwan participated in the longitudinal study in which they were virtually immersed in the TL and culture of London through the integration of “Google Street View into a three-dimensional environment” (p. 407). Although the author did not approach the experiment through an SCT lens specifically, the study did treat “the learning of culture as an ongoing social activity” (p. 414).

Participants’ proficiency ranged from the intermediate to superior levels on the general English proficiency test. These students walked the streets of London virtually, receiving cultural information from their instructor (i.e., the expert). They also participated in interactions with proficient speakers of the TL, role-plays, and various other activities such as giving directions. Activities like these provide excellent opportunities for scaffolding and socially mediated L2 learning. Following their immersive experience in the virtual streets of London, participants then wrote about these experiences in blogs.

This study presents interesting insight into the potential implementation of VR in the L2 classroom. It shows that, not only can VR provide students with opportunities for
immersion in the TL and culture where they can interact with others and receive necessary and difficult-to-obtain scaffolding, but it can also afford additional opportunities for interaction outside of the VR system. This can lead to more expert-novice interactions, scaffolding, and other-regulation.

The study found that “cultural immersion and interactions with the virtual context influenced all four learners’ attitudes toward the target culture” (p. 423) in a positive way. The experiment also resulted in higher English proficiency levels and motivation for two of the students. The author concluded that learners could benefit by virtual cultural immersion in similar ways as actual cultural immersion because “virtual environments also allow learners to experience culture through observation, interaction, and immersion” (p. 424). This conclusion supports my claim that VR can provide essential social interactions for L2 learning.

VR has the potential to provide a much more authentic, life-like perception of telepresence as exhibited uniquely in the study conducted by Berti (2019). The author recorded video, perceivable using a VR platform, of actual streets, buildings, and items in Italy. Participants were able to virtually step into those environments and experience them just as the author did. Using VR, the students were given the ability to become present in that environment.

The author identified the presence of the participants as scaffolding. Rather than being simply instructed on how to think about other cultures, the students were given the tool with which they could mediate their own learning. With this mediation students were able to compare, contrast, and discover. This furthers the opportunity for language learning to occur through a SCT lens because as the students draw conclusions from their
own experience, they also participate in both self- and other-regulation. They can discuss their experiences in real time and use the environment around them to offer regulatory feedback.

Another aspect of scaffolding that the author points out is the ability of the teacher to customize the environment according to the needs of the student. A teacher would be able to select which environments would be best suited toward learning goals and student proficiency levels. The author also argues that this technology, along with others, can allow teachers to become creators of innovative pedagogical content. This furthers a teacher’s ability to scaffold a given activity, allowing students to achieve their ZPD.

The crucial role of the teacher in facilitation and instruction is further discussed by Lin & Lan (2015). Necessary roles of a teacher include aspects like making decisions on how to integrate pedagogical activities into virtual learning environments by utilizing the strengths of VR. Though interactive simulations have been shown to promote self-directed learning, the set-up of those simulations is constructed and organized by the teacher, just like in a traditional classroom. A teacher can create learning environments that are differentiated to the specific learner. While a traditional teacher is limited by the classroom environment they are in, a teacher using VR has a wider array of options at their disposal to help learners engage in the most appropriate interactive simulations according to their learning needs.

Another example of the teacher’s role is the organization of the learners within the environment itself. The teacher’s choices of groupings can have effects on the learners’ experience. The study mentions the use of VR to help students with disabilities, such as autism. The teacher’s ability to create an environment that is less stressful than a
traditional classroom could be beneficial as it could lead to a better response from some learners. Specific students could also be given more time in specific situations to help them master tasks. These accommodations have the potential to greatly increase learning from a SCT perspective. With the scaffolding provided by the teacher, students can feel more comfortable in their environments, which can lead to an increase in their willingness to interact. Interaction, in turn, yields acquisition.

As discussed in this study, students across all variables of age and gender who learned in interactive simulations and games rather than traditional teaching methods showed superior cognitive outcomes and more positive attitudes toward learning. Not only did the interactive simulations promote self-directed learning, which may be viewed as self-regulation, but they also provided what the authors described as a fail-safe learning environment. With the fear and anxiety abated, the learners were able to feel more comfortable learning the material.

While these studies illuminate the crucial role of the teacher in this process, Canto, Jauregi, & Bergh (2013) discuss the many challenges that confront language teaching professionals as they endeavor to integrate VR and other technologies into L2 curricula. The authors identify these challenges as reasons behind the reluctance of many educators to integrate interactive technologies into their teaching. Their study found that huge organizational burdens, which included extra pedagogical intervention and making up for technical issues, were placed on teachers in their efforts to make the learning environment beneficial.

The authors also discuss the overall benefits of the virtual interactions despite the challenges. It was found that these virtual interactions added value in cultural, linguistic,
interpersonal, and motivational aspects. The use of synchronous learning environments, which allowed the students to interact, in combination with effective interactive tasks were identified as key contributors to the value in the aforementioned aspects. These are two essential aspects of SCT. The interaction between the students as part of the language learning process first and foremost, along with the necessary scaffolding provided by the teacher in the form of the interactive tasks.

With these challenges and benefits in mind, the authors point out the need for further research investigating the effectiveness of integrating virtual interactions on individual learners. This includes the need to study learners at different stages of their language learning process to determine the overall benefit of integrating the virtual interactions into their learning. The article points out that language learning evolves quickly in the first stages of acquisition, but then plateaus as students become more advanced. Along with this consideration, the authors also discuss the need for a similar study to be conducted over a much longer period to obtain data on the long-term effects.

Conclusion

The possibilities that VR affords to classroom language learners are many and exciting. There is potential for more authentic collaboration between learners and other speakers of the TL as systems are created that allow learners to interact with people from all over the world in an immersive environment that mimics the real world. It has already been shown that such learning environments have led to “language gains and increased critical thinking skills” (Parmaxi, 2020, p. 6). There is also potential for utilizing VR in the L2 classroom through a multiliteracies approach. This can be done through activities that activate students’ background knowledge before the VR experience, draw their
attention to certain linguistic or cultural aspects during the experience, and require them to further reflect and engage with the language and culture after the experience. Lessons that require the students to engage with VR systems can be structured very similarly to lessons that require students to watch videos or read texts. The benefits are that VR provides the learners with a more immersive experience as well as support for “skills and competences not directly related to language learning but necessary for twenty-first-century learners such as teamwork, [and] autonomy” (Parmaxi, 2020, p. 9).

This bibliography outlined much of the empirical data already collected that indicate the benefits of integrating VR into SLA through a SCT lens. The various principles of SCT can be implemented in many ways using VR and related technologies. These technologies allow for an incredible expansion of opportunities for teachers to create and instruct in new and beneficial ways, as well as many more opportunities for students to gain valuable experiences.

VR increases the opportunities for teachers to scaffold their students’ learning experiences. Teachers can transport their students to completely immersive environments via telepresence, thus allowing students to experience authentic, socially formed environments. Additional scaffolding occurs as VR itself is perceived to be a naturally less stressful environment.

This perception leads to the argument that the use of VR can become even more beneficial for SLA purposes than real immersion (although I recognize that this needs further study). VR has the potential for simple and seamless integration of a wide range of mediums. This has been evident in the integration of audio- and text-based interactions currently being used. The ability for VR creators, including teachers, to create any
situation they want creates an additional advantage over real-life. The recent COVID-19 pandemic is a perfect example of travel restrictions and a literal inability for countless language learners to have real-life immersive experiences. Via VR, all the experiences a learner needs to further their language learning journey can be fabricated and made instantaneously available. The ability for users to teleport between environments also simplifies travel and allows teachers greater freedom in designing situations they find beneficial to the learner at any given moment.

This paper has outlined that further integration of this virtual environment with proficient speakers of the TL allows learners to engage in authentic interactions which approximate actual immersion and that the benefits are comparable. This socially mediated environment allows students to participate in other- and self-regulation in ways not available to them previously.

The need for educators to become proficient enough in advancing technologies to effectively integrate them into their language learning curricula, as well as working through the technological issues of a newer technology that has not been tried, tested, and debugged, do present real difficulties. This, however, does not mean that it would not be worth the investment of time, energy, and money. With further developments in the technology and the simplification of user interfaces, VR has the potential to completely revolutionize the way people learn languages. SCT-informed methods have proven effective in SLA, and this technology opens these methods to myriads of people who would not otherwise have access to them.
LOOKING FORWARD

In my time in the MSLT program I have learned much about language, teaching, and people in general. Some of the new insights that I consider most valuable pertain to communicating with people, especially those of distinct cultural backgrounds. I have learned that understanding others’ cultures is essential to understanding them and engaging in effective communication. This added understanding has led me to consider more deeply the difficulties that immigrants to the United States (or any country) must face, even if they already possess linguistic knowledge and skills that are necessary in their new community. These challenges present themselves in what many of us may consider to be the simplest of tasks including grocery shopping, enrolling in school, and other common situations.

Using the knowledge and experience that I have gained while in the USU MSLT program I hope to continue to help others learn languages in ways that are meaningful to them. I would like to provide adult learners, including immigrants, with guidance and resources to be able to learn the language of their choice and begin to integrate into that community more fully. I envision myself mainly helping adults who are interested in learning English and Spanish and doing so through community outreach here in Cache Valley, Utah. Although I do not know exactly what these efforts will entail, I do know that they will be on a volunteer basis on account of recent opportunities and divine guidance leading my family and I to choose a career path outside of teaching.
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