The Conference Proceedings of MIDTESOL
Gateway to Global Citizenship
The theme for the inaugural edition of *The Conference Proceedings of MIDTESOL*, “Gateway to Global Citizenship,” is fitting. As we gathered in St. Louis in the fall of 2011, we were reminded of the importance of our place in the world, both as English Teachers and global citizens. Naturally, the strand that readers will find woven throughout the pages of this document reflects issues and concepts related to that theme in various ways: how to teach culture; how to help International Teaching Assistants connect with American students; how to assist L2 learners in cultural adjustment; how to educate non-ESL faculty members in cultural nuances; the list goes on. No doubt, readers will find helpful, insightful materials within the pages of our *Proceedings*, hopefully materials and techniques that will find their way into the classrooms across our region.

For this inaugural edition, I would like to mention what a success this endeavor has been. True, the process has meant many late nights for our editorial board, but the lack of sleep is worth the result. There were over 20 submissions for this first edition, and most of those were accepted for publication. This document has over 270 pages of text, with articles representing all of our Interest Sections, as well as some that represent topics outside of our Interest Sections. I would like to thank all of the presenters who chose to commit their time to creating a written version, most of the time much more detailed than the original presentation, and who made this first edition possible. Without you, we would not have this wonderful information to share with our membership! Thanks also goes out, again, to our editorial board, the planning committee, readers and section editors, who helped make this possible. I only hope you enjoy reading these articles as much as I enjoyed being a part of publishing them!

Jennifer Morrison, General Editor

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Integrating Language and Content: The Knowledge Framework
Tammy Slater and Jesse Gleason, Iowa State University

Abstract

Teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) academic literacy skills—academically appropriate ways of thinking, talking, writing, and problem solving—is an important goal of our school systems, and subject-based literacy is critical for students to succeed both academically and professionally. Given that language is the primary means through which teaching and learning is carried out, teachers need strategies to ensure that they can develop these skills in all their students. This article describes a non-commercial heuristic called the knowledge framework (KF), which provides a springboard for developing classroom tasks that aim to bridge language and thinking skills so that students can learn content and academic language simultaneously. We present selected work that has been carried out on the KF for more than twenty years and offer ideas for thematic units as an illustration of how to implement the KF.
The teaching of academically appropriate ways of thinking, talking, and problem solving is a key element in our classrooms at all educational levels. Following the No Child Left Behind act of 2001, school districts have been charged with improving the academic achievement of all students such that no child becomes left behind educationally. Yet with the shift of demographics associated with world migration, English language learners (ELLs)—as well as many other learners—are not faring well in areas that require language skills (Fillmore & Snow, 2000). While many content area teachers feel that English language development is the sole responsibility of English teachers (Gibbons, 2009), it is critical that everyone, both teachers and administrators alike, understand that language is the primary medium through which teaching and learning is carried out and assessed (Schleppegrell, 2004). Thus, developing academic language should be understood as helping students learn to participate fully in all of the various disciplines and contexts of the academic community in which they study. Indeed, when thought of in this way, we can consider every teacher to be a teacher of language (Gibbons, 2009; Mohan, 1979). In fact, the essential nature of language in content teaching is the most frequently referenced claim in the literature (Janzen, 2008). But how can teachers from different content areas tailor their unit plans to ensure that they are addressing the academic language and thinking skills that students need to succeed across the curriculum?

This article describes and discusses a gestalt called the knowledge framework (KF) that brings together the connections between language and thinking skills in content areas. At a simple level, the KF is a heuristic that teachers can exploit to ensure the integration of language and content, thereby helping ELLs or other at-risk school populations tackle and understand the linguistic demands of the various content areas. At a more complex level, the KF can be used as a theoretical framework for analyzing classroom discourse, to help illustrate how expert content-area teachers use language to teach and promote critical thinking in their disciplines. The following pages will describe the KF, review the work that has been done on it, and introduce steps that teachers can follow to begin using it in their classrooms.

What is the KF?
The KF, described fully in the seminal work by Bernard Mohan on the integration of language and content in teaching (Mohan, 1986), is a heuristic that provides a springboard for organizing pedagogic tasks that can help teachers bring language development into content teaching. It revolves around the concept of activity. Mohan distinguishes activity from the simpler notion of topic, suggesting that whereas a topic is anything that can be talked about, an activity is “a combination of action and theoretical understanding” (Mohan, 1986, p. 42), which thus brings both doing (action) and knowing (theoretical understanding which guides the action) into the forefront. In other words, the tasks created for use within the KF aim to develop students’ understanding of the content being taught as well as focus on the language used to construct the content. Students learn the content while doing the tasks and also learn how to talk about the content critically, with scaffolding by the teacher. Such subject-based literacy development is essential for students to succeed academically and professionally (Gibbons, 2009).

As a heuristic, the KF consists of six boxes representing three related pairs of knowledge structures (KSs), or semantic patterns of texts, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: 

Mohan’s knowledge framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASSIFICATION</th>
<th>PRINCIPLES</th>
<th>EVALUATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>SEQUENCE</td>
<td>CHOICE</td>
</tr>
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</table>

These three pairs of KSs form theory/practice relationships that can be illustrated in the following way.

1. Classification/Description: The practice of describing something infers an understanding (theory) of a set of classifications such as color, size, or other typologies. For example, a knowledgeable description of a triangle in mathematics would involve understanding the types of triangles that exist and how to define them. Describing an atom in science infers an understanding of the items that make up an atom, such as electrons, neutrons, and protons. Describing games in PE classes...
may involve understanding the types of games, strategies, or equipment. Describing art involves classifications of color, shape, texture, and media. And so on across the curriculum.

(2) Principles/Sequence: We create sequential order (practice) informed by our understandings (theory) of the principles behind the order. We may order certain things because we are aware of what we are attempting to achieve (means/ends), as in instructions for lab reports, mathematical solutions, baking, or any set of directions. We may also order actions in a particular sequence to discover cause and effect, as in many plot lines in literature, time lines in history, and the use of certain types of media in art.

(3) Evaluation/Choice: Decision making and problem solving (practice) involves being able to evaluate logically the available options. This cannot be done well without understanding how a specific discipline justifies best options (theory); these options are often explained and justified through the previous KSs. For example, choosing which matter to remove first in a science problem (practice) relies on an understanding of what kind of matter it is (classification theory) and what that matter can cause (principles theory) as well as how scientists typically carry out experiments (sequence practice). In other words, scientists do not look for salt in a salt-and-sand mixture and pick it out with tweezers; they use their understanding of solubility to wash the salt out. In fact, choice and evaluation is probably the most common task in education, from students choosing to respond to a question in class, to assessment, in which students choose their answers and teachers evaluate their correctness.

Each of the boxes in Figure 1 has thinking skills and language associated with it, and each has specific key visuals that relate to the thinking skills. For example, the KS of classification involves thinking skills of grouping, talking about part/whole relationships, and defining. The language associated with these thinking skills includes verbs such as “be,” both as a relating process (e.g., X is a kind of Y) and as existence (e.g., there are three kinds of Z), and “have.” Classification suggests nouns that are general rather than specific (“dogs” and “triangles” rather than “Lassie” or “this shape here”) and KS-related words such as “types,” “kinds,” “include,” and “made up of.” A classification tree is an example
of a key visual that shows grouping and part/whole relationships, and a definition can be captured visually using something as simple as an equals (=) sign. Table 2 offers a starting point for examining the KSs from the point of thinking skills, language, and key visuals (see below).

Table 2

**Connecting key visuals**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Knowledge structure</th>
<th>Thinking skills</th>
<th>Key visuals and examples</th>
<th>Language</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classification</td>
<td>Classify, group, sort, categorize</td>
<td>Tree, Web, Table</td>
<td>General references: “Being” verbs (e.g., be, have), Additive conjunctions (e.g., and), Taxonomic, part/whole lexis (e.g., noun: types, classes, kinds, categories, words: verbs: classify, sort, group, organize, categorize, divide, compare).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles</td>
<td>Evaluate, predict, draw conclusions</td>
<td>Cycles, Line graphs, Cause-effect chains, Problem-solution branches,</td>
<td>General references: Action verbs, Consequential conjunction and adverbials (e.g., since, due to, in order to), Consequently, because, thus, (if-then) Cause-effect lexis (e.g., cause, effect, result, verbs: cause, produce, bring about), Passive + agency (e.g., is caused by, are produced by)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Evaluate, rank, judge, criticize</td>
<td>Grid, Rating chart, Evaluation chart</td>
<td>“Thinking” verbs (e.g., believe, think, value, consider, rank, judge), Comparative conjunction (e.g., however, whereas, while). Evaluative lexis (e.g., number, best, worst, adjective: good, bad, right, wrong, boring, acceptable, verbs: rank, approve, value, like)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Identify, label, describe, compare, contrast, locate</td>
<td>Picture, map, diagram, drawing, Venn diagram, Flow chart, Same different chart</td>
<td>General or specific reference: “Being” verbs (e.g., is, are, have), Additive conjunction (e.g., and), Adjective lexis (e.g., adjectives of color and size), Language of comparison and contrast (e.g., the same as, similar to, like, different from)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequence</td>
<td>Arrange events in order</td>
<td>Timeline, Action strip, Flow chart</td>
<td>Specific reference: Action verbs, Temporal conjunction and adverbials (e.g., after, since, as, initially, firstly, finally, when-clauses, whereas), Sequential lexis (e.g., noun: beginning, end, verbs: start, conclude, continue, examine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>Select, make decisions, propose alternatives, solve problems, form opinions</td>
<td>Decision tree, Generating alternatives/decision chart</td>
<td>Specific reference: “Sensing” verbs (e.g., like, want), Alternative conjunction (e.g., or), Appositional design lexis (e.g., noun: choice, option, which + noun, verbs: choose, opt, select, prefer)</td>
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As can be seen by the above description, the six knowledge structures appear in every content area across the curriculum, from art to zoology, both in the content itself and in the classroom management language that revolves around teaching and learning the content. The KF, therefore, becomes a very powerful tool for teachers to help students transfer their language and thinking skills across different contexts (Early, 1990). In other words, if a teacher teaches the language of classification, students can use language and key visuals to classify any information across the curriculum, such as triangles in mathematics, countries.
in social studies, forms of energy in physics, vertebrates and invertebrates in biology, games in PE, media in art, muffins in food sciences, and so on. Outside of school, students will be able to classify meat at the supermarket and gas at the gas station. Moreover, teachers can help students understand that there are simple ways to construct these taxonomies linguistically as well as more sophisticated ways. The linguistic choices the teacher makes and models can help the students expand their resources for constructing the various KSs.

**How has the KF been used?**

The KF has been used most extensively for pedagogical purposes, and several studies will be described below. Developed in Western Canada in the late 1980s, most of the research and development has been done in Canadian K-12 classrooms with the goal of helping mainstream ELLs.

With the six KSs in mind, Early, Thew, and Wakefield (1986) examined several curriculum resource guides and textbooks, finding that the six structures recurred throughout these, both as texts and as thinking skills to be developed. In a large-scale action research project, more than one hundred educators engaged in a series of activities, including needs assessment, materials and strategies development, strategies and context evaluation, and testing out of the applicability and utility of the KF within the local K-12 schools (Early, Mohan, & Hooper, 1988).

Early et al. (1988) argued that thematic units set up using the KF illustrated that students, when adequately supported in tasks specifically designed to elicit certain knowledge and discourse structures, were able to produce recognizable examples of particular types of discourse and to improve on their performance in this type of language use in a short period of time. (p. 121)

Early (2001) elaborated on the earlier project, describing various case studies that were carried out using the KF and concluding that the approach was highly successful in bringing to light the role of language in content-based teaching.

Using a unit on fish developed by an ESL teacher using the KF and taught to a class of fourth- and fifth-grade ELLs with diverse educational backgrounds, Early (1990) illustrated how teachers can
develop students’ cognitive and academic abilities alongside their language ability using the KF. She noted that even low proficiency students learned the knowledge structures of classification and description and were able to produce well-written expository texts at their grade level using key visuals.

Early (1991) addressed the application of the KF to wordless picture books by showing how one teacher worked with a group of primary (eight-year-old) ELLs to develop their oral language, academic literacy, and thinking skills, particularly sequence, choice, prediction, and cause/effect. Using the book *The Angel and the Soldier Boy* by Peter Collington, the teacher worked through a variety of questions and tasks using the KF, such as having students describe the characters, relate the plot, and write narratives based on the visuals in the picture book. Early concluded that wordless picture books used with the KF have great potential for academic language development while motivating learners with their illustrations and clever tales.

Tang (1997a) described the application of the KF to a seventh-grade social studies class in which the teacher organized the content of the textbook into KS-based key visuals. The teacher alternated between key visuals and the authentic text from which they were developed. At times, she presented the visuals she had made and had students read the text and organize the information using the visuals. At other times she worked with the students to develop visuals from the texts they were reading based on the characteristic language features of the KSs being examined, which she taught explicitly. Once the students were familiar with the key visuals and the language of the KSs, the teacher had them write texts from familiar key visuals. Tang concluded that using the KF in this way helped increase students’ ability to read and write academic discourse. Moreover, having students create a key visual from a text and then use that key visual as a springboard for writing helped them write in their own words, rather than copying or plagiarizing the original text.

Several studies on the KF have heralded the importance of key visuals in academic literacy development. Key visuals lower the linguistic demands and display ideas while making explicit the underlying semantic relationships between them. In other words, whereas text structures are patterns of discourse that ELLs may find difficult to understand because of language, key visuals display the
semantic relations of the KS they represent. Moreover, key visuals based on the KF have been shown to be cross-cultural (Tang, 1994; 1997b) and thus able to trigger background knowledge that ELLs may have developed in the first language. Key visuals can serve multiple functions in the classroom, including *generative* to promote language generation, *representative*, to increase learner understanding, and *evaluative*, to assess content and understanding of language (Early et al., 1988).

Early (1989), following up on the primary study of Early et al. (1988), focused on teachers’ use of key visuals as tools to prepare students for reading tasks. The article not only lists steps that can assist teachers in the construction of good key visuals but also reports on the teachers’ informal evaluations of using these graphic representations of KSs with their ELLs, in which they report students demonstrating better recall and understanding of information from the text and showing much more engagement with the materials. The students themselves stated that the use of key visuals made them feel they had more control over their learning as they had a strategy to help them organize their notes; moreover, they felt more confident as learners using key visuals.

Early and Tang (1991) proposed using key visuals in tandem with the KF to help ELLs work with content-based texts. To support their proposal, they reported early results of a study that aimed to see if using key visuals helped students read and write in science and social studies. This pretest–posttest nonequivalent-control-group study was carried out in Grade 8 Social Studies, Grade 11 Social Studies, and Transitional ESL Science in two Western Canadian high schools. Preliminary results showed that the experimental group (using key visuals) improved consistently whereas the control group’s findings were inconsistent, with several results showing no change or regression. From the positive results of the study, the authors noted that there is tangible evidence of the power of using key visuals within the KF format.

Tang (1991a), in her ethnographic study on the role and value of graphic representations of knowledge structures, found that teachers needed to provide strong guidance on how to use key visuals before their students could make full use of them themselves. She followed 56 seventh-grade students (46 were ELLs) in their classrooms, the library, and the spaces just outside of the classrooms for about five months. Tang found that the students who were not given guidance on the use of key visuals rarely
attended to them, but those given explicit lessons on their use experienced no difficulties. The author concluded that there was great potential in using key visuals within the KF, but that teachers need to draw explicit attention to them and give “systematic guidance on how to read, interpret, and use them” (p. 38) before students can see the value for themselves.

In Tang (1991b; 1992), the author focused on the use of student-generated diagrams, examining both their role in helping students understand and recall the materials as well as students’ own ideas on their usefulness in understanding texts. Her study involved 45 ELLs in two classrooms. To respond to the effectiveness of student-generated key visuals, the author used a pretest–posttest nonequivalent-control-group quasi-experimental design, while interviews were used to establish students’ own ideas. Treatment in the quasi-experimental design involved systematically teaching the students how to create a key visual from a text and having them do this as a class, whereas the control group went over the same text in an oral question-and-answer format. The posttest involved either drawing a key visual of the text (for the experimental group) or making notes (the control group), then using either the visual or the notes to recall the text. The results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the total amount of information that was recalled about a new text that they were asked to draw a key visual about. Moreover, the essays they were asked to write about the text were more organized than those of the control group. With regards to students’ attitudes towards using key visuals, results were also positive, although many reported that they wanted more guided practice in using them. Tang recommended further research on the regular incorporation and use of key visuals.

The KF has also been used in assessment. Huang and Morgan (2003) used KS analysis to evaluate student learning of both language and content by examining the discourse features that ELLs used in their writing as they learned about particular scientific classifications. Their aim was to look at the simultaneous development of students’ content understanding of matter and writing ability about the topic. The authors reiterated the benefits of using the KF for its role in the (a) construction of content knowledge, (b) organization of knowledge, (c) development of language, and (d) creation of visual knowledge representations.
A full chapter on using the KF to assess projects in project-based language learning (Slater, Beckett, & Aufderhaar, 2006) describes a model that allows teachers to implement the KF to assess any academic project. This chapter offers snippets of texts from relevant literature and key visuals to provide assessment ideas and new ways of thinking about the assessment of project-based language-and-content learning and teaching.

Finally, Mohan and Slater (2005, 2006) used the KF to track patterns in discourse that emerged as a primary teacher worked to teach science to groups of first and second grade students (2005) as well as a secondary science teacher working with classes of ninth-grade students (2006). These articles identified logical progressions of KSs in science teaching, where concepts are described and classified, talked about sequentially and causally, and then students solved problems logically. These types of KSs can be presented with non-science materials to help ELLs develop understanding in science, as argued in Slater and Mohan (2010), who showed how an ESL teacher worked collaboratively with her school’s science department to help her ELLs understand how language is used to construct science knowledge.

To summarize, the key points that can be taken from the review of literature on the KF based on the frequent reiteration by the authors are as follows:

1. The six KSs recur across all areas of the curriculum in texts, tasks, and thinking skills to be developed.

2. Explicitly teaching the language and key visuals associated with the six KSs is needed to help ELLs develop academic language and thinking skills.

3. Using key visuals that represent the KSs triggers content-based background knowledge, helps ELLs develop language, improves academic reading comprehension and retention, assists students in the organization of academic writing, and raises students’ confidence as learners.

**How can a KF unit be developed?**

From the literature reviewed above, it can be seen that the KF offers a systematic way to integrate language and content to help students develop the academic discourse skills they require to succeed while
simultaneously learning the content that is appropriate for their grade levels. But how easily can such a unit be developed? As noted in Figure 2 earlier, the KF has specific thinking skills, language, and key visuals that work together. Each KS also has guiding questions that can help teachers develop the material. These questions appear in Table 3 (from Early, 1990).

Figure 3

Questions the KF asks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASSIFICATION</th>
<th>PRINCIPLES</th>
<th>EVALUATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What concepts apply? How are they related?</td>
<td>What principles are there? (cause/effect, laws, rules, explanations, interpretation of data)</td>
<td>How are things judged or tested? By what criteria?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>SEQUENCE</td>
<td>CHOICE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To put these questions to use, the teacher needs to decide on a theme for the unit. Take, for example, apples as a theme. For classification, the teacher might consider the types of apples that one finds in a local supermarket. How can they be grouped? By color? By softness for baking? By size? (A web visual can be used here.) What is an apple? Where does it appear in the classification of food types? (A classification tree diagram can be used here.) These are all questions that can be addressed when focusing on classification. Tasks can be developed to have students focus on these questions and to encourage them to use the language of classification in their responses to the questions. Description could involve describing different apples, a task that relates closely to grouping. A cut-section diagram might be used to teach the names of the parts inside an apple. Identifying the types of apples by looking at and labeling them would also bring out description language (e.g., “This is a Red Delicious.”), while teaching students how to identify particular kinds of apples. (Pictures of different apples can be used here.) The language and content go hand in hand.

For principles, the lesson might focus on what causes bruising in apples (using a cause and effect chain diagram) and what can be done to prevent bruising. Creating an experiment in which apples are
bruised and placed in different contexts might engage students in making predictions or explaining their ideas, all principles discourse. Talking about the annual growing cycle of apples (a cycle diagram) promotes sequence discourse. Engaging students in a discussion about what they like to do with apples involves choice language (a chart or match-the pictures diagram), and creating a form for judging apples (a rating grid) brings in evaluation. In covering all these aspects of apples, the teacher not only ensures that the students learn a great deal about apples, she also provides opportunities to have them focus their language on the different knowledge structures associated with the tasks, which in turn are related to specific thinking skills that appear in all content areas across the curriculum. Thus, the teacher who uses the KF is able to systematically organize the unit in such a way that she is developing language and content in an integrated way. And each of these tasks can involve key visuals as noted above, either teacher selected/produced, or student generated as they work with authentic materials.

Other themes can be broken down into the six boxes of the framework, as many of the examples from the literature suggested. For example, magnets can be broken down into the following KSSs: classify types of magnets (classification), label the ends (description), explain the rule of magnetism (principles), make a magnet from a magnet (sequence—instructions), choose the strongest magnet (choice), and evaluate the magnet’s strength (evaluation). Thematic units can be created from any concept that the teacher needs to teach across the curriculum, and from the discourse in existing textbooks so that ELLs will be better able to learn and talk about the content. Tang (1991b; 1992) advised having the teacher create the key visuals to use from the text initially, to use as a model if needed, even in cases where the teacher wants the students to generate their own key visuals.

**Conclusion**

It has been claimed that to be literate in a content area implies understanding how the concepts in that discipline are organized and evaluated (Gibbons, 2009). Mohan’s knowledge framework allows teachers to organize their lessons so as to draw attention to the organization of both language and content in a systematic way that can be applied across the curriculum. Research on the KF has shown that knowledge is structured in similar ways across a wide variety of situations, and so as Early (1990, p. 569)
states, “This raises possibilities for the transfer of certain language and thinking skills across different content areas and situations, and thus across the curriculum.” The KF offers a very useful heuristic for helping our ELLs develop language and content across all subject areas. Given that a major objective of ESL programs in North America is to prepare ELLs to be functionally successful in all subject areas, it may be well worth our time and effort to give it a try.
References


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Abstract

This article provides an outline of the main components of an assessment plan for English language learners that fits other assessment initiatives districts already have in place (data-based decision making and progress monitoring, Response to Intervention, and standards-based content testing) and reflects best practices according to the synthesis of research on the language and literacy development of language-minority children and youth (August and Shanahan, 2006; Cummins, 2007, 2009; Genesee et al., 2006; Gersten et al., 2007). The components include aligned placement and summative English language proficiency tests, a thorough intake assessment procedure, screening for reading difficulties, progress monitoring, the monitoring of reading engagement, differentiated standards-based grading, and the use of specific guidelines in classroom assessment. The author stresses the importance of coordinating assessment activities to yield timely, usable data that teachers utilize to make appropriate instructional decisions for individual learners.
he current school year differs for English Language Learners (ELLs) in Missouri fundamentally in those schools that have kept pace with educational initiatives for this population over the past five years. The game-changing initiatives include (1) school improvement with data-based instructional decision making with the aim to raise the academic achievement of all sub-groups, (2) the quick spread of the practice known as the Response to Intervention (RTI) model, which was initially prompted by the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), (3) the broad adoption of a research-based intervention suited for ELLs called the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), which has been introduced through the availability of Title III federal funding for teacher professional development. Even more recently, (4) many changes have resulted from Missouri’s joining of the WIDA Consortium (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) in the spring of 2010 and adopting WIDA’s approach to standards-based English language development and assessment (Gottlieb, Cranley, and Cammilleri, 2007). Best practices in the assessment of K-12 English language learners are meaningfully tied to this broader educational context, and they reflect what we know from the synthesis of research on the language and literacy development of culturally and linguistically diverse students (for example, August and Shanahan, 2006; Cummins, 2007, 2009; Genesee et al., 2006; Gersten et al., 2007).

In this article, I discuss the major components of an assessment plan with English language learners (ELLs) that is congruent with other assessment initiatives already in place in a district. I present these components in the order in which we can reasonably implement them. I start with the new mandatory, statewide placement and summative English language proficiency tests. Second, I discuss what a thorough intake assessment procedure looks like. Third, I show how to use the initial data from the placement test and the intake assessment to plan instruction for ELLs. I also talk about screening for reading difficulties and progress monitoring to modify and supplement instruction promptly as particular weaknesses show. Next, I present a yearlong outline, which I believe plays an essential role in utilizing
assessment data. Finally, I show how grading fits in differentiated instruction and what guidelines to keep in mind for standards-based classroom assessment.

**Aligned Placement and Summative English Language Proficiency Tests**

Since joining the WIDA Consortium, Missouri ELLs take aligned placement and summative English language proficiency tests. To be able to appreciate the value of this common sense approach, it helps to remember the previous practice when Missouri switched English language proficiency tests biannually (MAC II and LAS Links), where language proficiency levels did not correspond and were unrelated to the various placement tests that districts had available to them. Without aligned placement and summative tests, progress with language development cannot be reliably monitored. Fortunately, as of 2010, the WIDA English language proficiency level of every ELL is available within the first weeks of arriving at a new school by one of two means: either by obtaining the student’s previous ACCESS for ELLs test scores from WIDA’s database or - if the student is a new arrival to a WIDA state - by administering the placement test equivalent of the ACCESS for ELLs test, called the W-APT. Being able to monitor students’ progress toward grade-level academic English language proficiency in the four skill areas (listening, speaking, reading, writing) is key to knowing how to help them (Gottlieb, Cranley, and Cammilleri, 2007). The evidence from the test should prevent premature mainstreaming of ELLs without needed instructional support.

**A Well-Designed Intake Assessment Procedure**

Having a reliable baseline score of English language proficiency for the purposes of initial placement and progress monitoring is essential, yet the intake assessment of new-arrival ELLs should not be limited to administering a placement test and obtaining a baseline score. There are many other pieces of information just as important to know if we wish to understand the background of our students and to make sensible decisions about their educational experiences. A well-designed intake assessment procedure is necessary for getting it right from the start (for example, Celic, 2009). The questions at intake are what type of information to collect, when and how to collect it, and then how to best
disseminate the information to the teachers. The type of information gathered during this process is not
quite as important as how the information is used afterwards.

Because ELLs tend to be a highly diverse group, it is especially important to gauge those factors
that are consequential for their potential academic achievement and language development. Some of these
factors are more obvious, such as native language, prior schooling, length of time to achieve current
English language proficiency, or history of ESL support, while others are less commonly considered: age
of onset of daily interaction in English, opportunities to interact in English outside school, motivation for
learning English, native language literacy, home literacy, social capital (parental investment in the child),
personal strengths and interests. Information can be gathered by an ESL teacher through a variety of
means: a survey completed during interviews with the student and the caregivers, a dialog journal, an
illustrated autobiography, or a timeline of life experiences. An impromptu writing sample in the native
language can indicate native language literacy and academic preparation on the grade level even for an
educator who is unfamiliar with the particular native language. The interviewer can observe the ease with
which the student can express herself in writing and the fluency with which she is able to read back the
writing.

An intake assessment is not complete until the relevant information about the new student is
shared with the classroom teachers, para-professionals, and specialists in a form that is easy to understand
and access. In addition to the information itself, it is helpful when the intake coordinator interprets the
information, notes both strengths and needs, and attaches specific recommendations for working with the
student.

**Data-Based Decisions in Instructional Planning and Grouping**

Once teachers receive the results of ELLs’ baseline English language proficiency in the four skill
areas along with the results and recommendations from the intake assessment, they are ready to begin
planning for their students. A whole class profile is a practical way to collect pertinent information on all
ELLs (Celic, 2009), an example of which can be found in the Appendix. When the information on all
learners in one class is displayed together, patterns begin to emerge, which can be very helpful for
grouping learners to work together on specific goals and skills. For example, the whole class profile can show which learners may need more extensive background building and pre-teaching, which learners share strengths and needs, or which learners have weaknesses in just specific skill areas. A whole class profile can also help identify the resources necessary to support learners, as with a push-in ESL teacher or an instructional aide who can provide native language support.

Perhaps the most relevant pattern to look for on the whole class profile is how learners cluster with their WIDA English language proficiency (ELP) levels in the four language skill areas. For instructional planning, it is more important to know what learners can do in the four language skills than knowing their mean English proficiency level. For instance, a learner who scores Level 4 in reading and writing and Level 2 in listening and speaking would have Level 3 overall proficiency, the same as a learner who scores Level 4 in listening and speaking and Level 2 in reading and writing. Although both learners would be Level 3, suitable learning tasks for each would be distinctly different. Grouping these two learners together to work on the same language objectives would not be an ideal planning decision. It would be better to group the first student with Level 4-5 students on reading and writing tasks and Level 2-3 students on listening and speaking tasks, while the second student would be able to work more successfully with Level 2-3 students on reading and writing tasks.

What learners can be expected to do on each level of proficiency in the four language skill areas is outlined in WIDA’s CAN DO descriptor booklets (for example, WIDA Consortium, 2009). The CAN DO descriptors and model performance indicators of the WIDA ELP Standards are excellent take-off points for locating suitable language objectives that promote students’ language development. Instructional planning for language development should definitely start with these documents.

Two strongly recommended practices that fall under data-based decision making are screening tests and progress monitoring. Formal screening tests to identify reading problems are in place in most schools, and these should also be used with English language learners according to the Institute of Education Sciences practice guide (Gersten et al., 2007), provided that the tests are carefully reviewed for validity and reliability with the English learner population. ELLs should keep with the same benchmarks
as native English speakers, and teachers should not delay reading interventions on account of limited oral language proficiency. In fact, thirty minutes of reading intervention per day in small homogeneous groups is part of best practice with ELLs - with an added emphasis on oral language and vocabulary, which are foundational for reading comprehension (August and Shanahan, 2006; Genesee et al., 2006). Progress monitoring entails reviewing the reading performance of ELLs at least three times a year or more frequently if they are having reading difficulties. Weekly or bi-weekly follow-up is necessary with high-risk students (Gersten et al., 2007).

Some aspects of reading progress monitoring are specific to ELLs as was highlighted by the synthesis of research of the National Literacy Panel (August and Shanahan, 2006; Genesee et al., 2006); the sources of reading difficulties most ELLs experience can be atypical for native speakers, such as unfamiliarity with high-frequency vocabulary, collocations, and basic English phrase structures most children master before starting to read. Non-literal meaning and cultural content pose additional problems for ELLs. As far as progress monitoring, the most critical is the potential erosion of reading engagement as a result of sustained difficulties with reading comprehension (Cummins 2007, 2009). Students’ desire and motivation to read rapidly dissipate when they are overwhelmed by the task and gain little or no enjoyment from reading. This is why it is important to add reading progress monitoring measures that indicate change in reading engagement, such as reading logs and reading attitude surveys.

**Careful Planning of Assessment Activities**

No matter how many assessments teachers conduct, best practice requires that the data be used to inform instruction and benefit both students and programs. Administering assessments can be harmful if it wastes resources, reduces instructional time, or disrupts learning. The benefits of carrying out any assessment should outweigh the costs in resources and instructional time. Teachers need a thoughtfully constructed timeline of assessment events as a blueprint. It is best to schedule assessments to maximize the usefulness of the information collected. Assessments that do not yield usable, timely results should either be rethought or entirely eliminated. Careful planning is the only way to optimize the use of findings.
Table 1 is a sample timeline of an assessment schedule for ELLs over an academic year. Note that the state mandated assessment activities are set in advance (home language survey, language proficiency placement test, annual language proficiency test, large-scale academic achievement tests), and the timing of district instituted assessments may be only slightly more flexible (intake assessment, district writing assessment, reading benchmark tests, quarterly progress report). All classroom assessments have to be strategically distributed to work around the district schedule, which is a considerable challenge.

Table 1. Sample Timeline of Assessments with ELLs in an Academic Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Formal assessments</th>
<th>Informal assessments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>Home language survey</td>
<td>Intake assessment (academic records, interview, autobiography, dialog journal, writing sample)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>English language proficiency (ELP) placement test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>Reading inventory Standards-based report card ELP progress report</td>
<td>Writing sample Content area assessments Monitoring area team meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>Standards-based report card ELP progress report</td>
<td>Running records Oral language sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>Content area assessments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Standards-based report card ELP progress report</td>
<td>Running records Content area assessments Monitoring area team meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>Large-scale ELP test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Large-scale academic achievement test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>District writing assessment Standards-based report card ELP progress report</td>
<td>Oral language sample Running records Monitoring area team meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Portfolio assessment</td>
<td>Content area assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Standards-based report card ELP progress report</td>
<td>Monitoring area team meeting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grading with Standards-Based Differentiated Rubrics

Even though grading is a form of student evaluation and only partially formal assessment, it should be considered under teachers’ best assessment practices. Grades are not based strictly on evidence of learning. Teachers figure into grades participation, effort, timeliness, presentation, and whether or not students follow directions to the word (Gottlieb, 2006). When grades are distributed on the comparison of students’ products and performances, ELLs rarely compare favorably and have a fair chance of earning a high grade. It is important to consider how grades can be a part of setting high expectations for students while also providing them with the necessary guidance and high support to have a reasonable chance at achieving those standards. A way to accomplish this is to grade ELLs on pre-established criteria with which they can become familiar prior to completing the assignment. The pre-established criteria should include the content standard, the language expectations embedded in the assignment, and specifics about the support available to them to complete the assignment. The language expectations need to be modified to reflect what students can do with language on their current level of English proficiency. The modified language expectations may require adding to the assignment checkpoints for confirming the student’s understanding, language supports such as a template or word bank, or multimodal supports such as a hands-on demonstration. (Fairbairn and Jones-Vo, 2010.)

The examples in Tables 2 and 3 show how a standards-based assignment may be differentiated for a Level 3/Developing English learner for the purpose of fair grading.

Table 2

Sample Differentiated Assignment Rubric in Mathematics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English language proficiency</th>
<th>Grade-level</th>
<th>Level 3/Developing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language expectation</td>
<td>Read story problem independently. Record data on a graph. Interpret what</td>
<td>Read story problem and check understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the graph represents using complete sentences.</td>
<td>Interpret the graph in one complete sentence using a word bank.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>GLE: Mathematics. Algebraic relationships. 1B. Analyze patterns using words,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
standard tables, and graphs.

Support Blank graph.

Teacher to confirm comprehension. Blank graph. Word bank.

Table 3

Sample Differentiated Assignment Rubric in Communication Arts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English language proficiency</th>
<th>Grade-level</th>
<th>Level 3/Developing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language expectation</td>
<td>Read passage independently. Respond in paragraph form in writing.</td>
<td>Read passage with partner; check for comprehension frequently. Respond on the sentence level both orally and in writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content standard</td>
<td>GLE: Communication Arts. Reading. 1. 1b. Identify and explain relevant connections between text ideas and own experiences.</td>
<td>Partner. Comprehension checks with teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>None.</td>
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</table>

Guidelines for Standards-Based Classroom Assessment

In classroom assessment, best practice does not simply mean the use of a particular type of assessment technique. There are easy to spot, popular classroom activities that we tend to associate with best practice. The most common ones are the “thumbs up, thumbs down, thumbs in the middle” technique to check for understanding; another is the use of individual slates or mini whiteboards to allow everyone to record an answer and hold it up for the teacher to see. The third one is the exit slip, a brief written assessment task students complete before exiting the lesson (Echevarria, Vogt, Short, 2008). The fact that a teacher employs quick, convenient assessment tools does indicate that the teacher is interested in assessment; however, what really matters is what type of information the teacher is gathering and how s/he uses that information to modify instruction. Rather than any particular technique, best practice in
classroom assessment means that assessment activities are principled, employed strategically, and used to guide instruction.

The following guidelines represent a synthesis of expert recommendations (Echevarria, Vogt, Short, 2008; Ellis, 2009; Fairbairn and Jones-Vo, 2010; Francis et al., 2006), which I group by the three main stages of the assessment process: design, administration, feedback/evaluation.

During the design phase:

- Ensure that content learning objectives are based on grade level content standards appropriate for the student’s age.
- Prefer authentic assessment (demonstrations, presentations, projects, models, posters, real-life problems) to contrived forms of assessment (multiple choice tests, recitations, pedagogical problems, worksheets).
- Match the language burden of the assessment (the language skills needed to demonstrate understanding of concepts) to the student’s language abilities.
- Evaluate the assessment for cultural and general background knowledge embedded in the tasks.
- Check that the depth of knowledge required on the assessment matches the depth of knowledge that was explicitly taught. (For example, if only application was taught, but not evaluation, do not require evaluation on the assessment task.)
- Create differentiated rubrics to weigh content knowledge and language in a way that is fair for the individual student’s level of language proficiency but also motivates the student to improve language skills.

During the administration phase:

- Allow students to select from a menu of assessment options to best demonstrate the content knowledge they have acquired (if appropriate).
• Share expectations with students ahead of time by explaining the rubric that will be used to evaluate the work.

• Provide clear task explanations. If necessary, demonstrate tasks and have students show understanding by completing practice items before beginning the actual assessment task.

• Allow students to use the same supports that they were able to use during the review segment of instruction.

• Allow only pre-approved forms of accommodations on tests. Accommodations that have demonstrated usefulness are word banks, glossaries, and dictionaries the student is already familiar with and is accustomed to using.

During the feedback/evaluation phase:

• Monitor student output and provide usable feedback to students on an ongoing basis. Listen, repeat, recast. Elaborate student output.

• Make use of the most effective form of error correction: elicitation. Prompt students with cues to produce self-correction.

• Be frugal and strategic with error correction overall. Be mindful of the affect of explicit error correction and consider the type of errors students can attend to given their developmental level and their language proficiency.

• Highlight and reinforce strengths in students’ work.

• Avoid grading that is based on comparing students to each other.

• Grade each student according to predefined criteria presented explicitly in a rubric and shared with each student prior to completing the assessment.

• When making any consequential decision about each student, use several forms of assessment. If the data from different forms of assessment do not agree, give consideration to the validity of the data.

What’s Next?
To sum up, the outline of assessment presented here is a work in progress, which is based on what our current best practice is with K-12 English learners. We want to remember that ELL assessment has to fit the larger context of instruction and assessment in the district, which changes rapidly in response to federal mandates, state initiatives, and school improvement efforts. It appears that data-based decision making and continuous improvement, Response to Intervention, and differentiated instruction are here to stay, while content area standards, standards-based assessments, and accountability measures are presently in flux. As we transition to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the Smarter Balanced subject assessments, districts will be implementing many new initiatives. In addition, WIDA’s P-12 English language proficiency standards are in revision to match up with the academic language components of the CCSS. In the coming years, we should see a more integral alignment of the revised English language development standards and the general education standards in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science. Hopefully, this will lead to closer collaboration between ESOL teachers and mainstream classroom teachers on planning, instruction, as well as on assessment. The overall outline for ELL assessment I described will remain workable even as individual components change: start with a baseline measure of English language proficiency, conduct a thorough intake assessment, screen for reading difficulties, monitor progress and reading engagement regularly, always have a timeline to optimize the usability of data, grade with differentiated rubrics, and adhere to the guidelines for classroom assessment.

For an orientation on assessment terms, more detailed descriptions of the components, and additional practical tools, please access the accompanying online guide Assessment with P-12 English Language Learners at http://missouristate.academia.edu/AndreaHellman/Papers.
References


## Appendix

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<th>Resources</th>
<th>Needs</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Years to learn English</th>
<th>Academic background</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Native language</th>
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Grammar: It Isn’t a Dirty Word: Innovative Instructional Techniques for Teaching Grammar
Gelene Strecker-Sayer, Rockwood School District

Abstract

This article is based upon the presentation “Innovative Techniques to Clear-Up the Most Common Grammatical Misuses” which was given at the 2011 MIDTESOL Conference. The author stresses the need to teach grammar in ways that make abstract grammar concepts more concrete by using cuing systems or frameworks that enable students to take learning into their own hands. It places emphasis on teaching students not only to listen to the broader message, but, moreover, to retrain students to hear the smaller pieces of language. In addition to supplying techniques, this article offers a rationale as to why grammar teaching has been looked down upon by practitioners, presents information on student error types, as well as examines forms of teacher corrective feedback.
Do you teach grammar? If so, why? If not, why not? Like many English language teachers, I have turned my previous language learning experiences into questions and answers about what and how to teach my students. With my K-12 students, I have covered various skills and content areas, from teaching beginning letter sounds to inspiring amateur entomologists. However, I have consistently felt a little guilty when it comes to teaching grammar. What happened in our profession that has caused this anchor of language to become a dirty word? How do we go about teaching grammar in a way that moves from traditional drill and practice worksheets to being more innovative? This article will review some of the reasons why grammar has been looked down upon in our profession, examine various types of corrective feedback, and showcase instructional techniques to teach grammar in ways which provides a framework for learning discrete grammar points and make abstract grammatical concepts more concrete.

How did we get to this point?

When many of us learned a second or foreign language in high school or college, chances are the instructor relied on a healthy dose of what we know as the Grammar Translation method. In my first foreign language learning experience, there was an emphasis on memorization of rules, repetition, drill, as well as a push towards linguistic accuracy in combination with a lot of error correction. Grammatical mastery was definitely a highlight of the program. It was prescriptive and orderly. We first had to learn the simple present, the future, then past tense and subjunctive, etc. Of course, I learned my tenses pretty well, and a lot of basic vocabulary, phrases and idioms, but I was afraid to utter a word for fear of my message not making sense. My well-meaning teachers were always correcting me and others in our classes. This created the sense that linguistic perfection was a must in order to communicate. Unfortunately, I often had
no idea why or what they were correcting. The tacit message I gathered from their feedback was that I was incomprehensible. As my affective filter increased, subsequently my confidence decreased. This obviously has stuck with me and became one of the mistakes that I did not want to repeat with my students.

Alternatively, my next foreign language experience came by way of learning German through a computer program and talking to my husband who grew up in Germany. My husband is not constantly correcting my every word. He listens to the message I’m trying to convey. In the end I’m not afraid to talk, but in all honesty, I’m rather awful. My grammar is haphazard and pretty much follows the grammatical structure of English causing my message to be difficult for many to follow.

When studying to become an ESL teacher, I learned according to a completely different paradigm: the communicative approach. Ah, the wondrousness of it all. I was captivated with the idea of communicating a message and not focusing on grammatical precision. However, as I became a more seasoned teacher, I realized the importance of grammar in building communicative competence and fluency. I came to understand that there is a way to incorporate effective grammar instruction into a communicative approach.

**What is grammar?**

When we are teaching grammar, what we are really intending to do is build students’ grammatical competence. Grammatical competence encompasses the knowledge and use of lexical items and rules relating to phonology (how sounds are combined), morphology (the study of forms, or how elements are combined to create words), syntax (how words are strung together into sentences), and semantics or meaning (Brown, 2007: Musumesi, 1997). Since all languages have a grammar system that governs them, then essentially languages cannot exist without
grammar. Remarkably, under this definition, our profession actively teaches the phonological and semantic aspects of grammar every day. We teach our students the letter sounds and how they go together, as well as equip them with words and their meanings. These are all very complex processes.

However, today most often when ELL teachers refer to grammar, we are focusing on syntax and morphology. These are the two areas, in particular morphology, that seem to still be a ‘no-no’ when teaching English. I think this stems from a couple of reasons. One is that the stigma behind teaching grammar is so ingrained in many of us who learned under the communicative approach that it is challenging to break away from this mindset. This, in addition to our own language learning experiences, has left many of us unable or unwilling to admittedly travel down the grammar path. I also think the lack of techniques and materials that help teachers and learners make sense of such an abstract set of rules and concepts has also caused us to shy away from this complex task.

**Is there a happy place for grammar in Communicative approaches?**

As in many aspects of life, I find that the idea of all or nothing tends to leave something out. When Balanced Literacy came into the public schools, I was thrilled to push through the Phonics vs. Whole Language debate. I was eager for a similar paradigm shift to come along for English language teaching. I became enlightened and began to regain hope of this when articles on “Focus on Form” began to surface. Focus on Form or FonF, refers to drawing students’ attention to linguistic elements as they naturally occur in communication, but the overarching focus is still on meaning. This is in contrast to the more traditional paradigm, Focus on FormS, or FonFS, in which discrete grammar points are taught in separate lessons based on a predetermined syllabus (Long, 1997; Sheen, 2002). Yet, much of the research which leads to
more efficacy is inconclusive. Frequently, researchers point to both approaches demonstrating an impact on learning (Gu, 2007; Lew, 2007; Long, 1997). Although thought-provoking, unfortunately, Focus on Form was not the happy medium that I was seeking. However, I believe it pushes us to think about the broad aspects of teaching both ways and striking a balance that includes the most useful and effective elements of each.

**To correct or not to correct?**

Depending on the belief system one works under, corrective feedback is either necessary for learning and preventing fossilization, or it is utterly useless. Those who follow the Natural Approach might find that providing corrective feedback goes against the principles of Second Language Acquisition, pointing more to the readiness level of a learner, as well as the potentially harmful effects error correction can have on a learner’s self-esteem and motivation. On the other hand, there are those who agree that using corrective feedback is an essential means to help build communicative competence. In the end, whether a teacher follows Focus on Form or Focus on FormS most likely determines when feedback would be provided, either quickly during communication with attention still on meaning, or while teaching lessons on specific grammar points (Bitchner, 2005).

**What are the most common errors types and forms of corrective feedback?**

When I work with mainstream K-12 classroom teachers, they frequently tell me that they do not understand ELL students, in particular their writing. As I read through student work, I realize that student use of morphology and syntax were the cause of the teachers’ confusion. After years of telling the teachers to “look for the message,” I cannot help but think that I need to be doing more to help students learn how to be proficient in all aspects of language, including
grammar. Hence, if student errors tend to be grammatical in nature, then it only stands to reason that providing more feedback and support would better serve students’ needs.

Table 1 below shows Lyster’s (1998) evidence that grammar errors tend to be the most frequent type of errors made by ELL students. This demonstrates that there is a need to assist students with their use of grammar.

Table 1

*Types and Percent of ELL Errors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Errors</th>
<th>Percent of Student Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phonological/Pronunciation</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammatical</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Lyster, 1998)

Table 2 shows results of a classroom study linking the percentage and types of feedback teachers used to the corresponding percentage of student repair in response to the given feedback.
Table

*Teacher feedback and student repair*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Feedback</th>
<th>% of Teacher Feedback</th>
<th>% of Student Repair</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recast: Teacher implicitly reformulates student statement</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarification Request: Teacher says “I’m sorry I don’t understand.”</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elicitation: Teacher draws attention to error but doesn’t provide answer</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalinguistic: Teacher provides info or questions linked to better formation</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit Correction: Teacher provides target form for student</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition: Teacher repeats student’s statement</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Lyster, 1998; Tedick, D. & de Gortari, B., 1998)

Note that recasts provide the least percentage of student repairs, but are the most frequently supplied form of feedback given by teachers. The type of teacher feedback that produces the most results is elicitation at 43%. This is still not the percentage of repair that I would hope for when I work with students. So what is missing? In my opinion, not only do we need to provide better feedback, such as using elicitation, but we also need to utilize better grammar teaching techniques that help make these abstract concepts more concrete for our students, as well as placing the learning into the students’ hands.
Still the same old grammar exercises?

When it comes to the two forms of grammar that most teachers refer to, syntax and morphology, it seems that we are doing a better job at teaching syntax in general. Perhaps it is because nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc., are larger pieces or units which maneuver in a similar pattern across various sentence types. In addition, there are numerous games, word order picture cards, and color-coded systems available to assist in teaching syntax and making it more comprehensible.

When comparing syntax to morphological forms, the latter does follow a pattern but also has many exceptions to the general rules. In addition, when we look to materials that focus on morphology, much of the time it is still a single page of examples with repeat and drill exercises. Regrettably, often this limited practice includes multiple grammar points on a single page, as well. Not to mention, most exercises are in written form, supplying students little, if any, oral practice.

Recently, I was looking at a set of exercises in a major text series that our district uses. Shockingly, it offers only a half of a page to teach and practice both regular possessive pronouns/adjectives (his, her, our) and absolute possessive pronouns (his, hers, ours). Both sets of pronouns together include about 13 different words which are placed in different parts of a sentence. Yet this lone page not only introduced students to the concept, but also provided written practice for both types of pronouns in a grand total of 4 fill-in-the-blank sentences. Unfortunately, this is a common practice. There are multitudes of books and series that focus on all forms of grammar. However, even at the K-12 level, they tend to be the same old-fashioned, written, repeat-and-drill exercises. They don’t supply any systematic cueing or framework to scaffold information to help students use the correct forms.
Why do students miss many of the morphological elements?

The Communicative Approach has created a mass of better communicators. However, the holistic focus on communication might have also had its drawbacks. Understandably, we want students to focus on conveying and understanding messages. It is a hefty process, taking in information, deconstructing it and then orchestrating a response in a way that makes sense to others. When students listen holistically, they glean general meaning from the information around them. In doing so, they are listening in a very broad way. Overall, students are relatively competent at understanding and conveying the general message, but they are missing the smaller pieces of language, the fine details. Those morphological elements are the polishing pieces that are often left off by many non-native speakers. Therefore, as teachers, in addition to continuing to strengthen that core competence, we need to retrain their ears to hear the smaller, discrete points of language as well.

If we listen to our students speak or even read out loud, chances are we will hear them leaving off morphemes (s, ed, etc.) Interestingly, students often do not hear that they or other students are leaving off these ending sounds when they are speaking or reading out loud. But we can help them develop their ability to listen and pay attention to these smaller pieces of language. It is like when one hears a word for what seems to be the first time. Most recently for me, it was the word “avatar.” Not being much of a fiction reader, movie goer, or video gamer, “avatar” was a word I have heard before, but I never paid attention to it. Now I feel like I’m constantly coming in contact with that word in a variety of contexts. The same goes for our students. Unlike the word “avatar,” discrete grammar points occur constantly in written and oral language. We need to teach our students how to listen to both the larger message as well as raise their awareness of the smaller pieces within a message.
What to do? Basis of Techniques

I begin by first figuring out which forms students most frequently misuse. I do this by taking short notes after reading a couple of pieces of each student’s writing and listening to them read. From this information, the most common errors can be easily recognized. Then, I teach mini-lessons using techniques which incorporate all four modalities (reading, writing, speaking and listening). I base the techniques around a cueing system, or framework, which helps students learn discrete grammar points that incorporate their existing knowledge of English. I have used these techniques with intermediate to advanced language levels, ages 8 through adult.

I do not teach these as a one-time unit or lesson, but rather as a framework for distinct grammar points that can be applied or weaved into other lessons. The framework makes the abstract grammatical concepts more concrete, which aids in increased recall and application. At the same time, employing existing student knowledge keeps their affective filter low and student confidence intact. The cueing or framework is incorporated into everything they do, becoming a natural part of their language process and usage. In addition, because it is a cuing system or framework, the natural scaffolding falls away as students become more innate and proficient with applying the grammar point.

When creating techniques and teaching students, I keep the following in mind:

1. Incorporate all modalities (reading, writing, listening & speaking)—aids in cementing the correct forms by supplying adequate transfer to other modalities.

2. Connect to L1—enables students to see how language works and how making these types of mistakes are normal.
3. Use quality feedback—includes using elicitation but also pointing out areas of strength and difficulty, in an attempt to raise awareness and assist in self-correction, placing the learning in the student’s hands.

4. Make it fun—keeps motivation and interest high.

5. Provide a cue, structure or framework—makes abstract concepts concrete and comprehensible, thus supporting recall.

6. Focus on student strengths and prior knowledge—prevents damage to student motivation and self-esteem. Show what they DO know.

7. Train students to stop, think and apply a grammar technique or strategy—facilitates breaking the cycle of old habits and forming better ones, again placing the responsibility of learning on the student.

Sample Techniques

**Present Tense Verb Conjugation.**

Often students will leave /s/ off the ending of third-person singular present tense verbs. The technique I use to help students is called **STOPS & GO**. It is based on the international traffic signal. The traffic signal provides students with a kinesthetic, oral, and visual framework to help recall how and when to use the present tense accurately in reading, writing and speaking by **SIGNALing** when students need to place /s/ at the end of the present tense verb.

The basis of **STOPS & GO**

- **S**ingular- **Stop S** and add **S /S/**
- **P**lural- **Keep on G**O**i**ng’
How to:

- “If the noun is Singular, it…”
  
  **STOPS** and adds /S/” to the verb (notice the sibilant /s/)

  **RED** to signify “STOPping”

  The flower grows. A boy runs.

- “If the noun is plural, then…”
  
  keep on **GOing.” No change to the verb.

  **GREEN** to signify “continuing/GOing”

  The flowers grow. The boys run.

There are a couple of special rules with the pronouns “I” and “you.” Just as I is special and gets the “capital treatment” (capitalized), it gets to follow the plural rule. Students can chant “I **GO.**” I also point out to students that in English, “you” can be singular or plural. When we conjugate it, like the pronoun I, it follows the easier plural rule.

**STOPS** & **GO** can be used with various present tense verbs that students have difficulty using:

- Regular present tense: runs, goes, jumps, hides, plays, etc.

  **STOPS**
  
  He runs. They go.

  The dog jumps. I play.

- Has/Have-

  He has… They have…

  The dog has… I have…

  **Again “I’and “you” follow plural rule.**
**Is/Are –**

- He is …
- They are…
- The dog is…
- You are….

**“I” has its own special rule with “am.” Students can chant “I am special.”**

This technique can be incorporated into various oral and written activities. As mentioned previously, oral practice is very important in helping students recognize and make the transfer between written and oral usage.

- In whole group/pairs, students take turns giving a noun and responding orally by shouting out “Stop/Go,” using hand signals OR student made Stop-Go signs.

Reading practice is also essential. Often students will leave the /s/ off of words that they write and say, including during oral reading. These are some suggestions of how to integrate oral and reading practice to further cement learning.

- Students take turns reading a teacher- or student-prepared passage/paragraph to each other and LISTEN for verb agreement. Both students should have a copy of what is written to check or mark for oral/written errors. Then teacher/students conference with each other.

There are several fun ways to apply the technique in written practice.

- Students write and check their writing using red/green pens or highlighters.

My friend **Jack** has a dog. The **dog** is named Spot. **Jack** and **Spot** take a walk every day. Sometimes **Jack** keeps Spot at home.
Teacher/Students can make their own worksheets that include a traffic signal & a road to drive mini-Match Box® cars or finger across, stopping at the ‘intersection’ of ‘Subject’ & ‘Verb’.

He \( \boxed{0} \) eat/eats his lunch at school.

Driving in a sentence: -----------------------------------------------

The cats \( \boxed{0} \) have/has milk.

Driving in a sentence: -----------------------------------------------

- Pre-made worksheets or student writing can quickly be altered by drawing little traffic signal at the beginning of sentences and coloring the signal accordingly.

  \( \boxed{0} \) He ______ (is/are) going to the store.

This technique can also be woven into other lessons and activities. It is always helpful to connect to the students' first language. Students can be paired, or there can be all class discussions about how English is the same or different from the various first languages represented. Students can also note the similarities and differences in a grammar notebook.

The skill can also transfer beyond ESL sessions into the regular classroom by providing a small inconspicuous ‘traffic signal’ to tape to student desks. This way when the classroom teacher sees/hears that the student is not conjugating present tense verbs, he/she can discreetly point to the ‘traffic signal’ on the student’s desk. This puts the learning into the student’s hands, as well as spreads the responsibility for teaching English into the regular classroom.

**Irregular Past Tense:** think-thought, buy-bought, fight-FIGHTED!!!

Frequently, students have difficulty recalling all the various irregular past tense forms of verbs. To make the complex irregular past tense system more concrete, I provided a framework by organizing the most frequently used irregular past tense verbs into 11 color-coded groups.
The color-coding and grouping supply a cueing system for students to use. It also helps both teacher and students recognize which of the verbs students know. This assists students in making a direct connection between the verbs they do not yet know to the ones they already know.

I begin by making flash cards either by printing them off or having students write the color-coded/grouped words on index cards. As we work through all the colors, we can also print or write them out in black to see if the students remember the correct forms without the color-coding to cue them. Below are the color-coded groups with sample words from each.

**GREEN** - verb stays the same  put/put, hurt/hurt, pet/pet

**LIGHT GREEN** - drop mid or ending vowel to make word have short vowel  meet/met, hide/hid

**GRAY** - verb changes, but not in reliable pattern  pay/paid, fall/fell

**RED** - verb changes to a completely different word  eat/ate, go/went

**PURPLE** - middle vowel/vowels change to /o/  wake/woke, choose/chose

**YELLOW** - initial consonant/s remain, rest of word changes to /ought/ or /aught  think/thought

**BLUE** – final /d/ is replaced by /t/  build/built, bend/bent

**LIGHT BLUE** - /ee/ changes to /e/ and add /t/  sleep/slept, keep/kept

**PINK** - middle vowel changes to /a/  give/gave, come/came

**BROWN** retain initial blend and add /ew/  fly/flew, grow/grew

**ORANGE** - replace /i/ with /u/  sting/stung, swing/swung, dig/dug
There are many ways to use the cards. I always start with flash cards, focusing on one or two groups at a time. We go through the deck and for each card say: “I (present tense)” then say “Yesterday I (past tense)” turning the card over to reveal correct word.

I…..

Yesterday I…..

fight

fought

For example, if a student knows ‘think-thought’, ‘buy-bought’, but then says ‘fight-fought,’ when the student sees/hears that ‘fight’ becomes ‘fought,’ they make the connection between the pattern they already know to the one that they misuse. I have seen “Aha” moments with students over and over again. What’s more, I have witnessed students taking their learning into their own hands and self-correcting more regularly. They STOP, THINK and APPLY the technique. By providing this framework, and retraining their ears to hear the smaller pieces of language, students are able to break their habits and form new neural pathways to correct their own usage. After working on the flash cards from present to past, we practice them in reverse or mix them up. This helps reinforce and strengthen neural pathways. From here, we can make them into playing cards where students can enjoy a game of ‘Old Maid’ or ‘Matching.’ Each time, we expand our competence by adding another color-coded group to our piles. What also makes these so effective is that they can be used as a form of student practice as well as a quick and straightforward pre/post assessment tool. The color-coding system makes it easy for teacher and students to see patterns of use and misuse. Another added benefit is that students ask to “play” with them and/or take them home to “play” with their families. Students also use this
opportunity to explore how the past tense is formed in their home language and compare it to English.

**Preposition: “At Saturday??” Floor Activity.**

Prepositions are another challenge to students. I have a few ways to help with some of the basics. Below is a technique to help students remember to use the preposition ‘on’ with days of the week. This technique helps supply students with not only a cue, but also adds the physical sense of “ON” and connects to the idea of smaller pieces/chunks of time.

We start by writing each day of the week on a piece of paper and taping them on the floor. Students then carefully walk, jump or leap from day to day:

- Saying “ON Saturday,” “ON Tuesday,” “ON…”
- Expand by saying “On Saturday, I played with my friends.”
  “On Tuesday we…”
- Expand further by adding **holidays**: “On New Year’s,” “On my birthday,” etc.
- Put **days** together to create a span of time: “On vacation,” “On the weekend,” etc.

Students can extend this into their writing by keeping a journal, reading each other’s writing, as well as noting connections to their first language. Again, I have consistently observed changes in student habits. When I ask them what they did over the weekend, instead of saying “At Saturday I went to the park,” they STOP, THINK and say “ON Saturday I went to the park!”

**Coming to terms with grammar guilt**

In the end, I am overcoming my sense of grammar guilt. I realize that my job as a K-12 ELL teacher is to help students learn how to be proficient in all aspects of language, which includes grammar. I strive to provide a balance for my students combining, the Communicative Approach with mini-grammar lessons based on techniques that incorporate a cueing system or
framework, which scaffolds learning for students, as well as supplies feedback that delivers the most optimum learning possible. My goal is to continue to look for and create more innovative ways to demystify grammar rules and put the learning into the hands of students.

If you would like copies of my presentation Powerpoint, visit www.eslanswers.com under “Free Lesson Ideas” or go to: http://eslanswers.com/?page_id=142.

Note: All techniques & corresponding materials were created & copyrighted by Gelene Strecker-Sayer, 2010.
References


Gelene Strecker-Sayer began her career teaching for the Chicago Public Schools nearly 20 years ago. In addition to receiving an MA in Linguistics & Equity in Education, she also achieved National Boards Certification in English Language Development. Gelene is a Fulbright Scholar and Creator of ESLAnswers.com. She has been published in TESOL’s on-line Second Language Writing Newsletter, Phi Kappa Phi’s, National Forum and MIDTESOL Matters. She has presented at regional, state, and national levels on topics such as the language and learning issues of international adoptees, pull-out ELL programs, standards-based curriculum writing, as well as innovative spelling and grammar techniques.
Teaching Cross-Cultural Awareness as a Tool of Peace

Mary Black, Center for English as a Second Language, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale

Abstract

Our students come to the U.S. with a plethora of impressions, both accurate and misguided, which are inevitably colored by the values and assumptions of their own culture. They, like everyone, are usually totally unaware that these values and assumptions are culturally informed as opposed to universal and “natural”. This article examines a theoretical framework used successfully in settings ranging from IEPs to corporate training to help participants gain awareness of their own culture and thus help them not only to avoid stereotyping and misinterpreting the host culture but also to better understand their own and the target culture.
We hold these truths to be self-evident…

What’s good for me is good for you...

In our culture it is common, and even considered generous, to view all humans as more alike than different. We imagine that what we like, value, enjoy, and even believe is shared by all of humanity. Yet once a person starts interacting with people from other cultures, she realizes that, in fact, we share very little. She begins to realize that all of these questions, from what we think is beautiful to what is polite to what is enjoyable and even what is real, fluctuates greatly from one culture to the next and is indeed culturally bound rather than part and parcel of our shared humanity.

When I travel to Spain, I give two kisses to just about everyone I meet, regardless of age, gender, and situation (work, social, etc.), and even regardless of if I have ever met them before. Yet Americans would wonder if I started homing in on them for the traditional dos besos, and in Latin America, the two kisses becomes one or three, depending on the country. My Asian students avoid kissing socially at all costs, considering it a far too intimate act to be shared generally. Meanwhile, my Arab students understand the kissing, but they do it only with family and the same gender, as women kiss women socially while men kiss men. As the Arab men living in the United States kiss each other, some Americans look on wondering about their sexual persuasion. Greetings are a minor display of a culture’s values, yet the codes of “what’s right” and “what’s wrong” vary drastically among cultures. At the more transcendental end of the cultural divergence spectrum, imagine walking out into the middle of a gorgeous glade with a fervent believer in God (or Allah) and an atheist. To the former, everything around her is proof of God’s actions, whereas that contention would be viewed as absurd by the latter, who would
view nature’s bounty as nothing more than the evolution of the Earth since its inception. All of these differences show that most of what we do and believe is cultural more than universal.

I often tell my students that as humans we share little more than our biology: we are conceived and born the same way, and we grow and die the same way. Beyond that, virtually everything is cultural. We all seek happiness and fulfillment, but what makes an individual happy and fulfilled is cultural. Therefore, our opinions about the world around us, both the familiar and the unfamiliar, are inevitably colored by our culture. We interpret every person, every thing, and every act through the lens of our culture. Still, most people are unaware of this; since culture in this sense is rarely taught or discussed, most people believe that their way of doing things is the natural way, and that any other way is, beyond good or bad, simply strange.

Like students in most IEP programs, my students come from all over the globe: Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Egypt, Libya, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Togo, Mozambique, Turkey, Spain, Honduras, Nicaragua, Colombia, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Japan, Taiwan, China, Korea, ... and more. Each of them comes to the United States wearing the lenses of their culture. None comes totally unaware of U.S. culture thanks to cultural globalization, yet their notions are often erroneous and based on the media, which unquestionably exaggerates certain glamorous (big houses, beautiful people) or horrifying (violence) American traits while totally ignoring others. My students’ commentaries on the United States and its people and culture, and on our IEP program, even after they have been here several months, are fascinating. They include:

“Old people in the U.S. are lonely because their families don’t care about them.”

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1 Culture is often compared to an iceberg, with the visible manifestations equaling the tip of the iceberg visible above the water, and the rest of culture – the bulk of it – the vast underwater part of the iceberg. In this sense, we rarely talk about or have awareness of the underwater part of the iceberg, which is the sense of culture that we are discussing in this paper.
“Americans are cold and inexpressive.”

“Americans talk too loud.” (Notice the contradiction with the previous statement.)

“American children/students don’t respect their parents/teachers.”

“American teachers are unfeeling because they are inflexible about assignment deadlines.”

“My teacher doesn’t really care about me because she doesn’t want to be my Facebook friend.”

“When I go to my teacher’s office, sometimes she won’t meet with me even though she’s there.”

Yet equally fascinating – and erroneous – are the comments by my colleagues about our students:

“Our students try to manipulate and intimidate us by visiting us in groups.”

“Our Latin/African students are too boisterous – they dominate in the classroom.”

“Our Japanese students never speak up.”

“I’d really like my students to call me by my first name, but they insist on addressing me formally.”

“Our students expect us to break the rules just for them.”

“Our students don’t understand that we are not there to be their friends, but that doesn’t mean we don’t care about them.”

“Our students expect us to be endlessly available.”

What is happening here? What is happening is that we all judge other cultures based on our own; we see other cultures through the lenses of our own, and, therefore, we see them incorrectly.
Many Dutch and British researchers (see the Appendix for key references) have performed both longitudinal and latitudinal studies of different cultures, particularly corporate cultures, and they have tried to break down the cultural differences into different dimensions. All told, around fifteen dimensions (and counting…) of cultural variation have been identified. Following are some of the dimensions that I have found to be the most useful when interpreting the cultural differences that we find in the students in our IEP—and that our students find in us. Each dimension is followed by a brief description of the features of a culture of this kind. These dimensions are not absolute; in other words, a culture is not either one or the other. Rather, they are continua, and the goal is to map both our own culture and the target culture along each continuum. Obviously, the closer the cultures are, the more the other’s culture will seem “natural” and will not even register on our radar; conversely, the further away they are, the more the other’s behavior will seem “wrong” and will thus draw our (usually irate) attention.
Table 1

*Individual vs. Collective*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDIVIDUAL</th>
<th>COLLECTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Autonomy</td>
<td>• Togetherness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Standing out from the crowd, creativity</td>
<td>• Blending in with the crowd, conformity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-realization</td>
<td>• Group wellbeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Satisfaction and identity come from one’s own independence</td>
<td>• Satisfaction and identity come from group belonging</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A person from an individualistic culture like the U.S. tends to label collectivists as weak, dependent, or immature, while a person from a collectivistic culture tends to view individualists as cold and selfish. An individualist takes pride in being self-sufficient and solving his or her own problems, whereas this independence simply has no value for a collectivist. This is not to say that individualists do not care about others; bulldozing others to get to the top is not accepted; rather, they simply make their own choices and act on their own, regardless of the collective. And the collective, specifically the family, would never dream of imposing its will or needs on them.

Since most cultures are more collectivistic than American culture, our students’ misconception that “Old people in the U.S. are lonely because their families don’t care about them” is understandable. However, what they don’t take into account is that many old people here cherish their independence; it is, in fact, what keeps them youthful and maintains their self-esteem. Likewise, as members of an individualistic society, we often think that “Our students try
to manipulate and intimidate us by visiting us in groups,” but what we don’t realize is that individuals in a more collectivistic society rarely deal with problems on their own. Visiting us in groups is not meant to intimidate; it is more for the students than us. These are perfect examples of how all of us misinterpret and negatively label each other’s behaviors based on what they would mean in our own culture, not what they mean in the target culture.

Table 2

Neutral vs. Affective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEUTRAL</th>
<th>AFFECTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▶ Emotions are not displayed</td>
<td>▶ Displays of emotions are OK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Expressing emotions = offensive,</td>
<td>▶ Expressing emotions = honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imposing</td>
<td>▶ Effusiveness and touching are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Effusiveness and touching are</td>
<td>welcomed ways of sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>awkward/uncomfortable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The neutral vs. affective dimension defines to what extent emotion and expressiveness are accepted in our cultures. Interestingly, the U.S. seems to be in the middle of the spectrum worldwide. Therefore, international students from more affective cultures – Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East, for example – often find us cold and milquetoast, whereas that is how we label our students from cultures that are even more neutral than ours, such as most of the Far Eastern cultures – Japan, China, and Korea, just to name three. As teachers we may say “Our Latin/African students are too boisterous – they dominate in the classroom,” or “Our Japanese students never speak up,” in each case bemoaning the fact that the other is not just like us on the neutral vs. affective scale! Of course, our students do the same with us, with claims like
“Americans are cold and inexpressive,” or conversely, “American talk too loud,” depending on the speaker’s home culture.

Students from neutral cultures find us overbearing, while students from affective cultures find us flat. With no awareness that this is a dimension along which cultures vary, we tend to judge others, but once we are aware, we can more readily simply accept that people tend to be embodiments of their culture. One of my Japanese students once told me that his teacher, my colleague, had told him that he should “smile more”. I apologized to him; this teacher would do well to understand that there is no need for the student to change his behavior to be more American; rather, she should understand his values with regard to expressing emotions.

Table 3

Egalitarian vs. Hierarchical

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EGALITARIAN</th>
<th>HIERARCHICAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‣ All humans are equal</td>
<td>‣ There is a pecking order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Outward displays of vertical</td>
<td>‣ Outward displays of vertical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distance are distasteful/ mistrusted</td>
<td>distance are expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Questioning authority is a duty</td>
<td>‣ Questioning authority is subversive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is conceptually an easy dimension, yet one that manifests itself in multiple ways both in and outside the classroom and IEP programs. It is not about whether a given culture has a hierarchy; all cultures do. The question is how comfortable we are with showing that hierarchy or conversely how comfortable we feel thumbing our noses at it. My favorite way of getting my students, who usually claim that everyone is equal in their culture, to discern whether their
culture is more egalitarian or hierarchical, is to ask them what they call me. My gripe is: “I’d really like my students to call me by my first name, but they insist on addressing me formally.” I always tell my students to call me Mary, yet their automatic show of respect for a teacher is so ingrained that it simply feels wrong, and if they feel close to me, they might call me Ms. Mary, but never just Mary. This clear-cut sense of vertical distance, also called power distance, is a clear sign of a more hierarchical culture.

My favorite illustration of the egalitarian ideal of the U.S. (ideal because in reality there are scores of exceptions) was supplied by an Afghan student of mine. He explained how on his visit to Afghanistan, Barack Obama went through a cafeteria line and sat with the troops to eat. The Afghanis were blown away: he’s the President! However, this sort of “regular-guy” behavior is almost expected of a leader in American culture, and any signs of superiority are met with rabid rejection. In a more hierarchical society, however, it is natural and fitting to show and respect rank. Therefore, my students often say to me something along the lines that “American children/students don’t respect their parents/teachers” because they see children arguing with parents and students calling teachers by their first name. This casual behavior, which epitomizes an egalitarian culture, would be interpreted as disrespectful of the parents’ or teachers’ authority in their culture. Likewise, the pomp and circumstance associated with more hierarchical cultures seem ridiculous to a more informal, egalitarian society. Differences in this dimension lead to many misinterpretations of other cultures as, paradoxically, either disrespectful because some people are regarded as visibly superior to others, or disrespectful because inferiors are not deferential enough to their superiors.
Table 4

*Universal vs. Particular*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIVERSAL</th>
<th>PARTICULAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Rules</td>
<td>• Rules, but…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No exceptions</td>
<td>• Flexibility, exceptions are expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Blanket application to all people/situations</td>
<td>• Every person/situation is unique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Objectivity is fair</td>
<td>• Subjectivity is fair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This dimension – which mainly describes how “fair” is defined – is fascinating in the context of an IEP, where both students and programs have so much at stake. Most of our students are eager to get admitted into the university, and the IEP is just a required way station. Many of them will beg and cajole to get through the program, and teacher complaints tend to sound like, “Our students expect us to break the rules just for them.” From a culture closer to the universal end of the spectrum, we believe that systems can only remain coherent and functional through strict observance of the rules. That does not mean that there are no exceptions; it means that the exceptions are few and far between and clearly justified. We think this is fair.

Conversely, a person from a particularist culture believes that taking into account each individual’s circumstances is fair. Students may come with a late homework assignment and beg off with personal reasons, which fall onto the somewhat unsympathetic ears of many American teachers, who often refuse to be flexible as a way of “training” students to work within our system, which is what they will encounter at the university. Our students then complain that “American teachers are unfeeling because they are inflexible about assignment deadlines,”
viewing this as strict inflexibility and a greater concern with rules than with individuals. Who ever knew that the concept of fairness was cultural, yet it is! A univeralist will think that a particularist is trying curry favor or get around the rules, and in the worst case scenario is corrupt, while a particularist views universalists as cold and uncaring. As such fertile ground for misunderstanding, this particular dimension has serious implications for smooth student-program relations and truly merits some examination and explanation in student orientation programs.

Table 5

**Specific vs. Diffuse**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPECIFIC</th>
<th>DIFFUSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Relationships based on objectives (“my soccer friend”)</td>
<td>• Relationships permeate all realms of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relationships easily entered and broken</td>
<td>• Relationship are forever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Compartmentalized lives</td>
<td>• Hard to access, but once you’re in, you’re in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This particular dimension tends to have more repercussions in our students’ social lives than in their relationship with the IEP, yet the one place I have found it is in the confluence of the two: the social relationships I develop with my students. I often socialize with my students, but I consider this part of my job, and rarely do I admit a student into my truly private sphere. If I do, it is usually when he or she is no longer my student.

The incident related to this dimension comes when students send me friend requests on Facebook. My Facebook page is for me and my friends and family members. There, I am “me”, not the “work me” or the “professional me”, but the real, authentic, uncensored me, a distinction
that someone from a diffuse culture would find baffling. I am reluctant to accept my students’ friend requests because that means letting them into the personal side of my life, which might include political or social beliefs that I do not necessarily want to share with them. On the contrary, in many cultures, the idea of slicing our lives into different pieces is quite foreign and even absurd. If you are my friend, you are my friend, and I put no boundaries on this friendship. In the past, I seriously offended many students, who said, “My teacher doesn’t really care about me because she doesn’t want to be my Facebook friend,” yet my response would be, “Our students don’t understand that we are not there to be their friends, but that doesn’t mean we don’t care about them.” Caring in some aspects but not in all parts of our lives is a foreign concept to someone from a diffuse culture, and one that often leads international students to be sorely disappointed in their friendships with Americans, which they often perceive as lifelong, although within months of leaving the country, the American often loses touch.

Table 6

*Sequential vs. Synchronous*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>SEQUENTIAL</strong></th>
<th><strong>SYNCHRONOUS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time is a tangible commodity</td>
<td>Time is intangible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One thing at a time</td>
<td>Multitasking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The task counts; I’ll deal with you when I’m finished with my task</td>
<td>Relationships count; I’ll finish my task after I deal with you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time is linear</td>
<td>Time is overlapping, looping</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is quite astonishing how much a sequential, or Western, conception of time can lead to serious cultural misunderstandings. Since ours is a sequential culture, time seems to loom
heavily over us. The illustrious anthropologist Edward T. Hall wrote how the Native American
groups whom he studied actually believed that the European-Americans had a “devil inside who
seemed to drive them unmercifully. This devil was time” (Hall, 1992, p. 218). In fact, the idea
that time is a commodity that one can “save,” “spend”, or “waste” is downright laughable (and
not a little pathetic) to people from synchronous cultures. We sequentialists are jealous of our
time; it may seem even more important than the people in front of us. My classic example of this
is when I lived in Spain. I was the director of a language institute, and whenever I was working
on my computer and an American teacher came to my office door, I knew I could just tell them
that I’d come find them when I finished what I was doing and they would leave, perfectly happy,
knowing I would hear them out as soon as I could. However, if I did that to the Spanish support
staff, the reaction was insult: I was putting some abstract task on the computer above this living,
breathing person requesting my attention here and now.

Our students, like Spaniards, tend to be more synchronous than we are; in fact almost
every culture – perhaps with the exception of Germany and Japan – is more synchronous than we
are, and this leads to misunderstandings. In our IEP, teachers have office hours when they must
be available to students, yet they work many more hours, some of which, in the interest of
productivity – grading, planning, committee work, etc. – simply is off-limits to students.
However, our students are often not familiar with strict hours when they are welcome (or not)
and may come at any time. When the teacher rebuffs them, as they sometimes do, and tells them
to come back during office hours, the students may think, “When I go to my teacher’s office,
sometimes she won’t meet with me even though she’s there,” which is interpreted as a slap in the
face and proof perhaps of the teacher’s lack of interest and even professionalism. One former
student of mine from a hierarchical culture even interpreted this as the teacher pulling rank and
showing her superiority over the student, yet another example of how our interpretations of a culture are often more a reflection of our own. Our teachers, in turn, complain that “Our students expect us to be endlessly available.” We do more than teach, although it is the core of our profession, and there are times when we simply must devote our attention to our other duties. Sometimes, because of this different cultural perception of time, our students may view us as rude, uncaring, and inflexible, while we see them as pushy and disrespectful of our time.

This has been a brief survey of just six dimensions of cultural variation, and I have necessarily simplified them for the sake of space. Yet there are many more, and each of them affects our relationships with our students. Other dimensions include direct vs. indirect (which has huge implications on both verbal and written communication); high context vs. low context (which also affects interpersonal communication and behavior); external vs. internal control (who or what determines the course of our lives and to what extent); and ascription vs. achievement (how we are accorded status, by our own merits or by birthright, which is closely related to “leaders” that often develop among student groups from the same culture). The bibliography contains books that can help shed light on these dimensions.

The value of the dimensions lies in the fact that they can provide us with a systematic scaffolding on which to hang our cultural experiences and incidents. Without this scaffolding, we simply accumulate random experiences and have difficulty making sense of them, since culture on this level – the underwater level in the iceberg metaphor – is rarely discussed or taught. However, with the scaffolding of the cultural dimensions, we can not only organize our cultural experiences and incidents, we can also make sense of them, and understand that our own culture’s place on that continuum is just one of many and that whenever someone acts differently, it is most likely a symptom of a different cultural mapping along one of these
continua. It is in this sense that cross-cultural awareness becomes a tool of peace. Instead of judging others’ behavior as wrong, and likewise labeling them negatively – as rude, disrespectful, cold, unfeeling, obnoxious, corrupt, etc. – we understand that they are simply playing by different rules and operating from different coordinates. We learn that our way of being is not natural; it is cultural. We learn that our assessments of other cultures are not necessarily accurate and usually say more about our own culture than the culture of the person with whom we are dealing. We learn not to judge others based on our own culture, and instead we learn to observe, analyze, and understand, not to react viscerally.

As I always caution my students, this does not mean that anyone should adopt anyone else’s rules or culture; rather, all it means is that we begin to grasp that there are different possible rules governing a culture, and so instead of reacting negatively or viscerally (with irritation, frustration, condemnation) at others’ behavior, we can react more as cultural investigators, with the thrill of trying to decipher what dimension might be at play and filing away that knowledge away for future reference. We learn that every culture has its logic, even though we may not share it. So we learn to understand and therefore respect (and not fear!) different cultures. Anger, misunderstanding, and even hatred morph into a fascinating game of cultural diversity, one that leads to understanding – mutual understanding in the best of cases – which is the antecedent to any peace in this world.
References

Appendix

Additional readings for key terms in culture studies


Mary Black earned her BA in German in 1987 and her MA in Applied Linguistics in 1989, both from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. After graduating, she worked at SIU’s campus in Niigata, Japan, for two years and then moved to Barcelona, Spain. In Barcelona, she first worked as an EFL teacher, then became the Director of the English Program of the Polytechnic University of Catalonia, and finally became the Academic Director of the Institute of North American Studies. Around ten years ago, Mary also branched out into translating from Spanish and Catalan into English. Mary’s main areas of interest are bilingualism and cross-cultural communication.
“Teacher, Do You Pray?:” Addressing Religion in IEP classes

Colin Robinson, Center for English as a Second Language, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale

Abstract

Anecdotal occurrences in the IEP classroom can force ESL teachers reflect on their multiple roles. Currently, many IEPs are experiencing higher than usual numbers of Arab Muslim students. The Islamic religion, as an integral influence on the learners' daily lives, thus can become, a significant and overtly present component of student reflection and discussion in the classroom. This paper discusses, through the retelling of a true and compelling anecdote, 4 principal roles teachers play when religion comes to the fore in IEP classrooms: 1) value students as members of the English-speaking community, 2) Reward students for using their learning strategies, 3) Relinquish some control to students during discussion, and 4) Foster greater understanding of American academic culture.
Recently, after we had done a reading on stress-management in my intermediate-level Core integrated skills class, I listened in on a conversation between a female Saudi student and a female Korean student.

The hijab-wearing Saudi explained that prayer helped her manage her stress and kept her calm and positive. When it came time to share pair group answers with the whole class, the Saudi female was the last to speak. She pointed out that her stress-management strategies did not involve exercise or watching movies, as some of the other students had stated. Rather, her way of dealing with stress was strongly tied to the Quran. The Korean female she was working with seemed genuinely fascinated by the Saudi’s discussion of why she prays and her belief in the power of prayer. Perhaps she was also surprised by her partner’s openness regarding this topic.

The Muslim female student smiled after she had finished and turned to me after giving her perspective and reasoning. She asked me, “Teacher…do you pray?” I was surprised by her question. It was direct, personal, and brave. However, it was not inappropriate or out of place given the good rapport we had built up over a month. Indeed, she, more than the other students, had just honestly and openly shared her beliefs and opinions on a serious topic in a classroom setting, in front of everyone, in a second language, in a foreign country. That’s not easy.

This student had just done something very difficult. There were Muslim men in the class, but she, a Saudi female, was the one, in my opinion, who took the greatest risk by going into depth about her beliefs. Her words reflected introspection to the degree rarely seen in some of our students’ answers to “thinking questions.” In keeping with full disclosure, this student is a poet in her native language. She also has a very outgoing personality.

Right away, I thought, what should I do? Should I answer her question? Maybe she won’t like my answer. Maybe no one will. I was put on the spot. How should I answer her question:
“Teacher, do you pray?” This question was posed to me by a modern Saudi woman, one whose voice may not be heard as often as it should be, both back in her home country and in IEP classrooms across the United States and other countries, where male voices too often drown out the female ones. How do you think I answered? I’ll leave that question as I get into the focus and research of this paper. Then, I’ll return to my story and add a few conclusions.

**Focus and Research**

Our ESL students come from many countries; they are global citizens. The title of this MIDTESOL Conference is “Gateway to Global Citizenship.” The nature of current trends in student enrollment in academic IEPs has shifted from a higher concentration of Asian students to Arab Muslim students from the Middle East. Indeed, most of my classes at the Center for English as a Second Language (CESL) at Southern Illinois University are heavily dominated by Saudi students: they are currently roughly about 60% of our program’s students, thereby pushing up against our critical mass barrier. Given that more of our students come from the Middle East, more of our students have homogenous religious beliefs relating to Islam. When Ramadan comes, for example, it has an impact on our program because so many of our students are affected.

Given that many of our students originate from one culture, I can rely on certain cultural values to be held by my students. One of these important values is Islam. Sometimes my students begin to explain their ideas, opinions, etc., by prepositioning their religion in their comments. Some have stated something to the effect of “According to my religion (Islam), we believe such and such” about topics covered in our core integrated skills class, topics such as marriage/family, the mind-body connection, drugs, love and interpersonal relationships, dreams, health, stress-management, crime, luck/destiny, and the stages of life, to name a few. Because at CESL our
classes are a content-based curriculum, many of these aforementioned topics are the content and context which we use to help students improve their various reading, vocabulary, speaking, listening, and critical thinking skills. Therefore, we are obliged to consider how to best determine who our Arab students are and how we might best allow them to draw on their culture to inform their L2 acquisition.

**Who are our Arab Muslim English learners?**

Recent research has confirmed what many IEP ESL teachers have known for a long time. Fender (2008) stated compared with other cultural groups, Arab ESL learners struggle more to acquire literacy skills yet seem to achieve great development of aural and oral skills. Therefore, research conducted on this particular adult ESL population tends to focus on strategies to improve reading, writing, and orthography. In general, Arabs’ capacity for speaking in English and their cultural background come to the fore when we brainstorm or discuss topics. Indeed, one of the challenges for ESL teachers is to manage discussion in classes strongly influenced by a vocal student population. ESL teachers could better help their Arab students achieve greater writing proficiency in English if they are cognizant of specific weaknesses apparent in a contrastive analysis of their writing skills (Thompson-Panos & Thomas Ruzic, 1983).

Additionally, more recent research (Hayes-Harb, 2006) has shown that Arab ESL learners may be not as aware of vowel letters as other ESL students, which could explain the difficulty many of these students have in reading comprehension.

Carell and Eisterhold (1983) reported that students’ background knowledge of discourse can have a strong influence on reading comprehension. The topics appearing in our integrated skills textbooks are general enough that our students can approach a reading on family values, for instance, by using what they know about the subject from their culture and personal
experience. The teacher’s role is to encourage the students to think, remember, and utilize what they already know about the subject and activate their schemata so they can be prepared to engage the reading. Inviting Muslim students, in particular, to use these metacognitive strategies leads to greater opportunity of second language proficiency according to research. This background knowledge is very culturally laden, of course. Our Muslim students pray four times a day, men separate from women. Some Muslim students do so just outside our building in a somewhat secluded corner during their short breaks between classes.

In another interesting study, researchers looked at ESL students’ ethnicity and religion. Liyanage, et al (2004), looked at ESL students in south Asia and Australia, who were Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus, to examine whether ethnicity or religion was a greater determinate of ESL students’ language learning strategies: metacognitive, cognitive, or social-affective strategy. Their study used a Likert scale for the groups to self-report how often they use specific behaviors they engage in when learning a language. Liyanage and the other researchers found that religion is more important than ethnicity, and thus they advocate that ESL programs avoid using Western methodologies exclusively with students who are predisposed to particular learning strategies. In the case of the South Asian Muslim students, there is a preference for utilizing all 3 learning strategies. The Muslim men, and, in particular, the Muslim women, reported a greater use of all 3 strategies, especially metacognitive strategies. Metacognitive strategies include making links to what students already know about the content, planning for learning, and monitoring and a evaluating their own learning (Shrum & Glisan, 1994). From this research, we could conclude that if we give a class full of Muslim students a KWL chart, for example, we can and should expect that what they KNOW about a topic comes from their cultural background. A significant
part of the Arab culture is their Islamic traditions. This cannot be overlooked and should inform our teachers’ ideas regarding their role in the classroom.

**What is a teacher’s role in an IEP?**

A teacher’s role in any class/program, in this case a college-prep, IEP ESL program, is multi-faceted. We are language facilitators, cultural ambassadors, classroom managers, English language experts, academic guides, mentors to novice teachers, administrators, bloggers, record-keepers, academics, and professional colleagues. However, we are still more than that. We work together in intimate settings for multiple hours a day. We get to know our students in ways and to degrees other teachers do not. There is a strong sense of openness and friendship among teachers and students in IEPs.

Richards and Lockhart (1996) defined social roles as showing power relationships and patterns of interaction and communication. In the classroom, the teacher has the power; the students have less control. As the students’ skills improve, teachers do less hand-holding, and students become more independent learners.

Along these lines, Lightbown and Spada (p. 54, 2006) asked “Who is a ‘good language learner’?” and answered that many good learners are those who have motivation and opportunity. Norton and Toohey’s (2006) response to this question was that being seen as valued partners in a speech community is a very important predictor of second language acquisition success. One of the roles ESL teachers have is to demonstrate the value of our students’ words and views in an attempt to foster an atmosphere that is healthy so as to promote improved language proficiency. While this is integral to our jobs, we might consider some various roles that we can play in the ESL classroom.

**Role #1 – Value students as members of the English-speaking community.**
Zoltan Dornyei (2001) discussed the importance of second language teachers’ awareness and ability to encourage L2 language acquisition through the generation and maintenance of their learners’ motivation. In my situation, I must ask, “What motivates many of my Arab Muslim students?” Two major extrinsic motivations include their scholarship through their embassy or company and the time restrictions placed on their completion of our English program. They are also motivated by intrinsic, personal motivations and by the teachers’ reactions to their output, their language production. Generally, adult second language learners react positively to positive reinforcement. They take more risks if they feel supported in a safe, democratic environment. Showing that we value our students as speakers of a language community is important.

**Role 2: Be a good listener who is aware of student needs, thereby fostering intercultural communication.**

We must remember: teachers are important too, right? Lilia Bartolome (2000) has written about the importance of training teachers to be self-critical and examine what they say and how they say things to different students based on their students’ gender, cultural background, etc. Teachers need to be aware and monitor what they say based on who their interlocutors are. Remember, my student asked me, “Teacher, do you pray?” I wanted to show value to her, to her question, and to appreciate her openness and trust. However at first, I followed my ESL teacher’s instincts and employed a commonly used tactic: I declined to answer and tried to deflect her question. She looked at me with some disappointment as I said it was not important what I believed or if I prayed. She pressed on and gently prodded me in front of the students to give her an honest answer. She became the questioner, the figure of authority, which had just previously been my position.

**Role 3: Don’t be afraid to relinquish some control in the classroom and be honest.**
In the end, I relented. I had to give a response. I just had to. I stood and somewhat embarrassingly said that I don’t pray. Multiple sighs and gasps. Stares of amazement. A few eyes looking down. Then, the students began to smile. Still, the Saudi female student did not let me off the hook there. She politely asked me “Why not?” Why didn’t I pray? Didn’t I believe in God? The rest of the students looked on in anticipatory silence. I said “No.” Quickly I rushed to say that while I respect religions, and the people who believe in them, I do not choose to have a religion. I started getting nervous. I became aware that I had become the focus of attention. I had become a curiosity, an oddity. I stated that even though this was an interesting discussion, the class was not about religion, and was certainly not about me. A few students nodded. I wanted to switch gears to talk about the next part of the lesson. I wondered if I had lost their respect. I said I would be happy to continue the conversation outside of class, but that there wasn’t time to continue in class. That was it. The conversation ended. I had come out of the religious closet in front of my students. It was unplanned. I had tried to avoid it. But in the end, I am glad it happened.

**Role 4: Foster greater understanding of American culture, in particular its academic culture.**

American university discussions can be characterized by their open, frank, democratic nature, which may be in stark contrast to what some of our Arab Muslim students may have experienced in their countries. This cross-cultural difference may become more apparent when serious topics such as religion arise in the classroom. Peregoy and Boyle (2008) wrote, “Teaching, like parenting allows significant opportunities for a deeper understanding of ourselves and our influence on the lives of others” (p.15). If we as ESL teachers want to have an influence, want to empower our students through improving their language proficiency and their
awareness of American values by allowing them the freedom to speak about their beliefs, then the very least we can do is—without grandstanding, without getting on a soapbox, without proselytizing—the least we can do is to be as equally forthcoming. In doing so, we will help these students to see what typical American classrooms are like so that they won’t be shocked when the enter their programs of study.

Conclusions

Lev Vygotsky (1958) introduced us to the Zone of Proximal Development: the point at which children can learn on their own and the point where kids need more capable peers to help them learn. Educational theorists such as Jerome Bruner (1974) later adapted this into the notion of scaffolding, support structures which help the learner acquire new information and which can be removed when not needed. Some of these structures are learning strategies and activation of cultural schemata, such as background information. That is, what do the students already know and/or believe about a topic. For our Arab Muslim students, Islam is a crucial part of this schemata, which can inform their understanding of new material while adding to the discussion at hand.

I believe ESL teachers, like all teachers, have much clichéd “teachable moments.” These exchanges or events could be called our “zone of maximum intercultural exchange.” They are times in our lessons, often unexpected, when we reach our students and they reach us in ways we could not have planned. ESL teachers have for years found themselves at times in this “Zone of Intercultural Connection.” These are moments many teachers hope for. These moments go beyond language and can reach a pinnacle during critical thinking, discussion exercises.

A teacher’s role in the case of the topic of religion, in classes full of students whose attitudes and belief systems may be heavily predicated on their religion, is to allow for discussion
to precede as it fulfills the goals and objectives of the course. Part and parcel of learning English as a second language in preparation for academic life at a university in the United States is being introduced to and adapting to the norms of our academic culture, one of which is an open, free, and safe environment for the expression of diverse views. Therefore, as ESL teachers in an IEP, our role is to offer an open-handed invitation of understanding and respect for foreign cultures and religions that may be different from our own. If a student asks a personal, challenging, relevant question during discussion such as “Teacher, do you pray,” give an honest answer. By so doing, you will be valuing them as speakers of English (Role #1), listening to their needs and encouraging intercultural communication (Role #2), relinquishing some control in order to reward risk-taking (Role #3), and fostering a greater understanding of the American academic environment (Role #4).
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Input + 1000: Challenges and Effectiveness of EAP for University-bound Students
Diana Pascoe-Chavez, St. Louis University

Abstract

A study of an eight-week intensive EAP university program for low intermediate to advanced L2 learners explores some of the challenges of combining language acquisition with sustained content instruction. Minimum language proficiency levels are discussed, as well as the role of mismatched student and teacher expectations.
In many English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs, students are asked to read authentic texts, take notes for lecture classes, write research papers, and participate in academic discussions, while also advancing in their acquisition of their second language skills. The many challenges include how to make content accessible while trying to implement input enhancement strategies. In addition, teachers often face the challenge of a mismatch between their use of EAP methodology and the students’ perception of appropriate teaching and learning strategies, causing motivational and pedagogical issues in the classroom for both students and teachers. As a teacher in a sustained content-based EAP program for university-bound students, my “critical incident” moment came when I assigned a short researched essay on Chinese or Arabic cultural keywords to a group of students, some of whom had a low-intermediate level of language skills. The issues were whether I was asking too much from the students by presenting them with a very challenging academic task, and whether this would, in some way, hinder their progress in actual language acquisition. In essence, there was a moment when I questioned my identity as a language teacher, since I was perhaps assigning a task that was way beyond the linguistic capacity of the students. The following is a teacher’s perspective of the challenges faced by the participants in the program and an analysis of the effectiveness of using authentic materials and university-level assignments with low level L2 students.

It is difficult to find conclusive research to back up the claims of EAP programs that content-based instruction is the most effective way to bridge the gap between ESL goals and preparation for academic studies. So many factors come into play when trying to document effectiveness or success—student and teacher background, motivation, and expectations, as well as program methodology, resources, and evaluation tools. Rather than trying to quantify test scores and survey results of a limited sample in order to justify a method, I will use a more
narrative approach to describe a “critical incident,” in this case a specific group of students and
teachers who participated in an eight-week summer EAP program. Nunan and Choi (2010), in a
discussion on the use of reflective narratives as a mode of inquiry, defined the concept of a
critical incident as an “event that stimulates the individual to restructure their understanding of
the nexus between language, culture and identity” (p.6). As a teacher, I had to reflect on the
theory and assumptions behind an EAP program, and I was asking the students to reflect not only
on their cultural identity when asked to discuss cultural keywords, but also their identity as
language students in an American university.

Most of the 34 students were in the summer program because of low scores on language
proficiency tests, especially on the reading subscores as evidenced on the institutional TOEFL.
Most had been in the ESL program for two semesters, starting at very low levels, and most were
on probation, which meant that in some cases, they might not be able to continue if they did not
show progress during the summer. In the lower levels, the average TOEFL score was 430, and
the reading score average was 385. The upper level students averaged a 435 on the reading
subscore, but an overall average score of 480. As far as essay-writing skills, the lower levels
averaged a 3.0 on a scale of 6 on the university test, the SLUWE, and the upper level averaged
3.5. In order to be fully admitted into undergraduate programs, students needed to get a 4. Many
students could expect to spend at least three more semesters in the EAP program in order to
bring their scores up to the required overall score of 550 on the TOEFL and a 4 on the SLUWE.
All of the students were university bound, with four graduates and thirty-one undergraduates,
mostly business majors. The student mix was essentially monocultural; 94% of the students
were from China, and two were from a Middle Eastern country.
The summer program consisted of two short content courses: “History of Missouri” and “Cultural Keywords,” as well as four linked L2 skill classes—grammar, reading, writing and speaking. The program was intensive, with approximately 22 hours of instruction a week and outside tutoring hours at the ESL Resource Center available and recommended. The two content classes were linked through a movie series that focused on Hollywood’s interpretation of historical events, as well as some documentaries. Each of the three levels, from low intermediate to advanced, had a content history class with a syllabus that was modeled on introductory freshman history classes. We used an eighth grade history textbook for the lower level and a freshman-level textbook for the upper two levels. The “Cultural Keyword” class met twice a week with all levels present, and the content consisted of a handout of a chapter from a media and communication textbook, an article on Chinese cultural keywords, a series of movies with themes following the history class topics, and lectures on how culture can be expressed via the media through cultural keywords. The content topic was chosen to allow local field trips and contextualized discussions of cultural adaptation and communication. The reading and writing teachers then used sheltered instruction strategies and worked with the content using group discussions, comprehension check handouts and task-based activities.

All the students and teachers attended a movie discussion class together once a week, where small breakout groups, lead by a teacher, worked on the discussion questions provided by the content teachers. This ensured the use of English during the completion of the task, as well as the necessary help for those who needed help with concepts and vocabulary. In addition, the teachers took on the role of coaches since they were working on answering questions that they had not devised and were able to use material from the shared experiences as material sources for their activities and assignments in the skill classes. Finally, the skill teachers worked as a team
to provide scaffolding and learner strategy exercises meant to help with the students’ comprehension of the content material.

The challenge to the students and to their skill teachers was daunting. The program had been conducted in previous summers, but the majority of the students had been in the advanced level or higher. In the past, the final paper for the “Cultural Keyword” class had been an analysis of the cultural media message of an advertisement or a visual image based on studies of American culture, and the students were expected to apply what they had learned about American cultural keywords. However, from the class discussions and quizzes, it was obvious that the students were struggling with the content, and they did not seem to be very motivated by the topic. On searching for information about Chinese cultural keywords, I found a journal article that analyzed six core keywords (Cortazzi & Shen, 2001). This led to a change in the final paper topic. Students were asked to read the first two pages of the article and then were assigned one of the six keywords to explore and to find examples in visual imagery. My rationale for the change was that the students would be able to see that what they had been studying applied to their own culture, too, and that this was an area in which they could consider themselves “experts.” In addition, the article was co-written by a Chinese scholar, and this would seem to give face value to the content.

The paper assignment was presented as a challenge to the students. They were invited to inform their teachers about their own culture in the same way we had been telling them about ours. They were also challenged to produce a short freshman-level paper using MLA style and at least three sources. The assignment sheet specified that they needed to apply the content of lectures and readings on the effects of media and cultural keywords and find examples of their chosen keyword in some kind of media. The lower level was asked to write three pages, and the
advanced five. Grammatical accuracy and complexity would be graded taking into account students’ level, and students were encouraged to use the writing center resources. The writing teachers would be grading the rough drafts, and the content teacher would give the final grade. I informed them that they would be graded on the content and format in the same way I would grade an international student in a freshman class on the same topic.

The results of the summer program as measured by the SLUWE, grades on the final papers, and the institutional TOEFL Results were unexpected. The SLUWE is based on a short editorial (500 words) that discusses a current events issue and a prompt that asks for a 300 to 400 word essay that identifies the different positions and discusses the student’s opinion. The score takes into account reading comprehension, structural accuracy, lack of plagiarism, and organization of ideas. A 4.0 is the minimum needed to take the first level of English composition. At the beginning of the summer, the SLUWE scores of the whole group were spread out, with 71% scoring a 3 or 3.5, but with high and low scores in each level. Eight weeks later, 94% had a 3 or 3+, but most of the gains were made in the lowest level, where 93% made a .25 or .50 point gain. In the intermediate and advanced levels, 35% gained .25 or .50; 45% went down .25 or .50; and 20% got the same score. It is important to mention that in the writing classes, the focus was on general composition skills and specifically writing short researched essays. We did not hold as many SLUWE-specific workshops as normally held during the regular semester.

On the final paper, the lower level showed a significant gain over the grades they had received on earlier midterm reflection papers, with 71% receiving a B or higher and 43% getting an A or A-. In the intermediate level, 55% earned a B or higher, but none received an A or A-. In the advanced level, 56% earned a B or higher, and 33% earned an A or A-. While results of
the high-advanced and advanced levels were as expected, taking into account the writing samples obtained at mid-term, in several cases the lower level students received higher grades than their classmates in higher levels.

On the Paper-Based TOEFL (PBT), which is administered institutionally at the beginning and end of the summer term, we had not expected too much, given the amount of time and the low level of the students. In general, students in the program are expected to go up 15 to 20 points in one 16-week semester in order to get to the next level. In addition, during the regular semester, there are weekly TOEFL-test preparation classes, as well as workshops in the evenings. The summer program did not have a separate TOEFL-prep class nor evening workshops. Students were informed that if they passed the classes and showed progress on their test scores, they would be able to stay in the program. As seen in Table 1, the intermediate and advanced levels showed relatively good gains, which allowed them to progress into the level they should have been in at the end of the spring semester. However, the low intermediate level showed impressive gains, especially taking into account that 54% of the students had starting scores that were under PBT 450, which is the usual minimum level for the summer program.

Table 1

**TOEFL Gains of students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incoming TOEFL score:</th>
<th>Average gain:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low intermediate level: 420 - 459 PBT</td>
<td>42 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate level: 460 - 479 PBT</td>
<td>17 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Advanced level: 480 - 510 PBT</td>
<td>14 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Before discussing these results, the following section reviews some of the theory and assumptions behind EAP programs and the use of content-based instruction. One of the main assumptions has been that L2 language acquisition would be more effective in content-based instruction because it would be more relevant to the students, and it would provide ample opportunities to use language in a meaningful fashion. The content and type of assignments found in the EAP classes focus on the specific skills and demands of the target academic programs, using authentic materials. By introducing study skills such as note taking and research strategies in the language skill classes while working with academic readings, lecture-style classes, and classroom discussions in a content class, it has been assumed that the L2 students would simultaneously improve their general English skills and be more prepared for mainstream content classes (Pally, 2000). Part of the drive in the 1980s to introduce more content and study skills into the traditional ESL curriculum was precisely the concern that students who had completed ESL programs and passed the standardized entrance exams were still struggling with the demands of their academic classes (Benesch, 2001). However, there was little discussion of what the minimum threshold of language proficiency should be in order for the content-based classes to be not only a means to advance the students in their academic studies, but to also improve in their language proficiency levels. It was assumed that by using the language in a meaningful and relevant context, the students would continue to improve their L2 language skills.

This basic assumption of EAP has been criticized over the years for not being backed up by sufficient research (Cheng & Fox, 2008). One of the oldest challenges is based on the argument that students can be overloaded by the challenge of dealing with linguistic tasks that are beyond their established L2 level and at the same time being expected to complete authentic
academic assignments. Unless serious modifications to teaching instruction and materials are made, students neither improve their general language skills nor develop the critical thinking skills needed for academic tasks, and the results can be linguistic breakdown and general frustration (Spack, 1988; Marani, 1998). Furthermore, Wong argues that students will not be able to make the form-meaning connections in texts which demand more attention to meaning (2002). The use of authentic texts and university-level assignments could be seen as equivalent to asking a student to deal with input + 1000 instead of the proverbial Krashan input + 1 or to expanding Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development to the outer limits.

In response to this challenge, a lot of research in the K-12 area focused on how to scaffold and implement modification strategies to successfully integrate content and language. Content-based instruction has been seen as “an approach that can extend the time students have for getting language support services while giving them a jump-start on the content subjects they will need for graduation” (Echevarría, Vogt & Short, 2008, p. 13). Two key factors, however, are the close collaboration between language and content teachers, as well as modification of language and content, especially in the K-12 area (Short, 1991; Echevarría, Vogt & Short, 2008). At the university level, EAP programs have used content-based instruction in a variety of ways, including the adjunct model, where L2 learners attend a regular subject matter course, often for credit, and the ESL class or classes teach language skills linked to the content class. Since it is often difficult to ask university professors, adjunct teachers, or TAs to modify their teaching styles, and since close linking of mainstream classes with EAP classes is often difficult to implement in large universities, EAP programs and texts have either incorporated academic themes and specialized units into their ESL coursework, or implemented variations of linked, sheltered or simulated adjunct classes that are supported by a language skill class. Our summer
program is an example of the simulated adjunct model, where the subject matter and ESL instruction is delivered by ESL faculty based on syllabi that are similar to equivalent classes taught at the freshman level (Brinton & Jensen, 2002).

However, it is difficult to find any agreement on what the minimum threshold of language proficiency should be in order to have adjunct content classes in a language program. Many EAP programs or classes are given concurrently with regular university classes, where the students have the minimum proficiency scores or are close, generally in the PBT 500 – 550 range (Snow & Brinton, 1988). When going into lower levels, Marani (1998) recommended that students in content-based language classes need material that is “potentially comprehensible, i.e., at or just beyond the learner’s linguistic (including schematic) level,” referring to Krashen’s input +1 theory, but he did not specify how to determine what that range is (p. 13). Others referred to choosing materials that are “appropriate” to the level of the students and did not recommend using authentic materials or content-based instruction in beginning or low intermediate levels (Wong, 2004; Echevarría, Vogt & Short, 2008; Snow & Brinton, 1988).

Iancu (2002) and Stoller (2002), however, described programs using content-based instruction successfully within programs where the lower threshold is 450 on the TOEFL. One of the keys to success was the selection of content teachers who were “eager to participate in this adventure,” and the expectation that all of the EAP faculty would bump up their level of knowledge of the content topic (Iancu, 2002, p. 152.)

This is where another challenge, especially at the university level, has come from those who argue that by linking content and language, the ESL teachers are being asked to take on the role of content teachers and often overemphasize the content aspects of the curriculum (Cheng and Fox, 2008; Spack, 1988). In most cases, the objections are based on studies of English for
Specific Purposes (ESP) curriculum in writing classes, where the assignments are tailored to fields outside the humanistic “English” background of most ESL teachers. Benesch (2001) argued that both content and language teachers expressed uneasiness in having language teachers work with material because they may inadvertently “do a disservice to those disciplines, the students and themselves when they attempt to teach their genres” (p. 37). Another argument against trying to tailor the EAP program to specific academic genres is that there are very different demands in the various academic fields, and that even in a specific field, there is a great variety in the nature of individual professors’ expectations and assignments (Zamel, 1998). At one extreme, ESL generalists argued that the “decontextualized, discipline-general academic skills or capabilities may be of limited or no value to students” (Cheng & Fox, 2008, p. 312).

Thus, the choice of topic for the linked content classes or for embedded content exercises in EAP language classes is basically part of an ongoing debate over the relationship between the EAP programs and the larger university context. Should the programs and their content be separate in order to allow teachers and students to work on the primary goal of language acquisition, or should the programs be seen as service units that support the academic programs? Spack (1988) argued that ESL instructors should stick to content that was within their field, mentioning language and cultural topics, but it is not clear if she would consider a class on intercultural communication or language and media as part of the ESL teacher’s domain.

In the context of the SLU summer program, we had a team of trained faculty, both adjunct and full time, who had experience in using content-based instruction in a program where there has to be a lot of communication between the teachers and a lot of coordination of class syllabi and assignments. The two content teachers have degrees in the content area field, but in addition, the whole EAP team periodically takes training sessions and studies the topics being
given in the content classes. All the teachers were also experienced in working with students with a low level of academic language proficiency and low reading levels. However, two other factors—student motivation and student identity as an L2 learner—may have helped with the relative success of the program. Student motivation and morale was relatively low at the beginning of the summer since most had been required to stay due to low scores on tests. Most of these students had already been in the program for two semesters, having started at very low levels, and most were expressing a sense of frustration at not being able to pass the TOEFL exam. As reported in studies on student motivation and perception of EAP methodology, many students felt that the EAP classes were not actually fulfilling their perceived objective of helping them pass the TOEFL (Cheng & Fox, 325). Our SLU EAP students had often expressed this perception in interviews, on class evaluations, and in student meetings. By downgrading the importance of the TOEFL in the summer and emphasizing the importance of being able to complete freshman level tests and assignments, the students were challenged to show the content teachers if they were ready or not for freshman classes. As mentioned previously, there were no TOEFL study sessions in the evenings, no separate TOEFL preparation classes for the lower levels, and the final TOEFL test was voluntary. In a sense, we wanted the students to feel as if they had a free-TOEFL pass for the summer and that this would help them to focus on the content and academic language acquisition.

The students were also challenged to take a look at their conceptions of the roles of L2 language teachers and students. Stanley (2011), in an article on how the foreign language teacher is perceived in China, pointed out that there is a significant mismatch between the way language learning and teaching is viewed in China and the way it is viewed in EAP and ESL programs in the U.S. In her study, both teachers and students in China held the implicit
assumption that language was a system of discrete units that are first learned and only then used or “activated,” while in current communicative and content-based methods, the language is acquired through use and exposure to meaningful and relevant input. To the Chinese students, the choice of topics and assignments in the typical Western-style classroom seemed arbitrary, as well as unnecessary. In addition, the relative informality of the foreign L2 teachers did not seem “proper” to their students. The end result was a common perception that the teachers did not know what they were doing (Stanley, 2011). This perception had been reported among our own students, as well, especially when it came to preparation for the proficiency exams, and teachers encountered a generalized sense of resistance to the class work and homework assignments. The basis of content-based instruction is that it motivates students by supplying them with skills they will be able to transfer to their future studies, and that language development will occur, but this will only work if the students fully understand and accept the validity of what they are asked to do (Pally, 2000). As noted in Cheng’s and Fox’s (2008) study, “when student and program agendas do not match, students often feel frustrated and may not take advantage of the learning opportunities available to them” (p. 325).

In order to address these issues in the SLU program, several steps were taken. In the class where the final paper assignment was explained, I went over many of the cultural concepts that had been introduced as part of the culture studies, and then showed how they were reflected in the academic culture and teaching methodology the students were experiencing. I asked them to provide their own examples. I also mentioned Stanley’s paper and asked for their opinions. The main point was that there are different ways to learn and different ways to teach, and each way has validity under different circumstances. Finally, they students were encouraged to reflect
on what cultural concepts shaped their own identities as language students and to apply any insights gained to their final papers as a way to explain their perspective to me.

There are many factors that will influence the success of a class or of an individual L2 learner. In the case of the summer program, the groups were small, and there was a lot of individualized attention. Teachers were involved with the content and the students via the movie discussions and the field trips. The lower-level students were under a lot of pressure, but they also received a lot of extra support from the teachers in and outside of class. By dealing openly with the issue of resistance to L2 methods, there seemed to be a change of attitude in many of the students. Class evaluations and final essays showed that it was possible to create a pedagogical environment which could enable students and teachers “to reflect on their own knowledge systems and to engage with other knowledge systems in different ways, in their own learning and in their classrooms” (Pennycook, in Nunan, 2010, p. 196).
References


*Negotiating academic literacies: Teaching and learning across languages and cultures*


**Diana Pascoe-Chavez has been the director of the EAP program at Saint Louis University for five years. She has experience teaching ESL, EAP, and EFL in many contexts both in the U.S. and abroad.**
Rubrics: Learners’ Tools and Teachers’ Aids

Lindsay J. Miller and Irangi Egodapitiya, Missouri University of Science and Technology

Abstract

The session titled “Rubrics: Learners’ Tools and Teachers’ Aids” was presented at the annual MIDTESOL Conference held on October 21-22, 2011, in St. Louis, Missouri. The purpose of this article is to provide a permanent record of the presentation which gave practice-based information on the use of rubrics. It has been the presenters’ experience, which is substantiated in research, that rubrics assist learners to easily grasp what is expected in assignments before undertaking them. Furthermore, rubrics can help students to understand where to improve after assessment on completed assignments. Moreover, rubrics can assist teachers in explaining the assignment and in assessing it. This article also discusses, with examples, three main types of rubrics commonly used in academia (Rochester, 2011): checklist, analytic, and holistic. Additionally, rubric design is addressed with suggestions for individually developing rubrics, using online rubric generator resources, or combining both approaches.
Although rubrics have been around for quite some time and are easy to create and use, they still seem to be under-utilized as teachers’ aids and frequently not seen as tools to help increase learner achievement. This became apparent to the authors over a period of time during conversations with other teachers about assignment evaluations and the resulting learner outcomes. Therefore, the authors decided to present on the topic of rubrics as learners’ tools and teachers’ aids at the 2011 MIDTESOL Conference in St. Louis, Missouri. Information from the presentation is shared in the following account.

**Definition**

A short definition of a rubric is an assignment/assessment guide, which includes categories, values for the categories, and descriptors of the performance values. A more detailed description is offered by University of Hawaii - Hawaii Community College – Honolulu (n.d.) which states that:

Rubrics are explicit schemes for classifying products or behaviors into categories that vary along a continuum. They can be used to classify virtually any product or behavior, such as essays, research reports, portfolios, works of art, recitals, oral presentations, performances, and group activities. Judgments can be self-assessments by students; or judgments can be made by others, such as faculty, other students, or field-work supervisors. Rubrics can be used to provide formative feedback to students, to grade students, and/or to assess programs. (para. 1)

As can be seen from the definition, rubrics are versatile and useful learning and teaching tools. Additionally, with such adaptable versatility, they are easily used with most assignments.
Session Description

The presentation was conducted with the use of Microsoft PowerPoint, hands-on participant activities, examples, handouts, and the Internet. The intent was to show:

- ways rubrics can be used effectively to improve learner outcomes
- ways to increase teacher effectiveness and efficiency
- examples of different types of rubrics
- ways to design rubrics from scratch and using online rubric generators such as RubiStar (http://rubistar.4teachers.org), RubricLibrary (http://rubriclibrary.com), or ABET (http://www.abet.org/assessment.shtml).

The session began with a warm up activity where the audience was asked to clap as if its favorite sports team were winning. One of the presenters then assessed the performance at a grade C and then provided some guidelines regarding what was required to get an improved grade. Only after the complete Clapping Rubric (Phelps, 2011) (see below) was revealed did the audience achieve an improved grade.
Table 1

*Clapping rubric*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>3-Exceeds Expectations</th>
<th>2-Meets Expectations</th>
<th>1-Below Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPEED</td>
<td>Clapped at a RAPID PACE - like excitement at a sporting event when your team is winning</td>
<td>Clapped at a MEDIUM SPEED- like applause at an average performance in a theater</td>
<td>Clapped SLOWLY to a beat- like one would at a square dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOLUME</td>
<td>Clapped LOUDLY- everyone in the room could hear clearly</td>
<td>Clapped at a MEDIUM VOLUME-heard but could be drowned out by other noise in the room.</td>
<td>Clapped SOFTLY- could barely be heard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUSTAINABILITY</td>
<td>Clapped continuously- at least 15 SECONDS</td>
<td>Clapped continuously - at least 10 SECONDS</td>
<td>Clapped for a short period of time-for 5 SECONDS or less</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Phelps, 2011)

In a second activity, the participants utilized a Digital Story rubric (Miller, 2011) (see Table 2) to evaluate a student’s digital story. Participants briefly broke out into small groups to discuss the rubric and whether they would have done anything differently in the assessment or rubric design. Next, all the groups reassembled and shared their outcomes.
Table 2

*Digital Story Rubric*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>4 -- 3.5</th>
<th>3 -- 2.5</th>
<th>2 -- 1.5</th>
<th>1 -- 0</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Purpose – Self-Profile</strong></td>
<td>Purpose clearly established early and focus maintained throughout presentation.</td>
<td>Purpose clearly established early and focus maintained through most of presentation.</td>
<td>Purpose is somewhat clear. However, there are a few lapses in focus.</td>
<td>Purpose is not clear. Presentation jumps around.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>Language Usage</strong></td>
<td>Grammar and usage were mostly correct. Used complete sentences. Few to no errors.</td>
<td>Grammar and usage were usually correct. Some incomplete sentences. Occasional errors.</td>
<td>Grammar and usage were somewhat correct. Several incomplete sentences. Several errors.</td>
<td>Repeated errors in grammar and usage distracted greatly from the story. Many incomplete sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Economy</td>
<td>The story is told with the right amount of detail throughout.</td>
<td>The story is good, but needs slightly more detail in one or two sections.</td>
<td>The story is missing some necessary elements or has too much content.</td>
<td>The story needs extensive editing. It is too long or too short to be interesting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <strong>Image Transition Styles – Engage audience</strong></td>
<td>Five or more transition styles used to enhance presentation</td>
<td>Three to four transition styles used to enhance presentation</td>
<td>One or two transition styles used to enhance presentations</td>
<td>No transition styles used to enhance presentation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. <strong>Text Captions – Enhance story and help audience understand story</strong></td>
<td>Several text captions were used.</td>
<td>Some text captions were used.</td>
<td>Few text captions were used.</td>
<td>No text captions were used.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. <strong>Voice – Soundtrack</strong></td>
<td>Voice quality is clear and consistently audible throughout the presentation.</td>
<td>Voice quality is clear and consistently audible throughout the majority (85-95%) of the presentation.</td>
<td>Voice quality is clear and consistently audible through some (70-84%) of the presentation.</td>
<td>Voice quality needs more attention.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Miller, 2011)
Following the activities, aspects of design and development of suitable rubrics necessary for evaluation of various student assignments were presented. Finally, the participants received information about the free online resource, www.Livebinders.com, an online organizational tool for storage of documents, files, and website URLs. Specific instructions were given on how to use and access the LiveBinder file specifically created for this presentation which contains online resources for generating rubrics. To access this LiveBinder file, go to www.livebinders.com, and search for the public folder “Online resources – Rubrics” by Lyn Miller.

**Positive Learner Outcomes**

Loacker, Cromwell, and O’Brien (1985) note that “Learning increases when learners have a sense of what they are setting out to learn, a statement of explicit standards they must meet, and a way of seeing what they have learned.” In light of Loacker, Cromwell, and O’Brien’s findings, the authors believe a rubric is a significant tool to achieve improved learner outcomes with increases in learning as demonstrated in the “Clapping” activity during the presentation session. A rubric encompasses learning goals, standards for those goals, and an assessment scale which can easily show both learner and teacher what the learner has accomplished.

**Rubric Benefits for Teachers and Learners**

Rubrics can help teachers be more impartial and consistent with grading subjective assignments, such as reports and presentations (Rochester, 2011). Teachers can develop and communicate assessable goals and make instructions comprehensible and accessible to students. Rubrics also allow teachers to evaluate many different types of student work while increasing teaching efficiency and effectiveness. Furthermore, rubrics can be flexible to allow additional teacher remarks and comments for student improvements.
Moreover, well-designed rubrics help students understand goals teachers expect them to achieve and criteria to help them reach their expectations, such as better scores and further improvement. By seeing rubrics with assignments, students tend to work with content meaningfully and think critically. They receive useful feedback regarding their performances or products. It is apparent that the use of rubrics is very favorable to both teachers and students.

**Types of Rubrics**

The three most frequently used types of rubrics are checklist, analytic, and holistic. Descriptions of the main features of each are given below (Rochester, 2011). Checklist rubrics are the simplest rubric to assess if students completed all steps and parts of an assignment. The categories in this rubric do not provide performance descriptors for a level of performance but only indicate if a category is complete or incomplete. Teachers can easily determine if a student has included specific elements in the work by using a checklist. Below is an example of a simple checklist rubric.

![Checklist Rubric Example](Zaner-Bloser,n.d.)
Analytic rubrics, however, differ from checklist rubrics because analytic rubrics assess how well students have mastered desired skills rather than merely completed certain steps or parts of an assignment. The analytic categories include descriptors for specific skill performance and can have two or more scales for evaluation that are arranged in columns or rows in the rubric (see below).

Holistic rubrics, on the other hand, combine several criteria and evaluate the general overall effect of student effort (Chicago Public Schools, 2000). These rubrics help integrate criterion to be considered as a whole instead of separate elements (see below). However, holistic rubrics may have limitations if teachers want students to develop specific skills, e.g., writing skills such as different genre, styles, punctuation, or oral presentation skills like projection, enunciation, eye contact. In such case, they may use an analytic or checklist rubric as discussed above.
Table 3

**Analytic Rubric**

(Analytic rubric, n.d.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Achievement</th>
<th>General Presentation</th>
<th>Reasoning, Argumentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exemplary (10 pts)</td>
<td>- Provides a clear and thorough introduction and background</td>
<td>- Demonstrates an accurate and complete understanding of the question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Addresses the question</td>
<td>- Uses several arguments and backs arguments with examples, data that support the conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Presents arguments in a logical order</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Uses acceptable style and grammar (no errors)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality (8 pts)</td>
<td>- Combination of above traits, but less consistently represented (1-2 errors)</td>
<td>- Uses only one argument and example that supports conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Same as above but less thorough, still accurate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate (6 pts)</td>
<td>- Does not address the question explicitly, though does so tangentially</td>
<td>- Demonstrates minimal understanding of question, still accurate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- States a somewhat relevant argument</td>
<td>- Uses a small subset of possible ideas for support of the argument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Presents some arguments in a logical order</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Uses adequate style and grammar (more than 2 errors)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs Improvement (4 pts)</td>
<td>- Does not address the question</td>
<td>- Does not demonstrate understanding of the question, inaccurate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- States no relevant arguments</td>
<td>- Does not provide evidence to support response to the question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Is not clearly or logically organized</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Fails to use acceptable style and grammar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer (0 pts)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

*Holistic rubric*

(Ebert, 2011)
Designing Rubrics

There are certain considerations for teachers when designing rubrics. First is the timeline. When to design a rubric depends on the assignment goals and expected outcomes. It is wise to start early to leave room for possible modifications. Teachers can also have students’ input during the design process depending on the type of assignment, such as presentations, peer/group evaluations, and narrations. As students become familiar with rubrics, accordingly, they become empowered, involved, and focused on learning. The second consideration is to decide on the type of rubric. Rubrics can also be selected for a variety of subjects and assignments including subjective assignments, like writing and presentations, as well as objective assignments, like science and math projects. Third, once the rubric is designed to fit the assignment, ideally, it will then be shared with the students so that they are aware of all aspects of the assignment: goals, objectives, performance descriptors, and scoring scale. Fourth, rubrics can be used to evaluate both individual and group assignments. Another consideration is the time spent to create rubrics. While it may seem to take a good deal of time to develop rubrics for assignments, the time is likely to be gained back with efficient and consistent grading, which can be a benefit for teachers of both small and large classes. A final consideration is how to make the rubrics available to the students: online or paper copy. Online availability allows teachers and students to easily access the rubrics as needed. Students can quickly access the rubric from a computer workstation to work with an assignment. Likewise, teachers can also readily access convenient online storage to retrieve a rubric for a current assignment or modify it to fit a new or remodeled assignment.

Reflection

After designing and using a rubric, teachers can reflect on the experience and consider some issues, such as the following:

- Was it easy to decide on the type of rubric to use?
• Was the design from scratch, a rubric generator, or a combination?
• Was it easy to develop descriptors?
• Was it easy to apply the rubric?
• Did the rubric help the students to accomplish assignment goals?
• What could be done differently?

Answers to the above questions may help the teacher assess the usability, comprehensibility, and accessibility of the rubric, thus, making it a more usable tool.

Session Outcomes

The audience was compiled of novice and experienced English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors and graduate students. During the session, the presenters and the participants had constructive discussions concerning rubric design and use. At the end of the presentation, the participants evaluated the session using a Likert scale rubric (Miller and Egodapitiya) (see below), which included an area for comments. From nineteen participants, eleven evaluations were retrieved (58%). The data retrieved from the evaluation forms is presented in Appendix A – Compilation of Session Evaluations. The data indicates that the majority of participants thought the information presented was interesting and that they learned something they could use in their current classrooms (see scale and comments in Appendix A). Based on the evaluation results, the presenters feel that the presentation was a successful experience for both the presenters and participants. The feedback and conference experience have motivated the presenters to further investigate new trends in rubric use in general and ESL in particular.
Session Evaluation Rubric

Please take a few moments from your busy schedule to evaluate this presentation. A Likert scale, a type of checklist rubric, has been selected to help shorten your response time. A Reflection section is also included following the evaluation. Please take another moment to reflect on the information you received today. Thank you very much!

~ Lyn & Irangi ~  ljmiller@mst.edu & ikeydc@mst.edu, Missouri University of Science & Technology

Level of Satisfaction – 6 point Scale

1 – Completely dissatisfied       4 – Somewhat satisfied
2 – Mostly dissatisfied           5 – Mostly satisfied
3 – Somewhat dissatisfied         6 – Completely satisfied

- Information presented was useful and interesting.  1   2   3   4   5   6
- The presentation moved along at a good speed and did not bog down.  1   2   3   4   5   6
- In this presentation, I learned something that I can use in my current class(es).  1   2   3   4   5   6
- I would be likely to attend other presentations given by these presenters.  1   2   3   4   5   6

Did you find out what you wanted to know?

How could this session have been more helpful?

Reflection

- What have you learned about rubrics today?
- How can you use rubrics to assess your students?
- How could you engage your students in the process?
- What else do you need before you start using rubrics?

Table 5  Session Evaluation Rubric  (Miller, L.& Egodapitiya, 2011)
Summary

During our session, the participants learned that rubrics are powerful tools and beneficial for both learners and teachers. Using rubrics allows goals and objectives for assignments to be clarified and easily understood. If rubrics are given before an assignment, students’ achievement may increase since the student may better understand assignment goals. Also, both teachers and students can avoid ambiguity and misunderstanding in assignments. Rubrics are easy to create and use; consequently, rubrics are valuable tools for both learners and teachers.
Appendix

Compilation of session evaluations

The number of session evaluation forms distributed was 19 and the number retrieved was 11.

Table 6

Session Evaluation Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation question</th>
<th>Response category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 – Completely dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 – Somewhat dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 – Mostly satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information presented was useful and interesting</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The presentation moved along at a good speed and did not bog down</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this presentation, I learned something that I can use in my current class(es)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be likely to attend other presentations given by these presenters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Number of responses |
### Comments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>No response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Did you find out what you wanted to know? | • I did not have a goal.  
• I definitely learned some new things.  
• 6 responded – Yes. | 3 |
| How could this session have been more helpful? | • I was happy with the session as is.  
• Online rubric helps me a lot. I like it because I can customize it.  
• Thank you for letting us know about online resources.  
• Longer. | 7 |

### Reflection:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>No response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What have you learned about rubrics today? | • I have learned about LiveBinders.com  
• Everything! I’ve never learnt rubrics before and also because I’m a new teacher with insufficient training.  
• Website very useful. | 8 |
| How can you use rubrics to assess your students? | • I can use them to rate student performance and clarify any criteria for assignments  
• I’m gonna utilize it for written summary.  
• I’m creating rubric speaking test. You gave a lot of hints.  
• I teach free ESL classes (community) so I don’t use rubrics, but I feel I could start because my students want to see progress. | 7 |
| How could you engage your students in the process? | • I could have the students discuss and create rubrics before assignment is finalized.  
• I could use rubrics by having my students anonymously assess each other (pronunciation, clarity of storytelling, etc.)  
• Having students contribute ideas to the rubric is a good idea.  
• Perhaps asking students what should be in the rubric. Build it together. | 7 |
| What else do you need before you start using rubrics? | • I am ready. | 10 |
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Lyn Miller received her Master's degree with Distinction in Linguistics/TESOL from the University of Surrey, Guildford, England. Her Bachelor's degree is in Social Science from California State University - Cal Poly, Pomona. She has over fifteen years teaching experience in university, adult education, and private tutoring settings. In January 2006, she started teaching in at Missouri University of Science & Technology (formerly known as UMR) in the Intensive English Program (IEP). Early in 2011, she extended her teaching venue with two semesters in the IEP of Arkansas State University (ASU) in Jonesboro, Arkansas. She rejoined the Missouri S&T IEP as a lecturer in ESL. Her research focus is on communicative and applied language and the power of the narrative form (spoken and written) to develop the interrelated language skills for success across curriculums. Additionally, she has several publication and conference presentation experiences.

Rangi Egodapitiya completed her B.A. in Sociology, Management, and English from the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka and received an MS in Technical Communication at Missouri University of Science and Technology. She worked as a primary school teacher and the assistant sports coordinator at the Gateway (Kandy) International School in Sri Lanka and then as a graduate teaching assistant in the Department of English and Technical Communication at Missouri S&T. She was then a lecturer in the Intensive English Program and the English/Technical Communication Department and currently works on a courtesy appointment in the Intensive English program. She has made several conference presentations and publications. Her research interests include technical/visual communication, culture, ESL, and teaching methods.
Catching Students Who Fall Between the Cracks: Our Interdisciplinary 1030 Class

Denise Carpenter Mussman and Jessica Saigh, University of Missouri, St. Louis

Abstract

During this global recession, students have limited budgets for ESL classes. This is especially true for sponsored students whose governments don’t understand the difficulties adult learners face. To fulfill this need, we created a hybrid class open to ESL students as well as native speakers of English who are struggling with mainstream university courses. It is also ideal for 1.5 students, who are immigrants having attended high school in the U.S. but still need some ESL remediation. The class offers students elective credit while helping with the skills to succeed in the university. The course work includes readings, academic vocabulary, essays, grammar, presentations, and other activities, depending on the needs of the students. In this article, we will outline how we created this course, what we included, and our insights after teaching this class for three semesters.
The University of Missouri-St. Louis is an urban campus that prides itself on its diversity in terms of ethnicity and the socio-economic level of its students. Being the most reasonably priced research institution in the city, it is no wonder UMSL attracts students from across the state, country, and abroad. Our African-American and Latino populations are expected to rise in the next few years. We also have resident immigrant populations from many countries, and we strive to recruit more international students. One hundred and eighteen countries are represented by nearly 1,040 international students, including Saudi Arabia, China, Korea, and France (www.umsl.edu/~intelstu/about/demographics.htm).

Despite strong academic admission requirements, students often struggle with college-level expectations for a number of reasons. Although our average freshman enters with a minimal ACT score of 24, we have an abundance of non-traditional students, students who may have been out of academia for years. In fact, the average age of undergraduates is 25.9. (www.umsl.edu/about/studentprofile.html). Most transfer students come from community colleges. In fact, 77.4% of new undergraduates in the fall of 2011 who were enrolled on the main campus at UMSL transferred from another college. (www.umsl.edu/about/studentprofile.html). Some of these students attended inner city public schools that lacked resources. To illustrate, some Missouri school districts (such as the Kansas City school district) lack accreditation, and control of our St. Louis City schools was taken over by the city in 2007 (Killeen, 2011). Due to this lack of resources, many American, as well as international students, lack the academic language skills needed for success at the college level (Rossi, 2011). Along with this, some ESL students transfer from another school without a TOEFL score; others have no required ESL
courses but have several recommendations and need language support. Sometimes, pending graduate students need grammar, writing and GMAT or GRE test preparation, especially if they are international students who attended “cram schools” in countries that prepare students to take a test that often does not accurately reflect the proficiency of the student (Bartlett and Fischer, 2012). Nonetheless, all these students enter with the goal of obtaining a degree and entering the ever-tightening job market. As teachers, we want to help them achieve their goals. Also, as a four-year institution during a recession, we must maintain and increase the quality of education, retention rates, and graduation rates.

Many students need academic English for writing and reading comprehension, as well as a practical understanding of grammar. In addition, some immigrant and transfer international students have completed ESL at previous schools so are reluctant to take more courses, or they deny that they need to improve their second language skills. However, when these students struggle in mainstream courses, they look for help. Our class is for native speakers, immigrants, and international students who need a “shot in the arm” to strengthen their skills.

We created a course to help such students. It is called Interdisciplinary 1030 Language and Communicative Arts across the Disciplines (INTDSC 1030). Denise Mussman is the long-time teacher and coordinator of ESL in the Department of Anthropology, Sociology, and Languages. Jessica Saigh has been teaching ESL for over 20 years, including 12 at UM-St. Louis. Denise and Jessica co-teach the class.

The course focuses on many skills needed for success at the university level, and it covers academic readings across the disciplines of health, science, education, social science, and business. We aim to strengthen active vocabulary use and strategies for learning new words. The course includes writing activities (such as summaries and essays), note-taking, class discussions
and group work, group and solo presentations, and test-taking strategies and practice. Within writing skills, we address grammar and sentence structure, which are often inadequately addressed in high school English and ESL programs. We divided the course so that Denise devotes one class a week to reading and vocabulary skills. Jessica covers grammar, writing, and presentation skills. She briefly covers note-taking as needed. When co-teaching, we feel it works best to divide the curriculum content. Some advantages of co-teaching include brainstorming ideas and covering for each other if needed.

**Lack of Academic Preparation of College Students Today**

The basic advantage of our class, INTDSC 1030, is that students learn grammar. Grammar is generally not directly instructed in American high schools and college English courses (Charrow, 2004). In high schools, the focus has turned to communication, or a more whole-language approach. Although syntax tree-diagramming may seem old-fashioned, today many American students may be unfamiliar with simple grammar terms such as *subject* and *verb*. As a result, many such students finish a degree in Education and become English teachers in public schools, yet they have difficulty teaching basic grammar or understanding parts of speech (Charrow, 2004). At the college level, freshman composition courses are taught by graduate teaching assistants, many of whom lack teaching experience and knowledge of grammar (Fish, 2009). We feel that ESL-trained faculty are best qualified to teach this course because of their knowledge of grammar and reading skills, their experience with teaching developmental writing, and the flexibility that comes from dealing with students from various cultures.

More than ever, many college-level native speakers have difficulties with their writing, and their ability to communicate in academic writing is limited. Professors often complain about
errors in grammar, vocabulary expression, lack of organization, and faulty sentence structure. International students also need to improve their written grammar, for their errors are more likely to not just distract but impede communication. They often use present tense instead of past, present perfect, and so on. Many omit the be verb, making it difficult to distinguish between active and passive voice. We have found some of the African-American students make errors similar to those of non-native speakers with the deletion of article usage, omitting a or the, dropping word endings of –ed and –, and verb form errors. This is due to interference from African American vernacular (Christensen, 2003).

Another challenge related to writing is the reading ability of some college freshman. According to the International Center for Leadership in Education, around 75 percent of American 11th graders were unable to complete the reading tasks required in entry-level positions (Daggett and Hasselbring, 2007). In our modern world of videogames, the Internet, and social media, many American students do not read outside of class and thus have a low level of reading comprehension and academic vocabulary. We have found that many international students read at levels below that of a college student and struggle to read high school level novels (ie., To Kill a Mockingbird, 1984). Furthermore, many ESL programs lack the time and ability to focus on academic reading skills and vocabulary. We have had Saudi students who reported having never read a book in their native language, let alone their second language. However, they are expected to analyze and interpret readings while building their reading speed in English.

**Campus Resources**

Even though we offer remedial classes in Math, our university does not offer remedial classes in English because the demand was low when it was offered, and because many students transfer credit for Freshman Composition from community colleges. Nevertheless, we need
classes that prepare students for college-level reading and writing. Today, there is a push for retention of college students. Therefore, our campus offers services to help students: personal and academic counseling, study skills workshops, and tutorial labs in sciences, math, and writing. We used to have a reading lab, but it no longer exists. UMSL’s Writing Lab is flooded with students with basic writing difficulties, and the director of UMSL’s Writing lab reports that nearly 40% of those who visit the writing lab are international ESL students (David Linzee, personal communication). Every semester, UMSL’s Writing Lab offers workshops on specific areas of writing: – S endings, article usage, transitions, parts of speech, citing sources while using research, and getting started on a paper. Two ESL instructors and the Writing Lab Director teach the workshops, which are 30-minutes long. Attendance has improved steadily over the past few years. For example, in the fall semester 2005, 43 students attended such workshops, but in fall 2011, there were 158 (UMSL-Writing Lab). Although labs are a necessary resource, tutoring is not a substitute for a course with sequential lessons.

**Challenges of the Course**

Students vary not only in their languages, academic preparation, and majors, but they also have different levels of understanding of expectations in the American classroom. The American students understand the protocol: Attendance is mandatory, participation is expected, assignments must be turned in on time, and grading is objective. Our international students often lack this awareness and do not understand that their grades are directly affected by their performance in these areas. In many countries, homework tends to be optional and does not count much toward the grade. Fewer quizzes are given, and more emphasis is placed on the final exam (Bartlett and Fischer, 2012). Moreover, American culture is focused on time and deadlines. We have had international students try to submit homework more than a month late and
sometimes after the final exam. Our class is a non-intimidating environment where ESL students and Americans work together, sharing their experiences, expectations, and strengths. Because of the nature of the course, we have found the students to be highly motivated and participatory.

This class can be difficult to prepare in advance because it varies each semester depending on the students’ needs. The first time we offered the course, all the students were from Saudi Arabia, and their government scholarship refused to pay for a second semester of ESL classes. We tailored the activities and assignments to their needs, strengths, and weaknesses, with a heavy emphasis on grammar and writing. Since that first semester, the class has opened to a larger variety of students and now includes many Americans. With this diversity, we have changed the course and added new activities. We are thrilled that the class continues to grow and develop each semester and appeals to a widening array of students. Student feedback is essential, and the course is student-centered. Because they enter with diverse backgrounds and experience, students help each other through many different projects and assignments. This is one of the greatest benefits of the class. Students learn cooperation and teamwork.

Another challenge of the course is choosing the best textbook. We need a textbook that includes strong readings, academic vocabulary, lectures and writing skills. We have used Read to Succeed by Rothman and Warsi; Reader’s Choice by Silberstein, Dobson, and Clarke; Advanced Listening Comprehension 3rd Edition by Patricia Dunkel and Frank Pialorsi; College Vocabulary 2 by Chaudron Gille; and Strategies for College Success by Dianna Renn.

Finally, we have the challenge of the students themselves. Many are insecure or frustrated by their past failures in academia. They may be having difficulties in their other classes. Some lack study skills, have test anxiety, or fear public speaking. In our semester surveys, test anxiety and fear of public speaking are consistently listed by at least half the
students. We have to balance pushing them while building their confidence in their abilities and future.

Course Approval

As mentioned earlier, UMSL does not offer remedial courses in English. One reason is that it prides itself on the high level of entering freshmen. Furthermore, past demand was low since most transfer students have completed Freshman Composition elsewhere. However, as stated above, three times the number of new students at UMSL are transfers from other colleges, which can result in students who do not have the average entry-level ACT score. Thus, we had to create the course that was helpful, academic, and open to any level student.

The course is a cross-section of freshman-level classes: Freshman Composition, Public Speaking, and Traditional Grammar. All of the readings are college level, and topics include science, health science, social science, education and business. None of these subjects is remedial on their own. The course is Interdisciplinary, offered through the Department of Anthropology, Sociology and Languages, and counts towards elective credit.

Curriculum and Specific, Successful Assignments

As our class composition changes, so do our texts and coursework. Nevertheless, our basic framework is in place. We assess the new classes with a reading/writing test. We have them fill out a questionnaire asking what they would like to learn in the class. The course varies depending on the needs of the students each semester. Below is an example of our typical semester:

- We start the class with a discussion of study skills and time management. Students fill out time schedules and discuss teacher and university expectations and how they differ from high school and other countries.
• We review grammar, paying special emphasis to parts of speech, word order, sentence structure, and verb tenses.

• Students write at least two essays. The first one is done slowly. Students write their outlines. Jessica types them, and the class corrects them, focusing on strong thesis statements and supporting ideas.

• To improve grammar and structure, we do editing assignments. We pull awkward and grammatically incorrect sentences out of the students’ writing. We type them, and the students correct the sentences in groups or as a class.

• We usually do several group projects. We have done research and presentations on topics the students have chosen. We have done persuasive speeches and informative speeches. We sometimes do a big project where groups choose a topic, write questionnaires, interview people, return to the class, and organize their results. Finally, they present their results to the class.

• Another newer activity that Denise developed is having the students create a company, prepare a description and advertisement for job openings, and have members of other groups write cover letters and practice job interviews. The created companies review the letters and interview notes and then must decide on whom they will hire.

• To improve vocabulary and reading skills, students do the following: learn prefixes, stems and suffixes; practice determining vocabulary from a context; answer a variety of questions about readings, such as main ideas, inferences, tone, organization, and purpose; and take vocabulary quizzes. They write summaries of articles, write test questions, and use critical thinking to write responses.

• Students take notes from lectures on CD or from on-campus lectures. Groups compare
and analyze the notes and study them for quizzes.

- Students attend on-campus lectures about study skills and test-taking.

**Promoting the Course**

As mentioned in the overview section, professors of all disciplines have complained about the low abilities of their students. Difficulties in English are expected of international students but surprising when they come from American students. We tell these faculty members that we have created a course that they can recommend to help such students. Most are receptive. To promote this course, we contact academic advisors who work with at-risk students. We have created flyers and put stacks at the advising centers on campus and posted some on bulletin boards. We regularly email information to all advisors who work with international students.

One semester the course did not have any enrollment. Thus, we now offer it as a ten-week class, starting at week six in the semester. This gives time for advisors to inform students who need to drop a class in which they are performing poorly. On the other hand, it shortens the class and reduces the number of activities we can fit into the course. Word of mouth from former students attracts some students. The longer we teach the class, the more people will know about it. Ideally, the class will have fifteen students per semester.

**Final Thoughts**

UM-St. Louis will continue to offer Interdisciplinary 1030 because it fulfills a student need and improves student retention and success. In an era where universities worry about student retention, and many students enter lacking important study skills, this flexible course adapts to student needs. In addition, by team teaching the class, the students benefit from the strengths of two teachers.
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Denise Carpenter Mussman is an associate teaching professor of ESL and the program coordinator at UM-St. Louis, where she has taught since 1995. She teaches seminars for ITAs and international faculty and has done consulting in pronunciation and accent modification. In addition to UM-St. Louis, Denise has taught ESL in colleges in St. Louis, Chicago and Indonesia. She possesses an MA in Applied Linguistics from UIC and a BA in French from the University of Kansas.

Jessica Saigh has been an ESL professor since 1991. She has taught at the University of Missouri-St. Louis since 2000. Before that, she taught at UM-Columbia and Indiana State University. She has developed ESL curriculum, created courses, and tutored struggling students, especially Arabic speakers. She has an MA in Applied Linguistics from Indiana University, an MA in Library and Information Science from UM-Columbia, and BA in French and General Linguistics from the University of Kansas.
Engaging and Empowering Non-TESOL Educators: Applying Principles of Joinfostering in a New College ESL Program

Jan S. Rog, Metropolitan Community College—Longview, Kansas City

Abstract

Since its classes first began August 2007, the MCC-Longview ESL program has provided English Learners with language instruction as well as college-wide student services. At our program’s inception, many personnel at our college had not worked directly with an ESL program or large groups of English Learners; furthermore, many brought a range of preconceived understandings of ESL programs and English Learners’ needs. Introducing the principles of joinfostering (Faltis, 1997, 2001, 2006) has engaged and prepared colleagues, working with non-native speakers of English. In this paper, I will introduce joinfostering and how it was presented to other colleagues. Second, I will focus on how the joinfostering principles presented here were used with our English Learners and then extended to the work of five colleagues representing various educational and student service roles at our college. Finally, I will address unanticipated lessons and opportunities learned these first five years of our program.
Our college began credit ESL courses in August, 2007. This was a key time to begin as, first, we were following recommendations by a college-wide 2005 ESL Task Force to offer such courses to the growing numbers of non-native speakers of English in our community (VanMiddlesworth, 2005). Second, for two years a small team from our college had taken the task force findings, conducted additional research, and coordinated focus groups of schools, businesses, English Learners, and TESOL professionals (Abraham, Lindquist, Allen, Lorenzen & Rog, 2006). Finally, in 2007 we were engaged in Foundations of Excellence in the First Year (hereafter referred to as “The First Year Experience”), a program in which we participated from 2006 to 2010 (Nelson, 2010). Our current credit ESL program is one result of these years of preparation. Throughout this time we have been dealing with larger numbers of English Learners seeking college studies while various non-TESOL professionals have been unaware of the opportunities and challenges of working with English Learners.

A prominent challenge in creating this new program has been helping non-TESOL colleagues understand our new program and also feel comfortable in serving English Learners and their unique needs. I have found that Faltis’ (1997, 2001, 2006) principles of joinfostering have served as a framework of successful approaches for educating English Learners and educators alike. Because joinfostering addresses social and pedagogical aspects of the educational process, it allows both TESOL and non-TESOL educators to create 1) active participation of all students, 2) social integration in school, 3) language integration into content academic practices, 4) participation of family and community, and 5) promotion of critical consciousness (Faltis, 2001). (See Appendix A.)
Because the joinfostering principles apply to the English language classroom, I have encouraged my colleagues to consider how they can expand some of the principles to their own work, essentially expanding the classroom throughout the entire school. When non-TESOL faculty and staff learn that they can foster academic inquiry, personal development, and social engagement throughout the school, they become more comfortable in creating ways to help English Learners join in this community. In a more extended way, they feel empowered bringing forth their own expertise and work to these students and can join and better work with English Learners. Finally, they find ways they can foster professional development among themselves when they collaborate.

The First Year Experience and Joinfostering

Joinfostering was not a framework I immediately suggested to my colleagues. I gradually realized it was a concept I could introduce to them while attending and participating in our first months of meetings concerning The First Year Experience. Underscoring the mission and vision for Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education, Gardner (2012) emphasizes how a participating school “fosters change by enhancing accountability, coordination, and the delivery of efforts associated with student learning, success, and retention during the undergraduate experience” (p. 1). That would correspond to the immediate application of actively involving students in their own learning, further creating a lasting predisposition towards learning and belief in self. I recognized other parallels as well. The principles of joinfostering first address the immediate needs of the learners but then challenge the classroom teacher to “. . . work toward social equality by directly challenging assumptions and practices concerning language, text, knowing, and learning that are taken for granted” (Faltis, 2001, p. 6). Another dimension of the “First Year Experience” addressed commitment to respecting diversity, which I recognized as
integral to a successful ESL program which would try to “ensure all first-year students experience diverse ideas, world views, and cultures as a means of enhancing their learning and preparing them to become members of pluralistic communities” (Alexander & Gardner, 2009, p. 24). These would fit with the joinfostering principle of “promotion of critical consciousness” but not only on the part of the students (English Learners and native English speakers alike) but also on the part of the school personnel: teaching faculty, support personnel, staff members, and administration. Even though I could see how joinfostering could reflect a successful ESL program, many of my colleagues couldn’t quite see that yet.

Gradually, I would present the principles of joinfostering, but sometimes I did not begin with the full explanation of what joinfostering is within the classroom. Depending on the task before us and also on the group or individual I was with, I might pose an introductory question and present the principles as “commitments of practice” (Faltis & Coulter, 2008), which would be easier to understand throughout the school as opposed to one classroom. The basic question became “What can we individually or as a school do to create a school that engages English Learners in 1) active participation, 2) social integration, 3) integrated language learning, 4) socio-cultural identity support, and/or 5) connections to wider communities?” This often elicited different responses unique to the pair or group work, always allowing for contributions from colleagues.

**Applying Principles of Joinfostering**

**Active Participation of All Students**

We learned how to enjoy everyone’s culture. Also, my classmates in ESL were very nice to me, and it was fun to learn words from them from their own languages. At times, you need to see or to be comfortable knowing that you have
some people who are your same level. It was good because they were pushing me, and I was pushing them, and we were trying hard together. The main thing is to practice always. You need to practice, practice, practice, practice . . . You will improve someday . . . There is always one step more to get there. You just need to be confident. You just need to trust yourself.

Teresa Achucarro, from Paraguay (Bussey, 2008)

When Teresa Achucarro stated this for a school video about our ESL courses, she was referring in part to the high level of active participation required of the English Learners in class. The first principle of joinfostering—Active Participation of All Students—has not only helped the English Learners within the English language classroom but has also helped non-TESOL personnel in their work. One benefit of having colleagues visit is the increased awareness of English Learners’ individual personalities and different learning needs as a group. Visiting personnel are encouraged to not only engage with the students but also reflect on and answer various questions (Appendix D); these are some of the recurring general comments:

1) English Learners were more proficient than colleagues had thought they would be, willing to speak up and engage their class visitors more in assigned small group work or in the question section of a presentation. This surprised visitors as often they had perceived English Learners to be quiet throughout the larger school.

2) Non-TESOL professionals had expected ESL courses to be more like their respective college courses in a foreign language. Visitors specifically stated how they were expecting verb conjugations and direct translation of specific vocabulary items.

3) Many were surprised to observe and/or participate in extended lessons involving “soft skills” or “social knowledge”. Many who engaged in conversation also pointed out
how they recognized a difference from preparing for language interaction in a country or culture “over there” (EFL) as opposed to preparing for language interaction “over here” (ESL).

4) Most had expected class communication to be comprised of short readings, short answer or cloze passage exercise sheets, and conversation. They were surprised to see emphasis on longer reading passages and composition.

Upsetting these preconceptions, ESL courses have involved students and visitors alike in activities within the class: lessons which designate pair- or triad-work, periods of quiet writing involving reflection and processing, and various times of group discussion. Throughout all of these, though, the common experiences are active participation and some form of tangible outcome the students can refer to whether it is a page of writing, a conversation which is reported back in team-member feedback, or a list of questions generated during a brainstorming session.

Within all of these and other activities is a goal of having students move from passive learning to active, collaborative learning involving scaffolding and discourse strategies (Faltis, 1997). When possible, I model new protocols or exercises with colleagues (who know in advance of the visit they will engage in the students’ lessons). The various exercises involve at least one of various discourse strategies: orienting; enabling others with follow-through questions, focusing questions, or checking questions; informing others about content material; sustaining communication through non-verbal encouragement to others to emphasize they are focused on each other; and concluding in an appropriate manner (Faltis, 1997).

After their active interactions with English Learners, many colleagues have been surprised when they visit ESL classes and observe students speaking, laughing at times, sometimes revealing painful experiences, and questioning each other; this was an awakening for
different people, for personnel often perceived many of these English Learners as quiet and withdrawn. By actively interacting with English Learners in the ESL classes, they often begin to appreciate the needs these students face college-wide. For example, in an interview, Ms. Terri Kelley, a Program Specialist for the Center For Teaching and Learning Support, commented:

I would like the larger group to know that these students are shy. We must take the time to introduce them to the enrollment process and make that human connection that will mentor and encourage them to work hard and succeed. We need to let them know they are wanted here. (Personal communication, December 16, 2011)

Ms. Kelley was assigned to work with the students entering our program in January 2011 despite lacking any training concerning this population’s specific needs. Designated as the front-line person for these students, she would set testing dates, contact students about their respective placement, and enroll the students. Additionally, she has done other work throughout her office and the school; working with English Learners is a small part of her work, but it is a critical part of the students’ processing. Reflecting on her presentation at MIDTESOL, 2011: Gateway to Global Citizenship, she expressed:

The greatest challenge I have faced is the lack of training (and) professional development offered when I took over working with these students. I seem to have the patience required but not the knowledge. (I need) total buy-in of administrators and other staff and faculty. Joinfostering is not just us joining with the students but all employees joining together to foster these students. (Personal communication, n.d.)

Throughout the 2011 academic year, I encouraged Ms. Kelley to understand her work with English Learners in small ways: familiarizing herself with materials TESOL professionals use, building a personal library of English and ESL resources, meeting with students in “welcome
visits” which complement their official school orientations, serving as an interviewee to two young women in a Listening and Speaking course, and then co-presenting with me in St. Louis for the 2011 MIDTESOL Conference. As Ms. Kelley took on these different experiences learning about ESL, she found new opportunities for working with students, and the work itself was potentially not so much a series of tasks as it was a more understandable path to serving English Learners. In an extended way, she has grown because of the way she has joined in collaboration with others, worked more actively with students, and fostered her own professional development.

**Social Integration to Build on Prior Knowledge**

All these things are new for me, so I ask myself what I am going to do. It’s going to be hard. I didn’t know the teacher. I didn’t know the students, but on the contrary, I feel confident now: more confident than ever. I want to say, ‘It is not a bad thing to know all the cultures or all the languages of the world because it is a simple way to contact them and know more about them.’ If I have knowledge about their cultures - - their languages- - it will be easier for me to know them better.

Khadija Roumani, from Morocco (Bussey, 2008)

Khadija Roumani’s statement reflects self-knowledge, a willingness to engage with others, and an openness to learn beyond what she has already mastered. She exemplifies a learner who builds on prior knowledge, grows stronger, and creates a stronger sense of self through social integration and personal resolve. Many of the concepts of the social integration principle apply to the students’ learning processes first within the classroom and then in their extracurricular activities: taking concurrent academic classes, joining student clubs, attending lectures, and using all our academic resources. Their four-walled classroom no longer exists as the primary locus of...
their learning; instead, it expands throughout our campus and into the surrounding community. In each of these contexts, they practice all the language skills, learn and negotiate learning norms, and collaborate with their peers in successfully mastering English for academic studies (Faltis, 2001). I include classroom work to initially discover and understand their own and their classmates’ underlying beliefs about education. Doing this in various groups or pairs, students can develop skills in learning to negotiate and practice new norms of participation: 1) listening to teachers, classmates, and visitors; 2) allowing classmates to speak, voice opinions or analyses, or speculate about different ideas; 3) intentionally seeking and eliciting contributions from their classmates; 4) intentionally complementing others’ ideas with their own learning; and 5) ultimately holding themselves accountable for their own learning and school production. These norms of participation are more developed than those developed for elementary school learners (Faltis, 2001), but that is because college students are more adept with more complex behavior; the basic concepts, though, remain constant for adults as well as younger learners.

Integrating these norms has allowed students to affirm their own cultural practices as well as recognize and respect those of others; deepen and enrich their current lessons by making connections to their own and others’ cultural backgrounds; and become more comfortable with various learning tasks, learning settings, and their personal challenges of learning new and challenging content material (Faltis, 1997). Again, these tasks are more developed than those required of elementary and high school students, but that is simply because more complex work is expected of adult college students; the basic concepts of the joinfostering principles can successfully be applied in college ESL courses and throughout the school which serves them.

With the principle of social integration in mind, I intentionally sought out Kappa Tau, our chapter of Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. I wanted English Learners to become involved with
this group of high-achieving students. By joining Kappa Tau, English Learners affirm their own experiences while working collaboratively on projects and personal development alongside honor students from throughout the school and other chapters. Developing scholarship, leadership, fellowship, and service, they are learning within their respective zones of proximal development (Faltis, 1997) with their fellow members. Through group goal setting, ongoing reflection and journaling, active team work, and then reexamination of what worked or failed, all students grow socially and intellectually in mastering academic lessons. Because they are applying this learning in written and verbal form for scholarships, group evaluation, potential interviews, or transfer to universities or colleges, they further strengthen their awareness and intentional, focused learning.

My co-advisor for Kappa Tau is Mrs. Margaret Berter, a colleague whose primary work at our college is as a Student Services Technician for Special Populations and Counseling. In addition to her full time work, she has worked extensively with English Learners and Kappa Tau members for more than ten years. She has been one of the most steadfast and supportive colleagues who empower our English Learners. Exemplifying non-TESOL professionals who are open to new ideas of teaching and student support, Mrs. Berter had already been practicing social integration though she had never heard the actual term “joinfostering”. Comments from an interview with her, reflect her commitment to helping not only English Learners but all students grow in their self-awareness, become more confident in their abilities, and form new identities as scholars and leaders:

All of these students want to improve their lives through education, and they are looking for ways to create change. I feel the ESL students have worked twice as hard and have traveled through different worlds of experiences to come and be with us. I have a lot of
respect for ESL students and admire their drive, so I look for ways to give them responsibilities and make them understand what contributions they bring to us. I have found myself thinking . . . if they can come here from other countries and accomplish what they have knowing the obstacles they have encountered, I think surely I can put forth more effort on my part and try new things, too. (Personal communication, June 17, 2012)

Mrs. Berter has supported student group collaborations among Kappa Tau members and English Learners in my ESL classes; their collaborations have included fellowship and service projects, integrating international perspectives into an Honors In Action project of “Democratization of Information”, and participation in the Kappa Tau College Project of “Community College Completion Corps”. Welcoming these students who are still new to our school, she observed, “By working with members of Phi Theta Kappa who value academic excellence, English Learners recognize that it is important to strive for excellence and value the work they must do to achieve this goal,” and noted how their skills and accomplishments would continually improve because they would raise their standards and strive for better grades. Though she was not previously aware of the theoretical basis for pairing English Learners with more capable peers, she had supported and negotiated thinking skills and language development between them (Faltis, 1997).

Mrs. Berter has further understood and created learning opportunities which further enhance English Learners’ perceptions of themselves and developing identities as scholars and leaders. Sometimes during long drives to other cities for Phi Theta Kappa events, we speak extensively about what we observe in the students’ development and learning. She has taken an interest in Cummins’ work, and she has even applied different aspects of scaffolding, community involvement, cognitive engagement, and identity investment to some of our work with the honor
students; after all, “good concepts of learning apply to all students of all ages and backgrounds” (Cummins, Brown & Sayers, 2007, pp. 213-217). She has been helping them develop new, stronger socio-academic identities in the competitive but also enriching setting of college.

Inviting individual English Learners to attend weekend conferences throughout our state, run for office for Kappa Tau, and join with the other student leaders in meeting with school administrators such as our president and our chancellor. During our time working together, some of our English Learners have won travel scholarships; applied for competitive academic scholarships to prestigious universities, many of which these students won; and prepared for and undertaken school internships. Though we both acknowledge that these students’ respective motivation and accountability are the primary forces behind their success, I have observed numerous times when she recognized an existing or unexpected opportunity to which she invited a shy, uncertain English Learner. These same students began to build upon those experiences and went on to achieve extraordinary goals for themselves.

Finally, she considered the principles of joinfostering and how they are reflected in her work and relationships with colleagues. Staying focused on our work as advisors, we discussed how we recognize ourselves growing because of work within Phi Theta Kappa. When asked about insights and developed abilities and contributions, she said, “My work has helped me become more confident in my own abilities and has given me a great feeling that I can help others and make a real difference in the lives of others. It gives me purpose and challenges me to be better” (personal communication). Recognizing that we need to encourage and support the students so that they can grow, she extends that same spirit of empowering camaraderie in her relationships among her colleagues. Her support has been essential to my professional
development and outreach and growth in our English Learners, especially during these first
critical years of our ESL program.

**Integration of Language Learning Into Content Activities**

“Since I was seven (7) years old, I started drawing, and I won my first award. . . . That’s how I
found my love in art. I see art is everywhere. . . . Teaching is an art. Everything is art for me.”

Danton Pareja, from the Philippines (Bussey, 2008)

Danton Pareja enjoyed the art classes, music classes, and interpersonal classes he took or
visited while studying in our ESL program. Not surprisingly, he told me that his favorite way to
learn English was by reading anything and everything he could find about the various arts. Every
semester, content learning becomes part of our language courses, and the students themselves
become aware of the different language required in various college courses. For example, when
preparing to visit art shows in our cultural arts center, they first use library resources to research
and list vocabulary from the Arts and Humanities. Likewise, during a tour of our automotive
center and observation of the automotive projects, students focus and take notes about the type of
language and vocabulary used. While they enjoy the excursions throughout the school, they are
often resistant to pursuing more ESL courses; they argue that they already know English so are
ready to take on full academic courses. Helping them better understand their metacognitive
processes and understanding of English in its many academic contexts, I present them with some
information about a) myths of ESL and b) distinctions between Basic Interpersonal
Communication Skills and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (National Council of
Teachers of English, 2008). In reading the same materials presented to numerous non-TESOL
professionals, students study and reflect on various components of their own learning:
1) Students can learn language and content both if they focus specifically on the language and functions within the academic content material. Though this is not impossible, it requires a disciplined understanding of BICS and CALP and then intentional study of the respective language and uses (National Council of Teachers of English, 2006).

2) As students, they need to become aware of language in its authentic contexts: scientific terms for science classes and historical terms for history classes being just two examples. Sometimes the same individual words may be used in a number of classes (such as “depression”), yet the students can learn to discriminate which context is appropriate.

3) Finally, they begin to learn and distinguish between the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills which could possibly identify them as “fluent” in informal conversations but could greatly limit them if they took on rigorous studies in college courses without sufficient Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency. (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008). This distinction between BICS and CALP is one aspect I refer to and build upon when working with non-TESOL teachers.

In working with faculty, the most recent collaboration I have undertaken is with Professor Greg Loftin, a biology instructor who has frequently addressed the need for students -- all students -- to become proficient in academic English. In an interview, he related:

I tell my biology students that learning biology is like learning a new language. Typical students in an entry level biology class will learn about as many new terms as they would in a first semester foreign language class. If you consider that each sub-discipline has its own variations on the scientific language, it becomes very similar to learning different
dialects of a more conventional spoken language. (Personal communication, June 24, 2012)

Professor Loftin has always responded positively in conversations about Cummins’ Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), and has provided numerous examples of how science students need to address such skills (Carrier, 2005). In 2009 and 2010, when I first told him about my desire to have students apply metacognitive skills to their language skills, he readily supported these initiatives. In spring, 2011, he donated 23 biology, anatomy and physiology, nutrition, and zoology college texts to complement the students’ materials. The first semester we used these in identifying and learning scientific vocabulary derived from Greek and Latin. Since then, he and other science professors have donated science texts to which I have added active reading, note-taking, and study skills. Creating lessons reflecting Carrier’s protocols and language application, I use the science textbooks to

1) demonstrate skills using the language (paraphrasing, summarizing, and discussing key science terms);

2) reflect they understand scientific language by asking, finding, or determining answers to questions derived from curiosity about everyday experiences or observations;

3) describe, explain, and predict natural phenomena;

4) develop an understanding of science by learning and applying metacognitive learning skills. (Carrier, 2005, p. 5)

While these reading, observation, and thinking skills are required of all students in science class, this can become even more challenging for English Learners when they are called upon to locate information in texts, read recursively in order to accurately understand and interpret information,
and apply scientific discourse in all language skills: team and lecture discussions, note taking, reading, and writing in numerous tasks (Carrier, 2005). If English Learners cannot apply these skills, they persist in remaining in a literacy gap.

Professor Loftin also observed in his interview that these skills are so strongly interrelated that they can help students build their skills into great success; he gave an example of a nursing student who realized she needed to improve her English and returned months later to again study her science courses, receive highest grades, and later be accepted to one of the top nursing schools in the Midwest, though he believes she could have applied for and been accepted to any nursing school within the nation. Conversely, though, he recognizes that students who lack academic language, mastery over critical thinking skills, and the confidence to stay persistent in studying will fall into the literacy gap they “cannot talk their way out of”:

If students have difficulty understanding either written or spoken English, they tend to have problems taking good notes; this can lead to increased levels of frustration as they get progressively farther and farther behind. In many cases, by the time they (English Learners) start addressing these issues, it is too late to recover in the class. (Personal communication, n.d.)

Using the donated science textbooks and workbooks such as Drewes & Milligan’s (2003) study guide, I have begun to create various lessons which incorporate reading and writing lessons in which students locate information and then create sentence builders and sentence frames which clearly and directly summarize lessons from science (Carrier, 2005). Reading and focusing on only one to four or five chapters or units per lesson (depending on how the respective texts are written), students actively read, take notes, discuss, and then compose a variety of writing tasks: summarizing and reporting information; comparing processes, organisms, or theories; classifying
significant aspects of a concept; analyzing texts in order to recognize and identify patterns; hypothesizing outcomes, causes, and effects; and making recognizing connections between tangible observations and abstract theories (Carrier, 2005).

Though I have only recently begun to develop such lessons, from the first time I received Professor Loftin’s donations, I have had students check out the science textbooks similarly to how they would check out books from a library. I have observed how these students have become more focused in applying reading skills, initiating note-taking skills, and collaborating with me or other students in actively studying. I have also learned to seek out more content specific dialogue with other academic teachers. Especially when a colleague takes such interest and expresses commitment to working with English Learners, I want to continue active collaboration so that the professor as well as the students feel empowered in academic courses.

**Participation of Family and Community**

“My name is Azarel. I am from Mexico, and I am the first child in my family. I have three siblings, and I have two parents that are lovely.”

Azarel “Alexandra” Chavez, from Mexico (Bussey, 2008)

Alexandra’s simple, direct statement in the student video captures what so many English Learners value foremost, their family members, friends, and community. Inviting key community members into the classroom and involving them in school activities helps English Learners bridge the gap from their education to their life goals (Faltis, 2001). For example, Professor Bambi Shen, a retired French professor and community activist, visited our class on July 25, 2011. Recounting experiences from her memoir *The Uncrushable Rose: A Memoir from Concentration Camp To Becoming a Free Woman*, she shared her experiences as a young Chinese girl imprisoned in a WWII Japanese concentration camp in Indochina, her life lessons as
a girl growing up with severe social limitations, and the life she created for herself as an immigrant to the United States. Despite the difficulties and tragedies, her stories were neither fearful nor angry; she spoke continuously of great hope and the inner strengths she learned to cultivate within herself. The second part of her presentation was about the life she created because she pursued education despite family and cultural blocks. Finally, she firmly directed students to take chances, strive to be their excellent best, and refuse to accept limitations upon their lives. For this group of students (many of whom were in their twenties or teens) the lasting impact of her visit was the message that they could prevail despite challenges and problems.

Just as community members have come into the ESL classroom, we have created opportunities on campus to bring in the community. “Fiesta de La Biblioteca” was a collaborative project I worked on with Judy Rice, our campus’s Library Manager. In November, 2007, she attended a Missouri State Library conference and learned of a federal grant, “Library Services and Technology Act”. The goals of this Library Outreach to Spanish Speakers program were to provide quality programs to attract Spanish speakers to the library; promote library services to the Spanish speaking community; and to provide opportunities for collaboration between libraries, community agencies, and leaders in the local Spanish speaking community.

We made certain to invite our entire school and city community, including our English Learners from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Leading up to this day, I visited different high school and elementary school programs and encouraged the students to write letters expressing why they wanted to attend college; these letters were later posted for participants to read and to write their own letters in return. Mrs. Rice proposed that we teach all the community about our library offerings and school programs such as “College for Kids” offerings, community computer classes, and non-credit community courses. We emphasized the
school’s programs for non-student community members, families, and other institutions. Of course, we celebrated the family and community within this as well.

On the morning of “Fiesta de La Biblioteca” we presented a comprehensive library event which involved leaders from our community such as teachers, business owners, and family services agencies: writers from the Latino Writers Collective who shared folk songs, poetry, stories, and personal reflections about their work; folklorico dancers El Grupo Folklorico Atotonilco, who presented not only dances of Mexico but also historical lessons setting the context of these dances; and various representatives of Kansas City’s Coalition of Hispanic Organizations (COHO). Attending personnel were Phi Theta Kappa officers and members, counselors, academic advisors, our dean of instructional services, and our dean of student support services. It was a colorful, engaging, and highly successful event on campus, and we were amazed at how well it turned out. We wrote the grant and had it postmarked by the December 15, 2007 deadline and then offered the day on April 19th, 2008, essentially pulling together a willing community within three months. Given the opportunity to participate in the third annual Migrant Education for English Language Learning in October, 2008, Mrs. Rice and I twice presented, “La Fiesta de La Biblioteca: Celebrating All ESL Options at College”. In our presentations, we repeatedly emphasized how inviting the family and cultural communities onto the campus and into the libraries would both expand the support college learners have but also encourage literacy throughout families and neighborhoods.

Months after all this had occurred, I told Mrs. Rice about joinfostering, and she immediately recognized the importance of family and community as a critical principle, and then she later reflected and saw how the different principles could also be reflected in these lessons. This specific initiative occurred during our first two years of our program, and our First Year
Experience team soon disbanded when we faced monetary and staffing problems, but it set a pattern of work and collaboration between the two of us, and Mrs. Rice and I collaborated on other community and educational events since that grand community event.

**Promotion of Critical Consciousness**

Take that adventure. Learn English. College is not just about having a grade and expecting to have a great job making thousands of dollars. . . . That’s the first thing people think about college, but college is about growing. It’s about being able to analyze your ideas better and build your mind. That will help you work in furthering your education, your jobs, or even your relationships with people. It is an experience you cannot get anywhere else.

-Oscar Aguilar, El Salvador  (Bussey, 2008)

Oscar’s advice here was to his fellow English Learners, many of whom were embarrassed or self-conscious about their language ability and cultural “know how” within the school. Frequently, they did not feel they had power within their school or learning processes. They often desired change and even envisioned contributions they could make, but they did not feel capable of creating such change for themselves. It often takes a great deal of encouragement and preparation to coax participation of students who are initially shy and uncertain of their skills. This last joinfostering principle engages all the previous principles, for the students must take action in creating their contributions and life-solutions, know who they are and recognize how to work with each other, keep a focus on the family, friends or community for whom they want to create such change, and then to maintain high standards of academic performance in order to move into better educational, professional, and leadership opportunities.
Understandably, this can be daunting for English Learners. However, throughout these years students have grown more confident and expressive of their plans for change as they participate more on campus, take different leadership roles, and explore and contribute to their larger communities. First, our English Learners have participated in the first three years of *Imagination Longview* (our literary showcase) as they presented their essays about classical literature, their family stories, and themes from their collaboration with Phi Theta Kappa - Kappa Tau. Second, for weeks before disAbility Awareness Day in March, 2010, students discussed and wrote about their respective countries’ policies and treatments for people with various special needs; they then created a poster to display at the various symposia. Finally, many have sought out courses like intercultural and interpersonal communication, which allow them greater command over communication and personal relationships.

These past years, one ongoing theme has been “The Power Of Stories”. Dr. Jim McGraw and Mr. Burke Maxted, two counselors who have worked most consistently with us, shared stories in many forms: family narratives, cultural tales, classic myths, family poems, and illustrative anecdotes. They have personalized lessons to reflect their own personal experiences, in turn inviting students to do the same. For example, Dr. McGraw has presented Camus’ “The Myth of Sisyphus” and challenged students to apply its lessons to their lives. They learn to recognize and address personal and social challenges, and they develop conversational, listening, and reflective writing skills as they connect these external “social and personal boulders” to their lives.

Additionally, Dr. McGraw’s own writing about family structures, specifically his collaborative work (Walsh & McGraw, 1996) has been part of numerous lessons about family narratives. Students have learned the structures, patterns, and themes of family dynamics, and it
has lent itself numerous times to studies in social sciences accompanying tales and family stories. In fact, Mr. Maxted has used this research while facilitating discussion of the film *God Grew Tired of Us*. These lessons were all part of developed thematic units which built upon each other as the semesters have progressed. Students analyzed the skills for survival, collaboration, and personal commitment exhibited by the young men of that film. In our very first years these counselors were uncertain how students could handle challenging academic texts but have since discovered how enthusiastically English Learners learn lessons when given support, opportunity for expression after the lessons, and the simple, direct message, “You can do this”.

In all of these, they further shared their unique experiences and contributions, expanding what we value about our school and taking their place in our collective history. Counselors have repeatedly taught lessons about identifying and nurturing strengths and gifts, and English Learners repeatedly have exhibited resilience, optimism, commitment to community, and persistence (Lopez, 2009). Mr. Maxted and Dr. McGraw have repeatedly used examples of how these English Learners they have gotten to know have realized their dreams of graduating from our college, obtaining target jobs they wanted, and earning significant scholarships when transferring to universities (Hoy, Tarter & Wloofolk Hoy, 2006; Lounsbury, Fisher, Levy, & Welsh, 2009).

Once familiar with school and better aware of themselves and their classmates, students serve as mentors to younger students or other college students. Letters of encouragement, classroom visits, or outreach to family or community groups have surfaced numerous times these past years. Through such outreach as Partners In Education with Prairie View Elementary School (spring 2009), English Learners have served alongside personnel who represent MCC-Longview. In all of these, English Learners have expressed hope, a quality which has been extensively
studied and found to be formative in personal and community success (Snyder, Harris, Anderson, Hollerans, Irving, Sigmon, Yoshinobu, Gibb, Langelle, & Harney, 1991; Snyder, Shorey, Cheavens, Mann Pulvers, Adams, & Wiklund, 2002). In outreach to elementary and high school students, English Learners have shared experiences of personal awareness and growth, their respective values about education and family, and their advice about how to navigate and succeed in U.S. schools. They affirm their own experiences while giving hope and valuable structure to others who may not recognize how they can grow.

Dr. McGraw is now working most consistently with me in posing questions like, “What impact will the nation’s and world’s current politics have on our college in the future? How can our institutions prepare for the students who come to us because of such changes?” Currently seeking opportunities to develop his studies in how to help these students, Dr. McGraw reflected:

In general, I have found the ESL students to be intelligent, resilient individuals who have had extraordinary life experiences . . . We are very fortunate to have an ESL program at MCC-Longview; it meets a growing need in the community, and it benefits all constituents of the college because it brings rich diversity to the campus. On a personal note, working with ESL students and the instructor has been incredibly professionally renewing. I am very thankful for this opportunity, and I hope to continue my involvement with the ESL program in the future. (Personal communication, December 12, 2010)

Since 2010, he has been more active in counseling these English Learners: developing and leading career development workshops, counseling students in times of great trauma and challenges, and continually seeking them as examples of positive qualities and strengths. Even though we do not have an official TESOL team, students come to class at the beginning of each
semester familiar with the contributions of colleagues like Dr. McGraw simply because they had heard high praises about him. Even in considering such positive regards, though, a great many challenges face us educators as we continue to advocate for these students. We still have a great deal of work to do to better educate our colleagues and communities about our work, but we have done so much within these first five years. How will we grow and develop as we set goals for the tenth year?

**Unanticipated Lessons and Opportunities**

Many of the extended conversations about joinfostering principles resulted in strong collaborative work relationships in which I grew as an ESL teacher and also helped other professionals grow. These unanticipated results proved greatly rewarding as these first five formative years coincided with severe budget cuts and restrictions.

First, our English Learners have participated in outreach to our larger community. In addition to Partners In Education, English Learners visited students and shared experiences of personal growth, respective values about education and family, and advice about how to navigate and succeed academically. Likewise, English Learners served alongside school counselors, faculty, and our college president in welcoming delegations of MATESL students from Hebron University and from Algeria touring the United States through International Visitors Council and Kansas City International Visitors Council.

Second, Dr. Jim McGraw has proffered a new research and perhaps professional development opportunity by revisiting the Cultural/Racial Identity Development Theory in terms of considering how non-TESOL professionals can understand their developing relationships with English Learners.
Finally, I have now come to realize that it is essential to provide professional development training for non-TESOL professionals so that they recognize how to best help English Learners. One key phrase I have found myself repeating numerous times has been, “While we learn how to best prepare these English Learners for our school, we also need to learn how to best prepare our school for these English Learners.” At times it was humorous and light, and at other times the humor was a bit more urgent; still it has always been true that we need to find ways to provide professional development to non-TESOL personnel: workshops, seminars, classroom observations, mentoring programs, or collaborative teams (Crandall, 1993). Creating peer collaboration, mentoring, or coaching can enhance colleagues’ experiences within the workplace, creating success not only for the students but also for those who serve the students. When such professional development involves the professional to train, discuss, co-teach, develop materials, or conduct research, it “engages adults in their own development and involves collaboration with others: teachers, learners, and administrators” (Crandall, 1993, pp. 505-506). Just as we are conscientious in providing our best instruction and services for our students of all backgrounds, we need to be conscientious in teaching and learning from each other as colleagues. As we continue to foster students who come and join our college, we need to similarly apply joinfostering principles in engaging and empowering each other as professionals.
References


Appendix A

Joinfostering Principles of Practice

Dr. Christian J. Faltis (1997)

1) **Active participation of all students.** Enable all students (though invitation and coercion) to participate actively in social and academic classroom practices.

2) **Social integration to build on prior knowledge.** Socially integrate students of diverse language and social backgrounds (using a variety of small-group strategies) to build on the funds of knowledge and interests students bring with them.

3) **Integration of language learning into content activities.** Integrate additional language participation strategies into all content-learning activities so that as students learn content they also gain proficiency in language.

4) **Participation of family and community.** Invite, involve, and build on the participation of families and communities in classroom, school, and neighborhood activities.

5) **Promotion of critical consciousness.** Invite and promote critical consciousness within the classroom, the school, and the community to confront racism, social stratification, and exclusionary practices.
Appendix B

General Reflection Questions Asked of Colleagues Coming To Class

PART I: How do your experiences with English Learners both reflect the expectations of larger MCC-Longview and shed light on how we can strengthen and improve our program?

A) First, before you met these students, what were you expecting?
B) What did you think ESL instruction entailed?
C) Had you wondered about their education in their homelands?
D) If yes, what had you thought about?
E) If no, were you surprised at any point when you met the students? What was the incident which brought about surprise?
F) What have been your greatest challenges working with these students? How were you expecting English Learners to behave?
G) What have been your most rewarding experiences working with these students?
H) What do you perceive to be English Learners’ greatest needs as they pursue academic studies?
I) What would you like our larger MCC-Longview community to know about serving these students?
J) What would you like in terms of support, information, and collaboration from ESL teachers and professionals?

PART II: What collaborative endeavors among personnel could help my English Learners improve in critical thinking and writing?

A) What in-class activities with English Learners have you directly led or observed?
   - What out-of-class activities with English Learners have you directly led or observed?
B) What are instances when you were impressed with students’ or an individual student’s critical thinking: questions, discussions, out of class initiatives, or any other instance.
C) In what ways have you seen students grow not only in the traditional academic sense (reading, composition, and discourse) but also in "social knowledge" (working/learning with others, using available school resources, taking initiative for academic and personal growth, simply enjoying themselves and their college experience)?
D) What have been frustrations you have had in helping these students? Have there been instances when you’ve observed students facing great difficulty with both traditional academic knowledge and also social knowledge needed at college?
E) How can we better help these students succeed in rigorous, competitive academic studies?
F) What other comments would you like to make?
Jan Rog, English and ESL Faculty at Metropolitan Community College, Longview, is responsible for overseeing the ESL for Academic Success Program. Jan teaches all of the ESL courses, Composition, and U.S. Latino and Latina Literature at MCC-Longview. Her additional school work is as co-advisor for Phi Theta Kappa - Kappa Tau. She earned her B.A. in Spanish and B.A. in Psychology from Rockhurst University and her MATESL from Arizona State University. She is also active in the Greater Kansas City Writing Project and Prairie Lands Writing Project.
Spelling Success with 3 Cs: Culture, Communication, & Classrooms

Sable Schwab, Northern Arizona University

Abstract

The drive to incorporate cultural issues into the second language classroom has been increasingly present in publications and presentations concerning second language (L2) teaching matters. However, relatively few scholars have suggested methods to fully incorporate cultural issues into the L2 classroom. I suggest that since our students are also students of culture and not just language, that we teach them to adopt the practices of the people who study culture (anthropologists) and use ethnographic methods to better understand culture. In this paper, I discuss how we can translate ethnographic methods into teaching methods, and discuss the benefits of doing so. These benefits are in regards to the realms of culture, community, and classrooms.
Peck (1998) suggests to language teachers that they must make culture accessible to students while using language to do so. Despite the abundance of scholars and teachers who agree with this sentiment, this task proves too daunting for the average language teacher—especially those who are native to that culture. According to anthropologist Rebekah Nathan (2005), "As anthropologists have come to know, culture can be invisible to its natives—so taken for granted that it seems unworthy of comment" (p. 67). Thus even someone like Nathan, who studies culture for a living, finds that culture is often invisible. Culture guides how people see the world and often generates a false perspective of normality. Furthermore, not only is culture invisible to its natives, but ways of speaking and writing are invisible, as well. Wennerstrom (2003) notes that ways of speaking and writing within a community usually go unnoticed by its members who consider these ways ‘natural’ and thus unnecessary to mention.

These phenomena observed by Nathan and Wennerstorm work together to complicate the curriculum ESL teachers are expected to teach. Likewise, Sowden (2007) comments that teachers need to be aware of the elements of culture that remain invisible to them, the ways of speaking and writing that appear ‘natural’ to them, as well as the cultures of their students and the settings in which their students will use English. Yet, we cannot just read about culture; it changes too rapidly, and it is hard to find a reading specific enough for students' particular target language use. How can we, as ESL teachers, teach our students culture and ways of speaking and writing if some aspects of English culture and ways of speaking and writing are invisible to us? Also, how can we teach students how to cope with American culture if cultural trends are constantly changing along with student needs? In this paper, I suggest that one answer to these questions is to teach language students ethnographic methods.
What I am suggesting is by no means revolutionary; I am not the first person to suggest translating ethnographic methods into teaching methods. Similar pedagogies have also been suggested by Wennerstorm (2003), Benesch (1996), Van Lier (1988), and Heath (1983), among others. Although these ideas have been brought up repeatedly, they have not been given the attention they deserve. Considering that plenary speakers of MIDTESOL have called for more culture-based pedagogy, perhaps it is time to bring up these ideas yet again and give them some more attention by looking at how using ethnographic methods as teaching methods can help teach culture, create community ties, and improve classroom environments.

**How to Use Ethnographic Methods as Teaching Methods**

**Planning**

How can we turn research methods into teaching methods? I suggest that we incorporate the steps suggested by Wennerstorm (2003) into ESL classrooms. These steps already follow the pre-, during, and post- format that many scholars suggest. In regards to the pre-data collection stage, the first two steps are to have the students predict the target structures they are going to encounter and to take part in planning the data collection. Predicting the target structures they will encounter helps to activate students’ background knowledge, as well as helps students to identify their own cultural assumptions.

Also during the pre-stage, it is important to have students take part in planning the assignment. For children, I suggest providing them with choices, but adults can easily develop their own ideas. If adults are given the opportunity to develop their own ideas, these ideas will be more relevant to their lives and their needs. It is not only important to have students develop their own ideas, but also to have them plan the data collection. Having students plan the data
collection allows students to practice constructing the questions they will need for conducting interviews, as described below.

**Collecting the Data**

For the “during” stage, students will collect the data themselves, thus allowing teachers to take a break from collecting materials to use for teaching our classes. The students then take a more active role within the community and classroom. Data collection includes interviews, participant-observation, fieldnotes, recordings of naturally occurring conversation, conversation analysis, and discourse analysis. All these methods can easily be created into assignments for students.

Interviews are especially useful for students because they require students to have formal conversation with native speakers. Interviews were a common assignment in an anthropology course where I acted as an English Language Learner Consultant. In the course, the professor, Rebekah Nathan, paired international students with American students to have conversations about culture. The pairs met up once a week outside of class to interview each other about various topics that ranged from family values and friendship to rituals and worldviews. The students then submitted to the professor cultural journals reflecting on the experience. Although the course focused on increasing students' awareness of their own cultural framework, as a language teacher I could not help but notice that the international students' conversation skills increased significantly throughout the course, while the native speaking students' ability to understand non-native speakers overall increased throughout the course, as well.

Participant-observation was also a key assignment in Nathan's class. Participant-observation means students not only participate within a target culture, but also observe the target culture, which is very similar to what ESL students already do. Nathan gave the pairs of
students assignments, such as to share a meal together. Because students were expected to write about the experience in a way that analyzed the cultural themes that influence how food is shared, what actions are appropriate, and so on, they noticed more about American culture than when they had dined with native speakers in the past.

Nathan also assigned fieldnote activities. Fieldnotes are relatively similar to a journal project, except that students are observing and making notes about native speaker interaction as it transpires. Fieldnote activities are a more guided version of traditional freeform fieldnotes. One example of a fieldnote activity is when Nathan had her students record in a grid worksheet everything they gave or received for an entire day. When the international and American students compared their worksheets, they were able to see differences in the way they perceived reciprocity. Another example of a fieldnotes activity is one I used for my own anthropology classroom where students recorded all of the metaphors/expressions they heard in a day. Then in class we discussed what themes were used (e.g. "to pitch an idea" is a sports-themed metaphor), where they were used (e.g. an office), and what the metaphors say about Americans’ cultural perceptions (e.g. Americans equate conducting business to competing in sports).

The next way to incorporate ethnography into a classroom is by having students capture video and audio recordings of naturally occurring conversations within the places they hope to speak English. For instance, Heath (1983) noted that a math class recorded interactions at a local store to bring story problems to life for the children. However, as the lesson plan played out, the teacher found that the students were having a hard time understanding the clerk and customers because of particular phrases only used within financial transactions. The math lesson quickly transformed itself into a language class as students began to discuss the source of the miscommunication between certain customers and the clerk. Transcribing these recordings can
be beneficial to students because it is a type of dictation activity. At the same time, one advantage that is unique to this kind of dictation is that it carries with it a significant meaning to the students and thus more intrinsic motivation than other dictation exercises.

**Analyzing the Data**

Once the data is collected from various ethnographic activities, we can guide our students in analyzing the data. Students can analyze the transcripts they created, which have direct benefits to them since the recordings are from the communities in which they live. Also, teachers can have students collect some written texts that they encounter and then use discourse analysis. Heath (1983) suggests that we do this by having students translate the data into terms they understand. For instance, Heath observed an elementary school science class that had interviewed local farmers about their crops. The students then translated the folk terms of the farmers into the scientific jargon they were learning in class and vice-versa. This translation process allowed students to connect scientific vocabulary to their own domains.

Discourse analysis assignments are especially helpful within the composition classroom for more advanced L2 writers. In my own college-level composition classroom, I had my students bring in three articles, blogs, political cartoons, etc., from a source in which they wanted to publish. I then provided activities to help guide their analyses of the examples’ format, structure, tone, and so forth. Specifically, I had them analyze the text for personal pronoun use (e.g. "I," "we," etc.) so that students could discover on their own when it was appropriate to use those pronouns and when it is not—a writing convention that I find is often over-generalized by writing instructors. The analyses culminated in a checklist depicting what it takes to be successful to publish in the source they chose. Students found that this assignment better prepared them for conquering writing assignments in other departments of the university. The
assignment gave students the mental tools to go between various departments with differing writing conventions, analyze the conventions, and reproduce these conventions accordingly. Also, because of the freedom I gave them, students enjoyed being given the chance to be creative. My students analyze and reproduce types of writing that range from statewide newsletters for people in their intended profession to political cartoons.

Finally, the teacher asks students to use the target vocabulary, structures, cultural tidbits, and other anthropological findings that they discovered. For example, with my composition course, students were asked to transform their research projects using the checklist they created. They were given extra credit for submitting their articles for publication in the source they chose.

If reproduction of the target forms is not necessarily a goal, such as in the case of Small’s anthropology course, the class can review the lessons learned through class discussion.

**Benefits in Terms of Culture, Community, & Classrooms**

**Culture**

Wang (2008) claims something that linguistic anthropologists have known for years: "language and culture are inseparably and inevitably linked" (Wang, 2008, p. 49). The question that Wang brings to the table is how to teach culture. There are two points to be made here. These types of cultural lessons can help students: 1) learn how to break free from the cultural practices that lead to their marginalization in society and 2) improve students’ socio-cultural competence. So, if we consider applied ethnography in terms of its original use—the discovery of socio-cultural problems—the use of applied ethnography is completely applicable to the lives of our students. I have been living in Arizona for over two years now, and I have seen how ESL students are caught in the middle of political problems deriving from socio-cultural problems. For instance, there is a new policy set in place in Arizona that judges teachers on
whether or not they have a foreign accent without using other criteria to determine if a teacher is fit for teaching (McGroarty, 2011). Also, it was not too long ago that the SB1070 issue, otherwise known as the “Show me your papers law,” was casting a dark shadow over immigrants in Arizona. Often times, it is our students who can identify socio-cultural problems that we are often oblivious to. According to Norton Peirce (1995), by using ethnographic methods, students “may learn to transform social practices of marginalization” (p.27). This transformation is achieved because it helps students to realize that communities are social practices; thus, the students are led to discover new ways to “claim the right to speak [and write]” (p. 27) in those communities of practice. Thus, “by better understanding the power relations of the dominant culture, students may discover avenues of participation where they might otherwise have been marginalized” (Wennerstorm, 2003, p. 11).

By socio-cultural knowledge, I mean the knowledge that Kramsch (1993) defines as the type of knowledge that lends itself to effective communication, which, according to Wennerstorm (2003), includes knowing how to use genres of discourse in context. By using ethnographic methods to help students acquire socio-cultural knowledge, three distinct advantages can be seen. First, culturally-based writing conventions in a variety of genres can be addressed in ways that help students continue with discovering these conventions. Second, opportunities for intensive study of grammar and lexicon in context are provided. Third, students become more critically aware of social structure and ideologies of the cultural community that produced the discourse (Wennerstorm, 2003).

Ethnographic methods do not just lead to ivory tower theories about human behavior—they lead to meaningful observations that students can incorporate into their own communicative competence or can use to create change within their community. This is called “applied
ethnography,” which is when ethnographic research is used to discover the underlying cause of social problems, and then to discover ways to combat these problems and bring about change. In this way, teaching ethnographic methods can easily be incorporated into critical pedagogy.

Community

Language learning is not just for the realm of the classroom, but for the community as well. This is why, as Urban Language Teaching and Learning: The Community Connection, 2011 claims, language and learning changes along with the communities in which we as teachers and our students are involved. After all, the communities that students live in and are a part of are their target language use domains. By using ethnographic methods, these communities become involved in and integrated into our classrooms. The community becomes integrated into our classrooms because students are sent into their target speech community to collect data, thus providing materials to use in our classroom that show how people in students' target communities use language (Schiffrin, 1987). These methods thus lead to the “integration of student, community, & teacher” (Heath, 1983).

Classrooms

So far I have shown how incorporating ethnographic methods into the classroom can benefit students in terms of cultural knowledge and competence, as well as further integrate the student, community, and teacher together. There are other more traditional ways that students benefit in terms of classroom instruction. According to Wennerstorm (2003), classroom activities and other assignments that invite students to practice with analyzing and interpreting texts will reinforce their ability to identify salient symbols and to "read" their meanings. This is why ethnography is compatible with communicative competence: “Language is intricate and multidimensional, yet it is systematic” (Riggenback, 1999, p.6), and ethnographic methods help
students to cope with determining the systematicity of even the most informal uses of language. After all, every dialect and informal speech type are “organized systems with rules” (Battistella, 2005, p.7).

Riggenback (1999) says that conducting ethnography within a classroom heightens motivation because students can decide on the materials being used for the class, better addresses adult learning styles, appeals to student’s autonomy, builds confidence, and creates an environment where students are not necessarily right or wrong (Riggenback, 1999). More specifically, there are advantages in terms of helping students with communicative competence. Communicative competence can be described in terms of sociolinguistic competence, linguistic competence, and discourse competence. Ethnographic methods help with sociolinguistic competence because they help students determine which usages are representative of a particular speech community. Ethnographic methods also help students with linguistic competence by helping students recognize the form-genre relationship. Discourse competence is improved by helping students gain a greater awareness of context.

**Conclusion**

Using ethnographic methods as second language teaching methods is an idea that is repeatedly brought up in the instruction and research literature, yet there has been little done in the way of making this idea into a reality within our language classrooms. For those teachers who are interested in introducing ethnographic methods into the classroom, but would need some help doing so, I suggest contacting an anthropology teacher or a local anthropologist. Anthropologists can help come up with relevant activities to help students discover the most relevant cultural themes that matter for communication in their target language use domain. An anthropology teacher may see the experience as a way to interest his/her students in studying
"foreign" cultures within the homefront. Either way, the next time you think about investing in a new textbook for your ESL class, consider investing in your students and having them find their own more relevant materials. By doing so, some teachers may find that their students can see aspects of American culture that are invisible to them, especially those whose native culture is “American.” This process will thus make culture the main message to and from one’s students and language the medium.
References


**S**table Schwab is a graduate from Northern Arizona University where she obtained two masters degrees: TESL with an emphasis in Applied Linguistics and Anthropology with an emphasis in Linguistic Anthropology. She has taught EFL/ESL in various different contexts (including Spain and China), for different levels, and for various age groups. She currently lives in Madison, WI.
Professional Development Skills for International Teaching Assistant Training Courses

Nancy L. Kauper, Purdue University

Abstract

University training courses for international teaching assistants (ITAs) typically focus on English communication skills for classroom teaching, but ITA graduate students have broader needs for skills to contribute to their professional success in graduate programs, at conferences, and on the job market. Activities to practice oral English skills for informal networking and interviewing are described here. This paper focuses specifically on how to address instruction of such skills in courses for ITAs, with practice of ‘elevator talks’ about research work and goals; short personal narratives that illustrate skills for use when answering common interview questions; and practice of face-to-face interview skills from the perspectives of both interviewee and interviewer. Focusing on professional development can help ITAs view their teaching jobs as providing valuable experience and skills for their professional careers.
University courses for training international teaching assistants (ITAs) typically focus on development of classroom teaching and presentation skills. However, graduate students in these courses commonly have need of developing a much wider range of skills in English in order to be successful in broader contexts in the university and other professional spheres. Graduate schools, graduate programs, and university career centers may provide professional development (PD) seminars and job market preparation for graduate students, but many students whose first language is not English may need more help with the linguistic challenges of professional communication skills than is typically offered in most university PD seminars for the general graduate student population. Ideally, ITA and ESL programs would offer separate courses in professional development and job market preparation (see Purdue University Oral English Proficiency Program, n.d.), but in this era of dwindling resources, courses of this type may not be prioritized for funding. However, some of the skills typically practiced in a professional development course or workshop can be integrated into a regular ITA training course. This report describes three activities aimed at skills useful for graduate students who plan to enter the job market.

**Informal Networking Skills: Elevator Talks**

Informal networking refers here to interpersonal communications in brief, unplanned meetings for the purpose of making connections that could lead to collaborations, referrals, interviews, jobs, or other professional relationships and activities. Elevator talks are very short (30 seconds to 2 minutes), informative speeches used in informal networking situations (such as in an elevator or a hallway at a conference) in which the speaker has a very limited time to convey important information. The talks must be well organized, concise, and focused in order to
effectively perform their function of clearly informing and leaving a good impression upon the listener.

A common genre of elevator talk consists of an explanation of one’s research for a non-expert audience. This type of talk can be included in an ITA course as part of a “first day of class” classroom presentation. ITAs can perform the elevator talk as part of their self-introduction to inform undergraduate audiences of what they do as researchers at the university. Practicing this type of elevator talk can be done in a 4/3/2 format used for fluency exercises (Nation, 1989), as described below. This format requires a countdown timer with audible signal, such as that available on the i-Phone app.

ITA students are first assigned to develop a 2-minute talk about their research area, aimed at an audience who knows nothing about that particular area. This talk should be thoroughly critiqued for language, content and effectiveness by the instructor and classmates, and may include answers to the following questions:

- What problem is the research aimed at solving, or what discovery do you hope to make by doing this research? Why is this research important?
- How do you carry out the research, in general terms?
- What progress have you and others made, and what still needs to be done?

After developing an effective 2-minute talk, students deliver the talk to classmates several times during three different rounds of practice. In the first round of practice, students are paired, sitting face-to-face, and the 2-minute talks are delivered first by one student, then the other. Students then switch partners and deliver their talks again to new partners. This process can be repeated as often as time allows. Time for partners to give brief feedback can be incorporated into the exercise if desired.
The second round of practice allows 90 seconds to give the same talk. The length of time is shorter, so speakers must be more concise or speak faster, or both. Ideally, students are given three or more times to practice this 90-second talk, with a different partner each time. The third round allows only one minute for the talk, and students are again given several opportunities to practice, with a different partner each time. After the final round of practice, the one-minute talks can be presented in front of the whole class and critiqued again for language, content, delivery, and effectiveness.

The three rounds of practice can be done during the same class period or in successive class periods. The point of all this practice is for delivery of the elevator talk to become routine or automatic. By practicing the talk at different lengths, students must focus on what is most important to say if given only a very short time in which to say it. The different lengths also guard against memorizing a speech word-for-word; although they should be well practiced, elevator speeches are most effective if they do not sound memorized or canned.

**Interview Skills**

**Responding to Interview Questions - Personal Narratives**

No matter what type of interview, graduate students are bound to be asked questions that require them to talk about their experiences and to illustrate mastery of particular skills. It can be very helpful, therefore, for prospective interviewees to prepare short personal narratives they can use when responding to a variety of questions during an interview.

Personal narratives for interviews are very short stories about past experiences that serve to vividly illustrate skills. Because personal narratives involve past events, their development and practice present opportunities for students and instructors of ITA courses to focus on grammar,
vocabulary, and transitions. ITAs can also develop personal anecdotes that may be interjected while teaching as a strategy for developing rapport with students.

ITAs are assigned to develop short narratives that describe experiences from jobs they have held, from their current research or teaching or administrative work, or from university class assignments. Each narrative should illustrate a different type of skill, such as: leadership; the ability to work successfully with a group or team; problem solving or creating something to fill a need; and effective oral communication. The length of each narrative should be 2 minutes or less. Narratives must be well organized and follow a general pattern to include:

- The context of the story (the situation in which the action arose – this may require only a few words to convey);
- The need, problem, request, or observation that prompted the action;
- The action taken;
- The results and consequences of the action.

(Purdue University Center for Career Opportunity, 2011, 36)

Students may prepare written outlines of the narratives, with a few words or phrases for each of the points listed above. However, because these narratives are meant to be used during oral interviews, they should be practiced orally, not written down word for word and memorized as a canned speech.

**Face-to-Face Interviews from Both Sides of the Table**

Mock interviews provide practice of listening comprehension skills, asking and answering questions, and focusing on and negotiating the meaning of questions, as well as appropriate body language and etiquette. In addition, when students play the role of interviewer during a mock interview, they can gain valuable insights into how interviewers view job
candidates, and what types of interviewee behavior create positive impressions or are turn-offs. The Appendix provides a handout with procedures and instructions for a mock interview activity in which students perform the roles of both interviewer and interviewee.

**Conclusion**

ITA training courses naturally focus on communication skills for classroom teaching. With a few adjustments, additional professional development skills and activities can be included in the syllabus. At the very least, ITAs can be reminded that the course they are taking is an important component of their professional training, and their future teaching job may play a crucial element in their professional career. Teaching involves leadership, problem solving, teamwork, effective oral communication, and creativity—skills and experience that employers look for in job applicants. With some coaching by the instructor, ITAs can learn to develop a habit of framing what they do in professional terms that can be capitalized on during networking and interview situations. These activities and reminders can reinforce for ITAs that they are indeed professionals, as well as promote practices and attitudes about teaching as an important professional activity that may contribute significantly to ITAs’ future careers.
Appendix

Interview Activity (designed for 8 students, 90 minutes - 2 hours in length)

This activity is based on the following announcement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12-month fellowship available for a Purdue graduate student</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Includes housing allowance, tuition, and a generous monthly stipend.</td>
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</table>

**Requirements:**
- Full-time graduate student
- Good oral and written English communication skills
- Demonstrated ability to carry out research
- Evidence of excellence in leadership and/or problem solving skills

Interview committees

**Committee A:** Duc, Yun, Ling, Taehwan

**Committee B:** Peter, Lili, Jan, Kim

Interviewees

Round 1: Duc and Peter
Round 2: Yun and Lili
Round 3: Ling and Jan
Round 4: Taehwan and Kim

Procedure

1. Committees meet separately and decide what questions to ask interviewees. (10 minutes)
2. Prepare individually to be interviewed. Prepare one question to ask the committee. (5 min.)
3. Conduct interviews. (10 minutes per interview - 40 minutes total)
4. Committee gives feedback briefly after each interview. (10 minutes total)
5. All meet and report how the interviews went. Report on effective or impressive responses and other interview behavior of note. Committee A reports, then Committee B. (20 minutes)
6. Final comments on experience as interviewer and interviewee. (10-15 minutes)

Instructions for Committee Members

- Stand and welcome the interviewees, shake hands, introduce yourselves.
- Each committee member should ask at least one question.
- Ask interviewees if they have a question.
- Take notes of what goes well, what needs improvement.
- Thank interviewees for their time, stand, shake hands and say goodbye.
- After each interview, give constructive feedback to interviewee.

Instructions for Interviewees
• Introduce yourself to the committee, shake hands and make eye contact with each person.
• Keep your responses brief and to the point.
• When prompted, ask at least one question.
• Thank the committee members, shake hands and make eye contact, say goodbye.
• Listen to all interview committee feedback and take notes, then ask questions.
References


Nancy Kauper works in Purdue University’s Oral English Proficiency Program, where she is currently the testing coordinator and formerly a classroom instructor, mentor teacher, curriculum developer, and interim director. She taught a special Professional Development section of the OEPP’s ITA training course in 2009.
Developing Pronunciation, Fluency, and Cultural Awareness in International Teaching Assistants

Erin Leddon, Northwestern University

Abstract

The challenges facing international teaching assistants (ITA’s) are well known, with many striving to improve their pronunciation, fluency, and cultural awareness in preparation for working with American undergraduates. In response to these needs, Northwestern University recently launched a new program designed to help lower proficiency graduate students develop their oral English skills early in their graduate school careers. Comprised of 3 programs that combine learning opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom, it has met with success in helping students improve their confidence and oral English proficiency.
International teaching assistants (ITAs) often struggle with developing the communicative skills required for success as instructors in American classrooms. Not only must they address linguistic challenges, but they must also prepare themselves to be effective teachers in an American classroom context. Educators serving ITAs early on identified 3 overarching learning goals for this population, briefly summarized as language, teaching, and culture (Civickly & Muchisky, 1991; Constantinides, 1987; Ford, Gappa, Wendorff, & Wright, 1991; Hoekje & Williams, 1994). With respect to language, ITAs must achieve sufficient intelligibility so they can effectively convey information to undergraduates (see Isaacs, 2008). This includes developing accurate pronunciation, as well as fluency (the appropriate use of stress, intonation, and pausing). Moreover, to be successful instructors, ITAs must also develop their teaching skills, including a cultural awareness of American classroom norms and the role of the teacher (see Gorsuch, 2012). All of this must be accomplished as they continue to build their knowledge about American culture more generally (see Lazaraton, 2003). Depending on their background and experience, many ITAs face great pressure to improve in each of these domains, even though it has been shown that they often face difficulty improving their language skills after arriving in the US (Gorsuch, 2008).

While the impetus for improvement often rests with the ITAs themselves, universities also have a vested interest in helping them to improve. Universities are increasingly relying on ITAs to serve as teaching assistants: in 2009, 27% of all US graduate assistants were non-resident aliens (Employees in Degree Granting Institutions, 2009). With universities relying more and more on ITAs to fulfill their teaching assistant needs, it has become increasingly crucial that ITAs be well prepared for their duties. This point is underscored by research showing that American students will readily blame the language skills of ITAs when they
perform poorly in a class (Fitch & Morgan, 2003). To support ITA improvement in language and teaching, many universities now provide courses and resources for ITAs to work on developing their skills (Chiang, 2009; Gorsuch, 2003).

Northwestern University recently developed a program for lower-proficiency first-year PhD/MFA students called Culture and Language Intensive for the Northwestern International Community (CLINIC) in order to address some of the most pressing needs of their ITA population (e.g., help in developing pronunciation, fluency, teaching skills, and cultural awareness). An intensive 3-part program offered at the beginning of students’ first year, CLINIC provides an opportunity for those students with the greatest need to improve their skills at the earliest possible point in their graduate school careers.

CLINIC originated during the 2010-11 academic year, when Northwestern began a new policy of English proficiency testing for all incoming international PhD/MFA students. Before classes begin, these students take the Versant English Test, an automated test distributed by Pearson, Inc. The students with the 30 lowest scores (of about 120 students) are required to enroll in CLINIC. Students’ Versant test scores, which are broken down into several components, reveal that CLINIC students struggle most with accurate pronunciation and fluency while speaking English. Most of these students are also new to teaching, and to the US, and are eager to develop their teaching skills and cultural knowledge, as well. To address these challenges, CLINIC offers programs of instruction both inside and outside of the classroom: a class that meets twice weekly, access to NativeAccent pronunciation training software, and InterCultural Explorers, where students are led by peers on weekly outings in the Chicago area.

The CLINIC classroom experience focuses on improving pronunciation and fluency through communicative tasks common to academic contexts. During the first quarter of the 2-
quarter sequence, each class contains pronunciation instruction (e.g., challenging consonants and vowels, stress, phrasing, intonation, linking), followed by the implementation of that skill in classroom communication (e.g., leading or participating in class discussions, asking or answering questions, paraphrasing, agreeing and disagreeing, describing quantitative data, reporting on written information, etc.). Students receive instructor and peer feedback throughout, and regular individual written feedback from the instructor. The class also involves preparation for the Versant test, which students take at the end of each quarter.

The second quarter of the 2-quarter sequence focuses on developing teaching skills. Students continue to develop their pronunciation and fluency through in-class presentations and simulated teaching exercises. They have the opportunity to work on developing syllabi, assignments, and feedback. They also observe and discuss videos of a variety of instructors (including native speakers and those for whom English is their L2), while also discussing how educational expectations and norms vary across cultures.

In addition to their classroom instruction, NativeAccent speech training software provides individualized pronunciation and fluency training exercises for students available online. Developed at Carnegie Mellon University's Language Technologies Institute, this program uses speech recognition technology to compare students’ speech to a composite model of spoken English. It devises a set of exercises prioritized according to each student’s needs, focusing on specific sounds and stress (pronunciation) as well as phrasing and intonation (fluency). Students enrolled in CLINIC are required to complete 15 hours of training during their first quarter of CLINIC, and have the option of continuing during the second quarter, as well.
The final component of CLINIC focuses on the development of cultural knowledge. InterCultural Explorers is a social program designed to give students an opportunity to practice their oral English skills in an informal environment and to facilitate the development of cultural knowledge about life in the US. It features pairs of experienced graduate students who lead groups of 10 international students on weekly outings in the Chicago area. Outings are designed by the groups, which receive a budget to spend on activities such as trips to restaurants and bars, cultural attractions, sporting events, music or comedy clubs, or simple potluck dinners. Through this program, students are able to build their confidence with the support of a social network of their peers, to practice their English in a low-risk environment, and to ask questions about American culture (and English) they may be reluctant to ask in a more formal learning environment.

While only in its second year, CLINIC has so far received very positive feedback from students, faculty, and administrators alike. Importantly, CLINIC students have also shown consistent improvement in their Versant test scores. Among students who demonstrated difficulty passing the Versant test in 2010-11, CLINIC students improved their scores at double the rate of students who did not participate in CLINIC (11% versus 5% improvement). Given the difficulty in making significant improvements in pronunciation and fluency over a scant 6 months time, these results suggest that CLINIC provides an effective program of instruction for students who may otherwise be at risk for success as students and ITAs. Student feedback has also revealed that students value the pronunciation and fluency training provided by their courses, as they overwhelmingly report that CLINIC has been effective or very effective in helping them improve their English. Their feedback also highlights the value they place on having opportunities to learn about American culture (e.g., InterCultural Explorers) and develop
their teaching skills. Future offerings of the program will build on this student feedback to further students’ three overarching learning goals of language, teaching, and culture.
References


Erin Leddon is the Associate Director of English Language Learning Programs at Northwestern University. She earned her PhD in Linguistics at Northwestern University in 2006, and subsequently spent several years at Northwestern as a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer in the department of Linguistics. In her current role she focuses on assessment, teaching, and program development for international graduate students, particularly those with lower proficiency. In addition to these duties, she continues her research on language acquisition (both first and second language), and teaches introductory Linguistics courses at the undergraduate level.
Reflective Narratives of the EFL Educator: A Panel Discussion
Dr. Ann Meechai, Jillian Baldwin Kim, Angela Hakim, Jerry Edris, Keith Hulsey, Denise Carpenter Mussman, and Jerol Enoch

Abstract:

In this panel discussion at the MIDTESOL Conference in October 2011, each member of the panel comments on their experiences living abroad and teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The panel reflects on how their experiences have shaped their conceptions of language teaching and have made them more empathetic to the experiences of their students learning English as a second language (ESL). In this article, the panel presents their individual reflective narratives of living, language learning, and teaching abroad.

The presentation was organized around 4 questions: 1. What did you learn from your experience abroad? 2. What surprised you about the culture? 3. What are some strategies for language learning that you used abroad that you were able to implement in your own teaching? 4. Do you have empathy for your students?
Jillian Baldwin Kim—China Experience Uncovers “Hidden Culture” Realizations

From my experience abroad, I learned to be flexible, resourceful, patient, and an unofficial ambassador of English and American culture. Shenyang is a medium-sized city in China and not one that many Americans visit, and, although there are two Starbucks, there are not many English-language resources available. Therefore, if I needed something for my classes, I had to find it or make it myself. I had to be patient and flexible because there were too many things out of my control not to be. I was an unofficial ambassador on and off campus, and I was acutely aware that I may have been the only American many people had met and would meet.

Before going to Shenyang, I had studied Chinese culture for two years in order to complete my Master’s thesis which was on possible subversive color usage in the films of Hong Kong director Wong Kar-Wei. Despite my studies, there were a few things that still surprised me about the culture in Shenyang. One element that I never got accustomed to was, shall we call it, flexible academic standards. I cannot speak with certainty as to how wide-spread this phenomenon is, but I can say that it was quite common in the university where I taught. It worked like this: the English language faculty would be trained to proctor or administer a placement test, and in our training we would be told that there is no forgiveness or accommodation for academic dishonesty. However, when it came time to give the test, we would be asked individually to pass certain students. I understood the immense pressures the students were under to succeed, mostly from their own parents who had sacrificed greatly to send them to the university. Still, I was surprised the university would be so flexible in their standards.
Life in China opened my eyes to how much of language is expressed in gestures, expressions, and context. I relied heavily on these non-verbal language cues while learning Mandarin and Korean, and I use them for two purposes in my current classes. The first purpose is to communicate with LEP students and, if they are K-12, their families. The second use is to further explain or illustrate concepts and vocabulary that the students do not yet fully comprehend. I began my life in education as a music teacher, and I am not afraid to use those singing and acting skills in class if it will help a student.

My life as a “foreigner” while overseas definitely gives me empathy for my current students. It is my empathy for the students which prompts me to serve as a kind of cultural informant, especially the first semester of their American-academic lives. I was fortunate to have my own informant in China who was invaluable to my survival both physically and mentally. She made me feel welcomed and safe in China. Once she helped me go to the post office and mail a letter. It seemed like such a simple task, but it was one that was impossible for me on my own with my limited Mandarin skills. Aside from the language barrier, she saved me from trying to lick the back of the envelope. Apparently it is simply not done in China because they use paste to seal the envelopes. Of course, nothing in my studies had ever mentioned this small, seemingly insignificant detail. It is these kinds of memories, of, for example, the taken-for-granted things I used to do in my home country that were now huge enigmas, which make me have empathy for my students.

Angela Hakim—Experiences in Russia Help with Empathy in Teaching

Studying, living, and teaching abroad have given me a perspective likely familiar to many who have lived in a foreign culture. Learning a language and living in a new country is more than learning grammar, listening, speaking, reading, and writing; rather, it involves
absorbing a new history, culture, and world view. Often, it is a process of developing a restructured identity. As a student and teacher in St. Petersburg, Russia, this process for me included a period of euphoria followed by frustration and distress, culminating in awareness and the restructuring of my identity. Experiencing the process of acculturation and reflecting on this process has made me a better teacher.

I left Oklahoma for Russia for my first trip abroad to study culture, politics, and language in my senior year of undergraduate studies. While in Russia, I also tutored teenage girls and taught English to adult learners through a language school. My first few weeks in Russia were incredible. Like many first time travelers, I was charmed by the food, the sights, the smells and everything about this new country. However, after this initial honeymoon period, going to the grocery store, walking down the street, getting on the metro—everything—gradually became a struggle. No one seemed to understand when I asked for change in the grocery store. No one cared to listen through my accent to help give me directions. My nationality and speaking my language became a hazard. I felt continuously physically and emotionally insecure. Tongue-tied, lost, dependent—I was powerless.

The feeling of powerlessness impacted my ability to assimilate to the language and culture. In my home country, I enjoyed many underlying advantages, as I was a native-English-speaking, middle-class, educated, white woman. The invisible advantages I experienced in the US were nonexistent in Russia. I had never experienced a position of powerlessness comparable to what I experienced in Russia. My identity and self-image were challenged in the context of a new culture, and in response I had to restructure my identity.

Much of what I experienced as a student and teacher in Russia is a mirror of what my students face in the US. Although their process of acculturation and identity-shaping may be
considerably different from mine, I have experienced and understand the process. This experience has enabled me to see my own culture from the perspective of my students, who, after hearing my stories of living abroad, see me as an insider and a cultural mediator. It has helped me better recognize how the context of cultural assimilation affects learning and motivation and has facilitated my ability to engage students in the classroom through a shared understanding of being foreign.

Jerry Edris—Acculturation in Korea

My experiences, especially my experiences as a language learner living and working abroad, have had a strong influence on how I approach teaching today. I learned that learning a language within the country involves much more than simply learning the language. It is a whole acculturation process in which language is only one part. Within the new native culture, one is going through this acculturation experience all the time, and sometimes it is beyond one’s own control. When learning a second language within one’s native culture, however, it is highly controlled. The learner is in the classroom focused mainly on the language for controlled periods of time and, beyond the classroom, the learner controls his or her engagement with the language. Because learning a second language within the culture is such a holistic learning process, also involving experiences with food, music, people and culture, the connection between language and culture is much easier to perceive than it can be in the second language classroom.

I had the opportunity to learn the Korean language while living in Seoul, South Korea, for three years. In Korea, I was surprised by the system of interpersonal relationships and etiquette which is partly based on age, status, and the nature of the relationship. This etiquette is reflected in the language (how one addresses people) and in physical actions (how to shake hands or hand something to someone, for example). As an equality-loving American, I initially
frowned on this, but I was wrong to do so. I was using my own cultural values to judge the Koreans’ values. The moment I began to learn to temporarily ‘forget’ my own native values and embrace theirs was a pivotal learning point for me. This was when I was able to fully immerse myself in the language that I was trying to learn. I went from being a casual observer to a fully engaged participant in the language and culture.

Through this experience, I am able to understand that the language learning experience my students are going through is a full acculturation process similar to my own experiences as a language learner abroad. I understand that they are not only learning the language, but negotiating their way through our culture, as well. I remember my own mistakes in judging other cultures by my own standards, and I do my best to help my students avoid making the same mistake. As a result, learning intercultural skills and cultural awareness have become a large part of the curriculum in my classes today, serving as a springboard for language and academic skills work. Additionally, I advise my students to develop their own system of language learning that takes advantage of their presence here: keeping a vocabulary journal at all times to record useful vocabulary they encounter in daily life, or joining a club or participating in activities which require them to use their English, etc.

In my present job, I work with young international students who are also struggling their way through our culture as well as the language. I feel that my job as their instructor is not merely enabling them through language, but helping them find their “other selves.” It is just as important for them to understand the expectations of their American professors and classmates and to “be” the person they need to be while here. Therefore, I spend a lot of time helping them to understand that being a successful student does not necessarily mean the same thing in every culture, and an understanding of this will help them develop into their “American student self.”
Jerol Enoch—An Expanded World View in Romania

I got a Master’s Degree in TESOL so someone would pay me to travel and live in a foreign country. I knew I wanted to get out of the US and see the rest of the world. I wanted to make a difference in the world; I had no idea how much this would make a difference in me.

I grew up in a house that always seemed to be filled with international guests. My father was the Director of the International Studies Program at Memphis State University, now University of Memphis. As a result, there was a never-ending train of guests from other countries, all of whom brought their own languages, customs, and cultures. I loved it. I knew that I needed to leave the US to see how the rest of the world lived and to learn more about myself. I had experienced other cultures and customs through years of interaction with people from other countries, and I had studied other languages, Spanish and French, so I was ready to go…or so I thought.

After receiving a Master’s Degree in teaching ESL in 1993, I was hired by the Open World Institute, a branch of the Soros Foundation, as a teacher trainer in Eastern Europe. Supposedly, my French and Spanish would come in handy in Romania, where it was said that everyone spoke Romanian, a Romance language. The twist came when I was assigned to a Hungarian school. Hungarian is in the Finno-Ugric language family, so my French and Spanish were of little or no use. In the end, I learned Hungarian and have a new perspective on life and language, based on my understanding of how Hungarians use words to construct meaning.

Two examples specifically stand out: “You are welcome,” in Hungarian, is szívesen. Szív means “heart.” Szívesen literally translates to “with all my heart.” “Thank you very much” is köszönöm szépen. Köszönöm means “thank you.” Szép means “beautiful.” -en is the adjective form. Therefore, szépen means “beautifully.” Köszönöm szépen literally means “thank you
beautifully.” Very nice! This made me think about the etymology and meaning of English words, as well. It could be said that until one begins to understand word meanings in another language, he or she cannot fully appreciate word meanings in his/her first language. I definitely learned this while in Romania.

During my seven years overseas, I learned even more about my country, my language, and myself than I had learned through all of my graduate studies. There were times when I would have conversations with non-native English speakers who knew as much about American history as I did. Therefore, I countered by reading Eastern European and Russian history. I thought it only right that if they knew that much about my history then I should learn more about theirs. It was easy to get my hands on new books starting to appear on the market, due to glasnost, perestroika, and an embrace of capitalism in Eastern Europe. In the US, I had been much too complacent with my minimal knowledge about history and the rest of the world. Every person I met seemed to know more about my reality than I knew about theirs.

Not only was I internally pushed to learn more about world history during those years overseas, but several seminal moments forced me to alter the way I looked at myself in my own world. One key event came while walking the streets of Bucharest. A man stopped me and asked me where I was. Literally, in English, he asked me, “Where were you?” I was confused. I knew he knew I was an American. In 1993, I was quite possibly the only person wearing shorts and a baseball cap in the whole country, so I was easy to spot. That still did not explain his question. Where was I when? He did not speak a lot of English and I did not speak any of the local language, so we spent some time trying to articulate what he wanted to know. I was curious. In the end, I discovered that what he wanted to know was why the Americans had not come to help Eastern Europe after World War II. Why had we betrayed Romania? I told him that at the time of
World War II, I had not been born yet. He was not satisfied with that response. I was not either. This was just one of a thousand fantastic “conversations” I was to have with students, colleagues, and strangers.

Seven years later when I came back to the States, I had lots of stories of faux pas, misunderstanding, success, realization, enlightenment, sadness, sickness, and satisfaction. For instance, when I was just starting to learn Hungarian, I had a long conversation with a neighbor. I thought we were talking about composting. I was telling him you can add egg shells, newspaper, leftover vegetables and table scraps. At some point, he walked away and came back with a rabbit, which he let me hold. While I was holding the rabbit, I suddenly realized he had been talking about what to feed rabbits. He wanted to show me what we were talking about as much as he wanted me to hold a rabbit. He probably tells all of his friends that Americans feed their rabbits egg shells and newspaper. I, as the representative of all Americans, had completely misunderstood the conversation.

That was one of the biggest personal lessons for me: I was the representative of the US in a city of 350,000. There were Brits, Scots, Germans, but I was one of the few Americans in the city. What I did and said spoke for all Americans. I wore jeans in the classroom. That must mean all Americans wear jeans in the classroom. I had to be more careful about what I did and said. Realizing this, I also came to the realization that each person did not represent a whole country or culture. I cannot make sweeping judgments about other people’s actions, and I hope they will make the same concession for me.

Professionally, there were lessons, too. While there, I taught English in several high schools in Romania and Hungary. I disliked most of the English language books because they were someone else’s words and ideas, using dialog that was often dated and sometimes
awkward. Students would memorize these words and phrases, but they would fade quickly if not used daily and in a more meaningful way. Since many of the words and phrases were so abstract and cold, I threw out the textbooks and created my own lessons based on events in the students’ lives. It was the first time that many of the students had been asked to speak about themselves. For many (if not most) of the students, language lessons were usually not a time for them to talk about personal issues or really talk at all. However, I told them that they were the most important subjects to learn to talk about. Expressing themselves and telling their own stories gave them confidence and gave meaning to the words.

I also observed a downside while teaching overseas. In most of the schools where I taught, the students were going on to college. College was free, but seniors had to pass very rigorous entrance exams. High school was a very stressful time for most of my students. As a result, in many of the school where I taught, I was not given my own classes. I was a supplemental teacher who was supposed “to talk” with the students. I did give grades, but I was not responsible for their overall success. There was always a “real” teacher who made sure that the students actually learned English. I was not to teach them grammar. For many schools, I was a trophy that they could boast to other schools about: “We have an American at our school!” That was a tough one. All of the parents wanted me to “teach” their children and would pay me extra to have their child in my class. Sometimes, the class would consist of thirty or more children. The school would encourage me take this class to supplement my income. I played games with them and got them to do activities, but I am not sure how much actual learning took place. I was more like a glorified baby-sitter.

So, what did I learn overseas? I learned to be very creative in the classroom. For instance, I once taught a lesson on noun clauses based on “rumors about me.” I entered the classroom and
wrote a paragraph about a rumor about me, (which I had entirely made up). The paragraph was full of noun clauses. I told the students to write the paragraph down and then let me know what they thought about it. The next class, I asked them to write their own paragraph using noun clauses, but they wanted to talk about the rumor. I told them I had made up the rumor, but they wouldn’t believe me. I loved that lesson.

I also learned to love the desertion of my own lesson plan in favor of the direction of conversation in class. I figured as long as the students were speaking English with me, then it was a lesson. I would help them formulate their thoughts and then get everyone to practice the new phrase or expression. After all, they should be driven by their own motivation and their desire to speak.

So, what did I learn in my years overseas? I learned to accept the role as ambassador. I learned to revel in the misunderstanding. I learned to dig for explanation through history and etymology. I learned a new language. I learned perspective. In short, I learned a lot about myself and my place in the world.

Denise Mussman—Challenges in France and Indonesia

I strongly feel that my experiences abroad as a student and teacher have influenced my teaching. I feel empathy for my students when they feel overwhelmed with culture shock or homesick for their family, holiday traditions or familiar environment.

As an exchange student in France, I struggled with the same challenges my college-level students have: meeting native speakers, improving my listening and speaking skills, and dealing with living in another culture. When I arrived, my roommates couldn’t understand me because my pronunciation was poor, and I lacked conversational fluency. I spent the first part of the year sticking to the other Americans as we struggled with finding our classes (there was no printed
schedule), navigating around town, and taking trips. I made friends with another international student, from Morocco, who understood my accented French. She helped me with speaking the language and learning useful phrases. She was the bridge that helped me become more fluent. As a result, I always encourage my students to make friends with other international students, with whom conversations are less intimidating and easier to understand.

Breaking through to make friends with native speakers was a challenge. None of we seven Americans had any French friends. Early in my second semester, I approached a French friend of my roommate who was studying English and asked if I could help him with his homework. He was shy at first, but we soon became friends. He introduced me to his friends, and I introduced them to mine. Soon we were a large group learning both languages. Similarly, in my experience at UMSL, the most successful language learners are those who befriend international students outside of their language group. ESL classes help facilitate this opportunity. I also remember the fun times we had living in student apartments with parties and pot-luck dinners, which my students living on campus enjoy.

My other experience living abroad was in Indonesia, where I taught English in a small town in western Java. Living in Asia and in a developing country was an incredible learning experience for me. I had never directly experienced being in a homogenous society with a group culture. Westerners were highly revered in this small town; I stood out and was often approached. Strangers were shocked to see a Western woman take a bus and drive a car. I also learned about how Asians communicate: direct communication, saying “no,” and expressing strong feelings were shunned. There were also advantages in this society: reliance on others, low crime rate, and a high respect for teachers.
Life in a developing country is vastly different from the States, and I spent three weeks in a hut located in a poor part of town. I enjoyed the reliance on people, as well as the warm weather, healthy food, and affordable and available transportation. However, thanks to this experience, I am no longer naïve about issues of true poverty, despair, and religious discrimination. At my school, the instructors were Christian and thus unable to find work in Muslim companies. I shared a room with an Islamic woman who woke up to change her clothes and pray in the middle of the night, and although she had almost no income, she always stopped to help beggars on the street.

In the beginning, I loved so much about Indonesia: learning Bahasa, the friendly people, the food and the weather. I then experienced an intense, overwhelming culture shock. As difficult as this situation was for me, I now possess an understanding for my students who come from countries with very different cultures.

I taught myself Bahasa and was conversant within a few weeks. I learned strategies that I incorporate into my teaching. They include keeping a vocabulary note-book, making small talk with strangers, reading texts, keeping a journal, participating in student events, interviewing native speakers about a topic, and using techniques to improve one’s confidence.

I recommend that every ESL teacher spend time abroad to widen the perspective of how others live and study. As Anais Nin once said: “We see others not as they are, but as we are.” The more we learn, the more understanding we have about our students’ cultures, and the better we can shape our teaching to accommodate their needs.

**Ann Meechai—Thai Like Me**

I learned from my experiences abroad that it takes time, patience and a lot of motivation to learn another language. I am a first-generation Thai-American. My parents are originally from
Thailand. I grew up in a very small Midwestern town, and I became used to being the only ethnic minority in school and among my group of friends. After graduating from college, I decided to move to the country of my ancestors. I wanted to learn more about my Thai heritage and be among others who were Thai like me. I thought that living in Thailand would be very easy because, after all, I was Thai.

Upon arriving in Thailand, I soon realized that I was not as Thai as I had thought. I had grown up in a household where Thai had been spoken, but my language skills were limited to “survival Thai.” My Thai colleagues and friends in Thailand called me an ABT – an American Born Thai. To them, I acted more American than Thai. How could this be? I had always identified myself as being Thai. I was a foreigner in my ancestral country. Since being Thai was part of my cultural identity, I realized that my own conceptions of myself and the expectations of those around me in Thailand motivated me greatly to want to learn my heritage language and culture. I often heard while living in Thailand, “You are Thai. You must know Thai.”

I had studied Spanish in high school and college, but I actually listened to my parents, who were still living in the U.S., about how to learn Thai since they had had actual experience learning a second language. I used the same strategies that my parents had used to learn English when they moved to the U.S. I tried to speak as much Thai as I could with my colleagues and friends while working in Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand. My father told me to read the Thai newspaper in the morning and watch the newscasts in the evening to reinforce what I had read in the morning. In addition, I loved to watch the Thai soap operas and listen to popular Thai songs to practice my listening and speaking skills in Thai. I always carried a small Thai-English dictionary and a vocabulary journal with me. When I began teaching English in Thailand at
Chulalongkorn University, I advised my EFL students to use the same language learning strategies that I had used when I had first migrated to Thailand.

Later, when I moved to the Philippines, I did not feel so strongly motivated to learn Tagalog, the first language of Metro Manila where my husband and I lived. I was able to communicate competently with those around me in English. This surprised me greatly because I was a language instructor. I realized that motivation and how we view our cultural identity plays a really important part in language learning. As a result, I try to find out about my own students’ motivation for learning English and what kind of language learner they would like to be and become.
Ann Meechai is an Assistant Professor in the English as a Second Language (ESL)/English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program at St. Louis University. She has a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Teaching English as a Second Language from the University of Kansas. In addition, Ann has taught ESL/EFL for almost twenty years. She has also developed the curriculum for training programs for teachers from China and Thailand.

Jillian Baldwin Kim has taught ELL students of all ages and abilities in Shenyang, China and St. Louis, Missouri. She has a MA in TESOL from Webster University and a MS in Media Studies from the University of North Texas. In the St. Louis region, she has taught or been affiliated with the Parkway, Rockwood, Clayton, and St. Louis City school districts, as well as Lindenwood University, Southwest Illinois State College, St. Louis Community College, and UMSL.

Angela Hakim is an instructor in the ESL/EAP program at St. Louis University where she has taught for two years. Before teaching at St. Louis University, Angela taught fourth grade in Pachuca, Mexico, and business English to adult learners in St. Petersburg, Russia. She has also taught and tutored in community programs in St. Louis for two years. Angela has a Master of Education focused in TESOL from the University of Missouri in St. Louis.

Denise Carpenter Mussman is an associate teaching professor of ESL and the program coordinator at UMSL, where she has taught since 1995. She teaches seminars for international teaching assistants and international faculty and has done consulting in pronunciation and accent modification. In addition to teaching at UMSL, Denise has taught ESL at colleges in St. Louis, Chicago, and Indonesia. She possesses an MA in Applied Linguistics from UIC and a BA in French from the University of Kansas.

Jerry Edris is an instructor and student adviser in the ESL/EAP program at St. Louis University. He specializes in teaching content-based courses which develop academic as well as language skills in more advanced students. Previously he taught adult learners in Prague, Czech Republic, for a year and a half. He also taught elementary and middle-school students in Seoul, South Korea, for over three years.

Jeronol Enoch is Coordinator for International Programs in the Office of International Studies and Programs at UMSL. He earned a Master’s Degree from the University of Memphis in 1993. From 1993 to 2000, he taught as a visiting professor at the University of Western Bohemia, Plzen, Czech Republic, and for the Soros Foundation as a teacher/teacher trainer at high schools in Romania and Hungary. Since returning to the US, he has taught undergrad classes at Fontbonne, Lindenwood, and UMSL. Some of the classes include: ESL grammar, social studies for the elementary school classroom, Russian culture and literature, and freshmen composition.
Increasing Interaction while Presenting: Strategies in an ITA Course

Denise Mussman, University of Missouri, St. Louis

Abstract

At MIDTESOL 2011, instructors from various institutions of higher education each shared insights, strategies and assignments to better train international graduate teaching assistants (ITAs). Topics included assessment, interaction, professional development, improving teaching ability, and pronunciation. This short article highlights ideas to help ITAs with presentation skills.
International graduate students who are assigned a teaching assistantship need to communicate well in English. However, effective teaching requires more than comprehensible output. Oral fluency and listening comprehension are also vital, as is an understanding of the class culture in the United States. Instruction in other countries tends to be one-directional with little regard for the needs of the students. Therefore, the ITA training course must include discussions of the expectations of American students and departments. In addition, it is imperative that non-native speakers develop strong audience awareness to compensate for language interference.

At UM-St. Louis, The Seminar for International Teaching Assistants is a semester-long course that meets once a week for two hours and has an average enrollment of six to eight students. One focus of the course is on teaching presentations that require the students to interact while presenting information. The more that the ITAs learn to interact with their audience and ask and deal with questions, the better prepared they will be to teach undergraduate courses.

As U.S. universities increase enrollments of international graduate students, more non-native speakers are required to teach undergraduate courses, discussion sections, and labs. At the same time, there is increasing concern about the language skills of foreign-born teaching assistants and faculty. As tuition fees increase, so does the demand for comprehensible instructors. Pronunciation is usually the biggest complaint that students have about non-native speakers; the issue of comprehensibility of non-native teaching assistants intensifies when student and even parent complaints rise. In the state of Missouri, linguistic and cultural training are required for graduate students who are non-native speakers of English. At UM-St. Louis, student evaluations now include a question related to the comprehensibility of the instructor. However, teaching in another culture consists of many factors beyond articulation of sounds.
Teaching in any foreign language and country is a challenge. Many ITA students lack clarity in speaking, oral fluency, or the confidence needed to communicate effectively as an instructor in their second language. Even those who do possess these skills may become shy when they have to speak in front of an audience.

It is unrealistic to assume a non-native speaker will never make pronunciation errors. However, such errors should not impede overall communication. Undergraduate students tend to be more forgiving of a foreign accent or lack of pronunciation skills if strategies are in place to compensate for errors by increasing the teaching abilities of the instructor. If a foreign-born instructor delivers a strong class lecture or discussion, students focus less on errors. Strong organization, discourse markers, and clear explanations all enhance comprehensibility. In addition, a comfortable class ambience increases the likelihood students will ask questions to check comprehension when needed. Likewise, if students personally like their teacher, they are less likely to complain. Thus, the curriculum of an ITA course needs to address how international students connect with the audience.

Our Seminar for International Teaching Assistants at UM-St. Louis addresses pronunciation, but with only two hours of class time a week, there is little time to develop strong pronunciation and speaking skills. Besides, those with lower levels of fluency and clarity may take a course that addresses pronunciation, accent modification, and oral fluency prior to or concurrently with the ITA Seminar. Therefore, in our ITA training course, the primary goal is to develop the audience awareness of the students. Audience awareness includes using the appropriate content, vocabulary, manner of presentation, and being able to monitor and adjust to responses of the audience. It requires eye contact and interaction (Smith, Meyers, and Burkhalter, 2007). By developing this competence, ITAs can connect with students, create a
comfortable class atmosphere, make students feel at ease to ask questions, and pace their teaching to a comfortable rate for the students.

However, developing audience awareness for non-native instructors is not always an easy task due to lack of confidence, non-fluency in English, or cultural differences in the role of an instructor. Many ITAs prefer to use one-directional communication as is done in their home country. In our seminar, we spend the first few weeks discussing cultural differences in teaching so that the graduate students understand the gap between expectations of American students and their own. One major cultural difference in classroom behavior is the propensity of American students to ask questions. Furthermore, many American professors not only expect questions, but some classes count participation as part of the grade. In other cultures, however, asking questions is considered rude as it disrupts the flow of the lecture and is viewed as disrespectful to the instructor. For ITAs, dealing with questions is challenging and important. One issue is listening comprehension. Even highly fluent second language learners struggle to comprehend the output of American students, who will ask complicated questions, use slang and idioms, or speak quickly with reduced words. To assist ITAs with understanding questions, we require them to rephrase questions to ensure that the ITA understands the question and to give him or her more time to think of an answer. It also lets others hear the question and offers an opportunity to have another student answer the question.

Interaction with the audience is key to the communicative success of the instructor. By asking questions while presenting, an instructor can better gauge whether students are able to predict information and understand the main points; engage the class and active thinking; make students comfortable with asking questions; improve the approachability of the ITA, which improves student evaluations; and increase the approachability of the ITA.
Another cultural difference in the classroom is formality of the relationship between the instructor and the students. In the U.S., this relationship is less formal, and many professors are even on a first name basis with the students. Furthermore, many courses at an American university are discussion-oriented. To encourage class participation, instructors develop a more personal relationship and often engage in small talk with students prior to class beginning, something non-native instructors tend not to be accustomed to. Engaging in small talk increases the approachability and likeability of the instructor. It is particularly important for ITAs to establish a comfortable atmosphere so that students are comfortable asking them questions when the pronunciation or fluency of the non-native speaker impedes communication.

Knowing the need for interaction is one thing. Creating new habits is another. Audience awareness is best developed step by step. It is best to therefore sequence assignments requiring ITAs to interact with their class audience by adding goals with each presentation. An early presentation in our course is the definition. ITAs present a term, a formal definition, a paraphrase of the definition in everyday words, an example that students can relate to, and a conclusion. Their goals for this presentation are to ask at least one information question, not yes/no, to check comprehension of the audience. They also must rephrase any questions asked. To prepare for rephrasing questions, the ITA students work on the grammar of direct and indirect questions. Students take turns playing “hot seat” in the class and are asked a number of questions by their classmates. They must rephrase the questions before asking them. They are also allowed to say “I’d rather not say” if they feel uncomfortable answering a personal question.

Their next exercise is a recap of the definition presentation. The ITAs must review all of the information delivered in the previous presentation by eliciting it from the class. Prior to this presentation, the ITA students study and practice the intonation of statements and various types
of questions. A wider range of intonation makes them sound more encouraging. Tone is
addressed because “body movement, eye contact, and tone of voice are critically important
elements of [the] message…in fact, studies prove that approximately 85% of [the] message is
nonverbal” (DuPont)! They ask questions to see whether the students can remember the term,
deinition and examples. If students cannot remember, the ITAs give hints. They also must
encourage participation by using expressions like: “Good job,” “That’s right,” “Almost correct,”
and “Try again.” An audio recording is made and posted on the class Blackboard sit
Students
must listen to their speaking and comment on strengths and areas to work on. They must also
write three sentences that were awkward in pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary expression
and write corrections of the sentences.

For the next presentation, the process presentation, the ITAs are now required to interact
while presenting, engage in small talk, and deal with inappropriate behavior. During the
presentation, the ITAs ask questions to see if students can guess the next step, know what the
steps are, and understand what to do. They must also include one minute of small talk at the
beginning of the lecture, a skill some students find to be quite challenging. In the American
classroom, teaching assistants are expected to engage appropriately in small talk and other
rapport-building techniques (Ross and Dunphy, 2007). A third strategy is to practice dealing with
bad behavior of a student, such as talking to classmates, reading the newspaper, or asking
inappropriate or annoying questions. (The “bad” student is notified in advance of what to do.)
The ITA must address the students appropriately. The students find these scenarios to be
hilarious. This presentation is videotaped, and we review it one on one with the instructor.

Once the ITAs begin interacting while teaching, students feel more comfortable asking
questions when they do not understand the teaching or pronunciation. The class becomes
dynamic and fun. Since most of the ITAs teach a lab or discussion section, it is imperative that they incorporate two-directional communication into their teaching.

In conclusion, even international graduate students with strong fluency in American English may need teaching training to build confidence while presenting, understand the American class culture, and build a rapport and strategies to enhance communication in the classroom. ITA programs must include discussions and application of classroom differences, in particular the approachability of the instructor to enhance two-way communication. Teaching assistants need to develop audience awareness, and American students need to feel comfortable asking questions about the subject and to check comprehension. Therefore, the curriculum of training courses for international teaching assistants needs to address interaction between the instructor and students, eliciting information and dealing with questions. Once strategies for the expected American-style teaching are in place, the international graduate student will develop connectivity with the students, build confidence in presenting, and continue to improve speaking, listening and teaching skills over time, skills that will help advance linguistic success in teaching, academic work and future professional careers.
References


Denise Carpenter Mussman is an associate teaching professor of ESL and the program coordinator at UM-St. Louis, where she has taught since 1995. She teaches seminars for ITAs and international faculty and has done consulting in pronunciation and accent modification. In addition to UM-St. Louis, Denise has taught ESL in colleges in St. Louis, Chicago and Indonesia. She possesses an MA in Applied Linguistics from UIC and a BA in French from the University of Kansas.
Key Concepts in Culture Instruction
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Abstract

This paper aims at providing language teachers with salient concepts and strategies for effective culture instruction. First, definitions of culture as well as key concepts in culture instruction will be presented. Second, the roles of teachers, curricula, and textbooks in culture learning will be discussed. Third, typical goals for culture learning in the classroom will be pointed out. Finally, techniques and guidelines for teaching culture will be examined.
Empirical research has found that giving cultural instruction to language learners increased not only their language proficiency but also their motivation toward language learning (Tsou, 2005). Teaching culture to foreign or second language students may not be a novel topic, as it has repeatedly been discussed by a whole host of authors such as Atkinson (1999), Blatchford (1986), Brown (1986), Brown (2007a), Brown and Eisterhold (2004), Brooks (1986), Damen (1987), Morgan and Cain (2000), Tang (1999), Tang (2006), Valdes (1986), to name but a few. However, in reality it seems that the majority of language teacher training programs focus on language rather than culture. The result is that many language teachers may feel underprepared to successfully teach culture to their students. This paper attempts to supply language teachers with prominent concepts and useful techniques for teaching culture.

**Definitions of Culture**

Prior to discussion of concepts in culture instruction, it is necessary to review notable definitions of culture. One of the well-known definitions of culture is Goodenough’s (1957).

> …a society’s culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves. (p. 167)

Brown (2007), however, defined culture as a way of life, as the context within which people exist, think, feel, and relate to others, as the “glue” (p. 188) that binds groups of people together. Moreover, culture, as Brown suggested, can also be defined as the ideas, customs, skills, arts, and tools that characterize a certain group of people in a given period of time. Sowden (2007) indicated that “culture tended to mean that body of social, artistic, and intellectual traditions associated historically with a particular social, ethnic or national group” (pp. 304-305).
Additionally, Mead (1961) postulated that culture can be learned, whereas Fox (1999) noted that “culture is relative and changeable in space and time” (p. 90). Like language, culture may seem to be another concept that is not easy to define. In fact, Tang (2006) rightly observed that despite the continued efforts in various disciplinary fields to find a definition for the term culture, at the present time there is no single definition that satisfies everyone.

According to the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1996), culture is typically understood to include the philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices, and both tangible and intangible products of a society. The relationship between perspectives, practices, and products within culture is illustrated below.

Figure 1

What constitutes culture?

Perspectives

(Means, attitudes, values, ideas)

Practices

(Patterns of social interactions)

Products

(Books, tools, foods, laws, music, games) (The National Standards for Foreign Language Learning, 1996, p. 43)

Key Concepts in Culture Instruction

Terms such as enculturation, acculturation, culture awareness, cross-cultural awareness, cultural identity, culture shock, and culture bump are often mentioned when the issue of teaching...
culture is discussed. An understanding of these terms will enable one to realize the importance of culture in language learning and teaching.

**Enculturation and Acculturation**

In discussion of culture and culture learning, enculturation and acculturation are commonly used. Whereas the acquisition of a first culture is called enculturation, the acquisition of a second or additional culture is termed acculturation, and both exhibit unique variations (Damen, 1987). Similarly, Brown (1986) defined acculturation as the process of becoming adapted to a new culture. In addition, Damen (1987) clearly delineated enculturation and acculturation as follows:

Enculturation builds a sense of cultural or social identity, a network of values and beliefs, patterned ways of living, and, for the most part, ethnocentrism, or belief in the power and the rightness of native ways. Acculturation, on the other hand, involves the process of pulling out the world view or ethos of the first culture, learning new ways of meeting old problems, and shedding ethnocentric evaluations. (p. 140)

**Cultural Awareness and Cross-Cultural Awareness**

Another term worthy of discussion is cultural awareness. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) pointed out that cultural awareness means to become aware of members of another cultural group including their behavior, their expectations, their perspectives and values. Kuang (2007) delineated four levels of cultural awareness. At the first level, people are aware of their ways of doing things, and their way is the only way. They ignore the influence of cultural differences. People become aware of other ways of doing things at the second level, but they still see their way as the best. Cultural differences at this level are deemed as a source of problems, and people are likely to ignore the problems or reduce their importance. People at the third level of cultural
awareness are aware of both their way of doing things and others’ ways of doing things, and they tend to choose the best way according to the situation. At the third level, people come to realize that cultural differences can lead to problems as well as benefits, and are willing to use cultural diversity to generate new solutions and alternatives. Finally, at the fourth level, people from various cultural backgrounds are brought together to create a culture of shared meanings. People at this level repeatedly dialogue with others, and create new meanings and rules to meet the needs of a specific situation. In essence, it can be said that individuals who experience the four levels of cultural awareness proposed by Kuang (2007) move from a stage of “cultural ignorance” to a stage of “cultural competence.”

Krasner (1999) mentioned a three-step process of internalizing culture that was proposed by Agar (1994): mistake, awareness, and repair. Generally, step one, mistake, is when something goes wrong; step two, awareness, is when the learners know the frame of the new culture and possible alternatives; step three, repair, is when learners try to adjust to the new culture. A critical goal of culture teaching in foreign language teaching, as Krasner postulated, is raising students’ awareness about the target culture.

Like cultural awareness, cross-cultural awareness, as Damen (1987) indicated, involves discovering and understanding one’s own culturally conditioned behavior and thinking, as well as the patterns of others. It is also “the force that moves a culture learner across the acculturation continuum from a state of no understanding of, or even hostility to, a new culture to near total understanding, from mono-culturalism, to bi- or multi-culturalism” (Damen, 1987, p. 141). In a similar vein, intercultural communication is defined as acts of communication undertaken by individuals identified with groups exhibiting intergroup variation in shared social and cultural patterns (Damen, 1987). Citing from Rich and Ogawa (1982), Damen remarked that the term
intercultural communication has had different names such as cross-cultural communication, trans-cultural communication, interracial communication, international communication, and contra-cultural communication. Zhang (2007) argued that having the proper awareness of cross-cultural communication is the first step to achieve harmony and success of intercultural communication.

**Cultural Identity**

Damen (1987) noted that cultural identity is associated with the relationship between the individual and society, and it is at stake when the process of acculturation is under way, because to become bicultural is to develop an altered cultural personality and identity. Kramer (1994) indicated that foreign language learning is a hermeneutic process where learners expose their own cultural identity to the contrasting influences of a foreign language and culture.

**Culture Shock**

Culture shock which is a common experience for a person learning a second language in a second culture refers to the phenomena ranging from mild irritating to deep psychological panic and crisis (Brown, 1986, 2007). In terms of the origin of the term, Damen (1987) pointed out that it was coined in 1958 by Oberg who suggested that it resulted from anxiety over losing familiar signs and symbols. Damen further indicated that culture shock is an intermediate stage in the acculturative process, and is particularly painful as it follows an initial period of euphoria and joy at the new and strange. Culture shock may endure for some, whereas for others it is quickly followed by a devastating period of depression, dislike of the new and strange, illness, discouragement, and despair (Damen, 1987).

1. The honeymoon stage
2. The disintegration stage
3. The reintegration stage
4. The autonomy stage
5. The interdependence stage

To further explicate what each stage means, Brown and Eisterhold (2004) stated that in the first stage, the honeymoon stage, the differences observed in the new culture are exciting and attractive. The second stage, the disintegration stage, is a period of frustration and helplessness. The new culture appears overwhelming in this period, and the response of the newcomer is typically depression or withdrawal. In the reintegration stage, culture appears to be a problem, and the newcomer is defensive, not responsive. The newcomer in the autonomy stage has perspective on the culture, and his or her opinions are balanced, objective, and may indeed be relatively positive. Finally, some people attain the interdependence stage when they adopt a new identity as a bicultural or multicultural person.

**Culture Bump**

Unlike culture shock, culture bump, as Archer (1986) noted, occurs when a person from one culture finds himself or herself in a different, strange, or uncomfortable situation when interacting with people of a different culture. Archer posited that such a phenomenon results from a difference in the way people from one culture behave in a certain situation from those in another culture. Moreover, a culture bump, as Archer indicated, also happens when a person has expectations of one behavior and gets something completely different; and an individual does not have to leave one’s own culture in order to experience a culture bump. Whereas culture shock extends over an extended period of time, culture bumps are instantaneous, usually over within
minutes or even seconds, but the effect may be long-lasting, and can occur any time an individual is in contact with members of another culture (Archer, 1986). This author maintained that culture bumps provide a good chance for international educators, as they lead both teachers and students to an awareness of self as a cultural being and provide an opportunity for skill development in extrapolating one cultural influence on everyday life, expressing feelings successfully in a cross-cultural situation, and observing behavior. Archer also suggested that although culture bumps can be negative, neutral, and positive, negative culture bumps should ideally be eliminated.

Jiang (2001) noted that for native English speaking teachers who work in English as a foreign language contexts culture bumps are inevitable, so whenever culture bumps occur, those teachers should use the incident as an opportunity to teach their own culture, since knowledge obtained from experience tends to be more deeply rooted than from books. Culture bumps can happen to anyone who is not familiar with a new culture; therefore, not only language students but language teachers may also encounter such experiences which can turn out to be very instructive for teachers and students to discuss in the class.

**The Roles of Teachers, Curricula, and Textbooks in Culture Learning and Teaching**

Several different factors may have an impact on the success and failure of culture teaching in language classrooms. Teachers, curricula, and textbooks are among the most important factors to take into consideration. Damen (1987, p. 5) postulated that there are reasons for the limitations of teachers’ efficiency as cultural guides.

1. Teachers do not know what “culture” to teach.
2. Until recently only a few textbooks of methodologies have been available to assist teachers in the direction of culture learning.
Assuming that language teachers can naturally teach culture is a serious mistake, for defining what culture is not easy, and neither is deciding on what culture to teach. Furthermore, without proper training in instructional methods to teach culture, it is not likely that teachers can do the job of teaching culture as effectively as expected. Regrettably, guidance on culture teaching may seldom be overtly stated in the curriculum of second or foreign language teaching programs.

Damen (1987) observed that while cultural guidance is rarely part of the stated curriculum of the English as a second or foreign language, or any language classroom, it is, nevertheless, often part of the hidden agenda, a pervasive but unrecognized dimension, coloring expectation, perceptions, reactions, teaching and learning strategies, and is, more often than not, a contributing factor in the success or failure of second or foreign language learning and acquisition. (p. 4)

Lafayette (1988) pointed out that among the three main components of the language curriculum (language, literature, and culture), the greatest amount of time and energy is still directed to the grammatical and lexical aspects of language; nonetheless, culture remains the weakest component “due to its uneven treatment in textbooks and to the lack of familiarity, among teachers, with the culture itself and with the techniques needed to teach it” (p. 47).

However, it may seem that culture is getting some more attention in the curriculum, as culture has been increasingly advocated as an integral part of the curriculum in foreign language education (Tang, 2006).

Textbooks can serve as one of the decisive factors in culture learning. Wandel (2003) suggested that textbooks should contain materials allowing and provoking diverging opinions and discussions on cultural stereotyping. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) stated that it is often expected that second or foreign language textbooks should contain elements of the target culture.
Nevertheless, through their examination of a range of textbooks from different parts of the world, Cortazzi and Jin found that a target culture is not always included. These authors also clearly articulated that English as a foreign language textbooks can have seven different roles in culture learning. Textbooks can be a teacher, a map, a resource, a trainer, an authority, a de-skiller, and an ideology.

Cortazzi and Jin (1999) then clearly elaborated on their points. First, these authors argued that textbooks can be a teacher, because they contain material intended to teach students directly about English-speaking cultures. Second, textbooks can also be a map that provides an overview of a structured program of language and culture elements. Third, they can be a resource or a set of materials and activities from which the most appropriate or useful items can be chosen for both linguistic and cultural learning. Also, textbooks can be a trainer, especially for inexperienced or untrained teachers both in terms of language and culture. Moreover, textbooks can be considered an authority, for they include reliable, valid, cultural content written by experts. In addition, textbooks can be seen as a de-skiller, as they allow teachers to follow the cultural content and activities as presented. Therefore, teachers may not use a creative, interpretive, and critical approach to using materials as they have been trained to do. Finally, textbooks can be deemed as ideology, as they reflect a worldview or cultural system, a social construction that may be imposed on both teachers and students; thus, textbooks can indirectly construct teachers’ and learners’ view of a culture.

Goals for Culture Learning in the Language Classroom

If culture is perceived to be part of the second or foreign language curriculum, specific goals should be clearly set. Richards (2001) presented three reasons for setting goals in language teaching. First, human beings are generally motivated to pursue specific goals. Second, the
utilization of goals in teaching improves effectiveness of teaching and learning. Third, a program can be effective to the extent that its goals are sound and clearly described.

Gaston (1984) set forth four stages of cultural awareness: (a) recognition, (b) acceptance/rejection, (c) integration/ethnocentrism, and (d) transcendence. This author argued that sets of specific skills must be developed at each stage of the process. At the first stage, learners have to develop a key skill labeled non-judgmental observation. Then, they need to learn to cope with ambiguity at the second stage. At the third stage, the ability to empathize should be developed. Finally, at the fourth stage, learners need to develop the ability to respect and appreciate other cultures.

In an attempt to help classroom teachers to deal with setting goals for their students, Valette (1986) maintained that cultural goals can be classified into four categories: (a) developing a greater awareness of and a broader knowledge about the target culture, (b) acquiring a command of the etiquette of the target culture, (c) understanding the differences between the target culture and the students’ culture, and (d) understanding the values of the target culture. In the same vein, Peterson and Coltrane (2003) indicated that cultural activities as well as objectives should be carefully and clearly organized and incorporated into lesson plans. These two authors even asserted that culture must be included as a vital component of language learning.

A case in point is the U.S. Kramsch (1991) noted that American foreign language teachers have given a renewed look at the relationship between language and culture, and that in the US current efforts are directed at linking the teaching of language to that of culture. Specifically, the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1996, 2006) set two standards for culture goals: whereas the first stresses the practices (or patterns of social
interactions), the second emphasizes the products (such as books, tools, foods, laws, music, and games) associated with cultural perspectives (such as meanings, attitudes, values, and ideas). Moreover, it was also mentioned in the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1996, 2006) that both formal culture (“big C”) and daily life culture (“little c”) are viewed as inseparable, because they are both inextricably woven into the language of the people who live in the culture, and because understanding and involvement with both aspects of cultures is of crucial importance for students at all levels of language learning.

**Techniques for Teaching Culture to Second or Foreign Language Students**

Byram, Morgan, and Colleagues (1994) commented that despite the fact that there are some indications of concern with theories of cultural learning most influential theorists in the field of foreign language teaching have not yet provided an adequately developed understanding on which practitioners can base their teaching. Many authors have proposed, however, some viable ways or approaches to teaching culture to second or foreign language students.

Lafayette (1988) suggested some specific activities for integrating culture and the teaching of vocabulary, grammar, listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing. Brooks (1986) recommended that teachers begin their classes with a short presentation in the foreign language of a subject that has not been previously announced. Specifically, he provided a list of topics that could be used to introduce culture of the target language in the classroom. Blatchford (1986) argued that newspapers could be vehicles to teach culture. Although Blatchford recognized that it can be discouraging for students to learn from newspapers on their own due to cultural interference and language difficulty, he emphasized that some aspects of the newspaper can help students learn culture more easily with the teachers’ help and guide.
Literature has also been considered a useful source to teach culture. Valdes (1986) noted that literature may be used to teach culture to upper-intermediate and advanced second language students so that they can have greater insight into the culture, and they may also have a greater understanding and appreciation of literature in their first language as well as that of the second language. Another effective way to teach culture in the classroom can be to use commercial television. Scollon (1999) convincingly argued that commercial television can provide a rich source to bring unconscious cultural codes to the level of conscious perception.

Krasner (1999) presented some useful techniques and methods of teaching culture to foreign language students: observation (through films, news broadcasts, maps, or menus), having students visit ethnic sections or restaurants of cities, mini drama (which provides an example of miscommunication in the form of dramatization and the students are asked to discover the cause of the miscommunication), culture capsule (which offer brief explanations of foreign language customs, and culture capsule can also be in the form of oral presentation, reading, writing, or visual aids or realia), and role play (which gives the students opportunities to demonstrate and rehearse appropriate cultural behavior).

Peterson and Coltrane (2003) suggested some instructional strategies to teach language and culture that may seem helpful for teachers looking for some practical ways to integrate culture in their language lessons.

1. Using authentic materials such as films, news broadcasts, television shows, websites, photographs, magazines, newspapers, restaurant menus, travel brochures, and other printed materials to engage the students in discussion of cultural issues
2. Using proverbs as a way to help students to explore the target culture
3. Having students act out a miscommunication based on cultural differences
4. Presenting objects such as figurines, tools, jewelry, or images that originate from the target culture to serve as a foundation from which the teachers can discuss other cultural, historical, and linguistic factors, or the students can be asked to do further research to find more information about the items presented.

5. Using exchange students, immigrant students, or students who speak the target language at home as expert sources for classroom discussion.

6. Sending students into the community of the native speakers of the target language to find information about their target culture.

7. Using literary texts as sources for learning culture.

8. Using films and television segments to provide students with an opportunity to witness behaviors which are not obvious in texts.

**Practical Guidelines on Accounting for Cultural Issues for Classroom Teachers**

In addition to suggesting specific activities or techniques to teach culture in second or foreign language classrooms, some efforts have been made to guide teachers to teach or address cultural issues appropriately as well as effectively. Brown (2007a) provided four guidelines on accounting for cultural issues for classroom teachers.

1. A student’s cultural identity is usually a deeply seated bundle of emotions, so teachers should practice empathy as they relate to their students in cultural matters: behavior patterns, and expectations; expected relationship to authority, family, and peers; ambiguity, tolerance, and openness to new ideas and ways of thinking; students’ attitudes toward their own and the second language culture; their view of individualism versus collectivism; linguistic conventions of politeness, formality, and other socio-pragmatic factors.
2. Teachers should recognize the cultural connotations and nuances of English and the first language of their students. Teachers should capitalize those in their teaching.

3. Teachers should use the classroom as an opportunity to educate their students about other cultures and help them to see that no one culture is better than another. Teachers should also practice in words and deed their respect for their students’ deeply ingrained emotions that stem from the students’ cultural schemata.

4. When cultural differences emerge, teachers should help their students to appreciate and celebrate diversity. Especially in an English as a second language context where students in the same class may represent many different cultures, teachers should try to make their classroom a model of openness, tolerance, and respect.

Peterson and Coltrane (2003) recommended that culture be instructed without preconceptions. In other words, they indicated that cultural information should be provided in a nonjudgmental fashion that does not place value or judgment on distinctions between the students’ culture and the culture being explored in the classroom. Citing from Krasner (1999), Peterson and Coltrane pointed out that possessing only linguistic competence is not enough for learners of a language to be competent in that language. These authors further noted that learners of a language need to understand that language use must be associated with other culturally appropriate behavior in order for communication to be successful. Moreover, as these authors suggested, instead of teaching culture implicitly through linguistic forms the students are learning, teachers can make the cultural features reflected in the language more explicitly.

Furthermore, Wylie (1961) postulated that although it is of great importance to learn the facts about a foreign culture, facts alone are not enough, and that the values and attitudes behind the facts are more important to cultural understanding. In addition, Krasner (1999) argued that both
linguistic and extra-linguistic cultural features should be taught to the students so that miscommunication, misinterpretation, and a major culture shock may be avoided.
References


Dr. Thu Tran is currently a Student Program Administrator at the Applied Language Institute at Missouri University of Science and Technology. He is also a certified TOEFL iBT speaking rater. He is interested in cultural issues in language education, teachers’ perceptions of vocabulary and grammar teaching, and language learner strategies.
Going Global: Exploring TEFL in Peace Corps

Miranda E. Wilkerson, Columbia College

Abstract

Throughout 2011, Peace Corps celebrated 50 years of promoting peace and friendship around the world, with one of the largest service areas being Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). TEFL Volunteers serve in a number of capacities, from secondary-school teaching to teacher training. They work together alongside local teachers and methodologists to improve the quality of EFL education in their host communities. Despite the long-standing tie Peace Corps has had to the TESOL profession, very little is known about the duties and impact of TEFL Volunteers. I describe the most common and universal threads and realities of TEFL service, providing additional insight by way of qualitative data into the positive effects Volunteers have on host communities. This paper seeks to answer questions, invite reflection, and spark interest in what it means to serve as a TEFL Volunteer in Peace Corps.

Author Note

This paper grew out of queries from educators about Peace Corps’ TEFL Program. I am grateful to Tamara Prydatko, TEFL Lead Specialist, and Thomas Ross, Director of Programming and Training, at Peace Corps-Ukraine for discussions on the topic, as well as for making Ukraine’s TEFL Impact Study (U.S. Peace Corps, 2010b) accessible for review. I also extend my thanks to Peace Corps’ Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support (OPATS) for providing me with data from end-of-year reports. Any errors in reporting, of course, remain my own. Thank you to the TEFL Volunteers, past and present, who reach beyond classroom and
office space and into the community. Finally, I extend my thanks to Heather Richmond for proof-reading this paper.
may be hard to believe, but it is true: Peace Corps’ first Volunteers were educators. Today, 50 years after its seminal founding in 1961, education continues to be at the forefront with over one third (40%) of Volunteers working as teachers in 50 host countries (U.S. Peace Corps, 2011d & 2011e). Programs in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) exist in the majority of these countries. Indeed, TEFL is considered Peace Corps’ largest “growth” area with host-country governments continuing to request TEFL assistance.

In the wake of Peace Corps’ 50th anniversary, recognizing the agency’s prominent role in TEFL education in underserved countries, including its current rapid growth and development, is timely. If we can agree that gaining global or intercultural perspectives is a strong motivation for working in English Language Teaching (ELT), an overview of the opportunities, responsibilities, and realities of a TEFL assignment in Peace Corps is duly warranted. As underscored in the November 2011 *TESOL Connections* online newsletter (“TESOL Celebrates”), TESOL and Peace Corps are inextricably linked. Sarah Sahr, TESOL’s Education Programs Manager, opened the piece on returned Peace Corps Volunteers who are also TESOL Members with this personal sentiment: “There are two very consistent entities in my professional career: TESOL and Peace Corps” (para. 1). Adding to this statement, Diane Larsen-Freeman, who served as a TEFL teacher with a government secondary school in Sabah, Malaysia (1967-1969), noted the professionalism of Peace Corps:

Incidentally, my life has been intertwined with the Peace Corps in other ways. My graduate education was, and my current positions are, at the University of Michigan, where in 1960, on the steps of the Michigan Union, John F. Kennedy challenged students to dedicate themselves to global peace and justice by living and working in developing
nations. From that challenge grew the Peace Corps, which Kennedy established after his
election. *Directing the English Language Institute (ELI) at the university, years later, I
learned how much of my Peace Corps training was influenced by Charles Fries and
others at the ELI. I have also been long associated with the SIT Graduate Institute, which
designed and delivered much of the early predeparture training of Peace Corps
Volunteers.* (Emphasis mine) (TESOL celebrates, 2011, para. 5)

Peace Corps’ TEFL Program continues to evolve to meet the standards of today. Projected for
2012, Peace Corps is transitioning to the TEFL Standard Curriculum, which meets standards
comparable to the minimum global standards of an internationally recognized TESOL certificate
(Brock, 2011). The curriculum includes 65 session topics and 120 hours of instruction and
practice teaching, among other things (U.S. Peace Corps, 2011a).

The vivid accounts in the *TESOL Connections* article are representative of the
considerable variation that exists among Volunteers and TEFL assignments in Peace Corps.
Some returned Volunteers only first discovered their interest in ELT through a TEFL assignment
in Peace Corps, for example, while others were drawn to service because of their background
and training in ELT. Likewise, assignments ranged from primary- and secondary-school
teaching to teacher training, and many served just out of college, while others—often in tandem
with making a career change—served later in life.¹

The aims of the present paper are twofold. First, I highlight TEFL growth, tracks, and
responsibilities in Peace Corps. Second, I review evidence on the positive effects and impact
TEFL work has on host institutions and communities, drawing on qualitative data from a 2010
survey conducted in Ukraine, as well as on my own accounts working with teachers as a recent
(2008-2010) TEFL Volunteer in Ukraine. Notwithstanding the variation across Volunteers,
assignments, and projects, the principal objective is sustainable development through collaboration with host institutions and communities. Not unlike TESOL’s mission and values, priority in Peace Corps’ TEFL Program is given to improving teacher preparation and providing support in the form of materials, pedagogical recommendations, and assessment.

**Goals of Peace Corps**

Before turning to the core of the paper, let me note the goals and most directly relevant aspects and requirements of service in Peace Corps. Three goals make up Peace Corps’ mission (U.S. Peace Corps, 2011d), namely:

1. To help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.
2. To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of peoples served.
3. To help promote a better understanding of other people on the part of Americans.

Core expectations for Volunteers are derived from these three goals. Volunteers are expected, for example, to commit to serving abroad for 27 months (an average of 3 months is devoted to training) and, while doing so, understand that “successful and sustainable work is based on local trust and confidence built through community and cultural integration” (U.S. Peace Corps, 2011b). Assimilation is fostered in a number of ways. During training, Volunteers receive substantive instruction in the local language and technical skills related to their assignments. They also become familiar with the country’s cultural traditions through cross-cultural lessons and, quite commonly, by living with host families. Stipends range from $200 to $300 per month, enabling Volunteers to live in a way similar to the local people.

Living and working alongside host country nationals enable connections, trust, and friendship. “First, we took time to study the Volunteer and then she became one of us,”
responded a host-country colleague when asked about how well a Volunteer came to know Ukraine (U.S. Peace Corps, 2010b, p. 8). Another Ukrainian had this to say about a Volunteer:

When he came… I told him that I would become his eyes, ears, and tongue. He smiled, and when he left he told me that I had become not only his eyes, ears, and tongue, but also his heart and soul (p. 8).

These anecdotes reflect the success with which Volunteers make friendships and integrate into the community. On what makes Peace Corps unique, photojournalist Richard Sitler (2010, p. 10), in his book on today’s Peace Corps Volunteers, remarked:

The Peace Corps is about relationships, and isn’t that the most important thing to human life? It is about getting along, and Peace Corps goes a long way to helping Volunteers and host country nationals see that no matter what differences people have with each other, it is always possible to get along.

Having talked with many Volunteers, most would agree that people were by far the most memorable aspect of service. For instance, I will never forget some of the questions friends, teachers, and colleagues asked or the stories they shared over a cup of tea and how these stories made me feel. I will never forget my host mother telling me that we didn’t need to speak the same language in order to understand each other (as cited also in Sitler, 2010, p. 123).

In sum, unlike many other teaching positions abroad, great care is taken in Peace Corps to ensure that Volunteers take an active role in community life. The idea is that community engagement results in greater individual success. Really, however, service is not a one-way street; it’s an exchange. By sharing skills and giving of themselves, Volunteers also secure good will and support from the citizens of their host communities. With this framework in place, let us continue to the TEFL perspective in the next section.
A Closer Look: Snapshots of TEFL Growth, Tracks, and Responsibilities

TEFL is the largest and fastest-growing of six program sectors in the Peace Corps. Based on data gathered in end-of-year reports for 2010 by the Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support (OPATS), the following information surfaced (U.S. Peace Corps, 2011e):

- The region consisting of Europe, the Mediterranean, and Asia has the largest current number of TEFL Volunteers.
- Africa is the region with the greatest number of content-based TEFL Programs.
- The Rwandan Ministry of Education plans to switch its entire education system to English.
- Ethiopia has signed a $3 million agreement with USAID to cover 180 TEFL Volunteers over a five-year period.
- Ukraine enjoys the largest number of Volunteers, with over 300 of them working solely in the TEFL Program.

While there is certainly no shortage of TEFL positions in Peace Corps, a concern expressed by many TEFL candidates for service is related to the type of position and its ensuing duties. Peace Corps has three main TEFL positions or tracks, comprising (1) secondary-school teaching; (2) university-/college-teaching; and (3) in-service teacher training (U.S. Peace Corps, 2011e). Most TEFL Volunteers teach at the secondary-school level, which requires an earned Bachelor’s degree and relevant tutoring experience. Volunteers with teaching certification and advanced degrees, however, tend to teach at universities/colleges, Ministry of Education offices, and/or in-service teacher training institutes, depending on the purported needs of Peace Corps host countries. Regardless of the specific assignment, each Volunteer is matched with a counterpart, a person (usually a teacher, director, or English language methodologist), who works with
him/her in a co- or team-teaching framework. Counterparts are Volunteers’ initial point of contact upon arrival in their communities and are typically their most reliable resource.

A broad description of TEFL responsibilities includes (in no particular order) (1) introducing communicative activities to classrooms; (2) launching English clubs, summer camps, and service-learning projects; (3) creating professional development workshops and teaching materials; and (4) boosting teachers’ overall confidence to speak English and try new methodologies. Depending on country of service, Volunteers may have opportunities to participate in programs outside the scope of Peace Corps since the agency desires to support Volunteer interaction with programs that assist with youth development.⁵

Like most teacher trainers in Peace Corps, I helped teachers develop insight into professional standards and organizations like TESOL-Ukraine.⁶ Working closely with my counterpart, I helped interested teachers develop more effective practices and draw more explicit connections between current second language acquisition research and their classrooms. I was able to guide local English language methodologists as they aimed to expand in-service, as well as school-based, teacher training. This was accomplished by developing and facilitating pedagogical workshops aimed at advancing communicative competency and participatory methods in language teaching; creating opportunities for teachers to practice constructive criticism through practice teaching; providing ongoing coaching and feedback to teachers by observing their classes; and developing supplementary tools and materials to assist teachers in planning student-centered activities that engage students in meaningful, authentic language use.

Perhaps one of the most rewarding aspects of my work, though, was the opportunity to take part in the professional development of fellow TEFL Volunteers. Through the creation of local support networks, Volunteers working in each of Ukraine’s regions met locally to discuss
lesson planning, student-related concerns, and/or self-assessment as they related to best practices in the field. Embracing TESOL’s credo of collaboration, this Volunteer-led initiative, fittingly dubbed “The Collaborative,” has inspired Volunteers in other countries to form peer-to-peer technical support groups as a means for teacher development.

Besides working with host country nationals, Volunteers are active in different Peace Corps projects. With the assistance of Coverdell World Wise Schools, many embrace Peace Corps’ third goal of helping “promote a better understanding of other people on the part of the American people.” They connect with a U.S. classroom during service and exchange letters, photos, stories, and so on. Communicating with Volunteers stimulates American students’ awareness and appreciation of cultural and linguistic diversity and volunteerism.

**TEFL Impact and Sustainability**

Like all Peace Corps projects, TEFL revolves around a specific outcome: making the positive outcomes of a Volunteer’s work sustainable. In other words, institutions and communities where Volunteers serve should be eager and prepared to continue the work after the Volunteer leaves.

As mentioned earlier, Ukraine boasts the largest number of total Volunteers, 452 to be exact, with over 300 working in TEFL (T. Ross, personal communication, December 18, 2011). In fact, Ukraine’s TEFL Project is considered a leader in Peace Corps because of its high-quality pre-departure modules on TEFL methodology, in-country pre-service training, and strong TEFL staff. Thus, Ukraine serves as a good testing ground for exploring the impact, meaning, and sustainability of TEFL work.

Considering impact, TEFL Volunteers complete the biannual, mandatory Volunteer Report Form (VRF), describing their projects, activities, number of participating teachers, and so
on, for the purposes of data collection, analysis, and information sharing. Based on reports from Volunteers serving in Ukraine in 2010, the following select outcomes were projected for 2015 (U.S. Peace Corps-Ukraine, 2010):

- Volunteers in collaboration with their counterparts will have trained 15,000 teachers in different methods of teaching English.
- 2,500 Ukrainian teachers in cooperation with Volunteers will have worked to develop and/or update English language teaching materials.
- 7,500 Ukrainian teachers of English will gain confidence in using English and cross-cultural information inside the classroom through daily contact with Volunteers.

Because self-reported data have a tendency to reflect belief rather than fact, reports and observations from host country individuals are needed to better understand and establish the impact and sustainability Volunteers have in relation to Peace Corps Goal 1 (bringing technical skills) and Goal 2 (helping host-country nationals to better know Americans). As part of a TEFL impact study (U.S. Peace Corps, 2010b) initiated by Peace Corps-Ukraine and Peace Corps’ Office of Strategic Information, Research, and Planning (OSIRP), over 160 Ukrainians in 20 host communities selected at random were interviewed by host-country researchers about their experiences working with TEFL Volunteers and Peace Corps. Results were overwhelmingly positive, indicating that Volunteers greatly contributed to the improvement of TEFL methods and the English skills of students and teachers, as well as the understanding of Americans. In regards to the latter, “More Ukrainians think that Americans are good people compared with their perception before working with Peace Corps” (p. 7). Characteristics ascribed to Americans include, but are not limited to, readiness to help, communication, cooperation, willingness to
share experience and knowledge, and hard work. The following select excerpts from the survey offer further insight into how counterparts viewed Volunteers at their schools and/or institutions (pp. 5-6):

Language knowledge, especially oral skills, improved both for the teachers and for students. Communication with the Volunteers helped us overcome the language barrier.

In order to advance one’s knowledge of English one needs to have a constant opportunity to practice one’s skills and to communicate. One also needs modern textbooks and information materials. The Peace Corps program gives it all.

Communication with the Peace Corps Volunteer was like a second university for me! I learned many things that were not taught when we were students.

I have a different attitude now to everything: family, myself, pupils, and friends. My general outlook on life has changed. I began to smile more often and am more positive about problems in my life.

The Peace Corps Volunteer was a very “warm” type of person, very positive. The Peace Corps Volunteer would always help when she could. The Peace Corps Volunteer’s advice was always good. Now, I try to act in the same way with my colleagues.

The following quotes from teachers taken from workshop evaluations during my service as a teacher trainer capture a similar change in attitude about work and Americans:
Your workshops encouraged me to work harder at my school.

The materials are very interesting and they may involve pupils into English lesson and motivate pupils.

All the tasks and exercises were very interesting! Students are very motivated doing such work!

It was interesting for me to know some tasks at the lessons of speaking and writing.

I never met an American before. I am so happy to know that I can understand you!

When asked about the sustainability of a Volunteer’s work at her institution, a teacher in the impact study responded (2010b, p. 9):

Both teachers and students are ready to and are already sustaining the changes. Support for events of the school’s English club has continued after the Volunteer’s departure; students organize the work of the club themselves. Furthermore, new methods of teaching are being used. The changes have already become a part of our culture.

Another respondent reported that “the work is not solely conducted by the Volunteer. It is done together with other teachers; therefore, I think that the initiatives of the Volunteer will be continued after he/she leaves” (p. 9).

This final anecdote is important because it attests to the collaborative spirit of the TEFL Program and Peace Corps more generally. Indeed, it would be glib to attribute the advancement of TEFL methods and practices in Peace Corps countries to the agency and its Volunteers alone. Introducing and supporting positive changes in EFL education is a joint effort, initiated first by the host country government who invites Peace Corps. Education Sector: Guidance for Project
Wilkerson: Going Global

*Development* (2011c) details ways in which host countries have adopted Peace Corps-promoted approaches.

**Reflection and Conclusion**

“The real thing I accomplished was forging human bonds,” said Tom Moriarty (Mali, 1988-1990), a federal government risk manager, when asked about his achievements in Peace Corps (Macy, 2011, p. 12). Having worked with teachers, I came to understand that the rewards of a career in teaching were few and far between in Ukraine. A major accomplishment, then, was helping teachers understand themselves as members of a TEFL community by cultivating a “we-are-all-in-this-together” attitude. Helping create a sense of pride in and enthusiasm among teachers, while impossible to measure, was one of my greatest achievements. Of course, most Volunteers would agree, as Alan Guskins comments in *Parade* (2011, p. 15), that they gained much more than they ever gave, returning to the U.S. with enhanced language, technical, and cross-cultural skills as well as international friends and colleagues.

Recent developments in the profession have reflected the worldwide demand for English. Most publically, TESOL International Association (“TESOL Announces Name Change,” 2011) has replaced the association’s former name to better convey the global stance of the organization. As TESOL expands, so does Peace Corps. President Obama’s emphasis on service resulted in 13,500 candidates contending for 4,000 Peace Corps positions in 2010 (Macy, 2011, p. 13). In May 2011, the President and British Prime Minister David Cameron announced a formal partnership between Peace Corps and Voluntary Service Overseas (U.S. Peace Corps, 2011g, p. 2). As explored in this paper, Peace Corps continues to match global standards in TEFL training. “Advancing Excellence in English Language Teaching,” TESOL’s new tag line, could just as easily describe the mission of Peace Corps’ TEFL Program.
References


Footnotes

¹ Peace Corps prides itself on the diversity of its Volunteers. According to the *Factsheet* (U.S. Peace Corps, 2011d), Volunteers span in age from 18 to 86 and come from all 50 states. Although there is no upper age limit, Volunteers must be at least 18 years old and U.S. citizens to qualify for service.

² The program sectors, including a breakdown of Volunteers working in each of the sectors, can be found at [http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=about.fastfacts](http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=about.fastfacts).

³ The Department of State and USAID partner with Peace Corps on TEFL education and initiatives (U.S. Peace Corps, 2010a, p. 52).

⁴ For a thorough review of these tracks, including qualifications and preferred skills, please visit: [http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=learn.whatvol.edu_youth](http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=learn.whatvol.edu_youth).

⁵ In Eastern Europe, for example, Volunteers have been known to team-teach sessions on American culture and family life for the Future Leaders Exchange Program’s (FLEX) pre-departure orientation cycles. FLEX is a federal government program that provides opportunities for deserving high school students from Eurasia to spend a year in the United States, living with a family and attending a U.S. high school.

⁶ TESOL-Ukraine has been an affiliate of TESOL since 1996 and holds a national conference, which draws hundreds of attendees from around Ukraine and abroad, annually. It is supported financially by the Regional English Language Office (public affairs section of the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, Ukraine).

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When It Doesn’t Work: The Impact of Service-learning on the Second Language Acquisition Process

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Abstract

The author describes the design of a service-learning course for ESL (English as a Second Language) students in an intensive content-based EAP (English for Academic Purposes) program and questions whether participation facilitated second language acquisition (SLA) for her students. This analysis is based on the author’s experience of several years as an instructor in the EAP program, where she taught service-learning courses at the advanced intermediate level. A brief review of literature on SLA theory indicates variables that may impact the SLA process for certain student populations as they engage in a service-learning course.
Service-learning has become a popular method of instruction in recent years in higher education. In many institutions, there are offices and staff devoted to training faculty in service-learning theory, methods, and course design. This comes at a time when higher education increasingly looks to address societal issues and to incorporate this emphasis into curricular goals and objectives (Jacoby, 1996). The purpose of this paper is to analyze to what extent participation in a service-learning course might facilitate second language acquisition (SLA) for ESL (English as a Second Language) students. A brief review of literature on SLA theory, along with the author’s experience with a service-learning course in an intensive content-based EAP (English for Academic Purposes) program, indicate variables that may impact the SLA process for certain student populations as they engage in a service-learning course.

**Service-learning**

Jacoby (1996) defines service-learning as “a form of experiential education in which students participate in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development” (p. 5). Part of the structure includes elements of reflection that link the course content with the service projects (Jacoby, 1996). This is similar to other experiential learning models, which emphasize a learning experience followed by reflection (Knutson, 2003). The overarching goal of service-learning as described by Jacoby (1996) is to address problems in society. Secondly, service-learning teaches students about citizenship, democracy and civic engagement, as well as adding to the students’ professional skills. Typically, there is no mention in service-learning literature of students who are also learning English as a second language. This is an important
distinction not only because of the students’ varying cultural backgrounds, but also because of
the additional mental processes that such an experience requires of them.

There is a growing body of research concerning service-learning courses for students in
the U.S. learning a foreign language, but there are very few studies that have been conducted
with ESL students as participants in service-learning. In the ESL context, service-learning could
provide additional opportunities for students to be immersed in the second language (L2), meet
native speakers, and learn about another culture. Also, projects may provide experiences that
reinforce learning of the course content, as well as language objectives. Elwell and Bean (2001),
in their study of community college ESL students participating in service-learning, claimed that
ESL students participating in a service-learning class benefited not only in the areas of
engagement in the community and with the class content, but also in their abilities to
communicate in English. Service-learning seems to parallel the communicative method and
content-based instruction, both of which are well established methods for L2 instruction
(Stanley, 2011; Genesee, 1991; Iancu, 1997; Snow, 1998). In the content-based EAP (English
for Academic Purposes) classroom, language instruction becomes the means for approaching
academic content. It is within this context that the service-learning class took place in this
current project.
Service-Learning in an EAP Program

The current project took place in an intensive EAP program at a private, religiously affiliated 4-year university in the Midwest United States. About 95% of the students were 18 to 22 year-olds from mainland China and had the expectation of returning to China after finishing an undergraduate degree. Most of the students hoped to get a degree in business, marketing, finance, or another related field. The students were enrolled in various levels of the intensive content-based EAP program based on their proficiency levels in English. In order to exit the program completely, they had to achieve a 550 PBT (paper-based) TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) score, which is equivalent to an 80 on the iBT (internet-based) TOEFL.

The EAP program in the current project was designed as a simulated adjunct model of content-based instruction to address both content and language (Brinton & Jensen, 2002). The main content-based course simulated an academic course and was adjunct to grammar, writing, reading, and speaking classes for a total of 20 hours of class time per week. In the advanced level, which represented PBT TOEFL scores from 470 to 500, the content class focused on topics of business ethics, intercultural communication, and social justice. The content for the class in this current project was chosen because it was perceived as useful background information by the teachers, who recognized that the students, regardless of degree program, would be required in later semesters to take courses such as philosophy and history. The incorporation of the business ethics content in later semesters was an attempt to more closely align the course with the students’ interests.

Service-learning was incorporated into this existing class a few years ago in an effort to improve class motivation and to create a sense of community in the program. The expectation was that the students would have hands-on experience with issues of social justice in the
community and thereby become more interested in the class content. Since the university was religiously affiliated, there was also institutional support to train teachers in service-learning and reflection methods in workshops and seminars. Although only a few teachers taught the content course, most of the teachers were involved in the service projects as team leaders. Since these teachers also taught the other ESL/EAP courses, they also had opportunities to speak to the students about service-learning and the content class. Many of the teachers were excited about the project and mentioned in casual conversations how they communicated to the students the goals of the program. However, there were some teachers who constantly questioned the process, including service projects.

In the service-learning content class, the students were assigned texts and movies related to the content, followed by class discussions, student presentations, lectures, and service projects. The teacher gave a brief introduction of the concept of service-learning presented in class and allowed the students time to do on-line research about the community organizations where they would serve. The service projects had a reflection component in the form of an on-line blog, which the students wrote before and after each service project. Students were given prompts to help them think about how the service projects related to their own past experience, as well as the class content. In order to ensure that the students completed the blog, they were often given time in class to finish it. The teacher responded to each blog after the service project, although only a few students responded to the teacher’s comments. The semester was approximately 14 weeks long and culminated in a final exam and reflection paper.

The service projects consisted of yard work and basic house repair, such as painting trim on houses, raking leaves, trimming bushes, pulling weeds, and winterizing windows. The primary community organization with which the students worked was one of the only groups
willing to accommodate large numbers of students when the course was designed. Because many of the students did not have vehicles and they were unfamiliar with the city, the teachers accompanied the students. This meant that at least one class would go to a service site at time, at least ten to fifteen students. Also, the community organization was hesitant to give the students complicated tasks because of their inexperience and lack of language proficiency. Each project lasted about four or five hours, with four projects for the whole semester. The teachers supervised the students during the projects, answered questions the students might have, and initiated conversation in English, since the majority of the students tended to speak in Chinese among themselves. Regardless, there were times when students had to continue working on a project without the direct supervision of a teacher for part of the day. The projects typically took place at the home of a widow, elderly couple, or refugee family in an urban setting. The students wrote in their on-line blogs that they enjoyed meeting the homeowners, and were disappointed when no one was home to greet them. However, the students did not typically initiate conversation with the homeowner unless prompted by the teacher.

Over the course of several years of this current project, different groups of students had varied reactions to the content class and the EAP program, in general. In class evaluations, final papers, blogs and casual conversations, some students reported that they enjoyed the class, especially after the semester was over. However, other students expressed negative feelings about the course. Some students said that they learned about U.S. culture, while other students wrote, mostly in teacher evaluations, that the service-learning content class was useless. Typically, they reported that their accompanying grammar, pronunciation, TOEFL, and writing classes were useful. Despite tremendous pressure from parents to exit the EAP Program and proceed to academic classes, every semester there were students who did not pass to the next
level in the EAP program after completing the service-learning class and accompanying coursework, either because of an insufficient TOEFL score or a non-passing cumulative grade in the program. Also, each semester there were students who were dismissed from the EAP program for failure to progress. While the service-learning course had mixed reviews from the students, the question remains whether it actually helped them to learn English. This paper will examine, in light of SLA literature, whether a content-based EAP service-learning course impacted the SLA process of the aforementioned ESL/EAP student population.

**SLA Variables**

Despite attempts to generalize the SLA process, there are as many variables as there are individual learners. For example, whether the learner is paying attention to L2 input depends on his or her prior knowledge, affective state, attention, as well as the frequency of the input (Gass & Selinker, 2001). The learner has limited mental resources, which can be seen, for example, in the acquisition of lexical items (Barcroft, 2004). Much of a learner’s linguistic knowledge is also socially constructed, and therefore depends on interaction with peers, instructors and native speakers (Nguyen & Kellogg, 2010). Also, whether the learner actually produces output could depend on his or her personality, the particular situation, or whether the learner is speaking or writing. The following section will include discussion about specific variables that might aid or hinder SLA in the context the ESL service-learning class in this current project.

**Attention**

In order for learners to acquire the L2, they must pay attention to the input, as well as some of the feedback, negotiation and resulting modified input (Gass & Selinker, 2001). There have been studies in which it has been found that non-native L2 learners will negotiate for meaning and, in turn, produce and receive modified speech (Pica, 1994). These studies have
typically taken place in a simulated classroom setting, and interactions have occurred between non-native and native speakers of English. In a study in which all the participants were non-native speakers of English, Foster (1998) found that negotiation of meaning and modified speech did not take place as often as might have been expected as students worked on a variety of information gap tasks in dyads and groups in a real classroom setting. During service-learning projects, it did seem that certain students were overlooked in a group task and did not participate in conversation. If the students were paired with native English-speakers, the chances for negotiation of meaning and modified output increased, but these opportunities were rare.

Further, while L2 learners should “notice” the gaps in their language, there are many instances when they do not (Lyster & Saito, 2010). In many cases, in order to promote SLA, it is necessary for the L2 learners to receive some kind of explicit feedback, such as explicit correction, meta-linguistic clues, or clarification requests. This will most likely be the case for a service-learning class, since this type of class is meaning-oriented and not focused on grammatical forms (Lyster & Saito, 2010). The service-learning content and projects provided the students with something to talk and write about, but without adequate feedback from a teacher or a native speaker, there was not much change in the students’ interlanguage.

Use of L1

Nonetheless, if the students are all from the same language background, they will not be forced to speak in the L2 at all. For example, Tarone and Swain (1995) found in the Canadian French immersion classroom that as L2 learners became adolescents, they tended to use the native language (L1) for informal interactions, reserving the L2 for academic topics. This was partly because of the need of the adolescents to form a social identity in front of their peers, but it was also related to the fact that the students were not exposed to L2 vernacular by native
speakers. However, ESL students in Australia who interacted with native English-speaking peers did acquire English vernacular (Tarone & Swain, 1995). The Chinese students in this current service-learning project were in a situation where they could be exposed to English vernacular on an on-going basis since they lived and studied in the U.S. However, because of the near homogeneity of the ESL classes, the program mostly functioned like an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) environment.

The service-learning projects seemed like they would provide an opportunity to expose students to native speakers and L2 vernacular. However, the students spoke in Chinese among themselves during most of the service projects instead of interacting with teachers, other service volunteers, and community partners. For example, when a native speaker gave instructions to the students, they seemed to not understand or pay attention and continued to talk among themselves. When a teacher asked them what they were talking about, they often admitted they were trying to understand what the person had said by asking their peers, or they would admit that they had not listened. It seemed that in many cases, possibly because the students were in a large group, they did not pay attention to native speaker. When instructors addressed students individually, there seemed to be better communication, and the students negotiated for meaning and sometimes modified their speech. However, it required the initiation of the instructor for this type of interaction to take place. Further, a lack of L2 output on the part of the students also meant there were few opportunities for instructors to give feedback.

Face

While the students in this current project often spoke in their native language, there were also instances in class and during service projects when they remained silent. There may be several reasons for this, but since most of the students were from China, it is important to look at
possible cultural factors. Face, roughly translated from two separate Chinese characters, can be described as a person’s reputation, which is hierarchical, reciprocal, and socially constructed (Wu, 2009). Despite sufficient language proficiency, the Chinese students in this project did not participate as much as was expected in the classroom and during service projects. For example, the students tended not to ask questions in English when they did not know how to perform a particular task. Instead, they would ask their peers in Chinese, stop working, or attempt the task anyway with poor results. In class, when asked to discuss topics related to the content, such as the environment, poverty, or other social issues, the students were also very reluctant to give their opinions or disagree with each other or the teacher. Since these students admitted in casual conversations with instructors that they mostly spoke Chinese outside the class setting, it was important that they produce L2 output in classroom interactions. It seems that protection of face may have prevented them from full participation.

**Motivation and Investment**

Teachers often look at the issue of motivation when students fail to engage in classroom activities. Motivation is an extremely complex and dynamic factor that can also conflict with investments, or other goals, which are related to the construction of the learner’s social identity (Pierce, 1995; Gardner, 1991). For example, while the Chinese students in this project were invested in passing the TOEFL and proceeding to academic courses, this did not carry over into overall motivation to learn English for social interactions or even class participation. In the social sphere, the students were invested in maintaining a Chinese identity in front of their compatriots. In casual conversations with their teachers, they sometimes said that other Chinese students would make fun of other Chinese students for speaking in English. Further, many of the Chinese students who participated in this service-learning class in this project had not chosen to
study in the United States, as they stated in casual conversations. Their parents made them study in an American university, and they frequently expressed a desire to go back to China. The students were invested in maintaining family ties while fulfilling their parents’ expectations of them. In this case, the students’ investment in English is linked to an on-going construction of their social identities with their families and peers, and therefore is divided.

**Willingness to Communicate**

Another factor related to motivation is willingness to communicate, which is defined as the probability that a person will initiate communication (Lu & Hsu, 2008). In general, American students showed more willingness than Chinese students. Nonetheless, even if native speakers were present with L2 learners on a service project in this current project, it did not guarantee that there was interaction between the two groups. For example, the widows or elderly couples in the urban context often expressed to the teachers that it was difficult for them to talk to the Chinese students because the students “didn’t speak English.” Also, there were other service projects where American students were assigned to work alongside the Chinese students. In general, the Americans students stayed with the Americans, and the Chinese students stayed with the Chinese, showing a lack of willingness to communicate on both sides.

**Mismatched Expectations**

Related to motivation and investment are students’ and teachers’ expectations of the nature of language learning and instruction. Stanley (2011) found that Chinese college students participating in her study had underlying theories of language and language learning that differed greatly from those of their Western oral English teachers. While the Chinese students viewed language as series of words and structures to be memorized, with no room for errors, the teachers emphasized communicative competence and allowed for errors as a part of the learning process. These competing theories created conflict in the classroom. In fact, the Chinese students in the
service-learning course in this current project reacted to communicative activities in a similar way as those in Stanley’s (2011) study. Since this service-learning class was content-based, there was a focus on effective communication about the content instead of explicit language instruction. For the students in the current project, who expected instruction concerning grammar and vocabulary, or perhaps preparation for a standardized test, this kind of course did not seem useful. They often commented in the teacher evaluations that they wanted “more TOEFL” or “more useful/interesting topics.” At times, the students became resistant to teaching methods and activities by refusing to participate, complaining, leaving early, or not coming at all.

**Prior Knowledge**

There are also cognitive processes that might inhibit SLA in the service-learning context. The students’ cultural background constitutes a major part of the prior knowledge that they will constantly check new input against (Gass & Selinker, 2001). A new term may be defined and presented to the students in numerous ways; however, if the students’ prior knowledge of this concept conflicts with the new information, students may leave the class with a culturally biased or shallow interpretation of the concept. Nguyen and Kellogg’s (2010) study shows the possibilities of contextualized peer learning in a sustained content-based ESL program, as the students arrive at a contextualized understanding of the word “stereotype” through the process of socialization on an on-line discussion board. Service projects might afford even more opportunities for group identity to form, along with more experiences and contexts with which to connect new concepts. Then, through on-line or in-class interactions, students might acquire not only the definitions of new concepts, but also the cultural context, as well.

In reality, while the service projects in the service-learning class afforded opportunities for the students to create a community or a “family,” as they sometimes wrote in their blogs,
most of the students still only interacted superficially with each other in class and on the on-line blog function used in the class. For example, even after several experiences with service projects, class discussions, blogs, movies related to the topics, and reading assignments, the students typically defined “social justice” in their final reflection papers as “fairness,” “harmonious living,” or “equality.” This is an approximation of the term, but it shows a lack of reflection on the part of the students about how this term might be culturally defined in different ways, not to mention the application of what social justice might look like related to the class content the students encountered over the course of the semester. In order for students to relate prior knowledge to new information, it requires their ability or willingness to interact with other members of the class in order to promote reflection and critical thinking.

**Limited Mental Resources**

Service projects would seem to be ideal for learning highly relevant and contextualized vocabulary words and phrases. Based on Barcroft’s (2004) study, although this new L2 vocabulary may be highly contextualized, unless it is also meaningful and comprehensible to the students, as well as frequently and repeatedly presented, L2 acquisition will be hindered. Further, it is possible that if during a service project the students’ limited mental resources are occupied with other tasks, such as learning a new skill or comprehending a native speaker, the acquisition of new vocabulary words could be limited. In many cases, it seems as if the input provided to the students by native speakers in the current project was simply incomprehensible, as later evidenced through casual conversations with the instructors. There were other instances when the students in this project asked to be told the name of some object, tool, place or person they encountered during a service project. In these instances, the students did notice the gaps in their linguistic knowledge, and if an instructor or native speaker was present, that gap was filled.
However, in classroom discussions, on-line blogs or written assignments, the students frequently talked around or literally translated the words that the instructors had provided during the service project. Perhaps because the students were not frequently presented with the words, they were distracted with other thoughts, or they were pushed to produce the words again too soon, they did not acquire many new lexical items from the service projects.

**Conclusion**

Other studies (Elwell & Bean, 2001; Grassi, Hanley, & Liston, 2004) have examined the potential of service-learning as a means to teach content and language skills. The students in this current project afforded many opportunities to examine when service-learning seemingly did not produce these intended outcomes. The issues of motivation, investment, and social identity created obstacles to the students’ language acquisition in this project. In many ways, the service-learning component served to distance the students even further from the instructors and course objectives because it did not meet their expectations of what a language class should be. For many students, it did not improve motivation to invest in learning English, nor did it decrease the social distance between the students and U.S. academic culture.

There can be lessons learned from this case. First, it might be argued that the EAP program fulfilled a secondary goal of preparing students for academic classes by acclimating them to service-learning since the students would most likely encounter a service-learning class when they entered their academic programs. However, the sociolinguistic variables described in this project seemed to become obstacles that hindered the SLA process, which may have impeded students’ progress to academic courses. It may be that students with an intermediate level of proficiency in English will not benefit from the addition of service-learning because of overloaded mental resources. Instead, it might be advisable to reserve a service-learning class
for advanced students who have already exited the ESL/EAP Program. On the other hand, it may be useful to partner with a group of native speakers of English during a service-learning class in order to create more opportunities for students to acquire the target language. It is not the purpose of this paper to discredit service-learning as a method, nor is it to discourage ESL teachers from involving their students in service-learning courses. On the contrary, it is the hope of the author that instructors will take into consideration these possible limitations in order to modify a service-learning class to facilitate SLA for ESL students in each particular context.
References


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