



OR TESOL Journal

Volume 32, 2015

Topics Inside

Observing content classes to inform IEP practice

Exploring emotional connections in vocabulary learning

Supporting IEP students in a learning center

Collaborating to align standards in K-12 schools

Placing students in extensive reading programs

Increasing confidence and English use outside the classroom

Applying Speech Language Pathology techniques to pronunciation instruction

Developing self-evaluation skills through peer writing feedback

Discovering a useful resource on pronunciation

Oregon Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

The ORTESOL Journal

Volume 32, 2015

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Contents

The ORTESOL Journal Volume 32, 2015

Features

Re-evaluating the speaking and listening demands of university classes for novice international students..... 1
Beth Sheppard, Jennifer Rice, Korey Rice, Brendan DeCoster, Rachel Drummond-Sardell & Nate Soelberg, University of Oregon American English Institute

Introducing Verbpathy in the English Language Classroom: Encouraging Students to Feel the Essence and Emotion of Words 13
Patrick T. Randolph, Western Michigan University

State of the Art Student Support Services in an IEP Learning Center ... 20
Jessica Hanson, Jeffrey Maxwell & Monika Mulder, Portland State University

The Call to Collaborate: Key Considerations as ELD and Classroom Teachers Begin to Align New Standards..... 33
Kena Avila, Linfield College

Reading Level Placement and Assessment for ESL/EFL Learners: The Reading Level Measurement Method..... 44
Aaron David Mermelstein, Ming Chuan University

Increasing Confidence and English Use Outside the ESL/IEP Classroom..... 56
Isaac Gaines, University of Oregon

Teaching Notes

Using Speech-Language Pathology Techniques to Enhance Pronunciation Instruction 68
Susan Ginley, Shannon Guinn-Collins & Jenny Stenseth, Portland State University

Developing Self-Evaluation Skills Through Giving Peer Writing Feedback 70
Misaki Kato, University of Oregon

Book Review

Pronunciation Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching..... 73
Teresa Cunningham Byrnes, Portland English Language Academy

Information for contributors 75

Re-evaluating the speaking and listening demands of university classes for novice international students

Beth Sheppard, Jennifer Rice, Korey Rice, Brendan DeCoster, Rachel Drummond-Sardell, and Nate Soelberg, University of Oregon American English Institute

Abstract

Instructors from an Intensive English Program (IEP) conducted classroom observations in university courses commonly attended by international students to answer two questions: 1) What listening and speaking demands do international students face in courses at our university? 2) How can instructors in our IEP better prepare our students for these listening and speaking demands? A qualitative instrument was used to record classroom events, and common themes were identified from the results through group discussion. Results showed that international students at the researchers' university likely need more practice in listening to informal lectures and quick announcements, following descriptions of visually presented data, and asking and answering questions. Implications for instructional practice in the IEP are discussed, and this methodology is recommended for other IEPs seeking to update curriculum based on the skills most essential for students in their own local context.

Key Words: *speaking, listening, international students, content class, observation, Intensive English Program, lecture*

Introduction

One goal of university-based Intensive English Programs (IEPs) is to prepare students with the skills they need to communicate effectively in their university courses after exiting the IEP. With limited time available, IEP curricula need to focus on this key mission. Therefore, oral skills instruction in IEPs should aim to develop the listening and speaking skills most essential for academic success in the university. But what are these most essential areas? What skills will

contribute most to our students' success once they enter the university as international students? Every teacher may have her or his own intuitions about the answers to these questions, but research can shed light on what is actually needed.

Published research is limited on specific oral language skills that international university students need and/or lack, and the research that exists is mostly based on surveys of faculty (see e.g. Johns, 1981; Ferris & Tag, 1996a; Ferris & Tag, 1996b) or students

(see e.g. Ostler, 1980; Ferris, 1998; Kim, 2006), many of which were published in the 1980s and 1990s. Subjects are asked what skills are required, and which are difficult. For example, in Ferris and Tag's (1996a&b) seminal research, hundreds of professors from four California universities and colleges reported on the frequency of specific types of assignments involving oral skills and the frequency with which international students have specific difficulties with listening/speaking activities, ranked the importance of oral skills such as "pronunciation/intonation/stress patterns of American English" and "lecture note taking," and provided additional open-ended comments. In a follow up study, Ferris (1998) reformulated the same survey for student respondents. She found very little agreement between the students' report and the professors', commenting that "instructors may not always be the best judges of the ways in which their students are struggling" and "students may not be the best informants on what professors actually require" (p. 307).

Indeed, while this self-reported data provides interesting information on instructor and student beliefs, it probably does not provide a complete picture of the listening and speaking behaviors common in university classes. As Powers (1986, as described in Flowerdew, 1994, p. 13) mentions in his analysis of a study surveying faculty about necessary listening skills, "faculty members who are not involved in language instruction may not be competent to analyze listening activities of non-native students, and faculty perceptions are only one of many sources of information (students and ESL instructors being two obvious

others) that must be considered in assessing necessary listening skills." Thus, the observations of ESL instructors would be a valuable source of information to triangulate with data drawn from studies of international students and university professors.

A great deal of research investigates the characteristics of academic lectures, finding, for example, that academic listening requires students to distinguish relevant from irrelevant information, integrate information from different sources, and understand various styles of monologue without much opportunity to request clarification (see, e.g. Flowerdew, 1994). However, little research attempts to bridge the gap between the characteristics of lectures and the learning needs of non-native English speakers. One study by Lee and Subtirelu (2015) uses corpora of both university lectures (Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English, or MICASE) and English for Academic Purposes classes (L2CD) to compare the metadiscourse used in those two settings. In this study, metadiscourse refers to any language used "to organize the information for their audience and to encourage them to understand the unfolding discourse in particular ways" (p. 53). Some examples include transition words, hedging language, references to course materials and books, and attitude markers. Lee and Subtirelu's results indicate that this kind of metadiscourse is pervasive in both EAP and university classes, but that it is significantly more common in EAP classes, probably as a result of the instructors' perception that more explicit instruction and scaffolding is needed for learners of English. This study looks only at metadiscourse of the instructors' spoken English, but it does not attempt

to identify language that is or is not taught within the EAP curriculum, nor does it indicate which university lecture language may be challenging for the English language learner.

Morell (2007) summarizes several studies that examine which characteristics of a lecture aid in English language learners' comprehension of its content. She lists "lecture schemata, speech modifications, use of visual aids, notetaking, and interaction" (p. 223). In addition, she summarizes some ways in which lecturers can modify their lectures to make them more accessible to English language learners, including "accurate representation of the macro-structure and discourse markers, an adequate speech rate, repetitions, and the possibility of negotiating meaning" (p. 223). While these findings help to inform the lecturer's practice, they do not necessarily inform ESL instructors about which skills to focus on for improvement.

There is also a body of research investigating ESL instructors' views on methods and practices in use in the ESL classroom, but no published research in which ESL instructors themselves observe university classes to see what skills students might need there. ESL teachers are familiar with their students' language abilities, and they have the experiential expertise mentioned by Powers above, to "analyze the [language] activities of non-native students." They can compare language activities in university classroom directly with the activities for which students are prepared in ESL courses, developing a

locally applicable knowledge. This is particularly useful, since the characteristics of university classes, and therefore the listening and speaking skills required, vary from course to course, from instructor to instructor, from institution to institution, and also change over time (Ferris & Tag, 1996a; Kim, 2006).

As IEP instructors, we are preparing our students for the language demands of a very specific academic context, namely our home university. Therefore, we chose to investigate the listening and speaking

What listening and speaking demands do students face in courses at our university ...[and] how can instructors in our IEP better prepare our students for these?

behaviors in the actual courses our students are likely to attend upon completion of the IEP, for the purpose of updating oral skills instruction in our program on the basis of the results. This study attempted to answer two research questions: (1) *What listening and speaking demands do students face in courses at our university?* (2) *How can instructors in our IEP better prepare our students for these listening and speaking demands?* Our findings may be interesting to instructors and curriculum designers in other university contexts, but it may be more important for those individuals to consider our methods and apply them in their own specific local situations.

Methods

A team of six oral skills instructors from our university-based IEP observed almost 40 hours of undergraduate courses at the same university, producing narrative observation logs and then collaborating on an inductive

analysis of the results to seek mismatches between the assumptions implicit in our current instructional practices and the actual needs apparent in the university courses.

Instrument

Observation data were recorded using a simple running log to record a narrative of classroom events in which students perceive or produce language, combined with a set of abbreviations for key listening and speaking behaviors to be analyzed. The list of key listening and speaking behaviors was created by the research team through a process of pilot observations, first with video-recorded lectures, and then in actual courses at our university. Selection criteria for key behaviors included frequency and centrality in the observed classes (research question #1) and perceived potential impact on international students, especially in relation to any perceived mismatch with current instruction in our IEP (research question #2).

The final list of key behaviors, each represented by a symbolic abbreviation, included aspects such as question types (e.g. ask for opinion, check understanding), content types (e.g. logistics, definitions, feedback, commands), challenging passages such as humor, slang, culturally specific references, or unusually complex sentences, and non-verbal features such as acoustical challenges and visual supports (see Appendix 1). This list was intended to complement the simple narrative observation notes and guide our analysis of completed observations.

The running observation log, while simple, was also standardized to include separate running logs of what students hear and what students say (left and right

sides of the instrument, respectively), annotations of time, basic data to identify the course and observer, and a retrospective question for each observer about the degree of reduction (linking and blending of phonemes, elision, deletion and vowel centralization) in the professor's speech (see Appendix 2).

Procedure

First, the team of researchers normed for use of the observation instrument by independently "observing" two recorded lectures. The team watched videos of these lectures independently and recorded their observations, then gathered to share the results and clarify discrepancies.

Next, a list was obtained from our university of all courses enrolling a significant number of international students over the past three years, including the number of international students enrolled, and total course size. From this data, a list of 40 courses were selected for observation on the basis of the following considerations.

1. Language courses (English for international students, Japanese, etc), and courses in composition, PE, and music performance were eliminated, since English language proficiency is less of an essential factor in these courses.
2. Lower division courses were selected (course numbers 100-299), because the great majority of our IEP students continue into these courses after exiting the IEP.
3. Courses with 18 or more international students enrolled (in any one term in the past three years) were selected. For comparison, a list of courses with a high *percentage* of international

students was also drafted, and the two lists overlapped 55%. We chose to use the list based on simple numbers because we wanted to study the courses most likely to be experienced by any given international undergraduate (not necessarily the courses most affected by the international student presence).

The resulting list included mostly large survey classes in disciplines such as Business Administration, Economics, Math, Accounting, Physics, Journalism, Arts Administration, Computer Science, and Geography. In cases where a class on the list included both lecture and discussion/lab sections, both session types were observed by a member of the research team.

A shared, online document was created on the basis of this list of courses. In each of two academic terms, members of our research team signed up to observe courses on the basis of their availability. Permission was requested from university departments, and instructors signed a letter of permission before their classes were observed. Each course was observed two or three times throughout a given term to get a more representative sample, since classroom activities and behaviors are likely to vary over the course of the term in most university courses. In this way 20 total courses were observed, for an average of 2 hours per course.

At the end of each term of observations, the team met to share observation logs and discuss results and impressions. The discussions at these meetings functioned as an inductive analysis to identify patterns in our data. All team members brought their completed observation logs representing

a record of professor and student behaviors, including phrases recorded verbatim and key behaviors highlighted with symbols as described above (see example in Appendix 2). Individual researchers commented on listening/speaking behaviors they found important, and others drew links to additional examples or counterexamples in the data they had collected. In this manner, patterns emerged regarding aspects of the observed classes that seemed likely to cause additional challenge for students (based on the instructional experience of the researchers), and to represent mismatches with our current IEP instruction. The meetings were audio recorded, and members of the research team listened to the discussions and took notes on emergent themes.

On the basis of the written observation records and the meeting notes, the research team was able to identify several major areas of potential mismatch with our current instructional practices in our IEP. These observations were grouped into three themes: lecture style, lecture components, and questions.

Discussion

Although we attended both lectures and discussion sections, we found that listening to monologues is by far the most commonly used oral/aural skill in the classes we observed. Even in discussion sections, there was a tendency for graduate teaching fellows to give lectures. In consideration of our knowledge of our intermediate students' challenges with listening (see e.g. Field, 2011), this result implied that we should focus even more on listening skills in our IEP curriculum, even if this slightly reduces the focus on speaking in our

IEP's combined listening and speaking courses.

The following sections will describe the three themes that the research team identified and discuss the implications for our IEP curriculum.

Lecture Style

As ESL instructors, we noticed several aspects of lectures that may affect students' general comprehension of the content: US-based cultural / historical references, idiomatic, informal reduced speech, and instructor asides.

First, professors often refer to current events, popular culture, and American history in an effort to make material more accessible to the majority of their students. For example, in a Biology laboratory class, one instructor referred to the lab instructions as being "like a Betty Crocker cookbook recipe." In another instance, a Psychology instructor used a reference to the *D.C. snipers* as a key example of "emotion without PFC [prefrontal cortex]." In quick succession, many historical figures and events such as *Rosa Parks*, *the Rodney King beatings*, *the Great Depression*, *MLK*, and *Emmett Till* were referred to in an Art Visual Literacy course, and immediately afterwards, the instructor assigned students to think about what they could do with historic photographs found at a *garage sale*. Based on our experience as ESL instructors, these references would likely be opaque to most international students. IEP instructors can play some role in exposing students to this type of

knowledge, but more importantly, they can make students aware that such references occur, and teach them how to seek the academic point of an explanation that includes cultural references, even when the reference itself is unknown. International students also need strategies and skills to recognize and ask effective clarifying questions about cultural references that are unknown to them.

Second, the language used in lectures was in many cases quite fast and

informal, with a great many idioms, reductions, and features of spontaneous speech (such as false-starts, self-corrections, and even un-corrected mistakes, see e.g. Lynch 2009 pp 15-

As ESL instructors, we noticed several aspects of lectures that may affect students' general comprehension of the content: US-based cultural / historical references, idiomatic, informal reduced speech, and instructor asides.

18). For example, in an Economics course, the instructor cautioned learners to not "lose the forest for the trees," using an idiom that many international students would probably not be familiar with. In most of the courses observed, informal, reduced speech was regularly used, with the centralized vowels, assimilation and elision typical of such speech. To illustrate, in a Philosophy course, the instructor asked students what society does to people who are deviant by posing the question (in reduced form), "Whadda we do? We lock 'em up. Get some medication goin'." These aspects point to a need to emphasize authentic or realistic texts for academic listening, and to draw students' attention to informal and reduced speech when listening. IEP listening teachers can select textbooks with more realistic recordings, or

supplement textbooks with authentic recordings found online. They can raise students' awareness of these challenges with visits to carefully selected university classrooms. They can also provide intensive listening practice in the form of short dictations or cloze activities with reduced forms.

Finally, we noted that professors sometimes employed a different delivery style for parenthetical asides than for the well-planned body of their lectures, speaking more quietly and quickly, with even more reductions. These asides were introduced by phrases such as "I had this buddy once..." "I think that's all... oh yeah, I actually wanted to..." "member we switched that?"

Significantly, logistical announcements were sometimes presented in this same manner while many students were entering or leaving the class, creating even more of a listening challenge because of rustling papers and bags, squeaking chairs, and echoing footsteps. In addition, many of those announcements were not posted on slides or other visual aids. This observation leads to several challenges for international students. First of all, if logistical announcements (such as changes in office hours or exam schedules) are not available from other sources, students who cannot follow them during class will be at a disadvantage. Also, it can be difficult for international students to know for certain whether a given aside is important for them to understand or not, especially in light of the fact that essential logistics are sometimes presented in this way. Finally, even if it does not affect course success, it can be discouraging not to be able to follow asides to the lecture content, which may be humorous and rapport-building in

nature (see e.g. Strodt-Lopez, 1987; Mason, 1994). IEP instructors can draw examples of this type of parenthetical announcement from recorded lectures and have students practice listening and comprehending the key information, or have them discuss the challenges presented by this type of discourse and work on strategies.

Lecture Components

As ESL instructors, we noted three special components of lectures that stood out as challenging and important because they were not being covered adequately in our IEP courses: the use of visual aids, the presentation of examples and definitions, and the way students took notes during lectures.

Because visual aids are meant to make lectures more clear, and they provide an alternate channel of information to the verbal, one might think that they would be an easy part of a lecture to understand, but we found that visual aids were often presented and described without the use of a pointer. This required the instructor to use fast, unstressed, specialized language (e.g. "axis," "legend," "apex," "on the right-hand side," "this little guy") to pinpoint the part of the visual that was being discussed. The ESL instructors involved in this study concluded that this factor could lead to significant challenges for international students, and decided to update instruction with a variety of activities and exercises to help prepare international students to understand their professors' references to visual aids. For example, IEP teachers can explicitly teach language for directing attention to a visual aid or have students analyze recordings of lectures [1] using visual materials and find patterns of vocabulary usage and presentation of information.

Then students can practice understanding short clips from lectures exemplifying these aspects, and later they can practice giving presentations that refer to charts and other visual aids.

In addition to visuals, it is essential for international students to understand the presentation of examples and definitions. We were surprised to see how often professors stated a term or concept only after presenting the definition or example that students need to apply to it. In IEP courses and course books, the pattern is that a new word is followed by its definition, but in our observations definitions often occur as a description of the word first, followed by the phrase “also called”, and then finally the target word. It seems likely that this rhetorical pattern will create extra challenges for international students, who are already expending more of their cognitive capacity on decoding the language they hear, and so have limited capacity remaining to figure out the relationships between ideas (e.g. Rost, 2011). It may be useful to draw IEP students’ attention to this and other rhetorical patterns in their listening materials, for example by pausing recordings at key points to ask about rhetorical structure.

Finally, we observed that note-taking practices in university classes did not match well with the kind of note-taking advocated by many academic ESL textbooks and practiced in some of our IEP courses. In many cases, university professors made copies of their PowerPoint slides available before class, and students simply annotated their printouts of the slides. In other cases, most students seemed not to take notes, or to copy into their notebooks only those sentences that were projected on a slide or written the board, and it was

unclear that effective note-taking was an essential skill for success. As a result of these observations, we felt that the emphasis in our IEP on taking formal outline-style notes could be relaxed into a system that views notes as a tool, not as an end into themselves. We could provide a variety of methods and models to students, including how to effectively annotate PowerPoint slides, and then let them decide for themselves what sort of notes work for them.

Asking and answering questions

In classes we observed, students commonly asked and answered questions. International students need to be able to understand professors’ questions and the answers given by other students, and they need to be able to ask and answer questions quickly and clearly. Our observations confirm that instructors tend to ask general questions (e.g. “How would you describe...,” “This is an example of what?,”) to the class and let the first volunteers give the answers. In order to participate in this dialog, students need to process the questions and formulate their answers quickly. In the IEP, instructors can have students practice strategies such as predicting professor questions during a lecture, so they can prepare to answer them. We can emphasize fluency with activities such as 3-2-1 drills[2] using questions and answers in order to build students’ ability to articulate their ideas under time pressure. To practice the situation students will face in class, we can stop when speaking and call on a student to quickly ask a question.

In our observations, we also saw frequent use of i-clickers[3] to ask questions of larger classes; responses to these clicker questions were displayed as a graph and sometimes recorded and

scored as a quiz. Once again, processing time for both understanding the question and reading the multiple choice answer options can be an issue for international students, and it may be valuable to provide extra practice in the IEP.

When the time comes for students to ask their own questions of professors, they need to either interrupt appropriately (a culturally-influenced skill, see e.g. Ferris & Tag, 1996b) or respond very quickly when professors pause to invite questions (wait times were seldom more than five seconds). In addition, we observed some international students trying to ask questions and struggling to make clear precisely which part of the content material they were asking about, and exactly which aspects of it they did and did not understand. We came to realize that asking questions in class is a much more complex skill than just knowing where to put the auxiliary verb in a question form. It seems useful for upper-level IEP students to study the parts of complex academic questions, perhaps drawn from a published corpus or recorded lectures from the internet. IEP teachers might also create short lectures that include a nonsense word or a deliberately confusing point and have students work together to create effective questions. This activity could be done under gradually increasing time pressure.

Conclusions

This qualitative research project has filled some gaps in our knowledge of what oral and aural skills international students will need when they exit our IEP and take undergraduate courses at our university. In short, we should focus more of our IEP curriculum on academic listening skills associated with authentic

lectures that include reduced and informal speech, instructor asides, visual aids, and different patterns of defining words. Our IEP curriculum also needs to emphasize the importance of asking and answering questions quickly, and perhaps de-emphasize the formal outline style of note-taking that is currently taught.

Ideally, this will be an ongoing project at our institute, providing many instructors with greater first-hand knowledge of what to emphasize in upper-level IEP classes. This is especially important in light of the lack of published observational research on oral/aural skills needed by international students at US universities.

Since course practices vary between universities and over time, a local approach may be most effective, with each IEP investigating its own local context and needs, in order to inform its instructional practices. This approach has certainly been fruitful in our IEP, giving rise to changes that we have already implemented in our oral skills classes, as well as ideas for future implementation. It would surely be useful for instructors in other Intensive English Programs as well.

Endnotes

[1] Authentic recorded university lectures are available from a variety of online courses such as academicearth.com, the YouTube and webcasting sites of specific universities, and scholarly resources such as the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE).

[2] A 3-2-1 drill is a commonly-used fluency exercise in which students repeat the same task (often with a different

partner each time) three times, with less time available to complete the task each time.

[3]i-clickers are wireless electronic devices registered to individual students with which they can answer multiple

choice questions in real time. These questions are often presented on PowerPoint slides, and the aggregated class results can be displayed immediately.

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The authors are current or former instructors in the University of Oregon's American English Institute. They have presented on this topic at multiple national and regional conferences.

Appendix 1

Observation Symbols Defined

Primarily used for **Students Hear** side

- S = Student
- P = Instructor
- V = Visuals (use of some sort of visual aid (.ppt, pictures, websites))
- Vdiag. = Diagram used is necessary to understand speaking
- NV = No visuals used
- A = Acoustic challenges (background noise, quiet speech)
- Q = Question (Content question is asked)
- Q√ = Question is asked to check for general understanding (“Does everyone understand?”)
- * = Humor/ Sarcasm / Idioms / Slang / Cultural references
- X = Extra challenging narrative (long sentences with many clauses, etc. Please provide notes here to explain situation)
- L = Logistics (dates, places, times, deadlines, schedules, plan for the day, order of the lecture, etc.) Please note which one!
- D = Definition (definition of important terms are given)
- Redo = Self-correction

Primarily used for **Students Speak** side

- C = Give clarification
- C? = Ask for clarification
- E = Encouragement / positive feedback
- Com = Command
- K = Knowledge-based answer
- K? = Knowledge-based questions- like Socratic method questioning
- O = Give an opinion
- O? = Ask for an opinion
- Ag = Agree or disagree
- T = Pass off a turn or interrupt in a group

Appendix 2

Sample Observation Data

Date: _____	Course: _____	
Observer: _____	Instructor: _____	
<u>Students Hear</u>	Time	<u>Students Speak</u>
P-Vdiag-D - constructive/destructive interference of waves	10:15	
P-aside - mumbling (A)		
P-C ←	10:18	S-C?
P-Com. (1st Reading quiz w/ clicker) (40 sec. to read + answer)		
P-Vdiag - K? →		S-K
"		"
P-V-D		
P-Vdiag (demo in front) → K?	10:23	S-K
(Socratic dialog for		
P-Vdiag - (demo of pulse) ←		S-K? (can you do...?)
P-V-D	10:28	
P-QV (no response)		
P-Com. (Pull out clickers for Reading Quiz #2) (37 sec. to read + answer)		
P-Com. - Activity → Simulation w/ ?s for Ss to do in grps.	10:31	Ss watch simulation + fill in wkst. (not turn)
P-QV + Com. "Everyone OK w/ that?" Write your answers now - OK to talk w/ people."		(Silence - no interact.)
P-(E) - "OK to talk w/ people → Learn best like that."	10:40	Ss begin to chatter (near n still quiet) O, Ag
P-K? - Vdiag →	10:42	Ss-K
P-V-D		
P-Vdiag - Comp. Simulation		
P-Vdiag - demo of Doppler shift (Ball w/ speaker)		
P-Vdiag - K? →		Ss-K
P- "Thank you."	10:50	

After the observation:

Was the Instructor's speech mostly **reduced** (informal speech that is linked, blended or illustrates elision, deletion, or centralization (moving toward a schwa sound))? Yes No Don't know

Introducing Verbpathy in the English Language Classroom: Encouraging Students to Feel the Essence and Emotion of Words

Patrick T. Randolph, Western Michigan University

Abstract:

A key element in vocabulary instruction is to get the students to “feel” the vocabulary and make it a part of their new language identity; that is, helping the students to “own” the terms is a top priority of language instructors. Using verbpathy as a tool meets this goal. The idea of using verbpathy in vocabulary instruction is to encourage the students to develop a feel for how terms can and should be used in both spoken and written work. By asking the students if a term has a “positive feel,” a “negative feel,” or a “neutral feel,” the students start to develop an intuitive command of the vocabulary. Moreover, while working on the verbpathy of words, students make their own unique associations and connections with the terms and relate them to their own lives. Research in neuroscience tells us that the more associations students make, the better they learn (Jensen, 2008; Medina, 2009; Willis, 2006).

Key terms: *verbpathy, neural pathways, reinforcement, student-ownership, long-term memory*

Introduction

Learning the vocabulary of a language is not just about memorizing words; it is about feeling the words, making them a part of the learner’s own identity; it is about personalizing the words and ultimately owning them. This notion of ownership allows students to befriend the English language versus merely studying it as a means to attain a degree.

One simple way that I have found to help my students reach this goal is by using what I call “verbpathy.” This is an element of a vocabulary acquisition technique I’ve developed called the

Head-to-Toe Method of Associations for Vocabulary Acquisition. Verbpathy means “word” (verb) “feeling” (pathy), or feeling “word-essence.” When students feel the positive, negative, neutral, or the multi-faceted aspects of a word, it is easier to make connections and learn the item in question. The following daily procedure explains one way in which verbpathy can be used to benefit students.

Procedure

First, I usually write three to four new vocabulary items on the whiteboard without any corresponding definitions.

These terms might be single vocabulary words, phrasal verbs (two- or three-part) or idioms. These lexical items are from the 80-100 items I teach each term. All the terms are new for the students. Some of these terms come from the articles the students are reading and some come from a list of “necessary” academic terms they will need for their respective programs of study.

Next, students receive a worksheet listing the same vocabulary items with corresponding example sentences, but no definitions. I almost always use the students’ names in the examples, which evokes an immediate sense of interest and focused level of attention on the activity (Randolph, 2013a; Thornbury, 2002). These two attributes—interest and attention—are crucial for learning and reinforcing neural pathways for long-term memory (McPherron & Randolph, 2014; Medina, 2009; Sousa, 2011; Willis, 2006). The following is an example from the worksheet:

come up with = _____
*Example: Javier just **came up with** a great way to learn new vocabulary.*

I give the students about two to three minutes to read the example sentences and discuss, in pairs, what they think the words, phrasal verbs, or idioms mean. If they cannot guess a term’s meaning, I give them extra example sentences until they are able to offer the definition. Encouraging the students to formulate the definitions adds to the whole notion of word ownership and language-confidence. In fact, it is very rare that I give the students the definition of a term. With respect to these student-generated definitions, I might add to, alter, or refine them, but I try to refrain from simply supplying them with the answers.

We, as instructors, must always keep in mind that the more our students contribute to the learning process, the more they will learn and be inspired to learn. This idea is reinforced in neuroscience; for research continues to show how excited neurons get and how fast they fire and make connections when positive emotions motivate learning (Jensen, 2008; Ratey, 2001).

After the students supply their definition for each term, I write it on the board as the example below shows:

come up with = **to create; to think up**
*Example: Javier just **came up with** a great way to learn new vocabulary.*

Once the students have clearly understood the definitions, I go over the verbpthy of each term. Next to each vocabulary item I write a positive sign, a negative sign, and an N for neutral. I then write the word “Emotion” under these. Under “Emotion,” I write both adjective or noun; meaning I want the students to supply an adjective or a noun that is directly associated with the vocabulary item in question. This gets them to think about the feelings and emotions they associate with the terms. Here is an example:

+ / - / N
come up with = **to create; to think up**
Emotion: _____
adjective / noun
Javier just **came up with a great way to learn new vocabulary.*

In the case of our present example, we would assign a positive feeling to the word because “to create” is a positive activity. Therefore, for this tri-part phrasal verb, we would circle the

positive sign. In addition, we might assign the emotional qualities of “joyful” and/or “excitement.” The resulting work on the board would look like this:

<p>+ / - / N</p> <p><i>come up with</i> = to create; to think up</p> <p><i>Emotion: Joyful / Excitement</i></p> <p><i>adjective / noun</i> Example:</p> <p>Javier just came up with a great way to learn new vocabulary.</p>
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As above, I try to get the students to think of one adjective or one noun that relates to the term in question. This serves four purposes: first, it helps them review or recycle word families and forms; second, it helps students review parts of speech; third, it helps to reinforce the connections between already learned words and the new words; and fourth, it deepens the emotive quality and connection to the words. The adjectives and nouns used to deepen the emotional link to the newly introduced terms will vary with the level of the class. The intermediate levels may overuse terms like “good,” “bad,” “happy” or “sad.” The higher levels, however, usually produce a nice variety of synonyms. It is thus up to each instructor to elicit as many terms as he or she can to help all levels of learners connect to the new terms by reviewing already learned adjectives and nouns and by inspiring his or her students to learn a wide spectrum of related synonyms.

Possible Complications

It should be noted that exploring the verbpathy of lexical items can lead to certain challenges, but questioning the positive, negative, or neutral “feel” of words only deepens the students’ relationship with them. For instance, one

could argue that a person could *come up with* a “bad” idea or plan, and, in such cases, we should label it as negative. However, it is important to look at the essential nature of the term, which is “to create,” “to think,” “to invent,” and, as above, this is considered a positive activity. The argument, however, that it could be negative is an interesting one, and these types of discussions about such terms get the students to actually analyze, think through, and struggle with terms like the aforementioned example. Ultimately, this simple step may and can become a major learning breakthrough for English language learners (ELLs). It also pushes the instructor to be on his or her toes and continually evaluate the feeling of words. In many cases, I have had to refine and update my own verbpathy of English words, phrases, and idioms based on the insight and intriguing perceptions of my students.

A few examples can clarify how some words belong to obvious categories, while others are a bit more murky or controversial. Words like *blissful* or *generous* are clearly positive terms, whereas items like *come down with* or *hazardous* are negative. Neutral terms like *add up to* or *boil down to* are also relatively easy to categorize. However, words like *religion*, *politics*, *Buddhism* or *vegetarianism* are more difficult to assign a feeling to because they usher in personal, cultural, or philosophical biases. How do you tell, for example, a proud, 54 year-old, Vietnamese Buddhist monk that vegetarianism is not necessarily a positive concept, if that is what he believes? The answer is not easy.

This is where instructors need to consider both the *personal* and the *universal* “feeling” for words (Lightbrown & Spada, 2006). Let’s take

my Vietnamese student as an example. For him, the term “vegetarianism” was very positive, so I let him label it as such. But the rest of the class labeled it as neutral. In my opinion, as long as my Vietnamese student was linking the word to certain personal feelings and emotions, thinking about the word, becoming engaged with the meaning, and ultimately learning it, then he was, as Willis (2006) puts it, “reinforcing the connections between neurons.” This reinforcement helped him not just memorize the word, but transfer it to his long-term memory and actually “learn” the term. Therefore, for our student in question, I let him consider the universal feeling as neutral, but the personal feeling as positive. There may be, then, in some cases, two distinct “verbpathies” for an item. This, in itself, can only help reinforce the connection or associations with the term at a deeper and more inspiring level.

The main motivation for this method is to help the students own the lexical items as real, live, dynamic, and functioning tools, so the more excitement we can produce in the classroom, the more they will attend to learning the words. Such excitement and attention, the neuroscientists continually tell us, are two crucial keys in the learning process (Jensen, 2008; Medina, 2009; Willis, 2006). Emotion plays an important role in learning and in analyzing the verbpathy of each vocabulary item, for without eliciting the students’ emotions, very little, if any, learning would go on (Davidson & Begley, 2013; Medina, 2009). In a survey I conducted in 2013 (n=42), all students concurred that the emotions of joy, surprise, fear, sadness, anger and

disgust were all important factors in their learning (Randolph, 2013b). Moreover, these students claimed that without the presence of emotional associations with lexical items, the terms are rarely remembered after vocabulary tests and quizzes.

Reinforcing Verbpathy with Examples

Once the students have gone through the verbpathy of each word, they give

example sentences orally to the class. I have found that they sincerely enjoy giving examples, and this

verbpathy activity usually helps them to give correct examples of the terms because they have looked at the terms’ register and essential feeling at a relatively deep level. This practice session of giving examples also offers the students a chance to review each term multiple times. The more they hear and use these items in an isolated amount of time, the better chance they have of retaining the words or idioms in their long-term memory (Ebbinghaus, 1885/1913; Jensen, 2008; Randolph, 2014).

Finally, the students write out example sentences for the terms and fill in the verbpathy information for each word as homework. It should be noted that the positive, negative, or neutral feeling for the terms will usually, as discussed above, be the same, but the adjectives and nouns that they believe to correspond to the new vocabulary terms can and will be different. They should write the example sentences as homework a few hours after class so that they reinforce in the evening what they learned earlier during the day.

Without eliciting the students’ emotions, very little, if any, learning would go on.

Below is a recap of the procedure:

- (1) Write the vocabulary terms on the board with the verbpthy symbols:
+ / - / N;
- (2) Provide a worksheet giving the same terms and an example sentence for each term;
- (3) Elicit the definitions for each term;
- (4) Evaluate the terms to see if they are positive, negative, neutral, or a combination thereof;
- (5) Elicit the emotion of each term. Try to also elicit adjectives and nouns for each term;
- (6) Discuss, if necessary, why you assigned that particular verbpthy;
- (7) Request example sentences from the students; and
- (8) Assign the homework as review tool.

Benefits

The benefits of using verbpthy to teach vocabulary are numerous. First, it personalizes the words for the students, and personalizing material is a great motivation to learn (Randolph, 2013b; Thornbury, 2002; Willis, 2006). Second, the words are no longer “owned” by the English language but rather by each student; that is, the student-ownership of the words becomes a distinct reality while using verbpthy. Third, it inspires students to “feel” the terms and use them as dynamic tools; verbpthy breaks down the commonly perceived “lifelessness” of words. Fourth, it creates associations with previous experiences and memories that will assist the students in learning the new terms (Sousa, 2011). Fifth, verbpthy requires both the students and the instructor to think deeply about the essence of the words or expressions in question. Lastly,

this will ultimately help them create more neural connections as they master the use, feeling, and function of each term.

Student Survey Results

At the end of the 2014 fall semester, I conducted a short survey asking ELLs from four different classes (n=32) what they thought about verbpthy as a vocabulary learning device. The three questions of the survey were as follows:

***The words are no longer “owned”
by the English language but
rather by each student.***

- (1) Does the use of “verbpthy” help you remember and learn the lexical items?
Yes Why? No Why Not?
- (2) Please write down the specific things that deal with learning vocabulary that you think “verbpthy” has helped you with.
- (3) Do you have any other comments?

The classes I surveyed consisted of two advanced writing courses, one advanced speaking class, and one credit-bearing high-level university writing course for non-native speakers of English. Question #1 yielded very positive results. In the first writing class, 88% of the learners answered that verbpthy did, in fact, help them remember the lexical items. In the second writing class, 100% of learners answered that verbpthy helped them. In the speaking class, 83% of learners claimed it helped them learn the items, and 81% of the high advanced writing class said that verbpthy was indeed a beneficial tool in helping the students remember the vocabulary they studied.

Below is a selection of comments from Question #2.

(Not edited from grammar.)

- (1) *It helps me understand the words' meaning deeply.*
- (2) *Verbpathy helps me use the words effectively and correctly.*
- (3) *Helps me to remember how it feels when I say or read these words.*
- (4) *Easy to memorize. Because you know the "verbpathy," you almost know how to use it. When you use it, you know it.*
- (5) *Have a feeling with the words and link our wordship with the word.*
- (6) *I feel I can communicate each word, and makes class more interesting during class.*
- (7) *It helps me to feel the situation of words or idioms.*
- (8) *It helped me to think more about the word.*

(9) *Make relationship with something in your mind.*

(10) *It makes me be interested in words.*

Concluding Remarks

The most important aspect of teaching vocabulary is to make it engaging, exciting, memorable, and learner-centered yet instructor-guided. Verbpathy promotes these elements. However, the crucial underpinning is the relationship that develops between the words and the students' personalities. Words are no longer just words, but rather they become "language friends," which the students carry with them on the journey through their English language learning experience.

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Patrick T. Randolph was recently awarded the "Best of the TESOL Affiliates" for his presentation on vocabulary pedagogy. He specializes in creative and academic writing, speech, and debate. He has created a number of brain-based learning activities for the language skills that he teaches, and he continues to research current topics in neuroscience, especially studies related to exercise and learning, memory, and mirror neurons. Randolph has also been involved as a volunteer with brain-imaging experiments at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He lives with his wife, Gamze; daughter, Aylene; and cat, Gable, in Kalamazoo, MI. Correspondence concerning this article can be addressed to patricktrandolph@yahoo.com.

State of the Art Student Support Services in an IEP Learning Center

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Abstract

Intensive English language programs (IEPs) at American universities have the task of recruiting, retaining, and preparing international students for mainstream classes. In order to achieve these tasks, many programs have explored using supplemental instruction (SI) in the form of learning centers (LCs) to support their students. In this study, we investigate how and why students make use of an LC and its resources at Portland State University's Intensive English Language Program (IELP). Multiple strands of data were used, including observations of the LC in use, surveys of students and staff, and interviews with students to investigate student use of resources and their reasons for using those resources. While a majority of the students use computer resources, many of the students noted they use a variety of the resources offered each time they visit. We also examined student motivations for using the resources and noted five themes in the responses: the variety of resources, the LC's accessibility, the physical space, personal contact, and community. We conclude our research with recommendations for promoting, maintaining, and building community in an IEP LC.

Key Words: *intensive English language programs; learning center; language center; supplemental instruction*

Introduction

Priyanka, Ahmad, and Yaqoub, three intermediate-level ESL students, have been studying in the learning center. They have been fully engaged in completing a grammar assignment. Occasionally, they compare answers, ask questions, and share explanations to the problems. As they reach the end of the assignment, Yaqoub decides to leave. Priyanka and Ahmad have a TOEFL test coming soon, so they stay for additional TOEFL practice. As the learning center staff prepares to close the facility, Priyanka and Ahmad pack, say goodbye,

and arrange to meet the following day to continue their “journey” with English language studies.

This scenario shows a typical afternoon for international students at many intensive English programs (IEPs) in the United States. Every year, a number of international students arrive in the US to first master English and ultimately enroll in mainstream classes and graduate with a degree from an American university. Since international students play a critical role in American universities' internalization processes and bring valuable contributions both to

their learning communities and to the overall financial state of their universities, most institutions in the US have been actively engaged in their recruitment. Many of these institutions have also begun to recognize that international students face a unique set of challenges when moving to the US and transitioning into the American university system (Andrade, 2006; Collis-Burgess, 2014; Fisher, 2014). Their success depends on many factors, including access to appropriate, specialized support services. Frequently, it is learning centers or writing centers that fulfill this role. With supplemental instruction ranging from tutors to language learning software, these centers provide the specialized support that international students need.

In this paper, we examine the specific resources and aspects of one learning center in an IEP that attract students like Priyanka, Ahmad, and Yaqoub and support their language acquisition. To do this, we first provide further insight into types of supplemental instruction and then describe the types of supplemental instruction in our learning center. We then describe our methodology and discuss the results. Although this study examines one particular learning center, we finish our paper with recommendations and guiding principles that may aid in the development of other successful supplementary learning services.

Literature Review

Supplemental instruction (SI) is defined as a voluntary academic assistance resource in which students in “high-risk courses,” or courses with high dropout rates or intensive workloads,

learn study skills that guide them through coursework (University of Missouri Kansas City, 2013). SI has existed in the US in varying forms since the first university was established (Arendale, 2002). While early forms focused on using tutors to improve the understanding of course content, SI gradually became a means to “encourage students to become more actively involved in their own learning” (Arendale, 1994, p. 18).

At the Intensive English Language Program (IELP) at Portland State University (PSU), students are certainly in “high-risk courses”. The IELP is an intensive, five-level, university academic preparation program. Most students arrive on F1 visas and are required to take a full load of classes each term, which includes four core classes (grammar, writing, reading, and listening and speaking) and one elective class of their choice. In a typical 10-week term, they spend, on average, 18 hours per week in class, with an expected additional 20 hours per week for studying and completing assignments. Many students also face external pressures such as the requirements of a scholarship organization, the challenges of achieving university admittance, or the demands of caring for children and families. Thus, many IELP students juggle both academic and personal responsibilities.

The IELP has addressed these challenges, and has also attempted to engage active learners, by offering its own supplementary instruction in the IELP Learning Center (LC). The center’s services include a unique blend of tutoring in all language skill areas, access to computers, specialized language learning software, a broad range of books and other materials, and

study spaces, all of which are specifically targeted towards English as a Second Language (ESL) learners.

Unlike most forms of SI in IEPs, the LC is a more extensive resource for students. Most IEPs offer a writing center or a language lab, not a combination of both. Writing centers typically offer tutoring, print, and computer resources, while language labs cover multiple skill areas using computer-based resources. The combination of both these elements is unusual and rarely discussed in the literature.

Murphy (1992) referred to such comprehensive facilities as “Language Acquisition Resource Centers” (LARCs). With a broad range of resources, LARCs attract students for various reasons. Understanding what draws students can help LARC administrators to improve services to fit learners’ needs. As Murphy (1992) observed, student feedback for LARC staff is essential to providing relevant and useful resources and services. Unfortunately, there is little research on LARCs and their relation to students; however, the literature regarding writing centers and language laboratories provides a comparable background.

A common theme in studies on writing centers and language labs is the need for student input in resource development. Indeed, numerous researchers have called for the inclusion of students in developmental processes (Barkhuizen, 1998; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Littlejohn, 1985; Spratt, 1999; Yang, 1999). Several research studies on supplementary support services (Conard-Salvo & Spartz, 2012; Jarvis & Szymczyk, 2010; Ross, 2003) also

recognized the need for including students in the process of supplementary resource development. Without student input, supplementary instruction may not adequately meet students’ needs and support learning in ways that help to develop autonomous learners. Thus, in this study, we approached students directly to discover what resources prove most useful and what continually draws them in to the LC.

This study aimed to include students and provide information about their use of a LARC through two research questions:

1. How do students make use of the IELP LC?
2. Why do students make use of particular resources in the LC?

Methodology

Kalikoff (2001) suggested that multiple strands of data are the most effective for writing center assessment in order to obtain rich, detailed information and identify common themes. As such, this study gathered data from both students and staff in a multi-pronged, qualitative approach, resulting in a clear picture of the LC offerings and how and why students make use of them.

Participants in this study consisted of three groups: students, assistants, and tutors. All student participants had utilized the LC services at least once. 150 survey participants represented each of the IELP levels as well as the diversity of linguistic backgrounds within the IELP, including speakers of Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, and Thai. Nine students representing Brazil, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, and Saudi Arabia also participated in an interview with one of

the researchers. For a well-rounded perspective, six front desk assistants and ten tutors were also surveyed. With their training and experience, both assistants and tutors provide valuable insight into the LC environment.

Surveys were used to obtain information from students and staff. All surveys included a mix of closed- and open-response items (Appendix). For students, the survey and interview questions focused on how they use the LC and their reasons for favoring certain resources. Questions for tutors focused on the resources that tutors believe students are using and the resources that tutors see as valuable. Assistants related their experiences using the LC as former IELP students, gave recommendations for current students, and made observations of student activity in the LC.

Data collection began in January 2014 with the surveys and interviews, followed by the observations and gathering of tutoring logs. A total of 203 students were invited to participate in the survey, with 150 responding. For interviews, students met with the LC Coordinator for a brief audio-recorded interview. For the tutor and assistant surveys, all invited participants responded.

Observations of LC activity were completed at various times of day over a month-long period. Data in this strand included the number of students in each area of the LC at each point in time and the resources being used. In addition to these observations, all tutors were asked to record a tutoring session log for one week. The tutors recorded the length of the session, the level of the student, and the topics covered during the session.

Completed survey responses were received electronically, with closed responses being automatically tallied. Open responses were analyzed and coded for themes. All survey responses were then compared with the interview data. For the interviews, detailed notes of the recording were coded for themes. Finally, the observation notes and tutoring session logs were analyzed and compared with the other data.

Results and Discussion

The student surveys revealed that the vast majority of students (82%) use some area of the LC at least once a week, with 40% reporting use two to three times a week (Figure 1). Among the ranking of the four LC areas (Figure 2), the Computer Classroom ranked

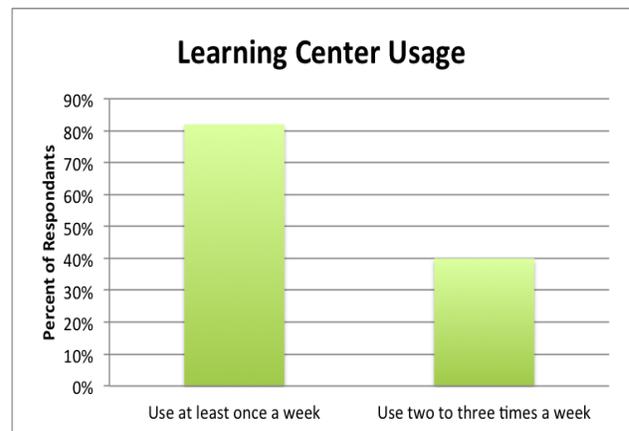
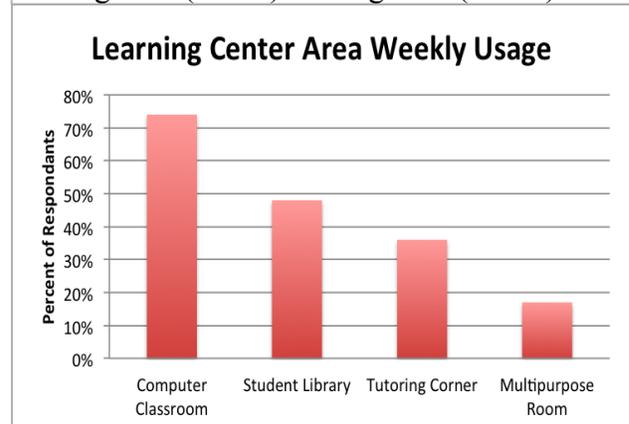


Figure 1 (above) and Figure 2 (below)



highest in usage, followed by the Student Library, the Tutoring Corner, and, finally, the Multipurpose Room.

When using the various parts of the LC, students utilized a wide variety of resources. In the Computer Classroom, Internet, printing, Microsoft Office, and class websites were the most popular resources. A total of 80 students also used at least one type of specialized language learning software, with the listening and reading software being the most widely used, followed closely by test prep and grammar software. In addition, nearly a quarter of the students reported participation in a tutor-led workshop. Interestingly enough, these workshops ranked relatively high considering their recent introduction.

The students used a variety of resources in the Student Library, with computer resources (i.e. printing, Internet, class web sites, Microsoft Office, and scanning) being the most widely used. Students also reported using a variety of library books. Testing guides (for TOEFL, TOEIC, IELTS, GMAT and GRE) were the most popular category of books, followed by graded readers, novels and stories, and finally textbooks and class books. A number of students reported using the library space for practicing English and studying at tables.

Regarding tutoring services, 119 out of 150 students indicated that they had worked with a tutor. In the Tutoring Corner, the most popular areas to practice were grammar, speaking skills, writing, test preparation, homework, and reading.

Student usage of the Multipurpose Room was quite different than the other areas of the LC. For example, just over half the students reported never having

used it. Of those who did use the Multipurpose Room at least once a term, group study was the most frequent activity, followed closely by taking TOEFL practice tests, practicing presentations, and, finally, watching videos or DVDs. It is worth noting that the Multipurpose Room is also used for drop-in tutoring hours at various points throughout the term, so this may have limited availability to a degree.

Students also reported the skills they most frequently practice in the LC as a whole, as well as their favorite resources. While most students came in to practice writing, we were surprised to find that reading was the second most popular reason for visiting the LC. This contrasted with our observations, wherein we noted a majority of students working on writing or grammar during observations. Listening also ranked quite highly, again unexpectedly surpassing grammar as a skill to practice. Finally, many students mentioned a combination of skills. In other words, students practice multiple skill areas during visits to the LC rather than isolating one particular skill area.

Students also tend to practice using a combination of resources. While exact combinations varied from student to student, it was clear that the diversity of resources was valuable to many students. In examining individual resources, we found that 43% of students mentioned the computers, 25% mentioned tutoring, and 15% mentioned the student library.

Themes

Several themes emerged from the open-ended responses. The four key themes were: the variety of resources, the LC's accessibility, the physical space, and personal

contact. Additionally, the overarching theme of the need for community was strongly voiced in the responses. These themes and representative student quotes are discussed in further detail in the following sections.

Variety of Resources. Students repeatedly emphasized the value in utilizing multiple resources. As one student put it:

If I want practice with a computer with activities, I can. If I want to practice with a story or novels, I can. If I want maybe talk with the tutors about something I don't understand, I use it maybe computer classes, if like PowerPoint, something like IELTS or TOEFL, yeah, it's very helpful.

Clearly, this student and many others who voiced similar ideas value the diverse resources at their fingertips. Our observations corroborated this finding. As we noted, students would often study in the library, work with a tutor, and use the computer classroom in one visit. It was evident that access to a variety of resources played an important role in students' decision-making processes. As becomes evident in the next section, these centrally located resources also contributed to the creation of an accessible space.

Accessibility. The variety of resources in the LC would not be as appealing if the LC were not easily accessible to students. Indeed, with classes located all over campus, students stated that they liked the LC being located in a relatively central location near the main IELP office. They appreciated that dropping in before or after classes was easy due to location and hours. The LC is generally open from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekdays. The students also mentioned

always being able to find a place to study. This contrasted sharply with comments about other university resources, which will be discussed in further detail in the next section.

Physical Space. The theme of physical space was reflected in comments on two main areas: usability and comfort. Students mentioned that finding resources was simple and straightforward, making it easy to alternate between tasks. One student compared the LC with the main library on campus: "*I recommend the library because it's quite easy to find the related English books as compared to the giant infrastructure of 'Millar Library.'*" For students who are already juggling the demands of life and studies in a new country, this ease of access is crucial, enabling them to begin to navigate the American university system independently.

It was surprising to see that many students used words like "comfy" and "cozy" to describe the LC. One student wrote, "*My favorite resource is the student library because I feel comfortable there; it is a small and cozy.*" This student was not alone in these sentiments. It was evident that students are drawn to the LC in part because of the comfortable study environment.

Personal Contact. Finally, many students stressed the importance of connections and the personal contact made in the LC. During visits, many students connect and collaborate. It is important that students have this space to meet with others who might help in their learning process. In addition, the LC staff provides an important service and links students with resources and information that ease their transition into

American academic life. For many students, it was very significant that the staff is friendly and welcoming: *“The best about the Learning Center is people working here. Office staff and tutors are so nice and kind that I feel like they are my family and want to visit again.”* Another student stated, *“I like the reception desk of the people. I think the people are friendly and helpful to see what our problems or questions and how help us to solve them* These students appreciated having knowledgeable people who made them feel welcome, worked to answer their questions, and responded to their needs. Students repeatedly commented that the staff was friendly, helpful, and well trained.

This personal contact was further highlighted in comments regarding tutors. The distinction between technological resources and human resources was sharply contrasted in several survey responses. One student wrote, *“I think tutor, it’s a good one because connection with another person it’s very nice and if I don’t understand something I just say it. But with a computer, I can’t.”* This statement clearly shows that students need human connection. This is especially pertinent when seeking answers. For students who are already motivated, autonomous learners, a tutor can provide valuable insight when other means of finding information have not yielded answers.

This valuable human connection would not work if the people that provide help were not welcoming and supportive. Another student clarified a key aspect of effective human contact, stating *“...the tutors here are very welcoming and have this personal relationship with us. They are not just interacting with the paper in front of them, that is most of them they are*

interacting with you as a person.” To this student, it was clearly important that there was a relationship between student and tutor and that their interaction was personal and tailored to individual needs. As we discuss in the next section, this personal contact and connections with staff and other students are integral in building a sense of community that furthers learning.

Community. The idea of community stood out in responses both in terms of the space and the people involved in the LC. The LC was described as both a space with resources tailored to meet the needs of a diverse population and as a community of people who support and respect them. Through this tailoring, support, and respect, students developed a sense of ownership towards the LC.

While our observations gave us a sense that the LC created a community, the students expressed the same idea in their responses. One student explained the link between community and the ability to transition to American academic life: *“[I]t’s perhaps good to have this kind of community in which we work and we see people from our own culture ... It makes you feel safe at the initial stages before you immerse into the American culture.”* In this environment, students are interacting in a multicultural setting that supports and encourages them as they transition into mainstream classes. Student interaction also plays a key role in creating community: *“Last term I had like three friends, we use to go there... to get our HW done together, and you know, support each other all the time, so I didn’t want to leave there.”* This group made a clear choice to work together to build skills in a place that welcomed them and facilitated learning. The next section discusses how this and the other

themes interacted to create a vibrant learning community.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has provided a detailed picture of how IELP students use the LC and why they make use of particular resources. The results clearly indicate that there are three critical factors that have contributed to the success of the IELP Learning Center: the personal contact and community, the wide range of relevant resources, including knowledgeable personnel, and the accessibility and comfort of the physical space.

In returning to our research questions: how IELP students use the LC and why they make use of particular resources in the LC, we conclude with the following recommendations.

We cannot emphasize enough that it is critical to make a constant effort to promote supplementary services among ESL students. Reaching out through different channels, such as email, Facebook, flyers, and face-to-face conversations has proven to be effective.

It is also essential to promote these services among instructors. Teachers can be very powerful in influencing students' learning decisions. Teachers are frequently your best partners when it comes to encouraging your students to use the supplementary services available.

It is also highly recommended that a certain amount of attention be given to maintenance. It is crucial not only to ensure that your space is clean and that the equipment is working properly, but also to ensure that your staff is provided with ongoing training and support to provide international students with high-quality service.

On the other hand, it is ultimately still the students that need to make their own decision to come and use the resources, hence the importance of building a sense of community that will draw them in. Our findings clearly indicate that this is what has made our learning center "*a cozy place, ... a home for people who are away from home*" and what really makes students like Pryanka, Ahmad, and Yaqoub come back daily.

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APPENDIX: Survey and Interview Questions

(Editor's note: Line spacing condensed)

Student Survey

General Information

1. What IELP level are you in?
2. How many terms have you been an IELP student?
3. How did you find out about the Learning Center?
Friends Teachers ACAL tour IELP Office Academic Advisors
Tutors Welcome Party Website Flyer Conversation Partners
Other _____
4. How would you describe your computer skills?
Excellent/Good/Not Good/Poor
5. How often do you use the Learning Center?
_____ 1-2 times a term _____ 1-2 times a month
_____ once a week _____ 2-3 times a week
_____ 4 or more times a week
6. When do you use the Learning Center?
_____ 8am-11am _____ 2pm-5pm
_____ 11am-2pm _____ 5pm-7pm

Specific Learning Center Areas

7. Which part of the Learning Center do you use most often?
Computer Classroom/Tutoring Corner/Multipurpose Room/Student Library (rate them)
8. How often do you use the COMPUTER CLASSROOM?
_____ 4 or more times a week _____ 2-3 times a week
_____ once a week _____ 1-2 times a month
_____ 1-2 times a term _____ never
9. Please check all the resources you have used in the COMPUTER CLASSROOM.
Internet Printing Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.)
Class Websites/Pages/Wikis
Language Learning Software:
Listening Grammar Reading
Writing Pronunciation TOEFL
Spelling Typing
Other: _____
10. How often do you use the MULTIPURPOSE ROOM?
_____ 4 or more times a week _____ 2-3 times a week
_____ once a week _____ 1-2 times a month
_____ 1-2 times a term _____ never
11. Please check all the resources you have used in the MULTIPURPOSE ROOM.
_____ Group study _____ Practicing presentations/speeches
_____ Taking TOEFL practice tests _____ Watching videos or DVDs
Other: _____
12. How often do you use the STUDENT LIBRARY?
_____ 4 or more times a week _____ 2-3 times a week
_____ once a week _____ 1-2 times a month

Assistant Survey

- 1. How long have you been an IELP Learning Center assistant?
- 2. How long were you a student in the IELP?
- 3. How did you find out about the Learning Center?
Friends Teachers ACAL tour IELP Office Academic Advisors
Tutors Welcome Party Website Flyer Conversation Partners Other

-
- 4. How often did you use the IELP Learning Center when you were an IELP student?
_____ 1-2 times a term _____ 1-2 times a month
_____ once a week _____ 2-3 times a week
_____ 4 or more times a week

- 5. Which part of the Learning Center did you use most often when you were an IELP student?
Computer Classroom/Tutoring Corner/Multipurpose Room/Student Library (rate them)

- 6. Please check all the resources you used as an IELP student in the COMPUTER CLASSROOM.
Internet Printing Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.)
Class Websites/Pages/Wikis
Language Learning Software:
Listening Grammar Reading
Writing Pronunciation TOEFL
Spelling Typing Other: _____

- 7. Please check all the resources you used as an IELP student in the MULTIPURPOSE ROOM.
_____ Group study _____ Practicing presentations/speeches
_____ Taking TOEFL practice tests _____ Watching videos or DVDs
Other: _____

- 8. Please check all the resources you used as an IELP student in the STUDENT LIBRARY.
_____ Books: Testing Guides (TOEFL, TOEIC, IELTS, GMAT, GRE)
_____ Books: Graded Readers/Novels/Stories
_____ Books: Textbooks and Class books
_____ Computers: Class Websites/Pages/Wikis
_____ Computers: Practice English
_____ Computers: Microsoft Office (Word, PowerPoint, Excel, etc.)
_____ Computers: Internet Access
_____ Computers: Printing
_____ Computers: Scanning
_____ Study: Studying at tables
Other: _____

- 9. Please check all the skills you practiced as an IELP student in the TUTORING CORNER.
_____ Study Skills _____ Homework
_____ Grammar _____ Vocabulary
_____ Pronunciation _____ Presentations
_____ Reading _____ Writing

_____ Listening
_____ TOEFL
_____ GRE

_____ Speaking
_____ IELTS
_____ Other: _____

10. What was your favorite Learning Center resource as an IELP student? Why?
11. What is your favorite Learning Center resource now? Why?
12. What resources at the Learning Center do you recommend that other IELP students use?
Why?
13. What resources do you think the current IELP students use most often in the Learning Center?
14. What do you think IELP students like best about the Learning Center?

Student Interview Questions

1. How long have you been a student at the IELP?
2. How long have you been using the Learning Center?
3. How did you find out about the Learning Center?
4. How often do you usually visit the Learning Center?
5. What do you usually do when you come to the Learning Center?
6. How often do you use the Tutoring Corner/Computer Lab/Multipurpose Room/Student Library?
7. What do you do when you use the Tutoring Corner/Computer Lab/Multipurpose Room/Student Library?
8. What is your favorite Learning Center resource? Why?
9. What skill areas do you most often practice in the Learning Center? How do you practice?
10. How do you decide what to practice in the Learning Center?
11. Which resources do you think are most useful? Why?
12. Which resources would you recommend to a friend? Why?
13. What do you like best about the Learning Center?

The Call to Collaborate: Key Considerations as ELD and Classroom Teachers Begin to Align New Standards

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Abstract

Classroom teachers and English Language Learner (ELL) specialists are being called upon to collaborate in new ways in order to align new English Language Proficiency standards with new content standards. Instead of viewing language as a bridge to cross before accessing content, now language and content are being promoted as a partnership between teachers of ELLs. Currently, teachers of ELLs are isolated from one other, resulting in a lack of continuity among language, literacy, and content. Teachers of ELLs require time to collaborate, but time alone will not address the complexity of collaboration; teachers must also be aware of the dominance of an idealistic perception of collaboration. For ELL students to be successful in academics, literacy, and linguistic proficiency, teachers of ELLs must consider how issues of time and collaboration in their own schools can be resolved and how schools can become more effective in connecting language, literacy, and content.

Keywords: *English language learners, collaboration, language, literacy, content, teachers, specialists, standards*

Introduction

Classroom teachers and English Language Learner (ELL) specialists are being called upon to collaborate in order to align new English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards with new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) (Linguanti, R., & Hakuta, K., 2012; Oregon Department of Education, 2014; Quinn, H., Cheuk, T., & Castellón, M., 2012; Valdés, G., Kibler, A., & Walqui, A., 2014). This marks a shift in thinking from language learning as a separate endeavor taught mainly by ELL specialists to language learning through constructing meaning in content

areas, and this shift requires ELL teachers and classroom teachers to bring together language and content in new ways (Ciechanowski, K., 2013). Instead of viewing language as a “bridge to cross” before accessing content, now language and content are being promoted as a partnership between teachers of ELLs (CCSSO & ELPD Framework Committee, et. al, 2012).

While the new standards and new assessments that accompany those standards provide an opportunity for ELL specialists to work more closely in collaboration with classroom teachers, there are key considerations that must be addressed in forging these new

relationships. Primarily, teachers of ELLs need structured time together, but time alone will not address more complex and detrimental issues. One of these issues is a dominant view of idealistic collaboration, wherein collaboration is only done between teachers who like each other and does not involve the necessary yet difficult work of sometimes disagreeing (Honigsfeld, A., & Dove, M.G., 2010). The other critical issue that also needs to be addressed is the ELL teachers' comparatively lower status among teachers, which mimics larger national views toward ELL students (Creese, A., 2005). This paper presents evidence that these two issues can interfere with the successful integration of ELP standards and CCSS standards.

This paper presents data collected in 2010 from a qualitative study of twelve elementary teachers from two schools in the Pacific Northwest to answer the research question: "What are the discourses that teachers of ELL students negotiate?" The data revealed that classroom teachers, ELL specialists, and reading intervention specialists worked in isolation from each other and often did not find the opportunity to observe in each others' classrooms. This led to teachers not knowing what was happening with their shared ELL students. In order to align new standards and assessments, teachers of ELLs will need to address key issues that contribute to this isolation such as an idealistic perception of collaboration and differences in status among teachers.

The data from this study were drawn from twelve teacher interviews, twelve

teacher observations, and two 90-minute focus groups in the fall of 2010 approved by university human research protocols. The study was conducted in two elementary schools in the Pacific Northwest with an ELL population of 15% or higher. At each school, the participants included two classroom teachers, two ELL specialists, and two

The data revealed that classroom teachers, ELL specialists, and reading intervention specialists worked in isolation from each other.

literacy specialists. Overall, twenty-seven hours of data were compiled consisting of approximately fifteen hours of audiotaped interview and focus

group data along with twelve hours of field notes from observations. The data for this article focus primarily on the interview question "When you are working with other teachers and specialists in your school, in what ways do theory, politics, or instructional beliefs play a part in collaborative decisions?" A qualitative approach was chosen for this project as a way to richly explore the themes that emerged from the participants' insights, experiences, and viewpoints.

Audio-data were digitally collected, and then transcribed using Transana, an open-source transcription and analysis software. After loading the media, the data was coded using discourse analysis by creating a series of episode files within Transana. The discourse analysis used in this study focused on Gee's (2011) concept of context as a reflexive tool in creating meaning. Gee (2011) provides four questions that lead the researcher to examine discourse. For example, one question that was essential for this strand of data analysis asks if the speech "creates or shapes (possibly manipulates) the context" (Gee, 2011, p. 85). This question examines how the

speaker's choice of language is responsible for the creation and sustained presence of a context, in this case the existence of the isolation of teachers fueled by an idealistic view of collaboration and reflection of status between teachers. For example, the comment from a teacher who reflected on the nature of collaboration as having "cool people to talk with" reflected a discourse of an idealistic vision of collaboration.

The isolation of teachers of ELLs

Current common practices separate ELP instruction from classroom instruction, often in the form of pull-out ELP instruction. This division is further solidified with separate assessments for ELP and state-required assessments for grade-level content. Both the ELL specialist and the classroom teacher are able to meet their assessment goals without intentionally weaving together language, literacy, and content. ELL students' linguistic and content needs cannot be separated and treated as distinct because they are complex and dependent upon each other. While a simple response is to teach language, literacy, and content separately, in doing so, we reduce the complexity of language for the sake of making it measurable and oftentimes meaningless (Dantas-Whitney et al., 2009). Our ELL students often move from one classroom where they receive content to another where they receive ELP instruction, without the necessary explicit connections between content and language.

"That's not really my job."

Different teachers of ELLs can often see themselves in charge of different parts of an ELL students' day. Current practice

divides content, literacy, and language goals into separate entities, with little time allotted to putting the various perspectives together into a complete picture. Comments from the different teachers of ELLs reveal this isolation and separation.

- Classroom Teacher: *"I don't have to worry about the language development . . . that's not really my job."*
- Literacy Specialist: *"Primarily, what I'm doing is teaching kids how to read."*
- ELL Specialist: *"Our role is to teach the functions of language."*

These comments reveal a narrowly defined responsibility for content and language learning. The reality of testing pressures and lack of time together results in the day being divided up into discrete pieces. It is a false sense of efficiency where different teachers have isolated tasks and put the responsibility of connecting content and language on the shoulders of the ELL students themselves. While the clear goals and objectives of the ELL specialist, classroom teacher, or literacy specialist provide a focus for specific learning outcomes, they tend to not lend themselves to the co-creation of a more cohesive program for ELL students.

The allocation of effective time together

While it may seem obvious, for collaboration to occur teachers need dedicated structured time together. Effective and productive collaboration cannot happen during teachers' prep or transition time. Time is one of teachers' most valuable commodities and without it, collaboration will not occur (Santos,

Darling-Hammond, & Cheuk, n.d.). The data from this study reveal different perceptions of scheduled time together and confirm the reality facing teachers of ELL students who simply do not have enough time to talk with other teachers, share student data, and plan new approaches.

“I don’t have time to talk”

Teachers spoke of not having enough time: “Everyone else is doing these amazing things and you might just not

know it because you haven’t gone down to ask them and they don’t have time to explain.” This comment speaks to how more

immediate needs take precedence if structured time is not embedded in the busy school schedule, as observed below.

- Classroom Teacher: *“I think that’s a huge crutch in our system, that everyone else is doing these amazing things and you might just not know it because you haven’t gone down to ask them and they don’t have time to explain.”*
- Classroom Teacher: *“We have a push-in (push-in is typically when the ELL specialist or assistant goes into the mainstream classroom and works with students in their home classroom, rather than pulling students out into an ELL classroom for instruction) so that’s really nice from ELL and she comes and helps and I schedule writing at that time so she comes in and works with the ELL students.”*
- Classroom Teacher: *“All of the ELL assistants are amazing and do great work but I don’t have time to talk to*

them because they leave before my day is over.”

The two examples above demonstrated how classroom teachers discussed the role of the ELL assistants instead of the ELL teacher. One classroom teacher was clearly pleased at having an ELL assistant come into her classroom. Another classroom teacher spoke of not having enough time to meet with the ELL assistant who is amazing and does great work.

Moving beyond an “it’s really nice” model to a model that builds upon and connects the expertise of all the teachers is what is currently needed for the

challenging work ahead. Part of this work involves creating time and space for the teachers of ELLs to collaborate on both the co-planning of curriculum and the co-teaching of the lessons. The following data from this study describe how teachers of ELLs view this time allocation differently.

- Literacy Specialist: *“We get to meet with our teachers, half our staff about every other week, I think it is, and then the other half on the other – so twice a month we’re meeting with staff so we get to meet with all staff once a month, that’s what it is.”*
- ELL Specialist: *“I might occasionally hear from a class, from grade level teams or classroom teachers, something that their kids are working on in class and that they are asking me to support in their ELL time.”*

These comments reveal the difficulty of teachers finding common time such as “I might occasionally hear from a class”.

[M]ore immediate needs take precedence if structured time (for collaboration) is not embedded in the busy school schedule

Other teachers also spoke of complicated schedules of meetings with ELL specialists or literacy specialists as the norm. Accepting ineffective systems is an example of denying, being unaware of, or minimizing the marginalization of language goals. These comments reveal that teachers in this study accept the current schedules that are set up for teachers of ELLs to collaborate, and through that acceptance further perpetuate the isolation between the teachers of ELLs.

The idealistic perception of collaboration

An idealistic perception of collaboration is one that romanticizes work between teachers. This romantic or idealistic view is harmful because it limits not only who collaborates with whom but also limits the extent of these collaborative relationships. A complex collaboration between the various teachers of ELLs moves beyond sharing similar belief systems or simply bouncing ideas off of each other. Identifying the academic language demands to meet the new standards will require a more complex view of collaboration with possible differences in belief, approaches, and methods.

“We have the same belief system”

In an idealistic view of collaboration, like-minded people collaborate with each other and the difficult work of aligning goals rarely occurs. With idealistic collaboration, teachers do not choose to work with teachers outside of their own groups’ belief system, such as the ELL specialists working among themselves, or classroom teachers forming a team without the ELL specialist. This is a limited view of

collaboration and is revealed through comments collected from this study such as “people with the same belief system bouncing ideas off each other.” This type of idealistic collaboration prohibits a complex perception of collaboration that acknowledges differences in beliefs.

New standards require teachers, both ELL and classroom, to work together to create new ways of teaching language, literacy, and content in pursuit of common goals for ELL students. An idealistic perception can ignore the often-difficult differences in opinions that complex collaboration presents. Complex collaboration requires teachers of ELLs to find new ways to connect language, literacy, and content goals by honoring the expertise of each teacher. While many positive results and feelings result from a unified identity such as teams, by nature, it is also accompanied by the exclusion of certain groups of teachers from the team. This is evident in the following data:

- Literacy Specialist: *“Well, our, our teams meet every week”*
- Literacy Specialist: *“Well, in Title I, we have the same belief systems in how reading works and what’s important about teaching reading so we have been very fortunate.”*

Literacy specialists had positive comments about the time they met as “teams” sharing a similar belief system. A close analysis of subtle linguistic choices, such as pronoun choice or the use of the word ‘team’, shed light on the various ways that teachers perceived their relationships and status with each other (Gee, 2011). Both classroom teachers and literacy specialists spoke of their “teams”, but ELL specialists did not refer to themselves as a team during the data collected for this study. If a

team approach includes and excludes, teachers can remain separate and divided, interfering with productive, complex collaboration.

ELL specialists in this study did not identify, as a “team”, and the lack of active participation in the different meetings are an important piece of information. One ELL specialist spoke of how she “occasionally hears from a grade-level team or classroom teacher”. She mentioned that classroom teachers “ask me to support in their ELL time”, but does not talk about being a part of a team. This lack of inclusion can further exacerbate the misalignment between literacy, language, and content goals.

Teachers in this research study revealed different perceptions of collaboration. Regardless of the differences in belief systems, teachers must seek out expertise from one another for the success of their ELL students. Santos et al (n.d.) offered, “Educators with deep discipline knowledge and content pedagogical skills need to partner with English language development specialists to guide professional development” (p. 8). Likewise, the data collected from this study reveal a need to develop a more complex definition of collaboration that draws upon the expertise of various teachers.

“You can bounce ideas off each other”

Other teachers’ comments perpetuated an idealistic and superficial perception of collaboration, such as “You can bounce ideas off” each other and “we’ve tried to talk about what are things that we’re doing in literacy or what are things that they’re doing in ELL that would help those kids.” While the description of these current systems

begins to address how teachers of ELLs can work together, these comments also reveal a lack of effectiveness and depth in aligning language, literacy, and content goals.

- Classroom Teacher: *“You can bounce ideas off and they will have information for you or share information that they can help you with.”*
- Literacy Specialist: *“Each time we’ve gotten together we’ve tried to talk about what are things that we’re doing in literacy or what are things they’re doing in ELL that would help those kids with the vocabulary and the content.”*

These perceptions can reveal an ineffective view because they place ELL specialists on the periphery of instruction instead of within a system that integrates language, literacy, and content holistically. Though ELL specialists are considered helpful sources of information or useful sounding boards for ideas, this perception views language, literacy, and content as separate entities and places ELL specialists on the sidelines as assistants or resources to be used at the discretion of the classroom teacher or literacy specialist instead of as co-teachers and essential colleagues for collaboration. This reveals a difference in status and perception of the ELL specialist.

“We think for ourselves but try for consistency”

A more complex and effective perception of collaboration between teachers of ELLs includes examining teachers’ autonomy and differences in belief systems while also accepting the necessity of consistency, but not conformity, between the ELL specialist,

classroom teacher, and literacy specialist. This classroom teacher's comment reveals some of this complexity: "We think for ourselves and obviously we are our own teachers but we try for consistency". This comment embraces the need for autonomy and expertise while acknowledging the sometimes-difficult responsibility to work with other teachers.

- ELL Specialist: *"Last year, I worked with someone in the district who I disagreed with on many things. Her theory, politics, instruction were all completely opposing. We had the same job. We agreed to set aside our beliefs."*
- ELL Specialist: *"It doesn't come down to this policy or that policy. It comes down to listening. Everyone wants to learn. We want to help kids."*
- Classroom Teacher: *"You know, we think for ourselves and obviously are our own teachers but we do try for consistency. We try to do the same things with one another or do the same things as the other is doing."*

Without confronting an idealistic perception, collaboration will remain something that like-minded teachers do with the people of their choosing during their prep periods and free time.

Schools are filled with a wide variety of teachers, personalities, cultures, and methods for the best way to teach students. School relationships between teachers of ELL students often occur within seemingly respectful and polite school cultures, but the question remains concerning whether these polite interactions or idealistic collaborations are contributing to increased success for ELL students. Achinstein (2002) described the difference between a

complex and idealistic vision of collaboration: "In their optimism about caring and supportive communities, advocates often underplay the role of diversity, dissent and disagreement in community life, leaving practitioners ill-prepared and conceptions of collaboration underexplored" (p. 421). Perceptions of idealistic collaboration interfere with effective collaboration, which may involve differences in ideas or methodology.

Teachers of ELL students must accept and create a complex view of collaboration, one that includes space for disagreement and difference (Achinstein, 2002; Arkoudis, 2006; DuFour, 2007). An awareness of this idealistic discourse regarding collaboration allows teachers to challenge established norms of

dominance and move forward in seeking out different positions of power, voice, and dissent (Clarke, 2005; Gee, 1996; Miller Marsh, 2002). Respectfully working through

places of discomfort and congeniality can lead to a rich weaving of expertise and experiences from each teacher that ultimately benefit our ELLs.

"It's a little more effective"

Overall, teachers in this study did not seem convinced of the necessity to collaborate or of the actual effectiveness of collaboration. Some teachers were very clear about the positive effects of collaboration, such as "there's no doubt" to it being effective. Other teachers however described their collaborative efforts as just "a little more effective". What is clear is that teachers value collaboration differently.

- Classroom Teacher: *"There's no doubt that you know that working as a team has true benefits."*
- Classroom Teacher: *"When we have time for collaboration, it's a little more effective than when I'm doing my own."*

The adoption of new ELP standards and their alignment with CCSS Standards makes the need for collaboration more essential. For example new standards focus on the development of discipline specific language development, which is a place where ELL specialists can offer their expertise and time (Cheuk, 2013).

Without confronting an idealistic perception, collaboration will remain something that like-minded teachers do with the people of their choosing during their prep periods and free time. Teachers of ELLs who are engaged in complex and effective collaborative relationships listen and share expertise with the explicit purpose of aligning the content and language goals.

Conclusion

Dividing the curriculum responsibilities for ELLs into distinct parts puts an unrealistic burden and responsibility on ELLs to integrate language learning with content and literacy learning. This is a responsibility that all the teachers of ELLs must assume instead. As advocates and agents of change for our ELLs, we aim to seek out different ways of doing things that will disrupt ineffective patterns. This current system that isolates the content classroom teacher, literacy specialist, and ELL specialist has created a fragmented curriculum for ELLs. A response to this unproductive system

must include the allocation of structured time, challenging the idealistic view of collaboration, and examining power structures within schools. York-Barr (2007) described this as "re-culturing instead of restructuring" and considers the need to examine larger ways of looking at, framing, and responding to relationships between teachers. The teachers in this study reveal this deeper need for structural and pedagogical change that hinges on awareness of the dominant discourses along with the complexity of collaboration and the allocation of time.

Collaboration between the teachers of ELLs has become increasing more necessary with the adoption of new standards, but one cannot ignore the layers of challenges. Once those challenges are acknowledged and addressed, teachers of ELLs can engage in more effective and productive interactions. Within the last few years, some promising practices have emerged whereby ELL specialists are essential creators in the planning of curriculum. Some schools have built upon their Professional Learning Team models to examine a professional book on co-teaching and collaboration (see Honigsfeld, A., & Dove, M. G., 2010). Other schools have dedicated time to co-planning curriculum around a Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) model or Sheltered Instruction (SIOP) model. In these models, ELP standards have been integrated with content standards in model units of study. These are then taught in the mainstream classroom with both the ELL specialist and the classroom teacher co-teaching the lessons. While the co-teaching approach can look different based upon the strengths of each teacher and school, the key is to integrate opportunities for

all students to identify and practice language through focusing, modeling, and scaffolding academic uses of language. ELL specialists are able to lend their expertise on scaffolding academic language throughout classroom content and classroom teachers are able to identify where they can focus on academic language. New ELP standards are more relevant and accessible for ELLs when the ELL specialist and the classroom teacher plan and teach curriculum together. Each comes to the lesson with his/her own lens in regards to content and language demands, which result in a more cohesive and meaningful learning experience for our ELLs. This article presents data that describes why it is necessary to examine the ways in which we define collaboration, identify the isolation between teachers, and examine the different perceptions of status.

Separate standardized assessments for content and language might continue to dictate separate instruction, but new standards are asking for a closer alignment of content and language goals, which is best achieved by tapping into the expertise of all the different teachers of ELLs. This study concludes with three recommendations.

The first recommendation is that the teachers of ELLs including classroom teachers, ELL specialists, and literacy specialists have scheduled times to meet to align the new standards. This is a shared responsibility between the teachers of ELLs and their administrators. Through a close examination of ELP standards, teachers of ELLs can begin to uncover places of alignment, where both content and language goals can be strengthened within the same unit. Teachers need to advocate for more scheduled time

together, while administrators need to find time within existing schedules to dedicate time to planning curriculum that aligns new ELP standards and new content standards.

The second recommendation is that teachers of ELLs, including classroom teachers, ELL specialists, and literacy specialists, discuss how a view of idealistic collaboration persists in their schools. Teachers need to honestly and critically examine with whom and how they collaborate with others within their schools. While there might be systems in place to check in with different teachers, these systems limit the degree to which ELL specialists can contribute their expertise on incorporating academic language. They also limit the degree to which classroom teachers can find places where language can complement content. Teachers who are pulled into working relationships with each other based on aligning new standards will move beyond an idealistic view of collaboration.

The third and final recommendation is that teachers of ELLs including classroom teachers, ELL specialists, and literacy specialists examine how larger structures of power and status are mimicked within their own school cultures. In pursuit of developing and teaching curriculum in which both language and content goals are met, it is important to first examine how the ELL specialist is valued within the school. Teachers of ELLs who are looking toward examining larger structures of power can ask questions such as: “What is the role of the ELL specialist within the school?”, “How do we as a school value multiple opportunities to combine language and content, and where is that evident?” or “Where do we put into practice what we believe about the

teaching of language and content?” While teachers of ELLs need to self-reflect and closely examine their honest responses to these questions, administrators can also facilitate discussions of how to create equal status among the teachers of ELLs.

With the onset of new standards for content and language, ELL students need their teachers to weave together language, literacy, and content by advocating for time to engage in effective and productive collaboration with an awareness of the dominant discourses that isolate teachers of ELLs.

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Reading Level Placement and Assessment for ESL/EFL Learners: The Reading Level Measurement Method

Aaron David Mermelstein, Ming Chuan University

Abstract

For many ESL/EFL learners, reading is their main learning goal and may be the most important of the four language skills in the second language. For many ESL/EFL teachers, the issue of promoting proficient reading is important, and they look for additional or alternative methods to achieve this goal. However, when discussing reading as a primary goal of a curriculum, assessment becomes a critical element necessary for successful instruction. This article suggests that extensive reading (ER) should be used to achieve this goal and discusses a new method of reading assessment, the Reading Level Measurement Method (RLMM), as a practical means of assessing learners reading levels and accurately placing learners at their optimal reading levels to maximize their learning potential. Further, this article describes the step-by-step process of creating the RLMM, how to implement it in the classroom, and how to use it as a practical and economical assessment and placement tool. It also describes a successful quantitative study which adopted the RLMM and supports its effectiveness.

Key Words: *reading level, assessment, placement, extensive reading*

Introduction

For many English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) students, reading is their main learning goal (Carrell, 1993; Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2009; Mermelstein, 2013; Nunan, 1999; Waring, 2006; Tamrackitkun, 2010), and for most of these students, reading will be the most important of the four language skills in the second language. Therefore, it is no surprise that in many countries, reading has become one of the most emphasized skills in the ESL/EFL classroom (Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2009; Nation, 2001; Tamrackitkun, 2010; Tanaka, &

Stapleton, 2007) in spite of the current emphasis around the world on communicative language teaching (CLT). When discussing reading as a primary goal of a curriculum, assessment becomes a critical element necessary for successful instruction. Postlethwaite and Ross (1992) found that regular assessment was a key factor associated with students' success in learning to read. Assessment can help teachers determine if the instruction provided is resulting in adequate student progress. It can assist in identifying students who can benefit from a more accelerated instructional program and those who need more intensive instructional

support. Essentially, assessment allows teachers to identify where their students *are* academically, and where they need to go. For example, if a reading assessment determined that a class of students was at a lower reading level, the teacher may decide to change the course textbooks to use a graded readers or simplified texts instead of an original novel. Furthermore, if it was determined that the same group of students' reading level was low, the teacher may also decide to alter the writing content of the course and provide more scaffolding for individual students if necessary.

For many ESL/EFL teachers and administrators, the issue of promoting proficient reading is important. In order to do this, some teachers are looking for additional or alternative methods to achieve this goal. In the field of teaching ESL/EFL, there has been a trend for teachers to rely on skill-building textbooks that attempt to develop reading strategies for the learner to comprehend different genres of texts. These strategies are usually designed for the purposes of teaching the reader how to find some sort of general or specific information in the text.

Today, however, there is an enormous amount of research spanning decades promoting the effectiveness of extensive reading (ER) (i.e., Day & Bamford, 1998; Lee & Hsu, 2009; Mermelstein, 2013; Nuttall, 1982; Sheu, 2003; Waring, 2006; Tamrakitkun, 2010; Yamashita, 2013). In fact, Nuttall (1982) stated that "an extensive reading programme...is the single most effective way of improving both vocabulary and reading skills in general" (p. 65). This belief has also been echoed throughout more recent research (e.g. Cho, 2007; Day & Bamford, 2002; Day, & Hitosugi,

2004; Pigada & Schitt, 2006). For the purpose of this article, ER is defined as reading as much as possible within the learner's peak acquisition zone, for the purpose of gaining reading experience and general language skills and obtaining pleasure from the texts.

Statement of the Problem

In order to better build up ESL/EFL students' English reading abilities, ESL/EFL teachers need to develop English teaching programs that apply teaching methodologies and reading materials that are efficient, effective, and matched with the students' abilities and interests. Although many current educational systems throughout the world are achieving some level of success, they may still be lacking appropriate and/or alternative models for teaching vocabulary and reading (Mermelstein, 2013), such as student-centered learning activities like ER.

Therefore, the problem is not necessarily the lack of effort teachers are putting into creating a reading curriculum for their students, but it may be a lack of knowledge regarding how to properly assess and place learners within such a program. To further complicate the situation, most ESL/EFL courses are comprised of students with mixed abilities, which makes it even more difficult for teachers to teach reading through traditional methods, like the Grammar-Translation method or direct teaching of vocabulary.

Today there is a wide variety of reading assessment tests and assessment formulas on the market (i.e. the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Formula; the Fry Readability Graph), but most of these are norm-referenced tests intended for mainstream students and not for

ESL/EFL learners. Further, they are intended to compare students with what is considered the normal reading level for each grade in school, which is also not compatible with ESL/EFL students because their age does not necessarily reflect their grade level in terms of English language ability.

ESL/EFL students are uniquely different from mainstream students whose primary language (L1) is English because they generally do not have the background and cultural knowledge to perform as well on these types of reading assessments. For example, they may not know the meaning behind terms like traffic jam or sky scraper. They may also not possess the same linguistic knowledge of phonology, semantics, and syntax as mainstream students. ESL/EFL students may or may not have learned decoding skills, and students from different cultures may apply different strategies while reading, which may also be difficult to detect. In addition, there is the problem of lexical knowledge. ESL/EFL students may be able to sound out words in their minds or aloud, but this does not mean that these words make sense to them.

Therefore, in order to assist teachers in developing English reading programs that apply methodologies and reading materials that are efficient, effective, and appropriate to students' abilities and interests, this article suggests the use of ER and offers a new and easy method of properly assessing learners and placing them within an ER program.

Literature Review

ER Theories & Programs

One of the major theories underlying the modern development of the ER

approach in second and foreign language classrooms is Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, which is based on the distinction between acquisition and learning. Accordingly, the term *acquisition* is used to refer to an intuitive or subconscious process of constructing or "picking up" a language. The term *learning*, on the other hand, is used to refer to a conscious, active effort to understand information. Later, Krashen (1991) created a more specific part of the Input Hypothesis known as the Reading Hypothesis, which states that comprehensible input in the form of reading can also stimulate language acquisition. Since reading is the interaction of new information with old knowledge, learners who understand most of the text can infer the meaning of new words as they read and then test their hypothesis as they encounter these words repeatedly through reading.

One point that has not been challenged when discussing ER is that vocabulary control is necessary. However, there has been some debate among researchers regarding the amount of vocabulary knowledge that is necessary for a second language reader to accurately comprehend a text. In order to learn word meanings incidentally through reading, it is important for learners to encounter a suitable number of unfamiliar words in a text. According to Liu and Nation (1985), Laufer (1987), and Hirsh and Nation (1992), learners need to understand about 95% of the text in order to gain an adequate comprehension and to accurately guess unknown words from the context. Hill and Thomas (1988) suggest 90%, but the Extensive Reading Foundation (ERF) (2011) sets the percentage much higher at 98%. At 95% coverage means that there is approximately one unknown word in

every two lines of text, if each line of text contains about ten words. It is vital that learners know a sufficient amount of headwords and word families in order to understand 95% of the words in a text. According to Hirsh and Nation (1992), a word family is the base form of a word plus the inflected and derived forms created from affixes, which may include affixes like the third person -s, the superlative -est, -able, -ness, etc. A headword is a word in which a group of related words would appear with it in a dictionary. For example, if one looks up the word automobile in a dictionary, it might be accompanied with related words like auto, car, motorcar, vehicle, etc. Both Laufer (1997) and Nation (2001) suggest that a size of 3000 word families should cross the threshold and be enough for successful second language reading. Liu and Nation (1985) demonstrated that words in a low-density text, where there was only one unknown word out of twenty five words, were easier to guess than words in a high-density text, where there is one unknown word out of ten words. According to the ERF (2009), reading is at an “instructional” level when the students know between 90% and 98% of the words on a page. If the students know 98% or more of the words, then they are in the ER “sweet spot” and can read quickly or at a constant pace because there are not too many unknown words slowing them down. Further, at 98% it is most likely more enjoyable for the reader as well. Since vocabulary control has such a large impact and is so vital for reading comprehension and the acquisition of new vocabulary, proper assessment and placement into an ER program is paramount.

Extensive Reading

Extensive reading has been widely advocated for language learning

throughout the world (e.g. Day and Bamford, 1998; McQuillan, 2006; Mermelstein, 2013). There are several differences between extensive reading and intensive reading. The first is the amount of reading materials that the learner is required to read. The second is the degree of intensity with which the materials are to be read. During intensive reading activities, learners are generally exposed to short texts which include specific lexical and/or syntactic aspects of the language to be learned, and are usually followed by tasks to provide reading strategy practice. The goal of ER is different because ER attempts to immerse the learner in large quantities of comprehensible input without any specific linguistic task, except making meaning of the text. In other words, learners are generally not asked to do additional work related to their reading.

Day and Bamford (1998) offered the following ten top principles of ER to help clarify the common characteristics of successful ER programs:

- 1) Students read as much as possible.
- 2) A variety of materials on a wide range of topics are available.
- 3) Students select what they want to read.
- 4) The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding.
- 5) Reading is its own reward.
- 6) Reading materials are well within the linguistic competence of the students.
- 7) Reading is individual and silent.
- 8) Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.
- 9) Teachers orient students to the goals of the program.

10) The teacher is a role model of a reader for students.

ER can make a positive contribution to the development of competence in a second language (Lee & Hsu, 2009; Mermelstein, 2013; Tamrackitkun, 2010; Tudor & Hafiz, 1989; Yamashita, 2013) by providing learners several encounters with unknown words. It expands the learners' interaction with the language by exposing them to different words in different contexts so that learners can receive a more complete understanding of their meaning and use (Simensen, 1987). The pedagogical value attached to ER is based on the assumption that having students interact with large amounts of interesting, meaningful, and comprehensible language materials will produce positive effects on the learners' abilities to use a second language.

Several influential second language studies involving ER have taken place over the past few decades and have demonstrated several distinct benefits that language learners can receive through ER. They can acquire more vocabulary knowledge, increase their reading speed, improve their writing abilities, create more positive attitudes towards reading and the target language, and develop their linguistic knowledge (Bell, 2001; Cho, 2007; Fernandez de Morgado, 2009; McQuillan, 2006; Mermelstein, 2013; Nation, 2008).

The RLMM

The Reading Level Measurement Method (RLMM) is an assessment tool created by teachers and designed to measure learners' reading levels for the purposes of placement within a reading program or for measuring reading level progress over time. It was originally created by Aaron David Mermelstein

over the course of several years out of the need to accurately assess and place mixed ability ESL/EFL students into reading programs and track their progress throughout the programs. The RLMM is specifically designed to work together with ER programs using graded reader books.

There has been one published study and several as-yet unpublished studies carried out using the RLMM. All of the studies used the RLMM for the participants' placement in an ER program, but two of them specifically measured the reading level improvement of the participants over the length of the studies.

Mermelstein's (2013) study was conducted in Taiwan, using 4th year EFL university students. It was a 12-week quantitative study involving 87 participants and its purpose was to examine the effects of ER on the reading levels of the students and to find an appropriate alternative to the traditional teaching methodologies being used in Taiwan. After the initial reading level placement, the students participated in a weekly in-class Sustained Silent Reading activity, supplemented by outside reading, using graded reader books. The overall framework of this study was based upon Day and Bamford's (1998) top ten principles for conducting a successful extensive reading program, as listed above. First, a measure of the means and standard deviations of the results of the pre and post RLMMs were taken and then a categorical analysis was done on the reading level data using Chi-square. The results indicated that the treatment group posted significantly higher gains than the control group, with 1.01 levels gained vs. 0.46 levels gained respectively. The Chi-square analysis, using a two-way contingency table with

the two variables being the starting reading level and the ending reading level, found the variables to be significantly different with Pearson Chi-square (2, N = 87) = 115.72, $p = 0.000$, Cramer's V = 0.52.

RLMM Design

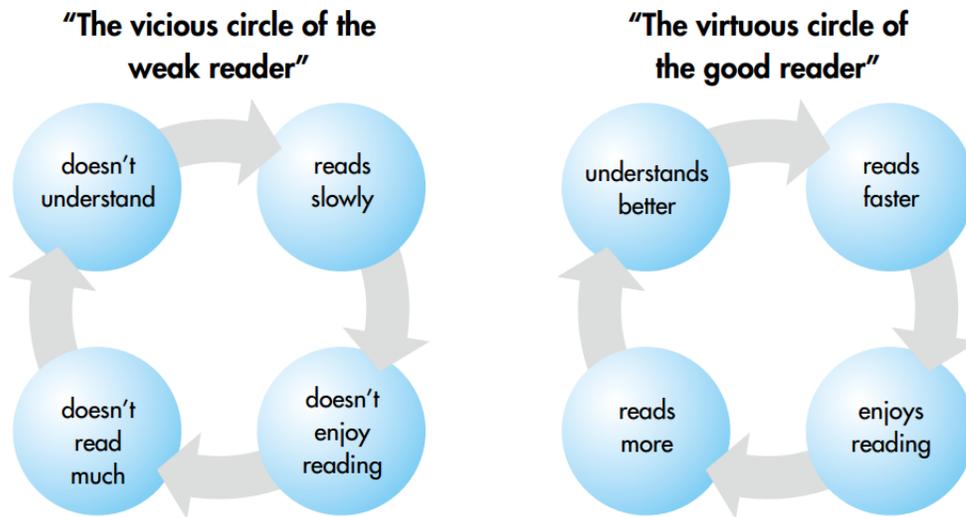
The design for creating the RLMM is simple and not very time consuming. From start to finish, it takes approximately one hour to create. Teachers would create six sections of the pre-reading level test (one for each reading level) to be used as assessment and/or placement and six sections of the post-test to be used for assessment and comparison. All of the RLMMs would be based on books from one specific graded reader series to measure improvement over the duration of the ER program. If desired, the teacher could also create a midterm RLMM to match needs or goals. The RLMM is based on the principle that the book publishing companies have already done the most difficult part for the teacher, that is, create graded reading levels based on the number of word families (e.g., help, helpless, helplessness, unhelpful, etc.) used in the text. Although it is not an exact science due to the actual number of words in any text and the fact that there is no way to specifically measure which words are being learned, in principle, each company has already calibrated each level of its book series with a range of word families. Therefore, moving from one level to the next represents an increase in the learners' reading level and the number of word families learned by the reader. How many word families are learned at each level depends on which graded reader series teachers have chosen as well as which books learners have selected.

The rating scales for each series differs, so it would be inaccurate to measure reading level based on book level. Some series distinguish levels based on multiples of 100 word families and others are based on multiples of 200 or more word families. In other words, one publisher's level 3 book does not directly correspond to another's¹. Therefore, one of the most important factors for creating the RLMM and towards assessing student development is consistency within the texts, or only using one graded reader series.

Once the RLMMs have been completed, it is then important for the teacher to determine the percentage of unknown words that is acceptable at a students' placement level. As previously mentioned, this is also one of the key factors involved in using this RLMM because the percentage of known or unknown words will have a huge impact on the learner and the learner outcomes. For example, if a learner was placed at a level where 90% of the words were known, this would mean that the learner would not know 1 in 10 words, and it would be difficult for the learner to understand what they were reading. They might need to frequently stop and use a dictionary and would mostly likely feel frustrated as well. Therefore, selecting the right placement level for learners is paramount to success. Diagram 1 explains the difference between a vicious circle of reading vs. a virtuous circle, which is directly related to the percentage of unknown words while reading.

¹ For a more complete comparison of graded reader scales by various publishers, see the Extensive Reading Foundation's (ERF) (2011) graded reader scale.

Diagram 1. Vicious vs. Virtuous reading cycle.



Source: ERF (2013)

Creating the RLMM

The first and most important material a teacher will need to get started is a set of graded reader books using only one specific publisher's series. While it is not necessary to have a complete set of graded readers, it is important to have an adequate number of books available to students at all levels, so that they can freely select books of interest from a wide pool of genres. Most series have levels 1-6. However, some series have additional levels, like *beginner*, *starter*, or *advanced*. It may not be necessary to create a starter level section of the RLMM, as students who find level 1 too difficult would automatically be placed at the starter level.

The second step is to select three books from each level for a total of 18 books. When selecting books, teachers should be aware of the differences between British English and American

English and select only books of a similar style throughout the levels. This will add to the validity and reliability of the RLMM. If students are unfamiliar with British English texts, it is recommended to only use American English texts in order to eliminate confusion due to differences in spelling.

The third step is to randomly select full pages from each text with approximately the same number of words on each page. How many RLMMs teachers want to make will determine how many pages are selected from each book at each level. For example, if teachers only want to give a pre-test and a post-test, then they would select two pages from each text at each level, one to be used for each test. Therefore, teachers would actually be selecting a total of 6 pages for each level. Using pages of the same texts for both the pre- and post-tests increases the

validity and reliability of the assessment. Before finalizing the page selections, teachers read each one and determine if it is of *standard level quality*, that is, if they have a variety of word families on each page. If possible, it would be ideal to have two other teachers analyze the test, so results can be normed. Having two or three teachers agree on the standard would increase the statistical inter-rater reliability of the RLMM; however, this step is not necessary.

The final step is to piece all of the pages of the test together. The test should start with the lowest level, and there should be three pages of text for each level for a total of 18 pages. Teachers should not worry if each page of the RLMM does not flow together as a single story. They should inform the students of this fact prior to the test. It is recommended to create a customized cover page for the RLMM where students can write their names and other important pieces of information. The final version of the RLMM is also versatile, in that it may be given as a hard copy, or it can be scanned and given online. Either way, it is recommended to scan the RLMM and keep an e-file which can be reused in the future, saving both time and money. Another versatile aspect of this RLMM is that a teacher can adjust the RLMM to assess as many levels as they deem necessary, perhaps only creating an RLMM with three levels.

Implementing the RLMM

Implementing the RLMM is also simple for both teachers and students. First, the teacher distributes the tests to the students and indicates that they should not start reading until they are given the command. For each page of the test, the students are to read it and

underline all of the unknown words to them. They should be instructed not to stop reading to use a dictionary. When they finish reading each page, they should count the number of unknown words, only counting each unknown word once, and then write the total amount on the top of the page and circle it.

RLMMs are designed to take approximately 50-60 minutes. However, each teacher may need to adjust the amount of time given for their own students, since they know their students' abilities best. More advanced readers should be able to move through the lower sections of the test relatively easily and quickly. Lower level students will move more slowly through the RLMM and perhaps not finish. This is okay and all of the students should be informed at the beginning that some of them might not finish. Since lower level students would struggle through the higher levels and have a higher percentage of unknown words, it is not important whether they actually attempt to read levels out of their range.

Assessing the RLMM Results

As indicated earlier, assessing the RLMM for placement and comparison depends on what percentage of known or unknown words the teacher wants to set. In order to find the percentage of words, teachers should count the words on each page. For some teachers, an approximate count may be adequate. So, for example, if a page has approximately 200 words and the teacher would like to set the percentage of known words at 98%, then there would be approximately 4-5 unknown words underlined by the student on this page. Since the RLMM is designed to have three pages at each reading level, a simple average of the

three pages is all that is necessary to identify difficulty level. However, it is important to note that in this specific example, if a student had identified 5 unknown words on two of the pages at level 4 and 7-10 unknown words on the third page at the same level, this would indicate that the student be placed at level 3. It is far better to allow the student to read at a slightly lower reading level than a higher reading level because the goal is to keep the reader as close to the designated percentage of unknown words without going over. For example, if the goal is 98% of known words and a learner is placed at a reading level of 95% of known words, the text may be too difficult for the reader to read without being able to infer the meaning of unknown words. Therefore, the learner would most likely need to stop reading to use a dictionary, which defeats the purpose and benefits of ER.

Placement can also be somewhat fluid. After the initial placement, the students should be informed that they should let the teacher know if the reading books they select are too easy or too difficult. This can also be determined by the percentage of unknown words on randomly selected pages from the texts that the students are reading. However, it should be noted that not all of the books within the same reading level will be equally challenging for the individual student. One reason for this may be due to the familiarity of the topic or the familiarity with specific vocabulary, but also because while there is standardization within every graded reader book level, each book involves different vocabulary. Therefore, if a selected book at any level is found to be too difficult for the student, they should also be told that they can stop reading

this book and select another book within the same level. If the second book is also too difficult for the student, or there are too many unknown words present, then the teacher can place the student at one level lower in the graded reader series and make a note of the change. However, this should be done as soon as possible to maximize learning and minimize student frustration.

For an overall assessment using the two RLMMs, all that is necessary is to do a comparison of the starting level with the ending level. Having a midterm RLMM is suggested since notifying the learners of any improvement may act as a motivating factor increasing their reading outside of class

Discussion

While the RLMM does not measure any specific vocabulary gains, it does measure improvement or gains in reading levels. Therefore, a reasonable assumption would be that with an increase in one's reading level comes an increase in one's sight vocabulary and/or one's acquisition of head words, and thus, an improvement of literacy. Further, with an increase in one's reading level, one's reading fluency should also be improved (Mermelstein, 2015).

While many of the benefits and advantages of using the RLMM have been discussed in the previous section, there may still be some teachers who may still ask why a classroom teacher would use the RLMM instead of using one of the tests provided by the publishers of graded reading books, for which there are several key reasons. First, publishers' placement tests are meant to interact only with the specific books that they are trying to sell. They

are not compatible with any other graded reader series. However, the RLMM is fully compatible by design to work with any graded reader series. In addition, many of the publishers' tests are only available for a fee or by purchasing one of their programs. This can actually be quite expensive and not in the budget of most classroom teachers. In comparison, the RLMM is practically free. In addition, most of the publishers' reading comprehension tests are merely vocabulary tests (e.g. Oxford, Penguin, and MacMillan), in which the words may be completely random and taken out of context for the learner. Often they are multiple choice tests and/or use pictures for the test takers to guess their answers. Since the test taker can guess answers, the results of these tests are likely to be invalid and inaccurate, and since the publishers do not provide any statistical data regarding their tests, one can only conclude their tests have not been statistically measured for validity or reliability and there have not been any correlation studies done regarding test scores and placement.

Another point to consider when comparing publishers' tests with the RLMM is time. Each time a teacher or student wants to use one of the publishers' tests, it takes a considerable amount of time to navigate through the publishers' website, and there is also no way of storing information without printing it out or copying it to an e-file. Therefore, collecting and storing students' data can take a considerable amount of time and effort. In addition, having students take an online test is also dependent on many outside factors: the number of computers available,

access to the internet, and the speed or quality of the internet service.

Conclusions

Considering the limitations of the classroom and the time available for teachers to directly interact with each student, ER may be able to help second language learners become more autonomous learners and improve their language skills in a multitude of ways, especially in ESL/EFL environments in which exposure to the target language may be limited. However, assessing learners' reading levels and reading level placement poses very real problems for language teachers towards instructional planning and accountability. Misplacement generally means missed learning opportunities, which can have a catastrophic impact on learner motivation. This can lead the learner to a negative view of themselves and the language they are learning. It can also lead to misbehavior in the classroom.

Stakeholders in the educational system want to accurately measure learners and see improved results in reading. The RLMM offers a simple and real solution to a real problem since it can be designed and implemented in approximately two hours. Also, the flexibility of the RLMM allows it to be used and reused over and over again, either via a hard copy or an electronic version. It can be adapted to any graded reader book series and include any reading level. In addition, for administrators and researchers, it can also offer significant statistical data that is both valid and reliable.

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Increasing Confidence and English Use Outside the ESL/IEP Classroom for Lower-Level Learners

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Abstract

Previous research has shown that ESL students' poor integration into their immersion environments can affect their academic success negatively, which called for structured support for such students. The current study investigated the efficacy of an IEP elective course that was designed to a) promote lower-level students' English use outside the classroom and b) improve students' overall confidence toward the target transactional tasks, as well as more open-ended interactions with native speakers in the local community. The specific scaffolding activities mainly involved presentation of new language points, pronunciation practice, role-plays, simulations with in-class tutors, field trips to perform the practiced tasks with native speakers, and reflective activities. The results from diagnostic and exit course surveys showed increases in students' confidence levels and increases in the overall quantity of English use outside the classroom. Considering the results, approaches to promoting ESL students' integration into local communities are discussed.

Keywords: *IEP, ESL, Confidence, Integrate, Community, Study abroad, Scaffolding, Tutor*

Introduction

Study abroad experiences provide adult, English as a second language (ESL) learners with the potential to attain high levels of language fluency. However, poor integration into the target culture may thwart the success of many learners, especially lower-level learners who may lack the proficiency to take advantage of their immersion environment. Connecting ESL course content with the community outside the classroom may be an effective solution to increase overall language proficiency as well as future academic success abroad. Furthermore, to perpetuate language use and improve quality of life

in the target culture, it is important to boost students' confidence to use English with native speakers.

From my experience teaching ESL, I have found that many study abroad students have fallen into the habit of using their first language while spending time with compatriots. Clearly, this is not a great way to take advantage of an immersion environment. I know from my own experiences studying abroad, however, that making friends in a new country and in a new language is not easy. As an instructor, I wanted to do something to help my students, particularly the lower-level ones, to gain confidence to use English in the

community beyond the classroom. It motivated me to create the course described below.

Through data collected from diagnostic and exit surveys, the current study investigates the efficacy of the intensive English program (IEP) elective course curriculum that was designed to help ESL students build confidence for using English outside the classroom. The results suggest that, by taking extra steps to scaffold the performance of authentic speaking tasks to be performed outside the classroom, lower-level adult IEP students will become more confident and more frequent users of English outside of their English classes.

Literature

A look at studies that focus on study abroad students reveals basic issues and some solutions that may potentially help ESL instructors improve their students' short- and long-term academic success.

Poor integration negatively affects academic success

Many studies have investigated the notion that connecting with the local community is crucial for successful second language learning study abroad experiences. In particular, not making friends with domestic native speakers has been found to contribute negatively toward second language acquisition and overall academic success (Gareis, Merkin, & Goldman, 2011; Ward & Masgoret, 2004). Unfortunately, as Gareis et al. (2011) found, ESL students around the world admitted having difficulties making friends with native speakers. A more recent study by Gareis (2012) found that nearly 40% of international students (and an even higher percentage for East-Asians) at

American universities had no American friends while many of those who had American friends were dissatisfied with those relationships.

Lower proficiency level ESL learners, in particular, seem to be at a great disadvantage in the study abroad environment. For example, in a qualitative study of a short-term ESL study abroad program for Japanese students in New Zealand, Tanaka (2007) found that low-level learners had very little contact with native speakers outside of their language classrooms and homestay environments. He also discovered that low-level learners had a tendency to spend more time with others from their home country, resulting in poor integration and less-than-expected improvement of English proficiency. He claimed that learners with higher language proficiency, on the other hand, were more likely to be able to take advantage of the immersion environment. Some researchers (e.g. Freed 1998; Wang 2010) have contradicted those claims, suggesting that low-level learners might actually benefit more from study abroad experiences than more advanced learners. However, Freed (1998) also found that study abroad experiences do not necessarily guarantee successful language learning for any level of learner. Infrequent contact with native speakers was among the main causes of this variability.

The need to bridge the gap between course content and the real world

Many researchers agree that classwork alone is insufficient for successful second language learning (e.g., Chisman & Crandall, 2007; Chisman, 2008; Dudley, 2007; Rossiter, Derwing, Manimtim, & Thomson, 2010;

Taylor, 1983). Chisman and Crandall (2007), for example, argue for the need for ESL instructors and institutions to help students take control of their own learning by bridging the gap between the classroom and English use in the real world. According to the researchers, there is only so much that can be accomplished in the ESL classroom. They say that one of the most important achievements of successful language instructors is the ability to foster autonomous learning by empowering students to use English outside the classroom in meaningful ways. Similarly, Buckingham (2009) argues for using the classroom as a stepping stone to facilitate out-of-class experiences in a comfortable atmosphere to practice the target language, and build students' confidence and motivation.

Activities for facilitating language use beyond the classroom

Many researchers and instructors have suggested teaching approaches, activities, and even curricular designs to promote students' target language use outside the classroom. Rossiter et al. (2010) suggest that ESL teachers need to include more structured instruction of pronunciation, formulaic expressions and circumlocution strategies to promote oral fluency and language use outside the classroom. They also claim that repetitive activities such as having students conduct surveys in and outside the classroom can boost learners' fluency and confidence in speaking. Murphy (1990) argues that various receptive and productive pronunciation activities, both controlled pronunciation drills and practice in freer situations, should be integrated into instruction to foster oral and communicative fluency. For lower-level learners, pair or small

group pronunciation exercises may be more comfortable.

Another well-documented activity for improving real-world communication is simulation. Sam (1990) claims that simulation activities are useful in that they mimic real-life situations, and promote fluency, communicative competencies, motivation, and active participation in class. Gaines (2014) goes a step further by suggesting that simulations utilizing teaching assistants in the classroom can be even more effective for preparing students to carry out specific speaking tasks outside. He describes an activity in which students practice approaching tutors (teaching assistants or volunteers) as if they were strangers and attempting to engage them in appropriate ways to perform the given speech tasks. Tutors are instructed to adopt various roles and respond to the students as native speakers are likely to respond in real life (e.g. being helpful, not being sympathetic listeners, or even ignoring them altogether). In this activity, students can attempt the same task multiple times in semi-authentic situations and get valuable feedback from the tutors. Also, as the author explains, "exposure to rejection and communication breakdowns in the classroom prepares students for those negative experiences that would otherwise be counterproductive by lowering students' confidence and motivation to use English outside" (p. 48).

Chisman and Crandall (2007) also described activities that were developed for low-level learners to improve their English use outside the classroom and enhance language-learning success in a community college immersion program. The program connected out-of-class homework with in-class activities and

course content. In the out-of-class activities, members of the college and surrounding community helped students engage in tasks such as checking out books from the library, consulting with the school's guidance counselor, and shopping with coupons. Finally, students were asked to take notes about their interactions, keep track of new vocabulary, and write reflections about their experiences afterwards. Though the authors didn't provide any data to quantify the program's success, they said that instructors and administrators were so impressed by the results that they were seeking funding to expand the program.

Finally, as Myers (1990) asserts, reflective activities such as keeping a language journal or sharing experiences with others help learners become more autonomous. Having learners reflect about what they did or did not do well for a given activity, for example, will help them realize their own strengths and weaknesses, which can motivate them to take on challenges without the oversight of an instructor.

Research Questions

As shown in the review of literature above, study abroad students' poor integration into their local communities could affect their academic success negatively. For this reason, structured support to help ESL students take advantage of their immersion environment seems to be important. Drawing from the ideas and activities described above, an elective course was created in a university IEP to help facilitate low-level learners' English use outside the classroom. This study is designed to examine the effectiveness of some of the specific components of the

course to determine: (1) if the course improved students' confidence to use English outside the classroom, and (2) if the course increased the actual amount of English that the students used outside the classroom. To investigate these questions, a diagnostic survey was administered to participants at the beginning of the course, and the results were compared to an exit survey administered at the end of the course. Also, student participants and the tutors who participated in some class activities each week were asked to comment.

Participants

Though at least 15 students were involved with the course throughout the academic term, there were nine participants who attended the class regularly and participated in all parts of the study (n=9). They took the course voluntarily in addition to their 18 hours of weekly, required core courses in the IEP. Five participants were Saudi Arabian and four were Japanese. Of the nine participants, five were male and four were female. All of the Saudi Arabian participants had been studying in the U.S. for at least two months, with an average stay of at least six months. On the other hand, all of the Japanese participants had arrived in the U.S. only a few weeks prior to the start of the course. Though they are called "lower-level," actual proficiency levels varied widely from high-beginner to intermediate levels of oral and writing skills.

Course Description

The course was an elective course within a university IEP program. The main objective of this course was to raise students' confidence and

motivation to use English outside the classroom. By helping students engage more with the community, the hope was that they would become more likely to make American friends, get more satisfaction and enjoyment from their student lives in the U.S., and be more successful in their future ESL (and beyond) academic endeavors.

The course content mainly involved preparing students to practice and perform simple speech tasks such as ordering coffee and asking for street directions. The format was arranged using a task-based approach to introduce, practice, perform, and reflect on the various tasks. The topics covered during the course were: greetings and introductions, asking for directions, gathering information from university offices, using circumlocution techniques to ask for help in a store, ordering at a coffee shop, and conducting a survey.

The duration of the course was eight weeks, meeting four days a week for 50 minutes each day. One target speech task or topic was addressed each week, culminating in weekly field trips to perform those speech tasks outside in mostly authentic situations.

In the first lesson for each new topic, relevant new language and expressions were introduced and practiced through video, written dialogues, pair and group discussions, role-plays, pronunciation practice, and other speaking and listening activities.

In the second lesson, four native-speaking tutors visited the class. These were university student workers who had been trained to assist in oral communication skills courses in the IEP. Each tutor led discussions and practice activities with groups of two or three participants about the current topic each

week. Then, participants engaged in simulated interactions with the tutors (as described by Gaines (2014) above) to prepare for doing the task in authentic situations outside the classroom.

In the third lesson, participants went outside on campus to perform the target speech task. The instructor followed along to assist them whenever necessary, but mostly just observed from a distance. The instructor reserved the last 15 minutes of class for leading discussions about what happened, addressing concerns and problems, and pointing out how the experience could apply to other situations, participants' lives and language learning in general.

In the final lesson for each topic, the class met in a computer lab. Participants were asked to write blog posts to share their experiences with each other about using English in and out of the class, and to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses. They were also asked to read and comment on their classmates' blog posts. I assisted them with technical issues and grammar, spelling and word choices.

One other ongoing component in the course was the introduction and promotion of the plethora of opportunities available to students on and off campus to get involved in the community. These included events, organized activities, intramural sports, volunteer opportunities, and student groups. The addition of the tutors was particularly useful in suggesting and explaining these. Though it was not a course requirement, many of the participants took part in various events voluntarily.

Data Collection

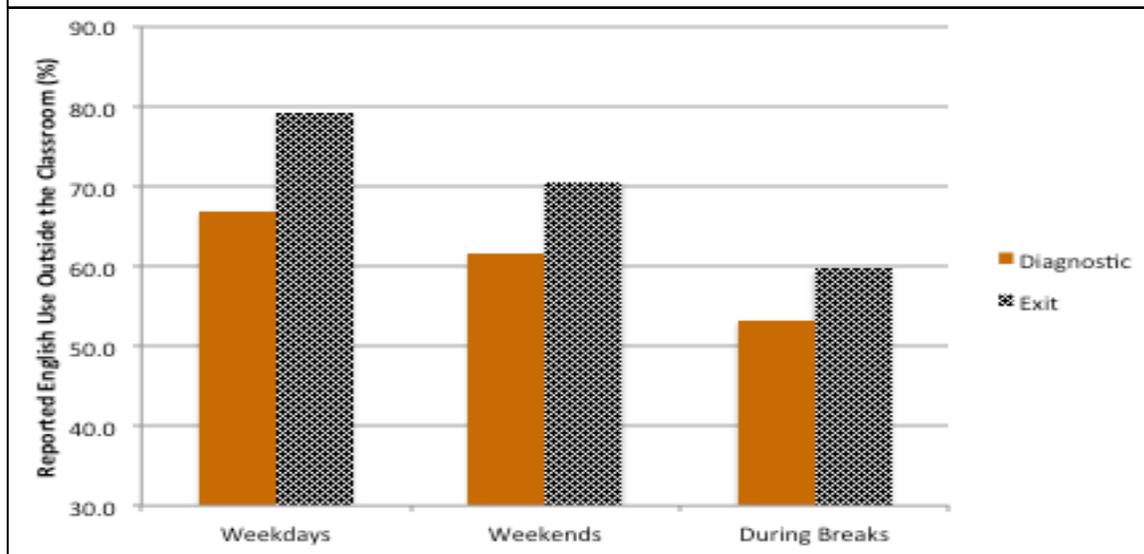
The data collection instruments were: (1) an online diagnostic survey consisting of 10 multiple-choice questions, administered in the first week of the course, (2) a similar online exit survey, administered seven weeks later at the end of the course, and (3) brief interviews with tutors at the end of the course. The surveys were completed in a

Results

Findings from the Surveys

In Item 1 in both the diagnostic and exit surveys, participants were asked what percentage of English (rather than their first language) they used outside of class on a scale of 0 to 100% a) on weekdays, b) on weekends, and c) during breaks between academic terms. Figure 1 below illustrates the results,

Figure 1: *Reported English Use Outside the Classroom (n=9)*



computer lab during normal class time with the instructor available to make sure participants understood the prompts. The questions were mostly multiple choice, but some allowed for more qualitative responses. Though the diagnostic survey asked some extra background questions, many of the questions were the same as or similar to those in the exit survey. This allowed for a comparison between the responses to see whether or not there had been any improvement in participants' perception about their own English use, confidence, and ability.

which highlight the differences in percentages between the two surveys. The average reported English usage outside of class for all participants on weekdays increased from 66.9% in the diagnostic to 79.3% in the exit survey, which is an improvement of over 12%. Similarly, English use outside of class increased for “weekends” and “during breaks” by 9% and 6.5%¹ respectively.

¹ The last figure was quite interesting in that participants reported an increase in use (or projected use) of English during breaks between academic terms, despite the fact that there had not been a break since the diagnostic survey had been administered. As with other items, it is difficult to argue that these numbers accurately reflect students' actual English use. However, perhaps they indicate an increase in motivation or resolve.

For Item 2, participants were asked slightly different questions in the diagnostic and exit surveys to draw conclusions about their overall English use. Results, as shown in Table 1 below, showed clear increases in reported English use with all nine participants reporting more English use in the exit survey.

Item 3 also posed slightly different questions in the diagnostic and exit surveys to ask about learning speed. Results, as shown in Table 2 below, showed that participants perceived an increase in how fast they were learning English. Of the nine participants, six reported learning faster than they had been before taking the course.

Item 4 was the same in the diagnostic and exit surveys. It asked participants to rank their levels of confidence (from 0 to 100%) using English with native speakers outside the classroom in nine different situations. The results showed increases in confidence for all situations, including some that were not specifically addressed in the course (c, d, h, and i below)². Results were calculated by comparing responses from the diagnostic and exit surveys. In Table 3 below, it can be seen that the averages of the reported changes in confidence for all nine situations were all positive. They are as follows:

By looking more closely at individual responses, it seems that length

of stay (time the participants had lived in the U.S. at the beginning of the course) was an important factor. The six participants who had stayed in the U.S. 0-6 months prior to the start of this course reported the biggest increase in confidence (average for all situations was +32%). On the other hand, the three participants who had stayed 6-8 months, 8-10 months, and 10+ months reported changes of +13%, +4%, and -27% respectively. By contrasting the latter three participants with those who had stayed 0-6 months, it was found that having stayed six months or less predicted greater increases in confidence, while confidence declined for participants who had stayed six months or more.

In Item 5, participants were asked to rate the effectiveness of the following course activities: a) simulations with tutors, b) role-plays with classmates, c) field trips to use English outside, d) group discussions, and e) practicing pronunciation (by choosing “It helped a lot,” “It helped a little,” “I don’t know,” or “It didn’t help”). The highest rated activities were tutor simulations and pronunciation practice. Eight of the nine participants reported that both activities “helped a lot,” and one reported that they “helped a little.”

Comments from Participants

Participants were also asked two open-ended questions in Item 6 in the exit survey. They were asked, “What did you like about this class?” and “What activities helped you improve your English?” Most respondents reported positively about doing activities outside, tutor activities, and pronunciation practice, such as in the following responses:

² The average change in confidence for situations (tasks) that were practiced and performed in class was +21.7%, while the average change for the situations that were not addressed was +18.6%. Since the two numbers are similar, it did not seem to matter whether or not the tasks were addressed in the course. Rather, there is the possibility that improving at specific tasks positively influenced students’ level of confidence for using English with native speakers in general

	More	Same	Less
Diagnostic Survey - "Are you using English more, the same or less than you had imagined before coming to the US."	3	2	4
Exit Survey – "Are you using English more, the same or less than before you took this course."	9	0	0

	Faster	Same	Slower
Diagnostic Survey - "Are you learning English faster, the same, or slower than you had imagined before coming to the US."	2	2	5
Exit Survey – "Are you learning English faster, the same, or slower than before you took this course."	6	2	1

a) Asking for directions = +23.8%	f) Meeting new people = +18.4%
b) Ordering food = +19.8%	g) Asking for help at a store = +30.2%
c) Talking to an American at a party = +25.2%	h) Talking to your English teacher in their office = +7.6%
d) Asking a police officer for help = +28.3%	i) Talking on the phone = +13.3%
e) Asking for information at an office = +16.3%	

"I like learning how we can use English outside, and I like the activities with tutors, and I like learning about pronunciation."

"It [the course] helped me many things. I could learn how do I ask for [talk to] stranger. It is so helpful for me."

"I think that it's helpful for me to take this class because I could use English in coffee shop, [the student union] etc. In addition I could practice talking with tutors."

"The tutor activity helped the people in the class. I like that activity. It was good for talking, for asking something, for hearing, and for asking for the word"

Also, the participant who had stayed in the U.S. the longest commented that

the tutor simulations were probably more useful for participants who had just arrived. For that participant, using English outside was the most useful part of the course.

Comments from tutors

Since tutors were able to work with the participants in small groups on a weekly basis, they provided valuable perspectives about the feelings of the participants and the efficacy of the course components, particularly the tutor simulations that they participated in. Noteworthy comments from three of the tutors are as follows:

"I believe most of the real-life simulation activities were useful for students. Having classroom

conversation partners (tutors) pretend to be different desk workers/store owners with various personality traits is a great practice for students in the real world.”

“I found the ‘tutor simulation activities’ useful for the international students, especially the [new] incoming students.”

“I think the simulations were very interesting, fun, and useful for students! I loved that you had tutors act-out different roles, allowing the IEP students to have an opportunity to practice with various kinds of responses. I also think that going out and using what they learned was very beneficial... ...I would have appreciated something like this when I was studying abroad.”

“This (tutor simulations) is a great activity! I think it is incredibly useful, and fun as well for both tutors and students.”

Discussion

This term-long study examined the effectiveness of an IEP elective course which was designed to promote lower-level students’ confidence and English use outside the classroom. The survey data were collected from the beginning and end-of-course surveys, and from interviews with in-class tutors. In the results, participants reported using English more frequently outside the classroom and learning English faster than before taking the course. They also reported increases in confidence levels using English outside the classroom.

Finally, they reported positively about the weekly field trips, activities with the in-class tutors, and pronunciation practice.

From my observations and a closer examination of the data, I have made a few other useful findings. First, it was apparent that the pre-task scaffolding benefitted the participants. In particular, I found that tutor simulations provided multiple chances to engage in somewhat

[T]utor simulations provided multiple chances to engage in somewhat realistic exchanges, ensured participation, pressured participants to learn the new language (and pronunciation), and provided them with immediate feedback.

realistic exchanges, ensured participation, pressured participants to learn the new language (and pronunciation), and provided them with immediate feedback. Also, I observed that many participants’ communicative failures using English

in and out of the classroom could be partly attributed to poor pronunciation. Pronunciation practice and tutor simulations seemed to help them improve and build confidence.

Second, though I found that blogging (as a reflection activity) helped to create a sense of community in the classroom, participants’ feelings about it were mixed. While the use of blogging needs to be further developed in the course, I saw its potential to improve learner autonomy, awareness, and motivation.

Third, the shyest and lowest proficiency level participants (generally high-beginner to low-intermediate) in my course seemed to benefit the most, though course content generally seemed to help all of them. Also, as was corroborated in the findings from Items 4 and 6, this course content might be most appropriate for those who have

come to the U.S. within the past six months. I suspect that some of the speech tasks addressed in the course were too common or easy for participants who had been studying in the U.S. longer than six months.

Finally, though the surveys might not be a reliable measure, perhaps the participants' perceived improvements and increases in English use demonstrate their motivation to embrace challenges and to not be overwhelmed by language limitations or increasingly difficult coursework. According to Gardner (2007), higher motivation would likely result in improved academic effort and achievement.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite my best efforts to elicit honest responses, the self-reported nature of the survey and the low number of participants are obvious limitations. For future purposes, better methods for measuring changes in confidence, motivation and frequency of English use outside should be considered. One possible way is to ask students to keep a journal to log all of their English use outside the classroom (perhaps even as a listening task too) for a day or two at a time, once at the beginning and once at the end of the term. For instructional purposes, this could also be exploited for student reflection and awareness activities.

Also, for IEP instructors who are considering creating elective courses, I suggest providing more fun and less homework, grades, and tests. More than 16 hours of coursework per week in an IEP program might not positively affect academic achievement and could even potentially be counterproductive

(Alibrandi, 2014). For this reason, I argue for an entertaining course curriculum that does not add to students' already significant workload.

Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

In conclusion, study abroad ESL students need to find ways to access and integrate into the communities outside their classrooms. They can benefit from in-class scaffolding and activities designed to facilitate English use outside in their communities. To boost lower-level oral skills students' quantity and confidence of English use outside, the following may be helpful:

1. Facilitating speech tasks outside the classroom that are practical, familiar, and relatively easy (but not too easy) for the target students will help them become confident performing those tasks, which may increase their overall confidence toward using English in and out of the classroom.

2. Pre-task: Providing extensive scaffolding in the classroom to prepare for the speech tasks is important. A) Periodically employing tutors (teaching assistants or volunteers) to engage students in various activities may be an effective use of time in oral skills classes. In particular, simulations of practical speaking tasks with tutors can give students multiple attempts at target speech tasks, more individualized feedback, and exposure to language and variables that are not always covered in textbooks. B) Also, more extensive pronunciation practice will help students become more intelligible and more successful speakers and listeners in and out of the classroom.

3. Post-task: Drawing students' attention to their successes, however small, can help to boost their confidence. Also, student reflection about strengths and weaknesses may be useful for facilitating learner autonomy.

4. Finding other ways to help students connect with the outside world

will likely perpetuate language learning and reinforce what they are learning in their other ESL courses. After all, the opportunity to use English frequently outside the classroom is one of the main reasons to study English abroad.

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Using Speech-Language Pathology Techniques to Enhance Pronunciation Instruction

Susan Ginley, Shannon Guinn-Collins and Jenny Stenseth, Portland State University

At first glance, Speech-Language Pathology (SLP) and ESL differ in their approaches to pronunciation. However, both disciplines share a goal: to enable students to communicate with confidence and clarity. Since 2011, the Intensive English Language Program (IELP) at Portland State University has collaborated with the SLP department to create a pronunciation course offering IELP students focused work on individual pronunciation challenges. Students in this inter-departmental course have reported gains in self-confidence while instructors have observed increased intelligibility.

The course is co-taught by an IELP instructor, who focuses largely on suprasegmentals, and SLP graduate students, who meet individually or in pairs with IELP students to focus on individual pronunciation difficulties. This article outlines the most helpful techniques SLP offers ESL teachers.

Speech-Language Pathology Perspective and Techniques

Pronunciation is a unique aspect of language learning in that it invokes a motor act overlaid with linguistic knowledge. Both teachers and students can benefit from the specialized knowledge of motor learning and its

application to pronunciation that Speech-Language Pathologists can offer.

The following techniques and concepts are ideally applied in a small group or one-on-one setting but can be useful in a larger classroom setting.

- **Do not be afraid to drill:** *Motor learning* involves practice. Multiple productions of target sounds are necessary. While “drilling” in this way is often avoided in ESL classes, SLP practices demonstrate that it is helpful for establishing motor control.
- **“Shape” your students’ speech:** Facilitating motor learning involves *shaping*. Shaping is the procedure of breaking down target behaviors into small components and teaching them in an ascending sequence. Each step moves the behaviors in successive approximations toward the target. Each successful approximation is reinforced to assist in changing the overall behavior. Example: Teaching “th” involves bringing the tongue tip between the teeth in an exaggerated movement, then pulling back slightly without losing the phoneme.
- **Make comments, ask questions:** Another key element in motor learning is *feedback*, both external

and internal. External feedback comes from sources outside of the speaker and refers to intelligibility to both native and non-native listeners. It might include requests for repetition that inform the speaker they have not been understood. Internal feedback relies on sensory input: auditory, tactile, and proprioception, which is the knowledge of where one's body is in space. To help students develop internal feedback, ask questions like, "Are you able to sense where your ___ (tongue, lips, jaw) is?" or "What did you feel when you produced the sound?"

How to Get Started

1. Determine baseline production of English phonemes using IPA (i.e.,

what sound is the student producing now?)

2. Determine the difference between the attempted target and the actual target (i.e., what sound does the student want to produce?)
3. Instruct simple changes in articulators (tongue, lips, jaw, etc.) to *shape* the current behavior toward the target behavior.
4. Ensure multiple productions at each step to promote *motor learning*.
5. Provide *feedback* at each step.

Through this partnership, IELP students have benefitted from focused, intense practice in gaining a new way of speaking, and through these techniques, students and teachers in other contexts may also benefit.

Additional resources can be found at this website:

<https://sites.google.com/a/pdx.edu/pronunciation-and-slp-resources/>

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Developing Self-Evaluation Skills Through Giving Peer Writing Feedback

Misaki Kato, University of Oregon

Normally, instructors hope that through peer review (PR) students are able to help each other to make their subsequent drafts better than their first drafts. However, the reality is that students frequently do not seem to trust their peers' feedback. Research suggests that they value their teacher's comments much more than their peers' (Nelson & Murphy, 1993) despite the fact that constraints on time and resources make it difficult for instructors to give every student extensive feedback on multiple drafts. Then, the question that remains is: How can students understand the benefits of PR?

Through personal experience, as well as reading previous studies (e.g. Berg, 1999; Lundstorm & Baker, 2009), I realized that the key is to shift the focus from encouraging students to revise their drafts based on their peers' feedback to taking advantage of the reviewing process itself. In other words, an important objective of PR is to improve students' self-evaluation skills through training them to read a peer's paper critically and making suggestions about how he or she can improve it. Ultimately, the goal is that eventually they will become able to critically review and revise their own papers. With this approach, the ability of students to

give each other equally useful feedback becomes less of an issue, and therefore, pairing students in an appropriate way may become less of a concern as well. Below, I suggest simplified steps for effectively implementing PR based on my experiences in English for Academic Purposes writing classes.

(1) Discuss benefits of and concerns about PR: Students should be

Ultimately, the goal is that eventually [students] will become able to critically review and revise their own papers.

encouraged to explicitly acknowledge any potential benefits of PR so that they understand the

purpose behind the activity. Before students discuss open-ended questions, however, they should answer simple multiple-choice questions and discuss them in pairs. This preliminary activity might facilitate the discussion. I usually provide several choices based on how I imagine students might feel about PR. By allowing them to choose more than one answer, the discussion can prompt students to confront several issues in a short time. Here is an example:

What do you like/not like about peer review and why? You can choose more than one answer. Explain your reasons to your partner.

(a) Looking for others' grammar mistakes helps me look for mine too.

- (b) *I can learn from how other people organize their writing.*
- (c) *I have a hard time understanding what the paper wants to say.*
- (d) *I'm not sure if my comments would be helpful.*
- (e) *Others?*

After the discussion, I introduce the idea that there are benefits for giving rather than receiving feedback. I explain that if students have experiences reading peers' writing critically, they should be able to do the same for their own writing (Lundstorm & Baker, 2009).

(2) Practice giving feedback: Students should review the same writing sample together and help each other come up with comments. I recommend providing a worksheet (I call it a *peer feedback sheet*) containing a list of aspects of the writing that you want students to focus on (e.g. transition features, passive voice, idea development, source-supported evidence, etc.). Students should focus on just a few basic features when doing PR for the first time in order to keep the task manageable.

(3) Do peer review: Students (a) exchange drafts with a partner; (b) read the essay and write comments on the peer feedback sheet for homework; (c) exchange comments orally in class. Step (b) is done more effectively at home rather than in class because of time limitations. Furthermore, I suggest this homework be integrated into the grading system to help students take the process more seriously. It is important for students to be provided with time for

step (c) in class so that they can explain their written comments and ask and answer questions about their partner's writing.

(4) Evaluate own papers: Students evaluate the same features in their own writing that they evaluated in their peers' drafts. This step can also be done at home. This process should help students apply what they did for their peer's writing to their own writing. To help students acknowledge the benefits of this process, I ask them to highlight all changes that they have made. Another option is to have them highlight changes in different colors depending on whether the change was based on their self-evaluation or on their peer's feedback.

I encourage [students] to explicitly recognize that they are the ones who make the ultimate decisions about how they can make their writing better.

The focus of this activity is not so much about how to incorporate peer's feedback, but rather to have

students analyze their own paper critically. However, sometimes students may want to use the suggestions made by their peers, but do not know if the change would be appropriate. In such cases, to promote students' sense of ownership toward their writing (Tsui & Ng, 2000), I encourage them to explicitly recognize that they are the ones who make the ultimate decisions about how they can make their writing better. Instructors may want to discuss with students individually about what impact the potential change might have on their writing to help them make decisions.

It would be more effective if steps (2), (3), (4) are repeated throughout the term. Training students to be critical reviewers

has long-term benefits such as making them become more autonomous and independent writers who take their

readers into consideration (Tsui & Ng, 2000) and take responsibility for their own writing.

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Book Review

A Review of *Pronunciation Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching*

Reviewed by Teresa Cunningham Byrnes, Portland English Language Academy

An increase in the emphasis on helping students with pronunciation has left many educators feeling uncomfortable as they address this important aspect of English. Most current ESOL teachers did not study the teaching of pronunciation as part of their professional preparation (Baker, 2011, p. 279). Linda Grant's new book, *Pronunciation Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching*, meets this need.

After providing a framework for the book and a succinct summary of the elements of pronunciation, Grant turns each of the most common myths over to a current expert on the subject. Educators may recognize some of their current beliefs in the list below.

- Fossilized speech cannot be improved.
- Beginners do not need to pay attention to pronunciation.
- Pronunciation teaching should focus on helping students recognize distinct sounds.
- Intonation is hard to teach.
- Students would make more progress if they practiced more.

The experts thoroughly dissect and debunk these myths and others. Even

more importantly, the discussions include effective techniques that teachers can easily use to implement new understandings about the teaching of pronunciation.

Throughout the book, the approach to each myth is consistent and easy to follow. First, the author describes an authentic "Real World" situation in which the effects of a myth are demonstrated. Next, a concise survey of "What the Research Says" brings the reader up to date on the validity of the myth. "What We Can Do" offers a variety of usable techniques for bringing the current research into the classroom. Lastly, a myth-specific reference list points the reader to additional resources and the underlying studies.

A good example of the book's approach is Myth #4, in which Judy Gilbert challenges the myth that intonation is hard to teach. She leads off with real-life examples of errors in English intonation and their consequences: a speaker emphasizes the wrong word in a sentence and causes an unintended insult; a speaker fails to signal the end of a list with a falling tone and leaves the listeners waiting for the rest of the message.

Gilbert's review of the research establishes that instruction in intonation produces the greatest improvement in speaker intelligibility. She also tackles the reluctance of teachers to address intonation. Gilbert ascribes this phenomenon to outdated and ineffective theories of intonation instruction that advocate the use of grammar rules, pitch level rules, and subjective rules about speaker attitudes. She tried them all and could not make them work for her students. Fortunately, she did not give up but went on to develop a very usable system of teaching intonation.

The primary elements of Gilbert's system include helping students understand the role of intonation in English, guiding their use of intonation

through self-correction of dialogs, and exploring their use of intonation to improve listening comprehension. Several specific techniques, such as template sentences, the stress pyramid, and kinesthetic reinforcements round out a teaching tool kit for intonation.

In a similar fashion, *Pronunciation Myths* overturns each of seven myths and offers alternative theories and practices. Educators who cannot find time to take a graduate course on teaching pronunciation or to spend hours catching up on the research should read Linda Grant's latest book. It offers a fresh understanding of pronunciation teaching and, more importantly, the techniques to implement these newly adopted beliefs.

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- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
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The *Journal* particularly welcomes submissions which draw on relevant research with a focus on direct application in the classroom (methods, materials, techniques and activities) at all levels of instruction. *Journal* articles should be written in a style that is reader-friendly and therefore accessible to classroom teachers, while following the conventions of academic style. While maintaining a practical focus, the articles should, nevertheless, be well-founded in research and include references to the appropriate literature. All manuscripts receive a blind review.

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