



OR
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Journal

Volume 33, 2016

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Digital literacy's role in ELL's health care
Addressing sexual diversity in the ESOL classroom
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Oregon Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

The ORTESOL Journal

Volume 33, 2016

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Feature Article

Rose City Reading: Towards an Open Educational Resource with a Place-Based Curriculum

Fidelia Twenge-Jinings and Joanna Sullivan, Portland Community College Rock Creek

Abstract

Realizing that ESOL students often do not integrate naturally into their new communities, we developed a reading class that focuses only on topics such as history, culture, arts, nature and entertainment that pertain to Portland or Oregon. In addition to readings, we asked that students go out and “live” what they learned through a series of field trips. The results have been gratifying: students have enjoyed the class immensely, begun to explore their new home more actively, and developed a sense of identity and belonging. Our long-term goal is to develop this curriculum into a permanent open resource for all local students and teachers to use free of charge.

Key Words: *reading, place-based education, OER, community, culture shock*

Introduction

In the Portland Community College (PCC) English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program, we offer eight levels of English. Our students are immigrants, refugees and international students from dozens of different language and culture backgrounds. By and large, our student community is thrilled to be studying in Portland, Oregon and very motivated in their study of English. However, the experience of homesickness and culture shock is endemic to living abroad. Language and culture barriers prevent students from seamlessly integrating into the local community; furthermore, the symptoms of homesickness and culture shock can lead students to be reclusive and insular

within the smaller communities of their language and culture groups, thereby limiting the opportunities to learn about local community and engage in it. More contact with the local community means more opportunities to use English in a meaningful way, so when students keep to themselves, they are not taking full advantage of the most valuable part of the ESL context – taking their English out of the classroom into the community. This leads to the question, how can we as ESOL instructors be a bridge between our classrooms and the local community so that our students can benefit more from greater opportunities to use and practice English as well as feel integrated in the community of Portland?

Place-Based Education

Curricula developed around students' local environmental, historic and socio-cultural context are the core of an educational movement called *place-based education*, coined and developed in the 1990s by the Orion Society, a non-profit organization whose mission is to, "...inform, inspire, and engage individuals and grassroots organizations in becoming a significant cultural force for healing nature and community" ("Orion," 2015). Place-based education is defined in the book *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms & Communities* as:

Place-based education might be characterized as the pedagogy of community, the reintegration of the individual into her homeland and the restoration of the essential links between a person and her place...Place-based education challenges the meaning of education by asking seemingly simple questions: Where am I? What is the nature of this place? What sustains this community? It often employs a process of re-storying, whereby students are asked to respond creatively to stories of their homeland so that, in time, they are able to position themselves, imaginatively and actually, within the continuum of nature and culture in that place. They become part of the community, rather than a passive observer of it. (p. ii-iii)

Place-based education models and curricula have been developed across the U.S., primarily in K-12 education.

Students' subjects are integrated into hands-on projects that seek to serve the local community while providing a holistic, contextualized education for students. Educators and researchers have found that through these programs, test scores have gone up; there is more enthusiasm for learning; civic awareness and pride is fostered; and the relevance of the curriculum to the real world is tangible and understood by students (Sobel, 25).

How can these principles help our immigrant, refugee and international students to learn English and adjust to local life? What would the curriculum

Curricula developed around students' local environmental, historic and socio-cultural context is the core of an educational movement called place-based education.

look like? With a place-based ESOL curriculum, will our students see the same rewards as those demonstrated in K-12 settings? Will they be more engaged and

enthusiastic in the classroom and with learning tasks? Will they feel that the topics in class are more relevant to them and their lives? Finally, will they feel more integrated, at home, and able to build a more meaningful connection to the place where they have relocated, whether short term or long term? With these questions in mind, we set about to create a new reading class that applies place-based principles.

Applying Place-Based Principles in an ESOL Context

We decided to focus on redesigning our Level 8 Academic Reading course, the final reading course in our program. We were in part inspired by a presentation at TESOL 2014 called "A Novel Guide to Local Exploration"

(Cheney, Petrovich and Luvison, 2014) in which a Seattle area IEP was using a Seattle-based historical novel as the foundation for an integrated skills course. Since we were not able to locate a novel appropriate for our students, we instead envisioned compiling a reader (to be used instead of a textbook and novel) of fiction and nonfiction pieces about the area and made sure those sources were written by local authors. We began by searching school and county libraries, compiling copies, references, notes and page numbers. When we brought our bibliographies together, our list was plentiful, numbering around 50 selections. Looking through the selections, the following themes emerged: Oregon and Portland history; Native American history, tales and contemporary perspectives; hiking, cycling and nature exploration; natural history; art and architecture; festivals and events; food and drink; Portland businesses and organizations; and “only in Portland” (a catch-all for the “weird” Portland pieces).

Next, we sent out letters to publishers to request copyright permission. The response was disappointing. Most publishers did not respond. One agreed to us using a chapter of a book but wanted to charge \$8 per use, which would have been cost-prohibitive for a text with upwards of 20 such readings. It did not make sense to create something that would be even more expensive than the average textbook. In the end, we chose our favorite readings that cut across our class themes, and we cross-referenced availability with the PCC library. If PCC owned or could borrow a text, students could access the reading on a course reserve in the library. On a second pass to locate interesting, relevant and level-appropriate materials, we

turned to online materials. We found articles from local publications, sites dedicated to topics such as Portland and Oregon history, blogs on all manner of topics, and websites that host not only readings, but multimedia content to enhance the text. Ultimately, we selected about half library resources and half online resources. Our experience has been that some students choose to borrow books from local libraries, while most are content to use the college library’s reserved copy.

Our next phase was developing a course around the readings that matched with our required course content and outcome guidelines. After we finalized the print and online sources, we created a materials development template which we used as we went back through all our selected sources. For each selection, we identified useful academic vocabulary words, comprehension and discussion questions. We also examined and annotated each text to see which were fitting for demonstrating or practicing the required skills of the course including:

- identify main ideas, rhetorical style, paragraph and essay organizational structures
- identify rhetorical features such as plot, setting, theme, point of view, narrative and descriptive techniques, symbolism, tone, and intended audience
- interpret basic maps, tables, graphs, and figures and their relationship to the main ideas
- make logical inferences, predictions, and conclusions
- distinguish theory, fact from opinion, and fiction from non-fiction

- use note-taking techniques including outlining, skimming and scanning
- recognize rhetorical devices, including similes and metaphors

Once the readings were selected and packaged with reading skills exercises, we moved on to the problem of delivering the course content without having a textbook. We were drawn to the concept of Open Educational Resources (OER), which is a growing trend in higher education across the country that seeks to lower textbook costs for students. Not having to buy a textbook is significant to many students with the ever-rising cost of tuition and textbooks. Textbooks can cost students 20-34% over the cost of tuition. When students lack the financial resources to buy textbooks, they are more likely to fail, drop the class or take fewer classes each term, placing students further behind in their goals (Ernst 2014). As faculty, we may not be able to change the greater economic forces, but we can help out with books. So far in teaching three sections of Rose City Reading during two terms, we have collectively saved students \$3,268. This number will double by the end of academic year 2015-2016 as we are scheduled to teach three more sections of Rose City Reading.

To make our textbook-free materials available to students, we turned to PCC's online learning management system used for distance courses, Desire2Learn

(D2L)¹. D2L allowed us to create files and modules where we could sequence and upload all our materials in a way that was easily accessible to students.

In addition to the texts we compiled, we were able to acquire some printed materials to add variety and enhance the class. *Portland Monthly* donated a class set of their August 2015 magazine,

which features innovative demographic, geographic and economic data maps of Portland. AAA of Portland donated class sets of both Portland and Oregon maps. Oregon

donated class sets of their "Welcome to Portland" relocation guide, which includes facts, statistics, photographs, and local attractions.

The real success of the class came from an extra-curricular requirement... We made a list of over 25 field trips that were closely associated with at least one of the readings.

Executing the Class

The Rose City Reading course met twice a week for two and a half hours at a time. We began every class with a quiz to ensure the reading had been done. This quick quiz activated the topic and segued nicely into "literature circles", which followed for about an hour. In our literature circles, students were given one of four jobs, which they rotated through every four classes: vocabulary master, summary master, discussion leader, and extra researcher. Students presented their homework to each other, discussed the readings, and made copies of their work for each other. The rest of the class

¹ See the following for more information about D2L:

<https://www.pcc.edu/resources/instructional-support/tools/desire2learn/>

period allowed for instruction, practice of new skills, map work, and group discussion of texts. Some texts were revisited in the second hour of class to use as a tool for a skill, for example looking for inference or literary language. Other times we introduced a new, usually shorter text on the same topic of their homework, to challenge the students' ability to apply a skill to a fresh reading. Overall, the bulk of the class time was student-centered.

The real success of the class came from an extra-curricular requirement. Sometimes reading classes are not effective in teaching language because there are just some students who do not enjoy reading, some who get bogged down in the translation of every new word, some who get discouraged by the amount they do not understand, and finally some whose interest just is not sparked by the topic of the text. We made a list of over 25 field trips (see appendix) that were closely associated with at least one of the readings. Students were required to select three field trips to do at their leisure during the term. Students were asked to read the text first, then go out and "experience" the reading by visiting the place mentioned or doing the activity described in the text. Students were also asked to engage in as much on-site reading as possible, such as signs or labels, information pamphlets, menus, ads, etc. For example, one of the assigned texts was about an immigrant rags-to-riches experience in which a young Thai woman came here with little English, and now owns several successful food carts. Students could then take a field trip to eat at the food cart. Another example was the darker history of Portland's underground Shanghai tunnels, in which unsuspecting men were kidnapped and

sold into servitude to the boats docked at the port. These tunnels still exist and can be explored with a tour guide who is more than willing to narrate the unsavory stories of the poor victims. A third example was to take advantage of the free Friday night at Portland Art Museum, which houses an excellent Native American exhibit, and encourages casual but constant reading of placards posted beside each piece of art. Academically, the field trips were followed up with required photo documentation and a written reflection of their experience posted in our D2L shell.

The intention was not only to bring the texts to life and allow the students to enhance their reading with another form of learning to encourage retention of the material, but to show the students that what they were reading about is all about their new home. The hope was that the readings would then become much more important, and their relevance to each student's life became real and tangible.

The field trips allowed the students to "do their homework" with friends, family, classmates, or even the teachers, in a casual way, in their free time. As a side note, both instructors led several trips, brought along our own families and encouraged students to do the same, helped coordinate rides, and also advertised times when prices (if applicable) were lower or free.

The resulting outcomes were enhanced classroom dynamics, closer teacher-student relationships, and increased English opportunities. While the field trip requirement may seem non-academic or unstructured, we felt strongly that this component would enhance the class immensely. It occurred to us that field trips would bring the texts to life in a way that words alone just

cannot do. They also allowed all the different learning styles to be engaged. *Visual learners* could go to and see with their own eyes the places they are reading about: museums, Shanghai tunnels, neighborhoods, bridges, etc. *Kinesthetic learners* could actualize the text by doing the things they read about: eating at a food cart, hiking in the Columbia Gorge, drinking coffee at a café, riding bikes on the bike-friendly streets, volunteering at Free Geek. *Auditory learners* could listen to versions of what they have already read when taking a tour at a museum or historical building, a winery, a dam, or the Shanghai tunnels. Our experience was that discussions about the readings happened naturally during the fieldtrips, which further enhanced the overall experience of seeing, hearing, and thinking about a place formerly only read about.

One additional assignment that we found to be successful was based on local festivals. We gave a list of all the possible festivals in the area and required each student to research one, attend if possible, and write up a description on D2L. Benefits were similar to the field trips, but also focused additionally to quality of life for the students who were attempting to make Portland their new home. This gives them insight on the many free events to which they can take their families, and it highlights the ways in which Portland is special.

The Challenges of Creating a Place-Based Reading Class

Perhaps the biggest challenge to teaching this class was finding the right

materials. We worked as a team of two and gave ourselves about nine months to research and read widely in order to find the best texts for our students' needs and level. For other instructors/programs interested in similarly developing a place-based curriculum, we recommend enlisting the help of as many teachers as possible to lighten the load of the initial design for your locale. One mistake we made was reading books that our school did not own. Unable to get copyright permission, we were forced to delete favorite readings from our list.

The second daunting task was to find and distribute materials without breaking copyright rules. We recommend working with a librarian right from the start to follow the law, and to enlist their aid in purchasing the texts / magazines that you would

like to use for the class. As the materials accrue, it is also advisable to develop an online shell that other teachers can access, which would house all the texts, references, websites, etc.

Because this is a textbook-free class, it is tempting to rely too heavily on the internet. Blogs, websites, and online versions of magazines abound to be sure, but the teacher needs to take care that the quality and length of the materials remains at a high standard of English and appropriate to college-level reading development. The teacher may also have to update readings on current events, people, or businesses that may no longer be relevant. This task can also be delegated to the students as a research assignment.

Finally, the seasons affect field trip and festival opportunities, which may in

[The] field trips would bring the texts to life in a way that words alone just cannot do... (engaging) all the different learning styles.

turn alter the choice of readings. As we teach this class through fall, winter and spring, we find that we have to consider the weather and holidays as we time our field trips and homework assignments. A case in point, we may not have the students read about the bike culture of Portland in the winter because few want to bike in the cold and rain. More “inside” field trips have to be offered for the winter term, such as attending PCC’s Winter Powwow or doing museum, historical house, or local business visits. We may then delete the bike reading and add in a reading about Portland coffee, and ask students to visit several cafes to compare taste and atmosphere.

Reasons to Teach a Place-Based Class

According to Sobel (2005), the place-based “approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students’ appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens” (6). These words rang true for our students. It seems clear that when ESOL students read about local topics, they become more interested, committed, and aware of their surroundings, and as a result they also begin to integrate themselves and their families into the community. Some are only observers, but some are active citizens as a result. On exit surveys, students consistently commented that they liked this class more than others because the readings were interesting and relevant. Almost to the last student, the field trips were a highlight, an opportunity for the readings to come alive, and a reason for the students to explore a city that had formerly seemed daunting or even frightening.

For the teachers, the impact is equally meaningful. First of all, we honestly enjoyed learning more about our city and state, and we brought that enthusiasm into the classroom. Like the students, we found the field trips to be the true gem of the class. We formed deeper, richer relationships with the students as a result of spending many more hours together, largely unstructured, accompanied by our families and theirs, in the exploration of our city. We have also become better teachers because we have shared the learning experience *with* our students. At times, the field trips became true cultural exchanges, wherein the students brought in stories of their own cultures and homes, in effect becoming enthusiastic impromptu teachers.

Although the initial preparations to teach a place-based reading class can be daunting, once the curriculum has been gathered and developed, the enthusiastic response by the students can make it worthwhile. Students remarked consistently in their evaluations that they not only enjoyed learning about their new homes, but that they also looked forward to sharing their new knowledge with their families here and back home. For most, the field trips were the highlight of the class, a way to bond with the classmates and the teacher outside the classroom, to make their readings come alive, to bring their families into their learning experience, and to turn words into a tangible, living experience. The evaluations from this class have been deeply gratifying, as exemplified by this one enthusiastic respondent: “You inspired us all with all the interesting information and subject you taught us. To you, and you alone I am thankful so much because you made me not only LOVE Portland rather than I ADORE

Portland now...Please keep being the candle that lights the student's way."

Conclusion

Orienting your class around local readings can provide a deeply meaningful experience. For us, the class became a way to integrate cultures, create real bonds of friendship through shared experiences of exploration and discussion, and an enhanced feeling of what "home" can mean.

We would like to share our course with other interested ESOL instructors.

We are working with a librarian and OER specialist to make our materials available online as adoptable and adaptable curriculum materials. If you are interested please write to us at fidelia.twengejinings@pcc.edu or joanna.sullivan@pcc.edu.

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Appendix: Field Trips

1. Go to **Chapman Elementary School** for *Swift Watch* in September
2. **The Oregon Zoo**
3. Do a **bike ride from the PDOT** (*Portland Department of Transportation*) website
4. Visit a **museum or garden** mentioned in *Fugitives & Refugees* by Chuck Palahniuk (See the bottom for complete list) *
5. Go to: **Free Geek, The Rebuilding Center** or a **City Repair Project**
6. **Choose one destination** from *Travel Portland* “**Parks & Gardens**” page
7. (*My Abandonment*) Choose **one hike in Forest Park** (you can borrow the instructor’s Forest Park map). You should read the map before you go on the hike.
8. Do a **hike from Portland Hill Walks** by Laura O. Foster
9. (“The Old Gal”) **Hike the Eagle Creek trail**. You should read the link on Eagle Creek before you go. You only need to hike to Punchbowl—that is four miles, and it is enough.
10. **Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge**: Volunteer on second Saturday of any month
11. Visit at least **two notable Portland buildings**: *Big Pink, China Town Gate, Union Station, Gerding Theater, Natural Capital Center, Temple Beth Israel*
12. **Portland Bridges**: Visit at least 5 bridges
13. Go to **one of the festivals** your classmates wrote about
14. Visit **Bonneville Hatchery** (see salmon and more)
15. Visit **Portland Art Museum Native American Collection**
16. (“Portland: Shanghai City”) Take a **tour of the Shanghai tunnels**:
<http://www.shanghaitunnels.info/>
17. **Maryhill Museum** (on the Washington side of the Columbia Gorge)
18. **Benson Bubblers** (“Simon Benson’s Fountains”): locate, go to and photo document at least 5 fountains
19. (“Simon Benson”): visit **at least 2 buildings by architect, A.E. Doyle**—*Benson Hotel; the National Bank Building; Multnomah County Library, Central Branch; Reed College; the Columbia River Gorge Hotel; the Multnomah Falls Lodge*
20. **The Missing Park Blocks**: Walk the length of the Portland Park Blocks, starting at either the north or south end. Find and photograph the “reclaimed” park block, O’Bryant Square. Have any other blocks been reclaimed for parks?
21. **Pittock Mansion**
22. **McLoughlin House**, Oregon City
23. “Simon Benson”/“Park Blocks”; “We Claimed this Land” (and other readings): Visit **the Lone Fir Cemetery**. Find the founder’s names mentioned in the readings. Tours are available: <http://www.friendsoflonefircemetery.org/tours/>
24. Go on a **winery tour**

25. Visit **two coffeehouses** mentioned in the article from class, order a coffee, hang around for a while, observe and compare them afterward in your self-reflection
26. Go on a **coffee tour**: <http://www.thirdwavecoffeetours.com/>
27. Go on a **Tiny House Hotel** tour: <http://tinyhousehotel.com/Tiny-House-Tours>

Portland Food Cart Stories: Go to a pod (not just one food cart!) and note what's there: types of food, nationalities, prices, types of cuisine, etc.

*Strange Museums:

- Kidd Toy Museum
- Stark's Vacuum Cleaner Museum
- Movie Madness
- Portlandia Exhibit
- Hippo Hardware & Trading Co.
- Bob's Red Mill
- The American Advertising Museum
- Galleries:
 - OHSU BICC Gallery
 - Art Gym at Marylhurst
 - Cooley Gallery at Reed

*Gardens:

- Mill End Park
 - Chinese Garden
 - Columbia Gorge Gardens
 - Berry Botanicals
 - Bishop's Close at Elk Rock
 - Elk Rock Island
 - The Grotto
 - Japanese Gardens
 - The Maize
 - Recycled Gardens
- Rooftop Sculpture Garden

Feature Article

Learners' Perceptions of Blended Learning and the Roles and Interaction of f2f and Online Learning

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Abstract:

The present study aims to probe into learners' perceptions of blended learning in relation to the respective roles of face-to-face learning (f2f learning) and online learning as well as their interaction in the blended EFL contexts. Questionnaires were used in the study to examine the attitudes of 296 university students towards a blended English course learned at the university. The results showed that students were generally positive about blended learning and they also acknowledged the interdependencies between f2f learning and online learning in the blended English course. The two learning modes were also considered to play different roles in English learning. Participants thought that online learning was more advantageous to listening and f2f learning promoted the learning of world knowledge and helped to improve learners' interests in learning English. The findings of the research shed light on how f2f and online learning interplay with each other in the blended learning context so that the learning environment can be better integrated for English learning.

Key words: *blended learning, face-to-face learning, online learning*

Introduction

Blended learning (BL) emerged as one of the most popular pedagogical concepts in higher education and in EFL contexts at the beginning of 2000 (Halverson et al, 2014). Scholars predict that blended learning will become the “new traditional model” or the “new normal” in course delivery (Graham, Woodfield & Harrison, 2011).

Researchers have tried to define “blended learning” in different ways. For example, Oliver and Trigwell (2005)

outlined three different kinds of blended learning: a combination of face-to-face and online learning, a combination of technologies, and a combination of methodologies. Neumeier (2005) regarded BL as a combination of face-to-face and computer-assisted learning in a single teaching and learning environment.

Osgathorpe and Graham (2013) defined blended learning as the combination of face-to-face (f2f) with distance delivery systems so that the benefits of face-to-face and online

methods can be maximized. They have actually suggested three models: blend of activities, blend of students in both face-to-face classroom and in online learning environment, and blend of instructors, which means students in face-to-face classroom can benefit from other instructors through online learning environment. As the term continues to develop, researchers tend to reach a consensus that blended learning refers to the integration of classroom face-to-face

learning experiences with online learning experiences (Owston, York, & Murtha, 2013).

Based on the definitions of blended learning,

researchers hold that blended learning usually consists of two main components: face-to-face (f2f) learning and online learning (Akkoyunlu & Vilmaz-Soylu, 2008; Drysdale et al, 2013; Gleason, 2013; Hubackova, Semradova & Klimova, 2011; Kern, 2006). F2f learning refers to the traditional environment where the instruction is conducted face-to-face between teachers and students in a contact teaching situation (Kaur, 2013; Neumeier, 2005). On the other hand, online learning allows learners to interact with learning materials, with or without the physical presence of peers and the instructor (Al-Qahtani & Higginst, 2013; Blake, 2011; Fryer et al, 2014).

The definitions of “blended learning”, “face-to-face learning” and “online learning” vary a lot across different instructional contexts. In the present study, however, blended learning is defined as the combined instructional

environment where face-to-face learning and online learning are mixed within a single teaching and learning environment. Furthermore, face-to-face learning refers to the traditional classroom instruction where instructors and learners teach and learn face to face in physical classrooms. Online learning, then, refers to web-based and self-directed learning either synchronously or asynchronously at computers. This involves the use of various virtual

resources and tools such as online learning materials, chat, message boards, net meetings.

When it comes to its study in EFL contexts, blended

learning has also become an important concept. EFL researchers pointed out that the most important aim of a blended learning design is to find a better combination of the two modes of learning for the individual learning subjects, contexts and objectives (Neumeier, 2005). Sharma (2010) echoed this proposition by claiming that the overall focus of the research is concerned with the search for better practice, i.e., the attempt to identify the optimum mix of course delivery in order to provide a more effective language learning experience. In other words, it is actually more significant to investigate how blended learning can be more effective rather than whether it is more effective than other learning modes (Bonk in Zhan, 2009).

Literature review

Among numerous sub-areas of BL research, one of the common themes is

“[I]t is actually more significant to investigate how blended learning can be more effective rather than whether it is more effective than other learning modes.”

participants' perceptions of blended learning, which incorporates perceptions, attitudes, preferences, expectations and learning styles. Review of relevant research in this area indicates that students were generally positive about the blended learning environment (Drysdale et al, 2013). Nevertheless, understanding how f2f and online learning interplay with each other to bring about more effective learning has remained somewhat blurred.

For example, Sagarra & Zapata (2008) investigated 245 second language Spanish learners' attitudes towards the pedagogy of blending four-hour classroom instruction with one set of online homework per week in relation to their scores of two different language assessment tests. Results revealed positive perceptions of students towards the blended environment in addition to a significant increase in grammar scores. The study emphasized the benefits of blended learning in terms of the easy accessibility to the material, user-friendliness, and instant error feedback. Besides, most students in the survey praised the usefulness of the online workbook in the blended environment for language learning, particularly in the areas of grammar and vocabulary acquisition.

Similarly, Owston, York, & Murtha (2013) studied 577 students' perceptions of blended courses in relation to their in-course achievement. Their perceptions were assessed in four areas: overall satisfaction with blended learning, convenience afforded by blended learning, sense of engagement in their blended course, and views on learning outcomes. Results showed that high achievers were the most satisfied with their blended course and they found the

course more convenient and more engaging. Compared with low achieving students, high achievers preferred blended format over fully face-to-face or online mode.

Another qualitative study conducted by Smyth, Houghton, Cooney & Casey (2012) also discovered several benefits and challenges of blended learning. Results showed that students appreciated the accessibility and flexibility that they thought characterized blended learning. Other benefits identified included greater freedom in planning their learning, more response in learning the content, and a better effect on learning the method. Despite some of the drawbacks like late feedback and poor internet connection, the study discovered that participants were generally positive about blended learning.

Together with other studies investigating perceptions of blended learning (Collopy & Arnold, 2009; Castle & McGuire, 2010; Farley, Jain, & Thomson, 2011), research findings in this area indicate that students favored blended learning as it combines the advantages of both face-to-face and online modes.

However, amongst numerous research articles that discovered students' preference towards blended learning are two studies that scrutinized the negative feelings of students towards blended courses. Stracke (2007) explored blended learning environment by focusing on three learners who left the class. Analysis indicated that students withdrew for three reasons: a perceived lack of support and connection or complementarity between the f2f and computer-assisted components of the blend; a perceived lack of usage of the

paper medium for reading and writing; and the rejection of the computer as a medium of language learning. With in-depth scrutiny of the reasons why those students dropped out of the blended course, the researcher hoped that blended learning environments could be implemented more successfully in the future so that it would appeal to all learners.

Another study (Fryer, Bovee, & Nakao, 2014) investigated the role of motivation within the compulsory e-learning component of a blended learning course at one Japanese university. The results of this longitudinal study revealed two key reasons for students' not engaging in the e-learning studies in the blended course: low task value and poor ability beliefs. Researchers suggested that classroom interventions could be undertaken to improve students' value for the online study component once students are identified as unmotivated. These findings suggest that poorly planned blended learning environment can result in lower satisfaction of students and eventually influence the fate of this type of course (Sagarra & Zapata, 2008).

It is held that students' preferences, together with their negative proposition, contribute to a complete picture in the area of blended learning research. In spite of its increasing popularity among instructors, researchers, and theorists, blended learning does not necessarily cater to every need of all learners, as learners vary in their performance, aptitudes, attitudes, motivation, expectations, and learning styles (Chandra & Fisher, 2009; Akkoyunlu & Sloylu, 2008; Chen & Jones, 2007). In addition, the positive effects of blended learning could be neutralized by

problems in the process of its implementation (Guzer & Caner, 2014). While most of the previous research tackles the overall perception of learners towards blended course as a whole, the present study targets learners' understanding of different roles of f2f and online learning and their interaction in a blended course, as well as whether and how the two learning modes complement each other as part of a whole to foster better practice.

Methodology

The goal of the study

The goal of the study is to probe into learners' perceptions of blended learning, especially of the respective roles of f2f learning and online learning, as well as their interaction across different areas of English learning. To be more exact, the present study intends to investigate three questions:

- 1) How do learners perceive blended learning, in this case, the blended English course?
- 2) How do learners perceive the interdependencies of f2f and online learning in the blended course?
- 3) What do learners think of the respective roles of f2f and online learning across different aspects of English learning?

The instructional design

The blended English course in question – The Integrative English Course is designed for non-English majors at universities. This blended English course lasts 36 weeks for a whole academic year. In basically every week, students have to complete

approximately four hours of classroom instruction face to face with teachers and two hours of web-based online learning by themselves in computer rooms. However, online exercises are also accessible after class in other places like dormitories if students cannot finish them in computer rooms.

The online learning program utilized by the blended English course includes various exercises ranging from listening, speaking, reading, and writing to exercises to prepare for the national English test. In addition to these learning resources, learner-learner interaction, learner-instructor communication, and feedback from instructors are also possible in virtual interaction areas on the learning center. However inclusive the online learning center is, students in the blended course are not required to cover everything offered to them there. Only some of the sections are compulsory, such as listening and reading, while others are optional, such as writing and speaking.

The f2f learning aspect of the course used traditional coursebooks, with 10 units in each volume and two longer reading passages in each unit, for the learning of vocabulary, sentence structure, reading comprehension skills, etc.

Participants

Participants were a total of 296 non-English majors at a university in southern China. All were attending the blended English course and were all first-year students at the same university. They were learning English in classes of similar sizes of around 50 students. In order to counteract possible bias in academic background, participants were mixed in their majors, which ranged

from mathematics to financial management to business to journalism. When the investigation took place at the end of the second semester, the participants had all taken the blended English course for nearly one year.

As to the selection of the participants, the group of students volunteered to participate in the study. After the researcher made clear the nature and purpose of the academic research to students class by class, six classes (first the teachers and then the students) agreed to take part in the study. If either the teachers or the students refused to participate in the research, the entire class was then excluded. According to Wu (2012), a valid sample of a study should be 5 times of the number of questions in the questionnaire. The total number of 296 students in this study is more than 16 times of the 18 items in the questionnaire, which suggests that it is a valid sample.

Methods and instruments

The questionnaire in use (Appendix A) was adapted from the questionnaire in Sagarra and Zapata's (2008) study. The adapted questionnaire consists of 18 items that falls into four sections. The first section has only one question dealing with students' preferences to different learning modes in the course. Sections II and III respectively tackle the accessibility to the online learning system and the relationship between f2f and online learning. These two sections contain 15 questions which students answered on a 7-point Likert scale. The last section includes 2 multiple-choice questions targeting the respective roles of the two learning modalities. To ensure that participants could understand the

English questionnaire properly, some terms, such as face-to-face learning and online learning, were given explanations in Chinese.

Data collection and analysis

Questionnaires were distributed to participants in class and then collected by the researcher after participants had finished them. Participants were assured that the investigation was conducted solely for the purpose of academic research and would not affect their assessment in any way so that they could respond to the questionnaire objectively and honestly. After all the questionnaires were collected, data was then input in the computer and then statistically analyzed with SPSS.

Results

Reliability of the questionnaire

The adapted questionnaire is comprised of two main kinds of questions. The first kind includes 15 questions on 7-point Likert scale and the second kind consists of 3 multiple-choice questions. Therefore, the reliability coefficient was calculated only on the 15 Likert-scale questions. The Cronbach's alpha value of these 15 questions was .822, which indicates that the questionnaire is a reliable instrument for the study.

Results of the questionnaire

Learners' preferences

The first section of the questionnaire had only one question investigating

learners' overall preferences to blended learning context. Results of the study revealed that the blended mode combining online learning with f2f learning was preferred by 58.8% of the total respondents. Comparatively, 33.4% of the participants liked f2f learning more and very few students (6.1%) favored online learning alone. Finally, a tiny proportion of students (1.7%)

[M]ore than half of the students preferred the blended mode to either f2f or online mode alone.

claimed that they had no interest at all in either mode of the course.

Obviously, more than half of the students preferred

the blended mode to either f2f or online mode alone.

Accessibility to online learning

In section two, participants (N=296) responded to five questions on 7-point Likert Scale dealing with different aspects of accessibility to online learning. The mean scores of these items, ranging from 1 (very easy) to 7 (very difficult), revealed how well the students can access online learning. In particular, the means of completing online exercises (4.41) turned out to be the highest, followed by login (3.58), getting technical support (3.56) and instructions to exercises (3.03) while checking grades had the lowest means (2.61). The results indicated that it was quite easy for learners to check grades and understand instructions to online exercises but they had some difficulty in getting technical support and login. Completing online exercises proved more challenging than the other four aspects.

In this part, altogether 10 questions on 7-point Likert scale were designed to explore students' perceptions of the independencies between face-to-face and online learning, an area which is under-researched in the realms of BL (Drysdale et. al., 2013). Table 1 shows the results of the descriptive data of this part. Items 7 to 9 show that most of the students agreed that f2f learning assisted online learning (81.1%) and f2f learning made online learning more interesting (64.2%) and more effective (79.1%). In similar vein, students were also positive towards online learning's influence on f2f learning. As shown in items 12-14, the majority of learners said that online learning facilitated f2f learning (82.8%) and made it more effective (79.1%). However, fewer participants (58.5%)

were sure that online learning made f2f learning more interesting.

Learners' approval was validated by their responses to another four questions. In items 15 and 16, they reported that f2f and online learning of the blended course were related (82.4%) and were complementary to each other (87.1%). Such attitudes were further proved by the two reverse items (10 and 11), to which most of students disagreed. In short, f2f and online learning, in learners' views, were integrated well to benefit each other within a blended learning environment. The majority of students also regarded the two learning modes as helpful and complementary to each other since they made each other more interesting and more effective.

TABLE 1
Learners' Perceptions of the interdependencies between f2f and Online Learning

Items	strongly agree (%)	agree (%)	somewhat agree (%)	somewhat disagree (%)	disagree (%)	strongly disagree (%)	no opinion (%)
7. F2f learning helps me with online learning	9.8	40.2	31.1	5.7	6.8	2.0	4.4
8. F2f learning makes online learning more interesting	7.1	23.3	33.8	11.5	16.6	2.4	5.4
9. F2f learning makes online learning more effective	12.2	37.2	29.1	10.5	7.4	1.7	2.0
10. The two parts of learning are independent of each other.	4.4	9.5	12.8	15.5	44.3	12.2	1.4
11. The two parts of learning make each other worse.	4.4	2.7	5.7	6.8	57.8	22.6	0
12. Online learning helps me with f2f learning.	9.5	39.5	33.8	8.8	4.4	2.4	1.7
13. Online learning makes f2f learning more interesting.	4.4	19.6	34.5	17.6	17.2	2.0	4.7
14. Online learning makes f2f learning more effective.	9.5	36.5	33.1	10.5	7.4	0.3	2.7
15. The two parts of learning are related to each other	11.8	47.0	23.6	8.1	6.8	2.0	0.7
16. The two parts of learning are complementary to each other.	9.1	43.2	34.8	6.1	3.4	1.4	2.0
Total:							100%

The respective roles of f2f and online learning in the blended English course. In order to survey more clearly how f2f and online modes facilitate learning within the course, the study probed into students' understanding of the respective roles of the two learning modes. In this section, there were two questions to

which participants were allowed to choose more than one item. Table 2 lists multiple responses of students to the roles of online learning and Table 3 lists relevant data on the roles of f2f learning. As indicated in Table 2, 93.2% of students thought that online learning helped to improve listening, making

TABLE 2
The Roles of Online Learning in the Blended English Course

Items	Number of the item responses	Percentages against the total responses	Percentages against the total sample subjects
Improve listening	276	25.2%	93.2%
Improve vocabulary	187	17.0%	63.2%
Learn world knowledge	151	13.8%	51.0%
Improve reading	119	10.8%	40.2%
Improve speaking	108	9.8%	36.5%
Practise methods and skills	107	9.8%	36.1%
Learn methods and skills	63	5.7%	21.3%
Improving interests in learning English	61	5.6%	20.6%
improve writing	25	2.3%	8.4%
Total:	1097	100.0%	370.0%

TABLE 3
The Roles of f2f Learning in the Blended English Course

Items	Number of the item responses	Percentages against the total responses	Percentages against the total sample subjects
Improve vocabulary	242	16.9%	82.0%
Learn world knowledge	193	13.5%	65.4%
Improve listening	185	12.9%	62.7%
Learn methods and skills	178	12.4%	60.3%
Improve reading	175	12.2%	59.3%
Improve speaking	174	12.2%	59.0%
Improving interests in Learning English	137	9.6%	46.4%
Practise methods and skills	119	8.3%	40.3%
Improve writing	29	2.0%	9.8%
Total:	1432	100.0%	485.4%

listening, in their eyes, the most beneficial aspect of online learning. Then over half of students considered that online learning had helped to enlarge their vocabulary (63.2%) and enrich their world knowledge (51%). More than one third of learners agreed that online learning had helped them improve their reading (40.2%) and speaking (36.5%) while 36.1% said it helped them to practice various learning methods and skills (36.1%). However, less than one quarter of the respondents reported that online lessons had helped them to learn methods and skills (21.3%) or had improved their interest in learning English (20.6%). Finally, only a tiny proportion of participants (8.4%) thought that online learning had benefitted their writing, which ranked the lowest in the list.

Therefore, Table 2 suggests that listening, in students' views, had benefited the most from online learning, followed by vocabulary, world knowledge, reading, speaking, practicing and learning methods and skills, improving learners' interests in learning English, and finally writing.

Table 3 shows data on the roles of f2f learning. Similar to online learning, f2f learning was also believed to play the greatest role on the same three aspects of learning: learning vocabulary (82%), world knowledge (65.4%), and listening (62.7%); however f2f vocabulary instruction, not listening, was the area

seen as most beneficial. Between 40% and 60% of learners said that f2f learning benefitted most other skills, while its impact on writing turned out to be the lowest (9.8%) in the group.

To investigate more clearly the different roles that f2f and online learning have taken up in the blended course, Figure 1 compares the relevant data of the two learning modes. As indicated in the figure, 93.2% of the participants reported that online learning helped to improve listening whereas only 63.7% of the respondents agreed that f2f learning had benefited listening – a difference of over 30 percentage points. Conversely, f2f learning had a greater impact on the rest of the eight areas of English learning. To be more exact, students who preferred f2f learning outnumbered those favoring online learning by 18.8 percentage points in learning vocabulary, 14.4 in learning world knowledge, 19.1 in reading, 22.5 in speaking, 4.2 in practicing methods and skills, 39 in learning methods and skills, 25.8 in improving students' interests in learning English and 1.4 in writing.

Consequently, it can be concluded that f2f learning, in students' views, seemed to have a much greater advantage over online learning in almost all fields of English learning. and the only exception lies in listening, where online learning is much more advantageous than f2f learning.

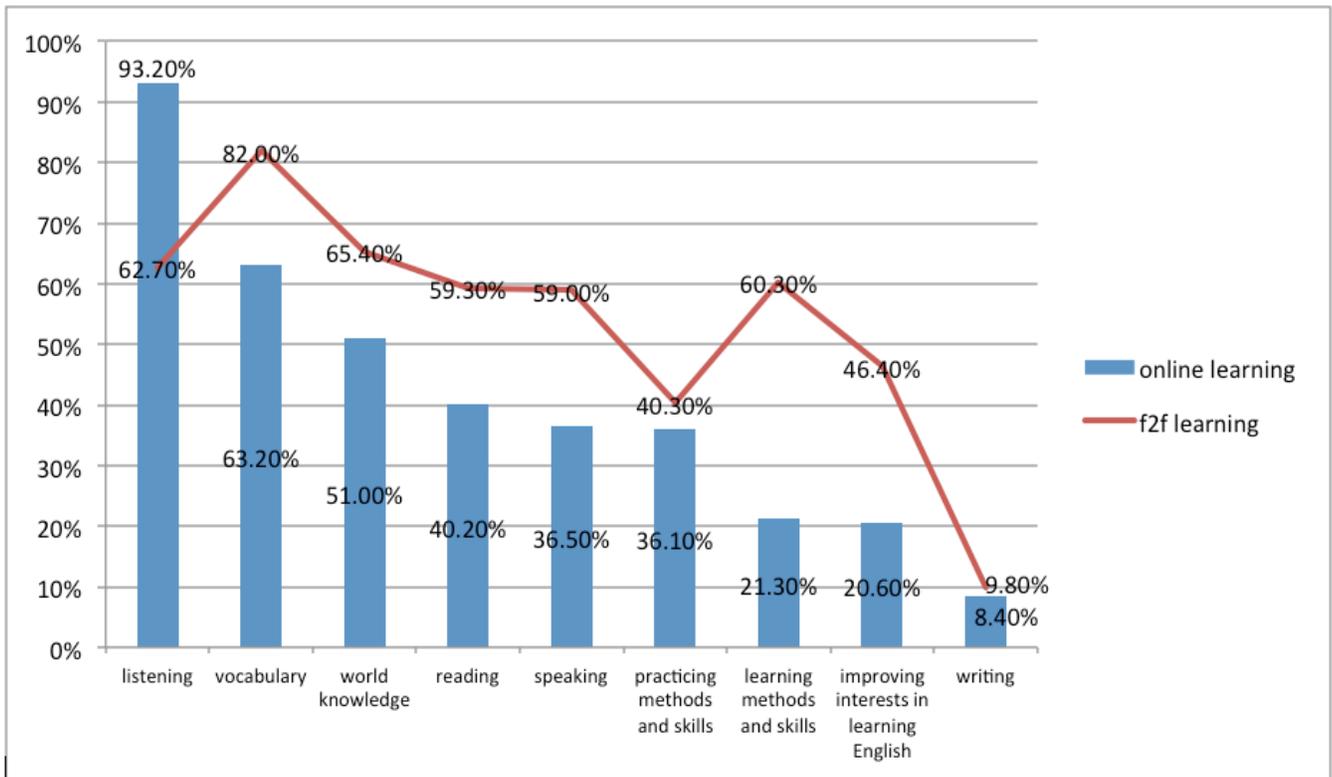


Fig. 1 Comparing the Roles of f2f and online Learning in the Blended English Course

To find out whether the above differences of learners' opinions on f2f and online sessions were statistically significant, further Chi-square testing was conducted. According to the results shown in Table 4 below, only three *p*-values were lower than .05, indicating that statistically significant differences could be found in the three corresponding sub-areas. These three sub-areas are listening (.031), improving students' interests in learning English

(.002) as well as learning world knowledge (.002). In other words, learners' perceptions of the roles of f2f and online learning are significantly different in only these three areas. As to the other six aspects, their *p*-values all went above .05, indicating there was no significant difference in learners' perceptions of f2f and online learning in the corresponding aspects.

On the whole, data from table 2, 3, 4 and figure 1 revealed that f2f and online

TABLE 4

	Listening	Reading	Speaking	Writing	Vocabulary	Learning methods and skills	Practicing methods and skills	Improving interests in learning English	Learning world knowledge
Pearson Sig. (two-tailed)	4.633 <i>p</i> = .031	3.399 <i>p</i> = .065	.731 <i>p</i> = .392	.100 <i>p</i> = .752	.810 <i>p</i> = .368	.816 <i>p</i> = .366	2.180 <i>p</i> = .140	9.628 <i>p</i> = .002	9.376 <i>p</i> = .002

Chi-square Test of the Percentages of Different Roles of f2f and online Learning

Note: *p* < .05, *df* = 1

learning were both regarded as more impactful on listening, learning vocabulary and world knowledge while the least advantageous to writing. Further chi-square test found that significant differences existed only in three aspects of English learning. To be more exact, learners believed that online learning was more advantageous to listening while f2f learning played more impactful role in helping students to learn world knowledge and to improve their interests in learning English.

Discussion

In this study, the researcher examined learners' perceptions not only of the blended learning environment as a whole but more importantly of the interdependencies between f2f and online learning as well as their respective roles. As to the first research question of how learners perceive blended learning, results of the survey indicated that learners preferred the blended English course to f2f instruction or online learning alone, which is in alignment with the findings of previous research (Drysdale, et.al, 2013; Guzer & Caner, 2014). Meanwhile, more than one third of students favored the f2f aspect of instruction over online learning. It seems that even though students prefer the blended format, f2f instruction still plays greater role in the learning context, which is consistent with the findings of the previous studies (Stracke, 2007; Chandra & Fisher, 2009).

The second research question in the present study focuses on the interaction of f2f and online learning in the blended English course, which is one of the sub-areas that has not been sufficiently investigated in the field of blended

learning (Neumeier, 2005). Results of the study revealed that the two learning modes, in learners' views, had mixed well within the blended course as they were regarded as helpful and complementary to each other by making each other more interesting and more effective.

Research shows that learners favor blended learning for many reasons (Collopy & Arnold, 2009; Castle & McQuire, 2010; Lin & Wang, 2012). Previous studies reveal that blended learning improves students' performance or learning outcomes in various areas in the EFL context (Yang et al, 2013; Jia et al, 2012). The present study adds that learners prefer blended learning because f2f and online learning within the blended mode are able to interact with each other and complement each other. In particular, traditional f2f instruction allows learners to have access to peers and experts. Instructors in f2f learning play significant roles in presenting the learning content, designing learning activities, providing instruction, and supplementing learning materials. Classroom activities like presentations, group discussions, role plays, and language games can be engaging and add additional interest to a topic. F2f learning, thus, serves to cater to learners with certain learning preferences, and to satisfy learners' affective needs of face-to-face communication in a different way from online learning (Kaur, 2013). As a complement, online instruction also assists language learning in its own way. For instance, students appreciate web-based online exercises due to its greater variety in learning content and its unlimited resources. Moreover, online learning can provide a higher degree of learning autonomy (Snodin, 2013).

Unlike the passive roles in classroom instruction, learners have much greater control over learning online. In online exercises, they are able to adjust the pace of learning, the learning style, and the lesson content to meet their own needs and personal tastes (Drysdale, et.al, 2013; Snodin, 2013). Researchers (Holley & Oliver, 2010; Raby, 2007) also hold that online learning succeeds in creating a learning environment that is more personal and private, away from the disturbance, distraction and pressure of peers and formal assessment in f2f instruction. This is where learners tend to feel more relaxed, more focused, and thus more engaged. As a result, blended learning is considered to be more preferable since blended learning enables f2f instruction and online learning to complement each other and combines their advantages to bring out better learning.

According to Neumeier (2005), analysis of the interaction between f2f and online learning helps to create a clear layout of the blended course and construct a focused and structured learning environment. Results of this study indicate that learners' perceptions of the interaction of f2f and online learning mirrors to some extent whether the blended course has been clearly organized and systematically structured. In order to organize a more systematic structure of a blended learning context, Neumeier (2005) proposed that blended learning should not aim at creating "the right" or "the best" way to present learning content. Instead, it should attempt to build a learning environment that takes into account the dispositions, aptitudes and attitudes of both teachers and students. The fact that blended delivery allows students to learn and

access material in a variety of modes gives it an advantage in meeting the needs of students with a variety of learning styles. In other words, blended learning enhances individualization, personalization and relevance without sacrificing face-to-face contact, and thus offers learners better learning because both instructors and learners have greater flexibility and accessibility (Kaur, 2013).

The third focus of the present study investigated the respective roles of f2f and online learning. It has found that online learning, in learners' views, facilitated listening more effectively. Although this investigation fails to examine learners' perceptions in relation to their learning outcomes, there are empirical studies which show that online learning promotes listening skills in addition to critical thinking skills, grammar, vocabulary, speaking, and writing (Cobb, 2007; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010; Sagarra & Zapata, 2008; Yang et al, 2013). A case in point is the study by Yang et al (2013), which examined a blended learning environment for individualized English listening and speaking while integrating critical thinking. The survey found that virtual learning environments facilitate individualized learning by addressing the difficulties faced by learners with mixed ability levels. This is where standard, lecture-based instructional approaches fail to support individualized learning. By creating learner-centered contexts, online learning is more likely to offer learners an individualized and adaptive learning experience, which tends to promote learning more effectively.

This is especially true of listening in EFL contexts. Some researchers (Blake, 2011; Kern, 2006) found that online

learning offered a modest advantage over traditional classroom instruction, although that advantage might be highly sensitive to the amount of time on task. It is not surprising that learners taking online courses spend more time doing online exercises such as listening on their own and do better than those in face-to-face situations (Grgurovic, 2007). Students are able to enjoy having multiple attempts and practicing at their own pace (Sagarra & Zapata, 2008). According to a US Department of Education report (2009, p. xvii), online learning stimulates students to spend more time engaged with the learning materials, which ultimately promotes greater learning. These factors add a very important value to online learning and also play a pivotal role in effective listening practice (Blake, 2011; Yang et al, 2013). This constitutes an irreplaceable advantage in online learning and serves to explain in a way why online mode has a notable advantage over f2f mode in the field of listening.

With regard to the roles of f2f learning, participants in this study thought that f2f learning promoted learners' interests in learning English and facilitated the learning of world knowledge, which seem to be two variables less explored in the field of BL (Guzer & Caner, 2014; Woltering, Herrier & Spreckelsson, 2009).

Several factors may contribute to students' perception that f2f learning is more effective in promoting learner interest. According to Raby (2007), interest in learning English can be motivated by both internal factors, such as learners' characteristics and aptitudes, as well as external factors such as pedagogy, instructors, learning content

in the learning environment. Maintaining students' interest and motivating them to learn may include generating learners' desire to take initiative for work, maintain their effort until the work is completed, and regulate their work by interacting with e-tools, peers, and teachers. To fulfil these goals requires cognitive, affective and social factors to come into play all together. It is easier to bring these factors into full play in traditional instructional contexts with face-to-face communication between learners and their peers as well as instructors. What is more, f2f instruction is able to offer students a relatively high level of interactivity and more chances to construct meaning independently (Chapelle, 2009). Smyth et al. (2012) suggest that interactive activities in f2f learning help students to engage more with their peers in class and develop close associations with each other that may develop a strong learning community. Language teachers in f2f instruction contribute to this sense of community by establishing rapport, maintaining high levels of involvement and engagement, encouraging cooperation, and fostering collegiality in class (Senior, 2010). All these variables in f2f mode, in fact, help to maintain and promote learners' interest in learning language, and perhaps world knowledge as well.

In contrast to f2f instruction, online learning is likely to become a drill center where more mechanical language exercises rather than interactive learning activities are provided for learners. In spite of wider and easier access to abundant learning resources in online learning, lack of face-to-face communication with peers or instructors and insufficient supervision from

instructors in online delivery may frustrate learners and decrease their motivation (Fryer et al, 2014). If online learning was reduced to a simple expansion of learning time or acted as a center of learning resources and mechanical practices, it would not be surprising that students might value f2f instruction over online learning. Online learners have complained about lack of regulation, immediate feedback and technical support in online learning, which tend to reduce learners' interests in learning. While students with positive motivational profiles may succeed in learning even though they are isolated in their studies online, students with less interest in learning will have more difficulty sustaining the effort necessary to meaningfully engage with their studies (Fryer et al, 2014). Consequently, similar to f2f instruction, materials and tasks in online learning also need to be organized and developed more systematically according to SLA theoretical approaches so as to play a more impactful role in the blended learning mode (Chapelle, 2009).

Conclusion

Unlike the previous research focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of blended learning, the present study aims at the respective roles of its two modalities, as well as their interdependencies. The investigation has found that most learners preferred blended learning to either f2f or online learning alone, with f2f learning more preferable than online learning. As to the respective roles of f2f and online learning, students considered f2f learning to be more advantageous to learning world knowledge and to

facilitating learners' interests in learning English whereas they regarded online learning as more beneficial to listening skills.

While this study yielded a number of statistically significant results, some caution must be observed in the interpretation and generalizability of the results. In fact, f2f instruction can vary widely with respect to techniques, class sizes, individual student attention, and teacher talents in ways that can tarnish the privileged status normally accorded to the f2f classroom experience. Similarly, online learning also differs wildly not only in terms of its format, but also in terms of particular technological tools and pedagogies. As a result, comparisons with other online or f2f learning environments could be rather difficult (Blake, 2011).

Another limit is that the results only reflected how students perceived the impact rather than the real learning effects of the blended course. The significant differences of learners' perceptions of different impact of f2f mode and online mode on English learning do not necessarily indicate similar differences in student performance in the corresponding areas. In other words, the study demonstrated what learners believed instead of what they achieved in the blended learning environment. The findings of learners' perceptions would be more revealing if learners' performances had been taken into account.

In addition to assisting practitioners to understand how f2f and online learning work together in blended English course, the current investigation also sheds light on future study. The researcher holds that, instead of focusing on the

advantages and disadvantages of blended learning, further research should be conducted to look into the sub-variables existing in the two learning modes which actually lead to the strengths and weaknesses of blended learning.

Among the numerous factors affecting f2f and online learning, some have been well scrutinized in the previous research, such as learner autonomy and interaction, whereas other issues remained somewhat unexplored, especially in relation to instructors' roles, learning resources and activities, and learning styles (Drysdale, et al, 2013). Because of their significant impact (Halverson, et.al, 2014), instructors' roles in the two modalities must be considered (Senior, 2011). Furthermore, to satisfy learners' cognitive and affective needs, it is

necessary to develop a wider range of learning resources, activities, and exercises in both modalities. The integration of these factors in blended learning decides to a large extent how learning is blended, which constitutes a noteworthy territory for further research in the realm of blended learning.

As a rapidly emerging domain of both research and practice, blended learning will continue to play a vital role in the EFL context. Researchers need to investigate its implementation more to satisfy the diverse needs of learners on both cognitive and affective levels. The ultimate purpose for this is to create a learning environment where different modes can be best integrated so that language learners can learn more efficiently and effectively.

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Huang, Qiang completed this project as a part of The Philosophy and Social Sciences Project of Guangdong Province. Huang majored in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics when studying for MA at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China from 1999 to 2002. Ever since then Huang has been teaching university students English. Huang's research orientation mainly falls in language teaching and language testing such as classroom research, classroom assessment, computer-assisted language learning, blended learning of online learning and f2f learning, materials developments and evaluation.

Appendix

This questionnaire aims to investigate students' views on blended learning and its two sessions -- face-to-face learning and online learning. Please follow the instructions below and finish all the questions. Thanks for your cooperation.

Part I. Learners' preferences to different learning modes in the blended course

1. What do you prefer in the blended course?
 - a. only face-to-face learning
 - b. only online learning
 - c. blending face-to-face learning with online learning
 - d. neither face-to-face learning nor online learning

Part II. The accessibility to online learning system

Here 1= very easy, 2 = easy, 3= somewhat easy, 4 = not easy nor difficult, 5 = somewhat difficult, 6 = difficult , 7 = very difficult. Please mark the most suitable choice for you.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

1. Login of the online learning system is _____.
2. Understanding the instructions of online exercises is _____.
3. Completing exercises online is _____.
4. Checking grades of the exercises online is _____.
5. Getting technical support is _____.

Part III. The relationship between face-to-face and online learning

Here 1= strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3= somewhat agree, 4 = somewhat disagree, 5 = disagree, 6 = strongly disagree, 7 = no opinion. Please mark the most suitable choice for you.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

1. Face-to-face learning helps me with online learning.
2. Face-to-face learning makes online learning more interesting.
3. Face-to-face learning makes online learning more effective.
4. The two parts of learning are related to each other.
5. The two parts of learning are complementary to each other.
6. Online learning helps me with face-to-face learning.
7. Online learning makes face-to-face learning more interesting.
8. Online learning makes face-to-face learning more effective.
9. The two parts of learning are independent of each other.
10. The two parts of learning make each other worse.

Part IV. The roles of face-to-face and online learning

Choose from the following answers *a to i* to complete the two questions. You may choose **ONE** or **MORE** answers to each question.

1. How has online learning helped you with your English learning?

It has helped me to _____.

2. How has face-to-face learning helped you with your English learning?

It has helped me to _____.

- a. improve listening.
- b. improve reading.
- c. improve speaking.
- d. improve writing
- e. improve vocabulary
- f. learn methods and skills
- g. practise methods and skills
- h. improve my interests in learning English
- i. learn the world knowledge

Feature Article

Digital Literacy Instruction for eHealth and Beyond

Laura Hill, Portland State University

Abstract

The increasing importance of digital technologies can disenfranchise individuals who lack digital literacy skills. As clinics adopt online health portals, even health care services require digital skills. Patients are often expected to check test results and perform other health-related tasks online, but few clinics provide support for those who lack the digital skills needed to navigate a health portal. For that reason, the Literacy, Language, and Technology Research group completed a project to teach patients how to use a health portal. They designed instructional materials in an online learning platform called Learner Web. The flexible nature of the online materials accommodated the needs of patients with a wide variety of interests, learning styles, and technological abilities. Importantly, the principles used to design these instructional materials are not only relevant for health portal instruction, but also for the ESL classroom. Thus, this article describes several strategies that ESL instructors can use to teach English through an online platform.

Key Words: *digital, literacy, health, portal, English, learners*

Introduction

Digital devices such as mobile phones, tablets, and portable computers have become an essential part of our daily lives. We access news, read email, check Facebook, text our families, and even communicate with our health care providers digitally. Because these activities have become so commonplace, we may take for granted the underlying digital literacy skills that are necessary for navigating online and communicating digitally with others. However, a lack of experience with digital technologies can significantly limit job opportunities and lead to social

exclusion (Bynner, Reder, Parsons, & Strawn, 2010). Therefore, digital literacy skills are crucial for ensuring that adults have access to equal opportunities. This is especially true for English Language Learners (ELLs), who often face additional barriers to achieving their goals. Accordingly, this article discusses instructional strategies for supporting digital literacy acquisition in the ESL classroom. Additionally, it describes how these strategies were implemented in the context of a local health clinic for digital health literacy instruction.

Digital Literacy Instruction for ELLs

English language learners (ELLs) are an important demographic to consider with regard to digital literacy instruction. Language and cultural differences can serve as obstacles to employment and services, and weaknesses in digital literacy can provide ELLs with yet another barrier. For that reason, technology instruction is particularly important for this demographic (Reder, Vanek, & Wrigley, 2012). Specifically, the use of online resources can enable ELLs to communicate with friends and family outside of the U.S. and can afford them access to online translating or language learning services. Additionally, with the recent push for individuals to communicate with their health providers through online health portals, digital literacy instruction can also help ELLs better manage their health. Because digital literacy skills can be so advantageous for ELLs, digital literacy instruction should be integrated into the ESL classroom at all levels. The concept of learning new language and digital literacy skills might seem overwhelming for learners. However, there are several instructional techniques that can smooth the integration of both skills in the classroom.

One key strategy for integrating digital literacy and ESL instruction is to design an online learning platform. Instructors can do this by building a simple website. The use of this website provides learners with a consistent platform with buttons in the places that

[B]eginning class from a screen that always looks the same allows students to slowly build their digital skills while studying English.

they expect. Simply releasing ESL learners onto the Internet and expecting them to learn computer basics and improve their English can be overwhelming. However, beginning class from a screen that always looks the same allows students to slowly build their digital skills while studying English. Accordingly, Reder, Vanek, and Wrigley (2012) affirm that it is beneficial for learners to “first develop digital literacy skills through direct instruction and practice and then apply

them in functional contexts” (p. 56). This allows them to immediately “apply emerging new skills” (p. 56). Thus, learners are able to practice foundational

computer skills such as the use of the mouse and keyboard within a familiar website. Later, when students have mastered those basic skills, they will be able to branch out to other topics such as navigating online, composing email, or using Skype.

Teaching English through a digital platform is beneficial not only because it introduces students to computer use, but also because it is advantageous for structuring English instruction itself, especially for multi-level classes. First, English instruction in an online format allows students to work at their own paces. Students can work independently at the speed that is most appropriate for their particular needs. An online platform can also make lessons more engaging and appropriate for students with a variety of learning styles. Instructors can incorporate videos, images, and sound clips into their lessons for learners with preferences for

visual or audio learning materials. Voice-over audio recordings are especially useful for students with low-literacy skills. Finally, learners can explore different resources on their own, allowing them to make choices in their learning and pursue the material that most interests them. This can increase learner engagement with the material and thus facilitate learning (Reder, Vanek, & Wrigley, 2012). Furthermore, Reder, Vanek, and Wrigley (2012) uphold, “Research suggests that all learners benefit from learner-driven input and learner-centered activities” (p. 49). Thus, online platforms are especially beneficial for ESL students, as they allow learners to constantly have input in their learning. Overall, using a website as a platform for English instruction can be extremely helpful in the ESL classroom. The flexible nature of online learning materials is particularly useful for adult learners with unique needs, interests, and goals.

[P]atients with limited English proficiency face many barriers to obtaining and receiving the health information they need. This is where online health portals and digital literacy skills can help.

materials intended to serve as an on-ramp to health portal use.

The integration of online health portals into the health field is an increasingly relevant topic. Health portals offer access to secure electronic records containing patient health information. They also allow patients to message their providers, check test results, refill medications, and use an online medical dictionary. Although health portals give patients increased access to their health information, they are challenging to use, especially for people with limited digital literacy skills (Lyles & Sarkar, 2015). Moreover, as health care systems are just beginning to

integrate the portals into clinics, most clinics have not implemented adequate support to help patients sign up and use the portals (Sarkar, Karter, Liu, Adler, Nguyen, López, &

Schillinger, 2010). This challenge becomes even further complicated when it comes to patients with limited English proficiency. Limited content is available in Spanish and other languages, thus requiring these individuals to switch between available first language content and English. However, using an online health portal can be especially important for this population.

Digital Literacy and Health Care

The Literacy, Language, and Technology Research (LLTR) group at Portland State University utilized the strategies described above to teach digital literacy in a health context. Although the project did not test the digital instruction techniques in an ESL setting, it provided an important demonstration of how an online platform can be used to cater material to learners with a variety of needs. For the project, LLTR created online instructional

ELLs’ Access to Health Care

It is challenging, if not impossible, for adults with limited English proficiency to receive the same quality of health care as English-speaking patients (Davidson, 2000; Davidson,

2001; Martinez, 2008). This is primarily due to the fact that health information is filtered through an interpreter. Although one might expect that interpreters can directly translate comments between patient and provider, this is not true. Interpreting inevitably alters patient and provider contributions (Davidson, 2002). Additionally, appointments with interpreters last approximately the same amount of time as those without interpreters (Davidson, 2001). As a result, patient contributions frequently fail to get conveyed to the provider, and patients often leave appointments with many unaddressed concerns (Davidson, 2000; Martinez, 2008). Furthermore, written health materials are often not translated into languages other than English (Martinez, 2008). Therefore, patients with limited English proficiency face many barriers to obtaining and receiving the health information they need.

This is where online health portals and digital literacy skills can help. When ELLs have the adequate digital skills to use a health portal, they can review their health information outside of appointments. Thus, if they do not obtain all of the health information needed during a consultation, they can access their after-visit summaries or medical records online and have time to learn more information about their conditions. Patients can also look up terms they might not have understood in the portal's medical dictionary. Perhaps most importantly, the online health portal provides patients access to their providers outside of appointments. If patients leave appointments with any unanswered questions or remaining concerns, they can securely message their providers online.

“On-ramps to eHealth Portals”

Although the benefits of online health portals are numerous, the issue of supporting patients with low digital literacy persists. In order to address the barrier that patients face towards using an online health portal, the Literacy, Language, and Technology Research (LLTR) group completed a one-year research project. The project team created online instructional materials intended to teach patients the skills needed to use an online health portal (more information at <https://www.pdx.edu/linguistics/ehealth>). This project was executed in partnership with the Wallace Medical Concern (WMC) in Gresham, Oregon. The WMC is defined as a safety net clinic, as it serves a primarily low-income demographic that includes both insured and uninsured patients. Additionally, 30% of the clinic's patients are Spanish speakers. The goal of the project was to design materials that would teach adults with a variety of technological abilities the skills needed to use an online health portal.

The first step was completing a needs assessment. For this stage of the project, LLTR project members sat with WMC patients one-on-one and observed them as they attempted to sign up for the online health portal and use its different functions. When patients struggled, LLTR provided support and noted any challenging aspects of the portal interface or the sign-up process. Several barriers to health portal use were identified. The primary barriers included low digital literacy skills, a lack of access to technology, and the need to understand the relevance of using an online portal.

Patients possessed a wide variety of digital literacy skills. Some had never used a computer before, while others excelled at using multiple devices. Thus, it was apparent that a customized approach was needed to teach patients the specific digital skills necessary for portal use. Accordingly, LLTR created a suite of online learning materials in a platform called Learner Web. Learner Web is an online learning support system created by LLTR (more information at learnerweb.org). It was created based on the findings from the Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning, which suggested that adult learners benefit from supervised self-study in computer labs (Reder, 2012). The study advocated for flexible online learning support systems that could accommodate the unique needs and busy schedules of adult learners. Learner Web was created to fill this need.

The Learner Web platform served as the ideal system for providing digital literacy training to patients at the WMC. First, it allowed the learners to access the material most suited to their particular needs. It included three units: 1) computer basics, 2) using a health portal, and 3) using the health portal app. Thus, patients who lacked basic computer skills such as using a mouse or keyboard began with the first unit, and those who had more advanced digital skills skipped to the lessons on the health portal. The flexible nature of the online learning platform also allowed the learners to make choices about which content they wanted to learn. The content was made available in English as well as Spanish to afford learners more choices in regards to which materials best met their needs. Second, Learner Web utilized a consistent, predictable structure that

allowed patients to learn new content while practicing their computer skills. Third, the online learning system was designed to be multimodal. The lessons were written in basic English, and included a voice-over recording of the text for those with limited literacy or English proficiency. Additionally, a significant quantity of images and videos accommodated learners with preferences for visual learning materials. Specifically, the videos included screencasts that demonstrated how to utilize different functions of the portal in a step-by-step manner. Finally, the Learner Web system allowed learners to work at their own pace, with the support of an in-person tutor. To watch a video about the Learner Web health portal instructional materials, visit <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7b6zRgA9p0seExDem1NWVB1ZkU/view?usp=sharing>

Digital Literacy Instruction Beyond Health

The “On-ramps to eHealth Portals Project” sought to address the needs of patients who were expected to use an online health portal but did not possess the necessary digital literacy skills. LLTR’s involvement at the WMC revealed that patients possessed a wide range of abilities with technology. Thus, the use of a flexible online learning platform was necessary to provide them with lessons that were customized to their particular needs. Likewise, the use of an online platform can be similarly beneficial in the ESL classroom. It allows learners to study English at their own pace, with the aid of multimodal learning materials, and with the ability to explore resources that best match their

personal interests. Finally, using an online platform also allows students to practice digital skills. According to (Reder, Vanek, & Wrigley (2012), “being able to access information over the Internet, providing information on-line, selecting websites that address one’s needs and interests are now part of the basic skills that every citizen, native

speaker or English language learner, needs” (p. 58). Thus, digital literacy instruction should not be overlooked for ELLs, but instead should be integrated into the English classroom. Teaching English through an online platform can be a successful means of supporting ELLs as they acquire the skills they need for opportunities beyond the classroom.

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Research Note

Steps toward Respecting Sexual Diversity in the ESOL Classroom

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Keywords: *Sexual diversity, LGBTQ+, Inclusive, Classroom culture*

During the 2014-2015 academic year, we conducted roundtables related to queer identity in the ESOL classroom at ORTESOL's fall and spring conferences and at an in-service day at Portland State University's Intensive English Language Program. We centered our conversations on one question: How are teachers addressing sexual diversity in their adult ESOL classrooms? Participant responses were as thoughtful as they were multifaceted, a reflection of how complex the issue still is.

Not until the early 1990s did researchers start addressing queer issues in TESOL literature (Nelson, 1993, 1999, 2009; Wadell et al., 2011). Subsequently, Nelson wrote one of the first books that described practices teachers have taken to create an inclusive environment for their LGBTQ+ students, as well as the associated challenges (2009). In our roundtable sessions, however, we found many ESOL educators still struggle with how to integrate queer topics, support LGBTQ+ learners, and provide for their safety.

While predominantly sympathetic, roundtable participants--queer and ally alike--expressed a variety of perspectives toward the topic, ranging

from avoidance to activism. Strategies for addressing sexual diversity in the ESOL classroom fell along a similar spectrum. Here we present our summary of recommendations from the roundtable participants. Even as systemic change must be sought at the institutional level, these recommendations represent the first steps a teacher can take in their classroom to respect the sexual diversity of their students and to address homophobic notions and actions.

Make an inclusive space.

- *Respect privacy.* Make offices and classrooms welcoming spaces where individuality is honored, but confidentiality is upheld. Let people come out on their own terms, but support them when they do. Understand that for some there are political, cultural, and social consequences of coming out.
- *Make it policy to respect others' backgrounds.* Communicate clear boundaries of what is appropriate behavior in your class. Enforce systematic practices against hate speech of any kind. Put this clearly in your syllabus and address it in the first class. For lower-level learners,

consider translating diversity statements into students' L1s.

- *Neutralize micro-aggressions.* Interrupt inappropriate comments (e.g., "That's so gay") just as you would for expressions toward other groups. Steer students toward more constructive language (See also Sue, 2010).

Learn more.

- *Educate yourself.* Learn the basics of queer culture just as you would learn the culture of another country. Understand you will have queer students in your classroom. Learn what it means to come out as a teacher, as a student, as an American, and as someone from another culture. Distinguish opinions from facts.
- *Know school resources.* Have information for students. Be familiar with your campus's queer resource center, clubs, and health care facilities.
- *Embrace learnable moments.* When students ask questions that you do not know the answer to, it is okay to say "I don't know. Let's find out together!" Learn why they are asking and begin discussion at the root of the issue.

[R]oundtable participants...expressed a variety of perspectives toward the topic, ranging from avoidance to activism. Strategies for addressing sexual diversity in the ESOL classroom fell along a similar spectrum.

Ratify the conversation.

- *Undo the taboo.* Do not dismiss or ignore students who bring up LGBTQ+ topics. Acknowledge cultural differences, but make no assumptions about what others believe.
- *Represent.* It is meaningful for students to know that there are others like them and others who

respect them as they are. Try to be a role model for your students, whether that is as an openly LGBTQ+ teacher or a passionate ally. Adapt your teaching materials to include images or descriptions of

queer individuals, families, or members of a community and advocate for these changes when interacting with publishers and materials providers.

- *Put it in context.* When isolated, sexual diversity is othered. When interwoven into a regular lesson, it is another thread in the fabric of society, neither promoted nor denigrated. Fold LGBTQ+ identities into existing topics such as family, relationships, and civil rights.

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Special Extended Teaching Note

Proactive Mentoring: Tips from the Trenches

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Abstract:

Effective faculty mentors both support and challenge the instructors and TAs with whom they work. A mentor's job is to orient protégés to their new work culture, to support their teaching and to advocate for them. A mentor looks at the organizational systems of the workplace and projects how those will affect the people under the mentor's umbrella of support. A mentor's aim is to collaborate with other members of the unit to create a culture of mutual support that enables new faculty to find their unique place in the organization, taking advantage of new opportunities for growth and developing their professional niche. A mentor recognizes that each mentee comes with different levels of experience, and a mentor strives to tap into the special contributions mentees have to make. From their initial "survival" and "getting grounded" stages, mentors do everything possible to support their efforts, to help them identify and develop their particular passions in order to create a meaningful career path.

Key terms: *Mentor, Protégé, Proactive mentoring, Orientating new faculty, Integrating new faculty, Developing a professional niche, Mentoring TAs, Role of a teaching mentor*

Introduction

In her 2005 book *Creating a Mentoring Culture*, Lois J. Zachary states that "Mentoring is a journey, not a destination" (p. xxiii). This notion of *the journey* is popping up all over the culture beyond the field of education. After working as a Faculty Mentor for the past five years, I could not agree more that it is a useful concept if we are dedicated to bringing out the best in those with whom we are working and we are committed to the idea that mentors too, are lifelong learners. For each person we mentor, the journey is unique, and while we strive to include all the

best practices we can in this endeavor, it is critical to keep in the forefront of our minds that "best practices" may mean very different things depending on who and what we are discussing. There is much to be learned along the way, for everyone involved in the process.

Many definitions of what constitutes a mentor exist, reflecting varying contexts in which mentors and protégées work. For the purposes of this article, I am describing the mentor as a person in an educational setting who has experience within the organization and whose job it is to orient, initiate, guide, engage, encourage, and integrate the new faculty

members into their new work environment. How the mentor goes about doing this will look quite different depending on the level of experience new faculty members bring with them and the specific work ethic and personality traits they possess. The successful mentor will have a deep toolbox of tips and strategies to share with mentees, but will also treat each new protégée as the individuals they are, helping them find ways to develop *their* specific skills so they can thrive in the organization and continue to develop professionally.

Brad Johnson and Charles Ridley organize their book *The Elements of Mentoring* (2008) with a focus on behaviors and actions that I find absolutely key to my work. While they do include a section discussing what good mentors *are*, the chapters in which they pinpoint what “excellent mentors do” are the ones that resonate most with my experiences of the last five years. How I organized the categories I include here is based in part on the model from this useful book that caters to mentors of many fields, not only education. Unless noted specifically, however, the categories themselves are mine, based on my experiences working as a mentor. There is much to be learned from varying models.

With this in mind, I discuss below tips, techniques, strategies and practices I have found most useful working with the dozens of new instructors, teaching assistants and seasoned faculty with whom I have been working—nearly one hundred hardworking souls so far. Other educators whose teaching influences my

own work include John F. Fanselow’s books *Breaking Rules: Generating and Exploring Alternatives in Language Teaching* (1987) and his next book *Contrasting Conversations: Activities for Exploring Our Beliefs and Teaching Practices*, as well as John Berger’s deeply influential book, *Ways of Seeing*.

Know your mentees: distinguish, differentiate, discern

Getting to know each mentee as an individual helps mentors to adapt our suggestions accordingly. We need to listen to them in an active way to get a

good sense of where they are at now in their teaching and professional development, and what *their* next steps might be. We will have

something different to offer the brand new instructor fresh out of school than we will the seasoned teacher who is simply new to the program. We should offer training and growth opportunities for all, but find ways to integrate the experienced teachers’ skills into leadership. We can ask ourselves these critical questions:

- What unique strengths, interests and experiences do they have that might be further cultivated for their professional development?
- What do they have to offer the unit/department that will help distinguish their work and give them solid activities to add to their annual review?
- What sort of relationship will serve them best?

Getting to know each mentee as an individual helps mentors to adapt our suggestions accordingly.

Some of our mentees will want more emotional support, others less. Some may want a lot of interaction and advice and others a more hands-off approach. Listening carefully and reading non-verbal cues is key. Underlying it all is the idea that we are genuinely concerned with helping them succeed and move forward on their own professional trajectory.

Make time to talk

This is tricky, but not impossible if we have dozens of people we are assigned to work with at once, but is another key element in helping to build a trusting and productive relationship. We need to find out who *they* are, what their interests, both personal and professional are. Welcome them warmly and make clear that no question is too big, small or very important, repetitive. Make clear that we expect them to need to hear information many times and that it is okay to ask repeatedly. We never know where the great ideas are going to come from and having ongoing dialogue gives many more opportunities to find out. The following are some ideas to help use time wisely, even with groups:

- Invite our protégés for coffee or tea.
- Organize a campus tour and chat informally while we show them around.
- Have a brown bag lunch meeting after the term gets going and bill it as time to talk about “challenges we are facing.” This will often help solve problems before they grow too large and help provide a support

system for all. It will also go a long way in reassuring newcomers that they are not alone in their struggles.

- Check in via email often, even at odd hours, especially in the initial stages of working together, and especially if you can engage them even before they arrive on campus. If mentors prefer, give mentees a cell phone number. Whichever mode we use, be available.
- Use post-observation conversations as another opportunity to check in and chat informally.

Embrace humor

This advice from Johnson and Ridley (2008) is also key, as long as mentors understand that humor here is of the supportive sort, and never drifts into snarkiness or sarcasm, which can have a devastating effect. Many of the mistakes that mentees will make can be made less dire with a smile or with humor, and we can help put things in perspective as noted below. We can focus on them as opportunities to learn and we can help more sensitive teachers to “let it go,” focusing instead on not repeating the error. If we are people who embrace sarcasm in life, it is a good area to be self-aware and regulate, avoiding this sort of humor in the mentoring relationship, where it can have unintended negative consequences.

We never know where the great ideas are going to come from, and having ongoing dialogue gives many more opportunities to find out.

Employ the first person plural

Why? Because this work we are all doing is a challenge for us all and we are

all in it together. “You” can sound isolating and accusatory; “we” is collaborative and inclusive. It sends a subtle message that makes an important difference, reminding the mentees that this is something *we all* deal with. The best part is that it is true.

Learn to frame your language positively

We can say almost anything in a positive way. Even critique can be worded carefully so as to propel the action forward and make it a true learning experience. We all know about *affective filters* and resistance from the student’s perspective, but too often we forget to apply that concept to our colleagues and protégés. Be aware of our language and avoid “don’t” statements; instead, reframe a negative statement with the lens of, “When we do X, we get..., but if we try Y, this is what I have seen happen,” to note one example. Practice framing and reframing the language we use in the most positive manner possible. This can be awkward or challenging at first, but is well worth the extra care, and soon becomes a habit that mentees report to be quite reassuring.

Celebrate and note all successes

When we are busy and wrapped up in our daily routines, it is easy to forget to notice what was done well, but it is critical for new instructors and faculty new to the program to be told *what they are doing right* in terms of their teaching, their integration into the unit and every other aspect of their presence in this new workplace. Johnson and Ridley note that we can never affirm their work too much, or as they say,

“Affirm affirm affirm, and then affirm some more” (p. 11). They go on to say, “If you can do only one thing as a mentor, affirm your protégés.” This resonates with me from a personal standpoint, and I have found it to be mostly true in my experience. There is a lot of research out there discussing the potentially negative impact that “too much” praise can have on student motivation, and this idea may well be perceived as similar with regard to the mentoring relationship, but I would argue that unless actually presented with the far more rare situation of an overly confident mentee, our protégés are starved for this sort of positive support. Now, does it mean we should employ so-called “empty” praise? Of course not. Praise is helpful when it is highly specific and put in the context of all that the teacher is doing. It is also to be balanced with the specific suggestions we make to help improve. We might well adapt Johnson and Ridley’s triple affirmation to say instead, *encourage encourage encourage!* I honestly do not think we can do this enough. Ever.

Provide correction

As Johnson and Ridley (2008) point out, it is a disservice not to provide correction, even when painful (p. 32). However, as discussed above, the secret in this lies in the *how*. Framing mistakes positively and as opportunities for growth can actually lead teachers to *beg* us for corrective feedback. No one ever wants to feel attacked, but we all feel respected and well supported when we see the clear steps for how to improve our practices or adapt our thinking. When correcting, we can start gently, using our best positive language, focusing on actions instead of

characteristics, moving to more strident critique and guidance as needed. It *is* our job to correct and teach when necessary, letting teachers know when what they are doing may land them in hot water of one sort or another and to help find solutions that will avoid these trouble spots. There is a fine line here to note because we are not supervisors, or at least not in this role, and therefore, our strategy must be firmly rooted in a model of “correction-as-support.” For example, I no longer engage in summative (evaluative) observations with the teachers with whom I work; however if they *will* be having a summative observation in their second term of employment, I point out what they may be doing that might be flagged as problematic in their teaching when the time comes for another teacher or administrator to observe and evaluate them. In this way, the mentor continues to support by providing useful information and sharing clear expectations of what the mentee will encounter in his upcoming summative observations.

Also in my experience teachers *know* when things are not going well, and not addressing the problem directly leaves them feeling isolated and, often, wanting to hide. By shining a light on the problem while signaling, “I’m here and I’ve got your back,” we embody the mentoring spirit and give a clear road map for how, together, we all make it back to a positive place.

Help put things in perspective

When the inevitable happens and one of the mentees makes a significant mistake, it is important to help them put it all into perspective. Most of the time, the mistakes are not dire. A favorite line

of mine is, “Well, the good news is, we are not doctors. Nobody died here.” That usually makes people laugh, and in this case, it is important to be sympathetic and empathetic, while also propelling the discussion forward to what we can do to fix it, what to do the next time, or what to avoid in the future. Keeping it positive and as light as possible can help a lot. We can remind them that we have *all* made such mistakes at one point or another.

But what do we do if what they have done *is* dire? While rare hopefully, it is our job to stand together with our mentees and walk them through the steps necessary to make reparations, offering to preview what the mentee may write or say when attempting to resolve the predicament. Again, empathy is key here. It can have a life-changing effect on both the mentee and the mentor.

Sharing our own tales

This point is directly related to the one above, and I have witnessed its calming effect. When we share our own mistakes and perhaps what we learned from them, we remind the teachers we are in the trenches with them and have stood in their shoes. The information we are imparting is not Divine, coming down from the mountain above, but is instead, hard earned, just as they are experiencing now. Putting things in perspective is excellent for individual mistakes, but what happens when mentee teachers genuinely feel that they are failing at the job or that they are in a larger sort of trouble? This is an opportunity to share our own real life harrowing stories and what we did to remedy and survive them. It can be enormously helpful for them to know that I too, was put on probation during

my first term of teaching in a particular school, because I was observed leading a class that was deemed too teacher-centered and because I did not stop the students in back who were chatting in Russian right next to my directors *throughout* the observation. Checking my ego at the door, I find it is highly useful to share this sort of information with teachers who are struggling, in order to show them that mistakes, even of the large variety, *can* be overcome with awareness and adaptation of our practices and a willingness to learn.

Often, mentors are the only ones who have the direct responsibility to advocate for teachers and teaching assistants.

Avoid conflicts of interest

Be aware of any potential conflicts in our role as advocate and mentor. When I first began mentoring, I was already a member of our Summative Observation Committee (SOC), meaning that I went into teachers' classrooms to complete the required evaluative observation, which results in a form filed annually in our personnel files. Almost immediately this felt wrong and in direct conflict with the mentoring relationship: How in the world was I going to be able to maintain trust when I was evaluating and scoring someone's teaching? My directors agreed that this was contrary to our objectives and pulled me off that committee, allowing me instead, to consult with the SOC on the value of employing fact-based observation as a starting point for these evaluative discussions. In other words, I could still be involved in order to advocate for teachers, but in a role that did not directly clash with my role as mentor.

Embrace contradiction and different approaches in teaching and problem solving

A mentor's goal is not to create "mini-me" clones of ourselves, but rather to bring out the best that each of our protégés has to offer for a diversified and complementary faculty. This will be manifested in wildly diverse ways, and is to be celebrated too. Even within ourselves, we should embrace contradictory practices at times.

This is key in differentiated instruction and our students will benefit from having teachers who employ a diverse assortment of tools in their toolboxes.

Advocate for mentees

Advocating for mentees comes in many forms.

- Often, mentors are the only ones who have the direct responsibility to advocate for teachers and teaching assistants. For example, if one of the mentee's students complains to advisors or administrators, this is an excellent opportunity for the mentor to become involved and to discuss in private with the mentee their side of the story. This can help to get a fuller picture, to help mitigate bad feelings, and to collaborate to find solutions. The mentor can offer to accompany the mentee to follow-up meetings with any administrators, if that is desired. Working together with the advisors or whoever is talking with the student in question allows everyone to feel supported

and to move to find solutions as quickly as possible.

- Mentors have the unique opportunity to put newcomers' names "out there" by getting them involved in projects they may not have access to or may not yet have the confidence to step up to on their own.
- When we see our protégés in action and have spent time in discussion both professional and personal, we can guide them to areas that will help *them* grow and become immersed in the work culture.
- There are times when it is useful to give our mentees "insider information" and tips for how to approach a particular person or a potentially thorny situation. We must be careful to be ever discreet, however, avoiding gossip at all times and staying within professional boundaries, but we also owe it to our protégés to avoid letting them find information out "the hard way" when possible.

Model professionalism and demonstrate humility

The idea here is obvious but important to reiterate and remind ourselves often, so as to provide the best possible models. If we want our teachers to behave in professionally appropriate ways, we had better do the same.

Be honest, direct, specific and kind

We serve our mentees best when we are direct with them, but tact and diplomacy go a long way in softening any blows they may feel hearing critique

and suggestions. All feedback should be highly specific and framed as positively as we can make it, in order to be as informative as possible without raising teachers' defenses. I have found that teaching assistants and faculty *request* more of the critique-type suggestions when they are framed as opportunities and also practices that I too, have to keep in mind daily.

Engage *with* our protégés

We can create collaborative explorations with our mentees in our post-observation discussions. We go into the observation with "clean" eyes, leaving our preconceived notions of "best practices" behind in favor of an approach where the observing teacher takes fact-based notes on all that the teacher and students are saying and doing, records time markers, groupings, and the strategies she is using to manage her class. In the post observation conversation, we can work together to note observations such as how the groupings were arranged. Suspending judgment for the moment about the efficacy of the teacher's choice for that day, the mentor and mentee can brainstorm together as many alternate possibilities as they can, thereby building *both* teachers' toolboxes and engaging in a project together. After that exercise, the mentor can ask the observed teacher how he feels his own choice worked and why or why not. Delving into the details together will reveal a lot for both mentor and mentee to learn.

Other options exist too; we can:

- invite questions big and small
- ask questions that direct their attention to specific areas

- ask questions we do not know the answers to
- invite them to teach us something we do not know, encouraging the attitude that *everyone has something to learn and something to teach*
- invite them to join in a collaborative research project
- invite them to co-present at an in-house or outside conference workshop
- ask them what *they* might like to collaborate on (this is easier if you do not have 20 protégés!)

Find necessary support in other faculty

As accomplished as we may be, mentors are not always able to answer every question. Tapping into other faculty is a useful and appropriate tool, and it helps send the message that mentoring is a communal and collaborative effort. There are several occasions when we ask for support from other faculty:

- Encourage “buddies” among new faculty and Teaching Assistants (TAs).
- Pair a new faculty member or Teaching Assistant with an experienced teacher who is assigned to the same course, to answer course-specific questions. Serve as liaison for them.
- Establish a network of teachers who are open to being observed while teaching and help facilitate observations, making strategic matches to illustrate specific skills such as managing group work, structuring classroom discussions,

managing time, and engaging students in active learning, to name a few.

- Keep our ears open when we hear of projects that might be excellent “ins” for our newer faculty to become involved with.

Be a “Point Person”

This can aid our mentees in both their professional and personal lives. As noted above, we can be the person mentees contact first. If we know the answer, wonderful, but when we do not, we find out where to direct them, helping to make any introductions necessary.

A resource we instituted in our department during the years of exponential growth was a good list of local “favorites” gathered from the rest of the faculty and staff, most specifically having to do with medical care and schools, but also suggestions for local restaurants, places to shop, and so on. Mentors can organize and update the file periodically or post it on a shared server, which has proven useful for everyone in the organization, and not just the newcomers. Mentees have mentioned this resource surprisingly often as something that helped support their acclimation to their new city.

“See one, do one, teach one”

While this model, originating in the medical field and specifically regarding invasive procedures, has been replaced with newer models, I find it still useful for educational purposes. For example, if we give a new TA a tutorial about how to complete midterm grade report forms, we may have her teach another new TA the procedure—under our guidance for

consistency—in order to help solidify the new procedure and get it “in there” when there is so much else going on. Having to teach someone else the procedure helps ensure that it is truly learned and more easily remembered and has the added benefit of making the newcomer feel like he has contributed something useful.

Reassure

One piece of feedback mentees have reported as especially powerful relates to my assurance that no one expects them to be brilliant their very first term and that we expect they will make mistakes. We understand how many aspects and threads of the job there are, and simply surviving their initial term intact is what we expect. We also assure them that by midterm so much will be clearer and that having the opportunity to start over the next term provides a real opportunity to make changes, fix initial errors, try new approaches, learn from their first set of formative observations, learn from the mistakes they made, ask far more informed questions and *then*, perhaps, strive toward brilliance.

Be prepared to hear personal stories and concerns

There is often an exceptional amount of stress that comes with taking on a new high demand job. Add to that the further stress of moving one’s family long distances and all that entails—kids starting new schools, finding all new doctors, changes in everything from one’s home life to adjusting to a new climate, health related issues and all the uncertainty that comes with “beginning again” – and we have a perfect recipe for feeling overwhelmed. Mentees often just

need a sympathetic ear for all the “extra curricular” difficulties they may be experiencing. Many of the books on mentoring note that this is a potentially fine line to balance; we are neither therapists nor counselors and need to take care neither to take on those roles nor allow a protegee to impose them upon us. But we *can* listen and support, empathize, help brainstorm solutions and resources, and simply allow our newer colleagues the chance to “get it out.” It is surprising how often this is enough. When it is not, we can help find the appropriate resources. I have been surprised and humbled by the many spontaneous hugs requested and offered at the end of a private meeting, particularly ones in which personal and professional hardship stories had been shared and challenges solved.

Confidentiality required

Whether we have just heard a personal story from their home life or have seen something egregious in the classroom, confidentiality is key in the mentoring relationship. One bit of leaked detail can undermine all the trust we may have built up over a period of time, and this makes sense; why should we trust anyone who has blabbed something difficult and personal?

Invest the time

The mentoring process takes a lot of time, thought and care to make effective. It is not always easy but it *is* always rewarding. Invest the time to help integrate new faculty into the organization’s culture. Introduce them to people they may align with while they begin to make connections of their own. Set aside your own busyness for the few

minutes because they need your undivided attention. Most times it will serve you and your institute well.

Feedback from mentees: In their words

Feedback I have received from mentees (collected 2015, see Appendix 1 for the collection form) has been specific and positive and demonstrates the great need this role can serve. Many people note that, “the learning curve was steep, but [the mentor] made the entire process seem orderly and manageable,” and “helped us to enjoy the process of adapting to a new workplace culture and life in a new city.” One mentee observes that, “The affirmation of professional abilities and pedagogical practices that [the mentor] provides can have a transformative impact on the identities of early-career instructors.” Someone else writes that the “greatest gift to me came at the time of my first formative observation. I consider this to be a pivotal moment in my career because it was the first time I thought of myself as a good teacher. During our post-observation discussion, [the mentor] said a lot of things that gave me a great deal of encouragement, but it was not just empty praise. By identifying specific aspects of the class that she considered to be effective and giving clear reasons to explain why they were effective, she both established herself as highly credible and, more importantly, gave me reason to have confidence in what I was doing.

A seasoned teacher new to our department wrote that “having a mentor to answer ‘point of need’ questions I had as someone new to a program, but not new to the profession was useful...and she recognized my previous experience

with and passion for mentoring new and new-to-program instructors.”

Below are some other quotes from mentee instructors:

- “[The mentor was] generous in sharing her personal experiences and expertise in the classroom to promote my success in those early weeks of my new career...[I] asked her advice on many matters from challenges of balancing home and work schedules, finding solutions to classroom management concerns, and brainstorming professional development ideas.”
- “The Mentor makes a difference in the lives of the people she helps...and... greatly helped me settle into the job at hand. In my first term, [the Mentor] quickly identified that my career interests were oriented towards teacher training; since then she has been a tireless advocate on my behalf... I owe my current career trajectory at [the Institute], as well as my overall sense of contentment and progress, to the tireless efforts of the mentor.”
- “During the observation process I never felt judged or evaluated; I felt very much that I was treated as peer who was trying to improve my teaching skills...this was integral in my continued development as a TESOL professional.”

TAs comments are below:

- “Because I was overwhelmed with teaching in [this Institute] for the first time, which includes no small amount of grading and planning, and just figuring out how everything works, in addition to

taking a maximum load of challenging graduate courses, I needed support and guidance. [The Mentor] consistently went out of her way to make sure that I and the other TAs had all of their questions and concerns tended to, whether pressing or less significant. As someone brand new to [this Institute], it was comforting to have the Mentor guide me through the basics of ...the myriad particulars that learning a multifaceted job entails. She helped me create a 'plan of action' in the winter of 2014. I was able to observe some experienced instructors, receive critical feedback, and focus on areas of my personal teaching that could use especial improvement. This process was quite useful; as an inexperienced teacher I was able to develop rapidly at a crucial time. Overall, [the Mentor] has been a reliable source of: positive energy, useful information and constructive encouragement."

- "I have met with [the mentor] to discuss student engagement and for ideas on calling on students," "review lesson plans and organize thoughts."
- "It was reassuring not only to know I could turn to her when I needed assistance, but to feel that she took an active interest in my work and wellbeing."
- "Without her guidance, teaching would have been significantly more stressful!"
- "I was a more prepared teacher right from the start, instead of wasting students' valuable time orienting myself."

Effect on the Mentor

These words above from people I have mentored are some of my most fulfilling as a teacher and teacher trainer and remind me that this work is key in helping create a thriving, collaborative atmosphere where we treat the people with whom we work as treasured colleagues we are willing to invest time and resources in helping develop. However, I should be clear that I too, get so much from each of these relationships. Having the opportunity to discuss and observe people teaching every week has sharpened my own teaching skills, freshened my perspective, broadened my toolbox and made me far more aware of my own pitfalls and strengths as an English Language teacher. We can learn something distinct from every single person with whom we interact and have the luxury to observe and explore our shared profession, participating in so many stimulating, cherished relationships. People who have been carefully mentored become great colleagues and future leaders, invested in making our shared work world a positive place to spend our careers and dedicated to being the best teachers we can be. This benefits our students, all teachers, the programs in which we teach, and the field as a whole.

Conclusion

Effective faculty mentors both support and challenge the instructors and TAs with whom we work. Though we may be working with individuals, our aim is to help create a culture of nurturance that helps new faculty find their unique place in the organization, taking advantage of new opportunities for growth. It is also our job to

encourage them to begin taking the reins themselves, step-by-step, so that one day, possessing a large toolkit as described above, they may agree to

mentor another new member of the faculty, thus beginning a unique new journey.

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Appendix 1

Mentee Feedback included was submitted to the Faculty Mentor, Summer and Fall 2015, posted anonymously here, but signed optional statements answering the questions:

1. Name any ways that having a faculty mentor helped you in your work for the Institute.
2. Note any ways having a faculty mentor helped you in getting oriented to Eugene/UO. (This will mostly apply to new faculty, not GTFs, I think).
3. Note any areas of particular challenge we may have worked out together.
4. If your role changed (GTF < New Faculty), what support were you provided?
5. Any special ways I helped *you*.

Teaching Note

Using Collaborative Summary Writing

Jennifer Morris, American English Institute, University of Oregon

Key Words: *collaborative writing, summary writing, summaries*

Introduction

In the student-centered classroom, collaborative interaction is an expected part of every class. Traditionally, this interaction is done verbally through topical discussions, interviews with classmates, and project work in groups. While teachers might use collaboration for pre-writing or to follow up a writing task, they do not often think of using a collaborative approach to the writing itself; however, research has shown that collaborative writing is beneficial for L2 development by aiding student engagement with the task, increasing their confidence, and enhancing student responsibility (Sajedi, 2014).

Summary writing is an important and useful academic skill that is used frequently in the university setting. For most students, it is a cognitively demanding task, and lack of instruction and practice in doing it properly can lead to copying rather than accurately paraphrasing. For second language learners, this task is exponentially more difficult due to limited L2 proficiency, but writing collaboratively can help students learn to more clearly communicate meaning and improve their linguistic knowledge (Lin and Maarof, 2013).

Process

Collaborative summary writing can be used effectively to help students develop both reading and writing skills in an academic English class at the university level, and the task can be adapted for other levels and types of classes while the main process remains the same. In two 50-minute class periods, the following steps can be used as extended practice for academic summary writing. Please note that, prior to this lesson, students should have had experience with the basic skills associated with writing summaries:

- Discerning main ideas and important details from articles using reading guides and group discussions.
- Paraphrasing and organizing the main points

In addition, the structure should have been explained, and all parts of the academic summary should have been modeled and practiced in previous lessons and as homework.

From that point, the process is as follows:

- (1) **Skimming, scanning:** Students are given an article or reading of appropriate level and length. They

can familiarize themselves with the text either as homework or as part of the class. Students skim the text and determine the number of main ideas. This can be guided by the teacher or determined by the students. Then they scan for important details related to each main idea.

- (2) **Careful reading:** Students count off to the number of determined main idea groups and sit together to study and more carefully read the main idea they have been assigned. If there are four main ideas, for example, there would be four groups, each studying one of the main ideas in the reading. In these first groups, students are negotiating meaning and checking for understanding of the reading. They are naturally paraphrasing as they discuss the ideas and developing their linguistic knowledge as they work together.
- (3) **Summarizing verbally:** Students then sit in mixed groups with each of the main ideas represented to discuss all of the main ideas in order. Student number one would summarize the first main idea for the new group verbally. The other students in the group can and should ask questions to clarify and make sure that all of the important information is included. The guiding question is whether someone who did not read the article would have enough information to be able to understand it.
- (4) **Collaborative summary writing:** Students work together to write an

academic summary of the article. They work collaboratively, each contributing one or two sentences to the summary. The other group members can check for clarity of ideas, vocabulary use, and grammatical structures.

- (5) **Editing and checking:** All of the students work together to check the summary for clarity and completeness of the information. They write the first sentence of the summary together, identifying the article, author and thesis. Finally, they check their grammatical accuracy, vocabulary choices, and add the necessary guiding language.

Conclusion

Collaborative learning in general has many positive gains for student achievement, but the use of collaboration for writing tasks has particular benefits for the improvement of language skills in a way that students are likely to remember. Having students work together to accomplish the goal of writing an academic summary not only relieves some of the cognitive burden of this complex task, but also allows students to improve various aspects of their writing (Lin and Maarof, 2013; Shehadeh, 2011). Aside from the linguistic benefits and academic gains, having students interactively compose their summaries is an interesting and enjoyable use of class time.

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Teaching Note

Flipping My Class; A Shift in Perspective

*Mary Wills-Gordon, American English Institute,
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Keywords: *Flipped classroom, Bloom's Taxonomy*

A few years ago, I came across the famous Flipped Classroom (n.d.) infographic (<https://www.knewton.com/infographics/flipped-classroom/>) and was excited about the idea of more student engagement in class. My classes were going well; students were getting good grades and seemed to be enjoying themselves. However, I was becoming bored of the same pattern, and most importantly, I noticed that students were just not talking very much. I wanted a change.

As I started researching the model, I found a lot of information about software to help with recording and streaming lectures. However, I do not "lecture," and it was hard to find a concise guide on *how* to actually do it. So, I went back to the basics of teaching – Bloom's Taxonomy – and created a process that has added genuine interaction and active learning in my classes. Below is my own process that I used to change how I organize and create my classes.

What am I currently doing?

A typical day in a communication class (50 min.) looked like this:

In-class

1. Introduce the day, collect homework, and take attendance
2. Vocabulary – definition match
3. Watch a video (two or three times based on need) and complete a cloze activity
4. Answer questions, give homework and wrap-up

Homework

1. Answer comprehension questions on video

What are my goals?

I wanted a class where students did most of the talking. I wanted students to use and apply new knowledge in conversations and express their ideas. My goals were to have more communication, creating, and critical thinking.

What can I change?

The instruction and activities were all lower order learning in class; it was remembering and understanding – the base of Bloom's taxonomy. To flip, I needed to remember: do what you usually do in class for homework and

homework is now what you do in class.

In-class

1. Group work and feedback
2. Analyze: organizing and classification
3. Create: plan and produce

Homework

1. Factual knowledge (i.e. read or listen to audio)
2. Repetitious materials (i.e. vocabulary)
3. Materials in which technology is available (videos and audio)

One of my favorite links I often use is Bannister's (2002):

<http://teaching.uncc.edu/learning-resources/articles-books/best-practice/goals-objectives/developing-objectives>. When I am wondering what I should do in class and how I can get students engaged, I look at the actions verbs in application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. It helps inspire me to create new activities.

My flipped class

Homework from the night before

1. Listen to audio (as many times as needed*) on chosen topic and complete cloze handout.
** audio/videos are uploaded to the class web site.*
2. Complete vocabulary definition match.

In-class

Students:

1. Are put into groups, introduce the day, give students discussion questions about the previous night's homework (5-10 minute discussion) while I take attendance.

[W]hen I hear groups comparing, validating and discussing their own answers from the homework, I know that this change in focus has been exceedingly beneficial.

2. Describe audio in groups, compare and evaluate their cloze and vocab definitions. Discuss any differences and defend why they chose their answer.
3. Analyze audio

transcript for vocabulary, put into word family list, and create new sentences.

4. Create discussion questions from audio in groups (jigsaw activity).
5. Preview next listening and/or topic with discussion questions that connect to personal experiences.
6. Answer questions, give homework, wrap-up

It has been over 3 years since I flipped my first course and it has been a very positive experience. There are some days that I do focus on remembering and understanding, but the majority of my classes are flipped. My lesson plans focus on discussion and creation. Homework is not only a continuation of what happened the day before, but a preparation and precursor for what they will learn and use the next day. Classes are no longer monotonous. Students do most of the talking and when I hear groups comparing, validating and discussing their own answers from the homework, I know that this change in focus has been exceedingly beneficial.

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Mary Wills-Gordon earned her B.A. in Linguistics and M.A. in Education from Boise State University. She has been teaching since 2001. She moved to Oregon in the spring of 2013 and is a faculty member in the American English Institute at the University of Oregon.

Teaching Note

Small Talk Tackles Big World

Reiko Fischer, Hitotsubashi University (Japan)

Keywords: *Small talk, fluency*

For my university EFL students in Japan, I am constantly looking for ways to help them engage in less protected communication outside the classroom. During my own L2 immersion abroad, I found the ability to initiate and reciprocate in small talk with strangers opened up a world of new friends while "activating" my dormant "School knowledge" (Little, 2009) from 6 years of formal English instruction in Japanese middle and high schools.

The first challenge is to help students get comfortable initiating casual conversations in diverse social situations including conferences, parties, and clubs. To address this, the small talk activity starts at the beginning of the academic term and evolves with some repetition. First it functions to help students get acquainted, and then expands as students team up to plan interview projects. I use a changing mix of roughly the following four steps:

Step 1—Individual brainstorming

Have students imagine a situation such as attending a class on the first day and striking up a conversation with a classmate they do not know. I allow three to five minutes to think of things they could say to start and end that conversation. This step probably will not be repeated as the term progresses, but students should be encouraged to

continue expanding their portfolio of ideas indefinitely.

Step 2—Group discussion

Students form groups of three or four to share and discuss their ideas. Ten minutes is enough time for the groups to evaluate the appropriateness of their topics and prepare to share phrases they agree would be useful.

Step 3—Follow-up

With the entire class, each group shares their discussion results and entertains comments. Useful phrases can be written on the blackboard or typed directly onto slides. I might offer comments or encourage discussion on differences or similarities between cultures. In subsequent sessions, steps two and three can be replaced with a regular invitation for individual students to share any new ideas they have come up with since the last session.

Step 4—Action

Students pair up, initiate conversation with phrases they liked, change partners after a couple of minutes, and repeat. Of the four steps this one is the most repeatable throughout the term.

Any or all of these steps can be repeated in subsequent classes as long as necessary, but ultimately, this sustained, even recursive focus on small talk is

intended to prepare students for "street-level" interview projects which they begin planning in pairs after a few weeks' practice. Minimum project parameters specify initiating contact with English-speaking international students on campus, conducting interviews, reflecting on the results, and reporting on those results in peer-evaluated class presentations.

I would summarize benefits I have observed as follows:

- Used for warm up, this exercise helps students switch to English speaking mode.
- Rotation of groupings helps students get to know all of their classmates. This helps create a safe environment where they can try, fail and try again. (DeVilla & Jiang, 2001)
- Scaffolding among students of different fluency levels is spontaneous.
- Repetitive spontaneous small talk builds confidence.
- Students learn ways to start and end a conversation while helping build a repertoire of good topics.
- Students are empowered and incentivized to engage strangers in spontaneous language usage outside the classroom. (VanPatten & Williams, 2007)
- The brainstorming sessions generate sometimes hilariously creative usage of previous book knowledge gained over years of formal language training.

In end-term evaluations only a few lower level students have given negative feedback about the street level interview projects, saying they did not feel their English was good enough and they were too shy to talk to strangers. However, even those students report enjoying the in-class small talk activity as it provides opportunities to use English in a relaxed non-threatening environment. Students also indicate an appreciation for getting to know all their classmates and making connections with international students on campus. At the end of the term, EFL students in this non-immersion environment demonstrate increased confidence outside the classroom, and bring significant enthusiasm back to classroom activities.

Learners in immersion environments may have more opportunities outside the classroom, but may still lack the tools and confidence to engage those opportunities. For them the above 4 steps could be coupled with a higher frequency of projects for in-class reflection. This activity has progressed differently with each new mix of students and would certainly evolve differently in a different external environment. Ultimately, I hope this description will stimulate innovation across a range of teaching environments where teachers want their students to learn more intentionally outside the classroom.

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Reiko Fischer received an MA TESOL degree from Portland State University in 2012 after living in the States for nearly 30 years. Since then she has been teaching EFL classes at Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo, Japan.

Book Review

A Review of *Creativity in Language Teaching: Perspectives from Research and Practice*

Reviewed by Regina D. Weaver, Portland State University

Jones, R.H., & Richards, J.C. (Eds.). (2016). *Creativity in language teaching: Perspectives from research and practice*. New York: Routledge.

Part of a series for ESL and Applied Linguistics professionals, *Creativity in language teaching: Perspectives from research and practice* presents a unique collection of views from a variety of academics and educators on what constitutes creativity in language teaching. In the introductory chapter, Rodney H. Jones and Jack C. Richards explain that creativity in language teaching, traditionally associated with literary texts, songs, and games, has come to be recognized as embodying a more complex and central role in the “linguistic, cognitive, sociocultural, and pedagogic dimensions” of language education. Jones and Richards observe that despite the different positions of the book’s twenty contributors, all agree on the fact that creativity: 1) plays a key role in teaching and learning, 2) uses language to solve problems, form relationships, and incite action, 3) is social and collaborative, 4) is transformative.

Creativity in language teaching is divided into four parts: Theoretical Perspectives, Creativity in the Classroom, Creativity in the Curriculum,

and Creativity in Teacher Development. In their overview, Jones and Richards summarize the book’s fifteen subsequent chapters, highlighting important points for each. Inasmuch as the book aims to promote continued study of creativity in language teaching, each chapter concludes with questions for discussion and suggestions for further research.

In the second chapter of the Theoretical Perspectives section, which includes chapters by Rod Ellis and James Paul Gee, Rodney H. Jones seeks to discover which features of language make it a tool for creativity and in what ways effective language use involves creativity. Jones determines that language is creative in that it “allows us to *do* things in the world,” and language users are creative if they are able to “exploit language’s inherent capacity for creative action.”

“Exploring Creativity in Language Teaching” is the first article in the Creativity in the Classroom section. Jack C. Richards and Sarah Cotterall mine Cotterall’s teaching journal for examples of creativity implemented in an academic writing course taught at the

American University of Sharjah. Using Cotterall's reflections, the authors compile a list of 11 characteristics that comprise creativity in teaching. These include variety, risk-taking, and the innovative use of technology in the classroom. The chapter also offers suggestions for ways in which an institution can support teacher creativity; for example, it can encourage creative partnerships and provide resources to support creative instruction.

Kathleen Graves's "Creativity in the Curriculum" begins the book's third section. According to Graves, sound knowledge of how the different dimensions of a curriculum "function and interrelate," as well a sense of scale, are necessary in order for transformation to occur. Graves presents four case studies, two at the classroom level and two at the school system level to illustrate her point. She notes that while curricular innovations in the two classroom examples were successful, their influence was limited by their small scope. As for the other two examples, one was not appropriated by the institution and therefore did not result in lasting change. The other was adopted as part of a core curriculum. Only this last example, according to Graves, was truly transformational because "all dimensions of the system aligned."

Creativity in Teacher Development begins with the chapter "A Conversation About Creativity: Connecting the New to the Known Through Images, Objects and Games." In this chapter, authors Kathleen M. Bailey and Anita Krishnan engage in a dialogue about how Bailey,

who works as a teacher educator at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, teaches abstract concepts to her Master's students. For Bailey, creativity encompasses "combining familiar forms in novel ways." She shares several examples of how she does this in an Experimental Research Methods course. In one example, Bailey draws pictures on the board to introduce the concept of intervening variables: "a big rock (the dependent variable), a lever poised to move the rock (the independent variable), and a fulcrum (the intervening variable)."

Since the book includes chapters by researchers, instructors, curriculum developers, and teacher trainers, it stands the chance of exceeding the stakes of those within these distinct fields; however, the sections on Creativity in Teaching and Creativity in Teacher Development can easily benefit instructors and teacher trainers alike, and as the authors point out, the theoretical chapters "illustrate their points with examples from classroom practice, and all the chapters on classroom practice have strong theoretical underpinnings." The five articles touched upon here, not to mention the remaining eleven chapters, yield considerable food for thought. Theorists will find a conceptual framework for discussion, and practitioners will find an abundance of applications for their classrooms. Consequently, *Creativity in language teaching: Perspectives from research and practice* seems likely to prove a worthwhile addition to any ESL or Applied Linguistics faculty library.

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- | | |
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