

# **44th International MEXTESOL Convention Proceedings**

## **Strengthening Learning Communities**

**León, Guanajuato, México  
November 9-12, 2017**



Dear MEXTESOL member,

MEXTESOL, the Mexican Association of Teachers of English, A.C. is pleased to make available summaries of selected academic presentations given at this year's Convention. MEXTESOL offers this non-profit compilation as an alternative for accessing information given at the sessions for those convention-goers who were unable to attend. It is also our interest that those colleagues who were unable to attend this year's convention have an opportunity to see a sampling of what ELT professionals are pursuing.

As always, articles included in this year's proceedings cover a variety of topics: classroom activities, teacher leadership, working with technology and inclusion. There is also research into topics that affect the English language teaching community.

Authors come from across the country of Mexico, as well as from different countries. The different viewpoints provide us with the clear idea that we have more in common with each other than we have differences.

I'd like to thank Uli Schrader in the MEXTESOL offices for keeping the Proceedings on track. He started the Proceedings in 2003, and has always maintained a sincere interest in their production. The Proceedings, and the Convention itself, only happen with the collaborative effort of everyone who selflessly takes part in the largest event of its kind in México. With that in mind, thank you to Uli for his leadership and to everyone who sent in articles.

We hope that many English language professionals benefit from the ideas presented in this document and that in years to come, other Convention speakers participate as authors in the Proceedings. Thank you for your interest and participation in our organization, MEXTESOL.

Guadalupe Pineda  
Editor

*Note: The speakers / authors submitted their articles according to the guidelines that were provided. These were subsequently formatted in order to provide uniformity in the presentation of the articles. MEXTESOL is not responsible for the contents of the summaries, nor for inaccuracies or omissions in the information, presentation or bibliographical references contained therein. In the table of contents, summaries are listed in alphabetical order of the speaker / author's last name, as listed in the submitted files. The names in the articles appear as written.*

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## 44th International MEXTESOL Convention Strengthening Learning Communities

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### Growing together as a global community

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The Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán and Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, have brought their faculty and pre-service language education students together for the past six years to participate in several professional development activities focused on community-engaged language education through storytelling and conversation groups. This article is based on six years of shared experiences and results of research, investigating the impact of this collaboration on the participants. Some participants were engaged in the planning, organization and implementation of the activities; others were participants in the storytelling groups or the Conversation Cafés, and for others, their involvement was a source of information to work on research projects based on community service and community integration into an English-speaking society. This work has involved collaboration between both institutions with participants, researchers and members of the community playing a relevant role in these joint projects.

Key words: community engaged, community service, collaboration, conversation clubs, storytelling

### Introduction

This paper concentrates on two collaborative project areas, Storytelling and the Conversation Café Model. Storytelling encompasses training provided for teachers and students at the FEUADY by Rutgers; and working with groups of student-teacher storytellers trained to prepare and tell stories at state book fairs and other events. The Conversation Café Model incorporates training for teachers and students at different institutions in Mérida, as well as the development of a project called '*Conversation Time*' at FEUADY. It will also discuss the visits, collaborations, and research done as a result of this shared participation. Finally, voices from some of the participants will be shared in order to provide an overview of the benefits obtained from these projects and the impact it has had on the experiences and the ethnographic research that has been done, based on information that has been gathered through questionnaires to a sample of respondents involved. This piece of work will show how our students, teachers, and members of the communities have grown through working together in these collaborations.

## Storytelling

The first collaborative project we will focus on is Storytelling. The project started in 2012 with a workshop given by Dr. Curran and a group of in-service teachers from the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University, the State University in New Jersey (RU GSE), for students and teachers at the School of Education at the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán (FEUADY). As a result, a group of storytellers emerged with the aim of participating for the first time in the local book fair in the city of Mérida. On this occasion, Dr. Mary Curran and UADY professor Blanca Adán Sobrado led the group during the days of participation at the fair. Stories in Chinese, English and American Sign Language were told to an audience mainly formed by elementary school children. The principal objectives of these presentations were the promotion of the habit of reading, the teaching of moral values, and the learning of foreign languages. This collaboration became part of a degree course offered in both institutions known as *Classroom Organization / Management*, which included a component based on the acquisition of teaching skills. The competence of becoming a teacher-storyteller grew to have an important part in the course. In the same way, subsequent visits of Dr. Curran to FEUADY have contributed to the development of competences in undergraduate students at the Degree in English Language Teaching. These efforts match the goals of The UADY Institutional Development Plan (PDI 2010-2020), which states that due to the evolution of work-place tendencies, it is now required that students are to be taught content knowledge as well as a series of competences to enable them to face the challenges of a globalized world.

As the project has developed, new stories and different languages have been incorporated, such as, Mayan, French and Japanese. Each year, new members are added to the Storytelling group; therefore, this has given the opportunity to students of different levels of the degree program to become part of it. Likewise, RU GSE developed a professional development program that focuses on the technique of storytelling for language teachers. RU GSE's undergraduate students have used this technique in the teaching of languages, such as Chinese and Spanish as well. Currently, students at the UADY are in the process of reorganizing the team of storytellers in order to incorporate new elements as others have just graduated and hence left the group. To date, the storytelling activity has been presented at the local book fair for the past five years.

Derived from the previous experience, we published a paper, which is part of the book called *Sociedad, Desarrollo y Comunidad*, that we named *Interacción comunitaria de los estudiantes de la Licenciatura en Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés como cuentacuentos*, where the experience of interacting with the community by means of storytelling has been highlighted. This chapter is based on what Marchesí Ullastres (2005) stated about the methodology of storytelling as a useful tool that serves two purposes: metacognitive development and the promotion of values. Additionally, according to Cebrián (2012) children develop their imagination, their creativity, and their learning in the same way as they build their identity, show their emotions and their perception of reality through the stories they are told. On the other hand, the benefit for the pre-service teachers who have been part of this group of storytellers relies mainly in the development of leadership skills, creativity, and social responsibility which go beyond what they learn at university. The pre-service teachers play different roles as organizers and team leaders, being in charge of a number of chores, such as costumes, visual aids, scripts, scenery and props, apart from actually telling the stories and helping their teammates whenever needed. This is what the new FEUADY curriculum

(MEFI 2011) promotes, as part of the integral growth of university students who are engaged in cultural activities that have an impact on the community.

### Conversation Café Model

The 'Conversation Time' program is an adaptation of a model from RU GSE, The Conversation Tree: Community-Based Language Partnership Program. In The Conversation Tree Program, students and community members participate in "Conversation Cafés." These Cafés provide a source of community practice which takes place in local libraries, classrooms and community centers in New Jersey. The sessions are designed to create an informal, supportive environment in order to promote the practice of languages among community members who share the need for language practice. The participants need to interact within the social, work, school or university contexts using languages, such as: English, Spanish, and Mandarin Chinese, among others. At RU GSE, students enroll in a course, Community-Based Language Learning in which they are prepared to be a Conversation Facilitator in the local community. They learn the important skills of being a sympathetic interlocutor, making their conversations comprehensible, and seeing language learning from a resource-based perspective (not a deficit-based perspective).

The Conversation Café Model was adapted so it could be put into practice at the FEUADY has been carried out through the collaboration of both universities since 2013 when a group of students, guided by Dr. Curran, began a series of annual visits which had the purpose of sharing the conversation model with the UADY and organizing meetings with local students to encourage social, cultural and language interaction where participants could exchange academic and personal information in both English and Spanish. As Gay (2013) suggests, we understand culture in a broad sense, meaning: attitudes, values and beliefs, as well as heritages, contributions, experiences and perspectives, considering them synonyms for culture.

The main objective of the project is based on the theory of *Culturally Responsive Teaching*, established by Gay (2000), who believes that future teachers should understand different ways of thinking, of acting and of interacting within a given society to be able to respect the differences in a multicultural world. This is made possible through constant interaction and the exchange of ideas, while respecting points of view and customs of the people involved with the purpose of creating an environment of mutual encouragement. Along similar lines, Banks (2003) proposes a path to achieving social commitment in students, stating that socially responsible education professionals are shaped through the knowledge of the social context and interaction. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the facilitators who have knowledge of the social and educational context of the participants, their needs and abilities to promote this type of conversational exchange.

The adaptation to the model made by teachers at the FEUADY was done as a social service project, where students from the final semester of the degree in ELT were trained as facilitators to hold conversation sessions with groups of students from the Social Sciences and Humanities campus who have to reach an intermediate level of English in order to be able to graduate from university. With the support of the teacher trainers responsible for the project, a team of two students from the degree program developed a series of materials and organized and implemented conversation sessions where they used the model as a basis to plan and facilitate the activities, offering support and immediate feedback to the participants.

The facilitators created an extensive portfolio of materials and plans for the sessions that they organized, which served as evidence of the required product generated as part of the social service they carried out at the School of Education.

Given the fact that the facilitators/trainees designed and carried out a series of conversation sessions, receiving feedback from their trainers throughout the process, in terms of what Zeichner (2010) mentions when he refers to university curricula devoted to training teachers establishing that the type of practice that is done in a systematic way is the one that has a greater impact on the trainees, these constant experiences were the ones that boost interest among the students who participate in them. At the same time, facilitators at the '*Conversation Time*' offer opportunities of constant and systematic language to practice to the learners attending the sessions through a variety of topics, tasks and materials designed and implemented for these sessions, while assuming the responsibility of creating a supporting and engaging environment for the participants.

As a result of the above, we have submitted the project to the ANUIES *Catálogo de las Buenas Prácticas* (2016), which is an online database of teaching practice materials meant as a guide for English teachers in México. This website offers a large variety of activities of diverse topics that have an impact on the learners, the teachers, being the users and the state universities where these activities are implemented. Through this catalogue, a group of English teachers from different parts of the country have contributed in the creation of individual and collaborative actions based on the grounds of ELT, reflective teaching and creativity where they have fostered the appropriate environment and learning conditions to guide their students in developing their knowledge, skills and positive attitudes considering a diversity of learning styles, needs and objectives.

#### Research Results of the Impact of the FEUADY-RU GSE Conversation Projects on Students at the FEUADY

In order to gain insights into the possible impact on FEUADY students of the collaborative projects focusing on conversation, a group of students and graduates from the BA in English Language Teaching at the FEUADY were asked to answer a questionnaire (see Appendix) made up of a series of open-ended questions regarding their experiences with the Conversation Café and/or Conversation Time programs. A total of nine participants completed the questionnaires. The respondents included two graduates who had been the facilitators for the FEUADY Conversation Time project as the Social Service component of their degree; two graduates who had had the opportunity to spend a period of the time in New Jersey at RU GSE, during which they took part in Conversation Tree sessions; and five students/graduates who had taken part in Conversation Tree and/or Conversation Time sessions held at the UADY.

When analysing the graduates' and students' answers to the questionnaire, it became clear that responses tended to coincide over the positive role the experiences had had on: the participants' language development; their self-confidence as speakers of English and as facilitators/teachers; their awareness and tolerance of cultural differences; their awareness of the need for learner-centred teaching; their teaching skills; their motivation to attempt to set up similar programs in the future; and the relationships they have established between FEUADY and RU GSE students.

### *Language Development*

As might be expected, participants' language development was a recurrent theme when asked about the advantages of taking part in the programs, with one student stating that "[t]he major benefit is that people can practice and improve their skills in [the] English language." The participants were equally keen to point out that the conversation sessions allowed the learners to dedicate more time to speaking than is often possible in the typical classroom, as well as providing the opportunity to practice using the language in a more relaxed, fun atmosphere, both factors contributing to improving fluency. The authenticity of the communication between participants was emphasized, with one of the facilitators highlighting the fact that the sessions "allowed [the participants] to engage in natural conversations, "while another respondent stressed the benefits of "using the language in real life situations and with native speakers or speakers of other languages." Along similar lines, the suggestion made by one respondent that taking part in the program "helps the learner to develop social skills in the target language" reinforces the idea that the sessions foster the development of sociolinguistic competence.

### *Self-Confidence*

The effect of lack of self-confidence when speaking a foreign language is made stridently clear by one learner who asked, "How can you talk about knowing or learning a language if you are so shy that even speaking to others in the target language is something you cannot do?" The same learner considered that becoming more extroverted was the most important benefit of participating in the conversation sessions, adding that it helped him become more confident in English. Developing self-confidence was also mentioned by other participants, both in their roles as speakers of the language and as teachers/facilitators. In the words of one facilitator, "Conversation Time gave me a lot of confidence, before I was not sure if I could stand in front of a class and be in charge." Another concluded that "[b]ecause of this experience, I feel myself more confident to develop a lesson plan."

### *Cultural Awareness*

All the respondents claimed they had developed increased awareness of cultural differences as a result of the interaction with U.S. students. One stressed that taking part in the sessions had helped her understand other people's points of view in general. However, most of the others focused more on how much they had learnt about U.S. culture, with one simply enthusing that "it is great to learn from other people's culture," while another said that "it has been interesting to see how much you can learn from another country's culture through language teaching/learning." One of the graduates showed how much her general perspective had broadened as she admitted that "[b]efore I participated in this project, I didn't use to think about cultural diversity and global citizenship. The way I think about the world changed thanks to this project." She went on to say that she now realizes that:

being a language teacher is much more than [teaching aspects of the language], we have an important role in our society because with language we can teach students to be conscious about the world and to be socially responsible. What I mean is that a language can help us to become more sensitive about the world and our community.

The fact that people from the two countries share many similarities did not escape respondents, with one stating that "[i]t gave me a better perspective of how things are in the US, and the differences and similarities among us in terms of work, school, traditions, and daily life." The same participant also noted the willingness of the RU GSE and FEUADY

students to collaborate, saying they had been able to “create a kind of mutual work, and help.” Another commented that “it’s nice to realize that in some cases we have similar ideas or opinions, we might also have different opinions but it’s always good to learn about the way they think and their reasons.” This way of increasing tolerance of differences through better understanding was also mentioned by others, one example being the student who considered that “[i]t helps us understand that our culture is not the only one and develop more interest and tolerance.”

### *Learner-centered Approach*

Several of the participants mentioned having become aware of the need for a learner-centred approach to teaching. One graduate summed this up by saying that “[w]hen planning, I now consider whom my students are and what they are interested in” and that, in his role as a facilitator for Conversation Time, “[t]he challenge to ensure a student-centred classroom was always there: we wanted the participants not to feel bored and to engage in every activity, because we believed that everything we were doing could be meaningful if the public felt attracted to it.”

### *Teaching Skills*

In terms of the impact on the participants’ teaching skills, all of those who had taken part as facilitators reported a wide range of positive effects. One of the facilitators discussed having learnt to improve her lesson planning and to make her classes more effective while in the program. Another mentioned having been able to put into practice the planning and organizational skills he had acquired on his degree courses at the FEUADY when acting as a facilitator on the Conversation Tree project. A further respondent elaborated on how he had been able to put into practice what he had learnt in his BA, specifically on his courses in Classroom Management and Teaching the Productive Skills, this being a speaking program, but added that “[t]his project expanded what I had learnt on the degree because it allowed me to apply all those theories to the real world.” The need to be innovative and creative when planning and to design activities which ensure interaction also seemed to have been reinforced in their minds. One facilitator also stressed the importance of creating a “freer and safer environment for learners to express what they want” and an “accepting atmosphere.” Another emphasized the need to engage learners and check their understanding.

### *Motivation*

As far as participants’ motivation to set up similar programs in the future is concerned, every single respondent stated quite categorically that they would like to. As one student put it, “I would like to make a similar project to help people to improve their skills, as this program helped me when I needed.” Similarly, another elaborated on the idea saying that “[g]iving students an authentic opportunity to put in practice the conversational skills, grammar structures, vocabulary, and other things they’ve learnt is really a must,” while a third suggested that “[o]pening spaces to practice speaking and social interaction in a school will always improve the participant’s learning process and can even create a stronger bond to the language and maybe among the participants.” Some of the graduates stated that they are hoping to set up conversation programs in the near future where they are working, including one at a bilingual elementary school, and one reported, “I have tried similar activities with my students, we have a “Speaking Workshop” which has a similar approach to the CC [Conversation Café], and the students have responded really well.”

### *Relationship Building*

Participation in the program appears to have long-lasting effects. Many participants reported making strong connections, and six of the nine continued to maintain their relationships beyond the program. For example, one participant reported,

I am still in touch with some of them. I think that those relationships can benefit both parts by helping each other in the language teaching practice. I think it is great that we get to have connections with people from abroad; we are communicating with people, and learning a language, in the end, is all about communication. You can tell that Conversation Café sessions that we had here in Mérida were successful because I know many of my fellow classmates have kept in touch with students from the US that took part on the project.

In addition, the pre-service teachers keep in touch via social media:

I am still in touch with some of them. I think that those relationships can benefit both parts by helping each other in the language teaching practice. I think it is great that we get to have connections with people from abroad; we are communicating with people, and learning a language, in the end, is all about communication. You can tell that Conversation Café sessions that we had here in Mérida were successful because I know many of my fellow classmates have kept in touch with students from the US that took part on the project.

We feel these relationships are priceless, as our participants have created a new social network. One participant commented, sadly, that he regretted not asking his RU GSE partners to keep in touch with him. Seeing this feedback helps us plan for more encouragement to our students so that they share their contact information. The data helps us realize that when contact information is shared, these new colleagues are now available to support our pre-service teachers in their language development, their future teaching, and their ongoing professional development as they learn about new perspectives from other parts of the world.

### *Future Research and Conclusion*

It seems fitting to conclude this section covering the more salient findings of our research with the very encouraging comment made by one of the graduates who was able to take part in conversation sessions both at RU GSE in New Jersey and at the FEUADY, “participating in this project motivated me to become a better teacher and to keep learning.”

Our research has helped us see the transformative impact of our projects on the participants. In fact, in response to the question, “Have you maintained any contacts/friendships with these students?”, one student wrote: “[s]adly, no. But I regret not doing [it] when I could.”

We also learned that participants desired more opportunities to engage in the Conversation Cafés and they would have liked more options at different times of the day. This feedback is important, as we carefully consider the participants’ interests and requests as we design future program. At the same time, we feel encouraged to do more research. We plan to conduct similar research on the storytelling project, and we are working on an analysis of the experience of the RU GSE students as well for future publications. This careful reflection on

the pre-service teachers' experiences allows us to adapt and redesign our projects so we can best meet their needs and design programs in order to have a strong impact. We are also searching for funding to help support more student collaborations and exchanges.

In conclusion, we can see that these collaborations have offered opportunities for FEUADY learners to interact with native speakers and likewise, RU GSE students to interact with their Mexican peers, and participate in projects as facilitators, participants and organizers. In this way, they have held different responsibilities that have contributed to their growth as teachers, as students and in some cases as researchers and even as citizens. Furthermore, we have gained the experience of adapting to different learning environments, showing the participants that respect, tolerance and understanding are key factors in becoming culturally responsive teachers that could lead to acceptance of differences, as stated by Bennett (2014), "[a]cceptance does not mean agreement or preference for alternative values, but rather acceptance of the distinctive reality of each culture's worldview." If we had not come together with a view to collaborating on a series of projects, it seems unlikely that at the FEUADY, we would have taken on the Storytelling and Conversation Time programs when we did. It has certainly been the case that we have grown professionally to a much greater extent than we had initially expected as one collaboration has led to another. We are very much looking forward to future collaborations.

## Appendix

### Conversation Tree / Time Questionnaire

Answer the following questions in as much detail as possible. All the information provided will greatly contribute to the project and the identity of the respondents will be treated confidentially

1. What do you think the benefits of participating in the Conversation Tree / Time sessions have been for the language learners / public who attended?
2. As a trainee teacher, how have you benefited from attending /leading / facilitating some of the Conversation Tree / Time sessions in terms of planning, organizing, preparing materials and generally improving your English / teaching skills?
3. How have you been able to put into practice the English / teaching skills you have acquired from your degree courses.
4. How has your participation in this project allowed you to expand on and complement what you had learnt on your degree courses? What new skills did you develop, perhaps?
5. Has this experience motivated you to try to set up a similar program in the institution where you currently work or perhaps elsewhere in the future? Please explain.
6. What suggestions would you make to improve the project for future generations?
7. What has been the impact of participating with students from the US and México?
8. Have you maintained any contacts / friendships with these students? If so, what have you taken away from those interactions?

Thanks very much for taking the time to answer this questionnaire.

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## **Emotions matter! The SEL Program**

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The inception of this presentation began when the teacher realized that students needed something else from typical grammar-based or traditional classes in order to perform better in academics. It became evident that some students were not succeeding although they showed to be smart and laborious. After doing some research and a mini-project, this presentation emerged.

*Emotions matter! The SEL Program* is a practice-oriented session based on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) which according to *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators* (Elias et al, 1997) is a process through which children and adults learn to recognize and manage emotions, demonstrate care and concern for others, develop positive relationships, make good decisions, and behave ethically, respectfully, and responsibly. Some SEL practices have already been tested at the English Access Program at the Universidad Católica de El Salvador (UNICAES). Thus, this presentation is being updated as the presenter continues to do research in this area.

“The emotional centers of the brain actually can take over the centers for learning... It matters that students feel safe, that students feel calmed; it matters that they’re attentive... and now that we’re ready to learn, we can go ahead.” (Edutopiaorg, 2017)

As stated above, Goleman affirms, in his video “The Emotional Atmosphere of a Classroom Matters,” the how emotions do matter when we talk about the learning process. Not all students come to the classroom ready to learn the lesson the teacher has enthusiastically prepared. In addition, several students express their lack of self-control in various ways which can be wrongly labeled as simple reluctance.

Daniel Goleman, who is a co-founder psychologist of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning ([www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org)), states the following reasons why SEL is vital in education (Eqorg, 2017):

1. SEL is essential for life, school, happiness, good relationships, and workplace success.
2. Academic performance does not predict life performance.
3. Not every child has the advantage of good parenting; that is why SEL must be taught at school.
4. SEL encompasses 21st century skills: critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration.
5. SEL aligns with the purpose of real education; it helps learners reach their full potential and gets them prepared to adapt to jobs that do not even exist now.

According to Dr. Roger Weissberg, president and CEO of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (Eqorg, 2017), the success of the SEL programs being studied lies on the fact that students are supported by and sustain positive relationships with caring adults. Additionally, learners feel a significant bond with their schools as result of good experiences. Children are, also, provided with opportunities to build Social and Emotional competences as learning communities are safe and supportive. This last statement aligns with the *44th International MEXTESOL Convention, Strengthening Learning Communities* as well.

A very thought-provoking article by Edutopia.org called *How Gaming Connects to SEL and Career Readiness* (Maurice, 2017) affirms that

“What we can be most sure about in the future is that our ability to know our own feelings and thoughts, solve problems, and establish and sustain positive, constructive relationships will matter tremendously. A recent longitudinal analysis by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) titled *Skills for Social Progress: The Power of Social and Emotional Skills* claimed that social and emotional skills will play a pivotal role in improving children’s chances of success in facing the challenges of the 21st century.”

#### Session organization and flow of events

The session opens with the presenter’s testimonial about his kick-start with Social & Emotional Learning. The story tells about an extremely shy student who did not have enough confidence to speak basic phrases or express her thoughts in the target language; however, her problem was not about learning but about sharing with others. In brief, after several introspective talks with the teacher and the help of her classmates, she started to show her full potential every time she had to present. She appeared to be a new person, and now she is a confident English speaker, and a successful high school student.

After briefly narrating the story on how SEL changed a student’s life and academic performance, the presenter continues with the introduction and the explanations of the session’s name. Social and Emotional Learning concept and origin will follow as well as the presentation’s objective. Right after, attendees have a reflection moment with a turn-and-talk activity discussing some quotes about SEL.

Because it is quite necessary to state clear reasons why a different approach should be brought to the classroom/ institution, attendees will learn about sounded arguments about the need of SEL implementation.

In his book *“Working with Emotional Intelligence,”* Goleman (Goleman, 1998) gives several reasons why Emotional Intelligence is not only a trendy term but an urge in the current and future work environment. For instance, more and more often, employers look for more non-cognitive skills among their future employees; in fact, out of seven requirements valued by business owners, only one is academic. That is, interpersonal skills, communication, and initiative, which are emotional skills, are more determinant in order to be hired.

#### SEL Competencies

Some months ago, the presenter began to test the recommendations and tips now suggested in this presentation; thus, he created a SEL mini-project inviting some students who lacked

socio-emotional skills according to their teachers. These students were informed about SEL, and they experienced the activities and strategies described below and some more. The project participants started shy and reluctant but showed improvement and openness along the sessions. In the end, they videotaped themselves talking about the outcomes they identified out of the project.

After introducing the practical background behind his Emotional Intelligence research, the presenter will show the five competencies of Social and Emotional Intelligence, which are Self-awareness, Responsible Decision-making, Relationship Skills, Social Awareness, and Self-management which will be described in detail.

### Self-awareness

Here students learn to identify and describe their own emotions and to understand why they feel the way they do. In the SEL project carried out by the presenter, students were exposed to introspective activities (as shown in Annex A) where they had to recognize their feelings and the reasons for them. After completing the printed material, learners always had a period for reflection and sharing with peers.

Annex A



I Am...

Emotional self-awareness is the ability to recognize one's feelings. In the spaces below complete each statement based on how you feel. Use the blanks to add your own feeling words.

Example:

I am most happy when \_\_\_\_\_ .

I feel embarrassed when \_\_\_\_\_ .

I think negative thoughts about myself when \_\_\_\_\_ .

I am \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_ .

I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_ .

I think \_\_\_\_\_ about \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_ .

I am \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_ .

I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_ .

I think \_\_\_\_\_ about \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_ .

I am \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_ .

I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_ .

I think \_\_\_\_\_ about \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_ .

I am \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_ .

I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_ .

I think \_\_\_\_\_ about \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_ .



Finish this statement: I think the world needs...

### Responsible Decision-making

Students identify problems when making decisions and generate alternatives. After discussing about causes and consequences, students had to reflect about one of their problems whether present or past. Additionally, they were asked to write the final consequence of that problem on the bottom of an empty page. They would answer the question “*What caused that problem?*” as they continued filling the page upward creating a tree diagram.

### Relationship Skills

Students develop constructive relationships with students and adults and develop skills to recognize, understand, and address/resolve interpersonal conflict.

Here, students may analyze a past conflict they had with someone by answering questions such as “*What could I do better next time I have a conflict or misunderstanding?*” They can write a list of possible reactions and discard the least appropriate explaining why they are not convenient. In the project, learners were assigned simple daily assignments as: “say good morning to at least twenty people today” so that they start positive approach toward their community members.

### Social Awareness

Students understand others’ perspectives and demonstrate empathy. With the teacher as a coach, students were asked to write anonymously real problems they were facing at home; then, the teacher picked up the pages and distributed them again so nobody gets their own. Learners must read the problem and give it a real and possible solution (written or orally) that will serve as a piece of advice for the person facing the issue.

### Self-management

Students develop self-regulation skills and strategies for their feelings, e.g. agitation, anger, elation or listlessness. As shown in Annex B, students reflected upon their emotions and their reactions to them. After they have worked with the squares, they have a reflection/sharing time with the group and coach.

#### Annex B

#### Emotional Squares

In each square write what you do when you experience the emotion listed. Include both productive and destructive behavior.

<b>Aggravated?</b>		
<b>Angry?</b>		
<b>Depressed?</b>		
<b>Scared?</b>		
<b>Worried?</b>		
<b>Happy?</b>		
<b>Energized?</b>		
<b>Stressed?</b>		

Do you have more positives or negatives listed? Having someone you trust to talk to when you are feeling out of sorts helps you avoid negative behaviors and consequences.

To close the session, some steps to get started with SEL will be recommended to the attendees, for instance:

- share and listen to students' experiences
- discuss real-life and fictional dilemmas
- model problem-solving process and other social & emotional strategies
- encourage them to think about choices and consequences
- develop ethical reasoning
- have them keep an emotional journal
- praise students when they volunteer and help others
- provide emotional support
- prepare a short SEL camp or mini-course

Conclusively, attendees must understand the importance of starting with small steps as soon as possible. Also, they must realize that these practices should be constant and consistent as students deal with their and others' emotions every single day; and they need to be provided with practical plans to successfully react to them. The ideal thing to start is to have a psychologist as instructor to develop a mini course or project. Although a teacher is not a psychologist per se, sometimes, a teacher's help might be the only one a student might receive. That is, everybody can do something from their positions, coaches, teachers' trainers, teachers, principals, substitutes, and so forth.

Further actions expected

Finally, the teachers must be the catalyst for positive changes to occur. They have to identify those teaching moments where SEL might be introduced to or practiced in the classroom. Since it is the moments that the teacher starts to listen and show understanding that builds students' self-esteem, confidence, and self-awareness.

As the facilitator demonstrates emotional availability and emotional intelligence, the learners will emulate and rely on their role model's emotional abilities. That is to say, the leaders of the classroom or institution must "walk the talk" because students, especially children, learn best from examples than from words. It is then time to ask ourselves: How emotionally intelligent am I? How can I improve to teach my learners in a better way?

The strategies and tips suggested in this session have been tested at English Access UNICAES, and they have proven to be successful since students showed a better attitude toward themselves and their peers, better communication, and improvement in self-confidence due to the sharing and self-analysis that certain activities involved. Nonetheless, these are not the only practices about SEL. It is expected that the attendees become aware and motivated so they start their own searching, creating, and adapting strategies for their own contexts. That is why, this presentation at the *44th International MEXTESOL Convention, Strengthening Learning Communities* is an encouragement for best practices. Besides being expected to start implementing SEL in their own classrooms, attendees are expected to share the results out of those attempts.

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## **English for Kids Program: Building a graduate-undergraduate community**

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Building and strengthening communities has been an issue of special concern for the last decade in most contexts all over the world. It is not surprising that in the English Language Teaching field the emphasis on devising different groups and communities have trapped an increasing number of researchers, authors and professionals in general. Learning communities are best defined as “on going groups... who meet regularly for the purposes of increasing their own learning and that of their students” (Lieberman & Miller, 2008 p. 2). In this presentation we intend to share the great experience of developing a learning community in which graduates and undergraduates have found the appropriate environment to learn from each other.

In 1999 the first group of English for Kids started at the Language School Campus IV in Tapachula. It was a small group, only 5 children studied English from Monday to Thursday from 4-6 pm. The teacher in charge was a student of the BA in ELT program. Little by little the English school for children was growing and increasing the number of classrooms, so the principal in turn had to talk and agreed with some other public schools’ principals to use their facilities to receive our prospect English students. Nowadays, we have more than 1,800 students from 6 to 15 years old, the classes are on Saturdays and the teachers remain being the students of the BA in ELT program of the Language School in Tapachula.

The current society is placing new demands on young graduates who finish their careers with a diploma, but without any real experience in the educational field. Employers set high expectations on new graduates who sometimes feel overwhelmed to fulfill those expectations when they get a job. During this talk, the background and context of the program English for Kids will be briefly explained, as well as the general characteristics of the ELT Bachelor Program at UNACH. Other topics such as; the guidelines for staff recruitment, the different graduates-undergraduates’ communities that have been formed and the outcomes of all this work will be explained in more detail.

The purpose of the Language School Tapachula is giving the trainees the necessary teaching tools through forming or better said training them within the principles of language and communication, and the practice of English language teaching, while also incorporating courses from a variety of other subject pathways. Within the curricula of subjects, in 5<sup>th</sup> semester, there is the teaching children subject, which allows students to develop the knowledge and the necessary abilities to teach English to children among 6-14 years old. With the base of this preparation, the BA students interested in participate in teaching children

can feel able to apply for a job in English for Kids program since the 6<sup>th</sup> semester of the career.

The program for kids has surprisingly grown in that way as a result of the learning evidence in the young learners we have attended through all these years. The results of our work have been noticed by the society, by parents and even by the own children who have attended the courses, the students started getting better grades in their own school, in their English subject, they started to communicate in English, understand songs and TV programs. This learning evidence gave us a good image and reputation upon society.

In order to have a special attention for each group of children, the English program has been divided into two sections: the group of Starters for kids from 6 to 9 years old. It comprises 7 semesters. With these courses students reach TOEFL elementary level which is equivalent to level A1 of the Common European framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL). The group of Flyers for kids from 9 to 14 years old. It comprises 8 semesters. With these courses students reach the TOEFL Jr which is equivalent to level B1 from (CEFRL). The programs are designed in such a way that, through a great variety of activities, children and adolescents acquire the knowledge and practice of the language working approximately six hundred hours in Starters and Flyers respectively. It is important to remark that within the English for Kids Program we pay special attention in developing the four macro abilities: reading, writing, speaking and listening so the children can have an integral preparation in the language. In fact, some of our children have applied for the TOEFL Jr. and they have gotten high grades.

In a learning community the goal is to advance the collective knowledge and in that way to support the growth of individual knowledge (Scardamalia, M., 2002). As a matter of fact, this is exactly what we have been testifying; the collective knowledge of graduates and undergraduates supporting the growth of each individual. Moreover, the work developed in the English for Kids School is organized by academies, this means that all the teachers that teach a group in the Starters or Flyers sections work together by the level they have in order to plan the activities for the whole semester. They prepare lesson plans, games, spelling contests, and so on. They get together several times during the semester in order to plan ahead and evaluate the implementation of the different activities.

In each of the academies there are graduated teachers and still-student teachers who are studying their last semesters in the BA program. This work becomes interesting due to the experience the graduated students have and the new ideas and knowledge the teachers that are still studying can share with each other.

We consider the team work of this learning community of great importance, the ideas and the experiences enrich all the aspects of teaching. Furthermore, just the idea of the graduates working with students, reinforces the program tremendously. Lieberman states that although learning communities vary in form and context, they share some fundamental core beliefs and values (Lieberman & Miller, 2008). Teachers of the English for Kids School share the beliefs that teaching children a second language opens them a great variety of opportunities for the future, they also value the power of communication in this global era. Graduates and undergraduates teachers share great experiences in their teaching environment and the new technological information they have gotten from school. We can see the collaborative work

reflected in the development the students have, gathering major benefits for the acquiring of a new language.

The competence of teamwork in professional communities is reflected in the individual labor each of the members of the community develop. The change of structure and process of the organizations of the current society has generated a great impact in the new way of working (Torrelles, et al 2001). For that reason, current enterprises and organizations claim, today more than never, for the need of the transversal competence of teamwork.

Team work is considered a main point and a competitive advantage. Nowadays, due to the big importance that this has produced in the way of working, giving place to an increasing number of team work. This participative competence makes the productivity rise, the innovation and the satisfaction at work (Rousseau et. al. 2006).

As a result of this work done within the academies, the teachers cover the material proposed in each level and move forward in a continuous and serial way, following similar patterns. This is due to the programs elaborated and strengthened with the ideas of each of the members of the professional community we have formed. These ideas are so effective and efficient that they give the proper knowledge and the ideal environment for the young learners.

Another fact that is important to mention is that each academy implements an evaluation of the work done every semester. Students, parents, teachers and coordinators reflect on the academic and administrative processes in order to implement the necessary improvements.

We see ourselves as an innovative organization of English teaching; we feel the commitment to be in constant learning process of the new teaching methods. But we consider that teamwork is not a thing of being in fashion, on the contrary, it is a clever piece of our work which makes us strong in the activities we do in the field of English Language Teaching.

This paper tackles the topic of Learning Communities from two different points of view: firstly, from the perspective of the coordinator of the English for Kids Program, but, on the other hand from the graduates and undergraduates themselves. Two interviews will be presented; one with the teachers of the program talking about their participation in this learning community and a second one with the coordinator. Participants will have the opportunity of analyzing this special supporting community where graduates from different generations as well as still-students of the ELT bachelor program work, update, support and grow together.

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## **Putting the App in hAPPiness: Technology for Students-with-Learning-Differences**

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### **Abstract**

This presentation addresses some of the challenges that students with learning differences may endure in the English language classroom, while also offering a set of technological tools that can support all learners in their foreign language studies. Specifically, this presentation looks at ways to support students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and dyscalculia noting how free and low cost technology can aid and offer additional support to students both inside and outside of the ELT classroom.

### **Session Description**

This paper addresses some of the challenges that students with specific learning differences (SpLDs) may encounter in the English as a Foreign Language classroom. In doing so, this paper seeks to identify ways to support students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, Specific Language Impairment (SLI), Asperger's syndrome and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) by integrating technology into the students' academic lives. Addressing learning differences is important as roughly one out of every ten students in any English language classroom may have an SpLD (Kormos and Smith, 2012). For learners with a diagnosed or undiagnosed SpLD, creating unconventional classroom accommodations can expand learner access to information and ultimately successful learning (Crombie, 1999). This paper goes on to introduce teaching strategies that are multi-sensory: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. The strategies introduced are appropriate in ESL and EFL classroom settings.

### **Specific Learning Differences**

The need to support students' with learning differences in the English as a foreign language classroom is growing rapidly, as the international educational community tries to address issues of inclusion across academic levels. Yet with the ongoing dialogue about inclusion and it be obligatory that no student is left behind, we see little being said about how to address the needs of students with learning differences. This is in part because our overall understanding of what a learning difference is and how it affects overall learning outcomes is limited. Oftentimes teachers generally feel incapable of supporting students with learning differences due to lack of training in the area. In the coming pages, we will try to shed a light on what a learning difference is and how we as educators can put in place tools to support students with learning differences in the second language acquisition process.

In order to define the term learning difference, we need to think about the ways in which learners may have issues acquiring the necessary information needed to successfully learn. From this perspective, the term specific learning difference refers to a difficulty someone may have with different aspects of learning. Some of the most common SpLDs include dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia and specific language impairment (Kormos & Smith, 2012). Learners who struggle with the acquisition of numbers may have dyscalculia, while learners who struggle to acquire literacy skills may have dyslexia. Dyspraxia refers to the coordination of movements, while specific language impairment refers to issues learners may have comprehending and producing sounds in a given language. On average ten percent of all students in a foreign language classroom will have a learning difference and may or may not be diagnosed. Yet as we see above, many of these learning differences have similarities and thus the role of co-occurrence is quite high. On average about seventy percent of all students who have one learning difference will also experience some traits of another learning difference.

### Multi-Sensory Learning

In the foreign language classroom, students are encouraged to build their comprehension skills in listening, speaking, writing and reading. Yet, learning often relies on a students' ability to understand information presented in a text in order to gather necessary information about the language. Multi-sensory learning involves integrating resources in the class that can be accessed through sight, hearing or touch. The use of a variety of senses while learning a second language helps students with SpLDs create links to the long term memory bank since it activates different parts of the brain. Although multi-sensory learning works particularly well for learners with SpLDs, all learners within a class can benefit from this approach, as they can mix and match the channels through which they access the material, making learning richer and more varied. An example of teaching to read in a multisensory way is by supporting "eye-reading" with "ear-reading", using audiobooks and text to speech applications. (Foss, 2013). This technique can become a more integrative one if at the same time students can touch the text, by having embossed letters, and use the "air-writing" technique designed by Samuel Orton to interpret difficult words.

In doing so, students are offered multiple ways to acquire and demonstrate what they have learned and are able to do with their developing linguistic repertoire.

### Computer Assisted Language Learning

Computer assisted language learning (CALL) is quickly becoming a common trend in English language teaching, as educators across academic sectors understand the importance of integrating technology into the foreign language classroom. However, educators often fail to think about the use digital tools that were not necessarily designed to support English language education. Various software applications can offer additional support to students with SpLDs even though they were not designed with the language learner or the special needs student in mind. From the perspective of the teacher, learning how to use technology to support academic success and learning outcomes ought to be the purpose of infusing the use of technology into everyday classroom instruction. Youngs, Ducate and Arnold (2011), suggest that the CALL should be used as a tool to support second language acquisition. In other words, teachers and students alike should think of the computer not only as a tool but also, as an additional teacher and as an English tutor.

## Technology and supporting students with learning differences

In relation to students with SpLDs, infusing technology into the foreign language classroom will not only promote student success, but can also help students learn how to navigate and understand the way they best acquire knowledge. Moreover, students with SpLDs can also learn how to strengthen their study skills in areas that they may find difficult or problematic by incorporating technology into their academic repertoire. Students with SpLDs generally have issues moving new information into their long-term memory. This process generally causes issues with organizational skills and also retrieving new information from their short-term memory. We suggest that software that supports students in linguistic and non-linguistic areas can make a difference in the way the students cope with school as well as in their attitude about learning and their overall motivation. Productivity applications, to-do list applications, data visualization applications and software that provides voice-to-text or text-reading capabilities offer additional support for overall academic achievement. The rationale behind selecting these applications is that generally speaking, students with SpLDs need aid to organize their thoughts and support to their short-term phonological memory. Thus, tools that offer additional assistance to students with SpLDs can accommodate and support learning outcomes. Additionally as many students with SpLDs have developed their visual and tactile skills, the introduction of self-selected technology tools that provide such stimuli increases the possibility of the student's engaging in the English language class. The suggestions addressed in this presentation not only can offer support to students with SpLDs, but can help the general student population develop positive study habits. Thus, technology has the ability to ensure that all students receive the kind of support and instruction they need to succeed.

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## **The effective use of positive rapport in EFL students**

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### **Introduction**

One of the many goals in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is to help EFL learners to develop efficient language skills to be able to communicate orally in the target language. EFL teachers must use every tool that has proved to work and contribute to their students' language development. There is a concern in helping learners to be able to express their ideas naturally, without any hesitations or problems that could break communication.

However, this goal can be jeopardized when EFL students focus on passing grammar tests and show resistance to speak the target language. It might be common in foreign language contexts where EFL learners may think it is not important to be able to speak to English native speakers, as there is little or no interaction with foreigners in their context. These EFL learners may only show interest in learning vocabulary and grammar rules so that they can pass their classes. Thus, they can complete an English course and still fail to have a conversation in the target language.

Consequently, it is important to develop effective strategies to enhance EFL students' speaking abilities. Positive rapport, the relationship between the teachers and their students (Harmer, 2001), can be a useful motivational strategy to provide opportunities to develop interpersonal communication in the EFL classroom. EFL teachers could take advantage of their students' trust and the interaction they have with them to encourage their students to express themselves in English.

This article aims at exploring how Language Department Campus IV, UNACH EFL teachers establish rapport with their students, and exploring how they can use this social connection for encouraging their learners to develop their oral communicative skills. It also intends to present evidence of how positive rapport can motivate EFL students to speak the target language more fluently.

### **Problem**

In Tapachula, Chiapas, the Language Department of the Language School Campus IV, UNACH (Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas), is an important educational institution that has

offered courses to promote the learning of foreign languages – English being one of them - since 1980. Over the years, this language school has enjoyed the preference of society in Tapachula, helping a considerable number of students to learn English effectively. The alumni are usually composed by UNACH students from different programs (Accounting, Medicine, Management, Chemistry, and Pedagogy, among others), high school students, and public in general who wishes to learn English as a foreign language. UNACH students must take at least six levels of English as a requirement for obtaining their college degrees; in the case of students of the BAs of Tourism and International Commerce, they must study nine levels. On the other hand, non-UNACH students take English classes for other different purposes, such as professional, academic or personal interest.

The courses are organized into nine levels, the first six levels are called Basic English courses and the last three are referred to as Advanced English levels. Every level consists of 75 hours of English class instruction, given in two school terms a year. This means that an EFL student who completes the nine levels at the Language Department Campus IV, UNACH, will have studied English as a foreign language for four and a half years. At the end of this study time, Language Department students are expected to have learnt English integrally, developing the main four language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Unfortunately, the researchers have detected a phenomenon in the Language Department Campus IV students in Advanced English courses in the latest years. In spite of the integral teaching of the target language, the considerable amount of language input, and the communicative nature of the curriculum, most of the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students at Language Department Campus IV, UNACH complete their courses with a good linguistic competence, but they lack effective oral communication skills. This means that these learners cannot engage into a conversation with another English speaker. They usually get nervous and keep quiet, answer with single words, or even switch to their mother tongue. Based on years of teaching experience, the researchers have observed that most of EFL learners focus on passing their grammar tests, neglecting their communicative skills. It is very common to find students who are more worried about passing the level rather than developing their speaking and listening. They usually spend time in the library or get tutors to prepare them for final exams, instead of practicing their communicative performance.

Many EFL teachers at UNACH Language Department are not aware that establishing a friendly and cooperative relationship with their students could help developing their learners' communicative skills. *Rapport*, the term given to this relationship between teacher and students (Harmer, 2007), is an element to build a positive atmosphere in the EFL classroom. This positive relationship can be helpful to both teaching and learning of a foreign language. Unfortunately, it seems that very few English teachers at Language Department Campus IV are interested in building this positive connection with their students. Therefore, it may be common to find that there is not a friendly and encouraging environment in the Language Department English classes. This causes EFL students to become inhibited to participate in class, which narrows the opportunities to develop their speaking and listening abilities in the target language. For instance, English learners may not want to participate again if the teacher ignores them even when they raise their hands, or the teacher corrects the student inappropriately. It may also happen that teachers are too strict with classroom rules or they only focus on correcting book exercises, worksheets, and very few speaking activities with no wishes to take communication beyond. In this case, learners usually feel uncomfortable in

class and prefer to be silent and not participative, or what is worse, participate in their mother tongue refusing to practice the target language.

### Rapport and its advantages

Rapport has not always been a central element in English language teaching. It has been considered a simple element related to classroom management for years. For instance, Underwood (1987) mentions that a good English teacher must have the ability to create a friendly, cooperative classroom atmosphere. This environment works as a useful framework for EFL learners to feel confident and participate more in class. She does not write about how to build a good relationship with students, though. There has been recent development in which rapport has gained importance in language teaching in the last two decades. Brookfield (2006) expands Underwood's ideas for instance when he describes a skillful teacher as one who can see students as human individuals with different needs and expectations. However, not too many experts in EFL teaching have written about using positive rapport as a motivational strategy to promote interpersonal communication in learners.

With the advantages that other disciplines see in the use of positive rapport as a strategy, it is time now to determine what benefits are obtained when using rapport as a motivational strategy to promote interpersonal communication in English language teaching. After all, teaching and learning a foreign language has the same nature as those interactions in business and in psychology. As in a business transaction or a psychological session, a language class has two participants (businessman-client, psychologist-patient, teacher-student) that interact within a framework which provides the best circumstances in order to achieve a common goal. Based on this, it is possible to state that both teachers and students may benefit from an effective use of positive rapport. This research intends to promote this in language teaching, as it has an interdisciplinary nature, given to the fact that it is also supported by results found in education, psychology, and business.

### How to establish rapport

The question that arises at this point is how EFL teachers can establish a positive and effective rapport for a better teaching/learning experience. Harmer (2001:113) explains that rapport is based on two main bases. The first component is the students' perception of the teacher as a good leader and a successful professional. EFL learners become more participative when they appreciate that their teachers know about their profession and especially, they love what they do. This gives them enough confidence to engage in the learning process.

The second element to build rapport that Harmer (2001:113) points out is primarily the most important for this research project: the interaction between teachers and students. Rapport mainly depends on how EFL teachers socially interact with their learners. This interaction is directly connected with four key characteristics (Harmer, op.cit) of the relationship between teachers and students: recognizing students, listening to them, respecting them, and being even-handed with them.

Harmer (2007), Dornyei (2001), and Edge (1993) agree that students want their teachers to know who they are. It is important that EFL teachers know not only their names, but also their learning styles, interests, and personalities. With this information, English classes can result interesting, relevant, and motivating to keep on learning the foreign language. Similarly

important is the fact that EFL teachers need to pay attention to what students say in class. It can be very discouraging and disappointing for learners if their teachers do not listen to their participations, leading to an uninterested attitude that will hinder their learning of the target language.

Harmer (2001) also mentions that respect is an essential element for building rapport. At all times, students need to feel they are appreciated by their teachers, and respect is the key to this appreciation. Therefore, EFL teachers need to be careful when correcting their students, so that they do not feel discouraged or offended when given feedback. In addition, EFL teachers must not criticize or make their students look ridiculous in front of the whole class. These unfortunate events can lead to a total mistrust and the teaching/learning process can lose its effectiveness. Finally, Harmer (op. cit) points out that treating all students equally provides a cooperative environment in which learners will work and help each other.

As it can be appreciated, all these actions will lead EFL learners to have a friendly relationship with their teachers. Creating a positive atmosphere is vital for language learning, since positive emotional involvement leads to effective learning (Edge, 1993). In other words, building an effective rapport ensures a positive context that helps students learn more effectively (Buskist & Saville, 2001).

#### Results and findings

This section presents the results obtained after collecting all the data. The authors of this article interpret these results and share their findings. The following chart illustrates the comparison of how three teachers at the Language Department Campus IV establish positive rapport with their students.

Based on the research results, it can be deduced that Teachers B and C show a genuine interest in students and do not limit the class to only the topics in the course book. They encourage students to participate in a variety of topics they want to talk about and use English as much as they can. Furthermore, teachers B and C use personal information from students to gain learner's trust ever since the first class of the term and ask questions about their lives and hobbies beyond the classroom. On the other hand, Teacher A interacts with his students following a strict transactional purpose. He explained the classroom rules, the way students were going to be evaluated, and they even talked about the class material. All these situations could have been opportunities to practice the target language, but Teacher C preferred to use Spanish; English was only used for the teaching moments.

#### Correlation between rapport and interpersonal communication

The main point discussed is the possible relation between a positive, friendly rapport in an English class with the students' development of communicative competence through interpersonal language. The information provided is taken from the journal sheet that was used to observe the correlation between positive rapport and student's interpersonal use of English leading to a natural growth of the target language fluency. There is also narrative taken from the journal to illustrate the connections between the registered interactions. Finally, the cause-and-effect relationship (Lyons & Doueck, 2010) was used to correlate the two important variables for this research, since it is important to state the effects of positive rapport on learners' speaking skill.

After interpreting the data collected from the three classes, it can be stated that the positive rapport established by the three participant-teachers in this research had different effects on their students. Teachers B and C were more aware of how useful a positive rapport can be for their students' learning, while Teacher A used the little positive rapport for classroom management purposes. There is evidence that students respond to a positive rapport with the teacher, as they feel confident enough to share their experiences with the rest of the class, and they can even start the communicative interaction. This was not observed in Class 9 A, since Teacher A did not give enough opportunities for his students to socialize or expand their participations. Students only participated when they were asked to; they did not elaborate their responses when they could during discussions. What is more important to point out is that students in 9 A did not feel confident when they spoke the target language.

Another benefit that can be observed is that the existence of a friendly learning environment promoted by the effective use of positive rapport encourages students to interact more and express their ideas. Students in 9 B and in 9 C participated more; the latter even use personal information to share with their classmates and teacher. This is convenient to their speaking development, since learners are able to improve their fluency every time they have the opportunity to speak. Given the circumstance that they are sharing experiences and not really being evaluated, students pay more attention to the message they want to convey and less attention to grammar mistakes, which reinforces their fluency. Obviously, these participations must be in the target language and not in the mother tongue, since the progress would go to waste if they did it in Spanish.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings in this dissertation, it is recommendable for EFL teachers to count on a helpful tool to help their students to develop their speaking skill. This is rapport, the friendly relationship between students with their teachers and their classmates, which results into a positive, enjoyable, respectful, and socio-cultural learning environment (Yadav, 2012). In addition to the already known benefits that rapport can give as a classroom management strategy (Underwood, 1987; Harmer, 2001), it is possible to use positive rapport as a motivational strategy to encourage students to use English for socializing with other people.

A positive, friendly rapport provides the appropriate learning environment in which EFL learners feel confident enough to express and share their ideas without being harshly corrected or judged by their teachers or peers. The students in this research proved to be more participative in the classes where the teachers were concerned to provide a collaborative, respectful atmosphere in the classroom. Communication between the teacher and his students was very healthy to the point that they could socialize inside the classroom during the lessons. Students even started these social interactions, as they felt confident enough to have a conversation in English.

In the light of the above, the use of rapport as a motivational strategy to develop interpersonal communication would lead to the integral learning that the Language Department Campus IV, UNACH aims to provide to its English learners, helping them to be able to exchange ideas when interacting with other English-speaking students, foreign visitors, and people from other cultures students may work with. This could also work in other classes in different schools. There might be different circumstances, including cultural ones; however, it is possible for all English teachers to have a good, positive relationship with their students, and use this rapport

to encourage students to talk more frequently and for social purposes. When students share their ideas for interpersonal purposes, they focus on the message they want to convey and do not pay too much attention to grammar mistakes. This leads to an improvement in students' fluency, as they become self-motivated to keep sharing their experiences and opinions.

It is satisfactory to observe how English teachers are changing their perspective towards establishing a positive rapport and use the benefits from it. In the last four years, many studies related to how rapport contribute to language learning have been published. Richard Amato (as cited by Yadav, 2012) discovered that students are psychologically dominated by teachers, this is why there is usually conflict between teacher and students and a low academic performance if the class lacks mutual trust and respect. Clark (2014) had a doctoral study where she found that a display of kindness and caring from teachers usually meet a sense of appreciation and willingness to improve from students. Bouras & Keskes (2014) found a correlation between students' motivation to learn the foreign language and teacher's actions to build a positive rapport. All these studies have brought light to a topic that was merely considered a classroom management strategy. More and more academic experts are paying more attention to the benefits of having a positive rapport in the EFL classroom.

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## **Enhanced English Language Learning through Learning Management Systems**

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*One language sets you in a corridor for life, two languages open every door along the way.*  
Fran Smith

### Introduction

The following proposal, which was carried out in an institution belonging to the High School level situated in the city of Mexico, aims to demonstrate that the inclusion of certain Learning Management Systems (LMS) has positive effects in English language learning. The LMSs employed were *CourseSites*, *Lyrics Training*, and *ReadTheory* since they accomplished the requirements to stimulate such learning process.

The proposal was carried out through a case study with an experimental design and a quantitative approach and demonstrated 52% of the participants in both Experimental Group 1 and 2 increased their level of English in at least one band, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) based on the scores of the TOEFL Test and its testing instruments; *pre-test*, *test* and *post test*, this implies that the inclusion of certain LMSs in the classroom has a positive impact related to the increase of the language competence.

### Theoretical Framework

The implementation of LMSs in Mexico appears especially in tertiary education, taking into reference the public education. One of the main reason for that was the absent a proper policy related to the Information Technologies (IT), as in the case of digital platforms, since management for the development of digital skills was sparsely promoted until a few years ago with the new curriculum for basic education (SEP, 2011). This means that both teachers and students lack such digital skills so the use and design of tools and digital resources were usually required until higher education.

An example to be considered as the origin of the use of ICTs in Mexico is in the mandatory basic education system, which includes primary and secondary, the latter that contemplates the “*Telesecundaria*” modality that can be called as the pioneer in the inclusion of the Information and Communication Technologies in 1970 (SEP, 1999). According to the report

by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2000, the primary focus of “*Telesecundaria*” was the inclusion of rural communities with difficult access to the education system where one of its essential components for teaching practice was the use of television with fifteen minute programs delivered through satellite information through the EDUSAT network since 1995; which included other technological elements such as parabolic antenna, ecoder, video recorders, plus television. This report also argues that eventually “*Telesecundaria* will be based on actions that incorporate the use of the internet (digital libraries, interactive videos, online educational resources) which means the use of the web.

This evolution illustrates the use of ICTs have been implemented in the classroom from its most elementary to more complex forms; however, it only covers a low proportion of the entire compulsory basic system in secondary schools. For example, in the year 2000, approximately one-fifth of a total student population of 5 264,097 are immersed in this type of education aided by this type of technological means.

Currently based on the new Curriculum 2011 in Basic Education by the Ministry of Public Education stipulates the use and exploitation of technological resources available to students as means to communicate, obtain information and build knowledge as a result of the process of training throughout the Basic Education that is articulated through a formative path that contemplates the curricular standard known as << *habilidades digitales* >> (SEP, 2011). These digital skills standards that integrate actions for the use of ICT have their origin in the Sectorial Program of Education 2007-2012 with the Digital Skills for All (HDT) strategy that includes media and telematic classrooms in three school periods with closure in third and sixth grade of primary, and third grade of secondary, in search of replacing the previously driven system called << Enciclomedia >>. (SEP, 2011). These digital skills standards that integrate actions for the use of ICT have their origin in the Sectorial Program of Education 2007-2012 with the Digital Skills for All (*Habilidades Digitales para Todos* in Spanish) strategy that includes media and telematic classrooms in three school periods with closure in third and sixth grade of primary, and third grade of secondary, in search of replacing the previous system called << Enciclomedia >>.

Regarding the level of high education, this item was met with the *Reforma Integral de la Educación Media* (RIEMS), which consisted in the creation of the *Sistema Nacional del Bachillerato* (Agreement 442) based on mechanisms and management pillars of the reform. One of the mechanisms established in the Agreement 442 is the strengthening of didactic inputs in facilities and equipment for teaching practice, since "schools must have decent libraries with equipment to learn the use of information technologies and communications, and take advantage of them in education, and with laboratories and workshops sufficiently equipped "(SEP, 2008, p.55), especially in the non-formal and mixed modalities. While one of these pillars was the construction of a *Marco Curricular Común* through the Agreement 444 where the inclusion and promotion of digital competences in students is proposed in order to permeate in the integral learning because it describes that the student "uses the technologies of information and communication to investigate, solve problems, produce materials and transmit information "(SEP, 2008, p.8). In the same way, these requirements are included within the teaching professionalization in the agreement 447 where it is emphasized that the practice of teaching-learning processes executed as a teaching competence is executed in a creative and innovative way in its institutional context since "information technology and

communication with a didactic and strategic application in different learning environments "(SEP, 2008, p.3).

In conclusion, these efforts to adjust the educational model with interactive digital materials show that the inclusion of these materials is barely a decade old and that they are still in the pilot phase, experimentation and with a low scope of implementation in basic schools throughout the country. Consequently, students and perhaps teachers of higher education do not have the knowledge, skills, and skills to effectively use any digital tool, which is why the implementation and use of digital platforms or technology-based education at an early age will form to the competent student with the necessary requirements to work in this educational modality.

### Methodology

This study followed an experimental design to determine how Learning Management Systems (LMSs) as a tool of blended learning provides students with better outcomes in their language competency than those that are obtained in a traditional pattern. In particular, three platforms were utilized which are: 'CourseSites', 'Lyricstraining' and 'ReadTheory' due to their easy accessibility, overall design in activities, freeness, student grades management, among others. Two experimental groups of 53 language learners and two control groups of 49 language learners were part of the study. The instruments that were used to collect data about the subjects' language level were the pre-test and post-test in the book "*Preparation Course for the TOEFL Test*" (Phillips, 2003). In this study, the implementation of these LMSs (i.e. the treatment) took place in five distinctive stages. The first one dealt with diagnosing students' language level by means of the pre-test and this led the path to design lesson plans and activities that would meet students' needs. The second stage had to do with the actual implementation and utilizations of these platforms during four months after the pre-test. The third part involved diagnosing the first effects of the treatment by assessing students' performance in a similar test as the one with the pre-test. This allowed the instructor to restructure teaching strategies and the content of the course. The fourth stage implied the improvement of the treatment with the data collected during the first implementation. The second implementation lasted four months too. Finally, the last part dealt with applying the post-test to collect data about TOEFL scores.

### Role of the Language Management Systems used in this study

- *Coursesites*: This technological tool provided the subjects a virtual framework where they could access the course content as well as the activities designed to support their grammar expertise.
- *ReadTheory*: This website was utilized to enhance subjects' reading skills. The best asset of this website is that after diagnosing students' reading comprehension level, it provides reading passages tailored according to their needs.
- *LyricsTraining*: This website allowed participants to develop discreet aural skills such as word discrimination and word-guessing through context. However, the potential of this tool lays on motivating students with ludic activities.

### Results

#### Analysis of results from Control Group 1 (CG1)

In the following section, an analysis of the CG1 data analysis is done with respect to the initial linguistic level and final level at the end of the cycle. At the beginning of the course, Control

Group 1 consists of three different levels. However, at the end of the cycle one of them disappears; the level A1, this being an increase in the English language proficiency in one of the students.

The study also revealed that only two students increased their competence in the language to level B1, which represents 8.33% of the students. On the other hand, twenty-two students did not increase their level, reflecting 91.66% of the population.

#### Analysis of results of Control Group 2 (CG2)

In relation to Control Group 2, at the beginning of the cycle, 100% of the population of this group consists of only one level, that is 25 students. At the end of the year, 12% of the population increases to level A2 which translates to only three students. Likewise, 22 students did not increase their level, which reflects 88% of the population in that group.

#### In summary with both Control Groups 1 & 2

The two Control Groups, which were not based on educational platforms, only showed an increase of 8.33% and 12% respectively, which gives a total of 20.33%, in other words, only 5 students were able to increase of level. In contrast, in both Control Groups, 22 students failed to increase their linguistic competence, that is, 44 students remained at the same level with which they started the school year.

#### Results Analysis Experimental Group 1 (EG1)

At the end of the school year, 53.57% of the total population increased its level, this means that more than half of the participants reached intermediate levels. GE1 started with twenty students in level A2 and 8 students with level B1. At the end of the school year, the study revealed that not only a large percentage of learners increased level, but they did it at levels that are not common in high school students; B1 and B2. The increase of the linguistic level in the students was in levels B1 and B2 with 17.85% and 37.71% respectively, which the MCERL denominates these levels as independent and at the same time they are above the requested scores with respect to the profile of high school graduation, which in turn is stipulated by the *Dirección General de Educación Media Superior, BUAP*, that instance dictates that students should be proficient in the English language of A2.

#### Results Analysis Experimental Group 2 (EG2)

At the end of the cycle, GC2 showed an increase in English language learning by 52%, reflecting that more than half the population showed an increase in their language competence (Figure 17). In Figure 18, it can be seen that GE2 started with thirteen students at level A2, eleven students with level B1 and one student at level B2. At the end of the course, 52% of the total population increased level.

Finally, Figure 18 illustrates the levels to which the students were promoted; B1, B2 and C1 with 16%, 32% and 4% respectively. Likewise, 40% of the students, ie 10 of them, raised their TOEFL score even though they are not represented in the graph 16, failing to reach the reference standard of this framework.

#### Conclusions

On one hand, both control groups demonstrated a modest growth in their language learning with a slight increase of their TOEFL scores (i.e. 8.33% and 12%) between the pre-test and the post-test. On the other hand, both experimental groups experienced a superior growth in

relation to their language learning with a significant 52% of progress. This progress meant that the participants reached a higher band according to the Common European Framework if the conversion table of the TOEFL is used. In conclusion, it was demonstrated that this sort of blended learning maximize the course outcomes over those that were portrayed in traditional classrooms. In addition, language proficiency was not the only variable favorably affected but other areas were ameliorated such as students' autonomy and digital literacy (i.e. digital fluency in the usage and performance on the ICT's). It was also tangible that students' needs and interests were better met with this type of hybrid teaching. Some implications about this type of language learning deal with certain drawbacks when implementing the LMSs, such as the infrastructure or facilities as well as the complexity of each platform.

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## **Independent learning: How to develop a Self Study Center**

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English language students need a space outside of the classroom where they can interact with real-world language materials, ask questions of tutors or teachers, collaborate with classmates, practice authentic communication, and focus on their own weaknesses, strengths or interests. This type of location, often called a Self Access Center (SAC), has been in place for years in locations as diverse as Hong Kong (Choi, 2017), the USA (McMurry, Tanner, & Anderson, 2009), Japan (Mynard, 2016), and Mexico (Lengeling, Towgood, & Crawford, 1999). Larger universities in Mexico have had SACs since the 1990s (Lengeling et al., 1999), but many of the new or smaller universities lack them. Administrators may be unconvinced of their importance, budgets may be tight, or it may be that faculty simply don't have the time or knowledge to create them. However, SACs are an important part of language study, as they can help students gain confidence, have fun, and improve language ability and test scores (Klassen, Detaramani, Lui, Patri & Wu, 1998).

Self Access Centers should have some main aspects in common. McMurry et al. give us a good description of what an ideal SAC would look like, as well as a realistic description of some SACs in operation today.

The idea behind these self-access centers is to promote and facilitate autonomous learning. These centers may contain books, audiovisual equipment, and/or tutors. The purpose of these centers is to complement teacher instruction. Students can go to these places to participate in activities ranging from class homework to fully autonomous learning of language concepts. However, for many institutions, autonomous learning is not defined as independent learning. In many situations, a center exists, but nothing is done to promote learner autonomy. The center quickly becomes a computer lab or library, but maintains the name, claiming that it is a self-access center (2010, p. 102).

There are many documented benefits offered by well-run SACs. For example, according to a case study in Greece, 100% of the students said their SAC program helped them either “very much” or “a lot” (Papadima-Sophocleous, 2013, p. 135). This study also stated that “all students who completed the...program passed their compulsory EAP course. Even those who did only part of it passed their EAP and English for Specific Academic Purposes courses” (Salomi, 2013, p. 136). A well-run SAC can also offer students the chance to build important life skills. They can practice identifying their personal weaknesses and then learn how to self-motivate while having the flexibility to set their own pace and choose their own hours. All of these skills help them become independent lifelong learners. Finally, these hours in the SAC can build on and contribute to classroom education without having to increase teacher workload.

Over the past year, I have helped to create and manage a Self Access Center at a bilingual technological university in Mexico, and I would like to share some of the factors that have contributed to our success.

When providing supplies for a SAC, it's important to provide a variety of materials, such as graded readers with audio, games, conversation groups, magazines, opportunities to meet for tutoring, and access to popular movies or TV shows. There should be both tactile materials, such as board games, as well as internet access and information about free online English resources. If the university is short on funds, investment in a color printer and laminator can provide a wealth of free materials from the internet. Some examples of things that can be downloaded and used for free are printable board games, bright graphic organizers that can help students understand complex grammar issues, flashcards, and even free graded readers. An English language department in Mexico could create a partnership with a university in an English-speaking country which has Spanish Language classes. In this situation, both universities can ship each other gently used, affordable, authentic materials. For students learning about language and culture, materials such as free tourist advertisements and grocery store handouts are surprisingly interesting! Both universities can work together to arrange language partners for their students as well.

One common problem when arranging the materials of the SAC is how to set up the space. An open and welcoming environment with easy to access materials is ideal, but it must often be tempered with security measures to keep materials from disappearing. A study done at the University of Victoria in Wellington found that "60% of the students reported that it was difficult to find the right materials" (Cotterall and Reinders, 2001). In describing their SAC in Guanajuato, Mexico, Lengling et al. state, "Many of the audio and listening exercises were stored away in cabinets, difficult to find, or out of student reach....thus the learner was often not even aware of their existence" (1999, p. 60). In order to create a welcoming, yet secure environment, there should be cubbies where students can leave their backpacks by the door. The staff desk should also be located by the door, to keep an eye on students' backpacks and also to greet and welcome all the students who come in. Large bright signs can show students where materials are and how to use them. Large tables rather than desks encourage students to interact with one another more. Books with their covers on display are more likely to be read than ones with only the spine showing. There should be a large continuously updated calendar that describes events, activities, and open hours, hung in a location visible to people walking past. All of these methods can encourage students to come and enjoy spending time improving their English skills.

Tablets and computers are often seen in SACs these days, and they can be invaluable tools for language learning. Choose some good language learning sites such as [ELLLO.org](http://ELLLO.org), [learnenglish.britishcouncil.org](http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org), [bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/](http://bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/), [youtube.com/user/bizpod](http://youtube.com/user/bizpod), or others. Arrange them by themes and levels in the bookmarks bar and teach students how to choose the learning website that is best for them. There are also many free online services for students to find language exchange partners, and the SAC can be a place where students can learn how to find a partner and set up their initial (and possibly future) video chats. The staff should choose one site that will work best for their students and then set up accounts themselves so they are familiar with the process. Then they will be able to guide students through the process easily and confidently. Some example websites are: [language-exchanges.org](http://language-exchanges.org), [exchangealanguage.com](http://exchangealanguage.com), and [italki.com](http://italki.com).

When Choi relates her work improving a SAC in Hong Kong, she describes the website her team set up. The website provides information about “forthcoming activities . . . online registration for the activities, resources for language learning, and much more” (2017, p. 29). In this particular case, Choi’s records show that due to many factors, including the website, focusing on social interactions, and creating an inviting environment, student attendance more than tripled within one year (2017, p. 30).

Once the Self Access Center is set up, the main concern becomes, “How can we encourage students to attend and make sure they use their time wisely?” The most important thing is to provide a well-organized orientation to all students. This idea—that an initial orientation keeps students coming back and helps them achieve their goals—is repeated again and again in the research. Choi learned through student surveys that one of the most helpful aspects of the SAC is an advising session on how to utilize the resources at the SAC (2017, p. 32). McMurry et al. also noted that “students who were well oriented were more frequent visitors” (2010, p. 111).

Once the initial orientation is completed, well-trained staff must continue to greet students enthusiastically and lead them to the appropriate resources on a daily basis. Staff must have the authority and initiative to plan engaging and educational activities such as conversation clubs, game times, language partners, holiday events, and so forth. Each student will need guidance in finding the best materials for her or his individual ability level. The SAC staff must continue to provide this guidance as students gradually take control over their own learning. Within the previously mentioned SAC program in Greece, the students stated that the largest help to their studies was staff support. (Salomi, 2013, p. 135).

Providing a Self Access Center can be an effective way for a university to increase student exposure to English and improve test scores. By following three simple guidelines, any university can set up their own SAC: success depends on the careful selection of dedicated staff, the cultivation of a thoughtful supply of materials, and the development of a program of fun social activities.

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## **Am I the teacher who I dream to be?**

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### **Introduction**

Pre-service teachers start building and redefining their beliefs since they are learners at school and trainees at university. It means these beliefs are not just based on their teaching practicum, they come from personal, present and past experiences (Graves, 2000 ; Fives, Lacatena & Gerard, 2015), training process, observing in-service teachers and interacting with teachers, learners and trainers. Additionally, personal factors, Vera (n.d) “individual judgements and interpretations of a community” (Levin, 2015 p. 49) contribute to establish what each individual believes; however, those beliefs might be altered or confirmed according to the experiences they live.

Moreover, pre-service teachers own a great amount of beliefs at the same time; all of them meet in each one of the actions and discourses. For instance, Levin (2015) argues pre-service teachers “hold beliefs about knowledge, their students, themselves, their subject matter, how to teach, moral and ethical dilemmas” (p.48); it means beliefs make part of a system which involves understanding about every person and issue involved in the learning teaching process.

Research on pre-service teachers’ beliefs have taken more attention in the last years, since it is important to know what comes in pre-service teachers’ minds to understand their behaviors and what they do in their teaching practicum. Previous studies have researched beliefs about technology, curriculum, roles, language, learning and teaching (Cota & Ruiz-Esparza, 2013; González, 2008; Tagle, Díaz, Alarcón & Quintana, 2014), most of them focus on the last two beliefs, bearing in mind they show what a pre-service teacher believes a good teacher does and knows about methodology, resources and learning activities.

Regarding the aforementioned, beliefs are not static; they might change while pre-service teachers acquire new knowledge or have contact with the teaching context; however, in most of the cases, they are not conscious of their beliefs and origin. That is why, the Bachelor program in language teaching at Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios -UNIMINUTO- located in Bogotá, is developing a research project called “Professional identity construction: Beliefs about the language, its teaching and learning processes”<sup>1</sup> bearing in mind beliefs are part of the identity and they contribute to form the typ of professional pre-service teachers will be. The aim of this project is to analyze the professional identity construction of 12 pre-service teachers based on their beliefs about the language, its teaching and learning process, before and after their first teaching practicum. Taking into account these three beliefs involve a lot of aspects, this paper will focus on the beliefs pre-service teachers have about teaching.

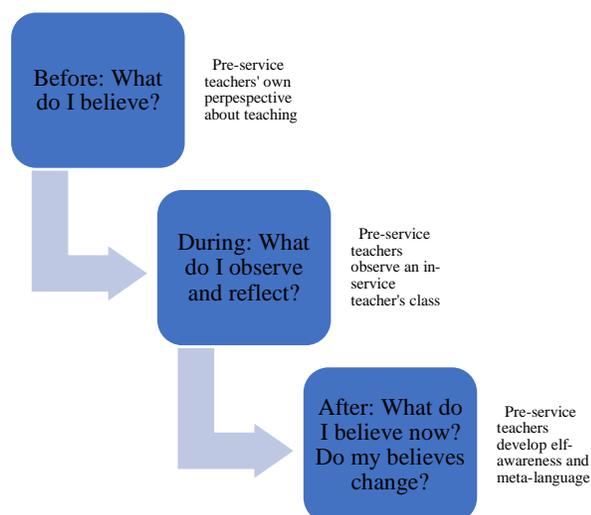
How can beliefs be explored?

Most of the studies focused on beliefs about teaching have been qualitative and implemented mainly interviews (Äzmen, 2012; Diaz & Solar, 2011; Seymen, 2012), questionnaires (Berg & Smith, 2014; Chung-Yuan, Meng-Jung, Yu-Hsuan, & Liang, 2017; Karatas, Bademcioglu & Ergin, 2016) or narratives (Abdolahzadeh & Nia, 2014; Barcelos, 2016). These instruments allow to explore the experiences that influence pre-service teachers' beliefs and the knowledge they have about teaching. However, more than explore them, the intention is to make pre-service teachers reflect about their beliefs before the teaching practicum. To get this, observation tasks were designed, so that pre-service teachers observe in-service teachers in action, and based on that they reflect on their beliefs and contrast and analyze them with the observed class.

Even though observations have been used in teacher training to teach pre-service teachers how to teach, evaluate, explain and manage students and situations (Richards & Farrell, 2011), they can also be employed to "open up a range of experiences and processes" (Wajnryb, 1992, p.1); in this case, pre-service teachers experience real learning-teaching situations that make them reflect about what they believe, so they might start building new beliefs or redefining those they have constructed based on previous learning experiences.

Wajnryb (1992) proposes each observation task must be focused on an activity while a lesson is carried out. In this sense, the observation task designed to reflect about the teaching beliefs, followed Wajnryb's (1992) proposal because it moved the pre-service teachers from their own perspective about teaching, then to collect information based on the observation and finally to a meta-language and self-awareness process, where they discuss and reflect about what they believe and observe.

In the first part of the observation task called, "before- what do I believe?", pre-service teachers were asked to write their own perspective about teaching in terms of methodologies, strategies, techniques used for language teaching, teachers' roles, resources and qualities of a good language teacher. Once they reflected and were conscious about the teaching beliefs they had, they moved to the next part of the observation task called "during". In here, pre-service teachers observed an in-service teachers class. In this part, questions related to the same issues asked in the first, guided the pre-pre-service teachers' observation. Based on the questions, they described deeply what was observed, and reflected about it. Finally, to promote meta-language and self-awareness, the "after" part asked pre-service teachers to contrast their beliefs about teaching stated in the first part of the observation with the observed in the class. In this way, it was possible to identify if their beliefs were confirmed or altered and analyze if the in-service teacher's teaching practices were a model to be followed by the pre-service teachers. Figure No. 1 summarizes the intention of each part of the observations tasks.



### Results: Do I want to be the teacher I observed?

The data reported below will show which beliefs about teaching, pre-service teachers had before observing an in-service teacher's class and if they changed or were confirmed after it. Firstly, it will be described the type of methodologies pre-service teachers believe work better when teaching a foreign language; then, roles they consider they hold in class, and finally, the way the material and classes should be designed. Figure No. 2 summarizes the beliefs before and after the observation.

Beliefs before the observation	Beliefs after the observation
1. Should I teach promoting communication, enjoyment? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I should use the Total Physical Response method (TPR)</li> <li>I should use the communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches</li> </ul>	1. Should I teach promoting communication, enjoyment? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I should use the Total Physical Response method (TPR)</li> <li>I should use Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP)</li> </ul>
2. How do I see myself in the classroom? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am the motivator to language teaching</li> <li>I help my learners to learn the foreign language</li> </ul>	2. How do I see myself in the classroom? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am the motivator to language teaching</li> <li>I help my learners to learn the foreign language</li> </ul>
3. How should I plan and design material? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I must identify my learners' needs, interests and styles</li> </ul>	3. How should I plan and design material? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I must identify my learners' needs, interests and styles</li> <li>I must just follow a book or school's curriculum</li> </ul>

Should I teach promoting communication or joy?

Before observing the in-service teachers, a great number of the pre-service teachers believed the communicative approach should be implemented in language teaching, for example, on one hand, Juan<sup>2</sup> believed: *It is important taught a foreign language through games and didactic activities that allow people to express their thoughts and feelings.* (Before phase)

On the other hand, Ana believed: *A teacher should lead students towards a communicative aim by giving them the tools, resources, materials which promote the use of the target language* (Before phase)

Another part of the pre-service teachers believed that Total Physical Response (TPR) is the best method to teach a foreign language, since it allows learners to feel comfortable with language learning. This is the case of Flor who affirms: *I would like to promote these methods (PPP and TPR), approaches, and strategies during my teacher practicum because these have been useful in my learning process. For that reason, I would like that my students learn in a comfortable and interesting way as I did it.* (Before phase)

Opposite to pre-service teachers' beliefs before observing a class, the beliefs described in the meta-cognitive or after phase of the observation task, evidenced a tendency to consider TPR and Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP) the best "methods" to teach, since they allow students to understand and practice the language.

*Taking into account what I observed in the classroom I would say that the method (PPP) that teacher uses in the classroom is useful because allows students understand the topic, practice it, and make something taking into to topic. Also, she gave students the opportunity to practice the topic because some students wrote sentences related to the movie. On the other hand, she used the production phase because in the homework students had to do a poster related to the sentences that they had written about the movie taking into account what did learn that day.* (Juana. After phase)

### **How do I see myself in the classroom?**

This part makes reference to the roles pre-service teachers believe they must assume when they are in the classroom. Before and after the observation, pre-service teachers believe their main role is to motivate students to learn; so that, they consider indispensable to design attractive material and activities, promote a comfortable environment, and show interests for students' learning. This was perceived in María and Lady's observations:

*The teacher is just a guide who has to motivate them. Teaching a foreign language must include a set of tools, materials as, realia, which facilitate pupils' understanding* (María: before phase)

*My beliefs about the roles of the teacher during the learning process confirmed because the teacher known what kind of strategies, activities and resources use with the students to make that them get interest in the class and the topic* (Lady: after phase)

Those examples show their motivator's roles did not suffer any change; pre-service teachers always believed they are the key point in students' learning motivation, that is why they must make great efforts to design activities and implement approaches and methods that engage students in learning.

Another important role pre-service teachers recognized before and after the observation task, is as facilitator. According to Richards and Lockhart (1994) this role refers to the opportunities teachers create to help students “to discover their own ways of learning” (p.105). In relation to this Rocio argues:

*Teachers in the English Foreign Language classroom should assume a patient attitude because they need to understand the students and help them to identify their mistakes and in this way clarify their doubts related to the learning of a foreign language. On the other hand, they should be as a tutor to guide the students in the correct way because they need to feel in a pleasantly environment in which they have the opportunity to learn. (Before phase)*

In the same way, but in the after phase, Carla says:

*The vast majority of the roles mentioned above were confirmed like, to be a facilitator of knowledge and resources. Also, to be guide and monitor by, providing support as it was necessary and checking students' learning. Besides, to be an organizer by giving instructions (after phase)*

As it can be seen, pre-service teachers see themselves in the classroom in the same way; it means their beliefs do not change and are hold along their learning and teaching life. Moreover, these two main roles show pre-service teachers' interest for guaranteeing learners learn appropriately and support the learning process.

How should I plan and design material?

Pre-service teachers believed before the observation task mainly, that the first step to plan and design material is to identify their students' needs, interests and learning styles. This allows them to catch student's attention and involve them in the learning process.

*I think that a foreign language should be taught taking into account the context and people's needs, by using a variety of strategies, concepts, and methodologies. (José. Before phase)*

Even though, in the after phase, pre-service teachers recognized again the importance of knowing their students needs, they questioned how in-service teachers included students' needs and interests in each one of the activities developed in class.

*I want to be creative and dynamic person who implement interesting things and who think about students' likes and dislike because it is so important to me and it could help me to organize good classes although we know that sometimes our plans not conclude well but this profession is like that, we have to learn from our mistakes as teachers but it is marvelous. (Juana, after phase)*

*My beliefs about the way a foreign language should be taught were altered because previously I had thought that a foreign language should be taught taking into account the people's needs, but in that classroom the teacher taught the topic in a general way (Pedro, after phase)*

In spite of they considered student's needs as the base for planning and designing material, the classes' dynamic and the lack of interests in the students' learning process, make difficult

to answer students' needs. It might say the belief about need analysis as the base for planning and designing material could change once they start their teaching practicum.

### Conclusions

Up to this point, it is not possible to affirm if pre-service teachers are the teachers they dream to be once; however, it could be seen the kind of teacher they would or would not like to be based on in-service teachers' practices. Overall, pre-service teachers believe the best method to teach a foreign language is the one that, firstly, promote joy, and secondly, allow students to practice the language. This belief evidences that for pre-service teachers, learning is connected to how much enjoyment students have, so more than applying a method or approach that allows students to learn, they are worried for guaranteeing students have a good time in class.

Moreover, they recognize the important role they have in students' motivation towards learning. However, there is not still evidence of any beliefs about classroom management. It means they do not still recognize themselves as leaders and managers of classroom discipline. It might happen until they face real situations.

Finally, they believe knowing students is essential to design class and material, they start believing it is not easy and always possible to do in class, due to the time they have to know their students, and the school regulations.

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2. The names of all the participants were changed to guarantee confidentiality.



## **We are all special: Strategies to help all learners**

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### Introduction

Research regarding how to help students with special needs in the foreign language classroom has been ongoing for many years. One study by Laura DeFalco entitled, “Running Head: Integrating the Secondary School Foreign Language Classroom through Multiple Learning Activities”, has focused on the importance of helping students with and without special needs in the same classroom. Another study conducted by Christine Root at Harvard University entitled “A Guide to Learning Disabilities for the ESL Classroom Practitioner”, offers specific strategies to teachers. The more research that is done, the more we begin to understand that all types of educators must work to help all students in the classroom.

Integration of all students, no matter their specific learning needs and individual learning styles, has been accepted as the norm in ESL/EFL classrooms, yet still many teachers feel at a loss of how they can help to meet the needs of all learners. This workshop focuses on identifying, implementing dynamic lessons, teaching strategies, and finally assessment for students with special needs. Helping students with Asperger's, ADD and ADHD will also be addressed. The workshop also covers how to effectively use differentiation in the classroom to meet the needs of all learners. The workshop, We Are All Special: Strategies to Help All Learners, is aimed at helping teachers understand the needs of their students, improve instructional goals, assess and better lesson plan in order to meet those needs.

### Assessing Students' Needs

Most students enter the classroom without any formal evaluation. Teachers should ideally look through records and have discussions with past teachers about their students. This may serve to be a great resource in helping to understand how a student performed in previous years. And although this information is very useful, teachers also need to make their own evaluations based on various assessments, both formally and informally. Assessment may be conducted in the classroom in the first few weeks of school by asking students to self-evaluate their own individual learning styles. Understanding these learning styles, for example, kinesthetic, oral, auditory, etc. can help a teacher to plan for future lessons, but it also gives them a chance to create groupings based on learning styles. It also allows for a conversation to begin and trust to form between teachers and students. Assessments can be found online or self-created. Such examples of these assessments may include: student

surveys about how they learn, questionnaires that allow for open-ended answers about both academic and non-academic topics, questions about interests and challenges in past learning experiences. From the information gathered, a teacher can gain a better understanding of how students learn and begin to better prepare lessons to meet their students' needs. One example of this type of assessment can be found on [educationplanner.org](http://educationplanner.org)<sup>3</sup> (see reference section).

### Awareness

Students, school leaders, and specialized special education teams ideally should work together with the students and guardians to create a circle of trust and communication, which will lead to the success of students with special learning needs. All members involved should work towards common, attainable and realistic goals in order to help the student. With more awareness and understanding of the learner's needs. Everyone involved can create plans and lessons that will help the student. Awareness gives the teacher the opportunity to understand the student's strengths and possible weaknesses and create lessons that will benefit the student with the goal for academic success.

### The Individualized Educational Program

In the United States, after a formal evaluation and recommendations from a school psychologist are completed, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) may be created. Guardians, school administration, teachers and the student will be called to a meeting to explain what the learning goals will be, a timeline will be agreed upon and a plan will be created by the teacher and team of how to accomplish the set goals in order to help the student succeed. The IEP is a legal document and guardians, teachers, school administrators and others will need to sign the document to begin services officially. Some at-risk services may be previously offered before the IEP is started.

Teachers are required to use the IEP as a guide when lesson planning, instructing students and when planning and giving assessments. The IEP and the progress of the student is evaluated every year (in most cases), and may be adjusted as students reach or do not reach their learning goals. The IEP also allows for guardians, school administration, teachers, service providers (speech, physical therapists, occupational therapists, English as a Second Language teachers, and other support staff), and the most importantly the students to have an open and honest line of communication about how they learn. This is also an opportunity to speak about the student's progress and what else may be done to help the students reach their targeted goals. Sometimes if goals are met successfully, the team may decide to also remove the IEP or discontinue certain or all services.

### Empathy

Although teachers cannot always completely understand how a student who is experiencing learning difficulties feels, there are a few exercises that can help the teacher to feel more empathy in what their students may be experiencing. For example, watching various videos online, which explain how to better recognize and how to manage students with ADHD can be very helpful as a stepping stone to understanding the situation and what actions may need to be taken. For further information, see the reference section for the link to a video<sup>4</sup>, for a basic explanation of ADHD and ADD. These types of videos may help teachers better understand the emotions and difficulties their students may be feeling and experiencing. They are not a "fix" to the problem, per se, but may serve as a useful resource in helping students when in

class and outside of the school environment. There are many resources available online as well.

### Designing Curriculum to Meet the Needs of Learners

Instructors need to be not only cognizant of how to help their learners, but they also need to be very calculated in designing curriculum which focuses on how to help learners with special needs. When a teacher fosters a positive learning environment through a well-planned curriculum, students feel better about what they are learning. When planning curriculum teachers need to take into account the following questions:

- Is there a history of learning difficulties in the past, how were they dealt with and what was done to improve the learning environment?
- What are the specific difficulties that the learner is having?
- Are there any ways in which the curriculum can be manipulated/differentiated to meet the learner's needs?
- What can be done both in and outside of the classroom to meet the needs of these learners?
- What can be done to create learning goals that are attainable by the learners?

After considering these questions a teacher must carefully plan their curriculum and lessons to help all learners. The task can seem overwhelming at first, especially when dealing with various students with different needs. There are several ways in which the teacher can work with other teachers as well as the students themselves to plan lessons which will help students with special needs.

### During the Lesson

Each lesson should be taught to help all learners. Once teachers have their data and know more about how their students learn, they can use strategies in their lesson that help their students. If a student has ADHD, for example, teachers need to teach in a manner that helps the student stay focused. According to ADDitude, a special magazine to help professionals, guardians and educators understand helping students with ADD and ADHD, the following ways may help students stay on track:

- Seat kids with ADHD away from distractions, away from doors, windows and high traffic areas.
- Make lessons exciting, funny, mysterious, use props such as flashlights, invite surprise guests and plan lessons around student interests.
- Teach self-monitoring so students begin to recognize what distracts them and how to avoid these distractions.
- Play attention-boosting games, Simon says and musical chairs both require listening skills and need students full focus.
- Go outdoors, get moving and having lessons taught outdoors using the body helps students with concentration.

These are just a few suggestions that are possible to use in the classroom. Teachers need to find their own ways to support students with special needs. Adjustments may take time for the teacher and students to learn, but with patience, practice and perseverance the students and teachers will hopefully adjust to these changes. Of course there are many other ways teachers can improve their lessons to help their learners. For further resources please see the

latest and past issues of ADDitude magazine online and other resources on lesson planning for students with special needs.

#### Continuous Assessment for Students with Special Needs

The days of everyone taking the same test at the same time in the same environment are a thing of the past. Now educators must make very careful and conscientious decisions of how to assess their students. 6 According to the Council of Chief State School Offices and their findings in a study called Formative Assessment for Students with Disabilities. “Formative assessment is a process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students’ achievements of intended instructional outcomes.” (pg. 8)

“Formative assessment has powerful potential to increase learning for all students, including students with disabilities.” (pg. 4) Students are all unique, therefore the assessments in themselves must also be unique in order to accurately assess the individual students. Formative assessment helps teachers, students, administration and guardians all see the progress of students. These types of assessment help students because they can demonstrate their knowledge over time without the pressure of having to show what they have learned and understood in one single exam. Refer to the reference section number six to learn more about formative assessments.

#### Other Useful Strategies and Next Steps

All teachers will encounter students with special learning needs in their teaching careers. The teacher needs to find ways to work with these students, and create dynamic lessons that will benefit all learners despite their specific learning needs. Teachers and students need to work together to create a supportive environment that will encourage success. Supporting students in the classroom will give them a feeling of comfort and confidence. The most important factor for integrated education to be functional is the enthusiastic participation of the teachers connecting with the special area teachers, the guardians and with the student who needs the support. Besides the strategies previously mentioned, this organizational sheet<sup>7</sup> in the link in the reference section provides a checklist that will help ESL students. All of the same strategies may be applied to helping students with special needs and learning differences. Of course there are others that can be done, but this list is a great start to help teachers help their students in their classrooms.

#### Conclusion

All teachers must support their students, and students with learning differences and special needs are no exception. With some research, open lines of communication and careful planning teachers can make adjustments to their lessons to help support all learners. Working with families (home support), work colleagues (school support) and the students individually will help them gain confidence in their academic work. With a few adjustments and ongoing support a teacher can make a real difference in the lives of their students. The way in which teachers can help learners will certainly continue to be a learning process. The hope is to create a less stressful environment which fosters learning, exploration and an opportunity to meet the students’ academic needs, no matter their learning styles and goals.

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<http://saisd.net/admin/curric/bilingual/pdf/files/instructstratell.pdf>



## **Mixed-Modality: Combining language classes and autonomous learning in CAADI**

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### **Introduction**

This research study looks at ways to expand language learning, encourage the development of learners' engagement, offer different learning modalities, take advantage of existing resources, offer expanded scheduling opportunities, and adapt learning to students needs. Our study combined two language learning modalities: autonomous learning in the Self-Access Center (SAC) (here referred to as Centro de Auto Aprendizaje de Idiomas - CAADI) along with traditional classes at the Language Department of the University of Guanajuato. The program showed overall improvement on students' language learning experiences, fostered students' motivation, and offered innovative, more flexible and individualized learning by empowering students' learning. The results of this mixed modality project showed a positive impact on language learning including a change in participants' attitude who became more confident and willing to take responsibility.

In this article, we will present the context of the study, introduce some definitions regarding autonomous learning, the theoretical framework, our research methodology, the data collection instruments, part of our results and data analysis, as well as the educational implication and conclusions.

### **Learning Context: The Language Department of the *Universidad de Guanajuato***

Language learning has become an essential tool in today's world of communication, business and travel. Many modalities exist to learn languages, the most common one being traditional lessons in a classroom with a teacher following a curriculum program with specific objectives. As stated by Cebollada, Vite and Castillo (2011), Zarco, Villanueva and Monleón (2010) and Noguchi & McCarthy (2010) the concept of combining different types of learning modalities such as classroom learning and autonomous learning outside the classroom is being developed in different parts of the world such as Mexico and parts of Asia. With the establishment of Self-Access Centers by the British Council in Mexico, new ways of learning languages have been developed.

At the Language Department of the University of Guanajuato, language learners registered in language courses normally attend language classes five hours per week. Furthermore, the

CAADI for autonomous language learning is made available on a voluntary basis as a space where students are free to learn at their pace and level at a time of their choosing. The center for autonomous language learning provides a variety of practical and authentic activities, material and resources, individual language counselling services, guided conversation practice through conversation clubs, environments suited to different learners' needs, and special workshops for users to develop different language skills (pronunciation, spelling, reading, etc.), exam preparation and the use of multimedia activities to foster the individual and autonomous language learning.

One unique aspect of the center that is highly valued by our members, is its conversation workshops run by teachers, international and local volunteers from the community and other students. Learning happening in the CAADI has been by users' interest and has no credited curricular value recognized by the institution. Students from language classes have had to pay an extra fee to become a member (presently \$265.00 pesos per semester for university students). In the last ten years, the University of Guanajuato has established a dozen new Self-Access Centers for autonomous language learning at different sites in the states of Guanajuato. Therefore, our mixed modality language learning project could be transferred and applied to other campuses.

As a learning innovation, we looked to synergize our existing language programs and services to offer more choices to learners. A group of language teachers from three language areas decided to combine autonomous activities in the CAADI with their traditional language classes. The two learning modalities were joint to offer an alternative solution to learning: traditional classroom lessons within a set curriculum complemented with individualized activities for autonomous learning. The program offers innovative, flexible and personalized learning alternatives. The goal of the study was to monitor learners' motivation, autonomy and skills development in order to evaluate the impact of the mix-modality option; in other words, our regular program in the classroom combined with autonomous learning in a Self-Access Center. It offered a wider variety of activities, material and resources to its users than solely traditional classes. We hoped that this would lead to greater recognition of the value of independent and autonomous learning within an academic context. This was anticipated to be attractive especially for students who are struggling with complicated timetables, lack of freedom in class, wanting to tackle special learning needs, etc.

### **Definitions and Theoretical Framework**

Holec's (1981) defined autonomy as 'the ability to take charge of one's own learning' (p. 3), while Dickinson (1987) spoke of autonomy as "the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions" (p. 11). In his definition, Holec gives power to the learner. Dickinson, on the other hand, gives no attention to the learning context by putting the entire responsibility on the learner. We believe that there must be a balance between these two extremes. Some authors recognize the relationship between autonomy, culture and learning contexts (Pennycook, 2013; Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Benson, 2007; Holliday, 2003; Benson, Chik & Lim, 2003). Closely related to the concept of autonomous learning, is self-determination theory in which the individual's ability to choose how to satisfy their needs and perform actions that need some degree of self-regulation (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1985; Jeno & Diseth, 2014).

Our theoretical framework is based on constructivist perspectives which places students at the heart of their learning process (Bruner, 1983; Vygotskiĭ & Cole 1978), the role of learning styles and metacognition (Doly, 2006, Delvolvé, 2006), development of autonomous learning (Benson 2001, 2007, 2013; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Hedge, 2000; Gardner & Miller, 1999) and offering complementary tools and techniques through language counseling (Nunan, 2009), and developing language learning strategies (Oxford, 1989; Rubin, 1975) to foster language learning and critical knowledge about one's own learning for deeper individual growth. Gregorio-Godeo (2005) makes references to the fact that for some teachers, this type of approach implies relying on learners' responsibility far too much.

It is important to recognise the learning opportunities available outside the language classrooms. As Richards (2015) says, "the curriculum of teacher-education courses needs to acknowledge that good teaching means preparing learners for learning both inside and outside of the classroom and that preparing teachers for this new reality is an important aspect of teacher education today" (p. 21).

### **Research Intervention and Data Collection**

This action research involved two phases: in phase 1, the pilot study, seven teachers worked with students taking classes in French, German and English. The pilot study was carried over two semesters. In phase 2, a second mix-modality project was developed by one French teacher with five groups (32 students) at three different levels (A1 to B1). In this paper, we are presenting the results from phase one of this research project involving classes in French, German and English with seven teachers and groups of learners at different levels.

The two phases of the program shared the same objectives, including three hypotheses:

- the existence of a link between the CAADI material and the pedagogical orientation gave by the personal with the students' learning styles;
- the tasks students achieved participate in the new skills' self-analysis;
- the topics taught in the classroom influence the material and the tasks carried out in the CAADI.
- 

Data collection instruments included learning styles and strategies questionnaires, online survey, interviews, students' learning logs and teachers' journals, individual registry of autonomous activities in a learning log, and students and teachers' journals. Moreover, participation in "learn how to learn" workshops was provided to the learners. At the end of the second semester, fifty of the 102 participating students completed an online survey of their experience.

Participating students were asked to keep learning journals of their experience, to complete two surveys, to fill out questionnaires on learning styles and strategies. When participating in activities in the CAADI, they were asked to register their arrival and departure times as well as briefly describe any activities they carried out as well as enlisting the materiel used. Participating language learners developed their skills, confidence, and abilities while learning at their own pace, setting learning goals according to their personal needs, and selecting their material and study schedule.

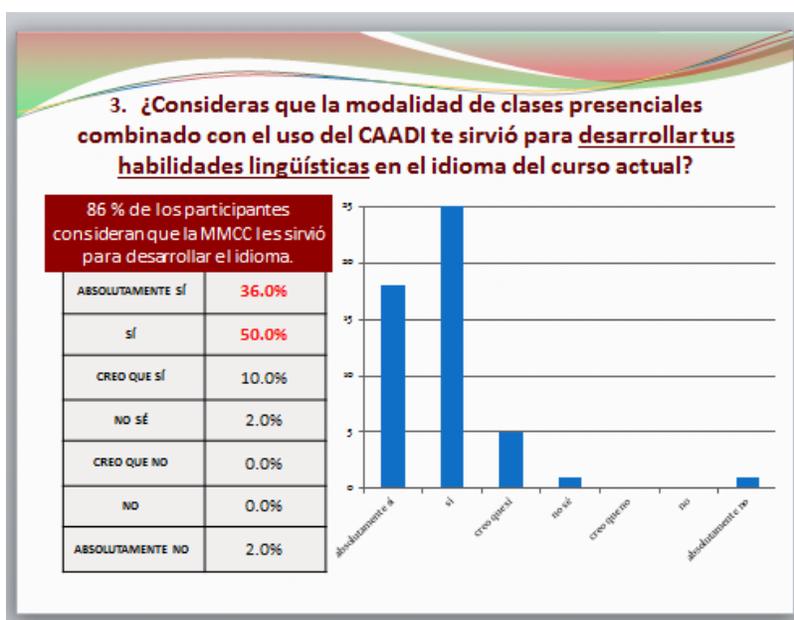
Participating teachers offered counseling in the CAADI for one hour a week as part of their teaching hours. Teachers in the traditional language programs integrated new and

autonomous activities into their curriculum and they also became more involved in the CAADI. They were also available to offer help to their own students as well as any other language users in the center.

### Presentation and Analysis of Results

The participants were asked to comment on whether or not their level of autonomy and their learning outcome had changed during the period of this study. Their responses were encouraging as they reported having a very positive experience in the combined classes-CAADI learning approach.

The survey results indicated that 90% considered that the mix-modality had been a positive or very positive experience for them, 86% said that it helped them develop their linguistics ability, and 88% indicated that they wanted to repeat this language learning experience in the future. 50% of the respondents revealed that they had not been CAADI users before participating in the project and were therefore new users of the CAADI. Overall, students indicated that participating in the autonomous activities complemented and fostered their language learning and improved their motivation.



A proportion of 96% of the participants indicated that they would “definitely or most probably” want to continue their language learning through the Mixed-Modality program which was a significant result. Furthermore, they majorly reported that their learning was richer through participating in this project, that they were able to develop their autonomy, that they had more freedom to choose their schedule, that they felt more involved in their learning, had more motivation, and found learning language more interesting that way. A student commented the following: “The fact that it was mixed, worked perfectly well. It’s an extra that perhaps the two modalities together could not achieve separately” (“*El hecho de que sea mixto funciona a la perfección. Es un extra, que a lo mejor las dos cosas por separado, no podrían lograr.*”)

**2. ¿Crees que hubo beneficios y inconvenientes al participar en este proyecto?**

	Si
MI APRENDIZAJE FUE MÁS ENRIQUECEDOR	96.0% (48)
PUDE DESARROLLAR MI AUTONOMÍA	92.0% (46)
TUVE MÁS LIBERTAD DE HORARIOS	86.0% (43)
ME SENTÍ MÁS INVOLUCRADO EN MI APRENDIZAJE	96.0% (48)
TUVE MÁS MOTIVACIÓN PARA APRENDER	82.0% (41)
FUE MÁS INTERESANTE PARA MI	90.0% (45)

In terms of the materials and activities used during the project, students indicated that the preferred activities were: completing class homework, listening to songs, using audio-books, asking help and guidance from a language counsellor, and participating in conversation groups. Chats and emails were the least interesting activities for their language learning.

**8. ¿Qué tanto usaste los siguientes materiales y servicios del CAADI?**

	mucho	algo	nada
Libros de gramática	16.0% (8)	28.0% (14)	14.0% (7)
Libros de texto	6.0% (3)	36.0% (18)	10.0% (5)
Audio-libros	22.0% (11)	34.0% (17)	14.0% (7)
Revistas y Periódicos	2.0% (1)	18.0% (9)	38.0% (19)
TOEFL y otros exámenes	6.0% (3)	34.0% (17)	28.0% (14)
Ejercicios de pronunciación	10.0% (5)	40.0% (20)	14.0% (7)
Ejercicios de vocabulario	8.0% (4)	52.0% (26)	10.0% (5)
Materiales en Internet	12.0% (6)	16.0% (8)	32.0% (16)
Chat y correos	2.0% (1)	12.0% (6)	64.0% (32)
Cursos audio-visuales	8.0% (4)	12.0% (6)	48.0% (24)
Películas	16.0% (8)	32.0% (16)	18.0% (9)
Música	26.0% (13)	24.0% (12)	14.0% (7)
Juegos interactivos	8.0% (4)	12.0% (6)	46.0% (23)
Talleres de Lectura	2.0% (1)	18.0% (9)	46.0% (23)
Talleres de Escritura	6.0% (3)	14.0% (7)	44.0% (22)
Talleres de conversación	18.0% (9)	28.0% (14)	24.0% (12)
Tareas del curso	28.0% (14)	38.0% (19)	16.0% (8)
Apoyo de asesores	20.0% (10)	34.0% (17)	14.0% (7)

The participants' responses to question five of the online survey showed that students enjoyed the freedom to choose their schedule to complete activities in the CAADI, the availability and variety of the learning material, the students' willingness to learn in an autonomous way, the support of the language counselors, and the support that the University of Guanajuato, through the *Division de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades* supported the project through a reduced fee for participating classes to register in the CAADI.

**5. De los siguientes aspectos de la MMCC  
¿qué tan importante te parece cada uno  
para que el programa funcione de forma óptima?**

	<i>Max. Importancia</i>
Libertad de horarios para asistir al CAADI	74.0% (37)
Disponibilidad y acceso a materiales en CAADI	86.0% (43)
Disposición del estudiante para aprender por sí mismo	92.0% (46)
Participación en el taller de Aprender a Aprender	54.0% (27)
Tour guiado del CAADI a principio del semestre	38.0% (19)
Apoyo de mi profesor en clase para fomentar la autonomía	66.0% (33)
Apoyo de asesores en el CAADI	78.0% (39)
Apoyo y participación de mi profesor en el CAADI	66.0% (33)
Cuota de inscripción al CAADI incluida en el costo del curso	48.0% (24)
Apoyo de la institución para nuevas modalidades de aprendizaje	72.0% (36)
Darle valor curricular (créditos) al aprendizaje autónomo en el CAADI	44.0% (22)

Results indicated that students developed abilities to evaluate new learning materials, combine activities according to their learning preferences, recognize their personal achievements, and set objectives in their language acquisition process. Taking part in this study greatly improved language learning experience and fostered students' motivation. The research showed positive results on language learning including a change in the participants' attitude who became more confident and willing to take responsibility. Students developed abilities to evaluate new learning material, to combine activities according to their learning preferences, to recognize their personal achievements, and to set objectives in their language acquisition process.

- 1b) ¿De qué forma impactado en tu aprendizaje tu participación en el proyecto de Modalidad Mixta?**  
*44 Respuestas*
1. He podido reforzar los conocimientos adquiridos en clase. Ha sido un semestre más productivo a comparación a otros.
  2. Es una forma más dinámica e interesante de aprender inglés, te da la oportunidad de realizar actividades distintas.
  3. Logre identificar de manera personal algunas de las fallas que estaba teniendo y que pude mejorar en ese aspecto.
  4. Logre ser también mas autodidacta y eso creo que fue estupendo.
  5. Aprendo un poco mas de lo expuesto en clase a mi propio ritmo, y enfocándome en mis deficiencias respecto al idioma.

The study also indicated that students consider themselves competent in evaluating the material according to the way of learning; the importance for the participants of a more natural contact with the foreign language they are learning; the needs for them to organize and prepare their visit to the CAADI; the opportunity of taking their own decisions in term of choosing the material or determine a learning goal; the presence of the teacher is less

notorious throughout the study. For two more years, the project continued with the help of different teachers and up to 20 groups participate to this mix-modality program. Although each teacher decided to use data collection and surveys, the students' interest of being part of the project was vivid.

### **Educational Implication and Conclusion**

In this research study, the benefits of the mix-modality program were mostly positive. The participating students reported an overall improvement in their language skills and indicated that taking part in this study enhanced their language learning experience and fostered their motivation. The CAADI benefited by gaining more language counselors, which is greatly needed in this age of severe job cuts. Most of the teachers and counselors in the CAADI are working under short term contract hours with no social benefits or permanent positions. Hence, our institution could greatly benefit administratively from promoting the mixed-modality project to gain teachers hours for the CAADI, to gain more students' registration each semester by offering a reduced fee to students. Most importantly, of course, were the various educational gains reported by the participating students who saw the value of combining autonomous learning with traditional classroom learning.

For this research, two existing programs were combined by offering a mix-modality alternative to regular classroom lessons complemented with autonomous activities, hence leading to recognition for independent learning within an academic context while offering an innovative, flexible and individualized language learning alternative. The aim was to support learners' initiatives, monitor their activities, offer personal language counselling, develop learners' autonomy regarding the use of the CAADI and the progress in applying new skills, recognize the material corresponding to their specific needs and learning style and, increase language learning motivation and development.

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## Enhancing L2 composition writing feedback through Screencast

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### Introduction

Computer-mediated language learning has become part of teacher's praxis and, in the last decade, video-based learning techniques have been successfully incorporated into teaching and learning in higher education (McCarthy, 2015). One of these techniques, *screen-capture technology*, has specifically been recognized by emergent scholarship with burgeoning interest in its use in the classroom (Vincelette & Bostic, 2013). In particular, screen-capture technology has been embedded in the overarching context of electronic feedback on students' work (e.g. audio feedback is another sample for electronic delivery).

Vincelette and Bostic (2013) argue that this alternative distribution of feedback has recently been studied due to the primary role that written feedback plays in L2 composition. In this matter, McCarthy (2015) advocates that "effective feedback is essential as the scaffolding that enhances learning" (p.153) which provides the foundations for learner autonomy and a framework for high achievement; in other words, feedback seems to be a critical part of learning (Weaver, 2006). Therefore, it seems crucial to investigate the reaction of L2 students to teacher feedback, as a sparkling area of study (Hyland, 2009), and the effects of this electronic-type feedback within the total context of teaching.

Nonetheless, McGrath, Taylor and Pychyl (2011) advocate that there is still a gap in the current pedagogical literature concerning the effectiveness of different forms of feedback. This is why the goal of this study was to bridge the gap between what it is known about the students' perceptions of feedback that influences their actual writing performance and the effects of providing quality feedback with screen-capture technology. Specifically, this report aimed to answer the following research questions by conducting a case study of a master degree cohort in an L2 composition writing class: how did screencast virtual tool (SVT) address the student's expectations about the purpose and value of feedback?, in what ways did the students think the SVT affected their writing?, and what were the students' reactions and attitudes to the use of SVT?

### Theory and practice related to *screencast* for language learning

*Screencast* was first supported by Udell in 2005 who promoted the value of software for instruction (Jesus & Moreira, 2009). This relatively new term, also known as *vodcasting* (Haxton & McGarvey, 2011), is used to describe the broadcasting of activities recorded from computer on-screen (Séror, 2012). Therefore, it involves attachment of recorded material (the

concurrent recording of a screen and audio file) on a website that students can access (e.g. Blackboard). Instructors can record what is on the screen (specific software, assignments, written essays, PowerPoint presentations, films, drawings, and so on) and captures simultaneously his or her voice commenting and explaining the image. Séror (2012) claims that, in the field of L2 writing pedagogy, Stannard (2006, 2007) was among the pioneers to explore how this virtual tool could be utilized to yield feedback by generating video-recordings of both his verbal annotations and his on-screen actions as he responded to students' texts.

Some studies related to this type of virtual tool demonstrated several advantages over other traditional and electronic-type feedback. For instance, McCarthy (2015) evaluated students' experience about getting summative feedback in three different types: written, audio and video feedback. This study indicated that students perceived video feedback as the most beneficial since it provided more in-depth analysis of their academic performance in assignments, followed by written feedback and lastly audio feedback. This predilection is echoed by Barger, Grudin, Gupta, Sanocki, Li, and Leetiernan's (2002) findings that support the idea that online learners prefer multimedia texts over text-only content.

Students' preference of video feedback is presumably based on their perceptions of flexibility and effectiveness because of its multi-sensory asset (Vincelette, 2013). Vincelette and Bostic (2013) suggest that this asset corresponds to *multimodality*, particularly in the teacher's use of mixed media response to students' work. They argue that *screencasting* adheres to the parameters of multimodality since it does privilege "the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 20). To sum up, these assumptions emphasize that "auditory/verbal and visual/pictorial stimuli increase comprehension, understanding, memory, and deeper learning than any single stimulus by itself" (Kirschner, Kester, & Corbalan, 2011, p. 30).

In addition to students' perceptions, Moore and Filling's (2012) examination about screencast feedback indicate that its use assists instructors in generating feedback that is more detailed, targeted, and tailored for each individual student. Mitchell (2012) claims that this approach, based on her small-scale study as a teacher-researcher, was a more personal stance for feedback besides student's positive perception of feedback effectiveness. Séror (2012) complements that "screencasting helps students remain active and at the center of a redrafting process and reinforces the link between the suggestions made by an instructor and the conventions and expectations that motivate them" (p. 107).

In conclusion, *screencasting* seems to be a tool that permeates in the students' perceived value and purpose of feedback as well as it does achieve language pedagogy aims set by the instructor. Yet, there are constraints when implementing this delivery feedback format related to technology-related problems that imply being careful about conditions in the context of application such as internet access, time constraints, equipment, and so on.

### Methodology

A case-study was conducted since this qualitative approach allowed the portrayal of a particular situation by capturing the detailed reality of participants' vivid experiences and thoughts about this situation (Cohen et al., 2000). Thus, the participants, who were enabled to tell their stories (Baxter & Jack, 2008), belonged to a cohort of the master program in English

Language Teaching at a public university in central Mexico. A total of 18 participants intervened in the research that took place 5 months after they completed their L2 composition course where they experienced feedback by means of screencast.

This study collected and utilized both *naturalistic data* and *elicited data* (Hyland, 2009) with the following instruments: a) analysis of a participant's authentic texts, stimulated recalls, an open-ended questionnaire, and b) A survey to every participant of the cohort. The former data collection strategies addressed the qualitative dimension, and the latter attempted to address the quantitative dimension of this study.

### Results and findings

The results in relation to the *elicited data* by the stimulated recalls and the open-ended questionnaire for the single participant revealed the following outcomes. He experienced feedback with a positive impact since he was not familiarized with video-feedback and perceived this electronic feedback more helpful and insightful than traditional feedback protocols (e.g. end comments responding to the students' work, minimal marking/correction codes, and so on). In addition, he praised that video feedback was timely, constructive and easy to remember as he was able to check it as many times as necessary.

In relation to what he did with feedback, he claimed that he first watched the video feedback in general before going over the current assignment or revise work and later he watched the video and stopped it when marks appeared to improve the assignment even if a high grade was achieved. He acknowledged that the lecturer was consistent in the marking criteria and verbal feedback so that every time feedback was easier to follow. However, he labeled the least helpful kind of feedback the one that targeted to highlight format or presentation issues and recognized the most helpful one to the marks or annotations related to structure or clarity (e.g. main and subordinate clauses, meta-discourse elements, use of links, writer's voice, and so on).

Regarding his feedback expectations, he made the following claims. On one hand, he emphasized that he expected more discussion on the content of his course assignments such as integration of theory and practice (e.g. appropriate use of examples, deep coverage of the topic, and so on) or critical analysis and reflection. On the other hand, he acknowledged that this could have been so because these texts were external assignments of other subjects of the master and his lecturer worked mainly as a "marker".

With reference to use feedback on written assignments when writing future tasks, the participant indicated that he used it to avoid making the same mistakes and by keeping what he had done well in relation to lecturer's perspective. Nonetheless, he observed that he did not look back at former feedback since assignments were not extremely related to the next ones. Overall, he argued that the global improvement in his writing was reflected on appropriate citation and referencing regarding APA (American Psychological Association) conventions rather than content elaboration.

The former data was also considered for the elaboration of the questionnaire in order to verify if the selected participant's experience was true to most of his peers. Consequently, the *elicited data* obtained in relation to the questionnaire that was applied to every participant of the cohort led to the following findings.

In relation to students' perceptions about what makes feedback on writing assignments effective, the greatest percentage of students considered that *feedback that benefits their learning* as the most valuable (84,2%), while the fewest percentage of students perceived *feedback that encourages them to revise more about their task* as the least valuable (47,7%). Yet, the lowest score average was related to the type of *feedback that tells them the exact changes they need to make*. By matching these perceptions with what they claimed that they had received with screencast virtual tool (SVT), the implication is that their expectations were met in relation about what they perceived as effective feedback.

Regarding students' expectation about feedback that leads to specific results, the greatest percentage of students considered *feedback that provides a better understanding of what makes high quality work* with the highest result expectation (52,6%), while the fewest percentage of students perceived *feedback that tells how to give feedback to themselves* as the lowest result expectation (26,3%). It seemed there was a mismatch about what students expected in comparison to what they assumed that they experienced with SVT since the majority of participants perceived that most specific *results led to know how to avoid mistakes to future assignments*. However, this criterion did match in relation about students' low expectation and low perceived results about *how to provide feedback to themselves*.

Of the types of feedback surveyed, the greatest percentage of students reported *suggestions for improvement* and *use of examples* as highly compatible (63,2%) to perceived feedback effectiveness and expected related results, while *praise or discouragement* was the least compatible. This result replicates findings yielded by Turninit (2014). In addition, *suggestions for improvement* was one of the types of feedback that they claimed that they experienced the most, followed by *specific notes written in the margins* and *general, overall comments about the paper*. Likewise, *praise or discouragement* was the least frequent feedback type received according to the participants. Therefore, there is a correlation between expectations of types of feedback and what they perceived that they experience with SVT.

Concerning the *surface* and *text-based* changes that were considered areas for development and lecturer's elements to which provide feedback, the participants considered that they improved the most in relation to *clarity and structure of the text* and they improved the least about *presentation*. The latter finding might correspond to the issue that the instructor rarely provided feedback to this matter, based on the analysis of the *natural* data. Nonetheless, in a closer review about the surveyed items related to *text-based* revisions, *critical analysis and reflection (when assignments provided the opportunity)* was the least perceived criterion for improvement; while and among the items related to *surface* revisions, *referencing (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, and so on)* was the criterion to be considered with the most improvement.

Finally, participants' additional comments and insights highlight this electronic experience with feedback as a positive one since they mentioned adjectives such as "significant", "nice", "refreshing", "best", and "great". Likewise, they converge about the overall perception about SVT as "helpful" and "useful" in relation to improvement and development of their texts. Their additional comments also reflected positive attitudes towards the lecturer since participants acknowledged that SVT acted as a channel for lecturer's expertise, competence and attitudes towards writing, feedback and this technological tool itself.

## Conclusions and implications

How did SVT address the student's expectations about the purpose and value of feedback? This case study demonstrated that students' expectations about the purpose and value of feedback were somewhat compatible with the characteristics portrayed in the video feedback. This cohort valued feedback focus that provided opportunities for learning and they received this focus. However, the value of feedback (i.e. feedback accomplishment of certain results) did not totally match between students' expected outcomes and with those they perceived they achieved. Remarkably, there was a correlation between expectations of types of feedback, which implies that there is a constant gap between students' idealized type of feedback and actual teacher's feedback. This outcome echoes Orsmond and Merry's (2011) discussion about the misalignment between the focus of instructors when giving feedback and students' conceptions of its role. A contributing factor for this gap is Butler's (2011) reflection on instructors' struggles with heavy schedules, limited resources, and large classes to achieve this *idealized* perspective of feedback. In practical terms, this gap supports Hyland's (1998) postulation about teachers' sensitivity to individual students' views on what establishes useful feedback and the necessity to explore their expectations, requirements, and past experiences. Thus, the pedagogical implication is that teachers might consider taking time to discuss with students the kinds of feedback that are normally provided and the rationale behind. In addition, students might share with the teacher the sorts of feedback they have encountered to be most effective (TurnItIn LLC, 2014). This also means that "teachers must build on the perceptions and practices of writing that students bring with them to the classroom to expose the authority of the prestige discourses that they seek to acquire" (Hyland, 2009, p. 42).

In what ways did the students think the SVT affected their writing? Most participants reported in both the closed and open items some sort of improvement in the development of their assignments. They highly scored most of the *surface* and *text-based* changes surveyed in the questionnaire. This might be due to the fact that students perceived feedback as focusing on performance improvement and a "standards-based"/"checklist-like" type, as an aid to target their learning efforts (Hendry, Bromberger & Armstrong, 2011). However, there was a misalignment about expected areas of improvement in participants' written assignments and instructor's focus. The findings in this aspect also revealed *communication breakdowns* relatively due to either the lack of an open dialogue concerning the types of feedback student wants and what teacher will provide (Hyland, 1998) for writing development as an inconvenience of electronic video feedback in comparison to face-to-face feedback. The pedagogical implication deals with drawing attention to the need of dialogic approaches on feedback to restructure areas for improvement that students seek to develop. In this matter, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) conceptualize feedback as "dialogue rather than as information transmission (to enable) the active role the student must play in constructing meaning from feedback messages, and or using this to regulate performance" (p. 210). This dialogic approach might also lead students to their development as professionals and the acquisition of lifelong learning writing skills when teachers vary their feedback focus (Orsmond & Merry, 2011).

What were the students' reactions and attitudes to the use of SVT? Overall reactions and attitudes of the participants show a positive spectrum in relation to the learning experience itself, the course and the instructor. These affirmative views seemed to prompt students' motivation that might become a driving force to handle the task at hand or future tasks (i.e. course assignments). Two implications arise from this finding. First, the novelty of experiencing something innovative may be more engaging and instructive. Secondly, a mixed-media feedback model, incorporating visual, aural and written components could also enhance the student experience (McCarthy, 2015).

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## Exploring the impact of a dual-language education program

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### Introduction

The following paper outlines a study which aims to explore a dual-language program, implemented at a charter school in the city of El Cajon, California. This school, which started to promote justice and quality in education, was established in 2005 by parents, students, and teachers who wanted to provide children from low-income, and other disadvantaged families, with the opportunity to attend a school that would also promote biliteracy.

The research falls under a qualitative paradigm, because the investigator works with the participants' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes towards the dual-language program, and the school as a whole. A case-study methodology was chosen because the phenomenon, EJE Academies' dual-language program, was studied within its context. The phenomenon was also analyzed through different perspectives: the teachers, the parents, and the students. The techniques used to collect data were: semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. A brief history of the school is included to situate the reader in the context where the research took place. This research has not concluded. I, the researcher, am in the process of analyzing the data.

**Participants and location:** The study was conducted at EJE Academies Charter School in the city of El Cajon, California with fifth-grade students, teachers, and parents. I chose to work with this population because academic instructional time is evenly divided between English and Spanish according to the description of the program. I am currently working with teachers from different grades through questionnaires, and interviews.

**Research aim:** To analyze parents', teachers' and students' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences in a dual-language program, and explore its impact on their personal and academic lives.

**Importance of the project:** Dual-immersion programs have proven to be successful in Canada and the United States (Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2008) because they "aim to support and extend the student's home language and additional language(s) through the systematic and sustained use of both/all as languages of instruction."(Hall, Smith & Wicaksono, 2011, p.181). Additive bilingual programs respect and consider students linguistic backgrounds while helping students achieve high levels of proficiency in both languages. In the case of EJE Academy, the target languages are English and Spanish.

The program provides native English and Spanish speakers a solid academic foundation in the target language. The target language is Spanish for English-only speakers and English for Spanish-only speakers. EJE Academy follows a 90-10 dual language program model. In this program, 90 percent of the time spent at school is in one of the target languages. EJE stands for Excellence and Justice in Education because it aims to provide a quality education for children.

Some studies have identified the advantages and disadvantages of two-way or dual bilingual education programs (Meyers, 2010; Lindholm-Leary, 2012). EJE Academy is one of the first public schools in Cajón Valley Union School District to implement a dual language program. This school has welcome students and their families from all kinds of backgrounds, especially Latin children from immigrant families since Spanish is one of the target languages at this school.

Exploring the impact of a dual bilingual education program in El Cajón city, which has a large population of immigrant families, will allow us to understand parents, students and teachers' feelings towards the bilingualism in a globalized society. Even though there are about two-thousand schools which implement a dual-language program, not only in Spanish, but also in other languages, such as a Chinese; other researchers might find this study relevant because it reflects the opinions of the people who are involve in these type of education, and provides an overview of how they work. If more programs like this are being created, this study will provide information about the community that they are directed towards.

**Historical context of the school:** *Not enough funding.* The closing of Ballantyne Elementary In 2004, Ballantyne Elementary closed down due to budget cuts and its low performance in statewide standardized testing. This school had 521 students enrolled. Many parents, teachers and students were against its closing. The school community came together to find a solution and keep their school open as a charter school. However, this would be a lengthy process. The concerned parents turned to El Cajon's advocacy group *Excellence and Justice in Education (EJE)* for support. In spite of their efforts, they were not successful.

The students were assigned to other institutions surrounding the area –that were also underperforming and overcrowded– and were offered transportation with the exception of one school. According to Eva Pacheco, EJE's executive director, “the closing of Ballantyne Elementary was a 'wake up' call for parents to take a closer look at the quality of education their children are receiving in [El Cajon Valley School] district.” (Sanchez, 2004, para. 16).

Excellence and Justice in Education: *Excellence and Justice in Education* advocacy group was formed in 1991 by parents to promote bilingual education in El Cajon. This organization also “educated and empowered parents; teaching them to demand a JUST education for their children.” (EJE, 2017). They established advisory committees at different schools in El Cajon as well as in the San Diego County Office of Education. In 2004, as Ballantyne Elementary parents were in search for a solution, EJE advocacy group decided to open their own school to be able to serve low-income families and promote bilingual education. They presented a charter school project to El Cajon Valley School District, and in August 2015, *Excellence and Justice in Education Elementary Academy (EJEEA)* open its doors “as the first independent, community led, 90-10 dual language (Spanish-English) school in [San Diego] county.” (EJE, 2017).

Twelve years ago, EJE Academy opened its doors to its first generation of students. Most of them came from low-income families who were thriving to find a quality education for their children and they considered that they have, as some of them have stated in the interviews that I held with them on June 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017. I decided to include the historical context of the school because how EJE Academies started is an important part of the school's identity as can be seen in its murals and the comments some of the kids and parents have made during the interviews.

### **Literature review**

The literature consulted to carry out the study is related to bilingual education programs, specifically recent articles and books concerning two-way or dual immersion programs. I wanted to explore success stories, but also understand the challenges that EJE Academies has faced since its creation. I also analyzed the literature resources that the school's website provides so people, especially parents, understand the objectives of the dual bilingual education program and how it will be beneficial for the students' academic, professional and personal goals.

One of the primary references to understanding the opportunities and challenges of dual bilingual programs is Meyer's book *Opportunities and Potential Problems in Two-Way Immersion Programs in the U.S.* (2010). This study is relevant to my research because it provides an overview of the history of two-way immersion programs in the United States, but concentrates on California because it is one of the states with higher rates of immigration. The most widely used minority language in this state is Spanish. The main focus of Meyer's study is schools that have a two-way immersion program in which the target language are English and Spanish. EJE Academies fits this description.

I also read about other two-way/dual immersion programs that have been successful at helping students develop proficiency in both languages and other aspects of the students' academic and personal life such as their identity as students of a dual bilingual education program. An example of a successful program is The Alicia Chachón International School, which Howard (2002) portrays as an exemplary k-8 two-way immersion program in El Paso, Texas. Alicia Chacón International School is one of the models that EJE Academies takes to start its program in El Cajón, California.

### **Methodology**

The present paper describes a proposal for a qualitative study that plans to explore the impact of a dual bilingual education program through students, teachers, and parents' attitudes, perceptions, opinions, experiences and beliefs about bilingual education in El Cajón, California. As this study proposes to interpret the perceptions of the participants of everyday observable phenomena, a case-study methodology will be used (Merriam, 1988). For the data collection, I employed individual and group interviews, and observation.

Burgess (as cited in Richards, 2003, p. 50) defines research interviews as "conversation[s] with a purpose." Richards (2003, p. 50) mentions that in everyday interaction, one listens to respond, while in an interview, the interviewer encourages the speaker to provide as much information as possible about an individual matter. Therefore, I encouraged parents, teachers, and students to talk about their feelings and ideas towards the bilingual program. The type of

interview that I used was semi-structured. This kind of conversation uses an interview guide or protocol, which are the questions that will guide it, although more questions can arise from the responses of each participant.

I used non-participant observation to collect data “on naturally occurring behavior in their usual contexts” (Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005, p. 2). Marshall and Rossman define observation as a systematic description of behavior and events in the social scenario which is a motive of study (cited in Kawulich, 2005). I observed some of the classes, and school's activities to explore students' attitudes and behavior towards the teacher and their fellow classmates in a culturally diverse background.

The data collection techniques that I described allowed me to understand the impact of a dual bilingual program in the academic and personal lives of teachers and students.

### **Arrangements, access, and ethics**

I traveled to El Cajon, California, during the second and third week of June to collect data through interviews, and observation. I spoke to the principal of the school. I wrote and had my participants sign a consent form stating the objectives of this research, so participants knew that the purpose of the study is purely academic. I worked with minors; I understood that parents might have had concerns about an outsider interviewing their children. Thus, I asked a teacher, school administrator or parent to be present during the group interviews.

### **Data collection report**

I arrived in El Cajon, California on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The first day I visited the school I met with Mrs. Gomez, the fifth grade lead teacher, Mr. Jimenez and Ms. Salas. The three of them form the fifth-grade team. We discussed what the project was about and how it should be conducted. Although, I was only going to send a questionnaire to the parents, they said that they would try to get as many parents as they could so I could interview them. On June 8<sup>th</sup>, I conducted two individual interviews and a group interview, with six parents. On June 9<sup>th</sup>, I conducted two individual interviews, and a group interview with 3 parents, which makes a total of thirteen parents interviewed. On June 6<sup>th</sup>, I interviewed 75 fifth-grade students in groups of five. I have asked the teachers to fill out a questionnaire about their experiences working at EJE Academies. The data collection is still in process.

### **Limitations**

One of the main limitations that I encountered is that I had to travel to the United States to collect data from the parents, and students. If I am missing any important piece of information I would have to go back. This represents economical and personal expenses.

### **Conclusion**

Although the study has not yet been completed, I would like to mention that one of the recurring answers when students were asked if they like learning two languages at the same time, they said that they did, not only because they think that they can improve their socio-economic status, but because they wanted to be able to help people communicate with each other. Most of them also mention that they appreciate their school because the teachers and the staff are loving and caring people who do not allow any kind of bullying in the school. They feel protected and understood.

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### Reading fair: A collaborative experience of 5th semester students

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The paper features the stages involved in the creation of a collaborative project called Reading Fair, at C.B.T.i.s No 66, in Tierra Blanca, Ver. This project was launched for the first time in December 2015, then again in December 2016. Using 5th semester students' talent and collaboration, each event was aimed to raise awareness towards the importance of books, thus improving students' reading skills for school and life. The descriptions of all stages were focused on the compulsory academic elements that contributed to the creation of the Fair, as well as approaches and methods used for preparation during the semester. Results from both years were compared and contrasted.

**Key words:** extensive reading, collaborative work, generic competencies, narrative texts.

In Mexico, people read 3.8 books per year (INEGI, 2016). Among those constant readers, teachers play an important part in the figures, as they alone read two thirds of the total of books tallied in the surveys. Older professors are responsible for enjoying 2.6 books per year, while younger ones barely read 1.9 books (IFEI, 2013). It has been noted that “a fundamental ingredient in any of the plans for teachers to help students to develop positive reading attitudes, is the teacher's own love of reading” (Cramer & Blachowicz, 1980). Since teachers have direct influence on students reading habits, teachers promoting the approach to books for pleasure makes perfect sense. For this specific task, a classroom library that promotes extensive reading (Day and Bamford, 2002) is the best ally in the creation of book-based projects.



The C.B.T.i.s No 66, as many other public institutions in our country, fits in the description above. The most recent PLANEA results (2016) showed that reading skills was an area of opportunity. Hence, promoting L1 & L2 approach to books became a priority.

For senior students in high schools, it is required to study types of texts, use of graphic organizers and retrieval information techniques. With a current classroom library and the memories of a personal project launched in 2011 as a basis for ideas, the Reading Fair started taking form. It was conceived to: a) decrease the level of anxiety towards L2 reading and b) expose students to pleasurable attitudes towards reading. As positive results had been observed in previous attempts, the bibliography and topics to cover in the fair started to surface. Besides, for 2016, the project included: **a)** principles of extensive reading, **b)** contrastive analysis (Wardhaugh, 1970), and **c)** Rassias Method® techniques. The mandatory generic and disciplinary competences (SEP, 2011) were included too, just as in 2015.

The steps created for the Reading Fair were as follows:

### 1. Team formation.

To create the fair, students were asked to make teams within their group or with members of other groups. Collaboration among different promoted safe learning environments, as well as sense of belonging to fandoms or literary genres.



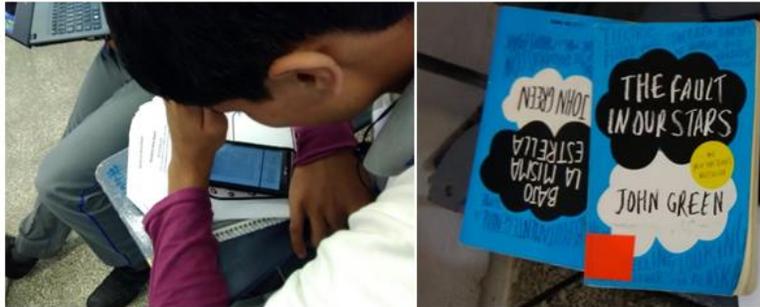
### 2. Creation of Action Plan

The Action Plan format was given to them, and they organized their weeks to complete the activities in time. Follow up was self-checked.



### 3. Read the book in English

Once teams were formed, students had to read the book in English and, instead of a dictionary, use the book's version in Spanish if necessary. Portable files were allowed, but not encouraged to respect copyright. Most books in English were borrowed from our classroom library, but some were purchased on Amazon.



### 4. Sandwich Report

After reading the book, following the Action Plan and managing the information through graphic organizers, students wrote a sandwich-shaped report to retrieve all the necessary information for the presentations. The sandwiches were allowed to be used during oral presentations, as cliff notes about the story.



### 5. Oral practice of questions



## 6. Presentation to school community

A set of generic questions was formed by all students. Then, these questions served as guidelines to retrieve information. In the fair, students needed to report about books orally. For three weeks, all students were exposed of the Rassias Method ®, created in 1960 by John Rassias in Dartmouth College. He believed that people “speak a language to learn it, rather than learning a language to speak it”. Teams used Tic-Tac-Toe ® technique to practice both questions and information related to the book they were presenting. Impromptu practice was encouraged, too, as it would prepare them for any possible scenario on the presentation day.



Students were assessed by teachers and students of other semesters, using checklists and observation sheets. All the elements considered for the fair were explained at the beginning of the month.

### Reading Fair

BOOK	TEAM CODE	STAND
HARRY POTTER AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE	1272	018

#	MEMBERS
1	SC - VERONICA BERNARDO BARRAMETA
2	TC - ROMONDO ABELAR NARCIA SUNDALOVE
3	SC - MARICIA MARICIA ADA PATRICIA
4	SA - FLORES ELLYNE RAMONITA
5	SA - PEREZ MARICIA MARICIA MARICIA
6	SA - BARRAMETA BARRAMETA BARRAMETA
7	SA - BARRAMETA BARRAMETA BARRAMETA
8	SA - BARRAMETA BARRAMETA BARRAMETA
9	
10	

#### INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1.- visit the stand corresponding to the number in the box on the top right of this sheet.
- 2.- Check the element and the level of performance. Tick ( / ) or cross (X) the choice.
- 3.- Add up the points awarded and write it in the TOTAL box.

#	ELEMENTS TO ASSESS	PERFORMANCE			
		OUTSTANDING (5 pts)	GOOD (4 pts)	SATISFACTORY (2 pts)	DEFICIENT (0 pts)
1	A themed-book stand / book board, representing the chosen literary text.				
2	Name tag for each member of the team.				
3	Book-related goodies to give away (snacks, bookmarks, decorations, etc.) promoting the reading of the book in question.				
4	Knowledge of the story during presentations.				
5	Teamwork and respectful attitude towards guests during presentations.				

TOTAL	
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Reading Fair Assessment Form 1

### Reading Fair

#	INSTRUCTIONS	QUESTIONS	ANSWERS			
			OUTSTANDING	GOOD	SATISFACTORY	DEFICIENT
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.- Call a team member by the name and let him know the question is aimed for him.</li> <li>2.- Read the question clearly. Repeat if necessary.</li> <li>3.- Cross the corresponding box from the ANSWERS column in the far right (<i>adequate, satisfactory, good, outstanding</i>)</li> <li>4.- Make sure to ask ALL ten questions with each team (no specific order is required; some members might need to answer more than once).</li> <li>5.- Move on to the next team.</li> <li>6.- Drop off all test formats in the corresponding box, or in Room D1 with teacher Ifigo</li> </ol>					
1		What is the story about?				
2		Who are the main characters?				
3		Why did you choose this book?				
4		Which is the most <i>interesting / important</i> part of the story?				
5		Who is your favorite character? Why?				
6		What is the setting of the story?				
7		What is the message you learned from reading this book?				
8		Which parts of the story do you connect with?				
9		What is the main character's conflict?				
10		Would you like to change anything from the story? If so, what part?				

Reading Fair Assessment Form 2

Specialty teachers also collaborated intensively, guiding the elementary and secondary school students that visited that day. A final raffle of books in L2 was carried out, and as students were waiting for the results they could scan 37 QR codes that included music, videos or TV programs inspired by or created for the books found in the fair.



The mandatory promotion of extensive reading in fifth semester of high school results in an advantage for students. Having identified that teachers and peers are a key element in the change of attitude towards literary experiences, this fair confirmed that by increasing the exposure to L2 reading is attainable when collaboration takes place. This exposure changes the perception towards book related activities, creating a broader vocabulary ranges and, in some cases, an increase in L1 reading.

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## **Do you know any traditional remedy? A TBL experience**

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### **Introduction**

The Ministry of Public Education of Mexico in its Educational Model claims "The education that is needed in the country demands the ability of the population to communicate in Spanish (...), as well as in English (SEP, 2017: 62). Therefore, new methodologies are required that promote conditions in which students are faced with communicative tasks similar to those of real life in which they make authentic use of English. However, this applies to both basic education and higher education because English is the language in which knowledge resulting from research is published and updated in all areas of science. UNESCO (2009) and ANUIES (2012) raise the need for the internationalization of Higher Education Institutions in Mexico (Instituciones de Educación Superior, IES) and one example of this is how the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP) has already contemplated in its Institutional Development Program (BUAP, 2013) strategies to encourage the internationalization of their teachers and students through training to achieve high levels of English; at the same time this would promote the exchange of knowledge generated in the different IES at an international level.

In this context the English language begins to take a preponderant role with respect to other languages since even the SEP (2017) has proposed a "National English Strategy" where it is proposed that all students who finish their basic education must have a B2 certification according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2002). This responds to new job demands as Roca (2015) points out:

More and more companies and agencies will need to interact with agents in different languages. Here, however, there is controversy, since some experts predict a full extension of English, which will be an essential requirement for any worker. English will be imposed, among other things, because it is the preferred language of the internet (Roca, 2015, pp. 190-191).

Some authors (Córdoba, 2016, Roessingh, 2014, Bush, 2012) emphasize the importance of promoting Communicative Competence in learning to foreign language rather than mastering skills such as grammar, reading, writing or listening in isolation according to the CEFR (2002). The Communicative Competence consists of several components: the linguistic, the sociolinguistic and the pragmatic. It is assumed that each of these components includes, in

particular, knowledge, skills and abilities (CEFR, 2002). One approach that provides opportunities for the development of communicative competence is the Task-based Learning Teaching approach (TBLT) proposed by Ellis (2003). Cordoba (2016, p.15) states that Ellis (2009) discussed some criteria that distinguish TBLT from regular teaching activities. He explained that this methodology focuses on the integration of language learning where students are expected to conduct creative activities, infer meaning from readings and oral messages, and communicate their ideas well.

The implementation of this approach has the objective of generating a Communicative Competence and promoting Significant Learning (Ausubel, 1968) by linking content in the interests of students with the learning of a foreign language; Which at the same time is improved when this is done in learning communities where there is guidance and accompaniment by the teacher (Rogers, 1996). The objective of this work was to develop higher levels of communicative competence based on the use of the TBLT approach in undergraduate health students.

### **Method**

Participants in this study were 69 undergraduate students of Medicina General y Comunitaria (39 students) and Estomatología (30 students) of the fourth semester who were attending their fourth English Foreign Language course at BUAP Complejo Regional Nororiental in Teziutlán, Puebla. For this work, a learning unit was designed (based on Simple Past and Traditional Aztec Medicine). In addition, readings and videos on traditional Aztec medicine and current alternative medicine were used. The students also carried out research activities on traditional medicine and its scientific bases, to finally elaborate a video where they presented a popular home remedy of their community, its form of elaboration, properties and the explanation of its effectiveness. In order to evaluate the impact of this activity, an instrument with different sections, focused on Communicative Competence, Meaningful Learning and Role of the teacher, was applied to explore the relationship that the students perceived between the contents of their subjects with their English Language subject, the motivation during the activity and the role of the teacher during the activity to achieve the goal.

### **Results and Analysis**

94% of the students reported that the task was related to situations of daily life, with the knowledge of their studies and the customs of their communities; 85% mentioned that the contents reviewed during the task were interesting because they were related to their professional formation and that they perceived a satisfactory performance of their own; 85% of the students mentioned that the teacher generated empathy and confidence to express themselves and finally; 88% reported an advance in their Communicative Competence since they were able to express their own ideas with freedom and used the 4 basic skills in the task (Speaking, Writing, Listening and Reading). In addition, something remarkable is that 80% of the students reported that the activity was related to subjects such as “Herbolaria”, “Medicina Comunitaria” and “Historia de la Medicina” mainly. This suggests that as long as there is a transversality between the disciplinary subjects and the subject of English Foreign Language, meaningful learning will be encouraged.

These results highlight the importance of generating meaningful activities or tasks within the subject of English Language, in which the use of the language is linked to the contents of their areas of training and interest. This helps students to feel more motivated to perform the activities proposed by the teacher because they find in them an opportunity to enrich the knowledge they have acquired during their classes by putting it into practice with aspects of their daily lives.

Another of the factors that promoted the achievement of the objective of this work was the role of the teacher. Rogers (1996) claims that the teacher should maintain a role of facilitator of learning that gives freedom to her/his students to work within a framework created by a contract in which both are responsible their roles. The teacher agrees to give advice and resources to achieve the target when the student requires, in addition to establishing an environment of trust that allows the student to practice what they learn and demonstrate their knowledge without fear of failure. In this regard, during this kind of activities, students often had to present progress of their work and in this way the student is involved not only during the performance of the activity but also as part of her/his ongoing evaluation. Santos Guerra (2010) states that a proper evaluation is an opportunity that allows the student to have information about their own learning process rather than focusing only on the outcome; this empower the student to be responsible of the learning process.

The collaborative work between student and teacher has been analyzed by the Historical-Cultural approach (in Wertsch, 1998) in which learning is constructed in conjunction with another person that provides adequate aids for learning achievement, therefore, counseling and feedback provided by the teacher provide resources for the student to improve their performance and develop new skills. In addition to ensuring that there is a gradual step of control of one's own activity that goes from an external regulation by the teacher to a self-regulation of the student.

## **Conclusions**

With the aforementioned results, it is concluded that the subject Foreign English Language should be viewed as an opportunity for students to express their ideas, interests and knowledge instead of focusing only on the mastery of grammatical rules. If English Language is disconnected from students' interests these could see it as a subject with no importance for them. This can be avoided by relating the contents of their training subjects to the subject of Foreign Language.

Considering the context within students develop to generate meaningful activities allows them to feel more motivated to participate in them and to have a more participative and responsible role within them as they see the opportunity to enrich their knowledge.

The environment of confidence generated by the teacher in the classroom is an important element in any educational process; however, in the learning of a foreign language it acquires a central dimension since some students express their anxiety before the possibility of making mistakes by not participating or not commenting their doubts. This can limit students to be able to correct possible errors and put into practice what they are learning in class.

Counseling and constant feedback are elements that serve as a support because they allow the student not only to detect their mistakes but also to highlight the things they already do well and enable them to perfect them.

Based on the results of this study it is proposed that English teachers at the upper level adapt some of their activities in a way that there is a relationship between the subject of English and the disciplinary areas of each degree; Which would result in greater motivation on the part of the students, a significant learning and the development of a communicative competence.

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## **Understanding reading to foster reading for understanding**

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As foreign language teachers, we may be tempted to assume that our responsibility for teaching reading is limited to helping students develop knowledge of English as a foreign language (L2) and that students will develop basic literacy skills, which can then be transferred from their first language (L1), in other classes. Such an assumption, however, is problematic. Although L2 proficiency is well-established as being a key factor in reading comprehension, there is not necessarily a correlation between strong oral proficiency and effective reading skills (Koda, 2010). Perhaps more importantly, given the educational realities of Mexico, we need to recognize that many of our students—regardless of age and level of education—are likely to struggle with basic reading comprehension skills in both Spanish and English.

According to the evaluation conducted by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2015, 42% of Mexican youth cannot read at the baseline comprehension level and very few (0.3%) are highly proficient readers (OECD, 2016a). These results are similar to those obtained since the first PISA assessment in 2000 (OECD; 2016b). This skills gap is of great significance because it affects not only the ability to learn in formal educational contexts but also the capacity to participate fully in society (*Ibid.*; Saulés Estrada, 2012). Although it is to be expected that many English language learners in Mexico will struggle with L1 and L2 reading, our students may be embarrassed to admit to facing challenges when deriving meaning from print sources.

As language teachers, we have a responsibility to help students understand what reading involves so that we can facilitate reading for understanding. Although standardized comprehension assessments that may alert us to reading gaps, they are unlikely to help us identify the specific sources of difficulty for individual students (Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Bilman, 2011). Thus, although fostering L2 language proficiency is clearly our central task as teachers of English as a foreign language, it is also important that we have a general understanding of the complex interaction among the various types of knowledge and cognitive processes involved in effective reading. Extensive exploration of each of these areas and of their implications for instruction is beyond the scope of this short text, but it is hoped that this brief overview of what reading involves can help teachers reflect on the complexity of reading and on how these factors are addressed in their own teaching contexts.

## Addressing Misconceptions

Before presenting an overview of theoretical perspectives on reading, it is essential to address two common misconceptions. The first is that reading is a passive activity. Reading may seem passive because many of the processes it involves occur so quickly and automatically that they often pass unnoticed. However, reading is a highly-demanding activity, one that draws upon a wide range of knowledge simultaneously and, thus, one that requires considerable levels of attention and motivation. Focusing on these multiple demands without noting how similar they are to those involved in other everyday activities may lead to the second misconception: that reading is somehow unnatural and inordinately difficult.

As Smith (2004) argues, developing the ability to extract meaning from written representations of language is akin to developing other types of knowledge about the world; all involve ongoing learning, or attempts to understand one's surroundings, processes that are a natural part of being alive. We also need to be careful not to think of knowledge as being static or to conceive of learning as a matter of storing away a set of rules (Koda, 2010). Likewise, we should not think of labels —such as skills, processes, or comprehension— as representing something discrete and readily measurable (Smith, 2004). These terms simply serve to help us discuss something that remains largely intangible.

To better conceptualize this last point, take a few moments to list everything you needed to know, think, and do to derive meaning from the text above. If you try to answer this question based only on reflection, you are unlikely to be able to do so simply because so many of the processes involved in reading occur without our being aware of them. Even for experts, reading continues to be somewhat of a black box. It is possible to test for word and non-word recognition, to evaluate certain aspects of sentence-level comprehension, to track eye movements, to scan brains to see which areas seem to be most active during reading, and to ask readers to comment on what they think they are doing while reading. Such techniques can also be employed to assess the processing effects of different writing systems, varying degrees of orthographic transparency, and of reading in L1, L2, and bilingual contexts. They do not, however, fully explain how each individual will make sense of written texts.

In the same way, the fact that we know that various factors affect comprehension does not mean this knowledge offers fail-proof recipes for direct instruction. Thus, although the strategies or approaches we introduce in class should be used with the intent of fostering effective reading, they should not become objectives in and of themselves (Duke *et al.*, 2011).

Admittedly, people who take longer than others to develop an understanding of print; those who have had instructional experiences that led them to associate reading with boredom, confusion, or frustration; and those who simply do not realize the amount of practice and ongoing learning involved in becoming an effective reader, may come to believe that they are 'bad' readers. This does not, however, mean that struggling students cannot become effective readers. They can, and it is in part because students' perception of their own competence as readers can affect the development of L2 reading competency (Walker, 2015), that we, as teachers, have a responsibility to foster a sense of self-efficacy by helping students identify what they can do to address the aspects of reading they find most challenging.

## Theoretical Overview

There are two major theoretical views on L2 reading: the linguistic interdependence and linguistic threshold hypotheses. The *Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis* maintains that reading in the L1 and L2 involves the same cognitive processes and that transfer of these cognitive skills is automatic; thus, once an individual can decipher the writing system used in the L2, he or she should be able to apply existing L1 skills to try to make sense of an L2 text. The *Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis* also posits that cognitive processes developed in the L1 can be transferred to the L2 but maintains that this transfer can only occur after a certain level of L2 language proficiency, the linguistic threshold, has been reached. A related issue is the effect of one language system on another, an aspect of language transfer commonly labelled as interference (Grabe & Stoller, 2011).

Although the existence of some sort of linguistic threshold has been investigated extensively, what exactly comprises this threshold remains undefined. An alternate conceptualization posits that it is important to differentiate between language and literacy skills, the latter involving aspects of cognition, such as visual processing, reasoning and world knowledge, that exist, to some extent, outside of a given language. According to this view, literacy skills developed in either the L1 and L2 become part of a shared body of knowledge supporting cognition in any language (Rolstad & MacSwan, 2014). In the same way, a shared gap in literacy skills may help explain why it has been difficult to establish a consistent correlation between L2 proficiency and L2 reading (Alderson, 2005).

Yet another way of looking at the issue of the interrelation between L1 and L2 reading skills is to consider the concept of cognitive load, which is a fancy way of saying that our brains can only do so much at once. In simple terms, if we need to dedicate a great deal of effort and 'space' in working memory to decoding and understanding words, we will have difficulty maintaining a clear sense of how this information connects to previous segments of text, let alone to our existing mental frameworks (schemata). As a result, comprehension will break down quickly. If we consider the potential effects of unfamiliar vocabulary, syntax, or cultural referents, we can surmise that reading in the L2 requires a certain degree of linguistic proficiency so that readers can stop making a conscious effort to think about what words mean and how they connect to one another and, instead, focus a greater proportion of their energy and attention on extracting meaning from the text and connecting that meaning with prior world knowledge. However, this does not imply that skilled readers stop thinking about language entirely.

Different models have been designed to represent the wide range of processes involved in reading. At one level, we can draw on variations of the *Construction–Integration Model*, which presents reading as a sequence that involves interpreting words and phrases to create, or construct, mental representations of meaning and then interpreting and connecting, or integrating, these representations with our existing mental frameworks (Kintsch (2004) as cited in Duke *et al.*, 2011; Smith, 2004). This type of model highlights the fact that effective reading comprehension depends not only on our being able not only to make sense of language but also to associate this information with something we already know. This perspective is helpful for understanding why it is normally more difficult to read a type of document, or genre, that is unfamiliar or about a topic we know little about. However, in its apparent simplicity, it may lead us to underestimate just how much is going on whenever we read.

One of many attempts to present this complexity is Birch's (2015) model of reading as a process involving extensive automatic decision making. She divides her *Interactive Information Processing Model* into two broad groups: processing strategies and the individual's knowledge base. Each group is further divided into two related subcategories: cognitive and language processing strategies and world and language knowledge. The cognitive processing strategies—which include constructing meaning, making predictions and inferences, and addressing problems—are related to general world knowledge. These are synonymous with what is often referred to as top-down processing. Likewise, other models use the term bottom-up processing to refer to the connections that Birch describes between linguistic processing strategies and the reader's knowledge of different aspects of language. As in other models, for comprehension to be effective, all of these interrelated processes must occur simultaneously in our short term, or working, memory.

Working memory, as Grabe (2009) points out, is not a specific area of our brain that receives and processes information. Rather, he explains, comprehension involves the creation of connections, or networks, among different types of information that have been activated by cues encountered while reading; learning occurs when some part of this temporary network is retained in long-term memory. Grabe also notes that for such processing to occur, the executive control systems that allow readers to focus attention, monitor comprehension and resolve problems and executive control are essential.

Birch (2015) also conceives of reading as involving these aspects, but she places particular emphasis on the role of language. She argues that work with L2 readers, including those who are effective L1 readers, must include deliberate attention to the four major areas of language processing: lexical (words, including meaning and morphology), syntactic (sentences and phrases), orthographic (graphemes [letter–sound correlations] and spelling), and phonological (phonemes, chunking, and other aspects of pronunciation). Again, for comprehension to be effective, all four need to occur with a relative degree of automaticity and in conjunction with cognitive processes.

Lexical range, or knowing words, is clearly part of reading. Lexical processing involves recognizing words, whether by sight or by using morphological cues, and activating the associations the words evoke. One way of measuring word recognition is to use a standardized instrument to assess vocabulary size. The theoretical justification for using such a measure is the apparent correlation between vocabulary size and overall language proficiency, although, interestingly, this factor appears to relate more to the ability to infer meaning than to the capacity to understand specific details (Alderson, 2005).

In lexical processing, language proficiency affects both the word-related cues readers pay most attention to and their ability to use multiple cues concurrently. Hamada (2014), for example, found that many L2 readers seem to focus on morphological cues and that readers at lower levels of language proficiency have greater difficulty using contextual information to check their lexical inference, or initial understanding of a term. Thus, if learners' overall language proficiency is limited, techniques focused on "getting the meaning from context" are likely to be ineffective. In fact, encouraging reliance on context to deduce meaning is problematic because this strategy slows down the reading process and, yet, may not provide sufficient clues to allow readers to deduce the correct sense of a term (Grabe, 2009).

The related activities of word recognition and lexical access—which involves using orthographic, semantic, and phonological cues to connect the word to its possible meanings—normally precede the use of syntactic information, even when reading in the L1 (Grabe, 2009). However, syntactic processing, which involves being able to use aspects of sentence structure, or syntactic clues, to process information is still important; diagnostic testing in different European languages, for example, has identified a close correlation between overall grammatical accuracy and reading comprehension (Alderson, 2005). In simple terms, this means that even if readers can recognize all the content words, they still need to have a certain sense of grammar to make sense of the how these words relate to one another. Nevertheless, the connection between direct grammar and vocabulary instruction and improved comprehension is questionable; what seems to be more helpful is for readers to have extensive practice in identifying and creating connections to words and patterns, practice that involves reading for meaning (Koda, 2010). That said, L1 speakers of Spanish who need to read texts at a level of complexity well beyond their current level of language proficiency may benefit from working through potentially confusing aspects of English syntax, such as complex nominalization, modality, or modifiers marked by extensive ellipsis.

Another area of explicit instruction that may be of benefit to some L2 readers of English is work on connecting the visual and oral aspects of language. In alphabetic languages such as Spanish and English, visual recognition involves orthographic processing. That is, readers need to know how letters, spaces, and punctuation symbols are used to represent spoken language. Because Spanish orthography is relatively transparent, “sounding it out” is a relatively effective strategy for both decoding and encoding, or spelling, words. Given that English uses more than 140 graphemes to represent some 44 sounds, this strategy can be more difficult for both English L1 and English L2 readers to apply. Helping learners to become familiar with the sound-symbols for common words and with the variety of graphemes used to represent the sounds of English can contribute to decoding and encoding skills. In contrast, declaring English spelling to be illogical will be of no help whatsoever.

Because even silent reading involves phonological processing, teaching the sounds of spoken language is part of teaching L1 and L2 reading comprehension. Word recognition depends on effective use of a pathway known as the phonological loop (Grabe, 2009). This mechanism, which is closely related to inner speech, allows us to use visual and phonological cues to remember and process information. One part of this mechanism, known as the phonological buffer store, keeps information in our working memory for short periods of time. The other part, known as the articulatory rehearsal store or subvocal rehearsal loop, allows us to establish the connection between a visual representation and phonological information. It is also used when we repeat, or rehearse, information mentally; doing so helps us store the rehearsed element in long-term memory. This connection between sight and sound helps explain why being able to pronounce a word can make it much easier to remember (Birch, 2015).

Likewise, the voice we hear in our head as we read, another aspect of inner speech, or subvocalization, contributes to reading comprehension because it helps us to parse semantic units, or identify connections between words that comprise a unit of meaning (Birch, 2015; Grabe, 2009). Subvocalization, which is beneficial, is quite different from moving our lips or another part of the vocal apparatus when we read, which is not. Such movements tend to

hinder comprehension because they slow down reading speed. A similar decrease in reading rate is common when readers feel they do not understand a text. While slowing down may be an effective strategy for dealing with a very dense or confusing section of text, reading too slowly undermines comprehension because we may not be able to retain information in our short-term memory long enough to make the connections between parts of a sentence, let alone to prior knowledge (Grabe, 2009). Repeatedly looking back at previous sections of a text has a similar negative effect (Birch, 2015).

While the effects of reading too slowly are widely recognized, calculations of the ideal reading rate vary significantly (Anderson, 1999). The general objective of working on reading rates is to increase the number of words per minute individuals can process without losing the sense of what they are reading. This increase in reading speed is distinct from speed reading, which is essentially a technique based on skimming and scanning (Grabe, 2009); it is not a substitute for reading comprehension.

Important as linguistic processing is to reading, it is important that we remember all the cognitive processes that occur simultaneously. Being able to draw upon a wide body of knowledge about the world facilitates the ability of readers to infer and construct meaning. Such knowledge can also make it easier to fill in conceptual gaps and make predictions about what is likely to follow. Familiarity with the conventions of different genres has similar effects. Having the executive control necessary to maintain attention is also essential.

### **A note on reading strategies**

Many language textbooks include exercises designed to present and practice reading strategies. To some extent, teaching metacognitive reading strategies can contribute to comprehension, but only if such instruction is part of a balanced approach that integrates reading with writing and conversation, that follows a differentiated approach to address the needs of specific students, and that is designed to lead learners to use multiple strategies simultaneously and independently (Duke, et al. 2011). In contrast, having students practice the same strategy repeatedly, or having them complete drill-like exercises with no real sense of why they are doing so, can have a negative effect.

In deciding which strategies to teach and how, we should consider the effect of the level of task engagement on strategy selection and use (Uhrig, 205) and the nature of the task itself. It is important to remember that readers are likely to approach tasks involving a single text and multiple texts in different ways (Karimi & Alibakhshi, 2014) and that, while a great deal of higher-level processing is likely to remain automatic, readers may make a conscious effort to focus on certain aspects because these are of greatest relevance to their purpose in reading (Grabe, 2009). Because some reading contexts can create anxiety, giving students the opportunity to identify and describe the factors in L2 reading that they find difficult or stressful is a good starting point for choosing strategies that may help them feel that they can have more control over both these factors and their emotions (Güvendir, 2014). Boredom or lack of interest can also be issues. All too often, a steady diet of reading “for school” or “because the teacher told me to” can lead students to forget that reading, like any other communicative process, is more effective if we know what and why we are reading a certain text: our purpose. One of the more helpful strategies for such students is learning how the assignments different teachers set relate to students’ reading purposes and how having different purposes entails using different approaches to reading.

As teachers, we need to remember that the underlying premises for strategy instruction are, first, that people who are classified as good readers seem to do certain things when they read and, second, that it has been assumed that teaching weaker readers how to do each of these things (that is, to use strategies) will help them read more effectively. However, because of the extent of automatic processing involved in reading, simply using metacognitive strategies will not make weak readers strong. In other words, while strategy instruction may help learners develop metacognitive awareness of what reading involves, strategies themselves are not magical techniques. They may address discrete aspects of some of the cognitive and linguistic processes involved in reading, but, as we have seen repeatedly, for reading to be effective, all of these processes need to occur simultaneously and with a certain degree of automaticity.

### **In Simpler Terms**

There is a great deal more to explore about each of the points mentioned here, yet even in such a brief overview, it can be easy to get lost in the details. To conceptualize the complexity of reading, it can help to think about another familiar multi-factorial activity: driving a car.

Just as effective readers rarely think about the various processes involved in comprehension, experienced drivers execute many concomitant processes without stopping to reflect on how these factors affect their ability to manoeuvre a vehicle from one point to another. Even before we put the key in the ignition, we need a vehicle in working condition, or a legible text. Because driving a standard-transmission garbage truck is not the same as driving an automatic-transmission sports car, we need to know what sort of vehicle we are driving and how it is likely to behave; likewise, when reading, we need to have a sense of the genre, or type, of text we are dealing with. We also need to know how to make the car move, or how to decode text at word, sentence, and text levels. We need to know where we want to go, or why we are reading a given text, our purpose. We need to know the rules and realities of the road, or to have extensive knowledge of the world. We also need to be prepared for the different conditions we may encounter; cruising on a well-maintained highway requires a different approach to driving than does navigating black ice or heavy traffic on a road full of potholes; in the same way, we need to be prepared for the fact that some texts are well-organized and coherent but others can be poorly structured, dense, and hard to follow—and some that seem simple can present unexpected difficulty. And, of course, we also need to be in good condition ourselves. We know that it is dangerous to drive when the weather is bad or while we are tired, under the influence of drugs or alcohol, upset about a fight we just had, distracted by a fellow passenger or the scenery, talking or texting on a phone, or simply daydreaming. All of these factors also affect reading; likewise, if we do not have enough light to see or we cannot make out letters because our eyes have some sort of impairment, the physical act of reading will be very difficult. Energy levels also matter; we sometimes forget that reading is another activity that involves intense, focused attention—and that it is very difficult to maintain such attention if we find a text to be dull, unrelated to our interests, or overly challenging.

### **Teaching implications**

The current text has offered only a brief overview of what reading involves. Each of these points deserves further exploration, as does the extensive literature on techniques that can be used to facilitate the development of the various sub-skills involved in reading, including

theory and practice from programs related to L1 literacy instruction, the language arts, biliteracy development, L2 acquisition, and developmental academic literacies, among other areas of specialization.

One of the most common teaching recommendations is to ensure a balanced approach to reading. That is, although working on language knowledge and linguistic processing is quite necessary, it is equally important to foster the development of knowledge of the world, to address cognitive aspects of processing, and to establish connections among reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In so doing, it is important to consider task relevance and the needs and interests of individuals.

Learners also need to be allowed to take control. Content knowledge, for example, does affect reading, but students do not necessarily need the teacher to lead activities designed to help them become familiar with a given topic (Pornour, 2014), nor do they need to rely on print sources. Videos, for example, can also be a source of conceptual and linguistic knowledge. Students should also be permitted to choose the L1 or L2 resources, or mix of both, that they find most helpful in addressing gaps in the background knowledge they may need to make sense of a text (Park, Yang, & Yi, 2014).

Less experienced readers may never have thought about the importance of ensuring that they read in conditions that fulfill the basic aspects of what we might call reading hygiene: sufficient light, legible print, a clear sense of purpose, and environment free of distractions and the energy and calm emotional state required to maintain attention. They might also need guidance to reflect on the effect of context—topic, genre, and purpose—on reading. Like all readers, they will also need to develop a sufficiently extensive vocabulary to be able to make sense of a text (Grabe & Stoller, 2011) without frequent recourse to deducing the meaning of individual words from context, a strategy most often relied upon by weaker readers or when understanding breaks down (Grabe, 2009).

To read for understanding, L2 learners are likely to benefit from the sense of control they can derive from understanding that reading involves a number of interacting processes and knowledge of many types of information, not “just English”. They also need to know that developing reading proficiency is quite doable, but it requires extensive practice, practice that can be enjoyable, relevant to their interests, and at a level that is both easy enough to develop confidence and challenging enough for new to take place.

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## **Five successful teachers of young dual language learners**

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### **Summary**

This paper is focused on a classroom-based research study that examined the practices of five successful early childhood teachers following their participation in year-long, professional learning with an emphasis on supporting the literacy development and learning of young dual language learners (DLLs). The following research questions guided the study: (a) How do early childhood teachers support DLL's learning and literacy development? (b) How do early childhood teachers consider and integrate DLL's life experiences into the classroom? Results of this study provide clear examples of literacy teaching practices employed by the teachers for effective instruction of young DLLs.

### **Introduction**

A common, global phenomenon is for a significant portion of the student population in early childhood programs to include young children who are learning their native language at home and starting to acquire another language at school. In Mexico, while preschool is not mandatory, almost 7 out of 10 children (ages 3 to 4 years) attend kindergarten (British Council, 2015). Similarly, in the United States (U.S.), nearly 8 out of 10 children (ages 3 to 5) attend kindergarten (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017, *The Condition of Education*). Of these 8 out of 10 children, one in five speak a language other than English at home. In some parts of the US, more than 50% of the young children in early childhood programs come from homes where languages other than English are spoken (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

What's in a name; why dual language learners? Depending on the context, young children learning more than one language historically have been referred to as English language learners or limited English proficient learners. The term, dual language learner, emphasizes the linguistic assets of young children and their families who are learning an additional language. This term was adopted in 2008 by the U.S. Office of Head Start to promote the linguistic assets of young children and families, and has been commonly used since then, in particular by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Early learning environments continue to be a major concern of human service systems supporting the young child population. "Children's oral language and early literacy development serve as the foundation for their later reading abilities and overall academic success" (Hammer, Hoff, Uchikoshi, Gillanders, Castro & Sandilos, 2014, p. 716). In fact, it is well documented that children with low oral language abilities are at risk for poor outcomes as they progress through school. Children in the U.S. who speak English and are exposed to another language at home show lower levels of academic achievement throughout school

and graduate from high school at lower rates than monolingual English-speaking children (Hammer, Hoff, Uchikoshi, Gillanders, Castro & Sandilos, 2014). However, when young DLLs are provided with systematic learning opportunities in *both* of the languages they are learning, the children consistently out-perform those DLLs who attend English-only programs on measures of academic achievement in English during their middle and high school years (Wiley, Lee & Rumberger, 2009).

A recent shift in the field has included a conceptual framework for understanding the development of children growing up as DLLs. This framework, founded on socio-cultural and historical perspectives, emphasizes that an individual's development cannot be understood when isolated from the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which it occurs (Vygotsky, 1978). This framework moves away from assumptions and expectations about developmental competencies grounded in monolingual perspectives. As such, valuable questions about the young DLL include: What are the contexts of home language use? Is the home language spoken only at home, or also in the community? Are speakers of the home language continually present in the home or only present during periodic visits? What are the family values and beliefs about maintaining the home language and adding another language, in particular, the language of school instruction?

### **The Study**

This classroom-based research examined the practices of five successful early childhood teachers following their' participation in year-long, professional learning with an emphasis on supporting the literacy development and learning of young DLLs. The professional learning provided teachers with a foundation in early language and literacy development of DLLs and support for developing instruction with systematic learning opportunities in *both* languages for DLLs.

### **The Setting and Methods**

The study took place in the Western U.S. in a large urban-suburban school district with approximately 40,000 students who were from 131 different language backgrounds. In particular, of the 1800 early childhood education students (ECE) in the district, 72% are learning English as an additional language, and 80% of these ECE students had Spanish as their home language. Each of the five classrooms had a student enrollment of 28 to 32 children. The ethnic/cultural backgrounds of the children reflected the demographic distribution of the school district and were similar across the five classrooms. Student demographics included approximately 50% Latino/Hispanic; 20% African American or African; 17% European-Caucasian; 5% Asian-Pacific Islander with the remainder mixed race or other. Languages other than English spoken by the children in each classroom varied and included Chinese, Amharic, Arabic, Vietnamese and Spanish.

The five early childhood teachers who participated in this study had five to 17 years of experience (two teachers with five to six years; three teachers with 10 to 17 years) and varying educational backgrounds in early childhood education (four teachers had a BA degree and one had a MA degree). The ethnic/cultural backgrounds of the teachers also varied (three teachers are European-American, native English speakers with basic Spanish vocabulary; one teacher is Mexican-American bilingual in English and Spanish; and one teacher is Asian-Pacific Islander bilingual in English and Chinese with basic Spanish vocabulary). The following research questions guided the classroom-based research during one school year:

(a) How do early childhood teachers support DLL's learning and literacy development? (b) How do early childhood teachers consider and integrate DLL's life experiences in the classroom? Results of this study provide clear examples of literacy teaching practices employed by the teachers for effective instruction of young DLLs.

During the classroom-based study, data were collected during four classroom observations (two observations in fall semester and two in spring semester), photo documentation of classroom routines and displays taken during the observation, audio recordings of debriefing conversations with each teacher after the observation, teacher responses to a pre- and post survey, and a culminating focus group interview with the teachers conducted by a critical friend..

The current paper reports on the observation and photo data. The researcher conducted a thematic content analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) by coding the observation field notes and identifying patterns from the observations. I have supported these patterns with photo data to document and illustrate the practices employed by the teachers to support DLL's learning and literacy development, and to integrate DLL's life experiences in the classroom. Results of the thematic content analysis revealed the following themes relevant to teachers' practices: Intentionality, integration, culture as a relevant resource and the family-school connection.

Each of the five teachers consistently employed an **intentionality** regarding daily classroom routines and the opportunities they provided for DLLs to use authentic language and literacy. The teachers were intentional about the content and theme of children's literature, songs, poetry, non-fiction reading selections and guided writing topics to ensure an obvious connection among each one. The teachers strategically identified essential vocabulary to highlight and elaborate in each of the aforementioned resources. As a result of intentional planning, the teachers repeatedly used the essential vocabulary during classroom instruction and interactions within a variety of contexts, including the reading center, art center, dramatic play area, listening center as well as the water or sand tables. Teachers intentionally "recycled" vocabulary, key language and literacy applications across contexts and content to maximize children's meaningful exposure to the words.

The teachers rarely taught literacy and language in isolation; instead they consistently employed an **integration** of content, literacy and language in their instruction. Daily routines included songs that integrated key content and concepts, such as colors, numbers, foods, or scientific concepts, such as the names and attributes of insects. Children's singing was supported by written lyrics they could visually track and later read. Particular words in the lyrics were pointed out in order for DLLs to highlight word initial letters and letter-sound correspondence. After listening to the teacher read-aloud from selected children's literature and non-fiction texts, young DLLs observed, handled and examined objects. They talked about their observations, identified attributes illustrated in visuals of the items observed, wrote notes about their findings, and shared their conclusions in discussion.

Working from the curriculum provided by the school district, the teachers looked for ways to use the **students' home culture as a resource** to support learning, literacy and language. Teachers took time to learn about the practices and routines of the children's families, then found ways to bring these into the classroom and curriculum. For example, instead of wooden building blocks, the teachers filled the block center with empty cardboard food boxes similar

to the brands and food items the children would find in their kitchens at home. While constructing with the boxes, the young DLLs “read” and recognized the familiar print and logos. Before introducing the unit on community, the teachers made an effort to spend time in the neighborhoods where the children lived. They took photos of the actual stores, restaurants, hospitals, mosque, church, synagogue and fire stations that were familiar to the young DLLs and used them in classroom instruction and displays thereby building on students’ culture and life experiences.

The teachers demonstrated through their actions the importance of the **family-school connection**. They articulated a belief that when connections are made between the learners’ family and the classroom, positive learning occurs at school (Gay, 2010). In order to foster such positive connections, the teachers made a regular effort to prompt daily conversation with parents or guardians. They inquired about the children’s well-being and interests, listened to the parents for insights about the family’s values, and shared observations with parents about children’s successes. Teachers articulated for parents what topics sparked a child’s interest and which book titles were selected repeatedly by a child. After observing her students to have an intense interest in bugs, one teacher held a family search day to prompt a unit of study on insects. Parents joined their child on the playground to search for bugs and living things. Back in the classroom, parents and child categorized living and non-living things, and labeled the insects they found. At the end of the insect search, children and parents had much to discuss, meaningful vocabulary to share, and notes to re-read at home.

## **Conclusion**

The five successful early childhood teachers demonstrated multiple ways they supported the learning and literacy development of young DLLs. First and foremost, the teachers understood that young learners are central to the teaching & learning that occurs in the classroom. Next, the teachers planned with intention to make sure that learning centered positively on the DLLs’ interests and life experiences. The teachers consistently integrated content with literacy and language in order to provide DLLs with complex and authentic learning opportunities. Instead of focusing on cultural differences as deficiencies, the five teachers actively viewed the children’s home culture to be a positive and familiar resource to ground and support the DLLs’ learning. Lastly, the five teachers understood the value of a strong connection between the family and school. By building a positive rapport with the child’s family, the teachers effectively created a partnership for the positive learning interactions of young DLLs.

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