

# **MEXTESOL**

# **Journal**

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# MEXTESOL

# Journal

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## **The Mission of MEXTESOL**

MEXTESOL, a professional organization for teachers of English in Mexico, seeks to develop in its members, as well as in non-members, the highest standards for teaching English to speakers of other languages so that their students can communicate effectively in all the diverse situations in which they may find themselves.

*More information about MEXTESOL is available at the website:*  
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## **The Mission of the MEXTESOL Journal**

Focusing on the special circumstances of teaching and learning English in Mexico, the MEXTESOL Journal publishes articles dealing with both practical and theoretical topics of interest to the classroom teacher. Articles and book reviews related to EFL teaching in Mexico and in similar situations throughout the world are accepted for publication. Articles may be written in English or Spanish. Abstracts are to be written in both languages.

The MEXTESOL Journal is published three times a year, in April, August, and December.

La revista MEXTESOL Journal se publica tres veces al año, en abril, agosto y diciembre.

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## Editorial Policy

The MEXTESOL Journal is dedicated to the classroom teacher in Mexico and Latin America. Previously unpublished articles and book reviews relevant to EFL teaching and research in Mexico and Latin America are accepted for publication. Articles may be of a practical or theoretical nature and be written in English or Spanish. The Journal reserves the right to edit an accepted manuscript in order to enhance clarity or style. The author will be consulted only if the editing has been substantial.

Research-Based Articles: A research-based article should report original research or discuss research-related issues. These articles are usually submitted as refereed (judged as acceptable, conditional, or not acceptable) by two members of the Editorial Board who are experts in an area related to that of the article. The refereeing process is blind but, if an author wishes, a referee may be assigned as a mentor to guide the author through the revision process. A footnote will state that the article was refereed.

Professional Practice Issue Articles: In order to open the publication process to more authors, refereed or non-refereed articles are accepted in this section. These normally describe professional teaching experiences or library research related to teaching which the author wants to share with the readers. These articles will be read, judged and styled by members of the Editorial Staff for originality, quality and clarity of ideas.

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Any correspondence to the Journal concerning manuscripts should be e-mailed to the Editors at the address below. Information concerning advertising in the Journal or MEXTESOL membership should be sent to the National MEXTESOL Office at the addresses also listed below.

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## Política Editorial

La revista MEXTESOL está dirigida al maestro de inglés en México y en América Latina. Se aceptan manuscritos y reseñas relevantes a la enseñanza del inglés como idioma extranjero e investigación que no hayan sido previamente publicados. Los artículos pueden ser de naturaleza teórica o práctica y pueden ser escritos en inglés o en español. La revista se reserva el derecho de editar un manuscrito aceptado para brindarle mayor claridad o mejorar su estilo. El autor será consultado únicamente para sugerir cambios.

Artículos basados en la investigación: Un artículo basado en investigación debe reportar investigación original o discutir asuntos relacionados con la investigación. Estos artículos generalmente se someten a arbitraje (juzgados como aceptable, condicional o no aceptable) realizado por dos miembros del consejo editorial expertos en un área relacionada con el artículo. El proceso de arbitraje es anónimo, pero si el autor lo desea se le puede asignar a un árbitro como mentor para guiarlo en el proceso de revisión. El artículo se publica con una nota al pie de página para indicar que es arbitrado.

Artículos relacionados con la práctica docente: Con el propósito de abrir las posibilidades de publicación a más autores, se aceptan artículos arbitrados y no arbitrados. Generalmente describen experiencias docentes o investigación bibliográfica relacionada con la enseñanza. Estos artículos son leídos y juzgados por miembros del personal editorial para asegurar su originalidad, calidad y claridad de ideas.

Reseñas: La revista acepta reseñas de investigación publicada o de práctica docente, ponencias que argumentan a favor o en contra de temas actuales o controvertidos y reseñas de libros de texto, materiales audiovisuales, programas de computadoras, y otros recursos didácticos. Las reseñas no son sometidas a arbitraje pero son sujetas a edición.

Indicaciones para enviar una propuesta: Para facilitar el proceso de publicación se recomienda enviar el manuscrito por correo electrónico a la dirección de la revista. Se debe utilizar un procesador Microsoft Word para el artículo y gráficas que lo acompañen y ser enviado como un attachment. Favor de indicar si se desea que el **artículo sea o no arbitrado**.

Cualquier correspondencia a la revista que tenga que ver con artículos para publicación debe ser enviada vía fax o correo electrónico a las direcciones que aparecen abajo. La información concerniente a propaganda en la revista o a membresías debe ser enviada a la Oficina Nacional de MEXTESOL cuya dirección también aparece abajo.

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## Manuscript Guidelines MEXTESOL Journal

Articles must be typed, double-spaced and preferably no more than twenty pages long. The format should conform to the Publication Manual for the American Psychological Association (A.P.A.) guideline format.

### **In-Text Citations:**

References within the text should be cited in parentheses using the author's last name, year of publication and page numbers (shown below):

*Rodgers (1994) compared performance on two test instruments.*

*or*

*In a recent study of EFL writing (Rodgers, 1994) .....*

### **Or for Direct Quotes:**

*Rodgers (1994) argued that, "most existing standardized tests do not accurately assess EFL writing performance" (p. 245).*

### **Reference Page:**

The list of references found in an article must appear at the end of the text on a separate page entitled "References". The data must be complete and accurate. Authors are fully responsible for the accuracy of their references. The APA format for reference page entries is shown below.

#### Books:

Brown, J. (1991). *Nelson-Denny Reading Test*. Chicago: Riverside Press

#### Journal Articles:

Ganschow, L. (1992). A screening instrument for the identification of foreign language learning problems. *Foreign Language Annals*. 24, 383-398.

#### Web sites:

Pratt-Johnson, Y. (2006). Communicating cross-culturally: What teachers should know. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 12. Retrieved November 22, 2007, from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Pratt-Johnson-CrossCultural.html>

## FROM THE EDITORS

This issue of the Journal has a variety of articles related to our daily English language teaching practices. Each one provides us with possible solutions to problems we face in the classroom or provides us with insights into the language learning processes of our students.

The first article, "Struggling for Meaning and Identity (and a passing grade): High-Stakes Writing in English as a Second Language" by Maria Coady and Eileen Ariza, examines the writing of one bilingual, Spanish-dominant secondary school student. The student's document reveals his multiple identities, as explained by the authors.

The following article, "The Impact of Instruction in Phonetic and Phonemic Distinctions in Sounds on the Pronunciation of Spanish-speaking ESL Learners", addresses the area of pronunciation. In this article Jaya S. Goswami and Hsuan-Yu Chen show us that explicit instruction in the distinctions of sounds was helpful for the students under study.

Next, author Jill Pellettieri looks at the results of a study involving two relatively new forms of language practice: synchronous computer-mediated communication and on-line chat. The results of the study are revealing and will perhaps make us rethink our perceptions of the learning value of "open" chat forums. So, be sure to read Jill's article "Online Chat in the Foreign Language Classroom: From Research to Pedagogy".

We return to the area of writing again in the article, "Impact of Teacher/Student Conferencing and Teacher Written Feedback on EFL Revision" by Elsa Fernanda González. In this article two types of teacher feedback on students' writing are examined. The author draws conclusions about the nature of the feedback the teacher provides, as well as about student preferences for teacher feedback. The author invites us to continue this line of research in this area of the teaching-learning process.

In the domain of classroom management, the article "Making Student-centered Teaching Work" by W. I. Griffith, Ph.D. and Hye-Yeon Lim, Ph.D., presents us with practical ways in which classroom activities can more easily involve the students' input, which, in turn, motivates the same students and enhances learning.

And to complement the articles in this issue of the Journal, Karin Zotzmann has written a review of Mark A. Clarke's book Common Grounds, Contested Territory. Examining the Roles of English Language Teachers in Troubled Times (2007).

We're sure there is something for every ELT professional and member of MEXTESOL in this issue.

Please note that as of the next issue of the MEXTESOL Journal, and, actually since the beginning of 2010, the new Editor-in-Chief is Martha Lengeling of the Universidad de Guanajuato. In addition, there are six new members of the Editorial Board who will be serving six-year terms.

# **Struggling for Meaning and Identity (and a passing grade): High-Stakes Writing in English as a Second Language <sup>1</sup>**

**MARIA COADY, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA <sup>2</sup>**

**EILEEN ARIZA, FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY <sup>3</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

In the current context of high stakes testing, writing is gaining ground as an important measure of student achievement, as much for English language learners as for native English speakers. Research on the way a student's first language affects the development of writing in English is emerging; however, we know little about how bilingual children negotiate meaning in terms of the primary language influence on writing (i.e. language transfer) and the construction of the student's cultural identity. At times, these appear to be in conflict, that is, while students have limited abilities in English writing, they simultaneously write sophisticated and rich pieces that reflect their varied, cultural backgrounds and identities. In this paper, we present samples of data: a writing piece from one bilingual, Spanish-dominant secondary student in the process of acquiring literacy in English. Data from this study demonstrate the ways in which the student negotiated multiple identities despite the limitations of his knowledge of English writing conventions. Our conclusions from the data analysis have implications for educators and exam scorers working with bilingual populations in the area of writing.

## **Resumen**

En el contexto actual de la evaluación de primer orden, la comunicación escrita está ganando terreno como una medida importante del éxito del estudiante, para estudiantes del inglés así como para hablantes nativos de dicho idioma. La investigación respecto a la forma en que la lengua materna de un estudiante afecta el desarrollo de su escritura en inglés está surgiendo; sin embargo, se tiene poca información sobre cómo los niños bilingües plasman el significado de sus ideas en términos de la influencia de su lengua materna sobre la escritura (i.e. transferencia lingüística) y la construcción de su identidad cultural. A veces, estos aspectos parecen estar en conflicto, es decir, a pesar de que los estudiantes poseen habilidades limitadas para escribir en inglés, producen escritos sofisticados y interesantes que reflejan sus diversas identidades y antecedentes culturales. En el presente trabajo, se presenta una muestra de la información obtenida en esta investigación; segmentos del escrito de un estudiante bilingüe (con dominio del español) de secundaria, en el proceso de aprender a escribir en inglés. El análisis de la información demuestra de qué maneras el estudiante negoció múltiples identidades, a pesar de las limitaciones de su conocimiento de las convenciones de la escritura del inglés. A partir del análisis de los datos las conclusiones tienen implicaciones tanto para educadores como para evaluadores de exámenes que trabajan con poblaciones bilingües en el área de la escritura.

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## Introduction

In recent years, the issue of writing among English language learners (ELLs) enrolled in public schools in the United States has received notable attention (National Commission on Writing, 2003). Much of the research on ELLs' writing has been conducted with students enrolled in institutes of higher education (Ariza, 2006; Panofsky et al., 2005) with a significant core of research focused on error correction and assessment (Leki, 2002). Another noteworthy trend that is prevalent at the elementary and secondary levels is that writing has become increasingly high stakes within the national standardized testing movement, much like reading and mathematics. Individual state assessments, such as *Florida Writes!*, (Florida, U.S.) use narrow definitions of what "good" writing should look like for all students to reach state-determined writing proficiency. As evidenced by the state of Florida Department of Education's writing rubric, proficient writing follows a predictable rhetorical structure and uses transitional devices; values the linguistic conventions of standard English only; does not contain "extraneous or loosely related information" (FL DOE, 2008); and injects 'razzle dazzle'<sup>4</sup> words meant to invoke 'voice' and 'creativity', among other characteristics of writing.

Judging by these measures, writing achievements among ELLs have appeared to lag behind those of native English speakers (National Commission on Writing, 2003). While we are currently learning more about the ways in which writing abilities in the first language (L1) influence writing development in English (CAL, 2007; Odlin, 1989), there is still much to learn about the ways in which bi- and multilingual children approach and negotiate the demands of writing in K-12 settings. While knowledge of assessment and identity appear to be unrelated, we argue in this paper that both are useful, if not necessary, in working with ELLs. In this paper, we demonstrate the ways in which one bilingual writer negotiates multiple personal and cultural identities in his writing and how these identities are connected to his attempt to create meaning and engage his audience. We show the multiple discourses that the student enacts, perhaps unwittingly, in his work, and discuss how this insight may be used to inform the way that educators should work with ELLs. Specifically, we answer the following research questions:

How are the identities of a bilingual, native Spanish-speaking English language learner constructed?

What challenges does he face in writing in English for high-stakes testing?

## Theoretical Framework

Some scholars, including linguists and educators focusing on first and second language (L2) development, view language learning as more than a process of encoding and decoding language; rather, they view language learning as intertwined with identity engagement, investment (Peirce, 2005) and negotiation (Cummins, 2001). The work of these scholars is grounded in Bakhtinian

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<sup>4</sup> The fourth grade teacher of one author's daughter, in preparing for the *Florida Writes!* assessment, sent a note home encouraging her to use more 'razzle dazzle' words in her writing, which consisted of catchy phrases and low frequency verbs.

poststructuralist theory. Bakhtin (1981) views language, or more precisely, situated utterances, as a medium through which interlocutors struggle to create meaning through dialogue. He considers such interactions as highly complex and neither neutrally conceived nor neutrally delivered. Each interlocutor's past, present, and future socio-historical positions are reflected in the utterance, and such utterances are dynamic and shifting as new interactions occur and new meanings are arrived at?

Luk (2005) extends this to communicative competence by noting, "in the process of constructing our sense of self and identities through interaction, our desire to assert ourselves may also enhance our urge to communicate and the value of meaning of our utterances (p. 251). For second language learners, this relationship between communicative competence and desire to assert the 'self' is intertwined. In her longitudinal study with young adult, second language writers, Leki (2007) investigated the literacy (writing) experiences of four university students learning English as a second language (ESL). She found that the students' literacy development was interwoven with their identity construction, their academic development, and the context where they are studying in the United States.

Gee's (2005) concept of discourse captures the way in which language simultaneously engenders as it reflects meaning from the world. Gee refers to this as "big D" Discourse (p. 22). About Discourse, he writes, it is "[a] form of life" which integrates words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes (p.7). Gee's Discourses are "specific social and culturally distinctive identities people can take on in society" (p. 61). For example, a particular written discourse style (that is, the organizational structure of writing) used by an author reflects a broader language communication scheme, which involves not only the linguistic features of writing, but also a way of expressing thoughts and participation in the sociocultural world. Like Bakhtin, Gee suggests that identities are socially-situated and negotiated or co-constructed during social interactions between interlocutors. Language is only one of many mediums used to enact "human affiliation within cultures and social groups..." which includes "performance of social activities and social identities" (p. 1). Thus, students' writing should be interpreted in the context of interaction of their selves with their inner and outer worlds, rather than with a narrow audience of evaluators.

Similarly, Peirce (1995) views language learning and identity formation as intertwined processes enacted by individuals interacting with the world. Drawing upon her understanding of the complex interrelationship between language learning, identity, and power, Peirce suggests that students, in fact, invest their identities and desires while acquiring language in an effort to organize and reorganize who they are and how they relate to the world. Thus, for Peirce, second language learning is more than just an investment in learning a target language; it is an opportunity for the learner to invest and negotiate her/his identity in the social world.

Some scholars have focused on the ways in which identity negotiation occurs in bi- and multilingual writing (Hudelson, 1989; Maguire & Graves, 2001; Pavlenko,

2001). Pavlenko's work, for example, captures the multiple ways in which bi- and multilingual authors conceptualize and construct their identities through writing. In her study, Pavlenko investigated a corpus of 15 bi- and multilingual authors' cross-cultural autobiographical works in English where the authors describe their relationship between language and identity. Pavlenko found that the authors' identities were negotiated throughout distinct areas such as linguistic, racial/ethnic, cultural, gender, and social. She argued that the genre of cross-cultural autobiography allowed the authors "to construct their autobiographical selves in terms of discourses recognizable by particular discursive communities and to adhere to particular constraints of the genre" (p. 320). She noted further that such works represent "ideal discursive spaces for repositioning in terms of particular identities and the invention of new ones," which allow for the creation of "new discourses of hybridity and multiplicity, and imagining new ways of "being American" (i.e., from the United States) in the postmodern world" (p. 339). Other authors (Maguire & Graves, 2001) have interpreted genres such as L2 journal writing as constructed spaces in which students' "speaking personalities" (c.f. Bakhtin) emerge. Pavlenko's findings underscore the link between language and identity and are not unlike Gee's broader Discourses, described above. Each of these authors' works suggests that a writer's "fluid, fragmented, and multiple" identities mark each piece of written expression and should not be ignored (Pavlenko, 2001, p.339).

These theoretical constructs challenge us to consider the role of identity negotiation and affirmation in educational settings and the ways in which teachers can support these processes with their students. How then, do non-native speakers acquiring literacy in English negotiate and engage their identities within the confines of standardized writing? And how can this writing be used in educational settings to affirm students' identities?

Regarding bilingual children in educational settings, Cummins (2001) suggests that when teachers affirm the identities of children in the classroom through positive and culturally sensitive interactions, students become engaged in their own learning. Accordingly, there are specific ways in which teachers and educators can affirm the identities of children learning a second language. These include examining our own interactions with students in order to reflect upon both the technical efficacy of instruction as well as upon the ways in which we affirm the whole child: personal, cultural, linguistic, and intellectual identities. In contrast, non-affirmation of students' identities reinforces unequal relationships that ultimately harm students' spirit and negatively affect learning. In this case, Cummins argues that students' identities and their negotiation are reflected in broader sociocultural and political contexts that impinge upon individuals' identities.

We argue in this paper that writing is an important but frequently neglected setting for identity formation and affirmation. The way we respond to bilingual students' multiple and fluid identities, as they struggle to create meaning in writing, is one way in which educators can affirm students' identities.

Two prior research studies conducted by Coady and Escamilla (Coady & Escamilla 2005; Escamilla & Coady, 2001) have contributed to our understanding of ELLs'

writing development and identity construction. Both studies revealed how the phonologic, morphologic, syntactic, semantic, and discourse subsystems transfer across languages in writing in the process of acquiring literacy in English for Spanish speakers. In a prior study, Escamilla and Coady (2001) obtained 110 writing samples from fourth and fifth grade Mexican and Mexican descent students enrolled in a transitional bilingual education program in an urban setting in the United States. Data from those samples showed specific ways in which language transferred between English and Spanish. We found that students' knowledge of how the first language functions, specifically the orthographic (punctuation, paragraphing, etc.) and linguistic features (e.g., sound-symbol correspondence in phoneme transfer), influenced students' writing development in their L2, English.

We also analyzed the discourse structure in the students' writing, as well as topic shifts and digressions that some scholars have suggested characterize the writing of Spanish speakers (Kaplan, 1966; Montañó-Harmon, 1991). The data revealed that a significant number of the young bilingual writers discussed complex themes of justice and equity in their writing, despite their limited command of English. This led us to question the role of identity and life experiences as reflected in the students' writing, as well as how we assess biliterate students.

In a later study, Coady and Escamilla (2005) returned to that corpus of writing and analyzed themes of the writing samples from children enrolled in a dual language or two-way bilingual education program. In this setting, children were instructed and provided literacy development in both English and Spanish. Half of the children were native Spanish speakers and the second half were native English speakers. The analysis of that writing revealed that students' identities and "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992) were socio-historically situated and reflected the social realities of their lives. The analysis further identified themes in students' work that revealed a complex understanding of the world, which included critical issues of equity and social justice, as mentioned above. As a result of this analysis, Coady and Escamilla (2005) suggested that educators working with ELLs in educational settings investigate and respond to the social realities of their students' lives. This information could be used to engage students in instruction in ways that reflect students' prior knowledge and experiences.

These earlier analyses provided insight into the ways that students' writing reflected their realities. However, what remained to be understood was the specific ways in which bilingual students negotiated their identities in writing in English and how those identities enacted broader Discourses (Gee, 2005). Thus, in this paper we chose to explore the identity negotiation of one bilingual student and the Discourses that he enacts. We then discuss possible pedagogical implications for classroom settings of the outcomes of the research.

## **Methods**

Data for this study were collected in the spring of 2005 as part of a broader study that investigated the writing of dual and multilingual students enrolled in an ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) pull-out program. A total of 120

students participated in the study; 57 of those students (48%) were Spanish-dominant from the following eight regions: Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela. The students from fourth to twelfth grades reported that their first language was Spanish and that literacy instruction occurred initially in Spanish. Students' length of residence in the U.S. ranged from two months to five years.

All of the data were collected during the ESOL class periods. Students were given 30 minutes to write narrative essays based on a specific writing prompt. While we realized the limitations of producing writing for inauthentic purposes, we also understood that this exercise replicated, to some degree, the type of writing demands on students during the high-stakes, state-mandated writing assessment program, which occurs each spring. In fact, the Florida State direct-writing assessment, *Florida Writes!*, is described as both more cost-effective and time-saving than student portfolios or projects (FL DOE, 2008); thus, despite its high-stakes nature for ESOL students in particular, we were confident that this type of assessment would not change in the near future. Writing samples were collected in three rounds in which students were asked to write in both their L1 and L2. We did this to investigate the relationship between first language and second language writing, as well as to gain insight into the phenomenon of language transfer. Specifically, language transfer in this case refers to the phonologic, morphologic, syntactic, and semantic ways that first language literacy and knowledge affect writing in English, and subsequently how that appears to influence writing in the first language.

In the first round, students were asked to respond to the writing prompt, *If I Could be Someone Else for a Day*, in English only. They were provided 30 minutes to develop and write a response. We chose this prompt for two main reasons. First, we had worked with data from a similar prompt with younger students in a prior study and were interested in the types of elicitations garnered by this prompt. Secondly, we felt that this prompt might elicit data that reflected the prior experiences and cultural background of the students. We also thought that the prompt would encourage students to use their imagination since this requires the use of complex verb structures (conditional and subjunctive tenses). Data presented in this paper were collected from this prompt.

We separated data into subsets according to students' first language. Data from the L1 Spanish subset were analyzed along three main dimensions with the help of two bilingual graduate assistants. First, we looked at the ways in which students' knowledge of language transferred linguistically from L1 to L2 and influenced writing in English. We specifically looked at discourse style and structure in writing and found that discourse styles transfer from Spanish to English and vice versa. Further analysis of writing samples showed that, although students were able to write in two languages, they did not demonstrate awareness of distinct discourse styles. Next, we analyzed the writing by themes. We noticed patterns in student's writings at the theme level and found that a sizeable number of students from the Spanish subset wrote about social justice themes. We categorized those according to political, social, and economic issues. We also noticed that these topics reflected students' identities and life



experiences, even though these were not often evident upon initial analysis due to students' early stages of proficiency in their development of English literacy.

Next, we conducted discourse analysis on a subset of students' writings. We used Gee's (1999; 2005) framework of d/Discourse analysis which acts as both theory and methodology in order to facilitate this work. We identified six categories of analysis, which demonstrated various ways in which the author (or speaker) used language and enacted identities: semiotic building, significance building, activity building, relationship building, political building, and connection building. Semiotic building refers to how a piece of language serves to (dis)privilege specific sign systems or different ways of knowing and believing. Significance building is a tool meant to illuminate how language is used to underscore certain ideas. Activity building corresponds to the type of language used when engaged in an activity. For example, one talks and acts in a certain way when opening a committee meeting or in a different way when engaged in "chit chat" before opening the meeting (Gee, 2005, p. 98). Relationship building involves understanding of the relationship(s) the piece of language seeks to build with others (who may be present or not). Political building refers to the perspective on social goods that the piece of language is communicating. This entails assumptions about what normal, right, good, proper, high status is, and so forth. Finally, connection building addresses how a piece of language (dis)connects things or how one thing makes another become relevant (see Gee, 2005, pp. 11-13).

Gee (2005) suggests that these six areas or "building tasks" provide clues and cues to guide our understanding and analysis of the author and his/her communication. They further allow us to use language "to construe situations in certain ways and not in others" (p. 104). As such, this work is interpretable, meaning it does not rely on empirical 'facts' or there is not only one correct meaning. In this study we used these categories as a tool to unearth the ways in which students "continually and actively build and rebuild... worlds not just through language but through language used in tandem with actions, interactions, non-linguistic symbol systems, objects, tools, technologies, and distinctive ways of thinking, valuing, feeling, and believing" (Gee, 2005, p. 10). The intention of the detailed discourse analysis, then, was to identify more precisely the ways in which students' identities were negotiated, reflected and invested in students' writing. In this paper, we present one illustrative case.

### **Data Analysis**

Of the 57 samples from the Spanish-dominant students, 21 (37%) wrote narratives that reflected themes of equity and social justice. This pattern was unique to the Spanish-dominant students; students from other language groups did not write about justice and equity themes *per se*. Of those Spanish-dominant students' samples, one is presented below as an illustrative case. The interpretation of this analysis is that of these authors, whose own sociocultural and historical experiences have influenced this analytic process.

**Diego: A Young Spanish Dominant Writer**

At the time of the study, Diego was a 16-year old, 11<sup>th</sup> grade high school student receiving ESOL services in a sub-urban school district in north Florida, U.S. The ESOL program included separate courses for English language development and English language arts classes as part of the students' coursework. Originally from Bolivia, Diego had been receiving these services and living in the United States for about six months at the time of the study. He had attended a public school in Bolivia from grades one through ten (enough to have heard history and political stories, and have some comprehension of politics in Bolivia) and relocated to the United States with his family in order for his mother to do graduate work at a local university. Diego's father worked in cleaning and janitorial services for the local school district. He had one younger sister. Diego had traveled to the United States once before moving there when he visited California. He and his family had traveled to Mexico, where he had relatives, on several occasions. At the time of the study, Diego had noted that he could read and write in Spanish, but was not proficient in other languages. Thus, he had first language literacy at the high school level.

When we first read Diego's writing sample, we were struck by the intensity of his writing and the need to express his political views, which appeared to reveal Diego's identities. However, at the same time, we were acutely aware of the difficulties that Diego faced in order to pass the 10<sup>th</sup> grade *Florida Writes!* writing exam. It was crucial for Diego to pass this high stakes test so that he could graduate from high school in Florida. Given that Diego was a beginning ESOL student already in the United States, we also realized that Diego had little time to develop knowledge of English writing.

The *Florida Writes!* writing rubric consists of four distinct parts on which students are assessed: focus (clarity of the paper including the main idea, themes, or points); organization (the overall structure of the piece as well as the use of transitional devices and sentence connections); support ("quality of details used to explain, clarify, or define" FL DOE, 2008, np) and conventions (general orthography and grammar, as well as variation in syntactic structure). The *Florida Writes!* test is considered a direct-writing assessment in which students are given 45 minutes to respond to a writing prompt. The assessment is given in grades 4, 8, and 10. The monolingual English assessment rubric is considered a 'holistic' writing rubric in that it is scored for overall impression within each of the four categories above. Moreover, the assessment is considered less costly and time consuming to administer and grade than are student projects or portfolios. Students are assessed on a six-point scale (3.5 is a passing grade), with six as the highest score. When applying the rubric from the State's writing assessment to his sample, Diego would not be considered a 'proficient' writer in any of the four areas: focus, organization, support, and conventions. This is true, despite the fact that Diego's writing is sophisticated, reflective, and conveys a powerful message, and that in our view, he is achieving communication. That is, not only is Diego able to communicate complex ideas, but he also conveys messages and invokes various identities and types of knowledge in his writing. He does this through the writing techniques he employs (including rhetorical devices and

parallelism) within the message he delivers. These are discussed in more detail below.

Figures 1 and 2: Diego's Writing Sample

IF I could be someone else for a day I'll select a president any one in America (Continent) and try to see how difficult is to be in that level of power.

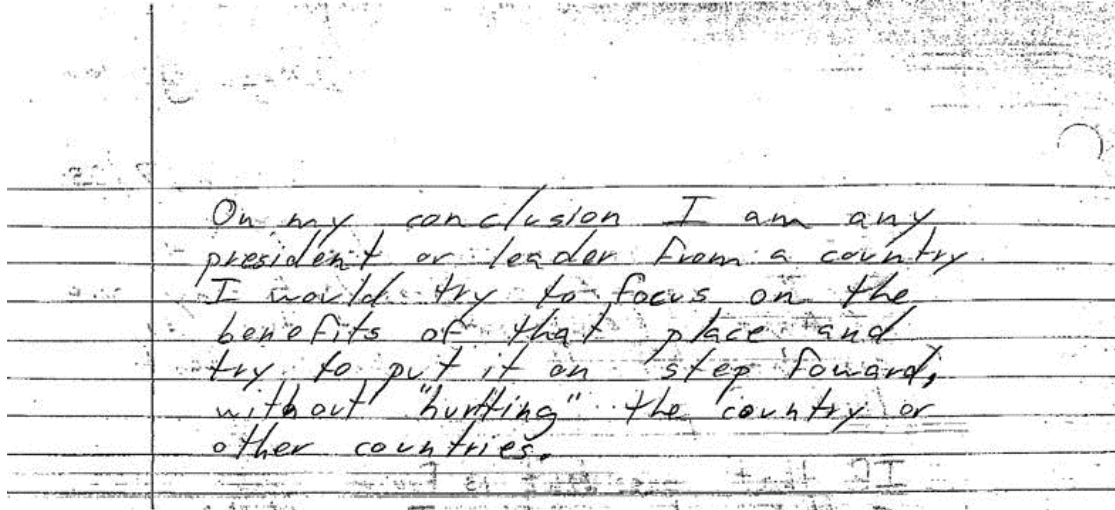
IF that president is from a South America country, I would like to stop all the "disappiring" money, in other words people stealling the money,

IF I wake up on the president Bush's pants, I would try to focus my target arrow on United States, how the people is living, all the differences of the social classes and try to help them, and let other parts of the world improve they cuality of live, without locking the market.

I find interest on be, or I should say, try to be the president, or leader, of Iraq. I would move all the people to stop attacking and to be in peace but to do that United States, Bush, have to STOP!!, let some other countries live, thats the only way that I could lead that country

1-1-11

mead



### Messages and Meanings

It is evident in the sample that Diego understands and follows a particular and planned rhetorical structure, emphasizing certain 'rules' of narrative writing that are highly valued in the United States. Diego's writing reveals a five paragraph narrative structure. The essay begins with an opening sentence that restates the writing prompt (paragraph 1), a body of writing with three paragraphs that develop the topic to some degree, and a concluding statement (paragraph 5). In utilizing those valued writing conventions and structure, Diego participates in the discourse of schooling in the United States, which includes writing for standardized writing assessments. However, writing in this format and following this prescribed structure is undoubtedly a tactical device that Diego employs to demonstrate his knowledge of school writing. In fact, during this round of writing, Diego inquired if he had to follow 'a five paragraph essay' format when he began to write. Adhering to this discourse structure, which was optional, is a maneuver that Diego may have made to ensure that the reader would engage in (read and attempt to understand) his writing. Thus, in Diego's struggle to create meaning through writing, he purposefully employs a discourse structure that the reader in school would be familiar with and in which the reader could engage.

Diego also uses the rhetorical device of parallelism in the first three paragraphs of his essay. Rather than demonstrating 'connections' or transitions across paragraphs in a traditional or valued format (e.g., first, second, third), he uses the word "If" to demonstrate connections within the topic. For example, the first three paragraphs of the essay begin with "If" when Diego discusses being an American President. However, he discontinues this pattern in the fourth paragraph when he changes the topic from being an American President to being the President of Iraq. Thus, Diego keys the reader to a topic shift, as he modifies the connector at precisely the time that he moves from the main topic of "being an American President" to "being a leader of Iraq" for a day.

In addition to using a discourse structure that is familiar to the reader and that the reader can follow using connectors, Diego also builds relationships with the

reader by attempting to use common colloquial expressions. One example of this is his use of the phrase, "We would wake up on the president Bush's pants." While both the article of clothing and verb were untraditional ("wake up" for walk and "pants" for shoes), Diego nonetheless, gains the reader's attention, perhaps in part *because of* the error rather than in spite of it. The humor of this sentence succeeds in engaging the reader further than Diego might have realized, though the fact that he employs (or attempts to do so) a common colloquial expression indicates that Diego is serious about the message he wishes to convey. Similarly, Diego emphasizes the serious nature and immediacy of the message by using the word "STOP!!" In this case it is as if Diego wrote the emphatic expression in capital letters to implore the reader to take notice of what he wishes to convey. In short, the use of these devices represents his struggle to create meaning and deliver a message that is important to him.

Diego uses additional devices to convey the idea of humanitarianism in several ways. First, Diego employs the expression "focus my target arrow on the United States". In this utterance, Diego appears to suggest that as president he would pay attention to domestic U.S. issues. Such a reflective president might reconsider and modify U.S. policies and actions and might address social issues such as class differences. Social class differences are prominent struggles among Latin Americans; therefore, it is not surprising that Diego uses his knowledge of social issues in Latin America and focuses on this particular idea. Secondly, Diego uses the verb "let" on two occasions ("let other parts of the world improve" and "let some other countries live"). He uses these as if he were imploring the president to promote policies that allow social well being and improve the quality of life both in the U.S. and abroad. In combination, Diego uses these words to convey a message that resembles a plea. Ultimately, Diego is writing about his values and beliefs in combination with his experience and identity as a Latin American immigrant in the United States. Indeed, we view Diego as writing beyond the identity boundary of 'an ESOL student in a U.S. high school'; his multiple identities reveal an understanding of the world, as well as his ideals, values, and beliefs. Below we discuss further how Diego's writing conveys these themes as well as negotiates multiple identities.

### **Enacting Multiple Identities**

Beyond being a writer in an ESOL classroom in which he utilizes various rhetorical devices to convey his message, Diego is also a raconteur who engages in "Conversations" (Gee, 2005, p. 21), or communicates openly, about the world. Such "Conversations", according to Gee, reflect the "talking and writing that has gone on in a specific social group or society at large around a major theme, debate, or motif" (p. 22). Diego demonstrates his knowledge about U.S. foreign policy, the war with Iraq, and the controversy surrounding U.S. participation in the war. His knowledge of particular Conversations both reflects and is reflective of his identity, and Diego demonstrates these several ways.

Diego demonstrates one identity immediately in his writing where he introduces the reader to who he would be for a day. He writes that he would 'select' to be a president from "America (continent)". Diego uses parentheses, i.e. America (the

continent), to let the reader know that the president he would be is not an American from the United States, but rather an American from the continent of America. The parenthetical clarification acts as a caution to the reader that American does not necessarily equate "America" with "the United States of America". In this regard, it is as if Diego were marking his identity (enacted through who he would be for a day) as one would stake out property boundaries. He takes charge of this event and explains upfront what American means to him, rather than leaving the interpretation of "American" to the reader.

Another way Diego enacts an identity in solidarity with other (Latin) Americans is in referring to "disappearing" money. In this case, Diego is an insider with an awareness of "disappearing" money. He indicates that people, at least some people, understand that money did not really disappear but was actually stolen. The word disappearing has a deep history in Latin America (e.g. Argentina in the 1980s), which refers to histories of military dictatorships where people who opposed the government and were later "missing" were referred to as *desaparecidos* or the disappeared ones. While it is possible that Diego, who was born in the late 1980s, was not aware of these events because he lived in Bolivia until his teen years, Diego was impressionable and knowledgeable of the politics of his culture. This interpretation was confirmed by Diego after an initial analysis during an interview in which 'member checking' of the data occurred. In that regard, Diego builds solidarity with other Americans, first by sharing knowledge about money being taken and, second, by sharing a common history and knowledge of the double meaning behind things 'disappearing' in Latin America.

Diego's knowledge is, in fact, not only about Latin America as he relays to the reader his beliefs regarding current world events and views of social inequities and his wish to improve them ("all the differences of the social classes and try to help them"). Diego, then, enacts another identity: an advocate for the oppressed who face social injustices. Diego's main activity in this narrative is arguably one of an advocate for people who face political and economic oppression. His writing conveys knowledge about social class structure, political parties, the position of the United States in the world, and market economies. Diego weaves these types of knowledge together around one theme, *If I Could be Someone Else for a Day*, though his real theme or message may be to advocate for social justice.

In addition, Diego's writing demonstrates that he is a risk taker who is unafraid to take a controversial stance. As he questions the United States' involvement in Iraq, Diego engages the reader in a controversial anti-war position, which was less popular in 2005 than it is in 2009. Diego demonstrates, then, that he knows about conversations engaged in the broader society. This may be the result of having lived in another country, one where conversations about politics and war in the context of U.S. foreign policy may be more openly debated. Diego positions himself as an advocate for a socially-responsive U.S. foreign policy that "improves the quality of live [sic]" for oppressed people around the world.

Diego uses his knowledge of politics and economics, and his beliefs and views to enact multiple identities that are situated in the social world. For example, Diego demonstrates some knowledge of both socialist and capitalist economic models in Latin America and the United States, and may be referencing, here, U.S.-imposed

trade embargoes. Yet, rather than emphasizing only one economic model, Diego writes about aiding different social class groups while at the same time advocating for policies that do not block the "market". Diego does not view these two positions in conflict but as a viable alternative. This socioculturally constructed stance reveals Diego's hybrid identity. He is neither totally in or from Bolivia, nor totally in or from the U.S. and can be referred to as a member of 'Generation 1.5.' - a cluster of often misunderstood students who are precariously balanced between their parents' home culture and their host country's culture because they share characteristics of first and second generation immigrants (Ariza, 2006; Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999).

In his writing, Diego must negotiate his position and borders in the face of many conflicting ideas (e.g. support for the war in Iraq versus an advocate for 'peace'; support for justice and equity among the social classes versus an open market economy). Diego's identities are multiple and fluid reflecting solidarity with other comrades from America as well as solidarity with people from all over the world who have an outsider perspective of the war. Ultimately, Diego challenges U.S. policy and its position in the war and then imagines alternative paths or solutions that address social inequities. Through his views, beliefs, and life experiences, Diego can imagine a new identity in the postmodern world.

## Discussion

Using a framework of language transfer and identity construction, the analysis of Diego's writing reveals two major points. First, ELLs in the process of acquiring literacy in English may and frequently do write about complex topics, despite what the conventional writing assessments in the current standardized writing era suggest about ELLs' writing. Secondly, ELLs such as Diego enact a variety of Discourses, which reflect multiple, fluid, and negotiated identities. Below we discuss these two positions and the relationship between them.

From a second language assessment perspective, it is evident that Diego's writing, despite its rich and complex ideas, would be considered less than proficient using a monolingual writing assessment, such as the *Florida Writes!* rubric. In fact, there is a contrast between *what* Diego has written, as a sophisticated and reflective piece, and *how* he has written it. Leki (1992) describes this phenomenon of content sophistication as one of several writing behaviors common among ESL students. She writes, "because [ESL] students profit from experiencing and comparing at least two cultures, their understanding of the world often far exceeds that of their U.S. counterparts" (p. 61). She continues that this reflection lends itself to student writing that appears more sophisticated than their native counterparts.

As a bilingual and global student, Diego's life experiences appear to be undervalued both in terms of the ways he uses his L1 knowledge to inform his writing in English (as bilinguals do in language transfer) and the rich, international themes that the writing evokes. Leki (1992) notes that international students frequently write about topics that are unfamiliar to their ESL teachers, and this often includes topics related to politics in their home countries, of which the students are typically well-informed. In that regard, she suggests that students

have a “tremendous advantage” over native English-speaking students, since teachers may not be aware of what ELLs are writing about (p. 63). Indeed, the rubrics from state standardized tests, such as those used by *Florida Writes!*, appear not to place value on novel or sophisticated content; rather, they rely heavily on standard uses of English and topics that are comprehensible to scorers.

In contrast to such a one-dimensional and static piece, Diego’s work underscores how languages for bilingual students interact in the brain in sophisticated ways that are largely unmeasured and are often punitive. For example, Diego’s writing shows semantic transference (e.g. *if I wake up on the president Bush’s pants* versus *if I were in President Bush’s shoes*). This particular transfer is a useful guide for educators working with Diego in that it reveals: 1) differences in idiomatic expressions across languages; 2) semantic transferences between languages; and 3) the use of literary tools to convey meaning in writing. The expression chosen by Diego reveals linguistic and cultural knowledge that could be used as a valuable resource, rather than viewed as a deficit in writing. Accordingly, it is up to educators to make the decisions as to how Diego’s writing, as well as his identity and life experiences, can be valued in the classroom. At least, one should expect to see rubrics for L2 learners that reflect their valuable bilingual skills.

In addition, Diego’s writing illustrates the complex and socio-historically-situated nature of his identity, as well as the complex ways in which he constructs, enacts, and negotiates multiple identities. Following Gee (2005), Diego’s ‘identity kit’, or enacted Discourses, arguably includes a high school ESOL student, a young immigrant from Bolivia, an American building solidarity with other Americans from the continent, an advocate for the oppressed who is knowledgeable about international inequities and improprieties, and a statesperson who seeks to negotiate a new, more humane position. It is these multiple identities that Diego reveals in his writing.

Accordingly, the identities that Diego constructs correspond with some of those delineated by Pavlenko (2001), namely linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and social identities. Linguistically, it is clear that both L1 and L2 usage, and his choice of words, are informed by and inform Diego’s identity. Moreover, Diego’s writing provides evidence of such ethnic, cultural, and social identities being enacted, which are embedded in the way in which Diego writes, the intended message he wishes to convey, the context or situation of the writing, and his beliefs and feelings. Ethnically, Diego identifies himself both as an immigrant to the U.S. and a Latin American. Both of these identities are enacted in his writing, and it is impossible to separate these identities from each other. Both his linguistic and ethnic identities reveal aspects of a dynamic cultural identity that Diego creates with the reader. In fact, Diego’s writing reflects the interrelated nature of those categories and boundaries. Diego’s identities are constructed socially as he interacts with a reader, even an imaginary reader, whom he views as one in an academic setting. Diego strategically uses devices inside the essay to engage the reader and to deliver his message and negotiated identities.



Similar to the work of Pavlenko (2001), in his study of bilingual students' writing, Jiménez (2000) found that bilingual students construct their bilingual, bicultural identities in and through "cultural borderlands" (p. 985). He noted that bilingual students' feared loss of the first language as part of their bilingual identity. Nonetheless, data here show that identities for this bilingual student are negotiated in his social interaction in writing, despite the fact that writing did not occur in the student's L1. Moreover, as Bakhtin's work suggests, Diego is in the process of 'struggling to create meaning' both literally in writing, as well as figuratively in the negotiated identities that he wishes to convey as he communicates.

Ultimately, we must ask, in the context of writing that is valued, at least academically in standardized assessments, for its adherence to focus, organization, support, and conventions in English, what is the usefulness of exploring bilingual students' identities in writing? As Cummins' (2001, 2002) work has suggested, affirming students' identities through social interaction between teachers and students is one way in which students see themselves as valued participants in educational settings. It is evident that students and teachers interact both orally and in writing in schools. Thus, the rich opportunities to affirm students' identities as evoked and negotiated in writing would be to overlook teaching and learning itself. That is, when we, as educators, begin to read the content of students' work as an expression of engagement, then we can engage in real dialogue about the world. This is not to suggest that writing conventions are unimportant; rather, students in the process of acquiring literacy in English need to gain control over the 'word' to relate to the 'world' (Freire, 2000). Both are necessary for full participation in the world.

## **Conclusion**

This paper explored the ways in which one ELL engaged in the process of negotiating his bilingual, multi-dimensional identities, writing, and expression in many interesting and important ways. Rather than viewing emerging English language ability as an array of phonologic, morphologic, syntactic and stylistic deficits which outsiders (or in this case, test scorers) may only view as reconcilable through ultimate command over English, Pavlenko (2001) suggests that "writing in the midst of the turmoil of budding bilingualism allows [writers] to accomplish linguistic transitions" (p. 352). Indeed, the demand for English language learners to perform well on narrow, English-only assessment measures in writing is problematic in so far as it necessarily overlooks the complex and various ways that ELLs communicate and use language to express their identities. Moreover, the interplay between two linguistic worlds, which are embedded in broader Discourses, allows bilingual authors to imagine and invent new identities with new and varied voices.

We believe that the language abilities of bilingual students are a resource that contributes to society, rather than a problem to be solved (Ruíz, 1984). Indeed, the valuing and use of languages can enhance the positioning of the U.S. in this global world. These linguistic resources have previously been squandered, which, in the current social and international context, can no longer afford to be wasted.

As the world becomes more global, the multiple voices of students that reflect their hybridized identities will increasingly become commonplace. As such, our role as educators is to connect learning to students' lives and lived experiences.

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# The Impact of Instruction in Phonetic and Phonemic Distinctions in Sounds on the Pronunciation of Spanish-speaking ESL Learners<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Second language learners must know the linguistically significant sounds in the second language to read, write, and speak fluently, and to avoid miscommunication. This raises the question of whether, how much, and in what form instruction in phonetic and phonemic distinctions in sounds should be implemented in the second language classroom, and whether or not such intervention is effective. This study evaluated the impact of instruction in phonetic and phonemic distinctions in sounds on the English pronunciation of English language learners, specifically, Spanish speakers learning English as a second language (ESL). Target sounds in English deemed difficult for Spanish speakers learning ESL were identified. The target sounds were categorized into sounds having allophonic distinctions between the two languages; sounds having phonemic differences in the two languages, and sounds which are phonemes in English but absent in Spanish. Subjects in the experimental group were instructed in the distinctions between the sounds in English and Spanish through lecture-type as well as technology-enhanced materials. Results indicated that the intervention had a statistically significant impact on the experimental group's pronunciation of the target sounds. Further, subjects' showed improvement in the pronunciation of individual target sounds in the following order: sounds with allophonic distinctions, phonemic differences, and absence in the native language. The paper discusses these findings and their pedagogical implications.

## Resumen

Un conocimiento fonológico consciente de sonidos en la segunda lengua no puede ser dado por obvio en alumnos principiantes. Sin embargo los estudiantes de un segundo idioma deben conocer los sonidos lingüísticos significativos en éste para poder leer, escribir y hablar fluidamente para evitar problemas en la comunicación. Como resultado surge la pregunta sobre cuánto y cómo debe implementarse la instrucción en las distinciones fonéticas dentro del aula del segundo idioma, y si tal instrucción es o no es efectiva. El presente estudio evaluó el impacto de la instrucción en distinción fonética y fonémica de sonidos sobre la pronunciación del inglés de estudiantes cuya primera lengua es el español que están aprendiendo el inglés como segunda lengua. En el estudio se identificaron los sonidos que fueron detectados como difíciles para los estudiantes hispanoparlantes. Estos sonidos fueron categorizados en sonidos con distinción alofónica entre ambas lenguas, sonidos con diferencias fonémicas entre ambas lenguas y sonidos cuyos fonemas existen en el inglés pero que no existen en el español. Mediante la

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instrucción directa y del uso de la tecnología, a los sujetos en el grupo experimental se les enseñó las distinciones entre estos sonidos del inglés y los sonidos del español. Los resultados indicaron que el impacto de la intervención sobre la pronunciación de los sonidos seleccionados fue estadísticamente significativo. Asimismo, los sujetos experimentales demostraron mejoras en la pronunciación de los sonidos objetivo individuales de acuerdo al siguiente orden: sonidos con distinciones alofónicas, sonidos con diferencias fonémicas y sonidos ausentes en la lengua natal. El presente documento explica los resultados y sus implicaciones pedagógicas.

## **Introduction**

Phonological awareness of sounds in the second language cannot be presumed in second language learners. Second language learners must know the linguistically significant phonemes and allophones in the second language to read, write, and speak fluently, and to avoid miscommunication. This raises the question of whether, how much, and in what form phonetic instruction should be introduced and applied in the second language classroom, and whether or not such intervention is effective. This study evaluates the impact of instruction in phonetic and phonemic distinctions in sounds on the English pronunciation of English language learners, specifically, Spanish speakers learning English as a second language (ESL).

## **Need for Accurate Pronunciation Skills in the Second Language**

### ***Effect on Communication***

A phoneme is the smallest, meaningful unit of sound. All else remaining the same, changing a phoneme in a word changes the meaning of the word, as in ban, van, man, and tan in English; the sounds /b/, /v/, /m/, and /t/ are linguistically significant sounds, or phonemes, in English. An allophone, on the other hand, is a phonetic variation of a phoneme. This variation does not change the meaning of the word, and therefore, is not linguistically significant. The phoneme /t/ in English, for instance, has, among others, the following two variations or allophones in terms of aspiration: it is aspirated in word-initial position (t<sup>h</sup>in, t<sup>h</sup>able) and unaspirated in word-medial or word-final positions (master, painting, bite, catt); misarticulation of these allophones does not change the word meaning.

Whether it is necessary or desirable to speak a second language with native-like accuracy is often a personal choice; what is clear, however, is that certain miscommunications may occur due to lack of phonological awareness in the second language. Kenworthy (1987) stated that language learners must develop concern and awareness for pronunciation because unintelligible speech resulting from inadequate phonological accuracy causes mutual frustration and unpleasantness for both listeners and speakers. In related studies, Plakans (1997) and Gravois (2005) pointed out instances of miscommunication and unintelligibility resulting from inadequate phonological awareness of nonnative English-speaking instructors. To avoid such instances, the second language learner must be able to identify and use the linguistically significant phonemes of the language appropriately. For instance, Spanish speakers learning English may mispronounce the voiceless post alveolar fricative /ʃ/, as in "wash", as the

voiceless post alveolar affricate /č/, as in "watch." Because of the lack of the /š/ phoneme in Spanish, some Spanish speakers may mispronounce the English phoneme /š/ as /č/, resulting in possible miscommunication. These problems may be prevented or remedied by instruction on phonetic and phonemic distinctions in sounds.

### **Academic Need**

Phonological awareness has been reported to be a predictor of reading success (Badian, 1998) and general academic achievement (Chard, Pikulski & Templeton, 2000). Native Spanish speakers who learn to speak, read, and write in their native language might have difficulty with the English orthographic system because of native language interference (Terrebone, 1973). Lado (1956), in a study comparing the English and Spanish sound systems, claimed that second language learners tend to transfer their entire knowledge of sounds in their native language, including phonemes and allophones, patterns of syllables, and intonation, into the second language, and these transfers result in nonnative pronunciation and possible miscommunication. Training in phonemic and phonetic contrasts between the two languages may compensate for students' pre-set phonetic and phonemic awareness in the native language.

### **Need for Instruction in Phonetic and Phonemic Distinctions in Sounds**

Research suggests that second language learners' pronunciation is affected by variables including the age and gender of the second language learners; the extent of second language use; length of residence in the second language environment; learners' aptitude; first language background; as well as the presence or absence of phonetic training in the second language (Piske, 2008). However, results of studies investigating the effects of these factors on second language learners' pronunciation are not unanimous. With respect to age being a crucial factor in second language acquisition, Long's (1990) claim that acquiring a second language in early childhood can result in native-like second language pronunciation was supported by Marinova-Todd, Marshall & Snow's (2000) study showing that late starters cannot achieve native-like pronunciation.

However, the results of a study by Flege, Frieda and Nozawa (1997) indicate that native-like pronunciation does not automatically come with early second language acquisition. In that study, a group of bilinguals who acquired English as a second language at an average age of 3.2 years and had been living in an English-speaking environment for more than 18 years were reported to be speaking English with a slight foreign accent. In fact, late learners too can have almost native-like second language pronunciation (Moyer, 2004). Studies show that adult Dutch speakers achieved native-like English pronunciation after phonetic training (Bongaerts, van Summeren, Planken & Schils, 1997), and Japanese adults showed improvement in the phonemic distinction between the /l/ and /r/ contrast in English, subsequent to phonetic training (Flege, Takagi & Mann, 1995). Some researchers (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996; Morley, 1999; Wong, 1987) argue that second language learners' inaccurate pronunciation results from the sole emphasis on individual sounds in the pronunciation teaching curriculum. In order to achieve real-life communication,

concern for and awareness of rhythm, stress and intonation, namely, suprasegmentals, should be emphasized more. These features may be small and easily overlooked; nevertheless, their essential status in pronunciation teaching should not be undervalued. Mistakes at the suprasegmental level, such as improper intonation contours, failure in connecting words, and nonnative-like stress/rhythm, lead to impressions of abruptness or even rudeness. Indeed, suprasegmentals should not be ignored in pronunciation teaching. Regardless of the accuracy of suprasegmental features, inaccurate phonetic realizations of phonemes still cause problems in communication. Thus, while discussing what should be emphasized in teaching pronunciation, the fundamental goal of phonetic and phonemic accuracy should not be compromised. Both segmental and suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation should be integrated in second language teaching curricula.

Given that the claims of the above studies are not unanimous regarding the age factor in second language acquisition or regarding the appropriate focus in teaching pronunciation, this study seeks to determine whether or not adult native Spanish speakers improve their pronunciation subsequent to instruction in specific phonetic and phonemic distinctions between English and Spanish.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study examined the impact of instruction in phonetic and phonemic distinctions in sounds on the pronunciation of target sounds by Spanish speakers learning English as a second

language. In particular, the study sought the answers to the following research questions:

1. What effect, if any, does instruction in phonetic and phonemic distinctions in sounds have on the overall pronunciation of target English phonemes and allophones by native Spanish speakers learning ESL?
2. What effect, if any, does instruction in phonetic and phonemic distinctions in sounds have on the pronunciation of individual target English phonemes and allophones by native Spanish speakers learning ESL?

### **Methodology**

#### ***Selection of Participants***

Subjects in the study were 33 high school students ranging in age from fifteen to nineteen years, all of whom were native speakers of Spanish (as spoken in Mexico), learning English as a Second language (ESL) at a private high school during the period of this research. Students who attend this private high school take an initial placement test, the Secondary Level English Proficiency (SLEP) Test, or the Institutional Testing Program for English Proficiency (ITP) test, both of which are administered by the school. According to school policy, freshmen students who fail the SLEP (if they obtain a combined score of 46<sup>th</sup> percentile or less) are assigned to an ESL class. Further, incoming sophomore and/or junior



students, who score below 400 on the ITP, are also assigned to ESL classes. Thus, the sampling of participant selection was subject to the school's placement and scheduling policies. For the purpose of this study, participants were divided into two groups, experimental and control, to determine the impact of the intervention, which was the instruction in phonetic and phonemic distinctions in sounds. According to Field (2005), a "convenient sample" refers to a "sample of the population chosen based on factors such as cost, time, participant accessibility, or other logistical concerns." Thus, convenience sampling resulted in subjects being placed in two groups: control (N=12) and experimental (N=21). The experimental group received instruction in phonetic and phonemic distinctions in sounds, but the control group did not. The control group received regular ESL curricular instruction from the classroom teacher, while the experimental group received instruction in phonetic and phonemic distinctions in sounds from the researchers during two 45-minute sessions each week for ten weeks. On the remaining weekdays, they received regular ESL curricular instruction from the classroom teacher.

Subsequent to the Institutional Review Board's approval of the study and the school authorities' permission to conduct the study, the researchers instructed all subjects, orally as well as in writing, of the purpose of the study prior to gaining their consent to participate in it. Consent was also obtained for participants to be audio taped and videotaped during pretest and post-test sessions.

### **Materials**

Based on *A Key to Pronouncing the Consonants of American English* (Dale & Poms, 1986) and *Spanish English Contrasts* (2nd ed.) (Whitley, 2002), seven consonant phonemes deemed difficult for Spanish-speakers of English were selected for instruction. These included sounds that differ from English in the following ways:

- A phonetic feature, specifically, place of articulation:
  - voiced alveolar plosive /t/ as in "ten"; and
  - voiced alveolar plosive /d/ as in "den";
- Sounds which differ in phonological behavior, specifically, allophone vs. phoneme:
  - voiced labiodental fricative /v/ as in "vase";
  - voiced alveolar fricative /z/ as in "zoo";
  - voiced interdental fricative /ð / as in "there"; and
- Sounds which are absent in the native language, specifically, Spanish (as spoken in Mexico):
  - voiceless interdental fricative /θ/ as in "think"; and
  - voiceless post alveolar fricative /ʃ/ as in "shoe".

In the first group of sounds, the place of articulation for the English phoneme /t/ in English is alveolar, i.e. the tip of the tongue touches the alveolar ridge in producing the sound; in Spanish the place of articulation for /t/ is dental, where the tongue tip touches the back of the upper teeth. This allophonic distinction between the English and Spanish sounds is not linguistically significant, but it

could contribute to a nonnative pronunciation of the sounds. A similar distinction is found in the English and Spanish phonemes /d/. In the second group of sounds, /v/, /z/, and /ð/ are phonemes in English. In Spanish, however, they are allophones of /b/, /s/, and /d/ respectively. Without this linguistic awareness or knowledge of accurate articulation of sounds, the Spanish speaker learning English may say, for instance, *ban*, *lacy*, and *den* instead of *van*, *lazy*, and *then* respectively. Given certain contexts, such misarticulations could result in miscommunication. The third group of sounds, /θ/ and /š/, are absent in the sound inventory of Spanish, as it is spoken in Mexico. As such, these sounds have to be added to the second language learners' repertoire of English sounds.

In Table 1 below, the target English sounds are presented in contrast to the corresponding sounds in Spanish.

TABLE 1  
CATEGORIES OF TARGET SOUNDS

	Target Sounds						
	Differ in a phonetic feature (place of articulation)		Differ in phonological behavior (allophone [AL] vs. phoneme /PH/)			Absent in native language	
	t	d	v	z	ð	θ	š
Spanish	dental 'taco'	dental 'dos'	[AL] 'viva'	[AL] 'zapato'	[AL] 'lado'	Absent	Absent
English	alveolar 'ten'	alveolar 'den'	/PH/ 'van'	/PH/ 'zoo'	/PH/ 'there'	'three'	'shoe'

Instruction in phonetic and phonemic distinctions in sounds was delivered to the experimental group in the classroom, in formats of, but not necessarily in the order of, verbal instruction, handouts, PowerPoint presentations and pronunciation exercises/activities. Subjects received the training for 90 minutes (during two 45-minute class periods on two weekdays) for a period of 10 weeks. Details of the instruction are as follows.

1. Lecture materials: These included instruction and explanations from the researchers, as well as computer software such as Pronunciation Power 1 & 2 (Buffel, 2000) developed by English Computerized Learning Inc. Handouts containing information on the place and manner of articulation of the target sounds, PowerPoint presentation slides, and photocopiable materials from Pronunciation Games (Hancock, 1995) were provided to the subjects.
2. Technology-enhanced materials: These included presentations made by the researchers using PowerPoint, incorporating animated components such as GIF (Graphics Interchange Format) and/or Flash with an emphasis on interaction between the subjects and the content (instruction in phonetic and phonemic distinctions in sounds). Communicative and interactive materials included exercises such as minimal pair discrimination, as well as activities designed by the researchers in both handout and Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) formats using SWISH templates available online.

## Data Collection Procedures

Common practice in the field of speech pathology includes the assessment of articulation of sounds. One type of phonological assessment entails the collecting of a speech sample, preferably tape recorded; transcribing the sample; and scoring and analyzing the sample (Gordon-Branney & Weiss, 2007). Several traditional tests of articulation use single word or sentence lists containing the target sounds in word initial, medial, and final positions. Based on such practice, and due to lack of readily available articulation tests which contained the target sounds appropriate for adult Spanish-speaking ESL learners, the researchers developed word lists containing the target sounds in initial, medial, and final positions in the word. A total of 60 words were selected to be used in the pretest and post-test. Both tests utilized the same set of words. Of the total number of words presented, six words for each target phoneme with the target sound occurring in word initial, medial, and final positions were ordered randomly for testing. Thus, 42 of the total number of words contained target sounds. The remaining 18 words contained corresponding contrasting sounds, such as /b/, /s/ and /č/ to contrast with /v/, /z/ and /š/ respectively.

Each subject was tested individually in a quiet room conducive to video and tape recording. Both researchers were present during testing. In the pre-test, each card containing a printed word containing the target or contrasting sound was shown to the subject to elicit the pronunciation of the target sound. The subject was asked to read the words aloud. If difficulty in understanding the word was detected, the researcher presented the opposite side of the card containing an image depicting the word. Once the target word was pronounced, the next card with the next word followed. The words were presented with the target sounds in random order.

Both researchers independently recorded and evaluated each subject's pronunciation of the target sound according to its phonetic features. The researchers did not model any of the sounds during testing. A subject's mispronunciation was not corrected; however, self-correction was accepted. Only target sounds in words were evaluated, regardless of possible misarticulation of other sounds in the word. As is customary in formal testing of articulation (Gordon-Branney & Weiss, 2007), the researchers manually recorded their individual perceptions of mispronunciations by noting the sound using IPA symbols; correct pronunciations of target sounds with a check mark; and omitted target sounds with a dash. As a result, each subject had four 'sets' of evaluations for each opportunity to produce each target sound (in initial, medial, and final positions in the word) which was tested twice. For instance, /š/ in initial position of a word was tested in two separate words. Thus, each subject received four evaluations for the pronunciation of /š/ in initial position: (1) by Evaluator 1 for word 1, (2) by Evaluator 1 for word 2, (3) by Evaluator 2 for word 1 and (4) by Evaluator 2 for word 2. These grades were summed up to form a scale from 0 to 4. That is, the combined evaluation of each subject's pronunciation of each tested item was depicted as a number from '0' to '4.' For instance, if the evaluation of an item tested from one evaluator was incorrect, a value of '0' was assigned for that instance. If the evaluation of an item tested from one evaluator was correct,

a value of '1' was assigned for that instance. Results of evaluations from both evaluators were integrated for statistical analysis.

After all the phonetic features of the target sounds were presented in the instruction in phonetic and phonemic distinctions in sounds, a post-test was given to both experimental and control groups in exactly the same format as in the pretest, using the same list of words, testing environment, testing format, and data collection procedures as in the pretest. The time between the pretest and post-test was ten weeks.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

After the pretest and post-test, the data collected was analyzed in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 13. An independent (paired-samples) *t*-test was chosen to answer research question #1. Research question #1 was answered by investigating whether there was a statistically significant difference between the pretest and post-test overall pronunciation scores of target sounds by subjects in the experimental and control groups. Research question #2 was answered by analyzing the frequency of accuracy in production of individual target sounds on a 0-100% scale.

### **Limitations**

Randomization of the participants in this research was subject to the private high school's ESL class schedule in the period during which the research was conducted. Convenience sampling was used for the selection of participants. Therefore, the study sample cannot represent the general population. Any effects of the instruction in phonetic and phonemic distinctions in sounds evident in this study can be generalized only to Spanish-speaking ESL students studying in a private high school similar to the one in this study, and who undergo a similar treatment. The advantage of diversity in terms of heterogeneous grouping was limited due to the sample population. Technology software application was limited to the hardware equipment available.

### **Results**

After implementation of the instruction in phonetic and phonemic distinctions in sounds, the following results were found regarding the overall pronunciation of target sounds by the experimental and control groups. The results, as in Table 2, showed that there was a statistically significant difference in performance between pretest and post-test scores between the experimental and control groups, with  $t(31) = .013$ ,  $p=.02$ . That is, the overall performance score of the experimental group in the post-test ( $M = 85.7$ ,  $SD = 9.84$ ) was statistically significantly different from that of the overall performance score of the control group in post-test ( $M = 76.9$ ,  $SD = 9.06$ ).

Thus, we can conclude that the instruction in phonetic and phonemic distinctions in sounds had a statistically significant effect on the overall pronunciation of target sounds in the experimental group of this experiment.

TABLE 2  
MEAN DIFFERENCES IN PERFORMANCES OF EXPERIMENTAL (N=21) AND CONTROL (N =12)  
GROUPS

	<i>Experimental</i>		<i>Control</i>	
	M	SD	M	SD
Pretest	71.9	12.5	70.2	5.9
Post-test	85.7	9.8	76.8	9.0
<i>t</i>	.013*			

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

\* $p < .02$

After implementation of the phonetics and phonological training, the following results were found regarding the pronunciation of individual target sounds by the experimental group:

TABLE 3  
PERCENTAGE OF IMPROVEMENT BETWEEN PRETEST AND POST-TEST SCORE

	Target Sounds						
	Sounds different in place of articulation		Sounds linguistically significant (phonemic) in English			Sounds absent in Spanish	
	t	d	v	z	ð	θ	š
<i>word-initial position</i>	45.24	40.48	26.19	38.10	21.43	04.76	02.38
<i>word-middle position</i>	40.48	47.62	09.52	40.48	16.67	07.14	03.97
<i>word-final position</i>	40.48	61.90	14.29	64.29	14.29	02.38	0.00
<i>overall</i>	42.07	57.94	16.67	47.60	17.46	07.14	03.97

### Interpretations and Implications

The results of this study show that the Spanish-speaking ESL learners who participated in the study benefitted from the instruction in phonetic and phonemic distinctions in sounds, focusing on specific target English sounds deemed difficult or different for the subject group. Specifically, sounds such as /t/ and /d/ that exist in Spanish but differ from English in place of articulation (dental in Spanish vs. alveolar in English) were easier to improve for the Spanish speaker learning English, than other problem sounds. The "adjustment," in this case, was learning the difference in the phonetic feature, and not a conceptual or phonemic difference between the sounds. Information on the differences between the two sounds was presented clearly to subjects not only in the phonetic descriptions of the sounds presented to them during the training, but also through interactive video clips showing the difference in tongue placement between dental and

alveolar sounds. The category of sounds showing the next best range of improvement is /v/, /z/, and ð/, which are sounds present in Spanish, but which carry a different phonological status in English, i.e. whereas they are allophonic in Spanish, they are linguistically significant or phonemic sounds in English. Here, it was necessary for the subjects to conceptualize and discriminate between the linguistic statuses of these sounds. Finally, sounds which are absent in the English language learner's native language, such as /š/ and /θ/, were the most difficult to master. These results are consistent with the expectations of Prator's (1967) Hierarchy of Difficulty that predicts that linguistic features that are most different between the native and second languages will be those that are most difficult to master. Although predicted or anticipated difficulties in second language learning do not always turn out to be so, based on the findings of this study, teachers may be better prepared to understand and address problems in Spanish-speaking ESL learners' pronunciation of English sounds, should they arise.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Overall, the results of this study have pedagogical significance in that they offer insight into the instructional materials that may prove effective in improving Spanish-speaking ESL learners' pronunciation of English sounds. As discussed earlier, improvement in pronunciation can lead to advancement in academic performance too. Future research in this area would benefit from examining the effects of the same type of intervention at the phrase, sentence, or discourse levels. In addition, the range of sounds examined may be expanded to include vowel sounds. The challenge that remains is the question of how to introduce this type of intervention systematically in ESL classrooms. As a starting point, ESL teachers would have to be trained in articulatory phonetics and linguistics to understand and teach the importance of accurate pronunciation in second language learning.

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# Online Chat in the Foreign Language Classroom: From Research to Pedagogy<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The study was carried out within the framework of second language acquisition (SLA) theory and investigated whether synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) or on-line chat would lead foreign language (FL) learners to engage in a more acquisition-rich discourse than would interaction in the oral mode. During two different class periods, eight university FL (foreign language) students of Spanish were paired to complete a similarly structured interactive language task in each mode of communication. The results revealed that in both the oral and the electronic modes learners spent equally large percentages of their turns negotiating meaning and pushing each other to more comprehensible L2 (second language) production, suggesting that the nature of the communicative activity had a greater impact on the quality of discourse for L2 acquisition than did the mode of communication. This finding provides empirical support for the use of structured interaction through SCMC as a tool to promote L2 acquisition in the FL classroom, while casting doubt on the effectiveness of informal paired and group electronic conversation, such as that which occurs in Internet chat rooms, as a means of obtaining acquisition-rich L2 practice. The study offers several recommendations for using SCMC with FL learners.

## Resumen

Este estudio se llevó a cabo bajo el marco teórico de la adquisición de segundas lenguas y comparó la interacción producida por parejas de estudiantes de lengua extranjera mientras trabajaban en tareas comunicativas oralmente y por Comunicación Sincrónica Mediada por Computadora (SCMC, por sus siglas en inglés). El objetivo fue averiguar si el modo electrónico fomentaría un discurso más benéfico para la adquisición de una segunda lengua (ASL) que el modo oral. Durante dos distintas sesiones de clase, cuatro parejas de estudiantes completaron dos tareas comunicativas parecidas, estructuradas para fomentar la interacción, una en el modo electrónico y una en el modo oral. El análisis reveló que el discurso fue igual de interactivo, con parecidas proporciones de las secuencias discursivas que la teoría de ASL postula que promueven el desarrollo lingüístico. Este estudio ofrece apoyo empírico para el uso de SCMC para llevar a cabo tareas comunicativas en el salón de lengua extranjera. Sin embargo a la vez cuestiona la efectividad para el desarrollo lingüístico de los salones de Chat, puesto que allí la conversación rara vez es estructurada para fomentar la interacción. Basado en los resultados, se hacen recomendaciones para el uso de SCMC entre estudiantes de lengua extranjera.

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## **Introduction**

This article explores principled pedagogical applications of text-based synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC), also known as online chat, in the foreign language (FL) classroom context. SCMC is a technology that allows two or more people to communicate with each other by typing messages that are exchanged instantaneously over a network and displayed in a shared posting space. Because of SCMC's resemblance to oral conversation, and because of the important role that oral interaction has been hypothesized to play in second language acquisition (SLA), language teachers are incorporating this tool into their courses with increasing frequency as a way to expand their learners' opportunities for L2 (second language) interaction. Research on SCMC and language learning offers some compelling evidence of this technology's potential as a tool for promoting L2 development, and some of this scholarship has either explicitly or implicitly suggested the following two notions, which are also beliefs shared by some L2 instructors: that the mere act of communicating in the L2 through SCMC is beneficial for L2 development, and that SCMC may offer learners a form of language practice that is superior to oral interaction. However, the body of SCMC scholarship, to date, is unable to support either of these notions, in part because the research in this relatively new field has not been unified in its theoretical underpinnings, methods, or contexts of investigation. It is only recently that research has begun to systematically investigate L2 learners' interaction through SCMC within the paradigm of second language acquisition theory, and little research has actually compared the discourse of FL learners as they interact with each other orally and through SCMC. The present study therefore fills a critical need in the field by investigating how the mode of communication through which FL learners interact (oral vs. SCMC) impacts the quantity and quality of learner-learner interaction for L2 acquisition.

In this article, I first review SLA theory and research regarding learner interaction in the FL classroom, and then review the relevant scholarship on learner interaction in SCMC. Next, I present the study and discuss its results, and I conclude by exploring the study's implications for classroom practices with respect to learner interaction in SCMC.

## **Interaction, SLA Theory, and the FL Classroom**

Learner interaction carried out in pairs or small groups is a hallmark of communicative language teaching, justified in part because it provides classroom learners more opportunities for L2 practice than teacher-fronted classroom interaction (Pica, Holliday, Lewis & Morgenthaler, 1989). Justification is also found within SLA theory, where both the more cognitively-oriented interactionist perspective and the sociocultural perspective posit that conditions for language acquisition are optimized when learners are involved in meaningful L2 interaction (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Ortega, 2007). But not all forms of language practice are the same, and only certain types of interactions are hypothesized to be meaningful and to promote L2 acquisition (Pica, 1994). One of the most widely studied is the negotiation of meaning, which refers to conversational exchanges that interlocutors use to resolve non-understanding. The prototypical negotiation

sequence involves three distinct moves: it begins with a listener's explicit or implicit indication of a problem in understanding a partner's message (e.g. by an echo question, clarification request, inappropriate response, or statement of non-understanding), which is followed by the initial speaker's response addressing that problem (e.g. through syntactic, morphological, phonological or semantic modifications of the problematic utterance), to which the speaker who indicated the problem can optionally react by acknowledging understanding or requesting further negotiation (Varonis & Gass, 1985). The negotiation of meaning provides learners with meaningful, and thus acquirable, L2 (i.e. input), because it makes target language messages more comprehensible (Long, 1985; Varonis & Gass, 1985), and the linguistic structures that encode them are more transparent and noticeable (Pica, 1994). Comprehensible input has long been argued to be necessary for acquisition, as has conscious attention to L2 form (Krashen, 1985; Schmidt, 1990). At the same time, negotiation can 'push' learners to produce more comprehensible output, which also leads to L2 acquisition (Swain, 1995). This is because signals for negotiation directed at learners' problematic utterances allow them to notice problems in their production, direct conscious attention to L2 form-meaning relationships, test-out hypotheses about these relationships, receive feedback on these hypotheses, move their L2 production in a more target-like direction, and ultimately expand their L2 competence (Pica et al., 1989; Swain, 1995).

In addition to instances of incomprehensibility, the mere need to produce the L2 in meaningful contexts can itself cause learners to notice gaps between what they want to say and what they actually can say, and these instances then become rich territory for language work that leads to L2 acquisition (de Bot, 1996; Swain, 2000). Swain and Lapkin (1998) call these instances language-related episodes (LREs) and argue that they are observable in interaction as those moments when learners "talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or others" (p. 326). LREs push learners to produce modified and more comprehensible output, and more importantly, they mediate such acquisition-rich processes as conscious reflection on L2 form, hypothesis testing, and the development of new L2 knowledge. Other important discourse moves found in meaningful interaction include those aimed at engaging learners in a task, simplifying a task, and tempering frustration (Anton, 1999; Foster & Ohta, 2005). This type of affective assistance functions as a gateway to language learning as it helps learners engage higher mental processes such as volition (effort) and selective attention (Platt & Brooks, 2002) without which active participation and language learning opportunities would be compromised. Interaction is therefore hypothesized to be meaningful and acquisition-rich, not simply whenever learners and their interlocutors say or write in on-line chat something to each other, but rather when through interaction learners are engaged in understanding language, noticing and reflecting on L2 form, pushing their L2 production beyond the borders of their L2 competence, and creating new L2 knowledge. Negotiation of meaning, LREs, and affective assistance are features of interactive discourse that enable learners to stretch their L2 competence and abilities beyond what they may be able to do alone, thus creating the leading edge of their L2 development.

A good deal of empirical research suggests that the developmental benefits of interaction are not limited to situations in which learners speak with native speakers or teachers; peer interaction can also be a rich context for L2 development (Donato, 1994; Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos & Linnell, 1996; Swain, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1998). These researchers argue that during interaction learners are able to share the role of a teacher/expert or a more capable peer, and therefore co-construct L2 meaning and knowledge and collaboratively surpass their individual L2 competence. However, several classroom-based studies have found the negotiation of meaning, and other types of LREs, such as providing corrective feedback and producing pushed or modified output, to be rare, or in some cases non-existent in learner-learner interaction, particularly in the FL classroom (Buckwalter, 2001; Foster, 1998; Foster & Ohta, 2005; Garcia Mayo & Pica, 2000). Foster and Ohta (2005) argue that learners may not be inclined to engage in negotiation work because it can be frustrating, demotivating, and disruptive to conversation. However, Buckwalter (2001) and Varonis and Gass (1985) posit that in the FL context, negotiation may be less likely to take place because learners share an L1 (first language) as well as other frames of reference. With a shared L1 it is simply easier to switch to L1 to avoid or repair a breakdown. Having similar cultural and learning experiences can enable learners to comprehend each other with less verbal interaction than might be necessary among those who do not share frames of reference. Nevertheless, many researchers argue that these contextual factors can be mitigated, to a large degree, through the careful structuring of the language task in which learners engage (Crookes & Rulon, 1985; Doughty & Pica, 1986). Pica et al. (1993) predict that the discourse of peer interaction will be optimized for acquisition when learners are engaged in language tasks that pose some challenge to their L2 competence and require them to converge on a single outcome that is only possible by sharing unique pieces of information that they separately hold. Such information-gap activities, as they have been called, reduce shared frames of reference by providing participants with information unknown by their partners, and they give learners a purpose for communicating as well as a reason to listen to and comprehend their partners. Gass et al. (2005) offer convincing data from a classroom-based study in which this activity structure promoted the negotiation of meaning and language-related episodes in oral interaction among FL learners.

### **SCMC and Learner Interaction**

L2 instructors and researchers have also explored how SCMC (online chat) might mitigate some of the factors that can hinder classroom interaction. Research has found that SCMC shares important features with the oral mode, including enabling real-time, meaningful interaction between learners (Chun, 1994; Pellettieri, 2000; Smith, 2003), and engaging many of the same cognitive processes that underlie oral language production (Payne & Whitney, 2002). As such, L2 practice through SCMC can be useful for developing L2 skills, including oral proficiency (Kost, 2008). But the real attraction of SCMC may lie in the features that distinguish it from the oral mode, including its non face-to-face interface, the slower pace of typing as compared to speaking, and the visual display and permanence of the language produced. Researchers investigating

SCMC and learner interaction have suggested that these features afford learners reduced anxiety and greater motivation for using the L2 (Beauvois, 1998; Chun, 1994) and enable learners to better notice L2 form (Lai & Zhao, 2006), to produce more L2, and to engage in more meaningful interaction than they might orally (Beauvois, 1998; Freiermuth & Jarrell, 2006; Kelm, 1992; Kern, 1995; Oliva & Pollastrini, 1995). In other words, this research suggests that SCMC may be better for promoting acquisition-rich interaction among FL learners than the oral mode. However, this is a hypothesis that has yet to be systematically tested. Several of the studies mentioned did not compare interaction samples generated in each mode, but rather made impressionistic comparisons based on experiences with learner oral interaction from the perspective of an instructor. Among the small number of actual comparison studies, the results have been contradictory. For example, some of these studies report increased L2 production in SCMC (Kern, 1995; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996) and increased interaction (Freiermuth & Jarrell, 2006; Kern, 1995); while others find that these results are either inconsistent or do not occur at all (Bohlke, 2003; Fitze, 2006; Warschauer, 1996). Unfortunately, the lack of a unifying theoretical and methodological paradigm among these studies complicates the interpretation and comparison of their results.

Two specific methodological factors may be responsible for much of the variability and the contradictions found among the comparison studies: the participant grouping and the language activity used to generate learner interaction. All of the studies relied on open-ended discussion activities, and all but one study focused on groups of learners as opposed to pairs. A fair amount of research, including research on SCMC, has found open-ended discussions to be far less effective in promoting meaning and form-focused interaction than information-gap tasks, which require students to exchange information to arrive at a single solution (Crookes & Rulon, 1985; Pellettieri, 2000; Pica, Kanagy & Falodun, 1993). Moreover, in a group situation, when learners are not required to offer, receive, and manipulate information from the others, it is less likely that the discourse will be interactive (Pica & Doughty, 1985; Pica & Doughty, 1988). This is particularly the case in SCMC, where every user can potentially "speak" (i.e. post their message) at the same time. The more participants within a group, the greater the number of messages that can be posted, and the harder it becomes to read and respond to them, especially since only a limited number of messages can fit on the screen at one time. When the conversation is not goal oriented (i.e. there is no specific outcome to which learners must arrive), topics can change rapidly since each learner can choose to follow up on particular messages in a different manner. Slower typists can find that by the time they compose and post their message on one topic, others in the group have already gone on to one or more different topics. The outcome, noted in several studies of SCMC interaction (e.g. O'Rourke, 2008; Smith, 2003; Warschauer, 1996), can often be disconnected discourse in which learners express themselves more than they pay attention and respond to their interlocutors.

Thus far, Fernández-García and Martínez Arbeláiz (2003) seems to be the only study that has used the SLA theoretical framework to compare oral and SCMC

interaction produced by the same FL learner dyads, or pairs. Their study involved FL learners of Spanish, and investigated whether the mode of communication would impact the extent to which the pairs engaged in the negotiation of meaning. Their data demonstrated that the dyad structure eliminated much of the problem of disconnected discourse found in previous SCMC studies involving groups of three or more participants, and their analysis revealed that the mode of communication did not impact the degree to which learner dyads engaged in negotiation. However, they found that the incidence of the negotiation of meaning among learners was very low in both modes. The researchers offer two explanations for this result. The first is that the learners shared many cultural frames of reference, which, as was discussed earlier, facilitate comprehension and can reduce the need for the negotiation of meaning. Second, they found that when the opportunity for negotiation did arise, the learners did not push themselves to successfully communicate, but rather resorted to their shared L1 to avoid communication breakdown. Fernández-García and Martínez Arbeláiz note that "learners resort to the L1 when they experience difficulties to express an idea in the L2. The use of L1-based strategies helps the learners to keep the flow of conversation going without fully exploiting their resources in the L2" (p. 126). Considering their results with those of other studies suggesting that classroom learners do not exploit the negotiation of meaning or produce pushed output in interaction, Fernández-García and Martínez Arbeláiz conclude that negotiation is not a significant resource for classroom FL learners in either SCMC or the oral mode.

Fernández-García and Martínez Arbeláiz's study (2003) represents a more carefully designed and theoretically motivated comparison than other studies conducted to date, but their conclusions still must be interpreted cautiously. First, their study focused almost exclusively on the negotiation of meaning and not on a wider range of acquisition-rich discourse moves, and like other studies, its data came from open-ended conversation activities rather than structured language tasks. One activity asked learner pairs to find out about each other's lives before coming to the university, and the other asked them to find out about each other's plans after graduation. These activities do require learners to exchange information, but since nothing is to be done with that information, learners are not compelled to listen to or comprehend their partners, nor are they required to engage in extended discussion. If learners do not find the questions or their partners' responses interesting or stimulating, they may legitimately complete the activity in three or four conversational turns, thereby reducing the opportunities to negotiate meaning, engage in LREs, and produce comprehensible output.

### **Research Questions and Procedures**

The present study was carried out within the framework of SLA theory and investigated whether SCMC would lead FL learner pairs to engage in a more acquisition-rich discourse than would interaction in the oral mode. To best study the potential of either mode of communication for promoting acquisition-rich learner discourse, it is necessary to create a context in which this type of language interaction is most likely to occur. This study therefore represents a

more carefully designed comparison than previous research because it utilizes a structured language task, rather than an open-ended conversation, as a data collection tool. As was discussed earlier, learners have been found to be far more likely to engage in acquisition-rich discourse during structured language tasks than during open-ended conversation (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Pellettieri, 2000; Pica et al., 1993).

The participants were all native English-speaking students enrolled in the same university-level intermediate Spanish course in the United States. During two different classroom sessions, learners were paired to carry out similar information-gap tasks. In one session the task was completed orally and in the other it was completed through SCMC. To achieve a valid comparison, learners were paired with the same partner for each task, but due to irregularities in attendance, only four pairs provide the data for this analysis. Seven of these students are female and one is male. All had some level of familiarity with online chat, but only one student claimed to use it somewhat frequently (e.g. to communicate with friends), and none had used SCMC to practice Spanish. Classes met three times per week for 65 minutes each. Both the textbook and the teaching methodology used in the course were communicatively oriented. While class sessions regularly included several short pair and small group activities targeting specific language structures or skills, prior to this study students had not spent the majority of a class session focusing on only one language task involving unrehearsed (i.e. spontaneous) interaction, nor had classroom activities included interaction through SCMC. At the time of the experiment, students were studying the vocabulary of technology and inventions and were learning to express conjecture in Spanish.

Following Pica et al. (1993), the tasks were designed to require learner pairs to converge on a single outcome, which was only possible by sharing the unique pieces of information that they separately held. The SCMC task was called "police sketch artist" and one student played the role of the sketch artist and the other student took on the role of a person who had been robbed of his or her most valuable possessions. The person who had been robbed was given a sheet of paper with five pictures on it, representing the stolen items. This person's objective was to describe in detail the items pictured so that the sketch artist could draw a replica of them for a police search. Learners were given 20 minutes to complete this part, at which time they were asked to switch roles, and five new pictures were introduced. In this way each student had the opportunity to play each role one time during this total of 40 minutes of interaction. The oral task, entitled "catalogue order", was very similar. This task was contextualized as a shopper who never received five items he/she purchased through a catalogue, and therefore had to describe them to a customer service agent. As with the SCMC task, learners switched roles after 20 minutes. These tasks were not tied to any specific topic or language structure that students were studying at that time, rather, they were presented as a way to create an 'immersion' situation in which students had to engage in spontaneous (i.e. unrehearsed) L2 communication without recourse to their L1. In order to provide greater challenge to learners' L2 skills, to reduce shared frames of reference, and to promote negotiation

sequences and language-related episodes, the pictures selected for the tasks were purposely odd (e.g. padlocks, hotdog cookers, special plumbing tools) and represented vocabulary that students had likely not studied previously.

Both tasks were carried out during normal class time. In the oral mode learners were seated face-to-face with a binder placed between their desks to hide the picture sheets from their partners. For SCMC, all students with the same picture sheet were seated on the same side of a campus computer lab, while their partners were visually separated, seated in a different section of the lab. The oral task was completed first, with the SCMC task occurring three days later. Immediately before each task, students were given instructions on how to complete the task and were reminded to use only Spanish. Additionally, they were told to use circumlocution in the absence of knowing exactly how to say something, to feel free to indicate communication with their partners, and to help their partners out when they needed it. They were not permitted to consult their text or a dictionary. Students were allowed the remainder of each class session (approximately 40 minutes) to complete the task. The oral task was videotaped and then transcribed, and the SCMC transcripts were printed directly from the software. Upon completion of the second task, students were interviewed about their experiences interacting in each mode.

### **Coding and Analysis**

The analysis relied on both quantitative and qualitative measures. Transcripts were first analyzed to quantify the number of turns taken and the total number of words produced in each mode. Where turns consisted solely of utterances such as "uh-huh" (i.e. back-channel cues), both the turn and the word were excluded from quantification. This allowed for a comparison of the amount of language produced by each pair in each mode. In accordance with SLA theory, the following sequences were considered examples of acquisition-rich discourse moves: the negotiation of meaning (Varonis & Gass, 1985), language-related episodes (Swain, 2000), and affective assistance (Foster & Ohta, 2005; Platt & Brooks, 1994). Negotiation routines were coded following the Varonis and Gass (1985) model. Though this model was originally conceived to describe oral interaction, several studies have demonstrated its suitability to describe electronic discourse (e.g. Lai & Zhao, 2006; Pellettieri, 2000; Smith 2003). LREs were identified as turns outside of negotiation routines in which learners requested or offered linguistic assistance, modified their own or a partner's previous utterance, or engaged in linguistic metatalk (e.g. explicitly discussed the nature of grammar structures). Affective assistance was defined as any offer of task-assistance, praise or motivation. To compare quantities of acquisition-rich interaction in both modes, an interactive turn percentage was calculated by dividing the number of total turns by the number of turns that involved any of the target discourse features. Though in principle there is an overlap between the categories (e.g. modified output can occur in LREs or in negotiation, and affective assistance can occur within negotiation and LREs or alone), turns with these overlapping features were only counted once. Because the purpose of the analysis was mainly descriptive and the sample size was small, no statistical tests were conducted.



## Results and Discussion

TABLE 1: TURNS PER PAIR IN ORAL AND SCMC MODES (N AND %)

	Pair 1		Pair 2		Pair 3		Pair 4	
	Oral	SCMC	Oral	SCMC	Oral	SCMC	Oral	SCMC
<i>Total</i>	292 +79%	163	433 +98%	218	185 +49%	124	349 +76%	198
Negotiation	190 65%	90 55%	225 52%	85 39%	72 39%	34 27%	185 53%	111 56%
LRE	12 4%	10 6%	13 3%	7 3%	15 8%	11 9%	7 2%	10 5%
Affective	35 12%	26 16%	87 20%	39 18%	37 20%	37 30%	31 9%	24 12%
Other	55 19%	37 23%	108 25%	87 40%	61 33%	42 34%	126 36%	53 27%

As Table 1 demonstrates, the analysis revealed that all pairs took more turns in the oral mode (from 49% to 98% more) than in SCMC, but this result is somewhat unsurprising, since one can verbalize utterance turns faster than type them. However, it appears that SCMC's slower pace allowed learners to pack more words into each utterance, because the large difference in turns between the two modes did not translate into large differences in the amount of language produced. Two pairs produced roughly the same number of words in both modes, one pair produced 10% more words in SCMC, and one produced 16% more words orally. The analysis also revealed that learners were highly interactive both orally and in SCMC, with the percentage of interactive (i.e. acquisition-rich) turns ranging from 60 to 81% of each pair's total turn at talk. For three pairs, the interactive turn percentage was higher in the oral mode by 1%, 4%, and 15% respectively, but for one pair it was 9% higher in SCMC. While LREs were frequent, most occurred within negotiation sequences, so the percentage of exclusively LRE turns was not higher than 10% for any pair in either mode. Exclusively affective assistance turns accounted for 9% to 20% of the interactive turns in the oral task, and 12% to 30% of the SCMC interactive turns. Three pairs produced more affective assistance turns in SCMC, 4%, 10%, and 3% respectively, and the remaining pair produced 2% more orally. Thus, as was the case with the number of words produced, with interactive turns there is no clear tendency favoring one mode over the other. The only feature that was not present in great amounts in either task was metalinguistic talk. While students provided each other linguistic assistance with grammatical features, it was not common in either mode for them to explicitly discuss the nature of grammar structures. This is to be expected, since both tasks were primarily meaning focused (Pica, 1994). Tasks with goals requiring more explicit decisions concerning grammar form would likely give rise to more LREs (Swain & Lapkin, 2001).

These results indicate that SCMC itself did not produce changes in the quantity of L2 production and interaction in a manner that would radically impact L2 acquisition. This result partially corroborates the results of Fernández-García and

Martínez Arbelaiz (2003). However, in sharp contrast to that study, and others focusing on FL learners (mentioned above), negotiated interaction and modified or comprehensible output were not scarce. These FL learners spent a large number of their turns, both orally and in SCMC, engaged in acquisition-rich dialogue, with the majority of the interaction dominated by form- and meaning-focused talk. Therefore, in response to the research question posed, the findings suggest that the mode of communication alone does not impact the quantity nor necessarily foment a more acquisition-rich quality of FL learner interaction for L2 acquisition. The following are representative samples from the oral and SCMC data:

A. *Linguistic assistance: help (oral)*

- 1 GL: ok y el juego tiene er es...
- 2 BN: ¿una mesa?
- 3 GL: no no

B. *Negotiation: feedback (oral)*

- 1 RT: creo que no es, pero es como, el mira como...
- 2 SP: ¿se mira como ese?
- 3 RT: se mira como

C. *Negotiation, linguistic and affective assistance (SCMC)*

- |   |  |    |   |
|---|--|----|---|
| 1 | LJ: La próxima es una cosa extraña       | 8  | HL: Oh, yo entiendo                               |
| 2 | HL: Dios mío. Que hices con esta cosa?   | 9  | LJ: Bien!   |
| 3 | LJ: Yo hizo para lapieces                | 10 | HL: Para hacer el punto mas agudo                 |
| 4 | HL: Para una lápiz?                      | 11 | LJ: Si, y la cosa es eléctrico                    |
| 5 | LJ: Sí                                   | 12 | HL: Es en la forma de una caja?                   |
| 6 | HL: Es un borrador para corectar?        | 13 | LJ: Mas o menos, aparece como una caja para gatos |
| 7 | LJ: No, uso la cosa para cortar el lápiz | 14 | HL: Que chistosa eres! Ok, muy bien.              |

Each of these examples demonstrates how learners used their L2 resources together and shared the role of the more capable peer to help each other stretch and grow their L2 competence. In line A1, when GL has trouble completing her sentence, BN offers the phrase "una mesa" to assist her. Note that GL did not explicitly request help, but perhaps BN sensed the need from her tone and hesitation and cooperatively offered the help. In B, we see that SP does not fully understand RT's non-target form "el mira como" and asks for clarification by correctly recasting the non-target form. RT acknowledges this correction (line B3) and modifies his original incorrect utterance to the correct form. Example C exemplifies a range of acquisition-rich discourse moves. In C1 LJ implies that her picture will be difficult to describe by stating that it is "una cosa extraña", so in C2 HL begins her utterance with the phrase, "Dios mío", which serves as affective assistance to let LJ know she understands that it might be difficult. She then asks a question to assist LJ to describe the object. In C3 when LJ tries to say she uses the object for pencils, she uses a non-target form "lapieces". Having trouble understanding, HL initiates negotiation with a clarification request that offers a

correct model, "una lápiz". When LJ replies without giving the type of detail HL needs to complete her part of the task, she asks another question, whose form provides a syntactic model for a more elaborate description: modification by a prepositional phrase of purpose.

Interestingly, in C7 we see that with HL's assistance, LJ moves to a more semantically and syntactically elaborate description of her item, and incorporates HL's earlier corrective model. She has moved from "una cosa extraña" to "yo hizo para lapieces" to "uso la cosa para cortar el lápiz", and afterwards LJ continues to use more elaborate expression. In C10, for example, LJ could have responded with a simple "sí", as she did in C5, but instead she responds with more detail, and in C13 she again uses a prepositional phrase to modify "una caja". This is precisely the type of pushed output Swain (1995) argues is necessary for linguistic development, and it was brought about through the learners' collaborative discourse. The affective support exemplified in C2, C9, and C14 played an important role in keeping learners motivated to stretch their language skills, as will be discussed later.

An important contribution of this study's findings to the growing body of scholarship on SCMC is that they strongly suggest that the nature of the language task in which learners engage will have a far stronger impact on learner discourse and its benefit for L2 acquisition than will the unique features of the SCMC mode alone. As was mentioned earlier, some studies of SCMC have suggested that unique features of this technology alone promote more interaction and a superior form of L2 practice than does FL learner interaction in the oral mode. Such an assumption renders the nature of the language task as less important than the mode of communication, and it is perhaps for this reason that the comparison studies conducted to date have relied on open-ended conversation instead of a structured language task to generate samples of interaction. As was noted previously, these studies have often come to contradictory conclusions, and as a result some have found little or no evidence of acquisition-rich discourse to examine. The present study, however, relied on the large body of empirical research on L2 interaction and language tasks (e.g. Crookes & Roulon, 1985; Doughty & Pica, 1986; Pellettieri, 2000; Pica et al. 1993) and assumed that structured language tasks would create a collaborative context which would promote high levels of acquisition-rich discourse. In each of this study's tasks, learners were given a shared goal, and in order to successfully achieve it, they had to exchange specific information in detail. As such, they could not complete the task without extended collaborative interaction, and could not easily avoid taking on linguistic challenges, as exemplified in Sample C. In line C8, HL acknowledged that she understood the object LJ described, yet because the task required her to draw an exact replica of LJ's picture, she went on to seek further clarification and more precise details from her partner (lines 10 & 12). This move resulted in more L2 production practice for HL, and it also resulted in LJ producing additional and more comprehensible L2. The tasks' requirements therefore created a context in which it was not only necessary, but also socially appropriate to question a partner's L2 usage and to offer and to receive help. The context created in open-ended discussions is quite different,

which likely explains why studies of FL interaction (oral or SCMC) which rely on that type of activity find little to no negotiated interaction. Open-ended discussion activities are not collaborative, problem-solving contexts; information is not exchanged for the purpose of jointly working towards a specific outcome or goal, so there is far less of a shared responsibility among participants to ensure the quality of the information and the accuracy of expression. Without this shared responsibility, challenging one's own L2 abilities, questioning a partner's linguistic accuracy, and asking for or offering linguistic help are more likely to be avoided because this requires hard work, and also because it may be perceived as more 'face-threatening' (Goffman, 1967). This study therefore suggests that where the goal of using SCMC is to provide FL students with meaningful L2 practice which is abundant in the types of interactive sequences that SLA theory predicts will aid L2 development, it is not enough to simply send students into cyberspace to have a conversation with others. Their interaction must be structured. Whether learners interact orally or through SCMC, they will be more likely to challenge their L2 resources, to negotiate meaning, and to ask for and to offer assistance to their partners when the task they carry out requires them to do so.

In principle then, the more this type of discourse can be promoted in learner interaction, the better the L2 experience should be for learners. However, Aston (1986) argues that in classroom practice, "tasks designed to maximize negotiation for meaning may end up de-motivating and discouraging students by making them feel unsuccessful and ineffective" (p. 134). The present study's data, which show learners engaging in negotiated interaction in an average of 54% of their turns at talk, offers a good case for testing this argument. If such a large amount of negotiated interaction were discouraging, we should expect to find large numbers of turns in which learners produced minimal L2 responses, such as, "no comprendo", and perhaps a high incidence of L1 usage; we should also expect some pairs to have given up on completing the task. But the data reveal quite the opposite result. Throughout their interactive turns, learners demonstrated sustained efforts at modifying and producing more elaborate L2 utterances and at cooperating to co-construct meaning with partners, all of which allowed all four pairs to successfully complete each task. Furthermore, only 23 L1 words were found among all the transcripts; these were mostly words such as "like" and "ok", produced mainly in the oral task. Post-task interviews offered additional evidence that these high levels of negotiated interaction were not de-motivating. All eight learners said that despite experiencing some frustration trying to communicate with their partners, they enjoyed doing the tasks, found them to be fun, and would like more of this type of L2 practice in their Spanish classes. It seems that the collaborative nature of this FL learner context, filled with both linguistic and affective assistance, was crucial in tempering learners' frustration and sustaining their motivation. One student noted, "It got really hard sometimes, but my partner and I just laughed at it because it was so funny the things we had to say when we didn't know how to say something"; while another stated, "I was trying to understand her as much as she was trying to understand me, so we were in the same situation and could sympathize with each other. We joked a lot and it was fun, and that made it easier". Perhaps most importantly, all eight learners said they felt more confident about their L2 skills after completing

the tasks. These findings indicate that extensive negotiated and pushed L2 production is not necessarily counterproductive for motivation or meaningful interaction, and that learners can appreciate conquering challenges to their L2 abilities. Tasks can be designed to maximize these opportunities, provided that the challenges they include are reasonable, given the learners' level of L2 development.

The post-task interviews offered other valuable insights for structuring FL learner interaction. For example, seven of the eight learners stated that they tried harder to use only Spanish in these tasks than they normally did in their classes. When asked why, five learners said that it was because these activities were more fun than those they normally did in classes, so they felt more motivated. Six learners said that the combination of being explicitly told not to use English (their L1), and knowing that they were being recorded and given credit for the activity were also motivating factors. Learners were also asked about the modes of communication used. All eight learners said that they enjoyed the SCMC experience, but that they felt more comfortable, or simply preferred, doing the oral task. One learner did note that using SCMC helped temper his frustration level because it gave him more time to think about what to say. Three other learners said they preferred the oral mode because it was easier. They felt that they did not have to express themselves as precisely when speaking orally as they did through SCMC: that is, they did not worry so much about verb endings or how words were spelled when they were speaking orally. These students touched on one of the bigger acquisition-related benefits of SCMC: its visual display of language may make learners more consciously aware of L2 form, and as a result, attend to the structure of their own production more than they do orally (Lai & Zhao, 2006; Smith, 2008).

## **Conclusion**

Although no appreciable differences were found in terms of the amount and types of acquisition-rich discourse learners produced in the two modes of communication, and although most of the learners involved expressed a preference for communicating orally, this does not suggest that SCMC is of no benefit for FL learners. On the contrary, this study points to both benefits and advantages of using this form of communication to enhance FL learners' language learning experience. This study's data suggest that, given a structured language task, FL learners will be likely to engage in a great deal of meaningful L2 practice of the type that SLA theory posits to be necessary or beneficial for L2 development. And while most students in this study, when asked to choose, stated they preferred interacting orally, they also stated that they enjoyed communicating through SCMC. Thus, SCMC can provide a pedagogically sound and enjoyable supplement to in-class oral interaction. One clear benefit of SCMC is that, unlike face-to-face oral interaction, it does not require that students be physically co-present to interact with each other, so FL learners can engage in L2 interaction outside of class time with classmates, with other learners across the globe, or even with native speakers. However, this study cautions instructors against relying on Internet chat rooms, as they often pose obstacles that hinder learners from engaging in acquisition-rich interaction. These rooms often involve

large numbers of chatters in open-ended communication, where topics change rapidly and messages often go without a response. In this type of context, even the most motivated learners can find it difficult to engage in negotiated interaction or push their own L2 production in extended conversation. Instructors should therefore structure chat sessions by setting up learner pairs or small groups, and assigning them goal-oriented, collaborative language tasks designed to challenge their current L2 developmental level.

This study provides other implications for using SCMC with FL students. Instructors should be explicit about their expectations for learners' performance, telling them, for example, to find alternate forms of expression when they do not know how to express themselves, to avoid using the L1, to ask for clarification when necessary, and to help each other. This study also suggests that learners may be more motivated to work hard and challenge their L2 resources in interaction when they know they will be accountable for their performance. This is one particular area where SCMC offers clear advantages over oral interaction because the discourse is automatically recorded and transcribed. Instructors should use these transcripts to evaluate the quality of learners' interactions, and offer learners credit for their efforts at participation. It is not advisable to give credit for accuracy, however, since the purpose of these interactions is developmental. The number of errors may increase when learners are stretching their L2 abilities, given the cognitive challenge involved (Robinson, 2001). Nevertheless, the transcripts can be exploited to promote metalinguistic talk through peer collaboration. Learner pairs can be asked to work with their transcripts, identify the forms with which they struggled in interaction, and discuss the correct L2 forms.

Another area where SCMC may offer an advantage over oral interaction is in promoting noticing. This study offers some additional evidence that the visual display of SCMC may heighten some learners' attention to L2 form, making them more likely to consciously attend to gaps in their abilities than they might orally. Recall that three students in this study stated that SCMC was harder for them because they had to pay more attention to correct verb endings, spelling, etc. Therefore, even in those FL classrooms where ample time is available for extended oral interaction, there is reason for instructors to consider incorporating task-based SCMC. Task-based oral interaction and SCMC may together offer a more complete and richer developmental experience for FL learners than oral interaction alone.

Finally, instructors who engage FL learners in SCMC should analyze their experiences and share their findings in scholarly publications. There is a great need to learn more about the actual processes and outcomes of interaction among learners in this unique context. This study constitutes an important contribution, but like much classroom-based research, it has several limitations. The number of participants was small; it is possible that greater differences in the amount of language and interaction generated in either mode may have been found among a larger number of learners. This study also focused on a rather homogenous group of learners at the intermediate level. It is possible that a more diverse group of FL learners at different proficiency levels would interact

differently in each mode of communication, and such differences may be of consequence for L2 development. To conclude, there is indeed much more that needs to be studied in this area.

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# Impact of Teacher/Student Conferencing and Teacher Written Feedback on EFL Revision <sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Revision, considered an essential component of the process approach to writing, refers to changes writers decide to make on their written drafts. Providing students with opinions, comments or any other type of feedback helps them to notice possible changes that may allow them to meet their audience's expectations and to improve their written work through revision (Berg, 1999; Mendoca & Johnson, 1994; Paulus, 1999; Tsui & Ng, 2000). In other words, feedback enables writers to review, analyze and modify texts to produce improved compositions. This case study documents data obtained from seven EFL (English as a Foreign Language) high school students and their teacher in Mexico. Two feedback techniques used to enhance revision were compared: Teacher/Student Conferencing (T/SC) and Teacher Written Feedback (TWF). The impact that each feedback technique produced was documented along with the participants' preferences towards feedback. Results suggest that: 1) TWF had more impact on the number of revisions made; 2) the participants' revisions focused mostly on surface aspects rather than on deeper text-based changes; finally 3) while the teacher had a strong preference for T/SC, some of the participants preferred TWF and others liked receiving both types of feedback techniques.

## Resumen

La revisión, considerada un componente esencial del proceso de escritura, se refiere a modificaciones que un escritor decide llevar a cabo en sus borradores escritos. Proveer al escritor de opiniones, comentarios o cualquier tipo de retroalimentación le ayuda a percatarse de posibles cambios que puede llevar a cabo y así satisfacer las expectativas de sus lectores así como también mejorar su trabajo a través de la revisión (Berg, 1999; Mendoca & Johnson, 1994; Paulus, 1999; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Dicho de otra manera, la retroalimentación guía a los escritores a reconsiderar, analizar y modificar sus textos para así producir mejores composiciones. Este estudio de caso documenta la información obtenida de siete alumnos de inglés como un idioma extranjera de una preparatoria mexicana y de su instructora de inglés. Dos diferentes técnicas para proporcionar retroalimentación a los trabajos escritos por los alumnos fueron comparadas: conferencias entre alumno y maestro (T/SC por sus siglas en inglés) y comentarios escritos del maestro (TWF por sus siglas en inglés). El impacto que cada técnica produjo así como también las preferencias de los participantes entorno a la técnica utilizada se comenta en este estudio. Los resultados obtenidos sugieren que: 1) la retroalimentación de forma escrita tuvo más impacto en la cantidad de revisiones producidas; 2) las revisiones que los participantes produjeron se enfocaron en su mayoría, en aspectos superficiales y no en aspectos de mayor profundidad como son los basados en el texto que pueden en ocasiones cambiar el significado del escrito; finalmente 3) mientras que la

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maestra mostraba una fuerte preferencia por la retroalimentación a través de conferencias, algunos de los participantes prefirieron el modo escrito y otros una combinación de ambas.

## Introduction

Revision, a part of process writing, is defined as any type of change made to a written text which can be done at any point of the writing process: brainstorming, drafting or revision (Freedman, 1985). Writers may decide to change their work during the brainstorming, drafting or the revision stages. Sommers (cited in Witte, 1985) defined revision as a series of changes that have a cause-effect relationship in which revision is triggered by a cue and can happen repeatedly throughout the writing process. It is not a linear activity which occurs only after writers have considered their work to be completed and then revise one more time. Instead, students can become aware of any discrepancies in their writing and intervene even if the text has not yet been completed (Allal & Chanquoy, 2004). Revision is possible in written language, in the procedures the writer follows in order to produce the text, or in the cognitive processes that the writer undergoes when revising (Freedman, 1985).

Allal and Chanquoy (2004) classify revision in two essential categories: editing and rewriting. While editing is considered to be any modification that does not change the meaning of the text, rewriting entails the transformation of meaning. Faigley and Witte (cited in Asenavage & Connor, 1994) developed a taxonomy for revision in which various "multidimensional classifications" were included. These classifications are: meaning-preserving and meaning-transformation modifications, the impact on language, the effect of revision on the text, and the specific modifications writers make to revise. These classifications have given insight into the variety of revision processes a writer can undergo (Allal & Chanquoy, 2004).

When provided with feedback, writers are able to reconsider their work, reflect on the meaning of their work and modify their information, if they consider it necessary. Therefore, feedback plays a key role in students' revision activities and it contributes to the quality of students' writing (Freedman, 1985; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Teacher feedback guides students through the revision stage in three different aspects: 1) it aids students to detect and to handle problems they may face while writing, 2) it provides opportunities to practice the writing skill through multiple drafts, and 3) it encourages students to analyze the comments received, to choose which suggestions are useful for them and to aid them in the production of new writings (Freedman, 1985).

Feedback is considered a source of input that encourages writers to improve their written work and to develop their writing skills (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Li Wai Shing, 1992). Some commonly used sources of feedback or feedback techniques are oral feedback or writing conferences, peer feedback, written feedback (end notes, side notes, or correction codes) and computer-mediated feedback (e-feedback or computer programs).

Teacher written feedback (TWF), in any of its delivery modes, allows students to benefit from working with a more experienced and knowledgeable person

(Goldstein, 2005). Providing teacher-written comments enables students to reflect upon whether what they intended to write was what the reader understood. These comments also give writers ideas for possible ways to mend the mismatch between what they intended to express and what was actually written (Goldstein, 2005). Moreover, it is permanently available for the writer to refer to when necessary and it gives the teacher the opportunity to expand her/his comments with full explanations of suggestions. However, teacher written feedback does not provide space for meaning negotiation; if the teacher's feedback is unclear or misunderstood, the writer does not have the opportunity to ask for clarification. Furthermore, writing personalized feedback to every student is time consuming for the teacher (Goldstein, 2005).

Teacher/student conferencing (TSC), another way of providing feedback to writers, is considered a "conversational dialogue" in which meanings are constantly being negotiated while a strong emphasis is made on the two-way communication (Freedman, 1985; Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Students benefit from conferencing because it encourages the development of autonomy and it allows them to construct their revision plan independently (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). This one-on-one dialogue allows the writer to reflect and change the main idea of the composition. It encourages or discourages changes on drafts and it helps the writer notice any issues that may arise in the written draft (Freedman & Sperling, 1985). Nevertheless, some researchers believe face-to-face conferencing may have certain reservations. For instance, the power relations between teacher and student may have a strong influence on the revision outcomes (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Conferencing requires large amounts of time and specific interaction skills which teachers and students may not have.

Several studies have addressed the importance of feedback in the revision process. For instance, Huang (2000) compared the effectiveness of teacher audio-taped feedback (ATF) and teacher written feedback on the drafts of twenty-three English major students at a Taiwanese university. It was found that the teacher produced more words in her feedback comments with ATF (54,258) on the final draft than with TWF (4,757). Additionally, 83% of the students stated they preferred ATF, 13% preferred TWF, and the remaining 4% preferred both.

Although Huang's study gives insight into the effectiveness of each feedback technique by analyzing the number of words that was used to give input to the participants, the study gives a limited view of how feedback and revision are related. It would be interesting to record the types of revisions participants produce and how the teacher's feedback influenced those revisions. On the other hand, the difference between Huang's study and the current study can provide information concerning how the program of study, teaching techniques, teaching methodology, and the students' personal preferences influence the writer's revision process.

Another study carried out by Conrad and Goldstein in 1991 documented how a Vietnamese student's revisions were influenced by the teacher's written feedback and conferencing sessions (cited in Goldstein, 2006). A recent revision of this study revealed that after receiving feedback through teacher/student

conferencing sessions, the participant produced revisions such as addition and deletion of information on the written drafts. However, it was found that the participant's personal beliefs, attitudes and individual factors such as the lack of adequate knowledge to write the analysis and to carry out the discussions that were required had also influenced the revisions. Conrad and Goldstein reported that when written feedback was provided, the participant's revisions and quality of written work were influenced by the feedback per se and by other factors such as the clarity with which the feedback was provided, the participant's motivation at the time of revising and the participant's lack of time to look up information concerning the topic of the assignment. Goldstein (2006) found that affective factors such as students' beliefs (any idea that the student believes is true or any information that the student becomes aware of) and perceptions (the way the student perceives feedback suggestions) can have an effect on revisions and the quality of writing. It is my opinion that in addition to students' beliefs and perceptions, the predisposition a student may have specific feedback technique can also influence the revisions made on drafts. Therefore, knowing students' feedback preferences can help writing teachers to improve their input and adapt this input to their students' needs.

As a contribution to previous EFL writing research, the current case study attempts to describe the relationship between teacher feedback and students' revisions by revealing the type and number of revisions students make due to teacher feedback. The participants of this study took part in multi-draft activities in which teacher feedback was provided using two different techniques: teacher written feedback and teacher-student conferencing. The participants made as many modifications as they considered necessary based upon the feedback they received. The source of the feedback, the number of revisions and the types of revisions carried out are documented.

This study also documents students' preferences towards the feedback techniques in an EFL context. This case study addresses the following research questions:

1. Which feedback technique produced the most revisions in participants' final drafts, Teacher Written Feedback or Teacher/Student Conferencing sessions?
2. What types of revisions did students produce?
3. What are the students' preferences towards the feedback techniques?

## **Methods**

This case study followed a mixed approach of quantitative and qualitative methods. Merriam (1998) considers case study research to be an investigation of a "bounded system" (p. 27) which focuses on a single entity or unit. It aims to describe the complexity and particularity of a single case within a certain context (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Both quantitative and qualitative methods were combined to obtain a more reliable understanding of the results of the study (Condelli & Wrigley, 2004).

The study's quantitative traits allowed the researcher to determine what the students revised as well as how the teacher feedback influenced those revisions by providing statistics concerning the number of revisions and feedback suggestions given. This numerical representation was obtained by coding each revision according to a specific taxonomy, thereby producing a more controlled result (Matveev, 2002). On the other hand, qualitative data gave the researcher an opportunity to explore the students' preferences and opinions concerning the use of feedback. This represents the affective side that quantitative data may not be able to show easily.

The data collection instruments used in this study are interviews, questionnaires, observations and the students' written work. It is important to mention that the results of this study cannot be generalized due to the small number of participants.

### **Participants**

An EFL class consisting of twenty students in a private high school was initially recruited for this study. The students were informed of the conditions of the study and what their participation would consist of. Only ten students volunteered to take part in the study. However, as the study progressed three students gradually dropped out due to absences or illness. Thus, only seven students (three females and four males) actually took part in this study. The other ten students of the class did not participate in the study; however, both the students who participated in the study and those that did not participate were treated equally during the classes and carried out all of the class activities. The work of the ten students who did not want to participate in this research was not used.

As shown in Table 1, the students' ages ranged from fifteen to seventeen. The data obtained from a background questionnaire (see Appendix A) revealed that four of the participants had previously taken a yearlong academic writing course while the three remaining students had not taken any type of previous writing preparation course. Six participants mentioned they enjoyed writing for a variety of reasons while one mentioned not enjoying writing.

TABLE 1. PARTICIPANTS' BACKGROUND

<b>Participant Number</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Writing background</b>	<b>Do you enjoy writing?</b>
1	F	15	No prior writing courses	Yes
2	M	17	1 year of academic writing	Yes
3	M	17	1 year of academic writing	Yes
4	M	16	No prior writing courses	Yes
5	F	16	1 year of academic writing	Yes
6	F	16	1 year of academic writing	Yes
7	M	16	No prior writing courses	No

The Mexican teacher participant has taught EFL for six years and had previously taught two academic writing courses.

### **Setting**

This study took place in a private Mexican high school. The students were enrolled in an intermediate EFL course as part of their semester schedule. The class met for ninety minutes daily for a total of 105 hours of class time during the fall semester of 2007.

The teacher adopted an integrated skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) approach for her lessons. Daily activities included the practice of the four skills. Grammar and vocabulary instruction were approached from an inductive perspective where students were encouraged to discover meaning and function through the use of examples and practice. The writing instruction included activities such as brainstorming, discussions, planning, writing and revising, which were carried out through individual, pair or group work.

The assignments were written in class and varied from letters, emails, descriptions and stories with a length of between 80 and 120 words. Writing was practiced two times a week and the 90-minute classes allowed for sufficient time for the stages of the process of writing to be completed. For each assignment two to three drafts were written and revised. A number of feedback strategies such as written, oral or peer feedback were used randomly with each assignment. However, both feedback techniques were used during the writing process of each assignment until the final draft was finished.

## **Procedures**

### **Data Collection**

The data collection was carried out in two phases near the end of the course. Each phase lasted two to three days with two weeks between each phase. The end of the course was chosen so as to give the participants the opportunity to be acquainted with the feedback and revision techniques. As the researcher, I was also an observer during both phases and I took notes to record the teacher's procedures in class. I did not take an active role in any of the phases.

Two writing tasks were used for this study: a letter to an imaginary friend in Phase 1 and a story in Phase 2. In Phase 1 the teacher focused on using the TWF technique and in Phase 2 attention was given to the T/SC technique. Whether a student had consented to be part of the study or not, all of the students were given the same tasks at all times. It should also be mentioned that there were other writing tasks besides these two, as well as activities in the other three skills of listening, reading and speaking.

**a) Phase 1:** On the first day, the teacher conducted a group discussion concerning a specific writing task by eliciting information such as: What would you include in a letter written to a friend that lives in a foreign country? and How would you begin to write? As the teacher and students carried out the discussion, the teacher wrote the important information on the whiteboard so that the students could refer to it later while doing their writing assignment.



Then, the participants were given ten to fifteen minutes to plan and organize their letter. Finally, all students had 30 minutes to write an 80-120 word letter to an imaginary friend. Once the session was over, the teacher collected all of the drafts for analysis. End comments were used to praise the students' work and to give organization and content suggestions while a correction code was used for language suggestions. On the second day, the teacher gave each student a copy of the correction code that was used for the language suggestions and led a group discussion to clarify any doubts.

The students were subsequently given their first draft back with TWF and had 30 to 45 minutes to revise their letters and write their final drafts. Although most of the participants finished their final drafts during class time, others were allowed to finish them as homework. The students also answered a background questionnaire (see Appendix A), which consisted of multiple choice and open-ended questions written in the participants' L1 so that students had a full understanding of each question and could express their ideas without any problems.

**b) Phase 2:** On the first day of Phase 2 – two weeks after Phase 1 - the teacher followed the same teaching procedure as in Phase 1. Discussions, elicitation, brainstorming and planning were activities done prior to the thirty minutes of class time given to writing an 80-120 word story. The teacher then collected the finished drafts. However, this time on the second day the teacher called each student to her desk to lead personal T/SC sessions and give them her feedback orally. They also had the opportunity to interact directly with the teacher to clarify any doubts. The amount of time dedicated to each student was approximately five minutes. During this time the rest of the class was given a revision activity to work on from a previous writing assignment. Once the feedback session was over, each student reviewed their first draft, revised it, wrote their final draft and turned it in. As in Phase I, the teacher received the final drafts, gave written feedback and assessed the writing by giving each story a score. The students were given the opportunity to clarify any doubts concerning the scores.

Once the class was over, the researcher carried out a semi-structured interview with the teacher in the teachers' lounge in order to gather information concerning the teacher's opinions. A list of questions was used as a flexible guide for the interview depending on the teacher's responses. The interview was recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

In addition, at the end of Phase 2 the students answered a ten-item questionnaire (see Appendix B) to obtain their perceptions and preferences regarding the two feedback techniques.

### **Data Analysis**

The information obtained from the four drafts, the TWF and transcriptions of the T/SC sessions, were analyzed in two steps.

**Step 1)** Draft one was compared with the final draft for both tasks. Revisions were coded using Faigley and Witte's (cited in Asenavage & Connor, 1994)

Taxonomy of Revisions (Appendix C). This taxonomy describes surface and deeper, text-based changes and includes a variety of revision categories for each type of change (modification). Therefore, it allowed the researcher to identify the types of changes students had made.

**Step 2)** After each revision was coded, the suggestions given in the TWF and T/SC sessions were noted and compared with the final drafts of each task. The purpose was to identify which revisions were a product of the teacher's input. Each revision was marked TF (teacher feedback) when it was the result of the teacher's feedback and SSR (student self-revision) when it was the result of the student's own initiative. This allowed the researcher to identify which revision was a product of which type of feedback technique.

Lastly the teacher interview was analyzed with the purpose of identifying the teacher's opinions concerning the use of feedback and her preference for feedback. Also the student's preference questionnaires were analyzed in order to obtain the students' perceptions and preferences concerning the feedback techniques.

## Results

**Question 1** Which feedback technique produced the most revisions on participants' final drafts, TWF or T/SC sessions? The data obtained indicates that participants made a total of 75 revisions on Task 1. As shown in Table 2, the majority of the revisions were a result of TWF rather than of the students' own initiative. On the other hand, data from Task 2 (T/SC) indicates that the students made a total of 32 changes to their texts (see Table 3). Once again, the input obtained from the teacher during T/SC produced the majority of revisions.

TABLE 2. NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF REVISIONS MADE ON TASK 1

Revisions	Number	Percentage
Revisions as a result of TWF (TF)	54	72
Revisions students made on their own (SSR)	21	28
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF REVISIONS</b>	75	100%

TABLE 3. NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF REVISIONS MADE ON TASK 2

Revisions	Number	Percentage
Revisions as a result of T/SC (TF)	18	56
Revisions students made on their own (SSR)	14	44
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF REVISIONS</b>	32	100%

The information obtained suggests that TWF resulted in more revisions, with a total of 75 changes, than T/SC which produced a total of 32 revisions.

**Question 2** What types of revisions did students produce? Students modified a total of 107 items on which a variety of revision techniques were carried out. As

shown in Table 4, participants reorganized information, deleted information, added information, substituted words, deleted words, corrected spelling, paraphrased, changed tense number or modality, and corrected punctuation. Surface changes (change of tense, number or modality, deletion of words, paraphrasing, and punctuation) were the types of revisions students carried out the most.

TABLE 4. TYPES OF CHANGES

Type of Changes	Number	Percentage
<b>Text-based Changes</b>		
Reorganization	1	1
Deletion of information	4	4
Addition of information	12	11
TOTAL	17	16
<b>Surface Changes</b>		
Substitution	4	4
Deletion of words	4	4
Spelling	14	13
Paraphrasing	15	14
Tense, number, modality	24	22
Punctuation	29	27
TOTAL	90	84
<b>TOTAL OF TEXT-BASED AND SURFACE CHANGES</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>100</b>

An analysis of the first and final drafts shows that the students made more surface modifications (84%) than text-based changes (16%).

**Question 3** How do students perceive the feedback techniques? The data revealed that the seven participants considered both techniques to be useful for various reasons. The seven participants perceived TWF to be useful because: 1) the students believed they became aware of their mistakes, 2) others felt that it enabled them to remember what they need to improve in their writing, and 3) others stated:

*"It is motivating."*

*"It allows me to improve writing."*

Additionally, the seven participants considered T/SC useful for various reasons and commented:

*"It allows me to improve my writing."*

*"It is easier for me to understand."*

*"I can learn better and clear doubts faster."*

Despite the usefulness of each technique that the students commented upon, they had preferences. Three students stated they preferred TWF; two students preferred T/SC and only one student preferred a combination of the two techniques. The remaining participant did not express a preference for either technique. However, due to the small number of participants, more research should be carried out.

Concerning the teacher's interview after Phase 2, the teacher mentioned she believed that it was easier for students to understand what they needed to improve upon in their writing using the TWF technique. However, she perceived T/SC sessions to be useful because they allowed her to negotiate meaning with the students and to be more specific in her comments. Of the two techniques, her preference was T/SC for feedback purposes. She also mentioned that she believed that using revision techniques and teaching writing with a process approach was a good way of guiding students with their writing.

The assignments that were carried out throughout the course and the study seemed to contribute to the construction of the instructor's opinion. The results of this study were only shared with the teacher after the data analysis had been carried out with the purpose of avoiding any influence on her opinions and preference.

## **Discussion of Results**

The results obtained in this study are consistent with those obtained by Paulus (1999). In this study the first and final drafts of 11 ESL (English as a Second Language) students were compared and the revisions were categorized. Paulus' (1999) data revealed that 62.5% of the revisions (527 modifications) were surface-level modifications while the remaining revisions were meaning-changing modifications. In the current study, a total of 107 revisions were made on Tasks 1 and 2, of which 84% (90 revisions) were surface changes and 16% (17 revisions) were text-based changes. Both of these studies suggest that even though students made mostly meaning-preserving changes, they were indeed capable of modifying the meaning (text-based changes) of their first draft.

This study contradicts the results of Asenavage and Connor (1994). Their data showed that 60% of the revisions made by their participants were a result of the writer's self-initiation – self-revision. Only 35% were a result of teacher feedback. The remaining 5% were revisions made from feedback from the participants' peers. It is important to mention that Asenavage and Connor (1994) reaffirm the idea of triggering student self-initiated revisions through teacher input. In the current study, students made fewer self-initiated revisions (SSR) on both Tasks 1 and 2. Only 33% (35 modifications) of the revisions made on both tasks were a product of the students' self-initiated revisions. Most changes were a result of either the TWF or the T/SC. The results obtained from both studies indicate that teacher input may play a major role in triggering students' written analysis and revision processes. However, revisions that were made by the students themselves without any input from other people cannot always be

expected especially if the teacher's teaching methods do not train students to revise on their own. Participants in the current study mentioned they preferred TWF and this technique produced the most revisions. This seems to indicate that students' preferences can influence the modifications made on final drafts. Therefore, it is important to take into account students' opinions when teaching and when teachers form their rationale for the use of feedback. Again, due to the small number of participants, more research is needed.

Future research might focus more on finding how TWF or TSC can influence participants' revision processes. By considering how these two techniques of feedback may or may not affect students' written outcomes, we can improve our writing lessons and provide opportunities for students to improve their work. It would be interesting to investigate teacher-student relationships; for example how the teacher's power over the students during conferencing sessions can influence participants' revisions and improvement in writing. Understanding the affective domain of the relationship between feedback and revision may allow writing teachers to improve their techniques and help students feel more comfortable with writing. On the other hand, during the T/SC sessions that were carried out in this study, participants did not take notes of the teacher's comments. Instead they needed to reply orally regarding their understanding of the received feedback and the teacher's notes written on the draft. Further research could focus on how students' note taking could influence the number and type of revisions that were produced.

In conclusion, the data obtained from the written drafts, the feedback comments and the conferencing transcripts revealed that participants' were more influenced by written feedback than by conferencing sessions. The students made more surface-level revisions (change of tense, number or modality and punctuation changes) than text-based modifications (reorganized information, deleted information and added information). The data obtained from the interview with the teacher and preference questionnaires from the students revealed that students preferred written comments over conferencing sessions while the teacher preferred giving oral comments in conferencing sessions. Yet, the number of participants was small and more research needs to be carried out.

### **Teaching Implications for Instruction and Conclusions**

The results obtained in this study suggest that feedback techniques can influence students' revision outcomes. Furthermore, it gives an insight into the different techniques that EFL teachers can use to motivate their students to improve their texts and how the teacher's feedback can influence the revisions of students. For instance, teacher's written input can motivate students to analyze their writing and to make any modification they consider appropriate even if the teacher does not necessarily suggest an analysis or modification. That is, feedback can encourage students to initiate their own corrections. I believe that one of the main purposes of training students to revise their writing is to lead them to self-analysis and self-improvement in their writing. On the other hand, rather than focusing on the surface level problems such as punctuation, tense or modality, teacher feedback may focus on the overall intention of the writing and any text-

based aspects that may improve the meaning of the text. This refers to making sure that students' intentions when writing match what they actually wrote. In other words, if the meaning of the written text is obscured or does not match what the writer intends to communicate, then the teacher may need to focus her or his feedback on text-based aspects. The teacher should keep in mind the needs of the students when choosing a feedback technique or a combination of feedback techniques. Taking into account the writers' feedback preference may help the teacher to make a suitable selection.

This study gives a perspective on how a teacher and seven students perceive feedback techniques. However, the results obtained in this study cannot be generalized to all EFL contexts due to the small number of participants. Therefore, it is of major importance to carry out more research in other EFL contexts that can lead us to provide adequate feedback which can best serve our students' needs.

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**APPENDIX A: BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE****Cuestionario Sobre Experiencias de los Estudiantes con la Escritura**

Este cuestionario tiene el propósito de saber más sobre ti y sobre tus experiencias anteriores con la escritura. Por favor lee cuidadosamente las preguntas y responde lo más sinceramente posible. No es necesario que escribas tu nombre.

1. ¿Te gusta escribir en español? a) Si  ¿Por qué? \_\_\_\_\_  
b) No  ¿Por qué? \_\_\_\_\_
2. ¿Cuál es tu principal dificultad cuando escribes en español?
3. ¿Te gusta escribir en inglés? a) Si  ¿Por qué? \_\_\_\_\_  
b) No  ¿Por qué? \_\_\_\_\_
4. ¿Cuál es tu principal dificultad cuando escribes en inglés?
5. De los siguientes tipos de escritos ¿Cuál es el que prefieres escribir?  
a) Ensayo  b) Resumen  c) Artículo  d) Reporte   
e) Diario personal  f) Cuentos  g) Poesía  h) Carta
6. ¿Por qué lo prefieres?
7. ¿Cuál te parece más fácil?
8. ¿Cuál de los géneros te parece más difícil?
9. ¿Qué tanta importancia piensas que le daban tus profesores a la escritura en las escuelas en las que has estudiado?  
**Primaria:** Mucha  Regular  Poca   
**Secundaria:** Mucho  Regular  Poco   
**Preparatoria:** Mucho  Regular  Poco
10. Cuando escribías trabajos escolares, ¿recibías comentarios por escrito del maestro?  
a) Si  b) No



## **APPENDIX B: PREFERENCE QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **Cuestionario de Preferencias**

Este cuestionario tiene el propósito de saber cuáles fueron tus experiencias con los escritos en clase y tu opinión sobre los comentarios proporcionados por tu profesor. Así como también tener conocimiento de cuáles son las preferencias de los estudiantes. Lee cuidadosamente las preguntas y responde lo más sinceramente posible. No es necesario que escribas tu nombre.

1. ¿Cuál crees que es la mejor manera de aprender a escribir en inglés?
2. ¿Cuándo escribiste los textos, qué fue lo que se te hizo más difícil?
3. ¿Cuándo escribiste los textos, qué fue lo que se te hizo más fácil?
4. ¿Crees que es importante revisar tu escrito una vez terminado? ¿Por qué?
5. ¿Cuándo el maestro te dio su opinión por escrito, tomaste en cuenta todas las sugerencias al momento de mejorar tu escrito? ¿Por qué?
6. ¿Hubo algunas sugerencias que no tomaste en cuenta? ¿Por qué?
7. ¿Cuándo el maestro te dio su opinión oralmente, tomaste en cuenta todas las sugerencias al momento de mejorar tu escrito? ¿Por qué?
8. ¿Hubo algunas que no tomaste en cuenta? ¿Por qué?
9. ¿De los dos tipos de comentarios, cuál fue el que tomaste más en cuenta para mejorar tu ensayo? ¿Por qué?
10. ¿Cuál de los dos tipos de sugerencias prefieres? ¿Por qué?

**APPENDIX C: TAXONOMY OF REVISION CHANGES**

Taken from Asenavage, K. & Conner, U. (1994). Peer response groups in ESL writing classes: How much impact on revision? *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 3(3), 257-276.

<b>Surface Changes</b>	
<b>Formal Changes</b>	<b>Meaning-Preserving Changes</b>
Spelling	Additions
Tense, number, and modality	Deletions
Abbreviations	Substitutions
Punctuation	Permutations
Format	Distributions
	Consolidations
<b>Text-Based Changes</b>	
<b>Micro-structure</b>	<b>Macrostructure</b>
Additions	Additions
Deletions	Deletions
Substitutions	Substitutions
Permutations	Permutations
Distributions	Distributions
Consolidations	Consolidations

The terms included in the table have the following meanings:

**Substitutions:** exchange words for others; keeping the same meaning.

**Deletions:** delete a word without transforming the meaning of the sentence.

**Permutations:** reorganize words or phrases; paraphrasing.

**Microstructure changes:** reorganize small parts of paragraphs without changing the meaning of the text.

**Macrostructure changes:** transform the idea or message of the draft; paragraphs may be deleted, added, rearranged and finally combined.

## **Making Student-centered Teaching Work**

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As teachers, we are all interested in creating an environment where our students can learn and where the learning environment is engaging, motivating, and exciting. In short, we like to see our students succeed. In reality, however, we often experience quite the opposite. Our students are neither motivated nor engaged. They are rarely excited about learning. They often forget more than they remember.

The reality of teaching English/ESL for many is that classes are large (35-50 students), last for 45-50 minutes, and follow a prescribed syllabus. Interactions in classrooms occur through simulations, readings, audiotapes or CDs. There is little, if any, chance for interaction with people outside the classroom, so learning the language becomes disconnected from use outside of the classroom.

Students are assessed based on how well they perform on written tests (usually grammar-based), and on the basis of these tests receive an evaluation of passing or failing with the requisite awards or penalties. Teachers, in turn, are evaluated on the basis of how well their students perform on these tests and are labeled as good or bad teachers.

No wonder both students and teachers become complacent or unmotivated under such circumstances. It is no surprise that such an environment does little to capture the imagination, nurture the creativity, or foster the success of either student or teacher (Dörnyei, 2005; Hansen and Stephens, 2000; Pintrich and Schunk, 1996). Research shows what teachers have long known: that students learn if they are able to put to work the knowledge and skills they have, if they put to work their creativity and their own inventiveness, and if they can work together to gain new knowledge and skills (Dieu, 2005; Nation and Newton, 2009).

Teachers work best when they have students who are motivated and who challenge the teacher. Teachers are excited when they see positive results for their students, when teacher efforts are recognized by the administration and the staff, and when teachers are allowed to use their own professional skills and knowledge in creating classrooms that work.

If data, intuition and experience all support the fact that traditional lecture or teacher-centered classrooms are not the most effective, then what alternatives are available? One solution is to create student-centered classrooms. As English teachers, this translates into one thing: giving the students the opportunity to practice the language in situations where they will actually use it (cf. Izumi 2002;

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Swain, 2000). By creating classrooms that achieve this objective, we challenge ourselves as teachers, develop our own professionalism, motivate students, and give them a chance to meet their educational and personal goals. Such classrooms are generally thought to produce better students and more effective learning ("Communicative language teaching", 1991; Brown, 2003; Norman and Spohrer, 1996; Nation, 1993; Nunan, 1991; Richards and Rogers, 1986).

### **Communicative Language Teaching**

Much has been written about communicative pedagogies and approaches (cf. Littlewood, 1981; Roberts, 2004). There is some disagreement on exactly what these terms mean and whether or not they are now an old style which is being replaced by other newer approaches (Bax, 2003; Thompson, 1996). However, recycling that discussion is not useful in this context. It is necessary to understand what "communicative classroom" means in the current context.

A communicative classroom (Brown, 2003; Nation, 1993) is one in which the student has a chance to learn authentic language. Authentic language is that which is actually used in the real world to negotiate meaning and to accomplish tasks. It also means students are able to learn how to extend the language beyond the classroom and to enjoy opportunities to practice the language.

The classroom environment places emphasis on interaction, conversation, and language use, rather than on learning about the language. There is a focus on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language. Authentic texts are introduced (Nunan, 1991).

Communicative classes focus on communication rather than on grammar, although grammar is an essential element in the communicative classroom. The functional use of language in different social situations or contexts is emphasized and classroom activities relate language form and function as well as meaning (Larsen-Freeman, 2003).

Typical activities in less communicative classrooms tend to focus on accuracy and reflect classroom use of the language. Such activities focus on how to form correct examples of language, have students practice the language out of context, practice using small samples of the language, and often control the choice of the language to be used. These types of activities are grammar-based and do not focus on the functional use of the language in real situations.

Some examples of such traditional accuracy-based activities include completing a drill in small groups, writing several sentences using the pattern just completed and having students read them to a partner or to the class, and doing substitution drills. These are the kinds of activities often used in classrooms because they are thought to allow repeated practice in the use of a pattern. Through such repetition, it is believed that students retain and "learn" the language.

One major issue with these kinds of activities is that they are often created without any context and most certainly without a relevant context for students. Often tasks are a series of isolated sentences where the student has to fill in the

correct form of the verb, the correct article, or the correct pronoun. Vocabulary in such sentences may be unfamiliar to the students.

Further, these kinds of drills or activities provide little opportunity for the creativity and inventiveness of students (or even for teachers). While they are easy to grade, it keeps the focus of the class on the teacher, on the presentation of the materials, and on the completion of relatively rote tasks.

More communicative classrooms involve more fluency-oriented activities, which reflect the natural use of language, focus on achieving communication, require the use of communication strategies, link language to context, and use or produce unpredictable language (cf. Richards, 2004). One example of such proficiency-oriented activities includes student-created role-plays where it is necessary to resolve a problem (e.g. describing an accident or making a purchase at a department store). Another is creating a map of a neighborhood or city and giving directions to a specific place. Other ideas include information gap activities or jigsaw activities where students must communicate to solve a task.

In the student-centered classroom the teacher is a facilitator who guides students in their language acquisition (Brown, 2003; Hong, 2008). The role of the student is to perform, describe, and relate. The role of the teacher is to guide, facilitate, assist, and evaluate. Such classes focus on the needs and abilities of the students and center on topics that are relevant to the students' lives, needs, and interests (Richards, 2004).

## **Student-centered Classrooms**

Student-centered classrooms generally take some kind of communicative approach to language learning. This means shifting the focus from grammar-based competence to more communicative competencies. The focus of learning is to make real communication; to provide opportunities to experiment and try to use the language; to provide opportunities to develop both accuracy and fluency; and to link the different skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking).

This description is a good place to start thinking about student-centered classrooms, but as teachers we need to be practical and actually create such environments. How can we create such classrooms?

### ***Creating Student-centered Classrooms***

However, an important question remains. What exactly do I, as a teacher, need to do to make my classroom more student-centered? There are a nearly infinite number of ways to do this. Below are some ideas which have proven successful, particularly in Mexico, for creating effective student-centered classrooms. These suggestions have been implemented by a number of Mexican teachers in a variety of schools (elementary, secondary, technical colleges, and universities). These teachers have reported a lot of success in their classes and improved learning on the part of their students (Griffith and Lim, 2007; 2008).

1. Have an explicit learning goal for each and every class. Tell the students what that goal is so that they know what they are doing and why they are doing it. This means that teachers need to focus each day on a small and manageable

chunk of language. Too often we have one grammar issue, one functional objective, some vocabulary, and even more--all to be accomplished in a single day's lesson. Try to remember that 45 minutes is not a long time and we must be sure that each objective fits within the time frame that we have.

What is an explicit learning goal? It is simply the things that we want the students to be able to do at the end of the lesson. These may include language goals such as "talk about rules and obligations." This language function could be discussed in a variety of contexts including, for example, whether or not it is appropriate to bring a cell phone to class. Other examples of language goals might include asking for and giving information about someone or stating likes and dislikes.

Goals could also be grammar-based, such as "using the simple present tense to express daily routines" or "simple future versus simple present tense." However, in the case of these, make sure that they are specific enough to be attainable objectives in a single lesson. Making goals that are too general will lead to a loss of focus. It is difficult to assess the success or failure of such lessons if there is no specific task or ability to be judged.

Good learning objectives express a specific target. It is possible to determine whether or not students have met that objective by witnessing their performance. Examples of good objectives would be such things as "being able to order a meal at a restaurant", "describing what one did last weekend", or "being able to identify 10 types of foods." These are good because students know exactly what they have to be able to do at the end of the class. At the end of the class, it is possible to determine whether or not the student is able to do these tasks. Further, these are small enough chunks of language that they will not overwhelm the student.

2. Move away from practice activities that focus on accuracy (i.e. grammar-based mechanical lessons; cf. Richards, 2004). Such lessons might be those found in student workbooks which require students to select the correct verb form or article and fill the blank to complete the sentence. Rather, use activities that focus on fluency. In this case, what we mean is that we require the students to use the language accurately in more authentic situations. We need to shift to activities that measure grammatical proficiency by the ability to apply the grammar in the student's own speech or writing. This will lead to a higher probability that students will be able to function in the language outside the classroom.

3. Be sure that the aims of the activity are clear to the students. Tell or show them how such activities will help them to meet the stated objectives of the day. If students understand why they are doing a given task and if they understand how it helps to meet the day's objectives, it may lead to enhanced learning.

4. Make explanations and instructions clear. It is probably best to model the activity with a student. Showing is always better than explaining, especially in classes with beginning level students. Students will not perform well if they do not know what they are supposed to do or how they are supposed to do it.

5. Include a variety of activities. Conversations with teachers in Mexico suggest that it is better to try not to have more than two practice activities of the same type in a day or more than four in a week (Griffith and Lim, 2007). Try to mix such things as fill-in-the-blank, dictation, find the differences, talk to a partner, describe something and so on. Too much of a single type of activity diminishes classroom effectiveness for several reasons. First, not all students are good at a single type of task. By varying your tasks, you meet the needs of learners with a variety of learning styles as well as provide a chance for all students to do well (Reid, 1995). Second, boredom can set in when students do the same thing repeatedly. Boredom diminishes motivation and learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Third, practicing in a variety of contexts allows the students to extend their range of skills to a variety of situations (Joe, 1998).

6. Link new material with old experiences. Use the student's background knowledge and link it to the current material being taught. Strategies include brainstorming, quick reviews, discussions (class or group), and using Venn Diagrams to show students where the overlap is.

Suppose that the objective of the day is to express future plans with "be going to." Instead of opening a text and having students look at the vocabulary, read the pattern, listen to an explanation of the grammar point, and then fill in the blanks, a better approach might be to link it to the student's actual lives. Here, the language is personalized and the student has more reason to learn. A good strategy would be to ask students what kinds of things they like to do during vacations or on the weekends. Then you could use this as a base for expressing specific plans that the students are going to do. Notice that they are not being asked to use a pattern they have not yet learned. We are simply asking the students to brainstorm a list of things they like to do or typically do on weekends or in the summer or for a holiday.

This type of brainstorming allows all students to participate in the class. It also allows students to be able to use a variety of vocabulary they already have in English. If students do not know the English vocabulary, it is fine to allow them to express it in Spanish (or their native language) and you can teach that vocabulary later. This is vocabulary that they are more likely to remember because it is relevant to them and to their lives. You can then use these ideas generated by the students to teach the objective.

7. Use production activities. Think about a common activity for students where student A has one picture and student B has another. Students are asked to work in groups to find as many differences as they can. Is this activity a communicative production activity?

The answer to this question has to do with how many language patterns the students are given and if they just read questions in a box or in a set pattern. In such cases, this would not be a truly communicative activity even though it might be meaningful. We would probably need to go beyond this type of practice to get a student-centered classroom because we need to make this activity really relate to the students' lives. How does finding differences in pictures of a family at a beach, for example, relate to the students' actual lives? How could you as a

teacher structure or create an activity that would be meaningful to the students and motivate them to use this language outside of class?

A potentially more effective version of this task would be to put students in pairs or groups and ask them to describe their rooms or homes to their partners. They then work to determine the number of similarities (e.g. we each have a bed) and the differences (e.g. my room is red but yours is blue). The results can be reported to the class. In this way, students are talking about things they know, about things in their real lives, and about things that matter to them. Further, the language is more likely to be produced rather than read because the nature of the task requires some unpredictable use of the language.

8. Use the students as a resource. Let the students provide examples and illustrations. This accomplishes several objectives. First, the examples come from the students' interests and, therefore, activate student background knowledge. Such examples are likely to be more relevant, understandable, and useful than randomly-generated materials that may have little, if any, relationship to the students. It also makes the students participants in the creation of their own learning. Rather than giving them all of the information and examples they can use, they must create their own while being scaffolded by the teacher. This makes it more likely that students will remember. Additionally, we have the advantage that the higher-order thinking skills will be activated because in order to provide a relevant example, students must understand and apply the principles.

9. Extend the language learning beyond the classroom. Try to create materials and assignments that make the students work and use English outside of class. Though some may teach in areas where native English speakers are in short supply, this does not mean that such a strategy is unworkable. Indeed, in this highly technological age, it is possible to access the world and native speakers using the Internet. Students can talk, email, or research materials in English and use the information to complete assignments or create more activities.

10. Try to create activities that employ higher-order thinking skills. Simply having students read, recognize, and remember is not likely to result in successful learning. Students learn when they have a need and when they have to use the material to accomplish some task. Simply being exposed to information, repeating it a couple of times, especially in random or irrelevant contexts, is likely to result in forgetting. Higher-order thinking skills require students to be more engaged in the task in order to accomplish it (Bloom, 1956; Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia, 1973).

These higher-order thinking skills include analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Tasks might include such things as deciding which activities to do for a class presentation for parents' night, creating a city map with the most important tourist destinations in your city with directions and descriptions, or planning a party or event for a class. All of these require discussion, thinking, planning, evaluating, and participation.



## Conclusion

The question for teachers is how to create classrooms where students will be motivated and engaged, where they can communicate using English with others, and where they become more independent and interdependent in their learning. Creating student-centered classrooms can significantly increase the probability of accomplishing this task. Students are provided with an opportunity to expand their knowledge beyond the original context and beyond the classroom. These classrooms focus on more than what Hall (1989) refers to as simple classroom situational language and allow for more cultural and contextual knowledge which makes for more accurate use of the language in context.

It is important for teachers to keep in mind the following. First, not all speaking or writing is truly communicative. Students reading a dialogue in front of a class or performing a role-play or describing a picture in a textbook is not necessarily a communicative production. Effective communicative tasks need to have a problem that needs to be resolved or a task that needs to be completed using students' critical thinking skills. The task should have some consequence or relevance to the students working on it and preferably this relevance should be beyond the "grade" for completing the exercise. These are the types of tasks that produce the most learning (cf. Pica and Doughty, 1985).

Further, students should be engaged in the tasks through the use of higher-order thinking skills. Going beyond the "read, recognize, and remember" aspects of language suggests that students will be able to retain language and structures longer and will be able to generate useful language in unfamiliar situations. This happens because a need is created when students move into the stages of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Such tasks cannot normally be done with "canned" speech. These provide the opportunity and necessity for all students to participate and learn.

Remember to choose an objective that can actually be accomplished in a day. Present small chunks of material each session making sure that students have enough time to practice and reflect on that material. Give students a variety of tasks to perform and make sure that the tasks are specifically related to the objective, contain little if any new material beyond that presented in the lesson, employ a variety of activity types, and include at least one production activity. You may not be able to have true production activities every day but there should be at least one for every unit.

Try to find ways for students to use their language outside of the classroom. This could be through homework. It could be through email or pen pals or other person-to-person strategies (i.e. P2P) (cf. Dieu, 2005; Dieu, Campbell, and Ammann, 2006). This will make the language seem more real and motivate students more.

These strategies have been reported by many Mexican teachers of English to result in more effective and engaging classes, and hence more motivated students. Making these changes and employing these strategies are likely to create better results for teachers and students.

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## **Book review: *Common Grounds, Contested Territory. Examining the Roles of English Language Teachers in Troubled Times***

**MARK A. CLARKE, (2007): ANN ARBOR: MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY PRESS.**

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Although the area of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has been dominated for decades by a cognitivist perspective, many authors have criticized its underlying computer metaphor where the learner receives *input*, processes it in the form of *intake* and then produces *output* which in turn mirrors exactly – in the ‘ideal’ case—the input (Kramsch 2003, Lantolf 2000). The search for new approaches attempts to account for the fact that our students are not passive recipients of information but human beings who learn in particular institutional and cultural contexts. In order to explain the kinds of socially ratified knowledge, researchers have turned to the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1978) who emphasized the importance of interaction, communication and scaffolding in the development of any higher cognitive ability. While this socio-cultural perspective provides fruitful insights into the complexity of formal foreign language learning, its underlying metaphor of the human being as an *apprentice* (and concomitantly the teacher as a *Meister*) captures learning only as a form of *socialization*. Again, we cannot account for the complex relationships between individuals who have specific motivations and occupy certain positions in particular societies which allow or limit these aspirations to be realized. Recently, a third strand has been developing that explores the biological metaphor of ecology for the field of Second and Foreign Language Learning.

Clarke adopts the ecology metaphor not only to explore the complexities of teaching- learning but also to help foreign language teachers in pursuit of their professional day-to-day activities and struggles. Through a list of guiding questions, he makes his readers reflect upon institutional policies, practices and constraints and sets these in relation to the educational philosophy and values teachers hold. He thereby opens up a conceptual space for teachers to reflect upon whether these two perspectives are in line or whether they diverge, and if so, to what extent. Clarke’s main aim is to make us aware of the fact that not all institutional ‘givens’ are unchangeable and that teachers’ voices should be taken into account in institutional decisions whenever possible since it is the teachers, not administrators, who are the experts when it comes to actual teaching and learning.

In order to create this awareness the author guides the reader through a multidimensional journey of all contexts (including conceptual ones) that impact upon and that we co-construe in our profession. In the first chapter he introduces the theoretical tenants of an ecological perspective on teaching under the title “Whose questions count?” and gives practical examples of how international

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relations, politics of national education, exam boards, administrators, managers and coordinators influence our daily teaching practices. He emphasizes the importance of not only being well-informed about these different factors but also of positioning oneself critically in relation to their discourses and practices. Since such a stance has to be reflexive and “clearly articulated” (p. 10), chapter two focuses on our own views and beliefs of learning and teaching in light of recent discussions in the field. In this, as in other sections of the book, the author does not only present academic theories and leave it up to the readers to infer the link to their teaching practices, but he also guides them through these complex territories by means of exploratory questions and concrete examples.

Chapters three (“Teaching as Learning, Learning as Life”) and four (“Philosophy as Autobiography”) deepen this self-exploration but link our philosophical and professional stance to ourselves as people with specific values and principles. By introducing action research, its main ideas and benefits, Clarke not only promotes professional development but also a new connection between our professional and personal selves. As he convincingly argues, this relation is increasingly lost in the hectic life of many teachers who work at several institutions at the same time, have only part-time contracts and usually do not receive social benefits.

Chapters five and six both deal with the concept of authenticity which the author regards as a means to harness the curiosity and enthusiasm of learners and hence the meaningfulness of learning. Since he is acutely aware that the creation of authentic lessons might be understood as requiring more preparation time, he presents a variety of examples of subtle adjustments that connect the classroom to relevant issues for both teachers and students.

In chapters seven (“Teachers and Gurus”), eight (“Teaching to Standards: How to and Why Not”) and nine (“Changing Schools: Creating Disturbances and Alarming Your Friends”), the author moves to external factors that influence our teaching practices. While the first of the three might be more relevant for teachers in the U.S. than in Mexico (Clarke states that in the current climate of accountability teachers are pressured to cite ‘authorities’ and advises strongly against following fashions), the latter two discuss the relation between institutions and individual agency. The author moves here from questions about the nature of the standards and educational change, their origins and their impacts upon our teaching practices to a discussion of how we can position ourselves to balance external mandates against our own sense of what is right.

Taking as a starting point the contested nature of our professional territory, as indicated in the title of his monograph, Clarke fills an enormous gap and is of invaluable help to foreign language teachers in current times of educational and social change. Having been a teacher himself for decades, the author mediates in a very accessible style between theoretical discussions and actual practical teaching concerns. Clarke motivates practitioners to reflect upon taken-for-granted assumptions and to develop their own theoretically informed perspectives. He argues forcefully that decision making about what should happen in the classroom has been further and further removed from teachers and presents the implications of this increasing ‘managerialization’ of our profession. His adoption of the ecological perspective allows him to bring into focus the

different contextual and institutional factors that impact upon the mundane decisions we face every day in class. His main contribution is to show that there is space for individual agency and change in these processes.

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