

BEYOND PRESCRIPTIVE APPROACHES AND TOWARDS LOCALIZED KNOWLEDGE: THE
EXPERIENCES OF ALTERNATIVELY CERTIFIED FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS AS THEY
ATTEMPT TO IMPLEMENT COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN U.S. URBAN
SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The acknowledgment of the role that diverse sociocultural realities have on teachers' pedagogical choices have led to the emergence of context-sensitive pedagogies demanding the abandonment of hegemonic discourses such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Studies on CLT's exportability for non-Western countries have recently proliferated in foreign language literature. Critical studies on the suitability of CLT within disenfranchised communities in the U.S. are however non-existent.

This qualitative multicase study addressed a gap in the literature by exploring the situated practices of alternatively certified FL teachers practicing in urban schools in the U.S. Specifically, this study examined a) FL teachers understanding of CLT and b) the contextual factors hindering or promoting the implementation of CLT in urban schools. Using Activity Theory (AT) as an analytical tool, the study unveiled a plethora of tensions between CLT and the pedagogical approaches dominant in urban schools. Findings from this study suggest that a strong *culture of rules and assessments*, lack of culturally relevant materials and major philosophical incongruence amongst those in charge of participants' evaluation and development had a strong effect on teachers' understanding, perception and implementation of CLT. Moreover, lacking the language and professional support they needed to gain agency within the *accountability discourse* dominant in their urban placements, participants in this study found themselves often voiceless and in need to assimilate. Finally, this study provides recommendations for the future training and support of alternatively certified urban language teachers and pushes for the recognition and promotion of teachers' localized experiences as valid and important sources of knowledge and expertise.

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A todos vosotros, por siempre creer en mi aún
cuando este proyecto parecía más una ilusión que
realidad.

A mis padres, por apoyar incluso sin
comprender.

A ti Todd, por un sentido de posibilidad infinito y
que contagia.

A mis niños, mis amores, qué bien nos lo vamos a
pasar!

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I.

Statement Of Problem

While the center speaks, the periphery listens,
and mostly does not talk back”
Ulf Hannerz (1992, p. 219)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged 40 years ago as an answer to the shortcomings of positivist grammar-focused approaches inspired by behavioral psychology and structural linguistics (Mitchell, 1994; Littlewood, 2013) Since then, terms such as *communicative approach*, *communicative competence* or *communicative method* have become the *sine qua non* condition of language teachers’ educational philosophies--both in the U.S. and abroad. Nevertheless, the exportability of “Western methods” such as CLT has been up for discussion during the past two decades (Canagarajah, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2001, 2006; LoCastro, 1996; Savignon, 2004; Hu, 2002; Jin & Cortazzi, 1996; Wang, 2002; Li 1998). As Kumaravadivelu (2003) notes, “methods are based on idealized concepts geared toward idealized contexts” (p. 28). The notion of CLT as a “ready-made” package of ideas and practices corresponds to “early conceptions of globalization and modernization as unidirectional processes in which ideas and forms are transmitted from center to periphery” (Littlewood, 2013, p. 16). Such a perspective ignores the fact that, rather than meeting a *tabula rasa*, inflowing pedagogical approaches meet and enter a dialogue with the perspectives and experiences of “local” populations (Schuerkens, 2004, p. 19; Hannerz, 1989, p. 212). According to Kramsch (2014), these encounters “call for a more reflective, interpretive, historically grounded, and politically engaged pedagogy than what was called for by the communicative language teaching of the eighties” (p. 296).

Kumaravadivelu (2001, 2003, 2006, 2012) proposes the concept of postmethod pedagogy as a reaction to “method as a means of marginality.” Following Giroux’s and Freire’s premises for critical pedagogy, Kumaravadivelu envisions (any) pedagogy as engaged in unequal relations of power and as the medium to sustain social inequalities (2001, p. 542). In other words, within this view, methods are never “disinterested” but rather prescriptive concepts that favor patriarchal understandings of teaching and the values of the “center” over the “periphery” (Pennycook, 1989, Canagarajah, 1999). Kumaravadivelu’s postmethod pedagogy rests on three premises: particularity, practicality and possibility. *Particularity* is the most important aspect of a postmethod pedagogy. The construction of methods has been “a predominantly top-down exercise ... guided by a one-size-fits-all, cookie-cutter approach that assumes a common clientele with common goals” (2003, p. 28). The premise of particularity argues that meaningful pedagogy can only be constructed while interpreting particular contexts (2006, p. 171). The premise of *practicality* focuses on the fact that context-sensitive pedagogies allow for theories of practice to emerge from the practitioner; that is, from “marginalized local knowledge” (p. 173). Finally, the parameter of *possibility* emphasizes the significance of participants’ experiences as shaped by the broader social, political and economic environment to which they belong (p. 174). Kumaravadivelu’s proposal of postmethod pedagogy constitutes a call for the emergence of local voices as counter-narratives able to challenge homogenous, globalized educational discourses.

The emergence of context-sensitive pedagogies has been accompanied by a parallel reconceptualization of language teacher education. Sociocultural approaches to teacher learning that “recognize the central role that social relationships and culturally constructed artifacts play in organizing uniquely human forms of thinking” have gained substantial terrain over “container” approaches (Lantolf, 2004, pp. 30-31). It is now widely accepted that teachers’

beliefs, prior language learning experiences, their classroom realities and most importantly, context of practice, play a major role in teachers' pedagogical visions and instructional choices (Elbaz, 1981; Richards, 1996; Golombeck, 1998; Borg 2003; Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood & Son, 2004). As it was argued before in relation to “globalized methods,” there is a need to create “locally appropriate responses” that recognize how “changing sociopolitical and socioeconomic contexts impact upon the ways in which teachers are positioned, how they enact their teaching practices, and, most importantly, the kinds of learning environments they are able to create for their students” (Johnson, 2009, p. 6). Such an approach requires both the expansion of the knowledge-base of teacher education and the recognition that learning to teach is a dynamic process that entails transforming and reconstructing practices to adapt them to individual and local needs (p. 13).

Studies focused on teachers' understanding of CLT and its suitability for non-Western countries have proliferated in the last few years (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Ellis, 1996; Li, 1998; Rao, 1996, 2002; Liao 2000; Karim, 2004; Savignon, 2002; Yu, 2001; Littlewood, 2010). Nevertheless, it is surprising to find that critical studies exploring the application of CLT within disenfranchised communities in the U.S. seem virtually nonexistent. As Osborn (2006) points out, although investigations around alternative pedagogical visions that are culturally relevant for urban schools have been conducted in other content areas, there have not been many critical voices in Foreign Language education (FLE) that have challenged the status quo. Part of the reason might be that, historically, FL classes have enrolled white college-bound, elite students (Osborn, 2006). Therefore, there has not been a need to question prevailing hegemonic discourses—like CLT—that might need to be re-evaluated within new sociocultural contexts, particularly underserved and under-resourced urban schools enrolling students of color and low

socioeconomic status at disproportionate rates. A push for “Foreign Language Education for All” after September 11th has drastically changed the face of FL enrollment in the U.S. The National Survey from the Center for Applied Linguistics (2011) reports that although access gaps to FL in middle schools persist—51% of private middle schools offer a FL compared to 15% of public schools—access in high school is fairly comparable but the quality of the programs is not. One difference noted by the report concerns teacher hiring. While thirty-six states and the District of Columbia have identified foreign languages as teacher shortage areas, schools enrolling students from low SES have the hardest time hiring teachers. They often rely on alternative certification programs or even other countries to fill their positions (Pufahl & Rodhes, 2011, p. 269).

Far from attempting to develop a “FL pedagogy of poverty” in Ruby Payne’s fashion (Haberman, 1991; Payne, 2005), the primary purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the practical theories of alternatively certified FL teachers in urban schools in their attempts to implement CLT. Specifically, this study explored the following research questions:

1. How do FL alternatively certified teachers practicing in urban schools understand Communicative Language Teaching?
2. What context-dependent factors promote or hinder the implementation of CLT in urban schools?

I approached FL alternatively certified urban teachers as silenced disenfranchised users of language methodology. Thus, because I attempted to understand their perspectives, a qualitative research approach naturally fitted this study. In particular, in this study I used a qualitative case study with multiple cases (2) located within a constructivist paradigm to study the activity of alternatively certified FL teachers practicing in the context of

underserved urban schools. In addition, I employed Activity Theory (AT)—more recently known as Cultural Historical Activity theory (CHAT) to include the role of context—as an analytical tool for interpreting alternatively certified foreign language teachers’ situated practices. CHAT served as a “holistic and contextual method of discovery” that helped me to unveil the meaning as well as possible connections and contradictions amongst the data gathered for this study.

II.

Literature Review

The main paradigm shift in language teaching and learning over the last 50 years has been a change from positivism to post-positivism and the gradual abandonment of behavioral psychology and structural linguistics in favor of psycholinguistics and later sociolinguistics (Jacobs & Farrell, 2001). Right up to the late 1960s, conversations around L2 (second language) teaching had focused on mastery of language structures. Grammar was taught *deductively* and emphasis was placed on accuracy over fluency. The Audio-lingual method in North America and Situational Language Teaching in U.K. supported the premise of language learning as a mechanical process of habit formation and automatization; practice, repetition and memorization dominated the scene of classroom instruction (Spada, Richards, & Rivers, 1964). During the 1970s and due to an increased interconnectedness among countries as a result of immigration, new linguistic necessities emerged in Europe that demanded a new approach to language instruction (Savignon, 2007). The reductionism of grammar-focused approaches became evident and the quest began for more comprehensive conceptualizations of language instruction that laid the theoretical groundwork for CLT (Spada, 2007, p. 273).

Although the ubiquity of the term might suggest consensus within the field, there currently is no single author, text or authority on CLT that has been universally embraced (Richards & Rodgers 2001; Butler 2011; Cheng & Goswami, 2001; Reynolds, 2012). Uncertainty around L1 (first language) use, student feedback or grammar instruction among other issues have led linguists and educators to question the usefulness of the term CLT (Spada, 1987; Long, 1980) and to open the door to a *postmethod pedagogy* highly dependent on context (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). As the field of language teaching and learning takes a *sociocultural*

turn, the crucial role of teachers—as the main “consumers” of new methodological undertakings—and the context in which they teach is now indisputable (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2006; Lantolf & Johnson, 2007). Language teachers’ knowledge and practices are understood “as emerging out of and through experiences in social contexts” (Johnson, 2006, p. 239). A sociocultural perspective embraces teacher knowledge and classroom practice as extremely complex endeavors and therefore undercuts the presumption that teachers develop their knowledge exclusively as a result of their participation in teacher preparation programs (Reeves, 2009, p. 109). Since the purpose of my study is to understand the experiences of alternatively certified foreign language teachers in trying to implement and adapt CLT within the context of underserved and underresourced urban schools, in this chapter I provide an extensive literature review of the origins of CLT, its connections to SLA theories and history of factors hindering or promoting CLT implementation in the U.S. and abroad. Finally, given the crucial role of teachers as “consumers” of educational research, this chapter provides a review of literature on teachers’ beliefs, knowledge and attitudes and their effect on pedagogical choices.

Communicative Language Teaching

How did we get here? Theoretical Foundations for CLT. Terminological disputes aside, from a theoretical standpoint, it is widely accepted that CLT’s ultimate goal is the development of learners’ *communicative competence*; that is, the ability to use language in a social context (Hymes, 1972; Richards, 2006). A simple semantic analysis of the term *communicative competence*, or “competence to communicate,” reveals the centrality of the word “competence” within the syntagma (Bagaric & Djigunović, 2007). Introduced to linguistics by Chomsky (1965), the term *competence* has become one of the most controversial terms within the field of second language teaching and learning.

In *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965), Chomsky laid down the theoretical basis for linguistic competence by establishing a strict separation between two concepts, *competence* and *performance*. According to Chomsky, *competence* refers to the “the underlying system of rules that has been mastered by the speaker-hearer” while *performance* refers to “the actual use of language in concrete situations” (Chomsky, 1965, p. 4). Nevertheless, this notion of an “ideal speaker-listener” soon grew unpopular amongst proponents of a communicative view (Savignon, 1972) who found Hymes’ (1972) notion of *communicative competence* better suited as the basis for theoretical considerations around the teaching of languages. Hymes’ definition goes beyond linguistic knowledge—in production and understanding—to include sociocultural factors related to appropriate use and acceptability. As he observes, “a normal child...acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner” (Hymes, 1972, p. 277). Thus, *communicative competence* combines cognitive and behavioral factors and requires the ability to make decisions regarding:

- whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible;
- whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available;
- whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available;
- whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails (Hymes, 1972, p. 281).

Hymes’ conceptualization bridges the gap of Chomsky’s competence-performance dichotomy and highlights the creative potential of language and actual usage (Mukherjee, 2005, p. 257). Happily, his efforts to further develop the concept of *communicative competence*,

particularly in regards to language acquisition, were not isolated. The late 70s and 80s witnessed an explosion of applied linguistic research on the same topic.

Highly influenced by Hymes, Widdowson (1983) expanded the notion of communicative competence by distinguishing between *competence* and *capacity*. According to him, competence does not account for “the ability to create meanings by exploiting the potential inherent in the language for continual modification in response to change” (1983, p. 7). He coins this ability as “capacity.” In later years, Widdowson (1989) revisited his definition of competence and proposed that “competence has two components: knowledge and ability, and that these...can be reformulated as grammatical competence (the parameter of possibility) on the one hand, and pragmatic competence (all the other parameters) on the other” (p. 132). Thus, competence is no longer just a matter of knowing grammatical rules and when to apply them; it also involves adaptation and negotiation based on “contextual cues.”

In their influential and often-cited 1980s article, Canale and Swain presented a theoretical framework for *communicative competence* that was later reexamined by Canale in 1983. They understood communicative competence as an “underlying systems of knowledge and skills required for communication” (Canale, 1983, p. 5). Their model includes four competence areas:

Grammatical Competence refers to the knowledge of lexical items and the rules of phonology, morphology, syntax and sentence-grammar semantics.

Sociolinguistic competence alludes to mastery of sociocultural rules of usage and thus the speaker’s ability to function in multiple sociolinguistic contexts.

Discourse competence refers to the ability to produce coherent and cohesive utterances.

Strategic competence is made up of verbal and non-verbal strategies—in relation to both grammatical and sociolinguistic competence—that can be used to solve communication problems due to low competence or variables in performance.

Canale and Swain's framework emerged as an attempt to make explicit both the knowledge and skills that language learners need to achieve communicative competence as well as the theoretical basis of CLT. Their framework has undergone revisions and additions over the years.

Savignon's (1972) first conceptualization of *communicative competence* places much greater emphasis on the notion of ability. She defines communicative competence as “the ability to function in a truly communicative setting—that is, in a dynamic exchange in which linguistic competence must adapt itself to the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic, of one or more interlocutors” (p. 8). Communicative competence is dynamic and comprised of grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociocultural competence, and strategic competence with all components being highly interconnected (2002, p. 8). Therefore, communicative competence is highly dependent on context and the negotiation of meaning between speakers. It requires using appropriate registers and styles and it applies to both written and spoken language (Savignon, 1997).

Regarding the distinction between competence and performance, Savignon (1997) argues that the distinction is only a theoretical one. From a theoretical standpoint, competence is used to describe what one knows, while performance defines what one does. In other words, “performance is observable, and it is only through performance that competence can be developed, maintained, and evaluated” (p. 15). In fact, within the context of language teaching,

Savignon often uses performance and competence as interchangeable and identifies competence with proficiency.

Similar to Savignon, Bachman's (1990) operationalization of the *communicative competence* emphasizes "ability." In lieu of communicative competence, Bachman coined the term *communicative language ability* (CLA) that combines *competence* and *performance*. Although his approach is very much oriented towards language testing, what seems to be more groundbreaking is his attempt to distinguish between "knowledge" and "skills" and the introduction of affective factors. Without getting into too much detail, Bachman's (1990) CLA model contains language competence (i.e. "a set of specific knowledge components that are utilized in communication via language" [p.66]), strategic competence (i.e. "the mental capacity to implement the components of language competence in contextualized communicative language use" [p.67]), and psychophysiological mechanisms (i.e. "the processes involved in the actual execution of language" [p. 67]). What seems to be most innovative in his approach is the focus on psychophysiological processes; that is, the auditory, visual, productive and receptive mechanism involved in the communication process.

Theoretical particularities aside, what seems to be unanimously accepted is that rather than mastering linguistic structures, communicative competence entails knowing when and how to use language in a multiplicity of sociocultural contexts. The evolution of the concept of *communicative competence* reflects an attempt to translate research into practice and to create definitions easily digestible by practitioners in the field. The next section discusses attempts to bring theory into practice and to bridge the gap between theoreticians and those who "perform" the actual work of teaching.

Applying SLA research and theory to practice: Teaching and learning with CLT.

The picture emerging from Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research is unsurprisingly complex. Although not directed at supporting CLT, SLA theory and research in general—and studies focused on the communicative nature of language acquisition in particular—have had a major influence on CLT’s pedagogical principles.

The emergence of new theoretical formulations in the hands of Selinker (1972) and Corder (1973, 1981) during the 1970s provided the initial spark needed to progressively discredit behaviorist approaches to language learning. On his *error-analysis theory*, Corder articulated a distinction between mistakes—related to performance—and errors—related to competence. His theory provides an alternative to “contrastive analysis” and remarks that learners’ errors are manifestations of underlying acquisition processes and strategies. Selinker (1972), on the other hand, abandoned the idea of “defective” learners to embrace the notion of interlanguage, an intermediate language system developed by language learners in the process of L2 learning. As Griffiths and Parr (2001) point out, Selinker’s was “the first attempt to take into account the possibility of learner conscious attempts to control their learning” (cited in Pavičić Takač, V., 2008, p. 32). His view on interlanguage expanded the research agenda to include psychological processes that had not been explored before. Nevertheless, despite the importance of their foundational work, it was not until the 1980s that the field of SLA started to witness the emergence of a series of hypotheses deemed crucial in the development and evolution of CLT: The Input Hypothesis, the Output Hypothesis, the Interaction Hypothesis, the Noticing Hypothesis and the role of feedback.

The Input Hypothesis. Developed by Stephen Krashen (1982, 1985, 1988), the Input Hypothesis is based on two fundamental premises: 1) Speaking is a result of acquisition, and 2) If input is understood, the necessary grammar is automatically provided (1985, p. 2). While learning is “a conscious process that results in “knowing about” language, acquisition is a “subconscious process identical in all important ways to the process children utilize in acquiring their first language” (1985, p.1). In order for acquisition to take place, learners must receive comprehensible input, that is, “input that contains structures ... beyond our current level of competence” or what Krashen terms $i+1$ (p. 2). Even if the input includes unacquired language structures, with the help of context and general knowledge of the world, the learner is able to understand the new language structures. There is no need for the teacher to “formally” teach the new grammatical forms.

Although comprehensible input is an essential ingredient, Krashen (1985) explains that it is not sufficient on its own. The learner needs to be motivated to receive the input with a low affective filter, which he defines as a “mental block that prevents acquirers from fully utilizing the comprehensible input they receive for language acquisition” (p. 3). When the learner is not concerned about failure, he is more likely to engage in the message and temporarily forget that he is learning another language. In other words, if the filter is down and enough comprehensible input is available, learners will acquire the language.

Although Krashen’s theories have been criticized for being too vague or lacking empirical foundation, their effect on second language teaching is undeniable (Lightbown, 2000). His theoretical approach emerged as the response needed for teachers frustrated by the differences between what they taught and what language learners were able to produce.

Output Hypothesis. Swain's (1985, 1993, 1995, 1998, 2005) basis for the Output Hypothesis can be found in her observations of students enrolled in a French immersion school. Despite having been exposed to "acquisition rich input" for six or seven years, students in the program continued to exhibit numerous grammatical and syntactic errors in speaking and writing. The answer to this dilemma seemed to be that teachers were not pushing students beyond their current interlanguage level. In other words, input comprehension does not solely explain language learning—the focus of research needs to be broadened to include other factors involved in language interactions, particularly output.

According to Swain (1995), output pushes learners to process language more deeply—with more mental effort—than does input. Output has three main functions: 1) noticing or triggering (also referred to as consciousness raising); that is, the idea that producing language might help the learner "notice" linguistic problems needing to be addressed; 2) the hypothesis testing function which claims that the learner might perceive output as a "trial run;" and 3) the metalinguistic function that allows the learner to reflect on production while using the language. While producing comprehensible output, students become aware of their limitations and focus on forms not yet acquired, which is essential for acquisition to happen, according to the Output Hypothesis.

The role of output has been identified by many researchers as relevant for second language acquisition (Pica, Holliday, Lewis & Morgenthaler, 1989; Ellis & He, 1999; Izumi, Bigelow, Fujiwara, & Fearnow, 1999; Wang & Castro, 2010; Izumi, 2000; Rassaei, 2012). Ellis and He (1999) conducted a study with 50 intermediate level ESL (English as a Second Language) students on the differential effects of pre-modified input, interactionally modified input, and modified output on comprehension and the acquisition of new words. In their study,

the modified output group achieved higher comprehension and vocabulary gains than any of the other groups. Izumi et al. (1999) investigated the role of output on second language acquisition, particularly around noticing. They found that providing students with extended opportunities to produce output and receive input had a positive impact on language acquisition. Wang and Castro (2010) looked at how classroom interaction and output led learners to notice language forms and found that output produced by means of classroom interactions facilitated the learning of the target form. Rassaei (2012) compared the effect of input and output based instruction on two different groups of ESL Persian students. The results indicate that although both modes of instruction have a positive effect on language acquisition, output based instruction can be more effective. Although studies showing the superiority of input-based approaches over output-based instruction are not scarce (Benati, 2005; Farley, 2001), and the benefits of producing output are generally recognized within the field of SLA, the idea of “practice makes perfect” may be too simplistic to explain language acquisition (VanPatten & Williams, 2006). As the next section outlines, it might be in the intersection of input and output, that is, in the interactions between speaker and listener that learners have the potential to find the most suitable environment for acquisition.

Interaction Hypothesis. Long’s interaction hypothesis (1983a, 1983b, 1991, 1996) is highly influenced by Hatch’s work (1978) on conversational interactions’ effect on grammar acquisition and by Krashen’s (1985) claim that comprehensible input is essential for second language acquisition to happen. In its updated version of the hypothesis, Long (1996) claimed that the conversational and linguistic modifications that occur during interactions between speakers provide learners with input needed for language acquisition. The process of negotiating meaning, particularly when interactional adjustments occur, promote acquisition because “it

connects input, internal learners capacities, particular selective attention, and output in productive ways (1996, pp. 451-452). In other words, when learners receive comprehensible input and interactional feedback, they are pushed to notice inaccuracies and to modify their output through negotiating for meaning, both of which are conducive to language acquisition (Ellis, 1994; Mackey, 1995; Pica, Young & Doughty, 1987; Gass, Mackey, & Ross-Feldman, 2011).

Regarding the source of input, Long (1980) points out that, rather than pre-modified input without opportunities for negotiation, interactional input that emerges from negotiation leads to learning. Pica, Young, and Doughty (1987) compared the comprehension of 16 non-native speakers (NNS) of English on directions to a task under pre-modified input and modified interactional input. Their study reported that comprehension was enhanced when directions and requests were deemed essential to obtain comprehensible input during interaction. Reduction of the linguistic complexity of input, however, did not have a significant impact on NNS comprehension. Loschky (1994) looked at the performance of 41 beginning-level students of Japanese on three different listening tasks in which participants had to identify and number the object being described. In his findings, Loschky concluded that premodifying input did not affect comprehension. Therefore, although there seems to be a connection between modified input and acquisition, the premodification of input as key to language acquisition remains controversial.

Noticing Hypothesis. Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis challenged dominant SLA theories during the 1980s that claimed that the process of learning a language is mostly unconscious. According to Schmidt, "input does not become intake for language learning unless it is noticed, that is, consciously registered" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 27). In lay terms, in order for people to learn

something they need to attend to it. Schmidt based his hypothesis on two case studies. The first study looked at Wen, a 30-year-old “uninstructed” English language learner who had immigrated to the U.S. from Japan. From a socio-cognitive perspective, Wen was a very good learner. His pronunciation, fluency, listening skills, pragmatic and, especially, his strategic competence were excellent. However, his grammar was limited. Schmidt looked at Wen’s acquisition of nine English grammatical morphemes over the course of three years and found that none of them moved from unacquired to acquired, taking 80% correct as the criterion for acquisition. The second study concerned Schmidt’s learning of Portuguese during a five-month stay in Brazil. Schmidt and Frota (1986) noted that although input was important, the effect of classroom instruction could not be underestimated. Errors that were frequent in output were not corrected until formally noticed in instruction. Moreover, it was noted that despite correction in conversations with native speakers, errors persisted because of the lack of awareness about being corrected. Schmidt coined this phenomenon the “noticing gap.” Empirical studies have supported the Schmidt’s Noticing Hypothesis (Leow, 1997, 2000; Izumi, 2002; Mackey, 2006). Criticism, however, also exists with regard to individual differences and the fact that noticing may be more related to learning than to acquisition (Schwartz, 1993; Truscott, 1998; Carroll, 2006).

The idea that becoming conscious of material can aid acquisition seems commonsense and a likely explanation for some of the phenomena observed in language learning amongst adults. Questions still remain around the best method to help learners “notice the gap” and, thus, to provide *feedback*. Research has focused on the effectiveness of explicit instruction, repetition, grammatical explanations, prompting and recasting, with the latter two at the center of the discussion.

A recast is defined as a “well-formed reformulation of a learner’s non target utterance with the original meaning intact” while a prompt provides a learner with opportunities to self-correct (Lyster, 2004, p. 403). Despite the large number of studies focused on recast, there is still uncertainty on its effectiveness. While the studies favoring recast do exist (Carrol & Swain, 1993; Long, Inagaki, & Ortega, 1998; Ayoun, 2001; Nichols, 2009) the criticisms should not be obviated (Lyster, 1998, 2004; Ammar & Spada, 2006; Ellis, Lowen, and Erlam, 2006; Long, 2007; Samani, 2013). Ayoun’s (2001) study used a pretest, repeated exposure, posttest design to test the effectiveness of written recast versus modeling in the acquisition of two French tenses: *passé composé* and the *imparfait*. Students of French were randomly assigned to either R (group receiving recast), M (group receiving modeling) or G (group receiving explicit grammatical explanations). Students in the R group did significantly better than those in G and slightly outperformed those in M. The researcher concluded that recasting was more effective than any other form of corrective feedback tested. While Nichols’ (2009) study confirms the usefulness of recast, it adds that in order to achieve maximum efficacy, recasts should not interrupt the flow of the interactive task. Opposite results were found by Lyster (2004). He compared groups of students in a French immersion program receiving recasts, prompts or no feedback. The study showed that students in the prompt group outperformed the other groups. Long (2007) found similar results and noted that learners often interpreted recasting as reaffirming the accuracy of their language choices. Samani (2013) revisited the same effectiveness question but in a computer mediated environment. His study explored thirty ESL Iranian students responses to either prompts or recast during four online one-hour text-based chat sessions through Yahoo messenger. Samani found that students who received prompts as corrective feedback outperformed their counterparts on the recast group.

The variety of theoretical perspectives discussed here illuminates the complexity of the issue at hand. The input, output, interaction and noticing hypotheses are not exclusive of each other. Without doubt, they all have had enormous influence on the field of SLA and the evolution of the CLT approach. The next section provides an examination of efforts to translate theory into practice, to develop “practical manuals” that are “risk-free” and easily applicable by teachers working in a multiplicity of contexts.

From method to approaches: “Performing” CLT. Discussing CLT in relation to everyday classroom practices is very problematic. The main issue at hand is the lack of a clear definition and the fact that “CLT has always meant a multitude of different things to different people” (Harmer, 2003, p. 289). Central to the confusion is the lack of clarity about the categorization of CLT as a method or an approach. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), CLT is “best considered an approach—rather than a method—that can be used to support a wide variety of classroom procedures” (p. 155). Most recently, CLT has been characterized as an “umbrella term.” Harmer (2007), for instance, describes CLT as “a generalized ‘umbrella’ term to describe learning sequences which aim to improve the students’ ability to communicate” (p. 70). Hall (2011), on the other hand, refers to CLT in terms of a paradigm shift, as “a change in thinking about the goals and processes of interpretations of how this might be realized in practice” (p. 93). Despite the multiplicity of definitions, what seems to be common in all characterizations is the move from teaching linguistic competence to emphasizing communicative competence and “real” language use. Moreover, although originally conceived of as an approach, it is undeniable that there is a widespread tendency to see CLT as a method and to develop clear classroom applications that are, for lack of a better word, teacher-proof.

Since its inception, there has been a strong push to bring CLT to the classroom by those who saw in the “CLT method” an answer to the perceived shortcomings of “traditional” approaches. Nevertheless, attempts to develop a systematic method have been received with caution. As Leung (2005) explains, “the transfer of this concept from research to language teaching has...produced abstracted contexts and idealized social rules of use based on (English language) native-speakerness” (p. 119). In fact, one of the main criticisms has been the lack of a clear definition or a set of principles. As a result, the most successful efforts have focused on “methodological guidelines” rather than prescriptive methods.

During the early 1980s, Morrow (1981) presented one of the first attempts to delineate the principles of a communicative “methodology.” Morrow was not concerned with specific procedures but rather with “the principles which might guide us in our search for a method *and that* should certainly suggest criteria by which teachers can judge procedures proposed to them” (p. 62). He proposed five principles of communicative methodology:

1. *Know what you are doing:* Students should leave every lesson knowing something “communicatively useful” that they did not know at the beginning of the lesson.
2. *The whole is greater than the sum of the parts:* The communicative method focused on “real” language above the sentence level.
3. *The processes are as important as the forms:* The intent is always to replicate the real process of communication (i.e. information gaps or choice).
4. *To learn it, do it:* Only the learner can learn and he learns by doing.
5. *Mistakes are not always a mistake:* Not every error should be corrected. A certain level of flexibility is necessary for learning to happen.

Morrow’s principles have had a great influence on the development of a vast array of pedagogical interpretations of CLT. One of the most prominent attempts is the characterization

developed by Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983). Their model characterized CLT against the prevailing audiolingual method as illustrated in the (modified) Table 1 below (1983, pp. 91-93).

Table 1: *Features of the Communicative Approach*¹

<i>Audio-Lingual Method</i>	<i>Communicative Language Teaching</i>
Attends to form more than meaning.	Meaning is paramount.
Demands memorization of dialogues.	Dialogues, if used, center on communication and are not memorized.
Language items are not necessarily contextualized.	Contextualization is a basic premise.
Language learning is learning structures, sounds, or words.	Language learning is learning to communicate.
Mastery is sought.	Effective communication is sought.
Drilling is a central technique.	Drilling occurs peripherally.
Native like pronunciation is sought.	Comprehensible pronunciation is sought.
Grammatical explanation is avoided.	Any device which helps the learners is accepted
Communicative activities only come after a long process of rigid drills and exercises	Attempts to communicate may be encouraged from the very beginning.
The use of the student's native language is	Judicious use of native language is accepted

¹ Adapted from Finocchiaro, M., & Brumfit, C. (1983). *The functional-notional approach: From theory to practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

forbidden.	where feasible.
Translation is forbidden at early levels	Translation may be used where students need
Reading and writing are deferred till speech is mastered.	Reading and writing can start from the first day
The target linguistic system will be learned through the overt teaching of the patterns of the system.	The target linguistic system will be learned through struggling to communicate.
Linguistic competence is the desired goal.	Communicative competence is the desired goal
Varieties of language are recognized but not emphasized.	Linguistic variation is a central concept in materials and methodology.
The sequence of units is determined solely by principles of linguistic complexity.	Sequencing is determined by any consideration of content, function, or meaning.

Right around the same time, Howatt (1984) developed a descriptive theory of “strong” and “weak” versions of CLT, a theory that has survived the passage of time and continues to influence the field. The “weak version” is, according to Howatt, a more or less standard practice. This version “stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes and, characteristically, attempts to integrate such activities into a wider programme of language teaching” (p. 279). It seems to be aligned with analytic and skill-based theories (Stern 1990, 1992; Criado, 2013). Allwright and Hanks (2009) see a classic example of the “weak version” in Littlewood’s typology of language-learning exercises. Littlewood made a distinction between pre-communicative and communicative activities as exemplified in Figure 1:

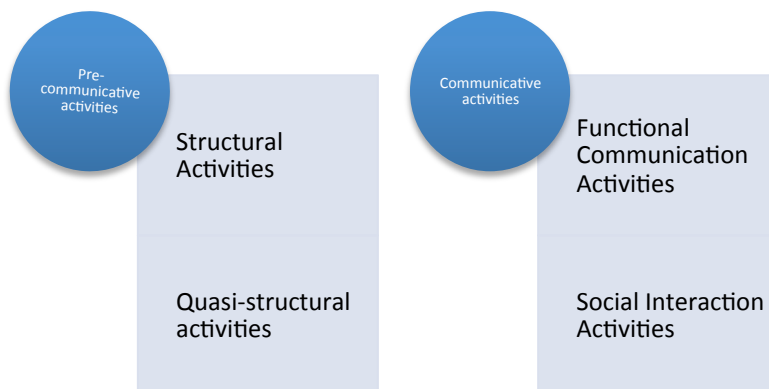


Figure 1: Typology of Language Activities²

During pre-communicative activities, the teacher isolates specific knowledge or skills for the students to practice without special concern for “communicating meaning effectively” (p. 85). Examples of activities in this category include drills, pre-established dialogues, questions and answer exercises. Communication activities provide the learner with an opportunity for “whole-task practice,” to integrate pre-communication knowledge and skills to communicate meaning (p. 17). Unstructured role-plays, reconstructing stories, presenting or finding differences are examples of such activities. The focus within this framework is on progression from controlled to automatic production, from accuracy to fluency, on “learning how to use English.”

The “strong version” of communicative teaching entails “using English to learn it” and it is linked to experiential learning (Stern 1990, 1992). This version advances the claim that “language is acquired through communication, so that it is not merely a question of activating an existing but inert knowledge of the language, but of stimulating the development of the language system itself” (p. 279). Cook (2008) labels this approach as *laissez-faire*, an approach where

² Adapted from Littlewood, W. (1981). *Communicative language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 86.

teacher interference should be minimized and learners should be allowed to learn in ways that teachers cannot control (p. 250). Within this approach, fluency takes a more central role than accuracy.

Besides providing a framework to evaluate CLT, Howatt pointed out that CLT is far from being a uniform approach (Ellis, 2003). One of the most prominent attempts to outline features of CLT was carried on by Nunan (1991), who distinguished five features of Communicative Language Teaching:

- emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language,
- introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation,
- provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language, but also on the learning management process,
- enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning,
- attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom. (Nunan, 1991, p. 279)

Savignon, on the other hand, points to Berns (1990) for an unambiguous and theoretically sound description of the core tenets of CLT. Although not completely absent in Nunan's categorization, Berns takes a stronger stand on the sociocultural context of competence and pinpoints the following components of CLT (Berns, 1990, cited in Savignon, 2002, p. 6):

1. Language teaching is based on a view of language as communication.
2. Diversity is recognized and accepted as part of language development.
3. A learner's competence is considered in relative, not absolute, terms of correctness.
4. More than one variety of a language is recognized as a model for learning and teaching.

5. Culture is seen to play an instrumental role in shaping speakers' communicative competence, both in their first and subsequent languages.
6. No single methodology or fixed set of techniques is prescribed.
7. Language use is recognized as serving the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual functions, as defined by Halliday, and is related to the development of competence in each.
8. It is essential that learners be engaged in doing things with language; that is, that they use language for a variety of purposes, in all phases of learning.

As illustrated by Nunan's and Berns' work, although the efforts to provide a set of principles to facilitate the implementation of CLT in the classroom are numerous, the similarities amongst them are obvious (Doughty & Long, 2003; Thompson, 1996; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Richards, 2006; Farrell & Jacobs, 2010). The latest trend in FL literature, what Richards calls (2005) "current CLT," has focused on the development of a series of "essentials" for language teaching that reflect the CLT paradigm shift. Farrell and Jacobs (2003, 2010) suggest eight parameters to guide language teaching: 1) learner autonomy, 2) social nature of learning, 3) curricular integration, 4) focus on meaning, 5) diversity, 6) thinking skills, 7) alternative assessment, and 8) teachers as co-learners.

As represented by the multiplicity of "classroom applications" that have been developed in relation to CLT, the field of language teaching continues to be hungry for methods that bridge the gap between theory and practice. Although most teachers would agree that "communicative competence" is a goal within their classroom's visions, not all of them are able to conduct their day-to-day operations based on a set of abstract guidelines. As long as there is not a clear

application of a communicative approach to the classroom, teachers will continue to adhere to practical applications—well-founded or not—and to develop their own “theories of practice” against which they are able to test their daily classroom instruction.

Curriculum. As expected, there is no one single curriculum model that dictates “content” within a communicative classroom. Instead of being organized around language structures—from less to more complex—a communicative curriculum is organized around meaning, functions and/or tasks. Savignon (1983, 1997, 2001) provides a set of guiding principles for curriculum development. She challenges pre-service and in-service EFL teachers to think of a communicative curriculum as composed of five non-sequential components that can be regarded as thematic clusters (in Celce-Murcia, 2001, p. 19-23):

- *Language Arts* focuses on what, according to Savignon, teachers do the best. It includes syntax, morphology, phonology and in general activities focused on accuracy.
- *Language for a purpose*—also called language experience—refers to using the target language for real and immediate communication goals. Regardless of the context in which the target language is learned, students should be given opportunities to focus on meaning rather than form.
- *My language is me* is the third component in a communicative curriculum and it involves both psychological and intellectual factors. This component implies “respect for learners as they use English for self-expression” and thus, minimizing error correction and abandoning discourses around native or ideal speakers (p. 21).
- *You be, I will be: Theater Arts* “provides learners with the tools they need to act, that is, to interpret, express and negotiate meaning in a new language” (p. 23). Within this role, the teacher acts as a coach providing students with opportunities to practice “new ways”

of communication and the sociocultural rules of appropriateness associated with those expected ways.

- *Beyond the classroom* is the final component of a communicative curriculum. It involves developing learners' interest and needs through target language use outside the classroom such as field experiences, conversation partners, host families, technology etc.

To sum up, Savignon's curriculum proposal emphasizes the need to include both cognitive (linguistic and cultural knowledge) and affective goals. Although her proposal allows for focus on form (Language Arts), the main tenet of curriculum design continues to be communication and real use of language. Regarding possibility of activities within a communicative curriculum, the options are truly endless. Richards and Rogers (2001, p.168) provide a basic classification of instructional materials: *text-based* (i.e., textbook), *task-based* (i.e., role plays, simulations and activities focused on communication) and *realia* (i.e., authentic materials such as newspapers, signs and posters). However, given the amount of variation possible here, Ellis' (1990) criteria for evaluating communicative activities may be more useful than a simple categorization. Ellis (1982, p. 204, cited in Nobuyoski & Ellis, 1993) provides the following characteristics that should be used to evaluate communication tasks: 1) communicative purpose 2) focus on message rather than on the linguistic code 3) an information or opinion "gap" 4) opportunity for negotiation and 5) participation in choosing resources—verbal and non-verbal— required for performing the task. These five "characteristics" provide a framework for teachers to evaluate not only their own task designs but also the vast array of materials available them in the education market.

Teacher and learner's roles. Embracing a CLT approach requires a reconceptualization of the roles of those engaged in the learning process. As Deckert (2004) elaborates, a CLT approach features “low profile teacher roles, frequent pair work or small group problem solving, students responding to authentic samples of English, extended exchanges on high interest topics, and the integration of the four basic skills” (p.13). Rather than “receivers of knowledge,” students become agents, assuming a much higher degree of responsibility and “ownership” (Brown, 1990). Individualistic learning gives way to collaborative approaches. Breen and Candlin (1980) refer to learners as negotiators of meaning “between the self, the learning process, and the objects of learning” (p.110). Similarly, for Larsen-Freeman (1986) students are communicators “engaged in negotiating meaning, in trying to make themselves understood, even when their knowledge of the target language is incomplete” (p. 131) Richards and Rogers (1991) suggest that learner roles are closely linked to those of a “traditional” teacher’s since students in CLT drive their own learning and continually practice self-evaluation and, as members of the classroom community, they frequently “teach” other students (p. 23). On the other hand, terms such as negotiator, mediator, referee, facilitator or need analyst are frequently used to characterize teachers’ roles (Richard & Rodgers, 2001; Hu, 2002; Mangubhi et al., 2004). Teachers working within a CLT approach focus on facilitating communication amongst students and between students and materials. They are open to learning and changing and have abandoned teacher-centered approaches to language instruction. As part of their role, they coordinate students, manage activities and act as consultants for students when needed. In other words, CLT challenges the traditional hierarchy that confers teachers’ authority over students and the traditional boundaries delineating teachers and students roles.

Understanding and implementation: The teachers' perspective on CLT. The viability of CLT as a theoretical approach capable of successfully influencing language-teaching practice has been called into question numerous times. The most common criticisms have revolved around teachers' understanding and perception of the approach and implementation barriers, particularly in non-western countries.

Thompson (1996) provides one of the most straightforward analyses of teacher misconceptions about CLT. According to him, interpretations of CLT in the field often assume that CLT means not teaching grammar, teaching only speaking, pair work and a lot of preparation time. In an effort to further understand teachers' conceptualization of CLT, Mangubhai et al. (1999) researched the understanding and beliefs of thirty-seven elementary school language teachers in Australia. Using a questionnaire adapted from Karavas-Doukas (1996), Mangubhai et al. surveyed teachers about their perspectives on group work/pair work, roles of error correction, grammar, instructors and students. The majority of teachers in the study favored teacher-centered approaches and the view of the teachers as transmitters of knowledge. Although their views of pair and group work were positive in general, they were deemed as unrealistic within their teaching context. Finally, regarding the role of grammar and error correction, results showed a preference for direct grammar instruction as well as a strong belief in the need to formally correct errors to achieve competence. In a second study, Mangubhai et al (2005) studied six Australian elementary school teachers' understanding of CLT and how their understanding compared to results reported in previous studies. The authors used a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and lesson recordings for recall during the interviews as their methods of data collection. While the survey results showed teachers' agreement with CLT principles in

44 out of 62 items, the interviews revealed that a mixed-method approach, particularly in regards to focus on form, was used for classroom practice in most cases.

Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) investigated the understanding, beliefs and implementation of CLT of 10 high school Japanese as a foreign language teachers in Australia. Teachers' understanding of CLT was very much in agreement with the misconceptions reported by Thompson (1996). The participants understood CLT as meaning learning how to communicate in Japanese, minimal grammar instruction, focus on listening and speaking and using time-consuming activities. Regarding implementation, the researchers explained that despite the use of role-plays, games and simulations, "classes observed for this study were heavily teacher-fronted, grammar was presented without any context clues, and there were few interactions seen among students" (1999, p. 505).

The exportation of CLT to non-western countries has occurred rapidly. McKay (2002) associates this success with a view of CLT as modern around the world and the proliferation of language products such as textbooks that claim to ascribe to CLT. At the same time, resistance to CLT as a pedagogical import is well documented (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Ellis, 1996; Li, 1998; Rao, 1996, 2002, Liao 2000; Karim, 2004; Savignon, 2002; Yu, 2001). A number of studies have focused on understanding the role that context and beliefs about education have on CLT implementation and call for a "local version" of CLT. Rao (1996, 2002), for example, pushes Chinese educators to modernize rather than westernize. According to her, challenges around CLT implementation have their source in a discrepancy between traditional educational theory in China (Confucian) and that of West. Li (1998) surveyed 18 EFL teachers in Korea regarding their classroom practices. Unanimously, teachers reported difficulties implementing CLT due to their own proficiency level, lack of strategic and sociolinguistic competence, lack of CLT

training and contextual factors (i.e. classroom size, grammar based examinations). Student resistance to Western approaches that places students at the center of the class were also mentioned as barriers.

Despite concerns in international contexts, more recent research is pointing to the emergence of more positive views around CLT. Littlewood (2010) explored learners' preferences in a study involving four hundred and ten students from four Asian countries. Students were asked to complete an online survey aimed at eliciting the characteristics of an ideal lesson. Students expressed preference for communication-oriented lessons with the exception of Japanese students, who showed a slight preference for form-oriented lessons. Duff (2013) observed a forty-minute lesson in a well-resourced Chinese urban classroom with fifty 11th graders. Although numerous constraints such as length of lesson, prescribed objectives or available textbooks were present, the teacher still managed practices consistent with CLT. Duff points out that during the lesson there were “many points of intersection between the curriculum and the students' own lives, their background knowledge, perspectives, and even hopes or dreams” (p. 6). Moreover there was a lot of interaction between the teacher and the students in the target language.

The above studies exemplify the complexities involved in studying and theorizing about classroom implementation and teachers' decision-making process. The fact that CLT—as a method born in the West—has gained way into “other” sociocultural contexts adds a different layer of difficulty for those attempting to understand the challenges that might hinder or promote CLT implementation. The following section considers “voices of dissonance” within the field of language teaching. These alternative perspectives have emerged as attempts to make context and

teacher experiences as the driving force in studying classroom practices, and therefore deserve consideration.

New approaches: Post-Method and Multicompetence. In an era of multiple competing discourses, voices of dissonance tend to emerge as spaces to reconsider “givens” within a field; that is, theoretical constructs that have been assumed unquestionable are being questioned. The validity of a pursuit to achieve implementation of a CLT “methodology” in language classrooms is being challenged. As noted earlier, “knowledge oriented” theories of pedagogies developed in academic contexts are being replaced by postmethod approaches that situate “classroom-oriented” theories of practice at the forefront (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, p. 29). Since the present study focuses on the perspective of teachers practicing in “peripheral” educational contexts (underserved and under resource urban schools), considering “voices of dissonance” within the field seems not only natural but also responsible. In fact, Kumaravadivelu urges teachers against the “uncritical acceptance of untested methods” (2006, p. 161). Packages of methods filled with easily “digestible bits and pieces of discrete items of knowledge” leave “very little food for critical thought” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 217). Rather than an alternative method, postmethod pedagogies are an “alternative to methods.” They challenge top-down approaches and place teachers’ knowledge and their contexts at the center. Nevertheless, “practicing and prospective teachers need a framework that can enable them to develop the knowledge, skill, attitude, and autonomy necessary to devise for themselves a systematic, coherent, and relevant personal theory of practice” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 40). In the case of CLT, attempts to minimize prescriptive methods have emphasized the concept of CLT as an approach. According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), CLT has failed in acceptability but, most importantly, in “adaptability” to context. Kumaravadivelu presents an alternative framework that is theoretically sound but

respects teachers' autonomy and is based on classroom-oriented research. As exemplified in the pedagogic wheel below, Kumaravadivelu proposes three parameters as central to his framework: the parameter of particularity that emphasizes local experiences; the parameter of possibility that highlights the importance of teachers' and students' experiences; and the parameter of practicality that relates to the centrality of personal theories as professional theories. On a different layer, the framework comprises a set of "macro strategies" or guiding principles that are "method neutral" (p.38). These macrostrategies include:

Maximize learning opportunities and balancing the teacher's role as manager and facilitator;

Minimize perceptual mismatches between intentions and interpretations of the learner, the teacher, and the teacher educator;

Facilitate negotiated interaction between participants and encourage students to initiate talk rather than merely respond;

Promote learner autonomy to equip with the means necessary to self-direct and self-monitor their own learning;

Foster language awareness by drawing learners' attention to the formal and functional properties of their L2;

Activate intuitive heuristics by providing rich textual data so that learners can infer and internalize underlying rules governing grammatical usage and communicative use;

Contextualize linguistic input by highlighting how language usage and use are shaped by linguistic, extralinguistic, situational, and extrasituational contexts;

Integrate language skills rather than separate them as listening, speaking, reading, and writing;

Ensure social relevance to the societal, political, economic, and educational environment in which L2 learning and teaching take place; and

Raise cultural consciousness by encouraging learners to engage in a process of classroom participation that puts a premium on their power/knowledge. (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, 38-40)

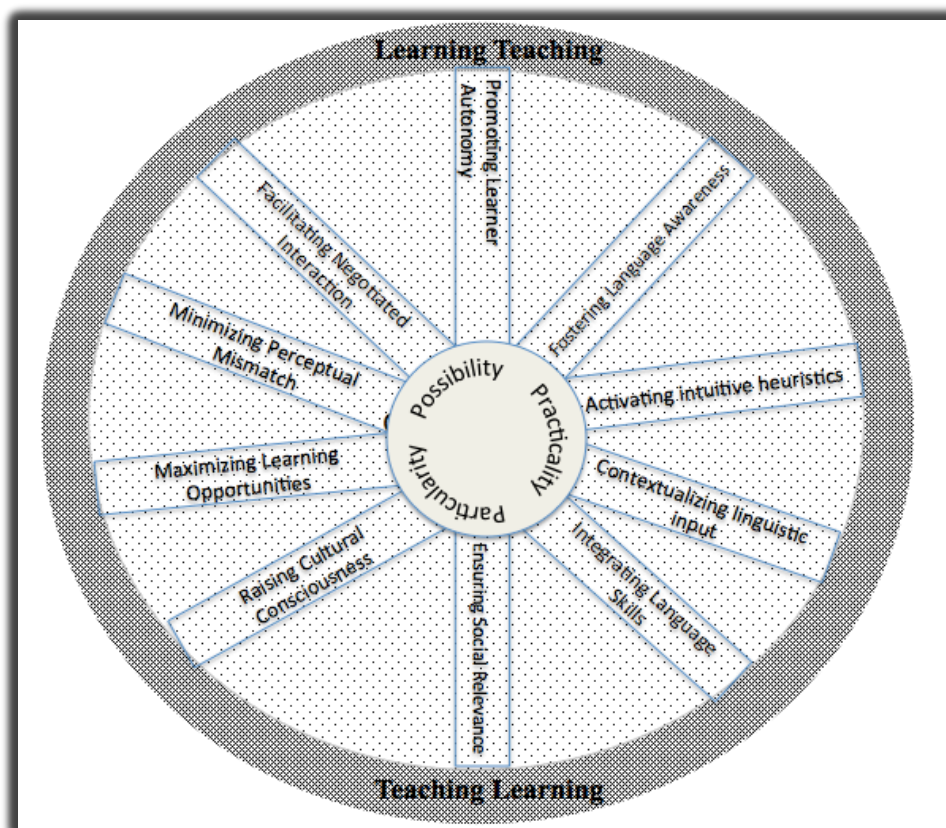


Figure 2: The Pedagogic Wheel³

The macrostrategies on the pedagogic wheel are interconnected in a systemic relationship and held together by the parameters of possibility, practicality and particularity. Such an

³ Adapted from Kumaravadivelu, B. (2003). *Beyond methods: Macrostrategies for language teaching*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

approach—particularly with regard to the language classroom and the questions under study here—does not signify an abandonment of CLT but rather a push for localized knowledge and for the reinterpretation of top-down theories to adapt them to the particularities of each educational context.

While the notion of post-method challenges hegemonic postulates around language methodology, the idea of multicompetence emerges against the so-called “idealized native speaker.” Coined by Vivian Cook, “multi-competence is not just the imperfect cloning of mono-competence, but a different state,” (2002, p. 8). Originally defined as “the compound state of a mind with two grammars” (2002), multicomptence was later explained as “the knowledge of more than one language in the same mind or the same community” (2012). The implications for classroom instruction are many. First of all, a multicompetence approach requires deconstructing the goal of language learning as a means to mirror the native speaker. The idea here is that a “native” English speaker from New York does not sound the same as a speaker from Kansas, so why would a Spanish language user from Chicago attempt to sound like a “native” speaker from Venezuela (Cook, 2013)? Moreover, L2 representations in textbooks and language materials needs to be seriously reconsidered “because they are virtually never represented positively” but as deficient speakers (Cook, 1999, p. 200). In the same vein, the “ideal” of a teacher as a native speaker of the language needs to be replaced. Students are more likely to identify with, and be able to emulate, another “user” rather than a “native” teacher. Finally, within a multicomptence approach, “language users” communication goals are vastly different from that of a native speaker. The goals of language courses should be focused on “users’ needs” rather than on unlikely visits to “other” countries.

Given the focus of the current research, considering alternative approaches to mainstream methods and language competence seems natural and necessary. Postmethod and multicompetence approaches provide a dissonant framework from which to analyze and interpret alternatively certified urban teachers' attempt to implement CLT, achieve their vision for their classrooms and develop their own theories of practice within their specific sociocultural context.

Educating Language Teachers from a Sociocultural Perspective

Within the field of teacher education research, the last fifty years have witnessed the movement of teachers' voices from the periphery to a central position (Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Sharkey & Johnson, 2003). Rather than focusing on transmitting expert knowledge, teacher preparation programs have come to the realization that factors such as teachers' beliefs, prior language learning experiences, their classroom realities and most importantly, context of practice, play a major role in teachers' pedagogical visions and instructional choices (Elbaz, 1981; Richards, 1996; Golombeck, 1998; Borg, 2003; Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood & Son, 2004). It will be beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide an overview of all research in teacher education. Rather, the focus of the study calls for a deep look at language teachers' beliefs and the role that context plays in shaping teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices.

Before I dive into this section of the literature review, a note regarding the distinction between knowledge and beliefs is necessary. Numerous studies have attempted to delineate the differences between these constructs (Ackermann, 1972; Brown & Cooney, 1982; Calderhead, 1996; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). Terms such as practical knowledge, practical theory, maxims or personal knowledge are often used in literature to acknowledge the connections between knowledge and beliefs (Elbaz, 1981; Shulman, 1986; Borg, 2008). Beliefs are said to refer to ideologies and do not require a "truth condition." On the contrary, knowledge is

presupposed to be based on objective facts, refer to factual propositions and satisfy “the truth” condition. Nevertheless, from a post-positivist perspective, these claims of truthfulness need to be reevaluated to determine if the knowledge/belief dichotomy is still useful.

In his article *Resubsumption: A Possible Mechanism for Conceptual Change and Belief Revision*, Ohlsson (2009) comments on four different types of uses of the terms knowledge and belief. The *everyday use* of the terms bases its distinction on a “degree of certainty” scale. The *normative use* defines knowledge as a justified true belief. The *psychological use* refers to knowledge as “what a person thinks is true ... regardless of objective truth” (p.23). Finally, cognitive scientists view knowledge as “the superordinate category, so a person’s beliefs constitute a subset of his or her knowledge” (p. 24). Following Ohlsson, I understand the term knowledge as equivalent to a set of beliefs about a topic and thus, the terms will be used interchangeably. From this perspective, knowledge is merely “a belief that has gained acceptance in a group...and that subserves its [the group’s] interests” (Bereiter, 2002, p.78). Moreover, and together with beliefs and knowledge, the term *teacher cognition* will be used as an umbrella term to encompass teachers’ decision-making, teachers’ background knowledge, teachers’ practical knowledge, teachers’ beliefs, and knowledge structures that will be noted in this dissertation (Borg, 2003).

Language Teachers’ cognition. Early research on language teachers’ knowledge was highly influenced by general education research and focused primarily on teachers’ decision-making processes (Clark & Peterson, 1986). It is only during the 1970s and through the 1980s that the field of teacher cognition started to explore new perspectives, particularly the importance of socio-psychological contexts in the development of teacher cognition (Borg, 2008). The separation between mastery of content and mastery of pedagogical principles became outdated

and gave way to what Freeman (2002) coins the decade of change (1980-1990). Elbaz (1981) proposed the idea of *practical knowledge* that “acknowledges the importance of theory while firmly situated in practice” (p. 23). This novel approach brought together empirical-analytical and phenomenological perspectives (Tsui, 2007, p. 47). Using Elbaz’s conceptualization, Golombek (1998) examined how two in-service English teachers’ personal practical knowledge informed their practice. Observations, interviews and stimulus recall reports were used to uncover the tensions in the classroom and to assist both teachers in verbalizing their practical knowledge through a reconstruction of their experiences as learners, teachers and students in a teacher preparation program. Both teachers recognized the influences that their experiences as learners had on their classrooms. In particular, one of the participants uncovered her “traumatic” experience with error correction while learning Russian as having a strong influence on her practical knowledge (p. 454).

Soon after Elbaz, Shulman’s (1986) *pedagogical content knowledge* reached the field of language teachers’ education. Shulman and his colleagues re-conceptualized the knowledge base for teaching into seven categories: general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, content knowledge, curricular knowledge, knowledge of learners and their characteristics, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values (1987, p. 8). In the same vein, Daniel Schön (1983) and his work on reflective practitioners continued to build a new understanding of teachers as agents rather than recipients of theory. His work explored teachers’ capacity to theorize in the classroom reaching the conclusion that indeed, teachers reflect both on and in the classroom in their daily attempt to make sense of what they do. Both Elbaz and Schön continue to have a major impact on the study of teachers’ learning and cognition.

Moving on to the next decade, Freeman (2002) coins the decades 1990-2000 as the “era of consolidation” with regard to teacher knowledge and learning. Specifically, research on language teacher cognition picked up momentum in the second half of the decade and continued to gather pace up to today, leading some to coin the decade as the “era of change in language teacher research” (Borg, 2003). Although the diversity of research around language cognition can be overwhelming, the common theme since the 1990s has been the acknowledgment that “knowledge in the classroom is widely networked; it brings together past experience and future goals within the context of present activity and interaction” (Freeman, 2002, p. 9). Prior knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learning languages are essential to understand the formation of teachers’ practical knowledge and pedagogical choices once in the classroom (Pajares, 1992). As Johnson (2006) points out, “the social, political, economic, and cultural histories that are located in the contexts where L2 teachers learn and teach” add an additional layer to the complexities involved in “learning to teach” and are key to understanding the development of teacher cognition (p. 245). Borg’s (1997, 2003) schematic conceptualization of teacher cognition (Figure 3) provides a framework to better understand the central role that teachers’ own experiences as learners, their professional coursework leading to licensure and the contextual specifications of their teaching practice have on cognition.

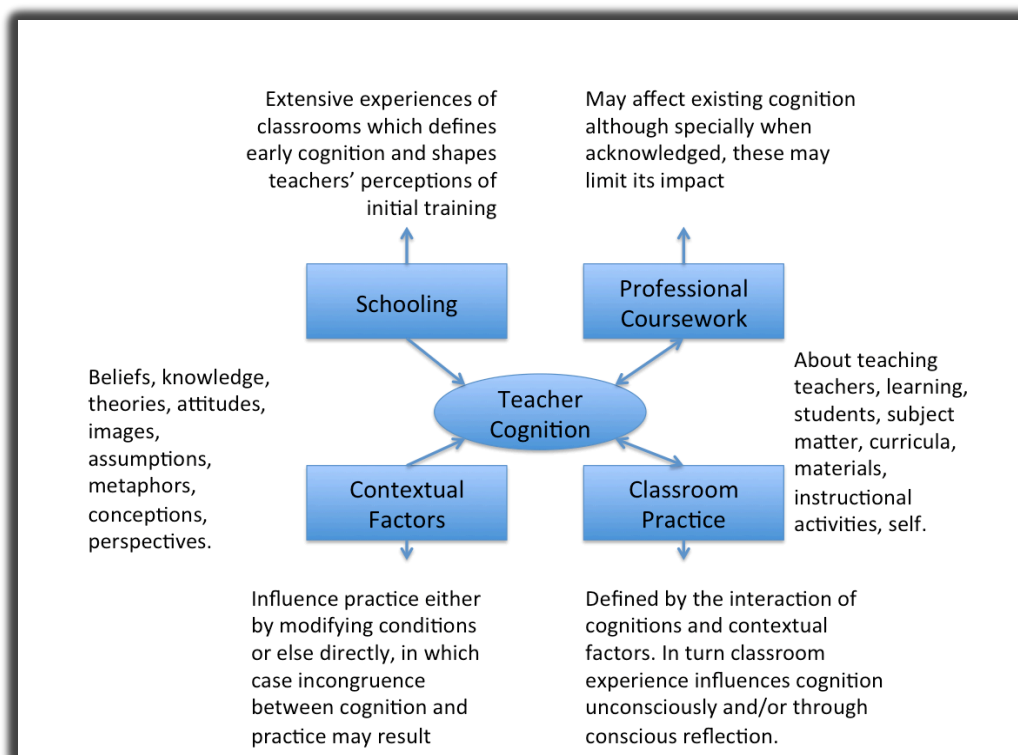


Figure 3: Borg's framework for Teacher Cognition⁴

As exemplified in Borg's diagram, context is highly relevant in understanding language teachers' cognition and has been well documented (Holliday, 1994; van Lier, 1998; Breen et al., 2001; Borg, 2003; Moran, 1996, Almarza, 1996, Velez-Rondon, 2006). Breen et al. (2001) observed and sub-sequentially interviewed eighteen ESL teachers of adults and children in a particular Australian context. The purpose of the study was to explain their classroom practices in relation to the underlying pedagogical principles that they saw as guiding their work. Results

⁴ Reprinted with permission from Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe, and do. *Language Teaching*, 36(2), 81-109.

of the study suggested the existence of a collective ideology; that is, “despite individual diversity in the teachers’ enacting of their role, *as a collective* there is an underlying and consistent pattern between the ways they think about their work and the ways in which they act in the language class” (p. 496).

While Breen et al focused on experienced teachers, Spada and Massey (1992) looked at effects of contextual factors on two novice ESL teachers’ ability to implement pedagogical principles they learned in their education programs. The teacher working at small private school, where classroom management was not a concern, was able to implement instructional strategies acquired during her studies. Contrary, the teacher working at an urban public school with serious behavioral issues spent most of his time focusing on classroom management and had little opportunity to apply the knowledge gained during his teacher education program. Richard and Pennington (1998) analyzed the role of contextual factors on the teaching practices of five graduates of a BA TESL course in Hong Kong. They found that teachers often abandoned communicative approaches to teaching due to a desire to blend into the culture of the school. In addition, the need to meet curricular expectations, students’ demand for more traditional grammar-based approaches, and classroom control were also cited as having an influence on their instructional choices.

Studies focused on FL teachers are particularly relevant for this study and have shown similar results. Moran (1996) followed Katherine, an experienced English teacher in New Hampshire, in her attempt to become a Spanish teacher after her proposal to add a foreign language class got approved by the school where she taught. The three-month study included classroom observations, written reports and six hour-long interviews. By the time of the study, Katherine had been teaching Spanish for six years. Katherine had not follow a “traditional” route

to becoming a teacher and thus lacked credentials in the beginning. Aware of her limitations, she sought ways to improve her proficiency, including summer abroad, hiring a tutor and completing a Masters in FL education. Her graduate work changed the focus of her class from drills and repetition to a clear focus on communication. According to Moran, a conglomeration of factors characterized this teacher's journey: her views on education, her sense of obligation to connect her students with the world, linguistically and culturally, and the desire to improve her teaching to meet the needs of her students and her own limitations and strengths as a teacher.

Almarza (1996) conducted a cross-case analysis of four foreign language student teachers designed to “analyze the origin and content of student teachers’ knowledge, the changes it undergoes during an initial teacher education course and how it relates to the way they teach during teaching practice” (p. 50). Using semi-structured interviews, journal entries, classroom observations and stimulated recall procedures, researchers collected data over a nine-month period—the length of Post-Graduate certificate in Education course. The study found that student teachers relied on a combination of multiple sources of knowledge for their practice. All student teachers adopted methods taught during their teaching program as exemplified by the similarities found in content selection, explanations provided as well as the organization of activities. Cognitively, however, the degree of acceptance of more communicative methods varied greatly as exemplified by teachers’ reflections. In talking about their practice, teachers frequently reverted to knowledge acquired prior to the course with some teachers expressing a desire to become free of the pedagogical constraints imposed by the program to develop their own methodological approaches congruent with their teaching context (p. 69).

Mangubhai et al.’s (2004) study looked into the personal practical knowledge of CLT of Doreen, an experienced high-school teacher of German as a FL in Australia. They found that

Doreen's practical knowledge was the result of an amalgam of features of CLT and general teaching. In other words, while Doreen expressed a preference for minimal error correction or communicative competence over grammatical competence, other features such as being reliable, punctual or sensitive to students' backgrounds emerged essential in her personal practical knowledge.

In her article "From Student to Teacher," Velez-Rendon (2006) recounts the learning-to-teach experience of Melanie, a pre-service German language teacher, from her own perspective. Contextual, academic and cognitive factors were found to affect her development. More than her education program coursework, Melanie's background experiences, content knowledge, level of commitment and an effective mentoring relationship seem to have contributed to a successful practicum experience.

Although the studies presented in this section vary in terms of methodology, context or purpose for students to learn the language, their results bring to the surface commonalities that are useful in studying teachers' cognition. Teachers, as sociocultural beings, are not empty vessels in which to place content. Rather, teachers bring with them experiences and beliefs that are key to understanding their classroom practices. Moreover, the influence of the context in which novice teachers—as "apprentices" who are trying to gain acceptance into a profession—start their career cannot be underestimated. Bridging the gap between theory and practice entails considering all the competing factors that shape the process of "learning to teach" and applying those to the improvement of teacher preparation programs.

Conclusion

The influence of CLT on language teaching and learning around the world over the past 40 years is undeniable. Nevertheless, as CLT gained popularity, its adaptability and suitability to

non-Western countries began to be questioned. Rather than a *tabula rasa*, teachers, as individuals and professionals, are shaped by a complex amalgam of history, knowledge, beliefs and the realities of the contexts in which they practice. As pedagogical approaches gain entrance in the classroom, they enter a dialogue with local perspectives; that is, with the historical and political realities of all the individuals involved in the acts of teaching and learning. Methods as “ready-made” packages are questioned and alternative discourses emerge. Researching the realities of teachers within the complexities of their context of practice requires new approaches that take into account, and are able to unveil, the world of tensions and contradictions that permeate their teaching. As I attempt to study alternatively certified teachers practicing in underserved urban schools, I will use Activity Theory (AT) as an analytical tool that has the potential to help me unveil those contradictions. The chapter to follow provides a detailed explanation on the origins of AT, its suitability to answer my research questions and its congruence with the strategy of inquiry that I have decided to pursue for the present study.

III.

Methods

Do not sentence me completely to the
treadmill of mathematical calculations
– leave me time for philosophical speculations,
my sole delight.
– Johannes Kepler

I have chosen to use a qualitative multicase study located within a constructivist paradigm to study the activity of alternatively certified FL teachers practicing in the context of underserved urban schools. I use Activity Theory as the analytical tool to interpret the results of this study. In this chapter, I provide a rationale and justification for the research paradigm, choice of analytical tool, strategy of inquiry and data analysis approach. I also position myself as a researcher and discuss the steps that I took to ensure trustworthiness in this study.

Research Paradigm

Studies conducted within the framework of Activity Theory most often adhere to qualitative methods (Barab et al., 2002; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Mwanza, 2002; Nardi, 1996). A qualitative research approach naturally fits this study. As I attempt to understand their perspectives, I approach FL alternatively certified urban teachers as silenced disenfranchised users of language methodology. As pointed in the introduction, methods are never “disinterested” and thus, have traditionally favored patriarchal discourses of practice aimed at promoting the interest of those holding “educational power” (Pennycook, 1989; Canagarajah, 1999; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Qualitative research as field of inquiry has taken the lead in providing a metaphorical space for the encounter of historically silenced voices and the problematization of knowledge production and consumption. The embracement of qualitative research implies the abandonment of *masternarratives* and reductive ontological,

epistemological and methodological research perspectives. I share with qualitative researchers the conviction that "a politics of liberation must always begin with the perspective, desires, and dreams of those individuals and groups who have been oppressed by the larger ideological, economic and political forces of a society or a historical moment" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 1048). Given that my focus is on urban FL teachers whose perspectives have been historically ignored, it is exactly this emphasis on *emic* -rather than *etic* perspectives- that makes a qualitative approach ideal for this study.

Qualitative research focuses on understanding the meaning of people's experiences within their sociocultural context. As Patton states, "qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there...what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are" (cited in Merriam, 2002, p. 5). In terms of knowledge production, the traditional locus of the knower shifts from the researcher to the researched. The voice of "the other," in this case, alternatively certified FL urban teachers, becomes the voice of the knower. This is congruent with most methods of data collection in qualitative research (i.e. interviewing, narrative, focus groups etc.) and with its emphasis on the use of rich descriptions that represent participants' worldviews. I am not affirming that such an approach neutralizes all possible processes of *otherization*, partly due to researchers' interpretation of participants' accounts. Yet, it shows an attempt to speak with *the other* instead of *for the other* and to develop a sort of "epistemological responsibility."

Recognizing that knowledge is situated and context-bounded, I choose to frame this study within a constructivist paradigm. Constructivist researchers ascribe to a worldview in which "universal, absolute realities are unknowable, and the objects of inquiry are individual

perspectives or constructions of reality” (Hatch, 2002, p.15). *Knowledge*, according to constructivism, comprises “*non-objective, developmental* explanations created by humans engaged in meaning-making in cultural and social communities of discourse” (Fosnot, 2005, p. 17). *Knowing* is viewed as an “ongoing social activity,” a “self-regulatory” process in which humans struggle to make meaning between existing representations of the world and the new representations they are confronting (Wright, 2000, p. 331). This perspective challenges “received views” of science that imagine research as a de-contextualized reflection on some pre-existing and stable reality. In working with urban FL language teachers as they attempt to implement ivory tower, “ready-made” methodological packages such as CLT, this implies the possibility of abandoning existing negative perspectives of their teaching realities. It opens the door to contextualized knowledge production and to the idea that teachers, rather than passive users, might become agents and connoisseurs. A constructivist perspective allows for more complex interpretations that look at educational context, institutional impositions and discourses of failure as alternative explanations of the current state of FL education in urban contexts.

I am well aware of the criticism around the lack of scientific rigor of qualitative methodologies. Some of the most notable criticisms include researcher bias and lack of reproducible or generalizable results. These criticisms will be addressed all throughout this chapter and in the trustworthiness section in particular.

Activity Theory: An analytical tool

This section focuses on Activity Theory (AT)—more recently known as Cultural Historical Activity theory (CHAT) to include the role of context—as the analytical tool used to interpret alternatively certified foreign language teachers situated practices. In this study, CHAT serves as a “holistic and contextual method of discovery” that helps unveil the meaning as well

as possible connections and contradictions amongst the data gathered. AT originates in sociocultural theory (SCT) (Hashim & Jones, 2007). Within a sociocultural framework, learning is understood as “a dynamic social activity that is situated in physical and social contexts, and is distributed across persons, tools, and activities” (Johnson, 2009, p. 9). Epistemologically, according to Johnson (2009), such an approach “transforms how we understand teacher learning, language, language teaching, and the enterprise of L2 teacher education” (p. 2). Teacher learning is situated and socially distributed. In other words, both teaching and learning to teach are “social activities” that gain meaning within the realities of a historical and cultural context. As an analytical framework, AT assists in understanding human experiences as shaped by their interaction with the environment. As Engeström clearly states:

First, activity theory is deeply contextual and oriented at understanding historically specific local practices, their objects, mediating artifacts, and social organization (Cole & Engeström, 1993). Second, activity theory is based on a dialectical theory of knowledge and thinking, focused on the creative potential in human cognition (Davydov, 1988; and Ilyenkov, 1977). Third, activity theory is a developmental theory that seeks to explain and influence qualitative changes in human practices over time. (Engeström, 1999, pp. 377-378)

AT therefore provides an ideal analytical tool to study the situated practices of FL language teachers practicing in urban schools and their attempts to understand, implement and reimagine CLT in the context of their realities. The following sections provide an overview of the evolution of AT and its main principles as they apply to this study.

Three generations of Activity Theory. The philosophical roots of AT date back to 1930s and the work of Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky challenged the strict separation between mind and behavior, between individuals and society. Rather, he conceived the individual and the social

as “mutually constitutive elements of a single, interactive system” (Cole, 1985, p. 148).

Vygotsky claims that humans use tools and cultural artifacts to achieve goals. In other words, as we strive to attain certain objectives, these cultural tools *mediate* our efforts. Our psychological being is transformed and in turn affects how we develop as individuals, as a society (culture) and, ultimately, as a species (Vygotsky, 1981; Scribner, 1985; Cross & Gearon, 2004). The introduction of cultural artifacts into the human activity equation was revolutionary at the time. From this perspective, individuals must be understood in connection with their cultural means and, interpretations of society, need to account for the agency of individuals who use and produce those cultural artifacts (Engeström, 2001). Vygotsky’s (1981) theory has been visually represented using the triangle below:



Figure 4: First Generation Activity Theory⁵

The triangle represents what Engeström (2001) coins First Generation Activity Theory, that is, the connection between a stimuli (A) and a response (B) mediated thru the use of a tool (X). In other words, A represents the subject (i.e. teacher), B represents the object of the activity

⁵ Adapted from Engeström, Y. (2001). Expansive learning at work. *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(1), 133–156.

(i.e. learner) and X the tools (i.e. textbook) required to achieve the desired outcome of the activity.

Vygotsky focused his research on the tools rather than the activity itself. Of particular interest to Vygotsky (1981) was children's development of higher mental function as they used language-mediated tools to communicate or be understood by adults. His disciple, Leont'ev, viewed Vygotsky's focus as limiting. Leont'ev (1981) turned the activity itself (vs. tool) into the focus of analysis. From his perspective, activity is a "system with its own structure, its own internal transformations, and its own development" (Leont'ev, in Lamb et al., 1981, p. 137). *Activities, actions and operations* comprise this basic structure as exemplified by the diagram below:

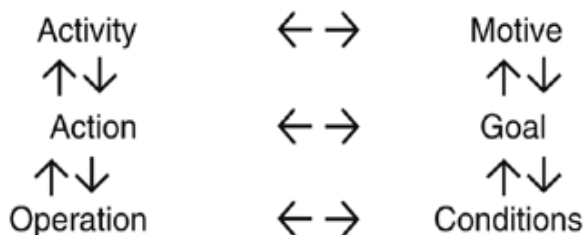


Figure 5: The Definitive Hierarchy of Leontiev⁶

Activity is governed by motives of the whole community and usually not the focus of conscious awareness. Actions, however, are conscious and oriented towards goals. Operations are routine behaviors that are almost automatic. Leont'ev uses his famous example of the

⁶ Reprinted with permission. Engeström, Y. (2001). Expansive learning at work. *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(1), 133–156.

“primeval collective hunt” to illustrate this structure (Leont’ev, 1981, pp. 210–213). During a collective hunt, people are assigned different roles. The beaters’ actions (beating the bushes to scare animals) are not directly related to the object of the activity. The process of “collective” hunt provides meaning to all the actions, which in the end support the main activity- hunting for the group.

Leont’ev never provided a graphical expansion of Vygotsky’s triangle. It would be Engeström who provided a visual representation of the influence that community has on the relationship between subject and object thus, modeling what he coins second generation activity theory:

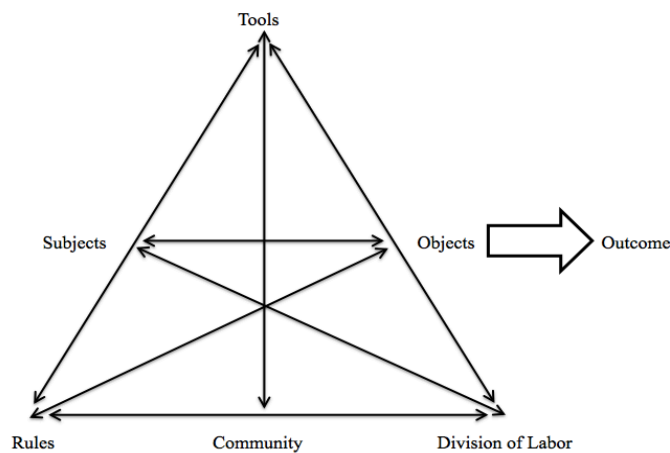


Figure 6: Second Generation Activity Theory⁷

⁷ Reprinted with permission. Engeström, Y. (2001). Expansive learning at work. *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(1), 133–156.

The top part of the triangle replicates Vygotsky's model. The subject is oriented towards its object to achieve his/her outcome by means of tools/instruments. What is novel about this representation is the inclusion of the sociocultural setting of mediation, that is, the *rules* and *division of labor* within a certain *community*.

Community refers to the fact that subjects are members of social groups. The activity of a human individual is “a system in the system of social relations *and* it does not exist without those social relations” (Leont'ev, 1981, pp. 46-47).

Rules on the other hand “regulate activity by defining acceptable expectations of behavior according to the community in which it occurs” (Cross & Gearon, 2004, p. 9). Rules can be explicit (i.e., foreign language requirements for graduation) or implicit and/or consistent with general social norms (i.e., not eating during class).

Division of labor emphasizes that different members of a community contribute to the ultimate goal in different ways. It also encompasses distribution of power. Tasks are usually divided horizontally –that is amongst those at similar levels- and power is divided vertically (Oliveros et al., 2010).

As AT's popularity exploded and the framework started to be applied internationally to a variety of fields, questions of diversity and the need to include multiplicity of interacting perspectives arose in some studies (Engeström, 2001, p. 135). The third generation of activity theory responds to these challenges for dialogue and diverse perspectives.

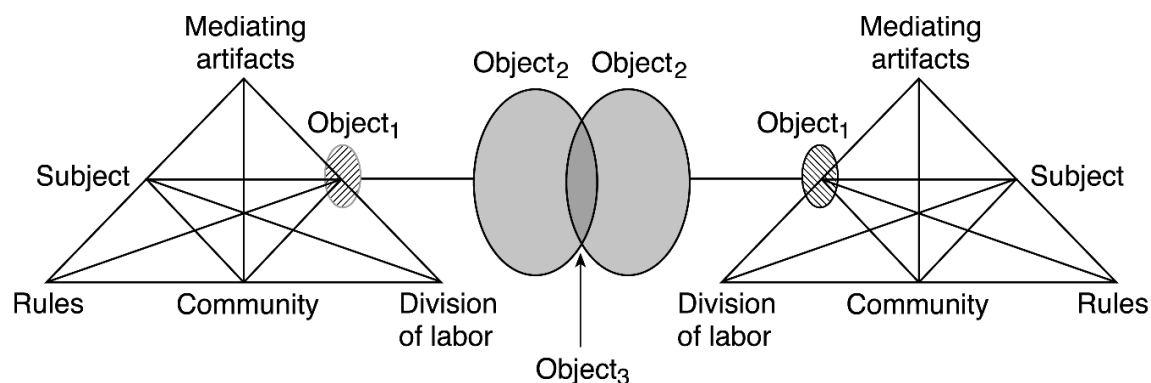


Figure 7: Third Generation Activity Theory⁸

The innovation of this model resides on the inclusion of at least two interacting systems as the focus of analysis. According to Engeström (2001), within third generation AT:

The object moves from an initial state of unreflected, situationally given ‘raw material’ (object 1; e.g., a specimen patient entering a physician’s office) to a collectively meaningful object constructed by the activity system (object 2, e.g., the patient constructed as a specimen of a biomedical disease category and thus as an instantiation of the general object of illness/health), and to a potentially shared or jointly constructed object (object 3; e.g., a collaboratively constructed understanding of the patient’s life situation and care plan) (p. 137).

The object emerges as socially constructed at the intersection of activity systems. This model is still in evolution and applied primarily to large systems evolving into institutions and organization (Nussbaumer, 2012, p. 40).

Despite “generational” differences, in its current state, Engeström’s (1999, 2001) activity theory is governed by five main principles: 1) activity as the prime unit of analysis, 2) multi-

⁸ Reprinted with permission. Engeström, Y. (2001). Expansive learning at work. *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(1), 133–156.

voicedness of the activity system, 3) historicity, 4) contradictions as a source of development and 5) expansive circles of learning.

Activity as the prime unit of analysis: Activity refers to “a powerful dialectic rooted in contradictions such as thinking and doing, knowing and performing, individual and society, ... internalization and externalization” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 210). Contradictions bring about learning and transformation. Activities are studied within the context of activity systems. *Activity systems* are “collective, artifact-mediated and object-oriented” and the sine qua non condition for an activity theoretical analysis (Engeström 2001, p. 136). As represented on Figure 6, the minimum components of an activity system are *subject, object, mediating tools, rules, community and divisions of labor* (Cole & Engeström, 1993; Engeström, 1987). The *subject* is the agent – group or individual- of the action, the doer from whose perspective the activity is analyzed. *The object* is the “problem” space towards which the activity is oriented and the reason why subjects participate in the activity. *Tools* mediate the activity between the subject and the object. Tools can be classified as primary (physical tool i.e. computers, textbooks etc.), secondary (psychological tools i.e. language, ideas) or tertiary (cultural systems) (Bertelsen 2000; Hasan & Gould 2001). Finally, as explained previously, subjects are members of *communities* that have implicit and explicit *rules* for acceptable participation and that divide and assign tasks to its members by means of the *divisions of labor*. *Community, rules and divisions of labor* add the cultural-historical perspective neglected by Vygotsky.

Multi-Voicedness of Activity Systems: This principle refers to the existence of “multiple points of view, traditions and interest” within the activity system. Subjects carry their own history with them and so do the rest of the elements in the activity system. Tools, rules and conventions are cultural, historical and thus, multilayered in nature. For instance, teachers’

activity in the classroom is constantly mediated by textbooks, school rules and/or district mandates that have the potential to influence not only teachers' pedagogical decision but also who they are as professionals and members of a community. Nevertheless, although "multi-voicedness" is often as source of trouble, it is also "a source of innovation, demanding actions of translation and negotiation" (Engerstrom, 2001, p. 136).

Historicity: Activity systems are constantly evolving, shaped and transformed overtime and can only be fully understood against their own history. History, therefore, "needs to be studied as local history of the activity and its objects, and as history of the theoretical ideas and tools that have shaped the activity" (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). As an example, FL teachers in this study need to be understood against the history of urban schools, the educational achievement gaps of minority children, federal mandates aimed at closing the gap or a long history of neglecting FL education, particularly within communities of color.

Contradictions as sources of change and development: Contradictions are different from problems or conflicts. They are "historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems" (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). They do not reflect failure but rather possibilities for learning and innovation, as "sources of development" (Kuutti, 1996, p. 34). In other words, contradictions are "illuminative hinges through which participants in an activity can reflect on their activity system's developmental trajectory and understand its dynamics" (Foot, 2001, p. 12). Contradictions enable constant change and re-structuration within the activity system. Engeström identifies four levels of contradiction that constitute the main source of data for the activity analysis.

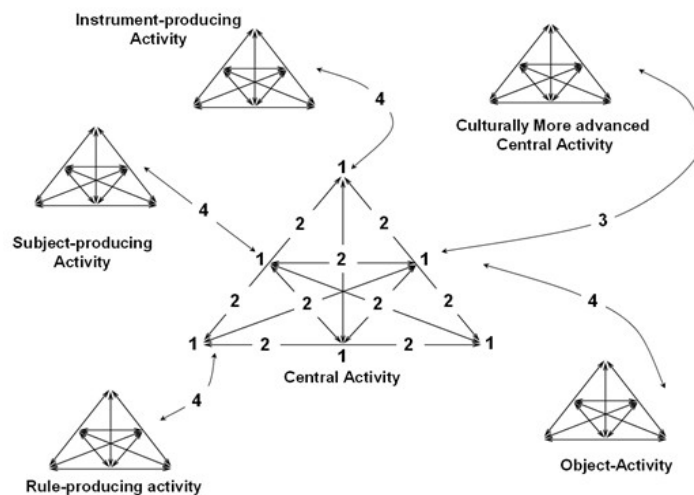


Figure 8: Interactions of Surrounding Activities and Possible Contradictions⁹.

Primary inner contradictions (1) happen *within* each component of the activity system, similar to an internal conflict. They are ever present and have been claimed to lead to secondary contradictions. As Foot (2001) points out, primary contradictions originate from dual constructions and the fact that elements of the activity system have both inherent worth and also value as part of a system. One example of inner contradictions would be between an ideal teaching methodology and actual classroom practice.

Secondary contradictions (2) arise between components of the activity system. As two elements of the activity system interact (i.e. subject-tool, subject-rule) tensions arise. One example of a secondary contradiction between subject and community could be exemplified by a

⁹ In Madyarov, I., & Taef, A. (2012). Contradictions in a distance course for a marginalized population at a Middle Eastern university. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 13(2), 77-100, p. 81.

teacher trying to implement communicative activities aimed at promoting competence who find resistance by students used to grammar oriented approaches (Kim, 2011).

Tertiary contradictions (3) arise “when a culturally more advanced object and motive is introduced into the activity” (Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research). For example, as teachers try to innovate their practice by introducing technology, tensions might arise between new approaches and features of the old system (i.e. lack of adequate technology or classroom policies regarding teacher-student interaction) (Blin, 2005).

Quaternary contradictions (4) arise between the central activity system under study and neighboring activity systems as they interact. Language teaching, for example, does not happen in isolations. There might be state policies regarding funding or content standards that have the potential of causing tension within the activity system of the FL classroom.

Human activity is in constant change and thus, contradictions are inevitable. Engeström (1993) provides a clear rationale that illustrates the need to explore contradictions in context:

Development can be understood by tracing disruptions, troubles, and innovations at the level of concrete modes of the activity, both historical and current. The analysis of such data [concrete modes of the activity] leads to hypothetical identification of the internal contradictions of the activity system. Such a hypothetical model is actually a depiction of the activity system at the level of ideal types- only this time the inner contradictions are built into ideal-typical model from “bottom up.” (pp. 71-72)

Contradictions at any level allow for the “voices” of the participants to emerge. It is this context specific exploration that allow for an in-depth understanding of the activity system.

When individuals participating in the activity system start to question the system and deviate from the norms, a collective effort for change might arise (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). However,

contradictions can also be ignored due to accommodation, existential reasons and strong beliefs and myths about the way things should be (Feldman & Weiss, 2010).

Expansive Cycles: The fifth principle of activity theory claims that activity systems are engaged in constant cycles of qualitative transformation that open the possibility of expansive transformation. Expansive learning violates the presupposition that the knowledge to be acquired is “stable” or even known. The most interesting types of learning happen in action and lead to transformation. Following Engeström (2011), expansive transformations take place when “the object and motive of the activity are re-conceptualized to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of the activity” (p. 137). In other words, cycles of expansive transformation need to be understood in the light of the *zone of proximal development*:

It is the distance between the present everyday actions of the individuals and the historically new form of the societal activity that can be collectively generated as a solution to the double bind potentially embedded in the everyday actions. (Engeström, 1987, p. 174)

The object of transformation is the entire system that by means of expansive learning produces new forms of activity. Due to its “transformative nature” and the learning possibilities involved in activity theory, it is important that researchers remain within the context to promote change and to help implement new ideas emerging from system considerations (Farrelly, 2012).

CHAT in language teacher educational research. Despite terminological disputes, particularly around the definition of “activity,” CHAT

seems to work particularly well for...some educational contexts...where you have a reasonably well-defined object, a pretty good sense of desirable outcomes, a self-identifying set of subjects, a good sense of what might count as an instrument or tool (Bakhurst 2009, p. 206).

Nevertheless, in a recent review of peer-reviewed educational studies, Nussbaumer (2012) found only 21 K-12 classrooms studies that used CHAT systematically and a vast array of publication “claiming” to use the framework but only superficially. While the reduced number of successful attempts might lead us to think that the making sense of this theory could be too difficult for researchers, the abundance of unsuccessful trials clearly brings to the surface researchers’ interest on CHAT and its potential to help us interpret and analyze complex and context-embedded educational practices (Nussbaumer, 2012, p. 46). In regards to teacher learning and teacher practices, CHAT has also gained increasing popularity in the field (Pardo, 2006; Tsui & Law, 2007; Tasker, 2011). However, studies focused on language teachers using activity theory as a framework are still very scarce.

Kim (2011) used the format of a case study focused on Hee-Won, a pre-service FL English teacher, to investigate the results of ten years of curricular reform attempts in South Korea. Using CHAT, Kim sought to investigate the impact that CLT and Teaching English through English (TEE) have had on teacher practices in Korea. Particularly, Kim’s study uncovered how Hee-Won had constructed “her perceptions of and practices within these curricular mandates and, at the same time, how these same perceptions and practices served to construct the contexts from which they have been derived” (p. 225). Many contradictions emerged during the analysis. Kim unveiled internal contradictions between Hee-Won’s beliefs about how languages are learned (i.e. teacher-centered classrooms and drills) and CLT (i.e. providing more opportunities for students to practice). Tensions also emerged between the teacher and the community, understood as the students. Although Hee-Won made efforts to include more communicative activities in the class, those were received with resistance by students who were more interested on tasks that mirrored state exams. Additional contradictions

emerged between the subject's level of proficiency and the TEE policy. Hee-Won only used English sporadically because of her lack of confidence and most of the times addressed students in Korean.

Reynolds (2012) used third generation activity theory to conduct a qualitative study of two FL pre-service teachers as they tried to understand and appropriate CLT based on the goals and motifs of multiple activity systems: the university and middle school and high school practicum placements. Primary, secondary and tertiary contradictions arose in the activity systems bringing to the surface pre-service teachers inability to execute lessons consistent with CLT principles despite their understanding of the framework. Reynolds concludes that for the teachers in this study, concept appropriation was not “a matter of merely transferring conceptual, physical, and practical tools from their university to their school settings, but a cyclical and interpretive process” (p. iii).

As exemplified in the studies above, exploring teaching practices, concept appropriation and pedagogical decision requires a deep and solid understanding of the context in which these activities take place. As Sanino et al. (2009) remark, “human life is fundamentally rooted in participation in human activities that are oriented toward objects. Thus, human beings are seen as situated in a collective life perspective, in which they are driven by purposes that lie beyond a particular goal” (p. 2). Given the general objective of the present study - that is, to understand the practice of FL teachers teaching in the context of urban schools, an analytical tool such as activity theory seems very well suited. The complexity of urban contexts, the realities of alternatively certified teachers and the current educational policy context that we live in call for an approach that is able to unveil the subtle influences of a vast array of elements and the contradictions amongst them. As Clark and Davis (2009) point out,

the particular and unique characteristics of U.S. urban schools, namely high enrollments of minoritized students, historical trends of low performance as measured by standardized assessments (and, consequently, a palpable assessment culture), high teacher attrition, and the consistent cycle of instructional and curricular ‘reforms’, demand that teacher practice be examined in ways that more fully acknowledge the complexities of teaching in these contexts (p. 505).

CHAT has much to offer in helping us deepen our understanding of the influences that context and history have on teaching. Moreover, in the context of this study, CHAT has the potential of providing a deep analysis of “other” perspectives, of novice teachers practicing in marginalized contexts that have historically received “innovation” from the outside without questioning. CHAT has the potential to uncover contradictions that challenge methodological approaches as theoretical and context-free and to give voice to bottom-up, context-specific understandings and solutions.

Strategy of Inquiry

I have chosen a descriptive multicase study as the strategy of inquiry for this study. Case studies are particularly relevant for educational research since “the world of education means bringing to life what goes on in classrooms and in schools and how both are connected to a broader panoply of real-life, school districts, state agencies, communities—and educational controversy” (Yin, 2005, p. xiv).

There are plenty of definitions and ideas on case studies (Yin 1994, 2003; Merriam 1998; Stake 1995, 2000, 2005, 2008). According to Yin (2003), a case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). He adopts such a methodological and systematic approach to conducting case studies that many have framed him

within positivism (Brown, 2008). For Stake (1994), the focus is not so much on the methods but on the “case.” Therefore, as a form of research, “case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used” (Stake, 1994, p. 236). Similarly, Merriam (1998) maintains that the “single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study: the case” (p. 27). Hancock and Algozzine (2006) identify case study as an “intensive analysis and description of a single unit or system bound in space and time” (pp.10-11). In terms of appropriateness, a case study is ideal if: a) the goal is to answer “how” and “why” questions; b) the behavior of the study participants cannot be manipulated; c) the researcher believes that context is key to the phenomenon under study; or d) the limitations between the phenomenon and context are not clear (Yin, 2008; Baxter & Jack, 2008). In fact, case studies are most useful when the objects of study are so embedded in the context that observation in the natural setting is the best channel to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 2002). A case study, therefore, allowed me to explore alternatively certified FL teachers in the context of their realities. My goal was to gain deep insight into their understanding, implementation (or lack thereof) and adaptation of CLT in urban contexts. The inclusion of context here was particularly relevant.

In order to avoid research questions that are too broad, the “cases,” “single units” or “bounded systems” need to be very specific and have clear boundaries. Possibilities on how to bind a case include: a) by time and place, b) by time and activity and c) by definition and context (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 546). In the present study, the “cases,” “single units” or “bounded systems” are the classrooms of alternatively certified FL teachers practicing in underserved urban schools. As it will be outlined in the sections below, the case is bound to a specific educational context and one semester of data collection.

The two cases in this multiple case study had differences in regards to students' population, school size or resources available. However, they are representative of urban schools at a large in that both are under-resourced, underserved, underperforming and enrolls high levels of low-income students (Yin, 2003). Yin (2003) explains that multiple case studies are useful to, (a) "predict similar results (a literal replication) or (b) predict contrasting results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication)" (p. 47). For this particular research project, some contrasting results emerged but were congruent with the literature. Nevertheless, as similarities emerged, the cross-case analysis allowed for a certain degree of transferability and more robust data that a single case study would have conferred.

Although case studies have become very welcomed in educational research, critical voices of this research strategy continue to be heard. Lack of generalizability of results is the most common criticism. According to Yin (1994), case studies are only "generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes" (p. 10). The goal of a case study is "analytical generalization;" that is, to contribute to expanding existing theory. Rather than making deductive generalizations based on statistical explorations, the researcher generally aims at making "naturalistic generalizations" by recognizing patterns and similarities within a context (Stake, 2000). The goal of this study was to fill a gap in theory concerning the suitability of CLT in the particular context of urban school and as enacted by alternatively certified teachers, an important source of staffing for underserved urban schools. Additionally, one of the main strengths of this approach—that is, its flexibility and possibility of being tailored to specific research questions—frequently emerges as an object of criticism (Meyer, 2001, p. 330). Case study researchers have often been vague about the process, particularly those using qualitative methods. Given the purpose of this study, the contextual nature of the case study and its capacity

to provide insight into phenomena in real-life context, a case study is ideal. In the sections to follow, I provide a detailed description of the methods for participant selection, data collection and analysis and the steps that were taken to ensure trustworthiness.

Activity Theory and Case Studies: Methodological considerations. As noted in the prior sections, Activity Theory, as a theoretical lens, involves the in-depth study of a specific “activity” or case. In particular, descriptive case studies like this one focus on describing a phenomenon—in this case an activity system—within a real-life context (Yin, 2003). Nardi (1996, p. 95) provides a set of four practical implications that should be considered in choosing a research approach and/or design:

- The research timeframe must be “long enough to understand users’ objects”. Activities form over a period of time and the process of transforming objects into outcomes requires several steps or phases (Kuutti, 1996, cited in Nardi).
- Attention must be paid to “broad patterns of activity rather than narrow episodic fragments that fail to reveal the overall direction and import of an activity” (p. 95). The system needs to be looked at holistically, within a context.
- A variety of data collection methods such as interviews, observation, video, or document analysis should be used instead of relying on just one method.
- Researchers must be committed to understanding the issues at hand from the participants’ perspectives.

An overview of Nardi’s methodological consideration makes it easy to see how AT is geared towards qualitative research approaches. The methods of data collection, the emphasis on context and most importantly the focus on the *emic* make AT an ideal analytical tool for this qualitative

study. In other words, the case study method is aligned with my analytical tool and is epistemologically congruent with a qualitative approach within a constructivist paradigm.

Setting

There were two sites for data collection in this study. Pseudonyms are used through out this paper to protect the privacy of both the sites and the participants. *Power Academy*¹⁰ is a relatively new charter school that opened its doors on 2007. The school belongs to a national charter network of free, open enrollment public schools with a focus on preparing students from underserved communities for academic success. *Power Academy* is located at the heart of the urban core in a large Midwest City. The school enrolls children from the neighborhood, one of the most dangerous and impoverished in the city. *Power Academy* serves students in grades 5th-8th and has a total enrollment of around 300 students at the time of this study. *Power Academy*, like many others, represents a failed attempt at school desegregation. The demographics of the student body are provided in Table 2.

Table 2: *Student population at Power Academy*

Student demographics		All groups	
Black, non-Hispanic	76%	Free/ reduced lunch	97%
White, non-Hispanic	2%		
Hispanic	21%		
Other	2%		

¹⁰ All data for this section were collected from the state report card website. No reference is provided to protect the privacy of the school and participants in this study.

The school is relatively new and shares a building with an urban community college. The classrooms, however, are relatively underequipped with just desks, chairs and white boards filling-up the space. As you walk in, the amount of posters on the walls is overwhelming. There are pictures of school's teachers reading books, charts of academic progress, goals for different content areas, shout-outs to students or motivational chants from the school network. There is lots of light in the hallways. The school feels clean and new and, somehow, fairly sophisticated. It also feels calm. Students walk around from class to class in their neat uniforms and maintaining a moderate, I would say lower than expected, level of noise. The school staff is very young and, as in most charter schools in my experience, mostly white. The school has a name for hiring high numbers of Teach for America teachers and for aligning deeply with its mission.

Logan Academy, the other site, has a long and rich history. Located in the same Midwest metropolitan city, the school opened its doors in 1865 as the only preparatory school for black students in the area. *Logan Academy* remained an all-black school until 1978 when the student body was integrated. The school enrolls students from across the city and has a name for providing a relatively free quality option in the urban core. There is an IB program option for students who qualify. Regarding infrastructure, the building maintains reminiscences of its glorious times with front doors framed by majestic tusk-like columns. Before I started this study, I visited the school a few times. I clearly remember the overpowering smell of old building when walking in the school. There is also an inexplicable generalized sense of chaos around. The walls are cracked and often decorated with outdated materials. The need for a fresh layer of paint is undeniable. The few classrooms that I have peeked into have their walls decorated with outcome measures and progress-to-goal percentages on state assessments. They all look overcrowded. The

floors always seem flooded with paper, pencil shavings and candy wrappers. A few classrooms here and there are equipped with old-fashioned projectors connected to teachers' personal computers; but in general the school is ill equipped for modern education. The student body is fairly diverse as represented in Table 3:

Table 3: *Student population at Logan Academy*

Student demographics		All groups	
Black, non-Hispanic	52%	Free/ reduced lunch	72%
White, non-Hispanic	10%		
Hispanic	29%		
Other	6%		

The school enrolls close to 900 students from grades 6th-12th. The staff at *Logan Academy* is quite diverse and with many more year of experiences on average ($n=13.7$) than *Power Academy* ($n=3.4$).

For the purpose of this study, I understand this school to be representative of the context of inner city schools characterized as under-resourced, underserved, often enrolling high levels of minority low-income students (No Child Left behind Act, 2001). Logan Academy is a typical public, well-established high school in the inner city while Power Academy represents the very common charter option available in most urban school districts. There are differences across the sites that will allow for a broader audience to relate to the context but also for stronger results when commonalities are unveiled. It also helps provide a wider picture of urban FL teaching, as both sites are, in my experience, typical inner city schools contexts.

Although FL coursework is not a requirement for graduation at the state level, it is however a mandate in both schools. The FL Framework adopted by the state was developed by

the Foreign Language Association, the State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and seventy-five teachers from across the region. Rather than a prescribed curriculum, the FL framework is meant to function as a common vision:

It is not a state curriculum guide but a “common yardstick” for curriculum development. The work in the frameworks document is aligned with the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century and the ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners. These standards have been integrated into each area of the *State Show-Me Standards*¹¹. (Association of FL teachers, 2001)

The framework, revised in 2011, highlights the well-known *Five Cs* based on the National Standards for FL plus an additional local category, curriculum integration:

Communication: Students should be able to communicate in languages other than English by engaging in conversations and presenting information in the target language.

Cultures: Students should gain understanding of other cultures, its products, practices and perspectives.

Connections: As the study a foreign language, students should be able to reinforce knowledge acquired in other disciplines and access information only available to those familiar with the target language and culture.

Comparisons: Students should develop an insight into the nature of the target language and culture and establish comparisons with their own.

¹¹ Approved by Department of Education in 1996, the state Show-Me Standards are general academic standards to be used across disciplines. The academic standards are grouped around four goals stating that students in the state public schools will acquire the knowledge and skills to: 1) gather, analyze and apply information and ideas, 2) communicate effectively within and beyond the classroom, 3) recognize and solve problems and 4) make decisions and act as responsible members of society.

Communities: Students should use the language in their communities and beyond the classroom goals and show evidence of becoming life-long learners.

Curriculum Integration: Correlations should be established between the state Show-Me standards and the National Standards for Foreign Language.

The connection between CLT—as outlined in the literature review—and the parameters outlined by the state’s FL framework are obvious since the ultimate goal of FL is for students to learn how to effectively communicate in the target language and culture beyond the classroom (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983; Berns, 1990; Nunan, 1991; Savignon, 2002). This communication-oriented vision is reinforced by the utilitarian rationale provided by the state for the study of FL. Aside from mentioning academic benefits (i.e., creativity, higher ACT scores or improved reading proficiency), the department of education highlights the state’s exports, investment in foreign countries as well as the number of local jobs as a result of foreign investment in the state. Thus, the objective is to point out the need to grow citizens who are able to participate, that is, communicate, within this global economy. Finally, instructional strategies focused on “interpreting,” “expressing,” group work, cooperative learning and terms such as acquisition or performance tasks are ubiquitous in the FL framework for curriculum development, pointing one more time to CLT as the underlying approach.

Despite the undeniable connections with CLT, the state department of education does not subscribe to any particular approach or method. Standards should guide educational practices but are not meant to be prescriptive:

These standards for students are not a curriculum. Rather, the standards serve as a blueprint from which local school districts may write challenging curriculum to help all students achieve their maximum potential. *State* law assures local control of education. Each school district will determine how its curriculum will be

structured and the best methods to implement that curriculum in the classroom.
(State Department of Education)

As I attempt to understand FL teacher practices in urban schools and their implementation of CLT, it will be necessary to gain insight into their awareness, command and implementation of standards as curriculum guides for their teaching. Given that the teachers in this study practice within the context of urban schools—where the standards movement has been most prominent, as well as controversial—understanding how they interpret and implement standards as they make sense of the context of their teaching realities seems particularly relevant for my research.

Participants

Participants for this study were selected by means of purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2005). I have selected two alternatively certified FL teachers, Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho¹², teaching in a Midwestern inner city school. These teachers constitute information-rich cases that will allow for an in-depth look at why and how CLT is understood, implemented and adapted in urban contexts (Patton, 2002). More specifically, participant selection was based on the following criteria:

1. *Teachers must be alternatively certified FL teachers:* I chose to focus on alternatively certified FL teachers. While the traditional route to certification generally involves 1 to 2 years of coursework, alternatively certification programs provide a faster route generally requiring four to eight weeks of training before school starts and one more year of part-

¹² Pseudonyms are used for teachers' names and were chosen by the participants.

time educational coursework during the first year of teaching (Johnson, Birkeland, & Peske, 2005). In the Midwestern state where the research was conducted, FL continues to be a teacher shortage area particularly in urban settings (Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2013). Therefore, given that one of the purposes of alternative certification programs is to assist with staffing otherwise hard-to-staff subjects and schools, alternatively certified teachers are likely to provide a good representation of FL teachers in urban contexts.

2. *Teachers must be part of Teach for America:* TFA is a non-profit organization that places teachers in high-need, underserved schools as defined by the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act; that is, schools in the state top quartile in terms of unfilled positions, high teacher turnover rate, teachers lacking a license and students living below the poverty line. At the same time that recruiting teachers within the TFA alternative certification program helps bind the study, it also provides the working parameters for “teaching in an urban school.” Moreover, TFA teachers challenge the deficiency discourse around teacher quality in urban schools that has been partly blamed for academic failure (Babu & Mendro, 2003). TFA criticisms aside, a recent study from Harvard found that the qualities used in TFA selection process; that is, academic achievement, leadership, commitment to closing the achievement gap and perseverance, are associated with improved student outcomes (Dobbie, 2011). What is more, as Rockoff, Jacob, Kane, and Staiger (2011) note, teachers with higher cognitive levels are more likely to be successful in the classroom and have fewer management issues. TFA is highly competitive and recruits top graduates from elite schools. In the last year alone, forty-five graduates from Harvard, forty-six from Vanderbilt, seventy-three from University of Texas at Austin and twenty-seven from

Spellman were among those who joined. They all competed to work in urban schools where most traditional teacher education graduates would not consider applying. They thus, defy deficit discourses that highlight the lack of employment choices or the low educational achievement of those working in urban schools. In other words, in looking for a group of teachers motivated and driven to success and with the capacity to understand, implement and critically analyze methodological approaches, this is the group.

3. *Teachers must have shown a commitment to teaching urban students:* One of the main criticisms of TFA teachers has been the short time commitment of the program: two years (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011). For this study, teachers must identify as career teacher; that is, wanting to stay in education beyond their two-year commitment.
4. *Teachers must have received some training in CLT and/or language teaching methods:* TFA alternative certification program consist of a very complex algorithm of formal and informal training opportunities and college courses. During Summer Institute, a five-week intensive teaching boot camp, corps members teach summer school while attending professional development sessions including the basics (i.e. lesson planning, classroom management) but also content specific sessions. Moreover, all TFA teachers are eligible for a substantial AmeriCorps award that requires additional professional development hours that are generally offered during monthly conferences. Monthly conferences generally offer a content session focused on methods. Finally, university partners offering required coursework not always provide a Foreign language methods course but generally enroll teacher in literacy course or ESL courses where CLT is generally part of the coursework. My point here is that TFA alternatively certified teachers are provided

with several touch points during their tenure to, in theory, learn about CLT if selected for a FL teaching placement.

I originally planned to work with two teachers on their third year of teaching. However, the school was scheduled to close after my proposal defense and both teachers secured a job at another school and teaching a subject different from FL. Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho were the only TFA teachers that met the requirements for selection. There were other TFA teachers in the region who had been assigned to teach Spanish. However, after careful examination, their placements resemble more either immersion or bilingual placements focus on core content rather than language.

Ms. Camacho joined TFA in 2013 and is in her second year of teaching. Born in Mexico, Ms. Camacho moved to the United States when she was 11 years old. Her experiences both in the US school system but also as a language learner bring her closer to the population she currently works with at her school. As an undergraduate student, Ms. Camacho majored in Education and Spanish. After completion of her bachelor degree, she went on to pursue a Master's degree in Business Administration. A TFA recruiter approached her during her last year of graduate school. Having volunteered at local schools for years, Ms. Camacho found the option of teaching appealing and decided to apply. Because Ms. Camacho had a background in education, after reviewing her transcript, the state exempted her from some of the required certification courses with the university partner. However, as part of TFA certification program and AmeriCorps, she was required to participate in all other professional development opportunities. Ms. Camacho currently teaches six sections of Spanish at a large inner-city high school in the US. For the purpose of this study I chose to focus on her Spanish III class rather than her International Baccalaureate classes. Students in the IB program are at the top percentile

of their class in terms of performance and therefore I deemed them less representative of the definition used here for urban students.

Mr. S. joined TFA in 2014 and is, therefore, on his first year of teaching. A Political Science major, Mr. S. has a long tradition of educators in his family. Not knowing very well what to do next after graduation, he joined TFA because of the prestige of the program but also due to a genuine interest in urban education. As a child, Mr. S. attended a bilingual school. He has a passion for languages and a desire to provide his students with the same opportunities that were conferred to him because of his knowledge of other languages. Right now, Mr. S. sees himself as a career teacher and cannot imagine himself in a career path away from education and the students he serves. Aside from Summer Institute and TFA professional development opportunities, Mr. S. is required to take online courses as part of his certification coursework. A university in the state -located at another city several hours away- offers the courses. Mr. S. currently teaches at a relatively new 5th - 8th charter school in one of the most impoverished neighborhood in a large Midwestern metropolitan area. The charter school belongs to one of the most celebrated national charter school networks, well known for its non-excuse policies and its focus on data-driven instruction. Mr. S. teacher 8th grade Spanish, the only grade for which Spanish is offered.

Both Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho met all the selection criteria. Moreover, they were the *only* TFA FL teachers in this region who were truly teaching FL language courses as explained above.

Data collection

Data collection occurred during Fall 2014. I chose a semester as the unit of analysis since a “semester” is institutionally constructed. The timeframe is part of the “school culture” and a semester allows for a holistic snapshot of the teaching activity. In other words, a semester

generally implies establishment of a cycle of rules and procedures, goals, objectives and evaluation. I used multiple sources of data collection including interviews, observations, and document analysis in an effort to gain a complete perspective and increase the validity of the findings (Merriam, 2002, p. 12).

Observation. I used observations as a way to gain understanding of the activity system of teaching FL in an urban school using CLT. Classroom observations were used to understand the phenomenon in its natural setting and from the perspective of the participants (Hatch, 2002). Moreover, they afforded me the “opportunity to see things that are taken for granted by participants and would be less likely to come to the surface using interview or other data collection techniques” (Hatch, 2002, p. 72). This was particularly important for the present study. My goal was to gain a deep understanding of why and how alternatively certified teachers in urban schools understand, implement and adapt CLT. However, most often teachers’ perceptions or self-reported teaching practices are far away from what actually goes in the classroom (Koziol & Burns, 1986; Borg, 2006). Observations afford an in-depth look at people’s behaviors and emotions in context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As much as possible, I tried to be a non-participant observer and to not take part in classroom activities. There were however instances where I was asked questions by both students and teachers. I attempted to remain on the observers’ end of the participant-observation continuum (Glesne, 2006). Given my background as an urban FL teacher, non-participatory observation assisted in “making the familiar strange.”

I observed each teacher a minimum of eight times for approximately eight hours for the purpose of this study. However, I was in their classrooms in other occasions as part of my continuous involvement with TFA, most often as a consultant. I observed each participant once

in August for the purposes of “gaining entry” and “establishing rapport” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 66); in other words, becoming known and familiar to those being observed. I observed each participant twice a month from September to November. Observing teachers in the middle of the semester provided a comprehensive picture of their teaching activities and their context, as they were “mid-stride.” During the month of December, I only conducted one observation due to testing and/or school functions.

The focus of my observations evolved as I collected, read, and analyzed data. Preliminarily, I focused on how participants teach FL, how/if they use CLT, what other approaches do they use and how do students react to it. With activity theory in mind, I tried to “observe” the system, that is, to discover the units of the system as I observe Ms. Camacho’s and Mr. S.’ “teaching activity.” Since this study is grounded on a constructivist perspective, the focus and structure of the observations evolved as data was gathered, the activity system was being delineated and contradictions arose. For instance, after just the first observation, I found a need to develop a framework to use while looking for CLT features during instruction. I found it hard to gain focus on my notes unless a framework was provided for guiding purposes. I decided to use an adaptation of the CLT language teacher checklist by Curtain & Dahlberg (2004) (see Appendix C). In addition, for the first two observations, I used Mwanza’s (2002) Eight-Step-Model for operationalizing Activity theory (See Table 4). Far from constricting my observation, the framework provided focus to my field notes and ensured that they were purposeful and aimed at answering the research questions proposed in this study.

Table 4: *The Eight-Step Model*¹³

The Eight Step Model	
Focus	Questions to answer during observation
Activity	What sort of activity am I interested in?
Objective	Why is the activity taking place?
Subject	Who is involved in carrying out this activity?
Tools	By what means are the subjects performing this activity?
Rules and regulations	Are there any cultural norms, rules or regulations governing the performance of activity?
Divisions of labor	Who is responsible for what, when carrying out activity and how are the roles organized?
Community	What is the environment in which this activity is carried out?
Outcome	What is the desired Outcome from carrying out this activity?

During my observations I took detailed field notes, which I reviewed right after for legibility and I transcribed to an electronic format within a day to ensure accuracy. Notes from observations can be hard to read since some of the notes require relying on memory and quick notation decisions that are not always neat. For that reason, I kept separate sets of notes: 1) short notes made at the time, 2) expanded notes made right after each field session, 3) fieldwork journal entries--mostly voice notes--to record problems and ideas that arose during each stage of

¹³ Reprinted with permission. Mwanza, D. (2002). Conceptualising work activity for CAL systems design. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 18(1), 84-92.

fieldwork and, 4) a provisional running record of analysis and interpretations (Spradley, 1979; discussed in Silverman, 2001, p. 227)

Finally, as Silverman (2001) points out, “the greatest danger is that you will seek to report ‘everything’ in your notes” (p. 64). Although I did not want my initial observations to be limited by a prescribed format that could possibly lead to losing meaningful and desirable data (Silverman, 2001, Maxwell, 1996), Mwanza’s (2002) model did help me to avoid the openness of a truly “unstructured” observation. Curtain and Dahlberg’s (2004) checklist also provided focus on my “observations” of CLT during instruction. After a couple of observations and once the activity system was delineated I started to use “activity triangles” heavily and the elements of the activity system as the main focus for the observations.

Interviews. Interviews were an essential data collection instrument in this study. I chose to conduct semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Interviews allowed me to clarify themes or events that emerged during observations as well as to dig deeper into unobservable phenomena including teachers’ background and experiences. As Rubin and Rubin (2005) point out, qualitative interviews allow the researcher to “understand experiences and reconstruct events in which he/she did not participate” (p. 3). Since the focus was on FL teachers’ experiences and perceptions, interviews gave participants the possibility to better express their ideas. Moreover, face-to-face interviews, in contrast to phone interviews, allowed me as the researcher to observe body language, gestures and conversational details that had the potential to emerge as valuable sources of information.

Interviews were planned as “semi-structured” but often evolved to “unstructured.” In this type of interview, “either all of the questions are more flexibly worded, or the interview is a mix of more or less structured questions” (Merriam, 1998, p. 74). The semi-structured nature allowed

me to use guiding questions that helped in establishing direction but to also follow up on participants' answers without being constrained by a questionnaire created beforehand (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). It is worth noting here that all three interviews ended up with parts that were highly unstructured. I designed a preliminary set of guiding questions during the proposal stage that allowed for guidance and, I thought, a deeper understanding of the teachers' background, beliefs around language teaching and learning and their perceptions of the context in which they teach (Appendix B). Nevertheless, often, participants--and myself--derailed from the initial questions to provide additional insights or connections that I hadn't thought about. These unstructured conversations provided very rich data in almost all occasions. I chose to follow Seidman's advice (2012) to conduct a total of three interviews (pp. 21-23). The first interview concentrated on participants' "focused life history" up to the present time. My goal here was to "put the participants' experience in context" (p. 21) and also understand their hopes and expectations--their vision--for their classroom. The first interview took place at the beginning of the school year (August) and just after the second observation occurred. I planned my second interview to revolve around "details of experience" (Seidman, 2012, p. 21). I wrote guiding questions and themes but as explained above, I allowed the conversations to evolve. I used notes from my observations to prompt reflection and better understand the tensions dominating the activity system. The interview took place in mid-November. Finally, I centered the third interview on "reflection on the meaning" (Seidman, 2012, p. 22). Thus, the teachers in this study and myself—as researcher and interviewer—engaged in a process of meaning making by providing clarification but also reflecting on prior interviews, the context of their teaching and the future moving forward. The third interview happened at the end of the semester (mid-December).

In terms of the duration of the interviews, following Seidman's (2012) recommendations I allotted ninety minutes. Seidman's rationale for the ninety minutes is that "an hour carries with it the consciousness of a standard unit of time that can have participants watching the clock" and two hours just seem "too long to sit at one time" (p. 23). However, Seidman insists, there is no magic formula. Given the semi-structured/ unstructured nature of the interviews, there was some variation in length. Interviews lasted in between sixty and seventy minutes. After an hour, they started to lose focus and I decided to end them. I always provided participants with an approximate timeframe in an effort to honor and respect their schedules.

Interviewing, as we know, poses some problems "because the researcher usually is in the presence of the person interviewed only briefly, and must necessarily draw inferences from what happened during that brief period to the rest of the informant's life, including his or her actions and perspectives" (Maxwell, 1992, p. 294). When necessary, I conducted follow-ups by email. Moreover, following Silverman's (2001) recommendations, I pre-tested my preliminary interview questions and themes with other FL teachers to assure clarity of phrasing. All interviews were recorded using electronic devices (Mac Computer). I used an iPad and a battery operated recorded as backup devices. I transcribed the recordings myself to ensure accuracy.

Documents. Document analysis provides qualitative researchers with another source to gain insight into their questions and to contribute to triangulation. Documents are situated "social artifacts;" they are created for a purpose within a certain context. As Merriam (1988) explains, "documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem" (p. 118). In the same vein, Bowen (2009) points out:

Documents provide background and context, additional questions to be asked, supplementary data, a means of tracking change and development, and verification of

findings from other data sources. Moreover, documents may be the most effective means of gathering data when events can no longer be observed or when informants have forgotten the details. (p. 31)

For the purpose of this study, I analyzed documents to 1) gain insight on teacher understanding, implementation and adaptation of CLT, 2) contextual influences on documents, and, 3) congruencies—or lack of thereof—during classroom practices; and 4) generate additional questions for interviews. Specifically, I analyzing teachers' classroom goals and vision for the year, long term plans, lesson plans, assessments and school wide documents. Most of these documents are required by TFA so they did not demand any additional work from the participants. It is worth noting that, in analyzing documents, I was constrained by their availability. Sometimes there were provided to me by email while other times I was given paper copies or allowed to take a picture. When available, however, document analysis contributed to a “more complete picture” and increased trustworthiness of the study by decreasing the effect of the researchers' reactivity and providing evidence for “thick descriptions” (Bowen, 2009).

Data Analysis

I started the process of data analysis concurrently with data collection with the purpose of guiding future data collection. Data analysis occurred in two stages (Laukner, Paterson & Kruba, 2012). Stage 1 focused on individual cases and Stage 2 involved cross-case analysis and the development of common themes.

Stage 1- Individual case analysis. I analyzed each case separately. Activity Theory, as the analytical tool of choice of this study, guided the analysis of data. More specifically, I used Mwanza's (2001) model--one of the main attempts to systematically use AT for data analysis--and I adapted it to fit the needs of my study. As it is the case with AT as an analytical tool,

Mwanza's methodology should be looked at as context-dependent and should allow for variations--particularly around sequential order--to reflect different research purposes and designs. Mwanza developed this model to analyze work practices at a major organization that was trying to develop a new computer system congruent and supportive of those existing work practices. Mwanza's method includes six stages:

Model the situation being examined (Stage 1) and produce an Activity System of the situation (Stage 2). The activity system was modeled and developed concurrently with data collection and analysis. Although as Mwanza points out this stage could happen a priori, for the purpose of this study and given my lack of involvement with the context up to this point, I needed observations, interviews and document analysis data to start outlining the activity systems. The Eight-Step Model (Mwanza, 2002) outlined on Table 5 guided the modeling process.

Decompose the situation's Activity System. Because activity systems can be extremely complicated, Mwanza (2002) encourages researcher to de-compose the system and provides an Activity Notation template to "aid the process of breaking down the situation's activity triangle system into smaller manageable units or sub-activity triangles" (p. 4).

Table 5: *Activity Notation*¹⁴

¹⁴ Reprinted with Permission. Mwanza, D. (2002). *Towards an activity-oriented design method for HCI research and practice* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from The Open University, United Kingdom: <http://iet.open.ac.uk/pp/d.mwanza/Phd.htm>.

Actors (Doers)		Mediator		Objective (Purpose)
Subjects	~	Tools	~	Object
Subjects	~	Rules	~	Object
Subjects	~	Divisions of Labor	~	Object
Community	~	Tools	~	Object
Community	~	Rules	~	Object
Community	~	Divisions of Labor	~	Object

Any sub-activity triangle needs a doer, a mediator and an objective. One example could be a *Subject-Division of Labor-Object* sub-triangle where the mediated relationship between subject and object could be analyzed in terms of the division of labor in that context.

Generate research questions (Stage 4) and Conduct a detailed investigation (Stage 5).

Given that I approached this study with specific research questions in mind, the generation of the research questions happened, in my case, at the beginning of the process. However, in looking closer at Mwanza's model, research questions seem to refer to a set of "guiding questions" to frame the analysis of the activity (and sub-activity) systems as exemplified by the questions below (p.5):

What Tools does the Subject use to achieve their Objective and how?

What Rules affect the way the Subject achieves the Objective and how?

How does the Division of Labour influence the way the Subject satisfies their Objective?

Questions such as the one presented above for illustration purposes were used during observations, interviews and document analysis to guide the whole process of both data collection and investigation.

Interpret findings. Mwanza recommends interpreting findings in the light of AT notion of *contradictions*. As explained in detail earlier on in this chapter, contradictions are "historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems" (Engerström, 2001, p.

137). Contradictions can happen within and across activity systems and rather than “problems” they are understood as sources of development, as metaphorical spaces where subjects negotiate within the context of their realities.

Without doubt, Mwanza’s systematization of AT as a tool of analysis provided a great framework for data analysis, particularly for novice researchers like me. However, the framework neglects to provide detailed insight into the “act of analyzing.” In other words, it lacks specifications that, for example, Merriam (1998) and Maxwell (2005) provide for analyzing qualitative data. Based on their recommendations, I followed the steps below:

Organizational stage: I organized transcripts, observations notes and document analysis that have been collected during the semester.

Read through all the data: As I read through all the data during the different stages of Mwanza’s model, I jotted down notes and comments on the margins. As Merriam (1998) points out "the notes serve to isolate the initially most striking, if not ultimately most important, aspects of the data"(p. 181). This process helped me to start organizing my mind around relevant topics particularly targeting possible elements of the activity system, answer to guiding questions and possible contradictions between instructional practices around CLT and within and in-between elements of the activity system.

Forming categories: While digging deeper into the transcripts, I initiated the process of "chunking" the data into meaningful categories. The list of categories focused around the first the research questions but later evolved into sets based on elements of the activity system and emergent themes.

The coding process: I developed notations/codes to reflect CLT features, elements of the activity system and types of contractions (i.e., primary, secondary, tertiary, quaternary). My

notations were flexible and constantly evolving. I used color tags and highlighting. Each color represented one of the categories and highlighting was used to underline quotes that emerged as good examples for the narrative of findings.

Constant comparison and category development: I compared all the data fragments obtained from the coding process. I determined whether the data segments that I had provisionally attributed to each category were coherent and consistent. If deviant cases were identified they were marked with a red tag. In relation to the first question, that is, how alternatively certified teachers understand and adapt CLT, I developed "etic" categories and used extracts from data to justify the categories. In relation to the second question, the AT framework and categories helped in organizing and analyzing data (i.e. particularly different levels of contradictions). During the process, I remained open to variation. The table below provides a graphic representation of my proposed data analysis that I did indeed followed during the analysis. Therefore, it fuses Mwanza's (2002) model for analyzing data using AT and Merriam's (1998) and Maxwell's (2005) recommendations for analyzing qualitative data.

Table 6: *Preliminary Plan for Individual Case Analysis*

Mwanza's Steps for AT as an analytical tool		Necessary Steps (Merriam (1998); Maxwell (2005), Mwanza, 2002)
Model the Situation	↕	Organize data, read thought data and form categories related to Activity System (AS)
Produce an activity system	↑	Develop coding for AS and code
Decompose The Activity system and form guiding questions	↓	Develop Activity Notations, form categories and codes.
Conduct a detailed investigation	↑	Read thought the data, form categories and codes based on different research questions
Interpret findings	↓	Identify and analyze contradictions at different levels, constant comparison method

I looked at the plan as a fluid document, meaning that the sequence of events was frequently subject to change as exemplified by the arrows in the middle column.

Stage 2- Cross-case analysis: In stage 2, I focused on comparing each case's categories. Cross-case analysis involves grouping together and analyzing answers from different people to common questions; it is a way "to build theory through induction and interpretation (Patton, 1990, p. 450). Thus, I compared within case categories across both cases. The main goal here was to identify similarities and differences and possible reasons for the variations, if any. Cross-case analysis has the potential to allow for broader generalizations and to strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the results.

Trustworthiness

There is no agreement in the field regarding how to approach questions of credibility. In fact, there is not even agreement on the terms. While some advocate for the use of terms such as "validity and reliability" (Silverman, 2001; Merriam 1998), others seem to favor "credibility" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) or "trustworthiness" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Denzini & Lincoln 2000). What is clear is that the use of a certain term implies a specific position on the debate of what constitutes good qualitative research. In this section, I describe the measures that I took to ensure trustworthiness in my study. However, I must agree with Lather (1993) that there is a need for qualitative research to develop its own language and counter-practices of authority that defy validity discourses as epistemological guarantees. We need to define validity as a process of continuous interrogation within a community of research. "The process of validation is arguably "democratized" by the proliferation of readings emerging from researchers, participants, and readers" (Agunaldo, 2004, p. 127).

Within this multitude of perspectives, tentativeness is not perceived as weakening research. Instead, "the acknowledgment of locatedness and partiality in this kind of analysis can move [qualitative research] toward a stronger and more credible kind of truth" (DeVault, 1995, p. 628). Most importantly, however, the question of credibility is a question of ethical and epistemological responsibilities that no systematic checklist can ensure. We, as researchers, must embrace the "code of honor" that informs the field and our work must be received within the research community as a reflection of the same code. What I present below is an amalgam of several approaches. Due to the lack of better choices, I find myself confined to using terms such as validity/reliability, trustworthiness and credibility. Rather than siding with a particular approach, I use these terms for the most part interchangeably. The specific strategies that I used to ensure trustworthiness include:

- *Carefully explaining the design* and re-designs of the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 266). This is especially important since qualitative research has been criticized for its methods, particularly for its methodological obscurity. In the design section, I explained the rationale behind my decision to do a case study. I documented the challenges that I encountered and that lead to changes in design. As Rubin and Rubin remark, "an implicit acknowledgement of what you have and have not accomplished strengthens the credibility of your findings" (p. 267).
- *Prolonged engagement in the field* contributes to the credibility of our work (Ely et al., 1991, p. 96). Extended periods in the field may contribute to closer relations to the subjects and thus to better data. Qualitative researchers need to "accept involvement and bias as inevitable and to work towards finding meaning through building close relationships with subjects" (Toma, 2000, p. 177). As Gunaratnam (2003) affirms,

building trust, rapport and a personal relationship that allows "talk about private matters" are crucial in researching sensitive topics (p. 90). I collected data for a whole semester, that is, sixteen weeks. Moreover, my initial observations were meant to not only get a holistic sense of the classrooms and context but also to build rapport and establish trust.

- *Audit Trail:* A great deal of attention was paid to providing transparent accounts of data, data gathering and decisions around data reduction. Equally important, data was stored and organized using a protocol. In regards to interviews, I digitally recorded the interviews and transcribe the tapes to enhance reliability (Silverman, 2005, p. 230). Initially, observations were recorded manually using pen and paper; however, expanded notes were written and digitally transcribed when necessary – for legibility purposes- within a day. In addition, I stored and manage data using printed copies of the data, notebooks, Microsoft Word and, rarely, Excel, since financial concerns impede the use of more elaborated databases (e.g., NVivo). I coded data manually using markings and notations of different colors.
- *Multiple sources of data collection:* My study used a variety of data collection such as interviews, documents analysis and observations. I used data from informal or natural occurring conversations and follow-ups in the forms of emails. Comparing data obtained by a variety of methods (i.e. triangulation) and presenting the reader with an analysis of *deviant* cases rules out the impression that the researcher may be bending data to her presumptions and excluding the cases that do not fit.
- *Inclusion of thick descriptions:* When presenting results, I included substantial descriptions to add trustworthiness. It is possible to strengthen the credibility of results "when you quote those conclusions directly from your interviewees with minimal or nor

insertion of yourself, and, hence, minimal possibility of you distorting the results to match theories of your own (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 266). As Stake (1995) remarks, thick descriptions allow the reader to vicariously experience the study. Thick descriptions contribute to increase the credibility but also, potentially, the generalizability of the results. Although the goal of case studies is rarely to generalize results to a population, including thick descriptions helps with analytical generalizability (Yin, 1994).

Reflexivity: I planned to write a blog twice a week with my reflections on the process of data collection, analysis and emerging interpretations but with a full time job and a family I found myself without time. I did keep a journal and recorded voice notes on my commute to work. Conversations with participants, colleagues and faculty advisors helped this process. Moreover, as I interpreted results, I constantly went back and answered the following list of questions:

- *Are sufficient data presented to support the researcher's claims?*
- *Do presented categories cover a wide range of empirical observations?*
- *Have I addressed taken-for-granted meanings?*
- *Have links been made between the context and teachers' classrooms?*
- *Does Activity Theory offer deeper insights about the phenomenon?*
- *Is my interpretation relevant to teachers' everyday professional lives?*
- *Were genuine efforts made to ensure reciprocity and co-construction of meaning during interviews?*
- *Have I been actively reflective about my contribution to the research?*

(Adapted from Laukner, Paterson and Krupa, 2012, p. 17)

- *Member Check*: I acknowledge that my representations of the data are filtered by my own subjectivities and philosophical positionalities within the field of qualitative research. Thus, my interpretations should be evaluated by other members of both the community under study and/or the research community. I solicited feedback from the participants as a form of respondent validation. For Maxwell (2005), respondent validation is "the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on" (p. 111). The time, however, was limited and many times we just focused on clarification. Besides participants, I held long conversation with teacher trainers working in urban district and also with experienced FL teachers (Ely et al., 1991, p. 161).

Member check also helped with an additional issue that arose during the process of data collection. During some parts of my interviews with Ms. Camacho she switched into Spanish and remained in Spanish for long periods of time. The issue of multilingual participants and thus, translation of data, might affect the credibility of the study. Traditional forward-backward approaches to translation fail to consider the complexity involved in translating "other" words and worlds. Language has a capacity to "create its own meaning, reflecting the view that people are neither bounded, integrated or organized as a whole" (Schotsmans, 2007, p. 469). As Temple and Young (2004) remark "the translator always makes her mark on the research, whether this is acknowledged or not, and in effect, some kind of "hybrid" role emerges in that, at the very least, the translator makes assumptions about meaning equivalence that make her an analyst and cultural broker as much as a translator" (cited in Schotsmans, p. 468). Temple and

Young's statement has several implications. On one hand, the voices of participants are at risk of being obscured by the translation process. Cultural- as well as gender-specific nuances are most often lost in verbatim translations. On the other hand, by ignoring the cultural aspects embedded in language we may be distorting the accounts that we are trying to analyze. I constantly debated with the issue of translation. Some parts of my interviews with Ms. Camacho were conducted in Spanish and thus I had to translate some quotes to include her voice in the discussion and presentation of the results. While I translated her words I debated between verbatim and interpretative translations. Initially forward-backward translations seemed to preserve her voice better. Very soon I came to realize that verbatim translations were distorting her voice. The other option, interpretative translation, did not offer a solution to the problem neither. Linguistic translation is also transcultural. The choices we make when translating accounts have a direct impact on our data. As we translate "words" we run the risk of distorting the "worlds" of the participants. To minimize this risk, I worked with bilingual colleagues in ensuring that my translation reflected the original meaning of the quotes as much as possible. I did tried to include Ms. Camacho in the process until she started to seem rather overwhelmed by the amount of time taken by his study.

Through the strategies outlined in this section, I held myself to high standards both in terms of methods and interpretations of data.

Author Positionality

In this section, I discuss the implications of choosing a qualitative approach for this study on my role as a researcher as well as my background and interest on this study. Choosing qualitative research methods entails a detachment from objectivism and the identification of the

locatedness of the researcher. Alluding to the work of Harding (1987), Roman (1991) defines objectivity as "the stance often taken by researchers in an attempt to remove, minimize, or make invisible their own subjectivities, beliefs and practices while simultaneously directing attention to the subjectivities, beliefs, and practices of their subjects as the sole objects of scrutiny" (p. 556). The researcher emerges as a de-racialized, genderless and decontextualized individual in search of an objective and knowable truth. Assuming a role as a qualitative researcher implies, to some extent, taking a stand on objectivity and this has significant implications. It implies accepting the fallacy of the division between the personal and the ethnographic self (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 1051). It implies the recognition that "the investigator as human instrument is limited by being human—that is, mistakes are made, opportunities are missed, personal biases interfere (Merriam, 1998, p. 20). Acknowledging my human nature as a researcher entails recognizing that I am located within the constraints of my social context as a racialized, gendered and class-bounded individual. This position contests the subject-object dualism. During the research process, my own "subjectivities" were submitted to scrutiny and become "objects" of inquiry as well. In some ways, I emerged as a "participant" in the dialogic process of generating knowledge and, together with the teachers participating in this study, I became vulnerable in the process of releasing information about myself (Fine et. al, 2000, p. 109).

In regards to my background, it would be impossible to deny the influence that my own experiences, values and identity have on selecting this topic for my study. I am a Teach For America Corps Member. Like the teachers in this study, I taught FL in an urban high school. My school was located in one of the most impoverished areas in the south side of Chicago. Saying that my school was under-resourced would be an understatement. On my first day at work, I found myself with thirty-four students and twenty-five chairs. In many ways I was a non-

traditional Corps Member. I applied to TFA without knowing much about it and definitely unaware of the competitiveness of the program. I was not a recent college graduate but rather a PhD student and a mother to a newborn. I had been teaching at the college level for four years and, I feel comfortable saying, at that point, I had had quite a bit of training on teaching methods, particularly FL methods. Nevertheless, what seemed to work in college did not work the same in an urban high school. The ivory tower theory regarding input sessions, communication, student interaction and alternative forms of assessment did not seem well received by either the students or those observing and evaluating my instruction. It is possible that my own experiences working as an urban FL teacher practicing in an underserved school could influence my reading of data. In addition, my interest and knowledge of communicative approaches to language instruction might also need to be considered and reflected on.

After two years in the classroom, I was hired by TFA as a Manager of Teaching and Learning. In that role, I trained newly hired FL teachers. I soon grew frustrated with the lack of implementation in classrooms of the approaches and methods covered during professional development and university coursework. I was never able to pinpoint what was preventing highly motivated, ambitious and very capable teachers from implementing the premises of CLT. My family moved after a year and I took a different job. However, I remain involved with TFA in different capacities in my current city. I continue to lead professional developments on a multiplicity of topics not always related to FL instruction (e.g., classroom management, culturally responsive teaching). I met the participants that I plan on selecting for my study during some of the TFA professional development sessions. I was also invited to observe their classes by their TFA supervisor so I could provide my insight on their overall performance. So, even though I do not have strong relationships with the participants, I have met them before and I

believe they regard me as a good source of knowledge and development. Therefore, I accept that there might be issues of power with me being a “provider of knowledge” and the fact that, to some extent, I can be perceived as an “insider” by those involved in this research.

I am a FL educator who subscribes to a communicative approach to language teaching and who was part of TFA. Although the list could be endless, the aforementioned circumstances link my reality to the circumstances of the potential participants in this study. I used constant reflection, comparisons and check-ins with participants to ensure that my interpretations were representative of the phenomenon under study and not merely reflections of my own experiences and understandings.

Ethical considerations

Participants were provided a consent form explaining the purpose of the study, the risk and benefits of participating in the study, and the information to be collected, as well as their right to terminate their participation if that is their desire. Administration consent was also sought on this case with the same form (Appendix A). While obtaining support from Mr. S.’s school was not challenging, obtaining entrance into a public school required a complex process and a formal request at the district office. I was originally denied and later granted permission after talking with the director of research and ensuring her that no additional work was required of Ms. Camacho and that I was only seeking permission to working with one teacher. Pseudonyms were used for the school site and the participants in an effort to protect participants’ privacy.

IV.

Findings

In this section I present the results gathered from classroom observations, in-depth interviews, course documents and assignments for the two case study participants in this research, Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho. Although there are commonalities in between cases, I have decided to present their cases individually in an attempt to provide a better insight into the complexities of their particular instructional contexts. Following individual case analysis, I will provide a discussion and cross-case analysis where common themes, tensions, contradictions and relationships will be unveiled.

Mr. S' case: Curtains up!

[Projected on the board, “What is an infinitive? Provide 3 examples.”] [Students are walking into class. There is a lot of noise. Some students are singing, there is dancing going on. Several are asking around for pencil and paper. Mr. S. stands by the projector.]

Mr. S.: Buenos dias estudiantes {*Good morning students.*}

A few students: Buenos dias Mr. S {*Good morning students.*}

Mr. S.: The Do Now is on the board. Remember, you will get participation points for this. You have five minutes. You are silent and your eyes are on your paper. That means no side conversations or comments. [*Mr. S. sets the timer.*] [About half of the class is still trying to find materials to work with. The homeroom teacher walks in and students try to start conversation with him.]

Mr. S.: I really like how Marcus is focusing on his work. Thank you Leila for being productive. This is your first warning Shar'ay.

Student: I was trying to ask a question. I don't know this. I swear, man! [Student is visible irritated.]

Mr. S.: Write now your voices are off and no questions are allowed.

Tamika, I need you to focus on the Do Now.

Student: But I don't get it Mr. S.

[The anxiety escalates as students try to answer the Do Now.]

Student: Is this for a grade?

Mr. S.: I am tired of all these voices. You don't freak out, you don't complain. The little side conversations need to be over.

[The room becomes quieter. Mr. S. walks around and tries to help students who need it with the Do Now. The side conversations start again]

Mr. S.: Tamika, I need you to step outside and take a break. If I have to ask you one more time you will be invited to leave the class for today. [The timer goes off.]

Mr. S.: Ok, class. Let's start. Who can give me a good definition for an infinitive? Does anyone know what an infinitive is? [Silence.] Does anyone know what a verb is? Brianna?

Student: An action.

Mr. S.: Ok, it is something you do. Michael?

Student: It is used to describe another word?

Mr. S.: Ok. Anyone else. Lorie what do you have?

Student: [I can't hear what she says.]

Mr. S.: Something that describes what a noun is doing. Great! Awesome! Some of you already know what a verb is. Today we are going to talk about infinitive verbs because it is really important. Michael, can you read the objective for today? El objetivo?

Student: Students will be able to identify an infinitive verb in English and Spanish.

Mr. S.: Awesome. Thanks, Michael. Get out your composition books and get ready to take notes on verbs and infinitives.

At the time of this study Mr. S. was a first year alternative-certified teacher assigned to teach at Power Academy, an urban 5th-8th public charter school located in a large Midwest metropolitan area. Mr. S. is in charge of four sections of Spanish I and provides ESL support for the entire school. The school belongs to one of the most celebrated charter school networks in the nation, well known for its non-excuses approach to discipline, its focus on measuring outcomes and data driven decisions.

Lacking a room of his own--the only teacher in the building in that situation--Mr. S.'s space is reduced to a rolling cart filled with folders, a computer, a projector and his most valuable gadget, a timer. The physical arrangement of the class is therefore very much mandated by the homeroom teacher. The desks are paired up in groups of two and arranged in straight rows facing the board. The walls of the classroom are decorated with motivational charts aimed at inspiring students to reach mastery of at least eighty percent in all the standards. Trackers of academic progress for different classes and shout outs for those who "work hard and are nice" are displayed on the wall. There is no visual in the classroom alluding to language learning.

The excerpt above describing Mr. S.'s daily "Do Now" routine provides a sneak peak into key factors and emergent contradictions in his instructional activity system. As it will be noted and analyzed in detail later in this chapter, Mr. S.'s desire to engage his students in real communication and to provide them with opportunities to know other cultures and their own better did not mirror his daily instruction (Interview II). In fact, the imposed aforementioned layout in the classroom seems to be very much in concordance with his actual teaching approach.

Most of his instruction is teacher-centered and when students' input is solicited the interactions are highly controlled. With a few exceptions here and there, English is the dominant language and explicit grammatical instruction prevails over more function-focused approaches, such as CLT.

Using Mwanza's (2002) Eight-Step Model for operationalizing Activity theory as described in Chapter Three, I used observations, interview and document analysis data to model the activity system of Mr. S.'s classroom and to progressively decompose it to expose and analyze possible contradictions amongst component of the system. The following section provides a detailed graphic representation of Mr. S.'s classroom using Activity Theory as the guiding framework for analysis.

Mr. S.' class: Unveiling the activity system

Mr. S.'s instructional system can be visually represented as follows:

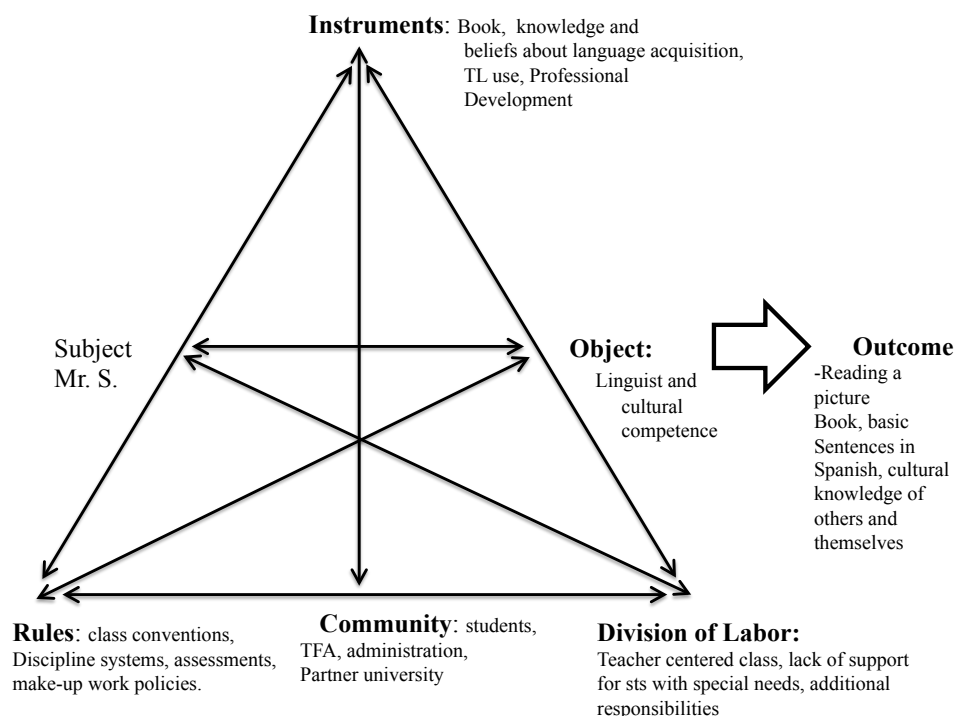


Figure 9: Mr. S.'s Instructional Activity System

The Activity System (AS) under study is a Spanish level I class at Power Academy considered from the perspective of Mr. S., the teacher and thus the *subject* in the AS. Mr. S.'s passion and personal connection to his work transpires in his Vision¹⁵, for the class.

Teaching Spanish at Power Academy means a lot to me. I went to a K-8th Spanish Immersion school growing up and know what it is like learning a second language at an early age. I continued my Spanish studies by minoring in it in college and even studying abroad for a semester in Chile. Looking back now, none of these wonderful experiences and possibilities would have happened without my Spanish history. Learning a second

¹⁵ As part of his work with TFA, Mr. S. is required to submit a formal vision and goals for his class at the beginning of the year.

language is like having an extra key. An extra key that if used correctly, as in by studying hard and sticking with it, will open so many more doors down the road; doors like going to college, more options to major in, higher income as an adult, greater chance for a job, and chances to travel and live abroad.

Lacking a formal curriculum, and what is more, a language department or group of colleagues, Mr. S. makes all curricular decisions as the only language teacher at Power Academy. As he points out in Interview II,

The principal said I can do whatever I want and that was it. He basically trusted me to develop a curriculum and attach that to any federal or state standards. From what I was told implicitly and explicitly I could do whatever.

Such freedom, as I will point out later, will bring serious challenges to Mr. S. during his first year of teaching.

Objects and Outcomes

In terms of the *object (objective)* of Mr. S.'s instructional activity system, it can be generally defined as Spanish linguistic and cultural proficiency. Referring to the five C's outlined by the American Council of Teaching Foreign Languages, Mr. S. explains that "Each Unit Plan will have components of all five C's and force students to dig both outward through linguistic Spanish expression and inward for cultural identity" (from Mr. S.'s Vision). The *outcomes* are more specific and reflect Mr. S.'s expectations for a level I Spanish class. They are in concordance and aligned to the proposed objective.

What I want students to be able to do by the end of the year is feel confident speaking basic phrases in Spanish, provide description about themselves without looking at a piece of paper. Anything that they can speak about they should also write a paragraph. Then they should also be able to conjugate basic verbs, simple grammatical structures

like *ser* and *estar* and hopefully *por* and *para*, basic grammatical structures of the sentence. They should be able to read basic a basic picture book. On the culture side they should know where Spanish is spoken and how culture looks like in a few Spanish-speaking countries. They should also know, and this is what is important to me and something that I have not done much, they should know why they're studying Spanish and how it affects them as young African Americans who are leaving in the places are. And that what I really care about and that's also what is the most important. (from Mr. S.'s vision)

Behind Mr. S.'s vision for his class there is a clear desire to empower his students with the same knowledge and skills that, in his view, afforded him life-changing opportunities such as traveling to other countries. More importantly, Mr. S.'s vision reflects an understanding of the potential of language as a social tool, particularly for urban students leaving in segregated neighborhoods where learning about "others" might seem irrelevant and alien to their realities.

Tools

The role of tools as mediators of activity is key to AT and particularly relevant in understanding Mr. S.'s instructional system. As explained earlier, tools can be classified as primary (i.e. physical tools), secondary (i.e. psychological) and tertiary (i.e. cultural). In terms of physical tools, they include the textbooks available--or as a matter of fact, not available--but also teacher-created handouts, assessments and activities. Cognitive or psychological tools involve Mr. S.'s knowledge and beliefs about language acquisition including the use of students' L1 in teaching the target language. The professional development gained both at the school site but also as part of his involvement with Teach for America contribute to shaping Mr. S.'s instructional decision-making. Finally, at a deeper and more complex level, the urban reform culture and particularly the non-excuses policies and the how to go about "doing school" are

very important mediating factors in Mr. S.'s class that will be discussed in detail later as they relate to community rules and the community's perceptions about doing school.

Community

Given the charter nature of his school, Mr. S. belongs to a fairly small and tight community. Besides the students in his classroom, his grade level team as well as several key administrators are part of his community; they all share a common interest in the object of the activity system. While the learners occupy a central position within this community, different from what it will be expected in a traditional public school, the principal is fairly active in Mr. S.'s classroom providing bi-weekly observations and feedback sessions. Personnel from Teach for America are also influential members of the community but might be not as active as one would have expected.

Rules

Several times during our conversations Mr. S. pointed out that one of the positive aspects of working at a charter school was that he "was supposed" to have more freedom and less restrictions around what to do and how to do it (Interview I). However, observations revealed a quite rigid but subtle structure and set of rules; therefore many rules unveiled in his activity system are *implicit rules*. *Explicit rules* include the format of the lessons as exemplified by a mandated lesson plan template and a rather complex system of incentives and rewards for good behavior and for showing certain character traits. There are also regulations around tracking and reporting of students' progress, including the use of an Excel database that helps identify objectives that need to be re-taught or students in need of remediation. *Implicit rules* mostly revolve around classroom conventions and are deeply connected with school culture and what he perceives as being valued and celebrated. They are related to expected teacher-student

interaction and Mr. S.'s role as the manager of the classroom in charge of keeping students "engaged" and "on task." In Mr. S.'s instructional context, silence, compliance and adherence to instructional interactions dominated mostly by the teacher are the norm. Aside from functioning as a mediational tool, assessments are also worth being discussed here. Despite the fact that Mr. S. is not officially bounded to any standardized test, as a member of a community where "what you measure matters," his assessment procedures not only seem to drive instruction but they also tend to mirror standardized test (i.e. multiple choice format, objectively scored etc.).

Division of Labor

The division of labor is highly influenced by rules and refers to both the division of tasks and the division of power within the classroom community. The teacher-centered approach to instruction puts Mr. S. in charge of most of the task carried on in the classroom. It also positions students as passive recipients of knowledge. Moreover, it is not surprising that as a teacher in a charter school, Mr. S.'s load is unusually high requiring him not only to plan for his Spanish classes but also to provide ESL support for a number of students and to hold several students and families accountable for individual education contracts. The lack of instructional support for students with special needs during Mr. S. class deserves attention here.

Emerging Contradictions: A deeper look

Mr. S.'s instructional activity system is complicated. Observation, class documents and interviews unveiled a great deal of contradictions at both primary and secondary levels. The following analysis focuses on those that, in my view, have a stronger effect in mediating the object of Mr. S.'s system.

Primary contradictions

Primary or inner contradictions originate within elements of the activity system in the form of internal conflicts and they are the result of having elements in the activity systems that have both inherent worth and also value as part of a system (Fosnot, 2002). In Mr. S.'s case, such contradictions are a reflection of a continuous internal dialogue as he finds his "place" and identity within his teaching context.

Instructional vision vs. instructional reality

The most salient primary contradictions emerged within the subject of the activity system and in particular between Mr. S.'s vision and goals for classroom instruction and his actual classroom practices. In the documents in which he outlines his vision for his class, Mr. S. explains his plan to approach Spanish I through the standards of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and that "each Unit Plan will have components of all five Cs and force students to dig both outward through Spanish expression and inward for cultural identity." Although (as it will be discussed later) Mr. S.'s' understanding of CLT was rather limited, interviews revealed a desire to have a class oriented towards communication.

During our first interview, he explained how in order to facilitate the development of communicative competence he designed his lesson plans and units to include and progressively move from input (listening and reading) to output (speaking and writing). He went on to describe how, from his point of view, in a good FL class "you see a lot of communication like turning and talking, all in Spanish. You see a lot of excitement and students answering questions ... the teacher should be hands-off. The teacher should not be talking like ninety percent of the time." He even comments on how: "I don't want them to be conjugating verb charts, I don't want them to work to be these little robots." Mr. S. also emphasized the central role that he wanted culture

to play in his class as a mechanism for students to better understand their own identities (Interview I, II, II).

Nevertheless, hours of observation revealed a picture far from the accounts reported by Mr. S. Using a checklist adapted from Curtain and Dahlerb (2004), I developed a notation chart to quickly evaluate teachers' classroom practices, particularly, in regards to CLT (see Appendix C). This notation chart allowed me to identify language performance goals (vs. knowledge mastery), tasks with real (vs. rehearsed) exchanges of information, error correction focused on meaning (vs. form), contextualized grammar and vocabulary instruction (vs. discrete isolated objectives), grammatical structures as functional chunks (vs. isolated grammatical objectives), use of target language (vs. L1), student talk time (vs. teacher talk time), authentic materials (vs. teacher created) and integration of a variety of skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening and culture). Observation data revealed an abundance of attempts by Mr. S. to make his classroom communicative. Nevertheless, a sustained and deep analysis of data collected unveiled a complicated picture in which, most often, form outweighed meaning and highly controlled student-teacher interactions prevailed over meaningful communication.

The following excerpt from one of my visits to Mr. S.'s class provides a good illustration of his attempts to teach vocabulary in context and to engage students in meaningful conversation.

[Projected on the board is the Do Now: Haga ahora: ¿Qué son tus comidas favoritos? Mi comidas favoritos para desayuno son_____] {What *are your favorite foods? My favorite food for breakfast is....*} [note lack of gender agreement.]

Mr. S.: Voices are off, you are working individually [Timer on]

Mr. S.: Time is out. Let's start with one example ¿Qué son tus comidas favoritos? [He proceeds to translate] Remember from yesterday, what are your favorite foods for breakfast? Can I have a volunteer?

Student: Son tostadas {*Toast*}

Mr. S.: Can you answer with a full sentence?

Student: Man! [Student answers quietly but I can't hear her from my seat]

Mr. S.: Another person. [Mr. S. makes eye contact with another student]

Student: Favorito comidas es huevos. {*Favorite food is eggs*}

Mr. S.: Can you look at the model on the board and try to say it again?

[Student repeats following the model. Two additional students are asked do the same].

Mr. S.: Awesome jobs. We are going to review vocabulary from yesterday. I am going to point at pictures and then I am going to ask you to say it out loud. [He points to a picture with a box of cereal.]

Class: Cereal [closer to English pronunciation]

Mr. S.: Close. I like how Sandra said it. Could you say it again?

Student: Cereal [class follows same procedure for three different examples]

Mr. S.: Do you have any questions?

Student: On the test tomorrow, do we have to know how to spell this?

Student: We have a quiz tomorrow?

Mr. S.: I have said it multiple times. Maybe not exactly but it needs to be close. I need to be able to understand it.

[Mr. S. unveils a power point presentation. There are four pictures on the slide of different lunch foods.]

Mr. S.: Today we are going to talk about Comida del almuerzo, food for lunch. I am going to ask someone a question and you are going to answer. [He points to an example

on the board. The example reads: ¿Comes fruta? Si yo como fruta OR no, yo no como fruta] *{Do you eat fruit? Yes, I do eat fruit OR No, I do not eat fruit}*

Mr. S.: Remember, as you are learning new words you are writing them down in your tracker. [Students are talking and getting agitated]

Mr. S.: I realize this is kind of confusing. If I ask you ¿comes fruta? *{Do you eat fruit?}* Then you say Si yo como fruta Or No, yo no como fruta. *{Yes, I eat fruit OR No, I do not eat fruit.}* I really like how Susan is paying attention. ¿Susan comes fruta? *{Susan, do you eat fruit?}*

Student: Si yo como fruta. *{Yes I eat fruit.}*

Mr. S.: Darion, ¿comes fruta? *{Darion, do you eat fruit?}*

Student: No como fruta *{I do not eat fruit.}*

Mr. S.: No, no como fruta *{No, I do not eat fruit.}* [Repeats after student.] Ok so if you translate the sentence it will mean “No, I do not eat fruit.” I guess either one works. This one just sounds a little bit better.

Mr. S.: Ok one more: Yo como sándwich de jamón york y queso. *{I eat ham and cheese sandwich.}* [He asks the same question: do you eat..? with several food items]

Student: How do you say I eat chicken?

Mr. S.: It is on the board. Yo como pollo. *{I eat chicken.}*

[Mr. S. proceeds to explain to students that they will be divided in groups to work on stations. One station requires students to conjugate using verb charts, another one to translate sentences, a third one is a word memory game and for the last one they have to ask questions following a model.]

The excerpt above is representative of many of Mr. S.’s lessons aimed at introducing new vocabulary. Although efforts to present vocabulary in context and engage students in conversation are obvious here, the attempts are superficial and reveal strong inner contradictions.

Use of the target language is very limited and translation is abundant. The importance of providing students with as much input as possible in the target language emerged in all three interviews. Mr. S. even pointed out his perceived progress on using Spanish during class. In referring to the class above he commented:

I am speaking way more Spanish in class. Students are speaking more Spanish too. The plans are now more alive so there is more listening and reading before there is any writing or speaking. That naturally scaffolds what they are learning. A video tape of today's lesson compared to a random lesson the first two weeks, it will be ninety-nine or one hundred percent English and today it was probably fifty or fifty-five percent English and the rest Spanish. The only time that I used English today is to give consequence and directions. (Interview II)

My notes and coding revealed a very different picture from that described by Mr. S., a picture where English dominated highly teacher-centered interactions. Moreover, and despite the fact that the lesson focus is on vocabulary, Mr. S.'s repeated emphasis on students using the provided model (i.e. "Si yo como or No, no como) shifted the focus from meaning to form, and from real communication to rehearsed repetition. His insistence on having students use the construction "No, yo no como (food)" instead of "No como (food)" disclosed a hyper-focus on structure regardless of meaning. In addressing error correction during our third interview, Mr. S. pointed out his internal battle between his desire to focus on fluency and maintaining low affective filters and his actual practice. He commented: "Yeah, I don't know why I beat them up all the time. I shouldn't and I know better. But I still do that, and that's bad and does not help them; it doesn't encourage them and it is not that important."

The discrepancies between Mr. S.'s vision and goals for classroom instruction and his actual classroom practices were obvious from my initial observations. As I became more familiar with his classroom, and with him as a teacher, I started noticing a lack of language proficiency on his part that made staying in the target language noticeably difficult. Lack of gender and number agreement, inconsistent use of *ser* and *estar*, or switching to English when lacking vocabulary were frequent during instruction. I also noticed an interesting increase in confidence when lessons revolved around discrete grammatical objectives --highly in contrast with Mr. S.'s lack of confidence in releasing control and letting students lead or at least co-lead instruction. Finally, even when Mr. S. reported making strides at employing more communicative activities, most of these activities were drills based on repetition and formulaic expressions.

Mr. S.'s knowledge and opportunities for professional development might provide some light for the aforementioned tensions. In fact, they act as tools mediating the activity system in his class and thus, representing secondary contradiction between the actor and the object of Mr. S.'s instructional system that will be discussed on the next section.

Mr. S. the language teacher vs. Mr. S. the urban teacher

Another primary contradiction in Mr. S.'s instructional system, and probably the most intriguing in terms of his particular teaching and licensing context, is represented by his struggle to define his teaching identity and to reconcile "Mr. S. the language teacher" with his idealized notion of an effective urban school teacher. This contradiction emerged while talking about professional identity and was a recurrent theme in our conversations:

I think that first year teachers who do Teach for America think that there is the archetype teacher that you are supposed to be. And my struggle is over with how much of one has to stay, how much of me the language teacher and how much of the tricks of *Teach like a*

Champion should stay, how much of me do I have to compromise. Some days I'm just being an ass. Other days I am being way too enabling. I'm still in the middle and I bet you next year I will be in the same position trying to find out where do I fit and where's my identity as a language teacher, how do I become the best teacher possible (Interview II).

In his comment, Mr. S. alludes to *Teach Like a Champion*, a book released in 2010 that quickly became a bestseller, particularly within the environment of charter schools and the urban school reform movement. It has been adopted by Mr. S.'s charter network as the main guide to developing novice teachers. The forty-nine content-neutral techniques outlined in the book provide a mechanical approach to becoming a "good teacher." Without getting too specific, the book provides strict guidelines on how to set high behavioral and academic expectations. It has been criticized widely for promoting compliance, passivity and control over learning (Lapayese et al., 2014; Radding, 2014; Senge et al., 2012). It is not surprising, then, that some of the training and development that Mr. S. received led to contradictions in his practice. Although I will look at some of those as secondary contradictions in the next section, the point here is to highlight Mr. S.'s inner struggle as he faces two different value systems that are nonetheless aimed at the same objective: to increase students learning. In other words, as reflected by the above quote, Mr. S. is poly-motivated.

As a very successful student himself admitted to a highly prestigious program like TFA, part of Mr. S. wants to become that "archetypical teacher." Last year seventeen percent of Harvard's graduating class applied to TFA and only fourteen percent of applicants were accepted (www.tfa.org). Talking about his decision to teach, Mr. S. frequently referred to TFA's prestige and wanting to be the teacher he is "supposed to be." But to be successful within the context in which he teaches, he needs to conform and master certain teaching techniques, or "tricks," as he

calls them. His desire to fit in, to be regarded as successful, became really evident during some of my observations in which his principal or instructional coach were present. During those instances, narration of behavior, achieving 100 percent compliance or silent independent work, dominated Mr. S.' instructional time. His vision for a communicative classroom and his identity as a language teacher vanished and he acknowledged that (Interview II). His desire to provide his students with the same opportunities that he had as a language student moved into the background. Although primary contradictions tend to remain unsolved (Engeström, 2001; Foot & Groleau, 2011), the tensions that they generate push the activity system to constantly transform, to address other contradictions within the system and to evolve towards achieving its object.

Secondary contradictions

Mr. S.'s activity system revealed a great deal of secondary contradictions; that is, contradictions in-between elements of the activity system. Physical, psychological and cultural tools emerged during the analysis as secondary contradictions. Given the complexity of relationships, as outlined in the methods chapter, I followed Mwanza's (2002) Activity Notation template to "aid the process of breaking down the situation's activity triangle system into smaller manageable units or sub-activity triangles" (p. 4). I divided the activity system of Mr. S.'s classroom into sub-activity units (i.e. subject-tool-object). Following, I focus on analyzing major secondary contradictions as they relate to the object/outcome of the activity system.

Subject-Tools-Object

Teaching materials

As a first year teacher, hired and placed to teach Spanish right before the school year started, Mr. S. welcomed the idea of a textbook that could aid him in achieving the goal he had set for his classroom. Nevertheless, language resources at his placement were, as he noted, really scarce and when existent irrelevant or inappropriate for the population that he serves. In talking about availability of materials, he noted:

There was pretty much nothing. They had five of these in the basement [he shows me a book titled “Asi se dice”]. There might have been more. It might have been twelve. I will have to double check. A few. But this was kind of like someone found this in the basement but the principal didn’t even know these were here. Aside from these books was nothing else....I am using *Realidades*. I have one teacher copy. The one you brought me [he laughs]. I like its philosophy to teach language. The way I structure my unit plans, I attach what I do to *Realidades*. I have to quit going through the searching mode (Interview I).

Despite Mr. S.’s reference to the *Realidades* textbook, my observations revealed little use of the book and a lot of teacher-created materials. I prompted Mr. S. about the reasons behind his choice and he commented:

Earlier in the year, I had bad experiences with activities in the book. I also think I don’t have all the books. I am lacking the materials from the web. The workbook. Not having each student have a book. I guess another reason is that I really do enjoy personalizing the stuff. I can make it more culturally relevant. It makes it easier for them to look at this all and say I know these or I am familiar with this versus using that book. (Interview II)

Having taught at an urban school myself, his comment really resonated with me.

Students’ apathy and lack of interest in the book, particularly around the sociocultural context in which the book was embedded, led me to endless hours of modifying book activities to make

them more appealing and to enhance student engagement. I wanted more details, so I asked Mr. S. if he could provide a specific example.

Yes, I am thinking about one day that you were here and it was a reading about an exchange student. And that stuff is very hard to relate for them because there are obviously no exchanges here or no one is going to come for many different reasons. We dedicated time to talk about new vocabulary. I try to tell them this is another useful word or expressions when you go to another country for a year abroad but it does not work very well. I haven't used a lot of black Spanish speakers, I want to, and that might be more motivating to them. With this community probably, honestly it would be better to focus on how it will help them get a job. Maybe a more culturally relevant book for my students will be having people during a job interview and then just are able to bust out Spanish. Jobs pay for stuff and it may be a job like their parents have. Or maybe even going to a restaurant and navigating a difficult terrain. (Interview II)

Aside from the cultural disconnection, Mr. S. finds that textbooks that embrace a CLT approach, such as is the case with *Realidades*, assume a certain level of L1 literacy in students and seem to rely on linguistic interdependence principles to aid L2 development. In his particular teaching context, such assumptions post serious challenges:

I feel like the students here lack the basic skills, the basic grammatical skills and that makes it hard for example to conjugate a verb. You have seen me calling it over and over and over in my class, we do this all the time. That is something that I've been bashing. It is language to talk about language. I think that is important. I tried giving examples in English, for example, you will say, okay in English we can say "I swim" but you cannot say "she swim," right? And then the class answers out loud, yes you can "she swim" and then you are like, ok that did not work. (Interview II)

The scarcity of resources at Mr. S.'s placement and the inability of students to relate to the sociocultural context favored by CLT oriented textbooks create strong contradictions in Mr.

S.'s activity system. Some of these tensions have positive effects for students learning. Mr. S., for instance, devotes hours of his time to create more culturally relevant materials. However, as noted before, his attempts are superficial and reveal limited knowledge, ingrained beliefs and also lack of appropriate professional development, as discussed latter on this section.

Beliefs: Language learning and students' ability

Despite his pedagogical content knowledge and declared alignment with CLT principles, Mr. S.'s instructional practices seem to be, at least unconsciously, filtered by his experiences as a language student. Mr. S. attended a bilingual school from grades K-8. In sharing his memories of language classes growing up he comments:

In my school each teacher was kind of different but I do remember clearly conjugating verbs, present and past, future so many times and I became really good at it. Because I thought it seemed easy, really straightforward and we did it for so many years. We also read a lot in Spanish, which I think helped me to become a pretty decent Spanish reader. I remember every teacher was different but there was one teacher with whom we did a lot of presentations and that, at least helped me become confident with my speaking skills. But I think it all came down to the reason why my school was a bilingual school, getting started in kindergarten when your language acquisition brain is getting molded. I think that was ultimately the main reason why I was able to acquire a second language and that is honestly the main difference with the school here, with this context. (Interview I)

The idea of the existence of a “critical period” for language acquisition--the belief that some aspects of the acquiring language capacity are operative only during a short period in life (Singleton, 2005)--was brought up frequently in my conversations with Mr. S. Upon reflection, his personal beliefs seem to serve as a framework to interpret students' reactions to CLT-oriented activities as lacking academic ability. As revealed in the above quote, Mr. S. identifies direct

grammar instruction as being “easier” or more straightforward based on his experience. This ingrained “theory” became clear in several of my observations, particularly during instances in which Mr. S. attempted to teach grammar inductively and in context, an approach more in line with CLT premises. The following notes from one of my visits to his classroom exemplify my point here. The objective of the day was “Students will recognize and use patterns of –AR conjugation.” Mr. S. provided students with a reading describing the activities a teenager does during the week. He divided the class into groups and asked them to answer comprehension questions about the reading. Students were also asked to underline conjugated –*ar* verbs and to try to fill out a chart of –*ar* conjugation endings based on the examples provided on the reading. The idea seemed to be to provide students with an opportunity to figure the rules out for themselves, to notice new patterns and experience grammar in context. Students appeared engaged while performing the tasks; however, as questions started to arise, the following interaction took place:

Mr. S.: I know this is hard and also kind of confusing. Just try to do your best. It is ok if it is not perfect.

Student: Do we just write the endings or the whole word?

Student: Do we write what it means?

Mr. S.: Let’s do this, guys. You have a choice. If you feel super confident you can stay in your group. If you don’t feel confident stay at the front and do it with me. This is hard stuff.

[Most students decide to go towards the front and Mr. S. proceeds to write a chart on the board and ask students to copy the endings. Students in the back slowly start to copy]

Rather than an isolated incident, the excerpt above represents a quite common occurrence in Mr. S.'s class. Expressions such a “confusing,” “too hard,” “too difficult” or even “too much” were frequently used by Mr. S. to refer to instances in which student-centered approaches were used. When I asked Mr. S. if he had noticed this pattern he commented:

I know. And I don't mean to do that. Yea, I said that. My intention is to encourage them like, ‘This is hard but you can do it.’ But I guess it is not the way it comes across. The reason I did it specifically this way I guess...I have not done much of that in the past. I just know that having the visual, the chart right there. I know that this is how I learned and how other people learned before all the research was changing. I really think that regardless they should know what the word *conjugate* means. And I did not do a good job at defining it. And I know we don't do this anymore. It is not the best for learning but I wanted them to see...this is the original form and now we are going to change it. And still, in this sample form, some of the girls still did not get it. I don't see how they are going to get it another way.” [Interview III]

Rather than acting as inner contradictions, Mr. S.'s beliefs about language learning and students' abilities seem to filter--and have an effect on--the outcome of the activity system. While as a teacher Mr. S. wants to provide his students with a high quality education, his interpretation of students' reaction to CLT oriented tasks as too difficult leads him to “simplify” his instruction and to focus on discrete objectives that, as a student, he perceived a simpler or easier. The frustration emerging from lack of success of CLT implementation leads Mr. S. to revert to familiar pedagogical approaches that allow more teacher control and immediate gratification for students (i.e. when they “get it right” even if the objective is extremely simplified). Moreover, as it will be discussed later in this chapter, Mr. S.'s perceptions of students' abilities might be conditioned by the context in which he teaches, where focusing on “basic skills” is often deemed necessary to help students catch up to the right level (Bamburg,

1994). A contradiction between students and instructional approaches can easily lead to positive outcomes such as personalization and contextualized learning. It can also lead, however, to what Haberman coined “pedagogy of poverty” (1991). In other words, teachers like Mr. S. “who begin their careers intending to be helpers, models, guides, stimulators, and caring sources of encouragement transform themselves into directive authoritarians in order to function in urban schools” (Haberman, 1991, p. 291). Lack of professional development opportunities--and as a matter of fact, research and literature--on teaching languages in urban schools might lead novice teachers like Mr. S. to interpret their personal beliefs and, most importantly, the beliefs of those surrounding them as potential explanations for problems, opening the door to the “pedagogy of poverty” that sees remediation, punishment of non-compliance, direct instruction, seatwork, directions and test as the ultimate goal of education (p. 291).

Professional Development

Mr. S.’s experience with professional development--understood as both opportunities for collaboration and formal training--are characterized by feelings of isolation and confusion. On the one hand, as the only Spanish teacher at his school, Mr. S. felt isolated and lacking direction. His only opportunity for collaboration was restricted to his grade-level team in which, generally, most of the time was dedicated to discussing students with behavioral or truancy issues (Interview I). On the other hand, in regards to professional development, as a TFA teacher, Mr. S. received support from the organization. During the summer prior to start teaching, Mr. S. participated in TFA Institute, a sort of teaching boot camp where TFA corps members receive intensive training during six weeks while they teach summer school. During the school year, a TFA staff member called Manager of Teaching and Leadership Development (MTLD) visits corps members’ classrooms and provides feedback and individualized coaching. TFA also offers

opportunities for professional development every month at Mini-conferences. During these events, corps members also meet with content leaders, experienced teachers in their content area. I have personally been invited to run some of these content sessions. As part of his work in Power Academy, Mr. S. receives frequent professional development, including visits to his classroom by the principal who operates as an instructional coach. He also attends a Summit (i.e. teaching retreat) before the school starts. Finally, as a teacher in an alternative certification program, Mr. S. is required to take classes with a public Midwest University to become fully certified.

Mr. S.'s plethora of professional development opportunities makes it easy to imagine why contradictions could arise in his case. Mr. S. even points this out when he commented:

I just get so overwhelmed. I don't even know where to start. People tell me different things are crucial for my classroom but there's no way that I can do all of them at the same time. And that's many times when you feel overwhelmed, you get all this information from different sources and you just have to go be okay with it, stop what you are doing. But I am just one, there all are a lot of people and I'm just one (Interview III).

Although tensions between the different sources of professional development could be easily identified as primary contradictions and as belonging to the same elements of the activity (tools), I have decided that these tools are not dialogic in nature and therefore they are relevant as they clash with other elements of the activity system, particularly the subject and the object of the activity.

During our interviews, Mr. S. commented how most of his professional development and training as a new teacher has been focused on classroom management and that little was provided around specific approaches to content instruction. In referring to TFA professional develop, Mr.

S. brought up several conflicting examples. The first refers to the main takeaways from his TFA professional development during summer Institute:

We spend a lot time on classroom management. We spend a lot of time on administering rewards and consequences. Investment is also a big thing and vision for your class. So we spend a lot of time developing a clear classroom management plan for our classrooms. But I also remember having a feeling getting out of institute that it did not matter what you teach and that good teaching is just good teaching. That it does not matter what you are going to teach, everybody is going to be doing the same (Interview II).

That same approach led many teachers like Mr. S. to start developing idealized notions of what a good teacher looks like. Going back to his experience during Institute, Mr. S. recalled watching videos of other CMs teaching:

I remember watching videos of classes where the teacher just made a gesture and kids just totally understood and looked straight at the teacher and...come on, that never happens. I remember seeing a video of a Kauffman classroom where every kid was on their seats doing what they was supposed to be doing, and I was like F*, that is definitely not what is happening here. They need to find more first year teachers or even second year teachers that are doing ok. This is what realistically your classroom is going to look like (Interview III).

Mr. S. soon realized that this one-size-fits-all approach was not going to fit his vision for his classroom with communication at the core:

Teaching Spanish is very different from teaching other subjects. I was trying to teach using a PowerPoint that would last for half an hour and having kids take notes and all in English. And seriously, I swear, I was never told how to do this better. And it was different feedback that I was getting from you and content experts and honestly for a while I did not understand that part of the feedback. From my training, I thought that good teaching was good teaching and that what I was learning was applicable to all subjects (Interview II).

Referring to the professional development support that Mr. S. gets at his school, his principal's visits to the classroom seem to be particularly relevant here. During our conversation, Mr. S. pulled out post-observation feedback provided by his principal. He explained that she visits his class once a week or at least bi-weekly.

When I met with her she would ask me what my lesson looked like and if my plans were aligned to my objectives. She is very organized and structured and when we meet we go through my instruction to make sure that my plans follow that specific format that is required at my school. For example, last time she was here we talked about examples and modeling and how my examples were not very clear. For example, today she liked that I have my behavioral expectations on the board and that they can be consistently referred to. She is very TFA in terms of setting expectations, making them visible and if they are not meeting expectations, then go ahead and give consequences. As much as sometimes this is hard, it is one of these TFA teaching things that I have to do (Interview II).

Although Mr. S.'s content knowledge is still limited--as I will fully address in the discussion chapter--his vision and goals for his classroom reflect close alignment to some of the tenants of CLT. Nevertheless, our conversation revealed that most of his professional development was focused on management, on creating a compliant culture on his class. As a first year teacher who wants to fit in, who wants to be acknowledged and rewarded like other teachers within his community, Mr. S. found it hard to reconcile his language communication goals with the non-excuse policies dominating his teaching context. Let me illustrate this point with an example. On one of the days I visited Mr. S.'s classroom, his assistant principal was also there observing. As exemplified by the excerpt above and from my observations, the priority during the lesson became discipline.

[The Do Now is projected on the board and the students work quietly on it. A student asks a peer if she has a pencil she can borrow.]

Mr. S.: The expectation is that you are working quietly on your Do Now.

Mr. S.: Buenos dias clase. {*Good morning class*}

So, today the expectation is that you guys will write a “resumen,” resumen means summary of the stuff that we have been learning.

[After the Do Now.] **Mr. S.:** OK, clase. All eyes up here in 1, 2, 3. I will not start talking until 100 percent of the students are paying attention. I really appreciate how Nelda is paying attention. Thanks Payton for putting your pencil down to listen to instructions.

Mr. S.: I am going to give you a number and divide you into teams. [Some students start chatting.] You are just listening right now and I am not taking questions at this point.

Mr. S.: Thank you guys for moving so quickly. You have one minute to pick your name. When you are finished your eyes are here.

Mr. S: We are going to start now. Thanks so much people for following directions. Thanks for tracking me while I am talking. You are allowed to use notes and take notes but you must participate and raise your hand to talk. If you don't follow directions, you will be asked to not participate.

Once the instructions for the activity were properly disseminated, students proceeded to participate in an activity in which Mr. S. said a sentence (i.e. *la chica es atrevida*) and the students had to write on a whiteboard the gender of the adjective on the sentence based on the ending (i.e. “a” for feminine and “o” for masculine). During the activity students were constantly reminded to be quiet, write on their board and exercise self-control. At the end of the class, he provided students with an exit ticket, that is, a quiz, where they had to show mastery of gender formation by selecting the appropriate answer to five multiple-choice questions.

Although I have observed Mr. S. attempting some of the management techniques displayed above during prior classroom visits (i.e. positive narration of behavior), this instance was definitely not average. During this lesson the priority seemed to be discipline rather than teaching and learning. The focus seemed to be directed at obtaining positive feedback from the observant, in this case his assistant principal. The tensions here between Mr. S.'s goals and what he perceives to be regarded as good teaching by his professional community are clear. As a traditionally successful student admitted into a highly prestigious program and committed to providing his students with a first class education, Mr. S. struggled with finding the right pedagogical approach to achieve the goals he had set for his classroom. In this case, the contradictions between the outcomes of his activity system (i.e. communicative competence) and the professional development led him to work towards a classroom climate that favors silence and compliance, a climate deeply in contrast with some of the main tenants of a CLT approach.

Subject-Rules-Object

As commented on the explanation of Mr. S.'s activity system, both implicit and explicit rules were unveiled and determined to have an effect on the outcome. Although some of them could also be analyzed as cultural tools mediating the activity, their use is required, not optional, and therefore my interest lies more in their imposed nature and the effects on Mr. S.'s classroom and pedagogical choices.

Lesson plan template

Mr. S.'s school has adopted a Five-Step lesson plan template widely used, in my experience, by TFA and charter networks where high numbers of alternatively certified teachers are hired. Table 7 provides a visual representation of the structure of the lesson plan.

Table 7: *Structure of Lesson Plan*¹⁶

Beginning	(i) Lesson Opening
Middle	(ii) Introduction to new material
	(iii) Guided practice
	(iv) Independent practice
End	(v) Lesson closing

While the opening of the lesson is focused on “catching students’ attention,” the introduction of new material consists of an “explicit” presentation of content. Guided practice provides students with an opportunity to show understanding in a very teacher-controlled environment. Quoting Farr (2010), “during this phase, the expert is still watching, gauging proficiency, clarifying points of confusion; the director is still making adjustments and critiques” (p. 89). The Independent Practice refers to “the time of the lesson when students refine their skills, without teacher assistance, and can be the time when students demonstrate their understanding of the objective through completing a formative assessment” (p. 94). Having used this template myself, I can testify that independent practice is generally associated with silent and individual work. The Lesson Closing often involves an exit ticket or quiz on the objective of the day.

¹⁶ Adapted from Farr, S. (2010) *Teaching as Leadership: The Highly Effective Teacher's Guide to Closing the Achievement Gap*. San Francisco, CA: Joseey-Bass, p. 77.

Mr. S. struggled to develop CLT-aligned lesson plans with the required lesson plan template. The format favors students as receivers of knowledge and the image of the teacher as the “knower” introducing the new material. A “paper and pencil” culture is assumed here, since the independent practice piece of the lesson is expected to focus on autonomous and quiet practice most of the time. Finally, the assessment at the end of the lesson provides an accurate picture of mastery levels, understood in terms of correctness. Such an approach demands objectives that are discrete, easy to master to perfection in one session, and collectable in a paper format.

The lesson plan template, however, provides more than structure. It provides a window into the culture of an institution, into what is valued, into key non-negotiable and implicit rules. In a certain way, the template acts both as an imposed tool mediating the object of the activity system and as a rule, acting as gatekeepers of school conventions. Nevertheless, as the year progressed, I found Mr. S. deviating from the lesson plans that he was turning in to his administration often. He also started asking me for help during my visits and connecting with more experienced language teachers at other schools in order to gain a better understanding of what effective FL teaching looks like in the specific context of an urban school. In this case, the contradiction cannot be deemed as solved, but my data affirm that a seed had been planted and Mr. S. is on a path to finding his way.

School- conventions: Discipline system

As most charter schools, Power Academy has an elaborate discipline system. Some of the rules are explicit and have led critics of the network to describe the system as militaristic. Mr. S.’s school has adopted a checkbook management system in which students receive school

dollars for displaying school values and lose money for not meeting expectations. Students' paychecks are constantly monitored. Eligibility for field trips and special activities is based on money earned. When the balance on a student checkbook reaches a negative value, the students might be suspended or referred for a transfer (Interview I).

As I argue on the discussion of primary contradictions, Mr. S. often struggles with discipline mandates. For instance, within his particular school context, his lesson plans were supposed to outline expectations for behavior on each "part" of the aforementioned lesson plan structure. As a novice teacher, Mr. S. attempts to find a balance between his role as a language teacher and his role as a disciplinarian were not always successful. Following the school mandate on narrating expected behaviors at all times, however, provided Mr. S. with positive feedback in several occasions. Commenting on one of his principal's classroom observations, Mr. S. explained:

Today she liked that I have my expectations in terms of behavior on the board so students can constantly refer to it. She is very Teach for America. You know, set expectations, make them visible and if they're not meeting expectations then go ahead and give consequences. As much as sometimes that is hard it is one of these Teach for America things that I have to do (Interview II).

Feedback like the one described on the quote above contributed to strengthen the mismatch between pedagogical knowledge and school discipline mandates and led to the emergence of contradictions within Mr. S.'s activity system. Moreover, those contradictions between Mr. S.'s vision for his classroom and his school discipline directives mediated the outcome of his activity. In particular, he comments on how the overall discipline system at this school might affect his instruction:

Although there is not a key mandate on when to give a consequence or when to send a student out of the class, it is all kind of subjective, but if there is a kid doing something that he is not supposed to be doing, you should probably give them a consequence. That is hard in Spanish class. I guess I could do that in Spanish but I am just trying to master that in English....There are certain things related to management that I just think need to be said in English. (Interview III)

This comment brings to light another potential secondary contradiction between the rules and one of the tools (the target language). Mr. S. acknowledged several times that a lot of his instruction was focused on discipline. The discipline approach at this school is based on narration of behavior, tone, and continuous reminders of expected behavior. It is apparent that “narrating behavior” constantly in the target language (Spanish) at basic levels could definitely be challenging and not bear the expected results due to students’ lack of understanding. In other words, within this culture, as Mr. S. eloquently explains:

What was ingrained on me is that kids are supposed to be in their seats, listening and not having any sort of conversations that are not related to the subject matter. If they are talking a little bit that is lowering expectations. So definitely that is what we are told. That’s what they are used to. And doing that in Spanish, I don’t see that happening. (Interview III)

As he learned more about content specific approaches and particularly CLT, Mr. S. started to question whether following management mandates was compatible with his preferred approach to teaching languages. For a first-year teacher trying to fit in, these tensions can be overwhelming, particularly within a teaching context lacking foreign language colleagues and with a very rigid school culture.

Absences and Make-Up work

Mr. S.'s students come mostly from the neighborhood, a fairly segregated and monolingual environment. In agreement with the literature, Mr. S. is the main source of input and, class time often the only environment where students get TL exposure (Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Spada & Lightbown, 1999; Polio and Duff, 1994). Based on the information provided to me regarding student enrollment, I noticed that on average five to seven students were absent during my visits. Mr. S. qualified the number of absences as "insane." He commented:

There's a few kids that just don't come and then there's a lot of kids that miss random days here and there and this affects their learning and their grades. And this is not only for Spanish, it is for every single subject" (Interview III)

Aside from limiting the amount of exposure to the TL, there is an expectation within the community that make-up work will be provided so students' grades can be adjusted:

The expectation here and at home, I think it is cultural, is that it is on the teacher to do that. It was never the case for me growing up. I had to ask the teachers or my mom had to come and get it. I have seen it with a couple of kids here where their mom would call me and ask for the work that the student has missed and the student does nothing. And I talk to the kids and I tell them...you missed this quiz and you have to retake it but they still don't come. I just realized that I have about six kids in this class who did not take it the last unit exam. (Interview III)

Mr. S. commented on how Power Academy's make-up work policies were very much in contradiction with a communicative classroom. In talking about the learning value of his assignments he explained:

As far as communication and language, how much it helps them?, probably not at all. They take it because it is often a quick and easy way at the last minute. I definitely don't think that is the best way to go about communication....I have to cut all the other kids' learning time and dedicate it to make up work. For example, Wednesday is a short day

and we're going to be doing make-up work. I guess it's going to help this artificial grade that they have. (Interview III)

It is easy to imagine how most of this make-up work is focused on individual effort and worksheets on grammar and/or content that students can read about and then practice without need of input or teacher's support. Mr. S.'s reference to this artificial grade is particularly insightful. It highlights the disconnect between those "artificial" numbers and the object of the activity system. Grades, from Mr. S.'s point of view, do not represent language accomplishment but, rather, they act as a pass within the context of the school. This particular rule unveils a serious contradiction within the system since Mr. S. needs to assess students' achievement using assessment methods that are misaligned with his approach, vision and ultimately, the object of his instructional system.

Assessments

Although I prompted Mr. S. many times in our interviews to talk about assessments, he was never very willing to expand on it. On the one hand, he did admit to "not knowing how to make a good assessment" (Interview II). He also mentioned having been trained to write more "traditional assessments," paper-based assessments. In fact, at the moment of our second interview, he acknowledged that up to that point, he had never had formal a speaking assessment and most of his tests had not been communicative. He did express that this was an important goal of his. As I talked to him, there was almost a feeling of guilt, of knowing that these tests only produce, like the make-up homework, rather artificial grades that are not aligned with the outcome of his instructional activity system. On the other hand, my observations revealed a climate of hyper-focus on evidence and standardized measures. As mentioned previously in regards to his classroom environment, the walls of the class he teaches at, but also the walls of

the school, are decorated with numerous trackers, celebrating students for their scores and growth on standardized tests. Mr. S.'s assessments, his frequent written exit ticket and the multiple-choice format of several of his unit tests revealed a certain alignment with the schools' climate. His reluctance to engage in conversations about assessments suggests that he is aware of this contradiction in his activity systems. Lack of professional development and professional examples of collaboration have left Mr. S. in a position where, despite wanting to evolve, he finds himself without the skills and, also, not fully ready to contest the culture of his instructional context.

Community-Tools-Object

Perception of communicative activities

Whenever Mr. S. tried to implement CLT-oriented tasks, particularly speaking tasks, his students lost interest and often struggled to remain focused. A connection between less structured activities (or even activities that did not require students to write something on a handout) and students' loss of motivation emerged quickly during my observations. Questionnaires, information gap activities, conversation grids or role-plays are a few examples of the type of communicative activities that caused lack of interest. "Is this for a grade?" or "Why are we doing this?" were some of the questions that students posed to Mr. S. as he tried to engage them in communication. Far from reflecting a critical analysis of the purpose of education, students' questions were more aligned with a "paper and pencil" culture in which worksheets are highly valued as rigorous work. Reflecting on those instances, Mr. S. pointed out to the existence of a token- economy culture at his school:

There is a transactional feeling here. There are maybe 10 or 15 percent of students who are intrinsically motivated here but there are many others who are constantly asking 'Is this for a grade?' (Interview II).

Mr. S. went on to comment on how students were able to connect that most of the assessments were paper-based and therefore communicative activities, particularly speaking activities, were identified as not relevant or worth their attention. I will dig deeper into assessment during the discussion of the tensions that emerged between Mr. S. as the subject of the activity system and the rules of the school.

Nevertheless, students were not the only ones who reacted negatively to speaking tasks. Other community members within the activity system, that is, the school administration or Teach For America supervisors, did too. In talking about what he thinks of his professional community perceptions, Mr. S. explains:

I think they perceive them (speaking activities) as fun. It depends on the day but I mean, on an average day, I think they will perceive it as if I was trying to do more games or fun activities. Maybe not. But definitely not as rigorous as all the other classes (Interview II).

I found the comment on rigor interesting, and decided to prompt Mr. S. on what he regarded as a rigorous class. His response was enlightening.

Probably a lot of independent work, I am thinking. That is what I think when I think about rigor. I think about silent, independent work, worksheets. I think everybody is doing what they're supposed to be doing. Everybody is engaged because, if not, then that reflects poor management and engagement (Interview II).

The contradiction between the tools used by Mr. S. to achieve the object of the activity system and the perception of those tasks by the community as lacking rigor are obvious here and problematic in many ways. As discussed earlier in the primary contradictions section, as a first

year teacher, Mr. S. was still trying to define his identity. As a traditionally successful student, Mr. S. wants to be recognized and feel part of a community of successful educators trying to improve urban education. In his case, the perceptions about the value that his community conferred to CLT activities might mediate how he approaches the object of the activity system and potentially, the object and outcomes of the activity itself. Lacking colleagues with whom to share content knowledge expertise, Mr. S. feels pressured to abandon or at least question content specific approaches such as CLT, and to open his classroom to one-size-fits-all tricks for teaching urban students--with all the consequences that such an approach might have on his students.

Subject-Community-Object

The role of several community members on Mr. S.'s activity system has already been discussed in relation to professional development or their perceptions of CLT oriented tasks. In this section, I focus particularly on students, their perceived lack of motivation, and the effect of their reactions and perceptions on the object of the activity.

During my observation I witnessed a lot of negative reactions and comments from students about Mr. S.'s class. "This class is lame," "I hate this class," or "Why are we even doing this?" were common remarks by students during class time. In chatting with Mr. S., he commented on how hard, but also how critical, it is to get students to understand why studying a second language is important:

Getting students to understand why they are taking a language, I guess, it has been definitely tougher than I thought. I thought they would take it as a challenge and something fun and some of them do. But there is definitely a good chunk of them who don't see a reason for taking a language class and I feel with them sometimes...it is hard

because I don't know how to do it. It is hard because they have not been told that is important by traditional education, by society. Learning Spanish is not important is not a crucial key to success (Interview I).

Going deeper into the issue, Mr. S. reflects on how society's view and expectations toward this particular student population might have an impact on their motivations:

Of course there's different expectations that we hold with, between, let's say middle class white students and African-American students. That is certainly true. You can see it on textbooks, you can see on the breakdown of college courses. My college courses, Spanish courses, I don't think I have any black kids. It was all white....If you are in a wealthy high school, at a white high school in the suburbs, I think Spanish will be taken more seriously. Most of the students would have to take Spanish when they go to college. Many are going to study abroad...and it's almost like that necessity. For them there is the expectation of course you need Spanish. But here the expectation is, well, it is only for college, I guess, some people internally probably think: 'You're not going to study abroad, don't have the money, that's like a privilege.' It is like we need to cover the basics before we even get there. So yes, there is certainly different expectations. (Interview I)

Mr. S. attempted to address students' lack of motivation as well as the effects that "others'" perceptions might have on them by conducting class circles discussing the importance of learning a language, by adjusting tasks to be contextualized within teen culture (i.e. Facebook, twitter etc.) or even talking about his own personal experiences and advantages due to knowing a second language. Nevertheless, in an effort to motivate them about the class, Mr. S. also found himself providing students with incentives that were not always aligned with the object of his instructional system. Sometimes these incentives were materialized in the form of "cultural activities." These efforts were very much in contradiction with the subjects' vision for his class, where culture was supposed to be an integral piece. Observations revealed that culture was

generally relegated to days when students were for instance rewarded after successful performance on an exam. In other words, culture was part of “easy” or “relaxed” days. On the other hand, Mr. S. also offered free time or movies, most often in English and culturally disconnected from the lives of Spanish speakers, in an effort to motivate his students. Rather than reaching the object/outcome of the activity, students’ perceived lack of interest in Spanish led to tensions and pushed the subject to make pedagogical and instructional decisions that contradicted his reported vision for the class. Finally, these efforts seem to be very much aligned with a “transactional” notion of education, an approach that Mr. S. previously criticized but that was dominant in his school. Thus, documentation of the efforts provide, in some ways, another example of Mr. S.’ attempts to fit in, to be accepted and to grow as a liked member of the community.

Subject- Division of labor-Object

Tensions between the subject and the division of labor certainly have an impact on the outcome of the activity system. Teacher-student dynamics, particularly with the teacher-centered nature of most classroom interactions, have been touched upon at different points in this chapter. The structure of Mr. S.’s lesson plans, students’ lack of motivation, and Mr. S.’s fear of losing control of the class are some of the factors determined to have an influence on the teacher’s and students’ roles and thus the outcome of the activity. Here, I choose to focus on workload as a member of his school community and support for students with special needs in his class.

Workload

Mr. S. brought up the idea of an unmanageable workload in every interview since our first interaction. During Interview I, he commented:

I think that at this point, nowadays, to be a kick ass Spanish teacher so much is required, so much more work. I am the only Spanish teacher here and I didn't have a summer to prepare. I am also doing ELL stuff. So every time I start digging deep into Spanish I am like, 'Oh gosh, I'm so behind in ELL and I feel that there is so much more that I should be doing.' All of this affects my preparation, all this without much experience has definitely proven out to be difficult. (Interview I)

As our professional relationship grew, Mr. S. started asking for feedback on his lesson plans. Many times, his initial plans had to be modified because of lack of time to develop handouts or a rubric but also because of additional assigned duties (i.e. following a student on a behavioral contract) or addressing concerns regarding the well being of individual students. The latter resonated with me. Much of what I did as a teacher in an urban school had to do with addressing emotional distress amongst students, with ensuring that they did not go hungry. It proved to be emotionally and physically exhausting and often detracted time from my planning and conditioned how much some students, despite encouragement and high expectations, were able to do on a given day. Mr. S. explained his perspective here:

I tried to think about all the situations as an iceberg and try to think that the only things that I see are the top of the ice. I only see what the students are willing to tell me but the reality is that there's a lot underwater, a lot of the stuff about them that I don't see that prevents them from paying attention and that is the reality also of where I teach. And I cannot forget that because that affects what they can do everyday and what I must do everyday, it reminds me that they are great and that they persevere and that they're able and willing to do so much. (Interview III)

The same way he struggled to find a balance between *Mr. S. The Language Teacher* and *Mr. S., The Urban Teacher*, as the subject of the activity system he also found it challenging to strike a balance between his duties at work. I would argue that this is, in fact, an additional

contradiction and one that, in the case of Ms. Camacho (as we will see in the next case study), will also prove challenging for her activity system. For Mr. S., responding to the socio-emotional needs of his students usually meant adding responsibilities to an already overfilled plate. He usually chose to care, to focus on students. Unfortunately, that meant sometimes neglecting the learning time of others or, as it was the case with make-up work, providing the other students with busy work, culturally irrelevant and more typical of grammar-oriented approaches to teaching rather than CLT.

Support for students with special needs

The division of labor in Mr. S.' class, that is, the teacher as the knower and actor and the students as passive recipients of knowledge, appeared to be related to more than just management concerns or rigidly structured lesson plan templates. I had noticed during my observations that some students were particularly struggling. Moreover, their conversations with peers revealed that there were not together with the cohort of students in this class for other classes. I asked Mr. S. about them, and he mentioned that those students were frequently pulled out from mainstream classes during the day for special support. He went on to comment:

I have many kids in my classrooms with special needs but I do not get support for that. The only thing that I have managed to do for them until now is let them use notes. But I have not done a lot of differentiating within my classroom. I think lack of support here also affects what I'm able to do. Some of the kids are very solid and doing pretty good. If I start speaking only in Spanish all of these kids needing special support will get lost. Even if I let them have notes in front of themselves. They require more teacher time. I try to do that when I give them class work and I call directly on other students that are doing better to help...as I try to make my classroom more and more focused on communication I'm going to have to be differentiating a lot; they're going to have to have their own

personal sheet with the rules or something so they can follow along, or chunk the work better; honestly I don't know how all this is going to work. (Interview III)

Mr. S.'s comments reflect an understanding of the tensions caused by the lack of support that students-- and as a matter of fact himself as a teacher--need to be able to reach the outcome of the activity system. I remember one of my classes where thirty-five percent of my students had special needs. Some, I was prepared to support. But others, including children with severe forms of autism, I was not. As it is the case with Mr. S., lacking that support sometimes led me to neglect planning for communicative lessons in favor of lessons focused on discrete objectives generally taught explicitly and in meaningless contexts. His remarks also bring up, one more time, the lack of appropriate professional development opportunities to solve these contradictions and to help all the students in his class to reach the ambitious vision that he had set himself to accomplish.

Conclusion

Summing up, using Activity theory as an analytical tool, I unveiled some primary contradictions and a plethora of secondary contradictions in Mr. S.' activity system. The inner tensions identified in this study gave light into Mr. S.'s internal dialogue as he struggled to develop his professional identity within the complex sociocultural context of an urban school. The classroom reality observed during my visits to his class differed greatly from the instructional vision Mr. S. had for his classroom. Moreover, as a new teacher still struggling to consistently engage and manage his classroom, Mr. S. found himself at the crossroads between his desired identity as a language teachers and a perceived contextual need to act as a disciplinarian. In terms of secondary contradictions, lack of appropriate materials and support, existing beliefs about language teaching and learning and, more strikingly, the perceptions that

members of the community had around Mr. S.'s attempts to implement CLT had a deep effect in the outcome of his instructional activity system. Some of these contradictions led to changes or at least to questioning the status quo as hoped by Engerström (2001). However, as it will be explored in the discussion chapter, the absence of appropriate support and a professional community impeded change and translate too often in Mr. S.' assimilation to the dominant culture at the urban school where he taught.

Ms. Camacho's case: Bienvenidos!

[Projected on the board: Diario 4: ¿Qué estudiarás de Carrera? ¿Qué harás cuando te gradúes de la escuela? {*Journal entry 4: What will you study in college? What will you do when you graduate from school?*} Students walk into class and proceed to take out their journal and write. Ms. Camacho walks around the class returning work to the students]

Ms. Camacho: Un voluntario por favor. ¿Quién quiere leer su respuesta? {*Can I have a volunteer please? Who wants to read their response?*}

Student: *Yo estudiaré arte y ser un pintor. {I will study art and I be a painter}*

Ms. Camacho: *Estudiaré arte y seré un pintor. Muy bien un artista. {I will study art and I will be a painter. Very good we have an artist}*

Student: *Yo estudiaré leyes. {I will study law}*

Ms. Camacho: Una abogada, ¿qué más? {*A lawyer. What else?*}

Student: *Yo estudiaré ingeniería y arquitectura. {I will study engineering and architecture}*

[Three additional students participate. Ms. Camacho writes down their names]

Ms. Camacho: Se acuerdan cuando les hablé de mi familia. Vamos a hacer lo mismo hoy con Mrs. Carter. Vamos a predecir el futuro de Mrs. Carter. {*Do you remember when I talked to you all about my family? Today we are going to do the same thing with Mrs.*}

Carter. We are going to predict Mrs. Carter's future} [Mrs. Carter is another teacher at the school. Ms. Camacho projects a power point slide on the board that reads: Cuando gane American Idol, Mrs. Carter dejará su trabajo en la escuela. *{When she wins American Idol Mrs. Carter will quit her job at the school}* The word “gane” is underlined].

Ms. Camacho: ¿Cómo se dice esto en inglés? *{How do you say this in English?}* [She waits for a second but class is quiet]. Casandra, do you know?

Student: Mrs. Carter will.... Leave the school... if she...when she wins American idol.

Ms. Camacho: Excelente [She provides five more examples]

Ms. Camacho: I am sure you noticed that some of verbs were underlined. Today we are going to study the present of subjunctive [She goes on to explain how in Spanish it can be used to make predictions about a future situation. Moves on to another slide. It reads “¿Qué harás cuando.....?. There are different pictures on the slide (i.e. dollar bills (win the lottery), wedding (get married). There is a conjugation chart with the present subjunctive on the top right of the slide]

Ms. Camacho: Jasmine, “¿Qué harás cuando te toque la lotería? *{What will you do when you win the lottery?}* [The student remains silent]

Ms. Camacho: Michael? It is not that hard guys and you all have the endings on the slide. Do you want a second to write it down? [Some students are getting off task.]

Class: Siii. *{Yes!}*

Ms. Camacho: Cinco minutos y compartimos. *{Five minutes and then we share}*

At the time of the study, Ms. Camacho was in her second year of teaching at *Logan Academy*, a 6th-12th public school with a focus on preparing students for college. The school is located in a large metropolitan area in the Midwest and is well known in the city for providing underserved minority students, particularly African American, with a relatively quality public

option. Ms. Camacho teaches six sections of Spanish, including basic levels and advanced classes that are part of the International Baccalaureate program.

Walking into her room is like transporting yourself into a cultural oasis, highly in contrast with the colorless and decrepit walls in the hallway. Pictures of famous Latino artists, activists, landmarks and flags decorate the classroom walls. A huge Mexican flag hangs over Ms. Camacho's desk. Numerous posters showcasing sentence starters, common requests and commands help create a feeling that communication in Spanish is expected. Some rules of conduct in the TL (i.e. use of technology) are displayed on the walls. It is definitely a language rich environment. The classroom has big windows but it is fairly small, more so if we consider that Ms. Camacho's roster averages thirty to thirty-five students per class. Desks are arranged in a "fishbowl" or semi-circle, with tables paired in groups of two. For a visitor like me, the classroom seems designed for group work, arranged with collaboration in mind.

The excerpt at the beginning of this section provides a window into Ms. Camacho's class and her daily routine. Students start every class period by writing a journal entry to an open-ended question that is thematically related to the current unit. After five minutes, Ms. Camacho requests a volunteer to share their answers out loud. The class comes alive and students do participate in high numbers. The atmosphere is joyful. Ms. Camacho records their names for participation points. During this time, the focus is on communication, on expressing a point of view or relating a fact. Ms. Camacho does not focus on error correction and it is clear to the students that what matters here is to write and share a message.

The above teaching moment also exemplifies one of Ms. Camacho's strengths: her capacity to help students establish personal and cultural connections with the content of the class.

Routinely, as in the example above, she includes members of the school community, **Kansas City** personalities or icons within this particular cultural group in an effort to engage and help students find meaning. It is without doubt that Ms. Camacho has a passion for what she does. Nevertheless, despite her many-times-successful- efforts to center her classroom on communication, Ms. Camacho struggled to overcome and solve tensions that emerged within the sociocultural context in which she teaches. For instance, the observation notes under analysis here provide an example of a good attempt to practice grammatical structures in context. Ms. Camacho challenged students to orally try to use the grammatical construction under study (i.e. present subjunctive), all this in a controlled Q&A format. Students hesitated to engage and requested time to write a response before they shared. The task quickly transformed itself into a writing and reading exercise. Later in the lesson, after struggling with students' misunderstanding and hunger for rules, Ms. Camacho gave in and provided students with an explicit grammatical explanation in English.

As mentioned when discussing Mr. S.'s case, to better understand the reasons behind Ms. Camacho's plan, I used Mwanza's (2002) Eight-Step-Model to organize and code data from observations, interviews and course documents; this process aided me in unveiling the elements of and contradictions in Ms. Camacho's instructional activity system. The following section provides an outline of the system followed by an analysis of the contradictions uncovered. To avoid repetition, since Ms. Camacho and Mr. S. are both part of the same alternative certification program, I will refer to Mr. S.'s case for additional background information when appropriate. A formal presentation of common themes and conclusions will be presented in the discussion chapter to follow.

3.2.A. Unveiling Ms. Camacho activity system

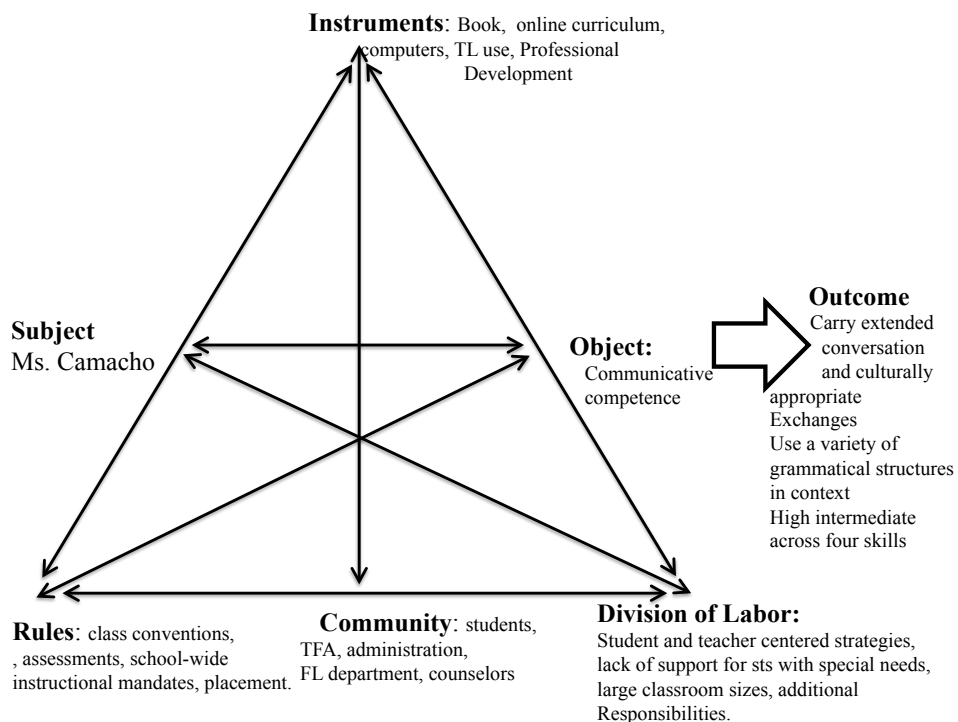


Figure 10: Ms. Camacho's Instructional Activity System

The Activity System (AS) under study here is a Level III Spanish class at Logan Academy and the *Subject* of the AS system is Ms. Camacho. Although part of Teach for America and, thus, an alternatively certified teacher, Ms. Camacho is a not traditional CM. An education major, a sector traditionally neglected by TFA, Ms. Camacho is not a recent college graduate. She has a background in education and in fact some experience teaching:

I did not have a clear understanding of what I wanted to do when I graduated from high school. What I was most attracted to was studying languages and literatures but I did not know what to do with it afterwards. And then an advisor suggested that I could go into education. It was either translation or education. And I decided that education was more for me because I have a personal connection to it and I have always been involved in education in some way or another, with educational support programs at schools. In terms

of TFA, when I was contacted by them I was already on an MBA program and they asked me to meet with them. It all sounded good. By May of that year I had a job. I liked the whole idea and I also had really enjoyed my work at El Paso before. (Interview I)

Unlike Mr. S., Ms. Camacho had had some prior contact with both educational theory and practice, although in a context very dissimilar from the one she is teaching at now. Moreover, also different from the other case participant in this study, at her school Ms. Camacho belongs to a rather large language department that includes teachers of a variety of languages and with different levels of expertise. Belonging to this community of practice, as it will be discussed later on this chapter, allows for professional support in developing and implementing content specific approaches.

Objects and Outcomes

Ms. Camacho's *Object (Objective)* for the class is very much aligned with the language goals of the International Baccalaureate Program; that is, "to be able to communicate information, ideas and opinions and to demonstrate comprehension of these, both orally and in writing" (<http://www.ibo.org>). In her own words, her class syllabus states:

The goal of the Spanish class is to strengthen the language skills acquired in the previous years of study, to become familiar with selected Hispanic cultural topics and to write and speak spontaneously on different issues.....This class is conducted almost entirely in Spanish and students are expected to use Spanish as much as possible in class. Due to the interactive nature of the class participation in class activities are essential to success.

Behind her vision for her class there is a clear desire to create a student-centered and input rich environment focused on communication. Nevertheless, although still faithful to her original vision for communication, in talking about her vision Ms. Camacho commented on how

her priorities shifted slightly as she became in contact with her students' populations and based on what she learned during her first year teaching:

At the beginning I wanted them to connect with the culture but as the year progressed my vision changed and I just wanted them to have interest in the class. They have never had a good Spanish teacher. I wanted them to be interested in the class and to realize that it could help them in the future, here where they live. I wanted them to see the connections with their own culture, and I wanted them to like the culture and the language since most of them had a negative connection with it because they haven't had a good teacher in the past. This year we also have a goal of getting ready to enter the IB program (Interview I).

As it will be discussed later, for Ms. Camacho, increasing students' motivation meant abandoning traditional approaches to culture and finding local alternatives. Her objective therefore is not only linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness but also student motivation.

Specifically, in terms of concrete outcomes, Ms. Camacho outlines the following in her syllabus:

1. Describe the historical significance of activities and celebrations of the culture under study.
2. Demonstrate high-intermediate proficiency across the four skill areas of reading, speaking, listening and writing.
3. Communicate in real life situations; and give advice and express opinions on topics of interest and current events.
4. Use a variety of complex tenses and grammatical structures in context.
5. Carry on extended conversations and create culturally appropriate language exchanges in a variety of settings. (From class Syllabus)

Ms. Camacho's outcomes focus broadly on a variety of components of communicative competence including grammatical competence but also sociocultural or strategic competence. Other elements in her instructional system put her vision and outcomes to the test.

Tools

As cultural artifacts mediating the relationship between subject and object, tools are crucial in understanding both Ms. Camacho's instructional activity system but also the contradictions that emerged as she directed her actions toward her object. As in Mr. S.'s case, physical, psychological and cultural tools deserve attention. Particular to this case are available textbooks, Pearson online instructional resources purchased by the district, as well as teacher created materials. Other tools include the use of the TL by Ms. Camacho and the professional development she received (or lack of thereof).

Community

Given that Ms. Camacho and Mr. S. are both involved in an alternative certification program with Teach for America, the composition of their community is rather similar but not identical. Ms. Camacho teaches at a traditional public school. Her principal visits her class to provide feedback and for evaluation purposes, but his visits are rather sporadic. Students, of course, occupy a central role in Ms. Camacho's instructional system. The Foreign Language department at school, the counselors, and personnel from TFA are also members of the community.

Rules

Ms. Camacho expressed frustration with imposed rules at her school and their effects in the outcome of the instructional activity system. Most of the rules were explicit and concerned whole school-- and sometimes whole district--mandates. During our conversation, Ms. Camacho brought up repeatedly the tensions caused by a nonsensical placement system for language classes. Other examples of explicit rules include mandatory use during instruction of recently acquired student laptops, and a supplemental online curriculum or the implementation of writing strategies for the ACT. As in the case of Mr. S., teachers at Logan Academy were also encouraged to use a common unit and lesson plan template in preparing for their lessons. Nevertheless, the templates in the case of Ms. Camacho were less rigid and allowed for many different instructional approaches. Finally, although some implicit rules around management and classroom conventions emerged, they were not as prevalent as they were in Mr. S.'s activity system.

Division of labor

Although teacher-controlled instructional strategies were still present in Ms. Camacho's daily instruction, she experimented a great deal with releasing control to students, which often caused tensions. In addition, within the class, the same lack of support for students with special needs was prevalent here and especially problematic given the class size and the different levels of linguistic proficiency amongst students. Finally, with several preps, Ms. Camacho often commented on all the other additional duties that she was in charge of and that prevented her from focusing on improving her practice and becoming a better teacher.

Emerging contradictions: Ms. Camacho's class

The different components in Ms. Camacho's instructional activity system shape and deeply influence teaching and learning in her class. Most of the contradictions identified in her case are of secondary nature, although primary contradictions also emerged.

Primary contradictions

The main primary contradiction occurred between *Ms. Camacho the Educator* and *Ms. Camacho the Student*; in other words, between Ms. Camacho's professional knowledge and her experiential/personal knowledge as a learner of English. As outlined during the description of the objects and outcomes of Ms. Camacho's Activity System, the class is organized and focused on communication. For the most part, my observations revealed fairly sophisticated attempts at creating a CLT oriented classroom. The same checklist used in Mr. S.'s case was employed here to record instructional choices during my visits (Appendix C). Ms. Camacho's use of the TL was extensive with a few exceptions involving instructions, discipline or concepts that, as it will be explained later in this chapter, in her view, needed direct instruction in English. Posters around the class provided linguistic support for those who need it (e.g., sentence starters, common requests). She was particularly skillful at modifying the level of her input or using realia around the classroom to aid comprehension. Culture had a constant presence both in her classroom environment and her lessons. Popular and trendy Latin-American music played in the background everyday as students walked in to start working on their daily journal entries. Most often, Ms. Camacho focused on correcting errors only that interfere with meaning but generally avoided direct grammatical corrections. A variety of grouping and interactions including teacher-student, student-teacher and student-student were present in almost every classroom.

Nevertheless, while Ms. Camacho's class provided ample opportunities for students to practice reading, writing and listening in meaningful contexts, speaking tasks were very controlled and rarely provided opportunities for real exchanges of information and opinion. The discordance between her vision for her class--to help students "communicate in real life situations; and give advice and express opinions on topics of interest and current events" --and her actual practice seem to emerge from an inner contradiction between her pedagogical knowledge and her practical/personal knowledge. Ms. Camacho's instructional practice is shaped by not only her knowledge about language teaching, but also her beliefs about students' attitudes towards speaking tasks. Let's elaborate this point further.

Born and raised in Mexico until the age of 11, Ms. Camacho was a language learner herself for half of her school years. During our first interview, Ms. Camacho explained her experience learning English upon arrival to the U.S.:

I learned English when I came to the United States, when I was 11. I took English classes in Mexico. But I did not learn much. When the teacher asked me "what is your name?", I did not know what she was saying. I was placed in bilingual classes but it did not help much. I just had another kid who translated everything for me. Then, they placed me in an immersion class where no one spoke Spanish, mmm...maybe a couple of kids. I had a teacher who pulled me out of class for support (Interview I).

Since Ms. Camacho's English proficiency is currently very high, and she has done tremendously well within the US educational system, I prompted her to explain what, in her view, aided her to become fluent in English:

What I did? I read a lot. I worked really hard. Speaking, I generally practiced on my own because I did not like that the other kids laughed at me. So what helped me a lot was to read. So yeah, I would say that the thing that helped me the most was reading. I advanced

very fast, from ESL I to ESL II in less than a year. The next year, I wasn't even in ESL. I did a lot of reading but I did not speak. I did not speak until after four years, I did not want to speak because I did not like people laughing at me (Interview I).

Ms. Camacho projected the anxiety that she experienced while trying to communicate in English upon arrival to the US onto her students. As she clearly explained:

It is really hard to get them to speak. They like reading and writing better. I feel that they are more comfortable because it is more private. They just don't feel comfortable. They don't have the basic knowledge. I also had to learn a language and I know that speaking is the most difficult. It took five years for me to start speaking. They only see me for 45 minutes and they don't practice all the time neither (Interview II).

Providing students with privacy, with a sort of language comfort zone, led Ms. Camacho to design very structured speaking activities where the outcome is predictable and little room is left for improvisations. Most formal speaking assignments, meaning those counting for a grade, took the form of oral presentations on a given topic. Several times during our interviews, Ms. Camacho commented on how students praised her willingness to let them practice before they had to present in front of the class:

When I first started here I had problems. I was trying to get students to speak spontaneously and they just can't. They freeze. Now, I give them time to practice. Even if it is a conversation, I give them questions in advance so they can feel prepare. They talk about that on the teacher evaluations. They say that they like that Ms. Camacho gives them opportunities to practice and she just doesn't throw them under the bus (Interview II).

Despite these claims, my observation revealed a plethora of examples of students communicating for real purposes, using the language spontaneously and expressively as exemplified below:

Example I:

Ms. Camacho: Mientras escriben el diario voy a recoger la tarea. {*While you work on your journal entry I am going to collect homework.*}

Student: Señora, lo siento no tengo mi tarea. {*Ma'am, I don't have my homework.*}

Ms. Camacho: ¿Por qué no tiene su tarea? {*Why don't you have your homework?*}

Student: Mi perro comió. Mal perro! {*My dog ate. Bad dog!*}

Example II:

[Students are walking back from lunch.]

Student: Señora, me duele el estomago. {*Ma'am, my stomach hurts.*}

Ms. Camacho: Oh no. ¿Qué comiste? {*What did you eat?*}

Student: La comida mala de la escuela. No me gusta pez, fish. {*The bad food from school. I don't like fish.*}

Ms. Camacho: Pues es sano. {*But it is healthy.*}

The disheartening piece of this internal contradiction is that it clearly grew out of caring for students. In Mr. S.'s case, his beliefs around language and students' abilities acted as a mediating factor in his activity system and thus, led to secondary contradictions. The battle here, however, seems to reflect an even deeper inner dialogue around Ms. Camacho's professional identity, a tension between her role as a connoisseur, as a knowledgeable authority and her role as a nurturer. As she learns to teach, Ms. Camacho battles with finding a balance between her professional knowledge and her personal experiences as a language learner. Aware of the importance of providing students with opportunities to communicate in spontaneous, real-life context, Ms. Camacho projected her beliefs of students' level of comfort with less structured speaking tasks, which ended up being a limiting factor in her classroom. Although as

exemplified above real exchanges of communication did take place in her classroom, Ms. Camacho's own language anxiety impacted the object and outcome of her instructional activity system. Nevertheless, as it will be noted next in the discussion of secondary contradictions, other elements in the activity system might have a role in explaining, or at least in clarifying, the nature of this primary contradiction.

Secondary contradictions

Numerous secondary contradictions surfaced in Ms. Camacho's instructional activity system with respect to physical, physiological and cultural tools. There are definitely commonalities between Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho. Nevertheless, differences in their teaching contexts—a small charter school vs. a large traditional public school—led to tensions particular to their individual cases. Following the same procedure employed in Mr. S.'s case, I used Mwanza's (2002) Activity Notation template to divide the activity system into sub-activity units (e.g. subject-tool-object). Following, I examine the most salient secondary contradictions as they relate to the object/outcome of Ms. Camacho's activity system.

Subject-Tools-Object

Teaching materials

The textbook adopted at Logan Academy and used by Ms. Camacho is *Realidades*. Unlike Mr. S.'s, Ms. Camacho's classroom is equipped with one textbook per desk. There are textbooks in the class for Level II and Level III. There are other books on a back shelf that read "IB program" but Ms. Camacho mentioned in one of our conversations that she has never opened one. The World Languages department at the school uses the book as a curriculum guide to determine what needs to be taught at each level. There is an expectation that the book will be

used to avoid lack of continuity or uncertainty about language level expectations. To this point she commented:

There hasn't been any continuity here in terms of teacher, curriculum...nothing. So students are kind of lost. The teacher that was here last year quit, she was fired. We have had to adjust the level and lower level expectations because they are not where they are supposed to be. They don't know much (Interview II).

Ms. Camacho often used the book's teacher guide as a pacing tool and to develop her curriculum. However, as we saw in Mr. S.'s case, most of the materials used in the classroom were modified versions of book's tasks. When prompted about the reasons behind this practice, she pointed at the need to adapt both the level but also the sociocultural context provided by the book:

It is not that I do not want to use the book. I cannot use the book. The kids are a lot less confused when I scaffold the book activities. I need to adapt them both linguistically and culturally. It goes a lot better when I structure the activities on a handout. They follow better. If I tell them just do this activity in the book it just does not work. (Interview II)

Students' dependence on "worksheets" and the practice's relationship with school culture will be discussed later as it relates to their perceptions of "good teaching." Nevertheless, several of Ms. Camacho's comments seem to refer to students' lacking basic skills (e.g., looking for information on a textbook, understanding instructions on a book activity) to use the book independently. As someone who had taught in a similar setting, I do remember that feeling. Lack of reading comprehension in English or even math skills prevented my students many times from working independently. For instance, simple tasks such as deciding on an order at a restaurant based on a budget and a given menu could drive my class to total chaos. It required a lot more than Spanish. It required math but also the sociocultural capital needed to understand and order

from a formal restaurant menu. Much of what Ms. Camacho is alluding to when she mentions “scaffolding” has to do providing students with additional academic support, understood holistically and not just in terms of language support. Going deeper into sociocultural factors, she mentioned:

The book assumes that students have certain historical and cultural knowledge that they don't have. The cultural topics are completely disconnected. They have artists that students have never seen...most of my students are African American and the reality is that no, their culture is not reflected in the book (Interview II).

For most users of the book--middle class white suburban teachers and students--this comment would come as a surprise. The book is definitely geared towards teenagers with pictures of high school students at the movies, the mall, playing sports or hosting an exchange student. During one of my observations, I noticed she had modified an activity from the textbook by just changing the pictures of the artist being discussed. On that instance she commented,

I try to include pictures of artists that they like and that are going to motivate them to talk. That day for example the book had Ingrid Hoffman, what? And I changed it to pictures of Beyoncé or Rihanna, for example. I do not know who writes these books or what country they are from. I guess they chose famous people from Spain or Mexico, but it is just not relevant (Interview II).

She went on to volunteer another example,

Like the other day one of the culture sections focused on flamenco. My students are not interested at all on that. It is something too far, too strange because it has nothing to do with their culture or what young people here are interested in (Interview II).

Ms. Camacho frequently sought ways to increase students' motivation and also to include their communities into their classroom. For example, during the semester of my observations,

Ms. Camacho engaged students in a project to design pamphlets on the most deadly diseases in their community (e.g., diabetes, obesity). Students' pamphlets provided information on the chosen disease but also recommendations for the community based on diet and exercise. The pamphlets were made available to parents during parent-teacher conferences (Appendix D). Adapting the materials to reflect her particular students' realities increased students' motivation and "got them to talk," according to Ms. Camacho. For students who, to my knowledge, hardly get to experience their own city, traditional culture sections in foreign language textbooks seem disconnected or reminiscent of exotic lands. They are not linked to students' realities and they definitely do not tap into their motivations. In this case, the contradictions between the subject and the object (textbook) led to positive results for students although they affect negatively Ms. Camacho's workload and therefore the division of labor in her instructional activity system.

Professional development

Since Ms. Camacho and Mr. S. are in the same alternative certification program, some of their professional development experiences are rather similar. Therefore, I will not elaborate in excess detail here to avoid repetition. Ms. Camacho did not have to register in graduate courses to achieve official certification given her background in education. Nevertheless, Ms. Camacho was required to attend the TFA institute--the summer preparation program offered to first year teachers--and at the time of the study, continued to participate in the monthly Mini-conferences during the year. In general, Ms. Camacho found the professional development not only inadequate, but also often irrelevant. Commenting on the value of TFA Institute she highlighted how most of the professional development, as Mr. S. also noted, focused on management and the development of rigid lessons aligned to discipline plans. During her first year of teaching, Ms.

Camacho found a lot of resistance amongst students when trying to implement the one-size-fits-all techniques acquired during Institute.

They wanted us to script the lesson plans, to write what you would say at every single point in the lesson and I just find that impossible. It is too rigid. My first year, I found myself teaching pure grammar, like filling the blanks and out of context vocabulary. It was hard to fit so much discipline stuff and still have time to talk (Interview I).

Commenting on management techniques, she expressed:

‘Raise your hand and count till five with me.’ I remember that when I tried to do that no one was following. Or for example, ‘Clap after me.’ And my students stared at me like ‘Who do you think you are? We are in high school.’ I had to learn how to do things better for them (Interview I).

Ms. Camacho recalled how her experiences teaching during her undergraduate years provided her with another perspective on how to do things, a more realistic view. Moreover, given the size of the school, Ms. Camacho also belonged to a department and, thus, did not experience the professional isolation felt by Mr. S. Like most TFA teachers, Ms. Camacho had an incentive system where fictional pesos--the Mexican currency--could be earned and exchanged for small gifts or extra credit points. Yet, most of her classroom management, as she expressed, was based on the development of strong relationships with students and respect. In this case, one more time, the tensions originated by the introduction of TFA’s management tools led Ms. Camacho to explore other options focused on collaboration rather than on compliance. Such options, in her view, were more appropriate for her teaching context and also better aligned with CLT principles and a communicative classroom.

In terms of additional professional development opportunities, Ms. Camacho mentioned attending sessions on the implementation of the IB program during her first year and the TFA mini-conferences. Regarding the latter, she expressed the disappointment at the lack of more content specific sessions. She thought that, most often, the general sessions she attended were irrelevant: “They always put me with Language Arts for professional development. I can get a few ideas, maybe, like a song or an idea for a gallery walk but honestly nothing substantial” (Interview I). In fact, Ms. Camacho felt rather isolated from her TFA peers and totally disconnected from their general educational discourse:

Within the TFA cohort, people talk about their students, and the years of growth in learning, and this award and the other. I don't know how much my kids have grown. I do not have a way to evaluate that. I think that they look at me and go... ‘Oh, she is the one who teaches Spanish.’ Like it is not important. Because it is not a lot of us within the cohort then it is not important. They don't know what we do (Interview II).

Concerning in-class support, Ms. Camacho brought up observations by her TFA supervisor and her principal and their lack of pedagogical content knowledge. While her TFA supervisor rarely visited and openly admitted to not having the skills to properly support her, her principal visited her classroom quite often.

When my principal comes he is not looking at communication, or the use of authentic materials. The only thing he wants to know about is how what I am doing that day relates to the IB or the final exam. For example, I administered a short test one day he was here and he asked why did I choose that test? How did it reflect the form of the final test? He even asked me why were the students using a dictionary if they were supposed to already know everything, like every word. But students are allowed to use a dictionary during the IB exam. He also asked me why were the students not speaking Spanish all the time. For example, one of the girls, I was speaking to her in Spanish and she was answering in

English and then she changed and she was answering in Spanish. He was all-critical about it. I tried to explain to him that comprehension is the first step and he did not get it. He mentioned that there were students speaking in Spanish. I told him those were native speakers (Interview II).

During our third interview, Ms. Camacho went on to explain how, additionally, the interactive nature of her class, the flexible grouping and the “relaxed” atmosphere made her principal uncomfortable and subjected her teaching to guaranteed criticism.

He wants the students to be sitting down and listening and writing. And raising their hand to ask questions about content. In fact, my principal came to my class today and we were doing an activity about headlines in newspapers. Students did a great job. But some of them were standing up, some of them were sitting and I don't think my principal liked that. Since he does not know any Spanish I am not sure what he could evaluate. I am not sure he liked the idea of me walking around and students talking (Interview III).

The information gathered by the principal during his visit was used to develop a growth plan for Ms. Camacho. It is easy to see how the tensions between the subject and the required “improvement goals” might have affected Ms. Camacho's object and outcomes for the class. Her comments regarding support by her principal seem to resonate with Mr. S.'s remarks. The lack of content specific support and the hyper-focus on management and control in the classroom emerge as common themes creating contradictions and ultimately affecting the implementation of CLT. Nevertheless, the confusion experienced by Mr. S. seemed to be alleviated slightly in Ms. Camacho's case by her access to other frames of references, such as colleagues in her language department at school, but also in other educational settings where she worked previously during her undergraduate years. These ideas will be explored in depth in the discussion chapter.

Community-Tools-Object

During our interviews, Ms. Camacho reflected several times on the community's reactions to CLT oriented tasks and methodology; that is, her tools to reach the object/outcome of the instructional activity system. My observations revealed a great deal of tension when student-centered methods were employed and when the right answers were not made explicit right away. On one of the days that I sat in on her class, I observed Ms. Camacho attempting to implement an inductive grammar lesson on the imperfect/past subjunctive where she encouraged students to come up with rules based on trial and error. Anxiety and chaos soon emerged in her class. Reflecting on the instance, she explained that in general her "students are used to things that are very structured, that give them a clear and fast answer" (Interview III). In regards to grammar instruction in particular, she commented:

They expect that [*explicit rules*] about language too. With language rules for example, they want to be taught explicitly, they want to know why do you say something a certain way, they like to have a lot of structure...and they don't want to hear for example about an exception. It always has to be the same rule for everything. They also need to know that they are going to get it perfect. They don't take risks, they don't want to think outside the box, and that in a language is very necessary.

Ms. Camacho's comments provide a good portrait of the well-known practices of spoon-feeding urban students content in ways that don't require critical thinking but that allow for right responses on multiple choice tests. She even went on to remark that "there is a culture of rules" at her school. The notion of a "school culture of rules" is reinforced when she noted that some school staff and the administration hold similar views. For instance, Ms. Camacho recalled that during her first year of teaching she set herself to only use Spanish in the classroom. After two weeks, the counselors visited her classroom and urged her to modify her teaching given the

number of student complaints. They insisted that if she did not change she wouldn't have students. Regarding her administration, with respect to speaking activities and providing students with opportunities to participate in real exchanges of information, she mentioned:

When they come [administration], something really formal, I feel that it is what they want. Activities such as role-plays or discussions might seem fun to them but not very rigorous. Probably they would ask, 'Where is this going?' (Interview III).

Moreover, the aforementioned culture of rules and structure lead to anxiety amongst students when they faced tasks that pushed them to dead with uncertainty (e.g. be creative); it ended up having a negative effect on her classroom management:

It affects my management of the class a lot. For example, I have classes with 33 students and just putting them into groups is chaotic. All of them have questions at the same time and I cannot divide myself and check on everybody at the same time. They all want to do it perfect. And then they start talking about something else. If you manage to do a speaking activity during class time but then you want a couple of kids to present, it just takes a long time. I know it is really good for them but it is a lot for me (Interview III).

Similar to Mr. S., Ms. Camacho's attempts to build a CLT-oriented environment were many times perceived by her supervisors as lacking rigor, particularly as it relates to speaking activities. Students, on the other hand, as the main members of the school community, have been acculturated into a system that favors passivity, structure, and rules. Ms. Camacho attempted to navigate this culture by providing more structure, by pushing students little by little to be more critical and to become comfortable with uncertainty. As she very well explained:

I can't just get here and start with long performance tasks and wait for chaos to start. They are not ready. I have to show them what this class is about, how to manage the class

and then we can start thinking about challenging activities and more freedom (Interview III).

The tensions that emerged in Ms. Camacho's instructional system led her to adapt her pedagogical choices to support but also to motivate students. Additionally, as a member of her school and a relatively novice teacher, Ms. Camacho also had to adhere to the rules and comply with the demands of her superiors. The next section explores exactly what rules had the strongest effect on her system and how they mediated and affected the outcome.

Subject-Rules-Object

Rules had a heavy presence in Ms. Camacho's instructional activity system. Members of her community; that is, her school's administration and personnel from TFA, determined most of the rules. Although few rules were explicitly presented as such, many others were pushed through professional development or instructional mandates for the district. Decomposing the activity system of the administration itself would require an analysis of tertiary and quaternary contradictions, additional interviews and a whole new study. Therefore, here the rules are interpreted as being endorsed by the administration and TFA personal, and members of the community in Ms. Camacho's classroom. I will focus here on the analysis of what I consider to be the most impactful rules in the system: Instructional mandates, assessment and placement.

Instructional mandates

In terms of rules in the system, they seem to be very much connected to the division of labor and therefore to the hierarchy represented by the administration of the district and the school. Two instructional mandates, requiring use of technology and implementation of ACT strategies, seem to have had the most effect on Ms. Camacho's system.

Use of technology is a district mandate according to Ms. Camacho: “All teachers must use technology. It is part of our individual plan. When the principal comes to your classroom he wants to see you using technology” (Interview II). My observations revealed attempts to use technology but often without much success.

Ms. Camacho: Ok chicos, saquen las computadoras y vayan a EdModo *{Ok guys get your computers out and go to Edmodo.}*[Many students already have the computers out. Ms. Camacho instructs them to go to the folder of the unit and complete a vocabulary activity.]

Student: Ms. Camacho, the Internet is not working.

Ms. Camacho: Ok, déjeme ver. *{OK, let me see.}*

Student: [Screaming from the other side of the class] Ms. Camacho I cannot get into EdModo. There is not Internet!

[Only two students are able to access Edmodo and are working on the assigned activity. The class is loud. The student beside me is talking about his weekend plans. Students are putting their heads down. One student walks out of the class to take a phone call. He passes by a sign that says: “Prohibido usar teléfonos celulares.” *{Use of cellular phones is forbidden.}* Ms. Camacho does not notice. She is going around trying to help students.

Ms. Camacho: OK chicos. Si no pueden entrar en el internet hay copias en mi escritorio. *{If you are not able to access the internet there are paper copies on my desk}*

Reflecting on the above instance, I asked Ms. Camacho whether this was an isolated incident or if she generally struggled with implementation.

Using technology is usually total chaos because many times there is no Internet in my classroom and the students cannot access the website. Technology affects my control of the classroom. It also wastes a lot of time trying to get on the Internet. But I still try to do

them at least once a week. I have to. But I don't think is very important for language learning (Interview II).

The instructional mandate is not limited to using technology. It also entails usage of an online curriculum by Pearson that Ms. Camacho does not seem fond of.

It is just pure grammar, workbook type of stuff. Yes, if I want to make a quick handout, I can go there but that's it. Also, the activities in the workbook have a lot of errors and I always have to be correcting them. That and the Internet not working, I'd rather print them and do them in class.(Interview II).

Meeting the mandate is important for Ms. Camacho since it affects her performance reviews. Nonetheless, the technology mandate caused main breakdowns in her instructional activity system. Aside from the purpose of accessing the online curriculum, Ms. Camacho used the Internet occasionally to have students research information. However, the lack of Internet connection reliability kept her from using it consistently. The Pearson curriculum also didn't seem aligned with her pedagogical vision for the class. Most of the activities were grammar based or fill-in-the-blank vocabulary activities that Ms. Camacho usually employed as drills for exam reviews or for students needing extra practice or additional tasks due to finishing earlier. The use of technology affected her management and did not render positive results in her view. In an effort to minimize disruptions, Ms. Camacho allowed students to use their phones to access the content if possible. Also, she always had available printouts in the event the Internet was not available. Not only did this increase her load of work but it also brings up to the surface the lack of purpose in using technology to accomplish the goal of completing a worksheet.

Aside from technology, Ms. Camacho also alluded to school-wide initiatives aimed at implementing literacy skills and rising standardized test scores. These initiatives were, according

to her, constantly changing and placed unrealistic demands on teachers' shoulders. At the time of this study, the focus was on improving ACT and SAT scores.

My principal cares a lot about ACT and SAT because they are very low right now. He wants all the teachers, independently of the class that we are teaching that, when he comes to observe, he wants to see the three types of writing, you know, what they evaluate on the ACT. How do you do that in FL? They are barely starting to learn new words....It is totally absurd. Are we doing this in English or in Spanish? (Interview II).

Having taught in a school with similar mandates her comment sounded familiar. I remember spending hours trying to find ways to implement whole school initiatives like, for instance, improving testing strategies. Sometimes it was clear that a Spanish class was not the best place to implement the initiative. However, the one-size-fits-all mentality and the obsession to boost test scores frequently dominated my school's discourse and did not allow for questioning. What is interesting about Ms. Camacho's case--particularly in contrast to her reaction to the technology mandate--is that her membership within a department pushed her to claim content expertise, to oppose and challenge the instructional mandate. Talking about her departmental meeting and the aforementioned initiative, she commented:

One of the teachers said, the only thing he [the principal] wants to see is that it is posted somewhere in your classroom, but he is not even going to understand what the students write; plus he cannot demand that students in the basic levels write a complex paragraph. We just wrote a response as a group to tell him this is not feasible as proposed and we need more guidance (Interview II).

Her professional community in the school conferred her a voice and had an empowering effect on Camacho that I did not see in Mr. S.'s case. Despite the opposition, however, mandates such as the example provided here created contradictions within her instructional activity system.

Using computers to fill out online worksheets or writing essays in English about Latino culture are tasks that do not advance the development of communicative competence. Ms. Camacho tried to solve the contradictions by minimizing their effects (e.g., printing out handouts). However, it is her belonging of a professional content group, I argue, that empowers her to contest members and rules in the community in an effort to keep her activity aligned with the object of her instructional system.

Assessments

Explicit and implicit rules surrounding assessments, particularly about what constitutes a valid assessment, were prevalent in Ms. Camacho's activity system and caused great contradictions. From the perspective of the community involved here, traditional tests in the form of paper and pencil, and, most often, multiple choice questions were regarded as desirable and highly suggested. At several points during our interviews, Ms. Camacho brought up TFA's hyper-focus on collecting and charting data to monitor students' progress. As a matter of fact, like every corps member, she was required by TFA to keep a complex data tracking system and turn it into the organization bi-monthly. However, as she mentioned, not all the assessments counted or were worthy including in this tracker:

I remember that they told us that data for the tracker...just to include relevant stuff. But no projects for example. Assessment are like a traditional test or a quiz. But not a project or an essay (Interview III).

A similar view was actually shared by the administration and, more importantly for Ms. Camacho's activity system, by her students. The administration "always wants something in writing to prove that they learned, like an exit ticket or something like that," she explained (Interview III). Undoubtedly, this culture had an effect on students' understanding of the purpose

of learning and schooling. The following interaction was recorded during one of my observations. In this occasion Ms. Camacho has challenged students to share their views in Spanish on eating disorders and the role that media might be having on teenagers' developing eating disorders. Some students were reluctant to participate.

Student: Señora, is this for a grade?

Ms. Camacho: You get participation points for in-class work.

Student: But how much will this affect my grade if I don't do it?

Ms. Camacho: I am not sure.

Student: Are we having a quiz at the end of the class. About this?

Ms. Camacho: Maybe.

Student: I don't think I am going to do this.

As was the case with Mr. S., students in Ms. Camacho's class held a very transactional view of education. On the instance above, she commented:

Certain activities, particularly speaking activities, if there is not a grade attached to it there is not motivation. They don't feel that they should do it if they are not going to be given a grade for it (Interview III).

Expanding on the "quiz" comment she went on to explain:

Students feel that if is in writing, then I have evidence to demonstrate that they did not do it right. I think that they have been taught that everything important is evaluated in writing. Everything is about circling the right word; everything comes from that, from standardized exams (Interview III).

On the other hand, despite students' perceived perspective on what is valuable in terms of teaching and learning, the disconnection between Ms. Camacho's focus on communication,

particularly as it related to speaking and writing, and the existing rules about paper and pen assessments also caused confusion for them:

The truth is that it is confusing for the students because they spend the whole class time talking and then you have to ask them to get a piece of paper out and do an assessment in writing (Interview III).

Ms. Camacho struggled to find a balance between her views on language learning and the rules and expectations of her community around assessment. Her comments, at times, reflected a level of uncertainty about how to evaluate speaking activities, but also a certain level of “giving in”:

During the oral exam, I just want them to answer some questions. If they understand and talk a little bit I just give them points. It is not very rigorous. It is very different from assessing grammar where if it is not totally correct they just lose points (Interview II).

In the comment above, Ms. Camacho’s perceptions and expectations around oral assessments seem to be in line with those of her supervisors. In fact, instances of such contradictions emerged several times in looking at Ms. Camacho assessments. In spite of criticism, Ms. Camacho employed a great deal of performance assessments in class. The evaluation criteria, however, many times reflected the contradictions under discussion here. In one of my observations students were working on a speaking performance assessment. I asked Ms. Camacho if I could have a look at the assessment and she let me borrow her copy. In the assignment students were asked to predict the future for one of their classmates, or themselves or one of their teachers. When I looked at the rubric, out of twenty points, fifteen had been assigned to language control and grammar. When I asked Ms. Camacho about it she looked puzzled before answering: “Yes, I don’t know why I did that” (Interview II). To me, the look on her face

reflected a realization of the “giving in,” of the tensions emerging as a result of the contradictions within her instructional activity system. While she remained critical of the assessment atmosphere at her school, as a new teacher working on developing her professional voice her views and practice were influenced and shaped by the sociocultural context in which she operated. The lack of professional opportunities to better understand language assessment left Ms. Camacho without a voice and led her, in some cases, to succumb to premises contrary and misaligned with her view for her class and with her focus on pedagogical choices that help grow students’ communicative competence.

Placement

The last rule to be discussed in this section involves placement of students, or in fact, the lack of thereof. My observations revealed multiple levels of language proficiency in the class. Some students with a Spanish speaking background seemed to belong more in a heritage or native speaker language class than in a traditional Spanish-as-a-foreign language class. In discussing my observation, Ms. Camacho commented that the school lacked a placement system. Students are required to take basic language courses before getting admitted into the IB program, probably as she notes, in an attempt to boost test scores. She recalled an instance at the beginning of her first year when she attempted to place a heritage speaker straight into the IB program:

There was a kid for example that I wanted to move up because his mom said that he was a native speaker. I did not know how to administer an exam for that so I used one I got from TFA. I gave him the exam to check his comprehension and I talked with him and I told the administration that he could be on the IB program and they told me no because he was a sophomore (Interview II).

As a result, Ms. Camacho, many times, had to and attempted to modify her input for different language levels in her classroom. Most often, this meant abandoning her attempt to remain in the target language and switching to English, causing one more time a derailment from her vision and the outcome that she had set for her class.

Subject-Division of Labor-Object

As a member of a unionized school district, unlike Mr. S., Ms. Camacho's role was more defined and less affected by additional responsibilities outside her contract. Although the issue of lack of support for students with special needs was also present in Ms. Camacho's case, the number of students needing support in her class appeared lower when compared to Mr. S.'s case. According to Ms. Camacho, the impact on her activity system, although still present, seemed to be less noticeable. Other factors previously mentioned also affected the distribution of work within the classroom. Expectations around discipline, the use of technology or the need to teach explicitly to adapt to the culture of rules at her school impacted Ms. Camacho's desired role in her class as a facilitator, and placed her in a more dominant role as the center of the class. Nevertheless, what seems prevalent in her case is an unmanageable *workload* due to lack of resources. Ms. Camacho expanded on this point by explaining:

Instead of being able to focus on improving my teaching, I have to worry about if there will be paper of not in the main office if I decide to make a handout. I have to sit down also and research what it is that I am supposed to be doing, because there is no guidance here, it is not like I have a clear curriculum neither. If you have a class with 33 students, that is crazy. But there is another teacher here that has 40 students in her class. There is no way you can focus on becoming better at teaching (Interview I).

As a relatively novice teacher, Ms. Camacho knew that her pedagogical and practical knowledge was limited. Maintaining focus on the object of her activity system required

accessing meaningful development opportunities to help her resolve the contradictions that emerged in her daily practice. As it is the case with most urban schoolteachers, her job demanded more than teaching; it required providing support to students for complex emotional and social issues that they face in their life. It also demanded, as I very well recall, becoming an inventor, expanding your imagination to compensate for the lack of basic resources that many times prevent teachers from doing what knowledge and experiences have taught is right for our students.

V.

Discussion

The construction of teaching methods has been “a predominantly top-down exercise ...guided by a one-size-fits-all, cookie-cutter approach that assumes a common clientele with common goals” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 28). A sociocultural turn in the field of language teaching and learning has led to emergence of local counter-narratives demanding “more reflective, interpretive, historically grounded, and politically engaged pedagogy” (Kramersch, 2014, p. 296). In the case of CLT, its exportability as a “Western method” has been up for discussion during the past two decades (Canagarajah, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2001, 2006; LoCastro, 1996; Savignon, 2004; Hu, 2002; Jin & Cortazzi, 1996; Wang, 2002; Li 1998; Liao & Zhao, 2012). Nevertheless, critical studies exploring the application of CLT within disenfranchised communities in the U.S. seem virtually nonexistent. This study aimed at addressing this literature gap. More specifically, I set myself to answer two questions: 1) How do FL alternatively certified teachers practicing in urban schools understand Communicative Language Teaching? 2) What context-dependent factors promote or hinder the implementation of CLT in urban schools? In this chapter, I provide a discussion of the findings as they relate to the research questions as well as recommendations for practice based on the “pedagogical thoughtfulness” and “adaptive” capacity of the participants in this study.

Urban FL alternatively certified teachers understanding of CLT

For the two teachers in his study, their understanding, that is, their knowledge of CLT, was mediated by a multiplicity of sources. As is the case with most alternatively certified teachers, the professional development provided by TFA--i.e., the education courses required to

achieve full certification and the opportunities for learning at their individual school placements--provided Ms. Camacho and Mr. S. with a very complex picture of the main tenets of CLT. In accordance with the literature, the diversity of perspectives around CLT and, more specifically, around what “good language teaching” looks like, led to misunderstanding, confusion and an inability to make sense of conflicting educational and learning priorities (Mangubhai et al., 2005, 2007). Part of the problem stems from the fact that there currently is no single author, text or authority on CLT that has been universally embraced (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Butler 2011; Cheng & Goswami, 2001; Reynolds, 2012). In other words, CLT has always meant a multitude of different things to different people” (Harmer, 2003, p. 289). Additionally, in the case of Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho, lack of a shared vision and conflicting priorities amongst members of the community in their instructional activity system--the parties involved in their development as teachers--had a deep effect on their understanding and implementation of CLT.

Unveiling teachers’ understanding of CLT in this study proved to be challenging. Direct questions around the CLT approach felt often like a test and created a rather uncomfortable environment. Therefore, most of their knowledge of CLT was gathered in conversations focused on their practice and rationale for pedagogical choices rather than on explicit talks about their expertise. In general terms, and as I expected, their understanding of CLT was not sophisticated. While teachers on a traditional licensure route take a plethora of education courses and a practicum before they step into the classroom, alternatively certified teachers become responsible for teaching independently after four to six short weeks of training. Moreover, the need to provide a common curriculum for a large group of teachers assigned to teach a variety of content areas translated, in this case, into the abandonment of content-specific approaches and the embracement of one-size-fits all methods. In fact, both Ms. Camacho and Mr. S. felt unsupported

as language teachers. According to them, as will be discussed later on in this chapter, their training and evaluation as teachers was characterized by a hyper-focus on classroom management, student control, assessment and data collection.

The teachers in this study understood CLT as a new approach that entailed moving away from traditional grammar methods. The term “new” marked clear contrasts between Ms. Camacho’s and Mr. S.’s experiences as language students and learners and the premises of CLT. Both teachers identified group work and focus on meaning as essential to CLT. During my observations, I witnessed attempts to teach grammar inductively and in context; those attempts were more sophisticated in Ms. Camacho’s case. Regarding error correction, prompting was most common in Mr. S. class while recast was prevalent in Ms. Camacho’s instructions. Yet, assessments in both cases had a tendency to focus on “absolute mastery” and discrete, easy-to-measure objectives, thus leaving little to no space for conversation around growth or progressive acquisition.

Classroom observations and interviews revealed an understanding of the approach close to what Howatt coined the “weak version” of CLT, a version that according to the literature continues to be prevalent in language classrooms (Howatt, 1984; Stern 1990, 1992; Criado, 2013; Allwright & Hanks, 2009). Both participants lacked, as they acknowledged themselves, a deep understanding of the approach and real strategies to implement it. Their understanding, however, was very pragmatic in nature and both of them referred to CLT as a method rather than as an approach. In fact, for instance, although they mentioned the importance of moving from input to output in their instruction, they fell short in providing a rationale for their decisions. None of their professional development had provided an opportunity to explore the theoretical (i.e. linguistic) foundation of CLT. While this might be due to the accelerated nature of their

certification programs, as will be discussed in depth in the next section, a one-size-fits-all approach to “learning to teach” and a lack of alignment between Ms. Camacho’s and Mr. S.’s goals for their classroom and the priorities of those in charge of professional development might provide a better explanation for the aforementioned knowledge gap.

When discussing their teaching, both Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho mentioned the importance of incorporating the four skills (i.e. reading, listening, writing, speaking). Yet, when referring to *communicative competence*--that is, the main goal of CLT--their tendency was to equate the term with *colloquial instruction*, with teaching listening but most of all, speaking (Lia & Zhao, 2012). Both teachers understood “enacting” CLT in the classroom as speaking Spanish during instruction and providing students with opportunities to use the TL orally and in meaningful contexts. Moreover, factors such as their experiences and beliefs, as reported in the literature, also mediated their understanding and implementation of CLT (Elbaz, 1981; Richards, 1996; Golombek, 1998; Borg 2003; Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood & Son, 2004). However, what I think is particular to this study is that the culture of the urban context in which Ms. Camacho and Mr. S. teach seems to play a crucial role in their understanding of CLT within their instructional systems (Johnson, 2009).

Amongst most community members in the participants’ instructional activity system--that is, TFA, school administration and students--CLT as an approach was understood as informal, colloquial instruction lacking rigor. A culture of rules, discipline systems focused on compliance and silence or standardized assessments led to a misunderstanding of CLT-oriented practices as “fun” and not representative of real learning. Ms. Camacho commented on how her role as a “facilitator” rather than a “content expert” during classroom instruction left her principal wondering about the value of speaking activities. My observations of Mr. S.’s

instructional system when his principal was present made it clear that he knew what was “expected” of him and that those expectations differed greatly from best practices in language teaching and CLT. Furthermore, students as consumer of the culture present at their school also understood tasks oriented towards communication as “informal” learning. The lack of multiple-choice paper and pencil assessments, a cultural symbol that highlights “what matters” within their urban school contexts, led students to perceive CLT-oriented tasks, particularly speaking tasks, as unimportant or a footnote to real learning (i.e. grammar).

Despite their criticism of the lack of understanding of CLT by members in the community, ironically, such views seem to clearly have influenced both Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho; their understanding of CLT emerged often as a blended combo of “what they knew was right” in terms of best practices and “what they knew was expected” of them within the cultures of their communities. Their assessment practices, choice of activities or even teaching objectives reflected that influence. Similar to most community members, teachers in this study did not equate communicative activities--understood most often as speaking activities--with rigorous work. While their assessment of grammar or even writing was based on clear mastery of objectives, their evaluation of speaking was either nonexistent or very informal and based on completion or the attempt to complete a task. Lack of professional development opportunities, community mandates around assessment procedures or fear of negative student reactions are some of the reasons possibly behind this phenomenon, as I will later explain in reference to the emergence of contradictions in their instructional activity systems.

Similar to Lortie’s “apprenticeship of observation;” that is, the idea that what teachers know comes mainly from their observations during their school years, Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho are still “learning to teach” from their environment, from those identified as experts within their

educational contexts (Mewborn & Tyminski, 2006). As new teachers wanting to belong to a professional community, by means of observation they are absorbing not only what is best for students but also what is best for teachers, what is valued and who is regarded as an expert within their particular educational contexts. In the case of Ms. Camacho, her context provides the opportunity to “observe” experienced language teachers and thus, to find a voice within a content specific community: her department. In some ways, this opportunity emerged as a metaphorical counter-space to contest mainstream mandates. Ms. Camacho’s language department, for instance, felt empowered to contest some of the top-down initiatives at Logan Academy when teachers, as content experts, felt that the mandates were in contradiction with their daily practices as language teachers. Mr. S., on the hand, lacked that space and also the opportunity to challenge conventional approaches. In fact, his understanding of CLT was more superficial and more influenced by “other” approaches than Ms. Camacho’s. While part of that might be due to less experience, it also became clear during this study that the way others perceived his practice and his desire to be valued and fit in also influenced the way he understood and enacted CLT. The idea of a cultural transmission model provides a window to better recognize Mr. S.’s and Ms. Camacho’s understanding of CLT as the result of a complex algorithm involving their own years as students, their experiences as “student-teachers” getting socialized into the profession, and the professional development opportunities provided by community members in their instructional activity systems.

Context-dependent factors affecting the implementation of CLT in urban schools

I uncovered several key themes as a result of the analysis of the contradictions and tensions present in Ms. Camacho’s and Mr. S.’s activity system. The findings chapter provided an individual analysis of the activity systems of the participants in this study. Here, however, I

discuss commonalities amongst cases and implications for training of alternatively certified FL teachers in underserved urban schools. Some of the tensions unveiled in this study match those previously discussed in the literature, especially studies focused on CLT implementation in non-western countries (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Ellis, 1996; Li, 1998; Rao, 1996, 2002, Liao 2000; Karim, 2004; Savignon, 2002; Yu, 2001). In this study, teachers' struggles to create CLT-oriented classrooms seemed partially due to classroom management challenges, inadequate CLT professional development, lack of TL proficiency in Mr. S.'s case, and very importantly, lack of resources (Rao, 1996, 2002; McKay, 2002; Li, 1998). Neither Mr. S.'s nor Ms. Camacho's class mirror the suburban language teaching realities of abundant resources including textbooks, workbooks, dictionaries; reliable access to technology; language labs in many cases; and paraprofessional support for those students in need of specialized help. Additionally, as is the case in my experience with most urban schools, both Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho were loaded with an unusual amount of extra duties including providing students, often living in stressful and vulnerable conditions, with the socio-emotional support they needed to be able to "do school." Despite the importance of those findings, what seems more relevant to this study are particular contextual factors; that is, factors specific to the experiences of alternatively certified teachers practicing in underserved urban schools, that had an effect on their understanding and implementation of CLT. Such factors include instruction as a means to discipline, lack of culturally relevant teaching materials, a one-size-fits-all approach to professional development, and an exam culture where satisfactory performance on standardized assessments emerged as the golden rule to identify good teaching. Following, I discuss the aforementioned findings in detail.

Instruction as discipline and discipline through instruction. The connections between a lack of CLT implementation and classroom management challenges, particularly in non-western countries, has been well documented (Spada & Massey, 1992; Sakui, 2004; Rao, 2002; Li, 1998). Both Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho reported challenges to maintaining order in their classes, particularly when group work, student-centered practices and speaking activities were implemented. Classroom sizes, low-proficiency level amongst students and, most importantly, the *culture of rules* and expectations about *doing school* prevalent in their teaching contexts often hindered the implementation of CLT.

The *enculturation* process for both teachers in this study; that is, their initiation into the dos and don'ts of teaching in urban schools, had been marked by a strong emphasis on classroom management and data-driven instruction during the six-week training prior to the start of the school year. Through the forty-nine techniques in *Teach like a Champion*, for instance, teachers were pushed to strive for one hundred percent compliance, constantly narrate students' actions, demand consistent on-task behavior, and develop complex reward systems to celebrate students' adherence to expectations (Lemov, 2010). The goal of instruction was focused more on discipline and control than on content learning; instruction was a channel to administer discipline. As my two participants very clearly stated, the expectation was that students are quiet and completing autonomous work. And for these two individuals, both with a strong academic and professional record and determined to succeed, learning what those in power valued and who they perceived as experts had a great impact on their practice and what they believed is right for students.

It is clear, without much analysis, that this *culture of rules* can be perceived as contradicting some of the main premises of CLT. What is more, to a certain level this

contradiction calls into question the object of the instructional system (i.e. development of communicative competence vs. students' control). There has been a plethora of different efforts to provide a set of principles to facilitate the implementation of CLT in the classroom but the similarities amongst those efforts are many (Doughty & Long, 2003; Thompson, 1996; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Richards, 2006; Farrell & Jacobs, 2010). The ideas of teacher as co-learners, students as co-constructors of knowledge and the classroom as a laboratory where unanticipated interactions can guide learning challenged the discourse of homogeneity and control favored during Ms. Camacho's and Mr. S.'s training.

Furthermore, the same message of "disciplinary instruction" continued to be reinforced once they arrived at their placement schools. The "hidden curriculum" at both schools emerged by means of cultural artifacts (e.g., format of lesson plans, rewards systems) and evaluation measures. The five-step lesson plan model described on Table 7 was strictly enforced in Mr. S.'s school and favored by many of those with input into Ms. Camacho's professional development. As stated earlier, the format favors students as receivers of knowledge and the image of the teacher as the "knower" introducing the new material, often in a traditional lecture format. Additionally, rather than on pedagogical content expertise, Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho reported that when observed, the feedback received generally revolved around management of the classroom. Both teachers pointed out that their supervisors favored quiet and individual work. What is more, they felt that communicative tasks, particularly speaking tasks that were based on "real" exchanges of information, were perceived as fun pastimes lacking rigor. Within their teaching contexts *teacher control often equals rigor* and those daring to implement student-centered approaches such as CLT run the risk of being seen as too lax or even unimportant for

falling outside of the expected discourse of practice within the context of the urban school reform movement.

As consumers and users of the educational system, students exhibited stark signs of assimilation into the *culture of rules* dominant at their schools. Ms. Camacho and Mr. S. reported negative reactions of students towards speaking tasks, the use of the target language or in any activity requiring tolerance for ambiguity. While those responses might be explained partly by their low proficiency levels (Li, 1998) or even high affective filters, their assimilation into the school's culture provides a much complex and complete picture. At both sites, students demanded handouts (i.e. worksheets), highly structured tasks, filling-in-the-blank activities, and straightforward explanations of rules. In line with the administration at their school sites, students perceived speaking tasks and, more importantly, the behaviors generally associated with them, as lacking rigor but showed great focus during grammatical drills requiring silent individual paper and pencil work. Attempts to use inductive or noticing strategies to introduce grammar, for instance, often led to chaos and resistance. Fear of making a mistake, probably induced, as it will later be explained, by a hyper-focus on mastery assessment, prevented students from using the TL very often. Moreover, as reported previously in the literature, such a reaction led teachers to frequently avoid CLT approaches and to often "simplify" content and lower standards for fear of losing students unused to being in control of their own learning (Liao & Zhao, 2012; Romano, 2008).

While the commonalities amongst cases are undeniable and likely to shed light onto the experiences of alternatively certified urban FL teachers, a crucial difference between them emerged in the analysis. Mr. S.'s level of compliance to the *culture of rules* and his adherence to *instruction as discipline* were much higher than Ms. Camacho's. Some of this could be attributed

to the fact that Ms. Camacho had, at the time of this study, one more year of teaching under her belt. She was also an education major in college and thus had prior knowledge of educational theories. However, what seems most relevant to explain this difference is her membership in a community of practice, a group of individuals “who share a passion for something that they know how to do, and who interact regularly in order to learn how to do it better” (Wenger, 2004, p. 2).

The Foreign Language department at Logan Academy comprised a large group of teachers including several with more than fifteen years of experience. The group provided Ms. Camacho not only with inside knowledge on contextualized approaches to teaching FL, but also with a metaphorical space to contest some of the expectations held by the administrations and TFA, particularly around discipline. In fact, as indicated in the findings chapter, Ms. Camacho had abandoned most of the teaching she had received on classroom management. She found them irrelevant to her teaching context. This thought was reinforced by other FL teachers at her school who, as she commented, pushed her to develop relationships with students and to find ways to connect her teaching with students’ sociocultural realities. Given this situation, Ms. Camacho had adopted a “fake it until you make it” attitude around her supervisors. When observed, she attempted to exhibit “desirable” and “valued” teaching techniques; techniques that otherwise did not dominate daily practice within her instructional activity system. And it worked for Ms. Camacho. Conversely, in Mr. S.’s situation, the lack of a “professional home,” a place to share challenges and also expertise with more experienced colleagues, left him in search of support. As a new teacher, Mr. S. relied on his “school community” for rules, structure and guidance. Often, what he learned from them led to the emergence of serious contradictions between their advice and his pedagogical content knowledge. Unlike Ms. Camacho, Mr. S.

lacked the support needed to solve those contradictions and to gain confidence to defend his content expertise. As a result, more so than in Ms. Camacho's case, Mr. S. found himself assimilating to the environment of the school and thus adapting practices that were in nature contradictory to the main premises of CLT.

A culture of "other" worlds. Both teachers lacked resources to appropriately equip their classrooms, particularly Mr. S. who lacked a classroom and textbook copies for his students. The tools available within their activity systems were very much in contrast with the state-of-the-art language labs available at suburban schools and frequently portrayed, in my experience, in best practices instructional videos.

Although there was mention of the scarcity of resources during interviews, what emerged in our conversations was a deep discontent with the lack of culturally responsive materials, with the lack of textbooks reflecting urban students' world instead of "other" worlds. On the one hand, "disinterested" language textbooks favor the values of the "center" over the "periphery" (Pennycook, 1989, Canagarajah, 1999). Ms. Camacho and Mr. S. commented on how the sociocultural context of the textbooks available favored tourist views of culture that emphasized "far-away" worlds, worlds that did not seem to awake much interest in students. Rarely, did the textbooks portray students or neighborhoods that mirror the populations at either site in this study. Moreover, the motivations for studying a second language focused on studying abroad, going on expensive vacations or hosting foreign students both at school or home. Even when the textbooks attempted to use a "local approach," the socioeconomic realities portrayed were far from those experienced by the vast majority of urban students (e.g., visiting different neighborhoods in the city, ordering from the menu at a Spanish restaurant). The chances of such events happening within their contexts unfortunately are minimal. On the other hand, the

pedagogical choices of the book, according to both teachers, relied heavily on an assumed proficiency level by students of their first language. Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho found a need to adapt the content, to simplify it. As novice teachers, most often, the lack of appropriate materials meant countless hours creating new resources. It also meant simplifying the content and reverting to known approaches, to direct instruction and explicit explanation of concepts.

The contradictions that emerged between the textbooks available and the student populations that the teachers in this study served had several implications. The implicit message of non-existence that these cultural tools--the textbooks--send to underserved urban students act as a sort of “racial microaggression” (Sue *et al.* 2007). When confronted with tasks straight out of the book, as stated by Ms. Camacho and Mr. S., students grew frustrated by the lack of understanding and often felt confused or discouraged. The lack of representation of their experiences (both academic and cultural) had a negative effect on their motivation as they, probably, felt disconnected or unable to relate to the promising advantages of studying a second language favored by the book.

Nonetheless, in this case, the emergence of contradictions between the tools and the object/outcome of the instructional activity systems did lead to positive results, to transformations or, using Engerstrom’s (2001) term, expansive learning. Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho showed ample evidence of adapting materials to fit the needs of their students during instruction. At times, their attempts to simplify instruction led to lowering expectations and to, unintentionally, getting dangerously close to a “pedagogy of poverty” (Haberman, 1991). Yet, most often, they succeeded at finding relevance, at connecting students to the goals of the course. While Mr. S.’s attempts were less sophisticated (e.g., including social media, popular artists), Ms. Camacho was successful at connecting content to community. She was able to empower

students to use what they learned in class to improve the lives of those who live around them (for an example, see Appendix D). In some ways the two teachers' approach to culture is "post-methodological" (Canagarajah, 2005) in that it abandons traditional touristic views of culture and expected goals for studying a foreign language. Moreover, their approach embraces "local knowledge" and addresses students' motivation from a sociocultural perspective that goes beyond exotic lands to focus on contextualized knowledge and purpose.

One-size fits all professional development. In this study, I approached professional development as comprising not only conventional workshops and lectures but also observations and feedback sessions. As alternatively certified teachers, Ms. Camacho's and Mr. S.'s professional development was the result of a complex algorithm involving TFA, university, and local school partners. Such a multifaceted approach to PD made it challenging for teachers in this study to reconcile the competing and sometimes seemingly contradicting priorities of those involved, and affected their capacity to implement CLT.

According to Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho, most of the formal training they received focused on *generic content* with a hyper-focus on classroom management and highly structured units, lesson plans and assessments. Workshops were generally contextualized within other core subjects; yet, it is not hard to imagine how what would work for a social studies class wouldn't be ideal for language instruction. Content-specific PD opportunities were provided as addendum to the general curriculum during TFA Summer Institute as well as monthly sessions. The fact that the TFA Summer Institute houses all new teachers from different content areas might justify the one-size-fits-all approach. Nevertheless, what seems more problematic in this case is that, under the motto of "good teaching is good teaching," new teachers in search of a professional identity were introduced, by means of countless videos and demonstrations, to the "archetype of

the successful urban teacher.” Examples of classrooms where students chant all at the same time, where silence is constantly rewarded and the teacher is in charge at the front were not only frustrating for teachers but also provided, in their view, an inaccurate picture of the realities of urban teaching, and more explicitly of teaching FL in an urban school. I vividly remember feeling defeated watching those videos. I wanted to do good for my students, to remediate within my classroom the effects of an unfair educational system, but the techniques that I was using seemed to have the contrary effect. In the same vein, both Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho found it challenging to balance a perceived duty to act as a disciplinarian with best practices in FL such as CLT that envision the teacher as a facilitator. Moreover, TFA staff members carefully supported workshops on classroom management and data-driven instruction with follow-up observations focused on implementation. On the contrary, content specific professional development was provided as a one-time event and rarely supported in the classroom context. Teachers in this study reported that their TFA coach had expressed her lack of knowledge of language teaching methods and thus, their coaching sessions were centered on setting timers, making sure everybody is engaged, or assessing students at the end of each class period, amongst other techniques. The hidden message was clear. Control is primary while content specific approaches are secondary.

At the school sites, the message delivered by those in charge of coaching and observing was similar. I found it surprising that principals at both schools were fairly active in the classrooms and seemed to act, more so in Mr. S.’s case, as improvised instructional coaches. Mr. S.’s principal visited his class weekly while Ms. Camacho’s was in charge of carefully designing and following her “growth” plan. In both cases, the administrators observing and providing coaching did not have an expertise in language teaching, could not speak the language and,

therefore, a lot of what went on in class was incomprehensible for them. Their feedback and development plans were based on classroom management and *all-school instructional initiatives*. Such initiatives posed serious roadblocks to fostering a communicative classroom. Ms. Camacho, for instance, mentioned that preparing for the essay portion of the ACT had been identified as a school-wide initiative. In Mr. S.'s school, goals around standardized assessments were a constant reminder on the hallway walls and teachers were provided with the professional development necessary to achieve them (i.e., backwards planning from assessment). One more time, Ms. Camacho's belonging to a professional content community provided her with the support that she needed to partially contest some of these initiatives. However, both participants in this study reported that their communicative instructional priorities were restricted and influenced by these initiatives. Even more problematic, a lot of the observations by administrators at the school were evaluative in nature rather than developmental and, thus, were often used to make decisions about employment. Ms. Camacho's "fake it until you make it attitude" and Mr. S.' efforts to please his principal-- as observed during my visits--make perfect sense from this perspective.

The tensions that emerged between teachers' desired instructional practices and those demanded by administrators and supervisors created contradictions that most often teachers were unable to reconcile. On the one hand, their desire to emulate "the archetypical urban teacher," to be recognized as successful by peers and to belong led teachers in this study, particularly in the case of Mr. S., to force--or fake--their assimilation into the *culture of rules* and to revert to a more traditional grammar-oriented classroom in lieu of CLT-infused instruction. Traditional classrooms made it easy for them to incorporate the feedback received during observations and the knowledge acquired during professional development. Follow-up observations by TFA

coaches and administrators reinforced “what is important” and also served to insert a higher degree of accountability on the teachers around implementation. Moreover, as discussed earlier, in their attempts to please their supervisors, Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho got to experience students’ reaction to direct teaching and teacher-centered instructions; and the reactions were very positive. On the other hand, the fact that observation data were often used for re-hiring purposes pushed teachers to comply even more and to derail from the object/outcome that they have set for their activity system.

Although the identification of contradictions in this case did not lead to transformations, it did plant the seed for change. As Engeström (2001) points out,

activity systems move through relatively long cycles of qualitative transformations. As the contradictions of an activity system are aggravated, some individual participants begin to question and deviate from its established norm (p. 137).

Ms. Camacho and Mr. S. have started to question the value of their training and also the image of the “ideal urban teacher” that had been instilled in them. They had both shared their discontent with TFA about the lack of content specific PD and, Ms. Camacho particularly, the need to start a conversation about discipline-specific management practices that are not only culturally responsive but also aligned to best practices in individual content areas. In fact, as an alumnus, Ms. Camacho is thinking about applying for a position as a content leader with TFA to take a leadership role in implementing some of these changes.

Speak but accurately: Lacking a voice within the standardized movement. The context in which Ms. Camacho and Mr. S. taught favored traditional forms of knowledge (i.e. grammar, vocabulary) and written examinations, some of which seem irreconcilable with the main premises of CLT. Their observers viewed authentic, task-based performance assessments as

relatively valid but generally informal means of evaluating mastery. As consumers and participants of the school culture, students held similar views. Teachers in this study emphasized how the exam culture led students to develop a transactional understanding of education where learning was often equated with the amount of right answers on a paper and pencil multiple-choice test. Performance assessments, despite rubrics, were generally perceived as fun class projects rather than as true measures of their learning. Surprisingly, my observations and interviews revealed that teachers' practices were in fact very much aligned with students' and administrators' views.

Daily assessment of students' knowledge acquisition in the form of exit tickets (e.g., short written quizzes) was highly encouraged and part of the *culture* of the schools. Such practice created an important conflict in their instructional activity systems. For days in which instruction was focused on listening and speaking, the written exit tickets seemed contradictory in nature with the lesson objectives. In fact, as reported by Ms. Camacho and observed in Mr. S.'s class, students found the lack of congruency between instruction and assessment confusing and often discouraging. What is more, this assessment-instruction discordance was not restricted to exit tickets. While Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho experimented with performance assessments, "traditional" paper-pencil summative unit tests were the norm in their classrooms.

Speaking was rarely evaluated formally, which could explain the lack of students' motivation to complete those tasks given their focus on grades. Both teachers in this study mentioned lacking the knowledge needed to develop and, most of all, evaluate students' speaking abilities. Classroom management concerns were also mentioned as a major roadblock. However, what seems more interesting here, within the *exam culture* prevalent in their teaching

context, performance assessments were not to be included for data reporting purposes and teachers were pushed to report only “objective” and measurable data.

Besides influencing assessment practices, the *exam culture* had serious effects on Ms. Camacho’s and Mr. S. instructional activity systems and their pedagogical choices as FL urban teachers. First of all, the dominant discourse within the *exam culture* left Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho voiceless. Within the urban school movement, teacher quality is often correlated with student achievement, particularly on standardized assessments (Harris & Sass, 2011; Ballou & Springer, 2015). Lacking standardized measures to “prove” student learning, FL urban teachers become an out-group; that is, marginalized voices missing a discourse of their own to demonstrate their self-worth within urban education. For novice teachers, a sizeable part of the urban teacher workforce, seeking membership and recognition within the dominant group led them to adopt assessments practices incongruent with their teaching philosophies.

Traditional assessments require discrete, tangible learning objectives. Required exams and insignificant learning effects have previously been discussed in the literature as possible reasons for the lack of implementation of CLT (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005; Li, 1998; Liao, 2000, 2003). For Ms. Camacho and Mr. S. justifying and assuring their membership in the urban reform movement drove them to adopt assessment practices that enabled them to report progress within the existing accountability discourse. In the case of language learning, such an approach meant abounding measures of “progress” to embrace “absolute mastery.” While addressing communicative objectives implies situating students on a proficiency continuum, discrete grammatical and vocabulary objectives allow for the abandonment of relativist notions of knowledge in favor of “correctness.” More dangerously, the discordance between teaching and assessment practices, between communication-oriented classrooms and paper-based traditional

tests, can leave teachers frustrated with students performance and encourage the development of deficit perspectives that question student ability rather than teaching approaches. This was the case for Ms. Camacho and Mr. S., who often complained about low performance on exams and commented on their students' inability to grasp some concepts. Even amongst those who have a passion and heart for underserved urban students, lack of appropriate professional development and co-existing within a culture of exams where performance in standardized exams is used to evaluate teachers' quality might help perpetuate "pedagogies of poverty" that continue to deny poor, disenfranchised urban students with the same educational opportunities conferred to those from affluent, mainstream backgrounds (Haberman, 1991).

Conclusion

This study sent me on a quest to better understand the teaching realities and experiences of alternatively certified urban FL teachers as they attempt to implement best practices, that is, Communicative Language Teaching, within the context of their local realities. Although studies focused on the effects of context--in this case the context of urban schools and the urban reform movement--on teachers' pedagogical choices in core subject areas exist, little to no effort has been undertaken until now to explore the marginalized voices of those placed on "untested" subjects such as foreign language. Activity Theory, as an analytical framework, provided the structure needed to unveil and analyze a plethora of sociocultural and contextual factors affecting CLT implementation in urban schools.

The teaching realities of the participants in this study were a far cry from the well-equipped suburban language classroom where CLT is often alive. As reported by prior studies, lack of teaching materials, access to reliable technology, adequate professional development or instructional support for students with special needs emerged as important roadblocks to make

classrooms more communicative (Rao, 1996, 2002; McKay, 2002; Li, 1998). Nevertheless, the unique realities of the teachers in this study, both in terms of licensing and teaching contexts, brought to the surface an array of contradictions and serious implications for educational policy and teacher training.

The credentialing apparatus in charge of providing alternatively certified teachers with the educational experiences needed to achieve full certification lacked “philosophical” congruence, leaving novice teachers still “learning to teach” in charge of deciphering a seemingly unsolvable hieroglyphic of competing priorities. While a limited number of content specific professional development opportunities pushed teachers to develop student-centered classrooms focused on communication, the dominant *culture of rules and assessment* promoted by other stakeholders such as school administration and TFA had a much more noticeable effect on their instructional decisions.

Teachers in this study showed attempts to resist mainstream mandates and to adapt their instruction to their particular teaching contexts. Ms. Camacho and Mr. S., for instance, reverted to teacher-created materials due to the lack of culturally relevant printed resources reflecting the social and academic needs of the student population they served. At the time of this study, although at different levels, both teachers had started to question the culture of rules, which favors instruction as a channel for discipline, and the culture of assessments, which demands evidence of “absolute mastery” of discrete objectives on paper and pencil tests. However, lack of appropriate content support and opportunities to critically reflect on the sociopolitical realities of their teaching contexts, to affirm the value of their incipient “local pedagogies,” led them often to assimilate to the dominant culture. For novice teachers, and especially for those like Ms. Camacho and Mr. S. who had always considered themselves as highly successful, the need to

belong and to be identified as “successful” by their peers had a big impact on what happened in their classrooms. Teachers in this study found themselves voiceless, lacking the language they needed to participate and gain agency within the discourse of academic gains and accountability dominant in the urban school movement. What is more, the greater the culture of assessment and rules at the schools, as it was the case with Mr. S., the stronger it seemed the need to assimilate. Moreover, while part of this tendency might be explained by an individual desire to succeed, the fact that those in charge of hiring and evaluation decisions saw practices close to a pedagogy of poverty and highly in contrast with the main tenet of CLT as the “golden standard,” provides a better and more comprehensive explanation for their pedagogical decisions.

The individual attempts of the teachers in this study mark a start for the beginning of what Engeström (2001) coined *expansive transformation*. When contradictions are identified within the activity system, with appropriate support, they have the potential to transform the system and to expand its possibilities. Although in its initial stages, Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho have started conversations with their administration requesting more content specific professional development and the need to be evaluated by master teachers knowledgeable on language acquisition and teaching. Ms. Camacho, entering her third year of teaching, is considering, upon my request, to become a content leader next year. In that position she will have the capacity to influence new FL teachers coming into the program and to foster a community of TFA FL practitioners that support and provide a sense of professional identity for the cohorts to come. Nevertheless, despite small successes and progress, it is impossible to deny that systems need to be put into place to provide alternatively certified urban FL teachers with the support they need to become successfully adaptive practitioners within the context of those realities. Those include:

- Opportunities to reflect on the sociopolitical realities of the context in which they practice. Such an approach demands recognizing the value of their expertise and “localized pedagogies” and pushes for the validation of post-method approaches that take into account local culture and needs.
- The abandonment of the *teacher as a technician* to embrace a more complex image of *teachers as intellectuals*. Rather than focusing on prescriptive classroom applications, teachers must be encouraged to critically analyze the dominant discourse prevalent amongst those claiming authority in the urban school movement. They also need to be presented with alternative voices that will aid them in developing their own informed counter-narratives and expertise needed to reclaim their authority within their classrooms.
- Meaningful professional development opportunities focused not only on best teaching practices and models, but also on the integration of FL into basic teaching courses covering skills such classroom management or student engagement. One-size-fits-all approaches might provide novice teachers with conflicting messages that they are still unable to reconcile.
- Evaluation instruments that are content specific and administered by content experts rather than administrators inexperienced in teaching languages.
- Careful consideration of placements sites to ensure that teachers have the mentors, community and appropriate content expertise at schools to help them develop into effective FL urban teachers. In the case of FL teachers, the reality is that many of them will operate solo at their school sites, particularly in the case of charter schools given their size. The use of technology to create virtual communities of practices needs further exploration as an alternative to on-site “departments.”

- Foster communication amongst all the entities involved in providing the educational opportunities required to grant alternatively certified teachers licensing. Lack of such communication might result in a multiplicity of parties trying to achieve conflicting and often-contradictory messages and a lack of “philosophical congruency” around the ultimate goal of public education in narrowing the achievement gap.

The need to implement changes to the way alternatively certified teachers are supported once at their placement sites should not be ignored. As a main source of staffing for urban schools, alternative certification programs for language teachers need to be carefully examined. FL classrooms have the potential to stand as pedagogical redoubts where innovation, critical thinking and true learning are fostered and promoted. Such an approach requires critical examination of urban teaching contexts and dominant pedagogical approaches such as CLT that have historically served affluent, mostly white suburban students and continue to send messages of exclusion to students of color in under-sourced urban communities. As demonstrated by this study, the cultural discordance between CLT and the teaching context is not limited to non-western countries but involves also those in marginalized communities within the U.S. When novice teachers are placed in schools where the sociopolitical context differs from that of the dominant group without adequate support, they might develop deficit perspectives on an already disenfranchised population--urban students--and contribute, unintentionally, to perpetuation of the status quo. Nevertheless, a sociocultural approach to their development has the potential to affirm the value of their “localized knowledge” and help them emerge as respected dissonant voices within the urban education arena. More importantly, contextualized and expert support has the potential to move urban students from the periphery to the center as we continue to

improve and explore new methodological approaches in FL education that serve the needs of ALL the students, rather than a selected few.

Limitations of the study

There are limitations associated with this study. This study examined the experiences of two alternatively certified TFA teachers. TFA's certification and selection process might not represent the diversity that is generally found in alternatively certification programs and thus, some of the result might be particular to highly successful recent college graduates enrolled in a particular certification program. That being said, as with most qualitative research, the purpose of this study was not to produce research results that are generalizable to the general population.

Beside generalizability, when using activity theory as an analytical tool, it is recommended that the research timeframe must be "long enough to understand users' objects". Activities form over a period of time and the process of transforming objects into outcomes requires several steps or phases (Kuutti, 1996, cited in Nardi). Due to time limitations and also financial concerns, this study followed two teachers for a semester. Although I believe a semester gave me a pretty comprehensive view of the participants' classrooms, a longer time-window might have allowed observing "transformation" and change in Mr. S. and Ms. Camacho. Additionally, as I got deeper into the study, I started to realize the crucial role that community members had on participants' activity systems. Having had the opportunity to observe teachers as they interact with community members (e.g. department or grade level meeting, observation feedback sessions) could have provided me with further insight into the role that they had on participants' pedagogical choices. There is a possibility the information shared by participants about the role of community members in their classroom might have been limited by fear or by wanting to protect themselves.

Finally, given my background and prior and current involvement with TFA and urban schools, there is a possibility that my interpretations of results are tinted by my own experiences. As a qualitative researcher I acknowledge and affirm this possibility; yet, as outlined in the methods sections, I held myself to high standards both in terms of methods and interpretations of data and I took the necessary steps (e.g. member check-in) to ensure trustworthiness and that participant's view and realities were respected and voiced to the best of my abilities.

Direction for future research

The findings of this study-and also its limitations-unveiled several opportunities for additional research. Future studies should focus on the experiences of non-TFA alternatively certified FL teachers to determine if their experiences resemble those of Ms. Camacho and Mr. S. Moreover, as I dug deeper into the participants' activity systems, the need to include the perspectives of other community members into future research became clear. Applying Third Generation Activity Theory as an analytical tool to include the perspective of "neighboring systems," such as TFA or the school administration, has the potential to bring light and additional insight into the tensions and contradictions uncovered in this study. Such an approach could also open the door to better communication amongst those involved in providing teachers in alternatively certification programs with the professional development needed to gain certification.

Additionally, as the debate around teacher accountability and performance-pay continues to evolve, studies are needed to explore the effects of standardized evaluation measures on FL teachers and/or teachers providing instruction in any other non-core Academic Subjects. Several steps should be undertaken here. We need to better understand how not having the tools and or language (e.g. standardized assessments) to participate in the mainstream discourse of urban

schools affects teachers' satisfaction, length of tenure and likelihood to move to teaching another subject when compare with teachers in core-academic subject. A large-scale study could be beneficial in answering these questions. This is particularly important for hard-to-stuff urban schools and for the educational opportunities of children in underserved urban districts since, as we know, teacher turnover does have important repercussions on their achievement. Finally, there is also a necessity to explore how standardized evaluation practices-particularly as they relate to performance pay-affect teachers' instructional decisions in non-core Academic subjects such as FL and also the development of their professional identity and content expertise.

VI.

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VII.

Appendixes

Appendix A- Consent form

Context-Sensitive Pedagogies: The Experiences of Foreign Language Teachers In Urban Schools

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Curriculum and Teaching at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. This study is part of my graduate schoolwork at K.U. and will be supervised by my faculty advisor, Dr. Lizette Peter. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to develop a better understanding of the experiences of Foreign Language teachers practicing in urban schools, the methods that they use to teach and the reasons for their choices. More specifically, I want to learn more about your views on Communicative Language Teaching and the factors that might promote or hinder the implementation of this approach within your own particular teaching context.

PROCEDURES

Observing your classroom

To better understand your choices of language teaching methods, I will observe your class. I will observe your classroom for one whole period twice a month during the duration of this study. I will take notes on your choice of activities and execution of your lesson plan. I will not be recording or videotaping your classroom and will not be interacting with students. I will schedule the observation well in advance so that you are aware that you will have a visitor. I will make every effort to not disrupt or disturb you or your students during the observation.

Interview teachers regarding choices of language teaching methods

I will interview you three times during the duration of this study. The purpose of this interview will be to learn more about your classroom goals and your views on language pedagogy within the context in which you are teaching. Once I have observed your class, I will interview you two more times about the lessons I observed and your perceptions of factors affecting the implementation of your lesson plans. During our interview, I will show you parts of my notes

and ask you to tell me what was taking place. These interviews will last approximately 90 minutes and will be conducted in a place that is convenient for you, most likely in the school. The interviews will be audio recorded. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audio or audio recording or the transcript. Only the research team (myself and my faculty supervisor) will be able to listen (view) to the recordings. The tapes will be transcribed by me and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. You have my assurance that the recordings and transcripts will be used only for the purposes of this study, and that transcripts will be stored in a locked file no longer than three years beyond the end of the study.

Document analysis

During the course of this study I might request classroom documents such as lesson plans, long-term plans, goals and vision for your classroom and/or assessments. I will not ask you to produce any additional documents for the purpose of this study. I will use these documents to better understand your vision for your classroom. I will likely bring up these documents during the interviews to ensure that I properly understand your goals. You have my assurance that these documents will be used only for the purposes of this study, and that all data collected will be stored in a locked file no longer than three years beyond the end of the study.

RISKS

There are no expected risks of the study, although I recognize that observing your classroom and recording your voice during interviews may create some discomfort.

BENEFITS

There are no direct benefits to be gained by participating in this study; however, your participation is important to better understand and be able to support foreign language teachers practicing in urban schools.

PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS

Participation in the study is voluntary and without financial compensation.

PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

As a participant in the study, you do have certain rights. You have my assurances that your name will not be connected in any way to the information collected about you or with the findings from this study. In reporting on the findings of the study, I will always use a false name instead of your real name. I will not share information about you unless required by law or unless you give written permission.

By signing this form, you give permission for the use and sharing of your information, excluding your name, for purposes of this study up until five years after the study has ended.

REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You may withdraw your permission to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and share information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to: Maria Alonso Luaces GO28 Murphy, 3901 Rainbow Blv, Kansas City, KS 66160. If you cancel permission to use your information, I will stop collecting additional information about you. However, we may still use and disclose information that was gathered before we received your cancellation, as described above.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher(s) listed at the end of this consent form.

PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email irb@ku.edu.

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

Type/Print Participant's Name

Date

Participant's Signature

Researcher Contact Information

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Appendix B: Interview I questions guide

Interview Purpose: Understanding the context in which activity occurs, the subject, the object, the community and the rules in which the activity is embedded.

Potential questions

Why did you become a Foreign language teacher?

How did you learn the FL that you currently teach?

What teaching and learning techniques did you find useful as a FL student?

How long have you been teaching?

How long have you been teaching at this school?

What type of teacher training have you received?

How has your teacher training influenced your teaching?

What is your Educational Philosophy?

What do you think is the best method for teaching FL?

What is your goal for your students this semester? How is this goal aligned with your overall vision for this course?

How does your current teaching situation influence your goals for this course?

How do you decide the objectives for the course?

How do you communicate the objectives of the course to your students?

How do you plan to evaluate your students this semester?

How is your vision aligned with your school's overall mission and vision?

How do school regulations on instruction and assessment influence your course design?

How do your current students influence your teaching approach?

How do your current student influence your course design?

What is your school's administration (principals, vice-principals, instructional leaders) vision for FL at your school?

How does you current school context promote your current approach to FL teaching and learning?

How does your current school context hinder the implementation of your current approach to FL teaching and learning?

How is your approach to teaching and learning similar to other teachers' approaches at your schools?

How do other members of your school community view your approach?

What is your opinion of the current state of FL education in your school?

What is your opinion of the current state of FL education in urban high schools in the U.S.?

What is your current students goal for taking this class?

What expectations do you think your students have on how good teaching looks like?

What expectation do you think your students have on how good FL teaching should look like?

What do your current student enjoy the most about your teaching approach?

What do you think your current students enjoy the least of your teaching approach?

Do you have a textbook for this course? Who chose the textbook?

How is your textbook aligned with your approach to teaching FL?

How is your textbook aligned with your school context and student population?

Are you planning on using any additional materials? If so, what are you using? And, how are you using those materials?

What do you enjoy the most about teaching FL to your current students at this school?

What do you enjoy the least about teaching FL to your current students at this school?

How do you think teaching at a well resourced suburban school be different?

How do you think teaching at a well resourced suburban school be similar?

Appendix C: Communicative Language Teaching Notation Guide¹⁷

Use of Target Language	CLT	Lesson Planning and Implementation	Atmosphere
<p>Teacher uses: TL almost exclusively for communication A variety of strategies to make TL comprehensible Realia, props, manipulatives etc. L1 separately from TL Little to no translation T shows advanced proficiency in the TL</p> <p>Notes/Examples:</p>	<p>T focuses on functional language chunks to promote communication Grammar and vocabulary are introduced in meaningful context Error correction focuses on meaning Teacher provides students with opportunities to practice: ___reading, ___listening, ___speaking, ___writing Questions and activities provide for real exchanges of information Activities reflect students' experiences</p> <p>Notes/Examples:</p>	<p>Lesson objectives emphasize language in use Lesson incorporates new and familiar material Activities are focused on real exchange of information Teacher avoids drills Lesson shows balance of language, culture and subject content goals Students are active throughout the presentation of new content T provides opportunities for group/pair work T incorporates authentic materials T conducts summative/formative assessments focused on performance vs. language knowledge</p> <p>Notes/Examples:</p>	<p>The physical environment reflects the target culture/language Discipline is positive and does not interrupt instruction Teacher appears enthusiastic Students are engaged and motivated Students are on task Teacher shows patience and encourages students to communicate.</p> <p>Notes/Examples:</p>

¹⁷ Adapted from Curtain, H., & Dahlberg, C. A. (2004). *Languages and children—Making the match: New languages for young learners, grades K-8*. Third Edition. New York: Allyn & Bacon.

Appendix D: Ms. Camacho Rubrica Proyecto Enfermedades

Nombres de Miembros en el grupo: _____

Nombre del grupo: _____

1. Primer Fecha Lunes 4: Total: _____/15 pts.

- Cover page **Cover page** with title (English translation should be written below in a smaller font) of your project not just “diabetes” catchy title with pictures.
- **Objective page:** you will write the statement as required in the sample pamphlet in English and Spanish. Must make sense in both languages.

2. Primer Fecha Martes 5: Total: _____/15 pts.

- 1. You should turn in an online draft to Edmodo **of the disease name and information**
 - What is diabetes? How does it happen?
 - What does it affect?
 - Any other important information about the disease. Don't forget to translate to English
- **2. Symptoms** in English and Spanish.
- **3. Statistics**
 - What percentage of population is affected in the U.S.?
 - Which ethnicities are affected by this disease?
 - What is the fatality rate?
 - Mention other 2 statistics you find relevant and important to know.
 - Don't forget to translate to English.

3. Tercer Fecha Miercoles 6:

- **1. Prevention of Disease**
 - Here you will give authentic/real advise on how this disease can be prevented. (Use formal commands and underline them)
 - At least 6 commands. Don't forget to translate it to English.
- **2. Recipe for diabetics 1 (dessert)**
 - Translated correctly

- Formal commands revised and must be correct underline them, highlight them, or change font color.
- **3. Recipe for diabetics 2 (main dish)**
 - Translated correctly
 - Formal commands revised and must be correct underline them, highlight them, or change font color.
- Everything should be typed by now to your template and some pictures should be up. Turn in second draft to Edmodo.

4. Cuarta Fecha Jueves 7

- Add pictures, change fonts, add colors, make it yours!
- Check for accents
- Revise grammar in both languages
- Everything must make sense
- Formal commands should be correct
- Everything typed in pamphlet ready to print
- Turn in final draft to Edmodo.

4. Viernes 8: Total: _____/15 pts.

Podcast: 1-2 minutos con los dos miembros hablando: