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# COMPREHENSIBLE AND ENGAGING: A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF ENGAGING AURAL INPUT ON WRITTEN OUTPUT IN SECOND-LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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**COMPREHENSIBLE AND ENGAGING: A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF  
ENGAGING AURAL INPUT ON WRITTEN OUTPUT IN SECOND LANGUAGE  
ACQUISITION**

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Teaching

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## DEDICATION

To my family and friends, especially my husband and children who encouraged and supported me through this process and to my colleagues who guided me through answering tough questions as I crafted my research query. I am a stronger, more confident professional because of the support you have all given me. Most of all thank you to my mother who always honored my passion for deep reflection and my father for his support and encouragement in my academic pursuits. Your belief in me is the foundation for all of my successes in life.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Some foreign language teaching methods are more explicit while others lean toward implicit instruction and for as many choices of methods, there are an equal amount of variations created by individual teachers. The interesting thing about each of these methods is that they are very well thought out and designed and each of them speaks to part or all of the processes that encompass what it is to learn a second language. Today's processes of teaching and learning foreign languages are rich and all-encompassing because they have evolved over time. They cater to all styles of learners and teachers. This evolution has allowed teachers to pull from a variety of tried and true practices and individualize them for their own teaching style and adjust them to the cognitive levels and interests of their students.

Beginning-level world language students don't tend to produce a lot of spoken language because they don't feel comfortable (Richards, 1984). Although they receive a lot of consistent and repetitive input which is language provided in the form of text or spoken word (Dubiner, 2019), they will need a lot more before they have acquired enough language to speak spontaneously (Christie, 2016). This forces teachers to use writing assessments as a measure of the student's growth in the language. Reflecting on this topic has prompted me to ask the question *How much can aural input in the form of storytelling that is made comprehensible and engaging with the use of language-free video shorts increase novice-students' written output in a World Language classroom?*

As I walk toward my quest for clarity on this topic there are some terms that will be used frequently, comprehensible, aural, input, and output. The following paragraph will clarify their meanings. (VanPatten & Benati, 2010):

Comprehensible aural input refers to messages that foreign language students hear (aural) that are communicated in a way that makes them comprehensible (VanPatten & Benati, 2010), usually by way of gestures and visuals. Many foreign language teachers understand the impact of teaching methods that use comprehensible aural input on the amount and quality of language a student is able to use to express ideas in the foreign language (proficiency) and language output which is the language a student can produce in either written or spoken form (VanPatten & Benati, 2010). However, teachers now find themselves in a space where the evolution of these methods are, once again, ready to take a step forward in their evolution. Comprehensible aural input needs to be more than what it is currently. Aural input that is simply comprehensible isn't enough, it needs to be exceptionally engaging as well (Krashen, 1992). But, how can aural input that has been made comprehensible and engaging increase novice students' written output?

In this chapter, I will reflect on my decision to study Spanish and my journey through the language acquisition process along with the impact it has had on my own teaching methods and beliefs about my role as a foreign language teacher. I will also discuss the impact that being bilingual has had on my life. Finally, I will present what I see to be the needs and attitudes of modern high-school students in foreign language classrooms and the challenges faced by teachers in connection with these two needs and attitudes.

## **My Personal Journey**

I initially started to study Spanish simply because my older sister had taken it before me. I struggled a lot academically and always wanted to do well in school. So, I took Spanish because I knew that if I was struggling, my sister could help me. Little did I know that when I walked into my Spanish classroom for the first time I would soon be learning about cultures whose view of the world would intrigue me. My 8th grade Spanish teacher was able to ignite a spark that would change my life.

So many of the important things that have happened in my life have a thread of my Spanish journey running through them. On my first day of school as I made my way through the old, dark, stuffy classroom to my seat, I walked past posters full of women wearing colorful woven dresses, their hair was braided, their faces solemn. I had never seen hand-woven clothing before. In that moment, I felt an urgency and excitement because to me those pictures represented the notion that what I was about to learn in Spanish class was going to enable me to communicate with people like the women in the posters. I had so many questions for them and I wasn't going to stop taking Spanish classes until I learned enough to be able to communicate my curiosity and to understand their stories.

Lucky for me and for my subsequent Spanish teachers, the spark that was ignited that day was only the first of many that would come as I learned more about the cultures of the Spanish-speaking world. My Spanish teachers were as excited about the cultures they taught as I was, and the more they taught me about them, the more I was pulled in. My teachers were also very skilled and organized which helped me through the language



acquisition process. However, that was not enough to get my proficiency level to an intermediate–low (which is the proficiency level of third–year Spanish students by the end of the year in the program I teach) by the time I graduated high school. For this reason, when I did my first study–abroad to Mexico, I found myself struggling to speak and even worse, to understand. I don’t want to get in the way of students’ proficiency growth by facilitating activities that limit their potential. I want my students to have as much proficiency growth as they can so that they can imagine a future with Spanish.

### **Capstone Context**

Who are the students? In my experience they are 14–17 year old high-schoolers taking Spanish II or Spanish III. They take a foreign language for many reasons. Some, like myself, have a profound curiosity about the people of the world who do not share their set of cultural norms. Others take Spanish because they understand the benefit of speaking a language that according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2019) connects itself to the second largest ethnic/racial minority group in the United States. Many, many others (the majority of my students) are taking it to fulfill college entrance requirements.

When I began my teaching career five years ago I used my own learning experiences along with research–based practices to help inform my teaching. As I have moved through the last five years, I have been fortunate to find a job where my instincts about teaching resonate with my colleagues. We all recognize that we are competing with a student “chore list” and that many students walk into our classrooms so that they can mark “2–3 years of a foreign language” off their list of prerequisites for college. Students with this mindset are hard to motivate and it is more difficult to get their buy-in within

the learning process. We know that when students have this kind of attitude, they don't reach their full potential in regard to language acquisition. Moreover, with this attitude, they don't see themselves as future Spanish-speakers or see how impactful the language could potentially be on their life trajectory.

### **Rationale**

So, how do we as language teachers pull students in and help them grow their proficiency? I would like to research a few things I have learned over the years in order to tweak what I practice in my classroom and hopefully come up with a valuable teaching tool that helps me get students' attention and help them to acquire language. In order to do this I will have to take a look at what the literature says about the main components of my question which are comprehensible aural input in the form of storytelling and student engagement. I suspect that I won't find studies that connect all of these components together exclusively rather, I will find separate studies that include them as a piece of the research. With the information gathered from the literature review, I will address my research question and create a project that can be of use for other foreign language teachers.

### **Gap-niche**

A few years ago, a colleague introduced me to an animated movie short that didn't have any language. It was simply narrated by music. My colleagues and I used the movie short as part of an art-themed unit to talk about colors and emotions. I had great success engaging my students with this movie short and have integrated it into my curriculum in a couple of different ways since. Each time I use it I find that it is fairly

easy to engage even the most reluctant of students. Because of my success using this short video as a tool, I have begun to explore this method of teaching with other video shorts and have found that I can draw students in quite easily.

Based on the experiences detailed in the previous paragraph and on Stephen Krashen's (1992) revised input hypothesis which emphasizes that input has to be engaging enough for the learner to forget that they are interacting with a foreign language, I have come up with my own hypothesis; because the students are getting incredibly engaging aural input, they should be able to increase their written output.

My research intends to briefly review the methods that have been used over the years to teach foreign languages in an effort to encounter the pieces of those methods that have stood the test of time. My research will also review studies on how to manipulate language teaching methods in order to learn more about the second-language acquisition process.

## **Conclusion**

My research question "How much can aural input in the form of storytelling that is made comprehensible and engaging with the use of language-free video shorts increase novice-students' written output in a World Language classroom" along with my passion for experimenting with foreign-language teaching methods, understanding student engagement, and a determination to increase the language acquisition of my students were the foundational themes of this chapter. They each resonate with me personally and I find the importance of their reciprocal and cyclical relationships with each other endlessly fascinating. Foreign-language teaching benefits from being conducted by way

of a method that is well organized. However, just because the method is organized does not mean that students will buy in to it. Moreover, if they do “buy in” to the method, how will this impact their output? I am excited to find, create and share solutions to this inquiry.

Chapter two will review and synthesize literature that points towards the answer to my research question. Chapter three will give a proposal for a curricular unit and a series of assessments that can be used as a way of testing my hypothesis. Finally, Chapter four will be a reflection on the process of creating my capstone project— coming up with a research question that fuels my passion for teaching and professional growth, and discussion of the path that led me to the end of my research and completion of my project.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

For many World Language teachers, one of the most enjoyable aspects of teaching is creating content that is comprehensible and engaging for students. However, beginning-level foreign language students are often nervous about understanding every word the teacher says (Wu, 2010). This can lead to a lack of engagement. When this occurs, students are likely to miss many of the crucial components that give life to the comprehensible input such as visuals, gestures, writing on the board, etc. Ultimately this lack of engagement greatly impacts the student's depth of language acquisition.

This literature review is a pursuit to find research that informs on student engagement and the role that aural comprehensible input plays in language output in order to facilitate the creation of a curricular unit that responds to the question; *How much can aural input in the form of storytelling that is made comprehensible and engaging with the use of language-free video shorts increase novice-students' written output in a World Language classroom?* In order to accomplish this task it is important to review the literature that relates to the major themes in relation to this question—comprehensible input, language teaching methods, aural input, and engagement. The comprehensible input and language teaching methods section of this chapter reviews a history of popular foreign-language teaching methods and their connection with current teaching practices. The section dedicated to forms of aural comprehensible input analyzes how aural comprehensible input has been used in relation to language acquisition in an

effort to understand its impact on language output. Next, an exploration of how aural input has been used to engage students is covered. Finally, the last section of this chapter covers how to make aural input engaging.

### **Comprehensible Input and Language Teaching Methods**

There are many different approaches to teaching foreign languages and a rich history of such methods has evolved over time (Boyadzhieva, 2014), each method being either a reaction to or a modification of previous methods. They also use varying degrees of instruction from instruction mostly in the students' native language (L1) to only instruction in the foreign language (L2) (Asher, 1969, , Krashen & Terrell, 1983, Kuznetsova, 2015, Natsir & Sanjaya, 2014, Shumskyi, 2016).

Some foreign language teaching methods are more explicit while others lean toward implicit instruction (Nagy, 2019). The following is a summary of the most notable language teaching methods used in middle/high school education in recent history and their connections to the most current trends of foreign language teaching.

#### ***Grammar-translation method***

The Grammar-translation Method focuses on direct translation of words, phrases and texts. The teacher gives detailed instruction in L1 of grammar in order to aid translation from L2 to L1 and vice versa. The learning materials used are texts and dictionaries (Natsir & Sanjaya, 2014).

This method of teaching continues to be utilized today by teachers even though studies have exposed its inability to strengthen oral proficiency (Kong, 2011). Teachers

find pieces of the method to be useful and use it sparingly as a formative assessment tool to check for comprehension and to help students increase grammar accuracy.

### ***Direct method***

The Direct Method is quite the opposite of the Grammar-translation Method. It is a conversational style of language learning where absolutely no L1 is to be used. There is no translation and grammar is taught inductively. While there is reading involved, it doesn't occur until students reach an advanced level of proficiency (Kuznetsova, 2015).

While many teachers strive to use as much L2 in the classroom as possible, it is very difficult to keep the attention of all students, especially if the students are not interested in what the teacher is trying to communicate (Krashen, 1992). Thus, many teachers fail to meet the expectations of this particular method. However, the failures that have been experienced have led to more successful practices which will be touched upon throughout this methods review section.

### ***Audio-lingual method***

The Audio-lingual Method places focus on speaking and pronunciation. For this reason there are a lot of language drills in which students repeat after the teacher. L1 is sometimes used by the teacher but students are highly discouraged from using it. Because this method relies heavily upon repetition, it typically includes an audiol-ab component where students listen to recordings and repeat what they hear. This method may include some visuals that accompany the audio recordings (Kuznetsova, 2015)

This method has long gone by the wayside because studies have shown that forcing students to only speak in L2 can cause anxiety (MacIntyre, 1994, Wu, 2010).

Current approaches tend to encourage students to speak in the L2 when they are ready such is the case with the Total Physical Response Method (Asher, 1969) and the Natural Approach (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

### ***Total physical response (TPR)***

In the TPR method, the teacher models verbs by doing the action of the verb while also saying the verb in L2. Next, the teacher gives the command to the student in L2 and the student performs the action that is representative of the command and vice versa. Students are encouraged to start using the language when they are ready. This method is based on a theory that one can learn a second language in the way a toddler learns a first language, by learning commands that parents give such as eat, walk, go, stop, etc. (Asher, 1969).

The positive aspect of this method is that it allows students to speak when they are ready and it allows for the students to use L1 to clarify any doubts they may have. In contrast however, while this method works well for young children who are less inhibited, few high-school students enjoy getting this far out of their comfort zones in an effort to learn a foreign language.

### ***Communicative approach and Natural approach***

In the Communicative Approach and Natural Approach, the teacher always uses the target language, the language students are trying to learn (TL) and strives to make communication in the target language as comprehensible as possible for the students. Unit topics are based on the interests of the students and oral output is assumed to come in stages through the language acquisition process. Students will first learn to answer



with simple words, then word combinations, etc until they are capable of complex discourse (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

One commonality that current foreign language teaching methods like the Communicative Approach and Natural Approach have is that they focus on providing high-quality input to the learners. These input methods were born out of Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1992) which states that we acquire language through messages that we understand and thus, comprehensible input is essential in the second-language acquisition process. It also states that the learner must be open to the input and that the input must contain something novel that is just above the learner's level of acquisition. As language teaching methods have evolved, we see Krashen's ideas about input starting to take hold within K-12 world language curriculum and becoming a larger part of such methods.

Early on, teaching methods focused on translation from L2 to L1 and vice versa. From there, different approaches worked to include various communication skills that the previous methods lacked. As these methods evolved, more and more focus has been given to making the L2 input increasingly more comprehensible to the student by whatever means possible and we now find ourselves in what is called the "post communicative era" (Shumskyi, 2016) which is home to the most current style of language teaching referred to as the post method condition. The post method condition isn't a new method, but rather an attempt to synthesize the successful pieces of previous methods. The post method condition falls under the umbrella of Communicative

Language Teaching (CLT) upon which comprehensible input is heavily relied (Nagy, 2019).

Comprehensible input (CI) simply put is context. It is language input presented to learners in a way that makes it possible for them to understand what they are hearing or reading even if they don't understand all of the words (Krashen, 1992). This is done in many ways by the use of pictures, videos, gestures, tone of voice and objects. Basically, the only limit to the type of CI available for use is the extent of one's imagination.

Comprehensible input has been proven to be an effective tool in making language more attainable. One study done on three separate groups of English language learners (ELL) at a public college found the following: The researchers instructed three different groups to read a short story on their own and answer comprehension questions about the story. One group simply discussed the story with classmates. The second group discussed and listened to an audio version of the story. The third group discussed and watched an audiovisual version of the story. After these activities were completed, all the groups re-answered the comprehension questions about the story. The researchers found that there was little improvement from the first and second groups and the improvement was very similar between the two groups. However, by the end of the study, the third group (the one with audiovisual support, a form of comprehensible input) had full comprehension of the story, and upon being interviewed, one student said that the video helped clarify a misconception he had when he initially read the story without out the audiovisual support (Whiting & Granoff, 2010). This observation can be concluded as proof that supports the notion that CI aids in comprehension.

Is the focus on comprehensibility the end of the road for evolving language teaching methods? WE educators are finding that the answer to this question seems to be no. Today's middle and high-school students demand more. Teachers find themselves competing evermore with the digital world and have to be creative when trying to capture their students' attention. For this reason, there has been a shift from combining CI with simple pictures and actions to using more dynamic forms including digital media such as commercials, vlogs, music videos, and movie shorts in an effort to inspire students to want to interact with the language. Although there is anecdotal research on teaching methods and their relationships to student engagement, conducting formal research that looks at this relationship would be a worthwhile endeavor.

### **Forms of Aural Comprehensible Input**

Aural input, the input given to a language learner in the form of sounds or spoken word, on its own is not typically very comprehensible. It needs to be modified to make it comprehensible. Variations in one's tone of voice can help aural input be more comprehensible. However, if the person receiving the aural input has low language proficiency, then tone of voice isn't going to improve the comprehensibility of the aural input by much. For this reason, aural input needs a "partner" in order to become a useful tool in language teaching.

Many studies have used aural input as an enhancement to variables in the investigation but not as a tool to make input comprehensible. Studies have shown the effects that frequency of exposure and frequency of exposure plus aural enhancement had on working memory during incidental vocabulary learning (Malone, 2018). Malone's

study showed that frequency exposure combined with aural enhancement increased working memory load. When he compared the outcomes of the incidental vocabulary learning and the working memory scores there was a strong relationship. These kinds of results suggest that, at a minimum, aural enhancement of written text creates an environment for more profound processing which could increase language acquisition. In groups that excluded the aural enhancement, incidental vocabulary learning outcomes were weaker.

A different study endeavored to find out the effect of processing demands on overall comprehension of a text (Wong, 2003). Here, aural input wasn't used as an enhancement, but rather a modality through which to test comprehension of a text that was given aurally in comparison to the same text given in a written form. One set of study participants were given a text aurally and were told that they would be tested on their comprehension of the text. However, while they listened to the text, they also needed to be listening for the word "the". Similarly, Wong gave a second group the same task, but they read the text instead of listening to it. The researcher's hypothesis was that having participants listen or read while also attending to something arbitrary (the word "the") would negatively affect their overall comprehension of the text. This hypothesis was correct. A third and fourth group were given a similar task but they were attending to the word "inflation" This word was picked because it was important for understanding the referential meaning of the passage. Wong hypothesized that because of this distinction, putting this extra demand on processing would not negatively affect the overall comprehension of the text. The study concluded that when compared to the

control group who was only listening or reading for comprehension without an added processing demand, there was less overall comprehension for these 4 groups.

While the previous study suggests that placing separate cognitive demands on an L2 lessens overall comprehension, it also suggests that when the cognitive demand is more closely related to the overall goal of the task, comprehension in this case, there is less of a negative effect.

Finally, in a study done on second-semester (beginning-level) Russian L2 learners, the use of combinations of video, audio, and captions as input was used to find out how they affected the vocabulary learning of the participants (Sydorenko, 2010). Three groups were set up. One group watched a video with the three input modalities present: video, audio and captions. Another group had 2 of the 3 input modalities in the form of video and audio. The third group had video and captions for the input modalities. This study found that the most gains were made in the group that experienced all three forms of input: video+audio+captions. The two groups that experienced captions scored higher on written word form recognition but not aural word forms and the opposite happened with the group who received video+audio input. That is, they did better on recognition of aural word forms.

The conclusions of these three studies add value to the search for a more profound understanding of second language acquisition and point toward my inquiries about how aural input affects second language acquisition. However, none of them gives a complete answer to my question as they don't take the importance of engagement into account.

### **Aural Comprehensible Input and Engagement**

Output is the ultimate goal in the foreign language classroom (Krashen, 1992). It manifests itself in the form of writing and speaking. Written output comes well before spoken output. This is because trying to speak before listening comprehension is acquired requires the listener to put demands on their processing of the language that they do not currently possess (Xu, 2011). Thus, one can and should provide a consistent flow of aural input that is also somewhat repetitive in nature in order to help the learner build listening competency (El-Dakhs, 2017). The listening proficiency can and should also be assessed frequently by way of questioning (Jiang, 2014) and guided written output activities.

There are three essential elements to make input comprehensible: visuals, gesturing, and speech, both pace and complexity (Rowe & Snow, 2020). One could argue that all forms of CI are effective at aiding in L2 acquisition. But, how are they used? There are an infinite amount of approaches that can be applied to combine CI with activities, as was mentioned earlier, the only limitation is one's imagination. However, it is unreasonable to address the infinite number of combinations, so this section will focus on combining aural input that is made comprehensible with other types of input and learning activities.

Many professionals in the field of teaching and SLA have tried to nail down effective use of aural input but have missed the mark. This is because these approaches don't take into account Krashen's input hypothesis (1992) of "i+1" where the language learner needs to be exposed to language input (i) that is a mere level above (+1) what they have already acquired.

DiCarlo (1994) discussed using authentic audiovisuals as input in the form of videos and commercials. In such an experience, the L2 learner is subject to the natural rate of speech of a native speaker. This is difficult for most L2 learners. For L2 learners not living in a country where the language they are trying to learn is spoken, the skill to comprehend native speakers at their natural rate of speech doesn't come until one has been exposed to the language consistently for many years. This may be due to the connection between vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension. Studies have linked low vocabulary knowledge to low listening comprehension (Kim, 2008, Stæhr, 2009). Listening to natural speech in an authentic setting falls low on the level of comprehensibility from the perspective of an L2 learner. While there are a few benefits to listening to a native speaker in such contexts the benefits do not outweigh the drawbacks, at least not for beginning learners.

Mordaunt and Olson (2010) understood the importance of teaching language in chunks rather than single words. They also recognized the importance of listening comprehension as it relates to output. In the article that they wrote for the Educational Studies journal, they described a research study that they performed. The study provided a learning activity to students that combined aural input and writing. In the study the students listen to an audio recording and write down what they understood. Then the audio recording is played in segments and listeners try to write down word for word what they hear. Mordaunt and Olson felt that there was a lack of emphasis put on an L2 learner understanding the sounds that they were hearing. They argued that teachers should be teaching students to listen for chunks of language rather than individual words and they

felt that the more comprehensible chunks the learner had in their comprehension corpus, the faster and better they would get at overall comprehension of spoken language. While this makes sense, this study did not address *how* to make the chunks of language comprehensible during instruction.

Here again, the intent of the activity does not include a component to engage the learner and there isn't much about this activity that makes the language comprehensible to the students. Krashen (1992) proposes that in order for comprehensible input to be useful it has to be presented in a manner that pulls the learner in. That is, the information (which serves as the conduit for language processing) being presented in a comprehensible way has to be engaging to the learner. Not just a little engaging, however, it has to capture the interest of the learner so that they almost forget that the information is being presented in a foreign language.

Trowler (2010) proposes that engagement can be defined in terms of positive engagement, non-engagement and negative engagement. Positive engagement contains traits like enthusiastic participation in the learning environment, showing interest, and completing homework assignments either satisfactorily or by exceeding the expectations for completion. Non-engagement could mean a student skips class without reason, the student is bored, and the student may rush through assignments and turn them in late or not at all. Finally, Negative engagement is defined as a student boycotting, disrupting or outright rejecting lectures and the student may redefine the parameters for assignments.

Trowler's parameters for engagement reflect what is happening in classrooms across the United States. However, in reviewing the literature, there is a noticeable



absence of studies that include a focus on the use of engaging activities in connection to student proficiency growth and output in foreign language acquisition. The simple fact that language is made comprehensible, doesn't also make it engaging. Also, when considering Trowler's definitions of engagement it could be acknowledged that while trying to engage students with the methods that make up the components to the current hypothesis, one might undoubtedly fail to engage some students.

On its own CI is not necessarily engaging. It can be made so, however, by pairing it with interesting topics, activities and curricular materials such as readings and videos. Because there isn't a scarcity of interesting topics or curricular materials that can be used in the foreign language classroom, the focus here will be narrowed to partnering CI with videos. In particular, movie shorts that contain little or no dialogue.

Movie shorts that are mostly absent of dialogue are a good partner to CI because one can manipulate the CI activities to fit the intended learning targets and the teacher doesn't have to rely on the listening proficiency of the L2 learner as it relates to any language or messages in the movie short. The message is visual and the teacher will provide the appropriate level of language to be used in order to deliver the message aurally.

Apart from being a great backdrop around which a lesson can be created, animated pictures have been found to do a better job of capturing the attention of learners than static pictures (Berney & Bétrancourt, 2016). Based on a survey done large-scale by Canning-Wilson & Wallace (2000), foreign-language students like learning from videos and prefer action and entertainment type films over language and documentary films.

This research suggests that animated movie shorts paired with a language learning objective could be a useful tool in a foreign language classroom.

### **Reflection**

Based on the research used to uncover and understand the sub-topics presented in this chapter, there is encouraging evidence that does not prove rather, supports possible answers to the question of *How much can aural input in the form of storytelling that is made comprehensible and engaging with the use of language-free video shorts increase novice-students' written output in a World Language classroom?*

### **Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed portions of the history of language teaching methods and their evolution. Comprehensible input and language teaching methods were discussed in an effort to explain why and how teachers are choosing and combining various language teaching methods. In the section about forms of aural comprehensible input there is an exploration of how aural input has been used in research on language acquisition. Findings show that it has been used extensively but not in a way that directly answers the research question posed for this capstone. The third section of this chapter, *Aural Comprehensible Input and Engagement*, sought to discover how aural comprehensible input has been used in foreign language teaching and pieces together research findings that support the creation of a curricular unit with the use of movie shorts.

Chapter three will propose a method of teaching and a sample curricular unit that is informed by the research covered in Chapter 2. It will include a description of an

appropriate audience with which the sample unit can be used along with a detailed layout of unit materials and assessments.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Project Description

#### Introduction

There are many language teaching methods used to help beginning-level students acquire language. However, not all of them are created equal. As discussed in the review of the literature, many are missing one of the most important components in helping students acquire language. That component is the ability to capture and pique students' interest while delivering input in the L2. Stephen Krashen's (1992) input hypothesis states that in order for second language acquisition to take place, one needs a great deal of comprehensible input that is exceptionally engaging to the learner. It also states that the input has to be just one step beyond the learner's current level of acquisition ( $i+1$ ). Inspired by this theory, I want to find out How much can aural input in the form of storytelling that is made comprehensible and engaging with the use of language-free video shorts increase novice-students' written output in a World Language classroom?.

In the next section of this chapter, an overview and description of a curricular unit will be presented. The unit is inspired by Krashen's input hypothesis (1992) along with a desire to make learning another language enjoyable for world-language students. Following the overview and project description, a framework for the unit is described. It is a framework that ensures all the pieces of a unit tie together and that the pieces work to support successful execution of the identified learning outcomes. The penultimate section of this chapter gives a description of the participants that the curricular unit is meant to assess and the final section gives the timeline of the proposed curriculum unit.

## **Overview and Project Description**

This capstone project is a sample curricular unit that focuses on utilizing a language-free animated video along with aural input on the part of the teacher in an effort to increase student engagement thus increasing the student's acquisition of the language which is demonstrated through language output. The format for this project was chosen because when finished it will be a resource that can be used and shared with colleagues. The project contains sample unit goals, lesson activity ideas and a sample summative assessment. While this curricular unit is an example for others to use, it will also be used as an introduction to a larger unit that currently exists in the level two Spanish curriculum at Stillwater Area High School.

The language-free video is intended to facilitate the teacher's use of the chosen language features and vocabulary that the students are expected to learn. Vocabulary will be chosen based on the objects and actions appearing in the video. Since the theme of the video correlates with the theme of the unit essential questions, by talking about what happens in the videos, the students will grow their abilities to talk about the essential questions of the unit.

The goals of the unit were created in an effort to reinforce and build upon current skills that students have in relation to language output. The essential questions of this unit were crafted while intentionally keeping the outcomes in mind in order to provide the students with a concrete idea to which they could circle back as they practice speaking on the unit topic. That is, as the students answer the essential questions each time with more detail, this will ensure that progress is being made toward the outcomes of the unit.

The initial lesson activity was created in order to pique the interest of the students. In this lesson, the teacher tells the story of the video accompanied by screenshots from the video. However, the teacher doesn't give away the whole story in the initial telling. This allows the teacher to engage students in various discussions in the target language about the story using techniques such as making predictions and giving opinions. The following lessons focus on the teacher giving more aural input while also allowing the students to give each other aural input.

The end of the unit culminates with a summative assessment that allows students to demonstrate their language abilities as they relate to the unit goals. Along with this summative however, there is a formative assessment in the form of a timed-write that the students perform at the beginning, middle and end of the unit. Its purpose is to help the students and teacher see the progression of the students' ability to express ideas on the themes of the unit.

The current section outlined the project as a whole while also breaking down the major components of the project— unit goals, lesson ideas, summative assessment description and formative assessment suggestion. In the next section a description of the framework used to design the project is given. The choice, importance and significance of the particular framework is highlighted as well.

### **Curricular Unit Framework**

The unit was created based on the design principles found in Wiggins and McTighe's, *J. Understanding by Design* (2011). This approach was chosen because it is in line with the philosophies of teaching that exist among the teachers of the intended

school where the curricular unit would take place. Understanding by Design uses a backwards procedure to craft curricular units. In the creation of any unit using this approach, the end of the unit goals including outcomes need to be identified first. This is accomplished by crafting statements that clarify what the students will be able to do and what they will understand by the end of the unit. In this part of the process essential questions are also created. These questions facilitate more reflection on the part of the student in relation to the unit theme. Next, curriculum designers must create a summative assessment that allows students to show the level of mastery attained in regard to the identified unit goals. For example, this project has students create a poster that includes pictures and descriptions of artifacts that represent a person of their choosing. Finally, the day to day lessons, materials and formative assessments are crafted using the defined unit outcomes and essential questions as a guide.

### ***Curriculum Guidelines***

Because the state of Minnesota does not have state standards in regards to World Language curriculum, the standards set by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) (2020) were used to fill this gap and are the standards that are used in the school intended for the use of this unit. In particular the standards that are addressed are cultural comparisons, Interpretive communication and presentation communication.

For the cultural comparison standard learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied

and their own (actfl.org, 2020). This is mostly addressed throughout the unit as students practice answering the essential questions and giving opinions.

Interpretive communication means that the learner understands, interprets and analyzes what is heard, read or viewed . In this unit students demonstrate this skill by retelling the story that the teacher introduced during the oral storytelling of the movie short (actfl.org, 2020).

Presentational communication means that the learners present information, concepts, and ideas to inform, explain, persuade, and narrate. Students do this through a poster project that is based on the theme of the unit (actfl.org, 2020).

This section gave a rationale for the use of backwards design in the creation of the curricular unit for this project. It also spoke to the significance and connection this type of design process has with the school intended for the execution of the curricular unit. Next, a brief description of standards was given along with a rationale for using said standards. The following section will describe the targeted participants for the curricular unit and the setting where it will occur.

### **The Participants and Setting**

The intended participants in this study are second-year (beginning of semester 1) high-school Spanish students between the ages of 14–16 at a large Minnesota suburban high school that has a student population of approximately 2,800. These participants were selected in an effort for this project to be of value for the World Language teachers of the school. The class sizes for world language at the school range from 30–40 students per class. There is only one teacher per class. This student to teacher ratio is double the



recommended ratio for foreign–language instruction which speaks to the importance of a curricular unit such as this one that can capture the attention of students. On the ACTFL proficiency scale (actfl.org, 2020), which is the scale that this school uses to measure world–language proficiency and growth, the students are labeled novice–mid to novice–high in relation to their abilities to produce presentational Spanish.

The proposed curriculum would take place in a classroom setting. Students sit in rows of desks and side by side with another student. For classroom activities, the students partner up with the person sitting adjacent to them. If activities or discussions require a group of students rather than a pair, students use the partners sitting either in front of or behind them to facilitate the expansion of the original pairing.

In this section a description of the participants and setting were outlined along with a commentary on student to teacher ratio. The commentary is important because it speaks to the importance of teaching techniques that engage students even in large class situations. In the next section a timeline of the entire project will be outlined.

### **Timeline**

The timeline given for this curricular unit is 2 weeks. The first day consists of an initial telling of the story and one showing of the movie short. Days 2-8 consist of learning activities that work toward proficiency growth and skill building. The ninth day of the unit is used to review concepts and prepare for the summative assessment which takes place on the tenth day of the unit.

### **Summary**

Chapter three outlined the framework, guidelines, participants, setting and description of the present capstone project in an effort to support the rationale for creating a curriculum unit based on the inquiries and findings that took place in the literature review. It was noted that the framework used for this project is important because it is in line with the style of curriculum creation the intended school already uses. The guidelines are also the same guidelines that the school uses. The participant and setting are not unique nor is the design of this curriculum. Therefore, this curriculum could be used in most schools in Minnesota which makes it valuable to the creator of it as it can be taken from one job placement to another.

Chapter four will be a reflection of the process for this capstone project that includes thoughts on the research and thoughts on professional growth toward the personal “Why” of the researcher.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusion

#### Introduction

Chapter four will serve as a conclusion and reflection on research and subsequent capstone project. The project that was created for this capstone is a curricular unit designed to test and get the answer to the question *How much can aural input in the form of storytelling that is made comprehensible and engaging with the use of language –free video shorts increase novice-students’ written output in a World Language classroom?*

The first section of this chapter will review the major learnings of the project which include a reflection of my role as a researcher, writer and learner. Next, major learnings from the literature review will be discussed along with connections and understandings that were gained. Following this discussion, implications and limitations will be pondered along with future research possibilities. Finally, an explanation of how the project will be shared and a reflection of how this project will benefit my profession is discussed.

#### Major Learnings

Through the process of creating a curriculum that supports my research question I have discovered many things about my abilities to research, write and learn.

#### *Role as a Researcher*

I never considered myself to be a researcher. As a novice World Language teacher, I have relied on respected colleagues for advice on how to approach teaching.

We share and reflect on what we see is working in our classrooms because not a lot of time is given for professional development that is content specific.

Through this capstone process I have become a more confident researcher that can identify and understand peer reviewed data which is a skill that I will continue to rely on as I work toward finding the answers to my questions about language teaching methods and student engagement. This skill will not only help me find reliable information that is backed by science but it will help me to create more solid assessments of my hypotheses. This will in turn help me be a more valuable member of my department and a more competent colleague that others can look to for support.

### ***Role as a Writer***

Creative writing has always been a strength of mine. However, I have not had much experience with academic writing. The process of learning how to take my voice out of my writing was very difficult for me and forced me to express my thoughts and findings in a less personal way. It also forced me to look at and report on data in a less biased way and having to write in this style also greatly helped improve my reading comprehension of peer reviewed literature. All of these skills will help me to be a more confident writer within my profession.

### ***Role as a Learner***

Throughout the process of researching topics related to my research question I came across an abundance of interesting information. Reading through such a high quantity of articles on second language acquisition uncovered a new interest in the language acquisition process that I didn't previously have. It has made me excited about a

different facet of teaching in a moment when I was starting to lose motivation as a learner. It taught me how to be a self-directed learner at a higher academic level within my field and reminded me of how rewarding it can be.

I am appreciative of the deeper learning and deeper acquisition I have attained in the areas of these three skills as it will help me to be a more efficient professional who feels less anxious about taking on more responsibilities that support the work my department is trying to do. I am also excited about the new foundation I have as a professional from which I can further grow.

### ***Learnings from the Literature Review***

The literature review proved to be very informative and eye-opening. While I was required to take a methods course as part of my degree completion, it was very broad in its scope. Although it touched on the history of second-language-acquisition teaching methods it also included space for us to create a couple of lessons based on what we had learned about well-known methods. Because so much had to be covered in one class, there wasn't any room for a more comprehensive look at research. After having conducted a literature review for this project, I feel a previous lesson including looking through the research would have been very beneficial to me as a professional World Language teacher. I am excited about the things I discovered in my literature review and will continue to read peer-reviewed articles on my own time and share what I find with colleagues.

Some of the most important parts of the literature review were the discoveries and connections that I was able to make between my current practice and data driven

evidence. The most significant being Krashen's updated input hypothesis (1992). I discovered that I have been informally testing this hypothesis using my own teaching methods. This practice along with the knowledge I gained by reading the research of others who have also taken this hypothesis into consideration helped to inform the creation of my capstone curricular unit.

Other valuable research that helped inform my project were two particular studies on processing demands and language acquisition. One was the study done by Malone (2018). He sought to find out the effects of processing demands on incidental vocabulary learning and found that the processing demands required during aural enhancement had positive effects on second-language acquisition. On the other hand Wong's (2003) study showed that attending to separate tasks in conjunction with listening would take away from the benefits of aural enhancement.

The information in regard to processing demands on language acquisition was extremely important and supported some of my ideas that initially led me to my research question. I knew anecdotally that aural enhancement was an effective tool for teaching foreign language but that when giving aural input students would lose focus if they had to also try and conduct any other task in conjunction with listening to me. The findings in Wong's and Malone's studies strongly supported my ideas and led me to include activities that balance processing demands in an effort not to overwhelm students.

One of the most interesting connections that I made with the literature review was through the clarity that I gained about my current teaching practices. From the review and reminder of where the practices come from at the beginning of chapter two to the review

of hypotheses and tests applied to these practices throughout the rest of the chapter, I was continually reminded of the value that each teaching method contributes to the process of second– language acquisition. I was able to find research that supported many of the teaching methods passed on to me from colleagues as well. This is important because the goal of this project was to find these connections and use them to facilitate the creation of a curricular unit based on data driven research.

### **Implications of the project**

As with any attempt at innovating teaching methods, there are implications for both students and teachers. My hope is that the implications of this curriculum will include higher student engagement and the creation of a more positive learning experience for the students that facilitates increased language acquisition.

The professional implications of this curriculum will benefit myself and my colleagues. The curriculum will serve as an example of the kinds of aural input one can use or modify along with other examples of how to make curriculum engaging. It will also serve as an example of how to mix historical methods of language teaching with current science based trends. My hope is that teachers will see how many connections can be made between a simple video short, content and language. Then, they can transfer that mindset to see the possible lessons that can be created using music videos, commercials and other video shorts.

### **Limitations of the Project**

During the creation of this curriculum some limitations were discovered. Initially all of the activities were intended to be aural. However, as I searched for available

content for this unit, I came across some valuable materials that were better suited to activities that were not aural-based. Since one of the other pieces of the research question focuses on student engagement, it was imperative that this curriculum honor that as well. So although the curriculum isn't 100 percent aural-based, the activities are engaging and better suited for second language acquisition which is the ultimate goal of doing this research.

### **Possible Future Research**

When it comes to thinking of this research as a piece to the puzzle of second-language acquisition, a few ideas come to mind for valuable future research. This project focussed on aural input. One could continue to focus on this kind of input but do an experiment on how the aural input from a teacher that is a non-native speaker impacts students' comprehension of native speakers.

Another possible continuation of this research could explore the area of student engagement. The research that took place in order to create the curriculum unit for this project did not uncover a lot of data or research on student engagement in foreign-language classrooms. One could use peer-reviewed research and data on student engagement to devise a way to test student engagement as it relates to World Language classrooms or as it specifically relates to second-language acquisition.

### **Communicating results**

The curricular unit created for this capstone project will be shared and reviewed with colleagues that also teach Spanish II. The goal will be to incorporate this unit as an introduction to a book based on the same theme. This curricular unit will also be



available for other language teachers to review and use as inspiration for creating curricular units for their distinct language classes.

### **Benefits to the Profession**

The benefits of this project to the profession of language teaching include the sharing of a curriculum that is full of activities that were created based on research in the field of second-language acquisition and the field of teaching and education in general. Also, but more importantly the work that went into this curriculum has made me a more confident professional that understands the importance of research in the field of second-language teaching. I will continue to find and share peer-reviewed data which will help make my colleagues and myself better teachers. This newly found confidence will not only make me a stronger teacher but also make my whole department stronger.

### **Summary**

This chapter was a reflection on each of the pieces that went into creating a curricular unit that could answer the question *How much can aural input in the form of storytelling that is made comprehensible and engaging with the use of language-free video shorts increase novice-students' written output in a World Language classroom?*. These major pieces include reflections about my view of myself as a researcher, writer and learner as well as discussions about what I have learned through this process and the impact this research and project will have on my profession. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to be challenged and to subsequently grow professionally as a result of this process.

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