An Investigation of the Best Practices to Develop Oral Proficiency in Adult English Learners That Are Engaging and Minimize Anxiety

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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE BEST PRACTICES TO DEVELOP ORAL
PROFICIENCY IN ADULT ENGLISH LEARNERS THAT ARE ENGAGING AND
MINIMIZE ANXIETY

by

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Dedication

To my father, Esher Kweller, and his wife, Paula Leff, for their ongoing love and support.

I would also like to honor my mother, Helen Kweller. Although she is no longer with us, fond memories of her inspired me to stay the course.

Finally, Karen Moroz, my Capstone Project Facilitator, deserves a warm and gratitude-filled *thank you* for your guidance and encouragement.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

During my four years as an English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor for adults, I regularly surveyed learners on their reasons for wanting to learn English and which language skills were the most important to them—listening, reading, writing, or speaking? Overwhelmingly, their answer was speaking because they wanted to *speak* English, followed closely by the desire to improve listening skills. In fact, according to Eyring (2014, p. 124), the primary reasons adults give for enrolling in English classes are to:

♦ gain job skills;

♦ cultivate friendships;

♦ speak to grandchildren;

♦ understand how to manage personal finances;

♦ obtain access to health information

Clearly, these first three objectives depend entirely on achieving oral proficiency in the target language. However, based on my observations as an ESL teacher, the quality of instruction tends to be uneven, even though speaking is a priority for learners. While many teachers design speaking activities that are both effective and enjoyable, others do not. In addition, qualifications and training for adult ESL instructors vary widely across the country (Eyring, 2014). This gap has led to my desire to know: *Which are the best instructional practices teachers can use to build oral proficiency while minimizing anxiety and maximizing engagement?* While I realize there are different ways to measure

what the "best" methods are, I will share in chapter 2 the ones I've arrived at through my research. Specific areas will focus on research-based best practices for teaching speaking, how learner affect, such as stress and anxiety, can negatively impact oral uptake, characteristics of the adult English language learner (ELL) in the United States and, to a lesser extent, ESL classes. In this context, *adult* ELL refers to immigrants and refugees 18 years of age and older who are learning English primarily for communicatory—as opposed to academic—purposes. There is comparatively little information about these learners, as the lion's share of research has been devoted to ELLs in primary, secondary, and university settings (Bailey, 2006).

This chapter gives a general overview of the adult English language learner, why I chose to focus on speaking instruction, my personal connection to the topic, a preview of research from my literature review, and a brief description of my project.

Why focus on speaking?

My purpose for undertaking this project is to share with my colleagues the most effective pedagogy to build oral proficiency while minimizing learner anxiety and maximizing engagement. Speaking, while fundamental, is also considered to be the most complex and difficult skill to master (Gill, 2016; Shabani, 2013). Though there are certainly many highly skilled teachers, the need for qualified instructors who use research-based practices to teach speaking remains high, as academic requirements and training for ESL teachers vary widely across the country (Eyring, 2014). As Crandall et al. (2010), notes, many states, such as Alaska, Montana, New Hampshire, and New Mexico don't require teachers to attend any college, while Massachusetts, Oklahoma, and Tennessee mandate at least a bachelor's degree, and California requires a master's degree

for a professional credential. Furthermore, in most programs, staff development via workshops, conferences, and seminars is voluntary and unpaid (Eyring, 2014).

The majority of studies I've drawn upon for my project have been conducted in academic, typically university-based English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning environments outside of the United States, where the classroom may be the only place students can practice their second language (Nuraini, 2016). A much smaller focus of research has been conducted on my target population — adult immigrant learners with a typical age range of 18-65 who are taking ESL classes to learn the language quickly while acquiring vital life-skills designed to help them navigate their new culture.

At first glance, the EFL and ESL communities appear to have vastly different needs and goals regarding speaking and speaking instruction. After all, ESL learners are surrounded by NSs and afforded ample opportunity to practice authentic English discourse in their communities, thereby freeing time for instructors to concentrate less on speaking and pronunciation and more on grammar, reading, and writing. However, this often unstated yet pervasive belief that immigrants will learn to speak English simply because they now live in a majority English-speaking country fails to account for the linguistic "island" phenomenon, in which speakers of a minority language self-segregate in communities where most residents speak a common first language (L1), leaving them with little need to interact with native-English speakers (Brinton et al., 2010, p. 18).

Such enclaves for L1 Spanish speakers are fairly common in Montgomery County, MD, which is 20 percent Hispanic or Latino. However, certain cities within the county—such as Wheaton and Glenmont—stand at 44 percent and 36 percent Hispanic or Latino, respectively (Census, QuickFacts, 2019). In fact, many of my former students live

in these small cities and have told me how little English they are required to speak within these environs. The county's burgeoning Hispanic population has prompted many county government services, including public schools and the Department of Motor Vehicles, as well as many local businesses, to employ bilingual workers, alleviating pressure on these learners to practice communicative English. Therefore, it is essential that the ESL classes in my community provide interesting, low-stress, and effective speaking activities. The less intimidating and the more engaging the classes are, the more motivated and inspired learners will likely be to venture beyond their L1 communities towards more vocational, academic, and social opportunities.

Learners want to speak in class, but many find it stressful. As a new teacher, I quickly noticed a discrepancy between what my students *said* they wanted to learn and the activities they actually wanted *to do*. I recall enthusiastically announcing to my class that the day's lesson would involve speaking activities, only to witness several anxious expressions and the occasionally audible groan. So, even though my students may really, truly want to learn to speak, practicing the skill can evoke noticeable anxiety, seemingly independent of formal educational attainment and even general English proficiency. Empirical exists supporting my observation. According to Carter et al., (2015), reticence to speak in the target language is not correlated with a student's lack of ability, knowledge or motivation, but is more likely to result from anxiety, low self-confidence, or cultural expectations that discourage students from speaking in class.

Not surprisingly, Gill (2016) deemed speaking the most difficult skill for an adult ELL to master, mainly because oral language proficiency requires more than simply knowing a language's linguistic structure; learners also must be able to quickly retrieve

the relevant information to speak in a comparatively short amount of time, whereas in other skills, such as reading and writing, they have more time to think about or search for the correct language forms (Shabani, 2013).

Also, compared with other language skills, oral language development has been given less consideration in second language learning, teaching, and assessment (Shabani, 2013). The lack of clear guidelines for speaking instruction may at least in part result from the fact that the primary placement test for non-academic adult learners—Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS)—has not historically included a speaking component—only listening and reading (CASAS, 2021). At least in the programs for which I've taught, the primary critique students tended to give on class evaluations was too little time spent on speaking practice in class.

Personal connection to the topic

Even though I studied Spanish formally for seven years, from 7th through 12th grade, and learned a great deal of grammar, reading, and writing, I failed to achieve even intermediate-level oral proficiency. Classwork and homework centered almost exclusively on listening to audio tapes in class, repetition of key words and phrases, grammar exercises generally devoid of context and meaning, and at the more advanced levels, reading and writing. My teachers rarely implemented the types of communicative pair and group work that build oral proficiency—interactive tasks in which meaning must be negotiated and fluency is fostered, such as information gap activities (Afrizal, 2015), and engaging in dialogues, skits, and role-play (Lazaraton, 2014; Shumin, 2002). Furthermore, I believe speaking in an L2 may have been—and still is—particularly anxiety-provoking for me. I have bad memories from age 5 or 6 of stuttering and

mispronouncing certain phonemes in my L1, resulting in ridicule by peers. Thankfully,

these issues were resolved with speech therapy. In 2018, I decided to give speaking

Spanish another try. I spent two months in Madrid, taking Spanish-immersion classes five

days a week. Even though my teacher was passionate and enthusiastic about her craft, the

lessons were teacher-centered, and speaking practice was limited to about 20 minutes per

day out of a 4-hour class. In addition, the classroom acoustics caused an echo when

students spoke loudly or laughed, as they frequently did during pair and group work. This

environment was not conducive to listening or to speaking. Furthermore, my experiences

trying to converse with my two Spanish flat-mates were anxiety-inducing. It was nearly

impossible to articulate one complete thought without having my verb conjugations or

other grammar mistakes corrected. Eventually, I stopped initiating conversations with

them altogether. This anxiety is what led me to devote a subsection of my Capstone to

how one's affect—feeling and emotions—influences the development of oral proficiency.

Through my experience in Madrid, I developed a profound and personal understanding of

the difficulties my learners experience as they strive for speaking proficiency or

fluency—namely, limited opportunities to speak in class as well as the stress and

distraction of being corrected on form at the expense of meaning. Now, I am determined

to create more enjoyable, research-driven speaking lessons and activities for my adult

students. When I returned to the States from Madrid, I was driven to investigate how

people become fluent speakers of a language in adulthood. Perhaps because of my

personal experiences with speaking, I was drawn to the *comprehensible input* strategy

advocated by Stephen Krashen: listen to and read interesting subject matter that is

understandable yet slightly above one's level and without pressure to speak until ready

(Krashen, 1985). While Krashen's strategy helped me to achieve a great deal more oral proficiency since my two months in Madrid, I cannot claim fluency yet. I am also aware that adult immigrants usually must achieve at least a basic degree of speaking ability soon after arriving in the United States, which is why they will need strategies for input as well as output. My literature review highlights the following areas:

The adult ESL learner and the learning environment. Immigrant adults with limited English proficiency comprised almost half of all new arrivals to the United States in 2019, according to the Migration Policy Institute (2021) and earn significantly less than those in the same age group who are proficient

in the language (Wilson, 2014). In 2015, just under half of the 1.5 million people in adult education programs were English language learners, a fraction of those with limited English proficiency, indicating a strong need for more community ESL classes

Proven instructional methods for developing oral proficiency. The instructional methods for teaching speaking outlined in more detail in Chapter 2 focus on communicative language teaching (CLT) practices deemed by research to improve speakers' fluency and accuracy; factors that constitute intelligible speech; and the total physical response (TPR) method. The eponymous purpose of CLT is to facilitate communication and achieve communicative competence by planning meaningful lessons in context (Duff, 2014; Hadley, 2001). Learning strategies emphasize: *pair and group work* to transmit and negotiate meaning or complete certain tasks; *engaging in role play, skits, and other dramatic activities* to develop accuracy and fluency; the use of *authentic materials and tasks* instead of those designed primarily for pedagogical purposes; the *integration of language skills* (Celce-Murcia, 2014), the importance of *language*

functions, scaffolding speech using *language frames*, *producing intelligible speech* using the communicative approach, teaching pragmatics through CLT activities; and the *total physical response (TPR)* approach, which integrates listening and movement.

Learner affect. In this context, *affect* refers to emotions experienced by learners when attempting to speak the target language. If learners, in particular teens and adults, experience too many negative emotions in pursuit of language learning, they risk developing a strong *affective filter,* which renowned linguist and researcher Stephen Krashen posits interferes with language learning, especially oral language development (Krashen & Terrell, 1995). Instructors can often exert great influence over whether or not their students experience such negative affective traits. For instance, many language learners fear making errors because they dread potential negative reactions by both peers and instructors; therefore, it is vital for instructors to cultivate an atmosphere of compassion and respect as well as to establish a good rapport with individual students, increasing learners' comfort level and willingness to speak (Baran-Łucarz, 2014; Carter, et al., 2015; Khan & Ali, 2010).

My Project

I will plan and conduct a 10-hour **professional development (**PD) workshop for ESL teachers that provides the tools and knowledge to cultivate speaking proficiency in their students using engaging techniques that minimize anxiety. Participants will also understand how affect influences oral uptake and willingness to speak. At the point of this writing, the *Delta* variant of Covid-19 is sweeping the country, so it's difficult to know whether this workshop will be online through Zoom or in-person. Either way, it will take place over two consecutive Saturdays, 5 hours each day.

Summary and Overview of Chapter

In this chapter, I've shared the importance of community ESL adult life-skills instruction, why I chose to focus on the skill of speaking, my personal connection to the topic, a preview of research gleaned from my literature review, and a brief description of my project. My research question asks: *Which are the best instructional practices teachers can use to build oral proficiency while minimizing anxiety and maximizing engagement?* This project's purpose is to share with my colleagues the most effective pedagogy to build oral proficiency while minimizing learner anxiety and maximizing engagement. Chapter 2 explores research concerning the adult ESL learner and ESL instruction; the most effective instructional methods for teaching speaking; and the importance of learner affect. Chapter 3 consists of a detailed overview of my project, including data collection and assessments, and Chapter 4 concludes with a reflection.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The goal of this literature review is to investigate: *Which are the best instructional practices teachers can use to build oral proficiency while minimizing anxiety and maximizing engagement?* My research centers on three areas:

♦ characteristics of the adult ESL learner, including the learning environment and initiatives to improve instruction;

♦ effective instructional methods for teaching speaking and which of these methods will be included in my project;

♦ the role of affect in oral proficiency development. To the best of my knowledge, most scholarly studies into oral proficiency are conducted in EFL academic environments abroad rather than in the adult ESL classroom in the United States. For this reason, the bulk of the research reviewed here was conducted in EFL settings. However, the majority of these methods can easily be adapted for adult ESL students. Regardless of the learning environment, second language instruction should utilize authentic materials, center on interactive and task-oriented activities, and include cultural awareness lessons (Shumin, 2002). In the following section, I present more information on the adult learner and the learning environment.

The adult ESL student and the learning environment

In 2018, the foreign-born population stood at 44 million people, with about half coming from Mexico and other Latin-American countries and a quarter from Asian countries (Pew Research Center, 2018). Of those 44 million people, more than half were

Limited English Proficient (LEP), according to the Migration Policy Institute (2021).

Working-age LEP adults earn 25 to 40 percent less than those in the same age group who

are English proficient (EP) (Wilson, 2014). LEP adults are less likely to own homes

(Urban Institute, 2018), which builds generational wealth; these individuals are also

"significantly worse off" than EP adults in most measures of access to care and health

status, with LEP older adults generally having poorer health and less access to care

compared with their EP counterparts (U.S. National Library of Medicine National

Institutes of Health, 2016). In addition, immigrants to the United States with low English

proficiency, especially those with limited *oral* skills, are more likely to live in poverty

and receive government benefits than those whose speaking skills are rated as medium or

high (Batalova & Fix 2010).

  According to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2018), more

than 67 million, or 22 percent of the population ages 5 and older, speak a language other

than English at home. Forty-two percent of immigrants speak Spanish, followed by 6

percent who speak Chinese (Pew Research Center, 2018). Locating accurate

demographical information on the adult ESL student is difficult, because, according to

Bailey (2006), relatively little is known about this population, as they relocate frequently

and some are undocumented. Furthermore, the bulk of research has been devoted to ELLs

in primary, secondary, and university settings. According to data from Pearson (2021), in

2015, 1.5 million adults were enrolled in adult education programs—with 44 percent

being English learners—a small fraction of the total number of limited English proficient

adults in the United States (Migration Policy Institute, 2021).

Initiatives to improve instruction

Despite the fact that there is a great need for quality English instruction in the United States (Eyring, 2014), community-based ESL programs are too often inadequately staffed, underfunded, and under-represented in TESOL research (Snell, 2013). In most programs, staff development and training are voluntary and unpaid, and the adult ESL profession suffers from high-turnover and with it, a recurrent need to train new teachers (Eyring, 2014). Moreover, as noted in Chapter 1, academic requirements and training vary widely across the country (Eyring, 2014), and according to Crandall et al. (2010), many states don't require adult ESL teachers to have any college credits.

The Teaching the Skills that Matter in Adult Education Project (TSTM) is a federal initiative designed to add rigor to adult education by training teachers to integrate skills that help learners succeed at work and in other areas of life (LINCS, 2021). ESL learners benefit from this initiative, as they comprise 46 percent of students in adult education in the United States (Eyring, 2014). TSTM's "skills that matter" are:

♦ adaptability & willingness to learn

♦ communication

♦ critical thinking

♦ interpersonal skills

♦ navigating systems

♦ problem solving

♦ processing & analyzing information

♦ respecting differences & diversity

♦ self-awareness

TSTM uses three approaches to teach civics: digital, financial, and health literacy and workforce preparedness. In **problem-based learning**, students, working in pairs or groups, and with guidance from an instructor, use research tools and analytical thinking to propose solutions to an authentic problem, such as choosing an inexpensive place to live where owning a vehicle isn't necessary. Students create written and oral presentations that describe the problem and solution. In **project-based learning,** ELLs utilize creativity and critical thinking skills and work in teams to complete a report, video, multimedia presentation or other project, for example developing a business plan or designing and planting a garden. Finally, **integrated and contextualized learning** uses academic content, such as reading, writing, or math, or a combination of these skills to develop, for instance, a household budget (LINCS, 2021).

Motivation and the adult learner. It seems obvious that the more motivated students are to learn, the more likely they'll succeed, not only in speaking but in language learning overall; however, what may not be obvious is that instructors have the ability to increase ELLs' motivation. Malcolm Knowles' principles of andragogy—how adults learn—contend that adults are more interested in learning about things that are relevant to their lives and concerns (Knowles, 1992), and tend to be more motivated when they have agency over what they are learning (Knowles, 1990). He formulated the following assumptions about adult learning:

♦ learning should be self-directed;

♦ students' lived experiences are important resources;

♦ motivation to learn stems from interests and needs of learners as they arise;

♦ curricula should be based on needs encountered in daily life instead of on decontextualized, traditional subject areas;

♦ internal motives, like greater job satisfaction usually tend to be stronger drivers of learning than external ones, such as higher salaries (Knowles, 1990, p. 57-63).

Though there has been limited research into how pedagogical practices influence learner motivation in the ESL or EFL classroom, an extensive analysis conducted in South Korea involving 27 teachers and more than 1,300 learners found a strong correlation between teachers' approaches and students' motivation. Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008, as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2013, uncovered a positive correlation between teachers' efforts to motivate ELLs, learner engagement, and positive ratings on a questionnaire completed by participants after the following strategies were implemented:

1. Instructors deliberately set out to stimulate curiosity and attention, promote autonomy, and communicate why and how that day's activities will benefit learners.

2. Students engaged in pair and group work.

3. Activities included individual and team competition, mentally challenging material, and ending the task with a tangible product.

4. Making the following regular classroom practices: praise; encouraging individual and peer correction sessions, class applause; and constructive self-evaluation and activity design.

In what appears to be a causal relationship between student motivation and speaking, the researchers noted that, "Students' eagerness to volunteer during teacher-fronted oral activities manifested itself in raising their hands and/or shouting 'Me!' " or '*Seon-saeng-nim*!' " (i.e., Mr./Ms. [teacher's name]!), or in standing up and walking up to the front of the class" (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008, p. 68).

The linguistic island phenomenon (discussed in chapter 1), where speakers of a common L1 live in self-isolated communities, resulting in little need to interact with with native-English speakers (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010, p. 18), is another important reason why learner motivation is so important. Brown (2000) posited that students need both *integrative* and *instrumental* motivation—a desire to learn for social and cultural reasons as well as for practical motives, respectively. Sociocultural dynamics can also impact speaking. Bonny Norton Peirce, who studied immigrant women in Canada, maintains that instrumental and integrative motivation inadequately explain how certain power dynamics can impact language learning. Though these women's desire to learn English was strong and they took extra classes, their speaking was hindered in situations where power among interlocutors was unequal. For example, Eva "was silenced" when customers at her job commented on her accent. Mai, beholden to management for job security and a steady paycheck, did not feel comfortable conversing with her boss (Peirce, 1995, p. 19). In other research examining the role of culture around speaking an L2, Japanese EFL high school students feared that speaking English within earshot of classmates would get them labeled as "show-offs" (Tomita, 2011, p.152). And Greer (2000) noted how Japanese college students deliberately made grammar errors and tried

to speak English with a strong Japanese accent because they didn't want peers to view them as superior.

This section has reviewed research into characteristics of the adult ESL learner, the learning environment, initiatives to improve instruction, and the complex role of motivation in learning. The next section delves into some methods and approaches that have been shown to improve oral proficiency.

Instructional methods for teaching speaking

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): meaningful, natural communication presented in context

Canale & Swain (1980) developed the following guidelines for communicative competence:

♦ *Linguistic competence* to utilize all parts of the language—grammar, spelling, vocabulary, punctuation, and phonological features;

♦ *Discourse competence* to understand how ideas are linked in writing and speaking as well as types of discourse; cohesion and coherence; academic language; and higher-order thinking skills;

♦ *Sociocultural competence* to develop varying registers; language functions; colloquial language; body language; and topic areas, in order to use language appropriately in different situations.

♦ *Strategic competence* to help with repair in case of a communicative breakdown and to increase effectiveness of communication by asking for help, acting out words and ideas, avoiding certain topics, and utilizing circumlocution to find the best word or phrase.

Lazaraton (2014) advised teachers to determine, prior to designing curricula, students' reasons for learning English and their proficiency levels. Tests measuring oral skills include the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and Cambridge ESOL. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) uses the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI). Effective oral skills training develops both *accuracy*—"conforming to the language system itself"—as well as *fluency*—"operating the language system quickly" (Edge & Garton, 2009, p. 15, as cited in Lazaraton, 2014). In other words, accuracy is focused on language forms and fluency on meaning. A generation or so ago, and still today in many countries, language learning centered more on learning *about* the language through language and text analysis, translation, and memorization.

CLT activities to build accuracy and fluency. The use of interesting, authentic materials presented in context should underpin lessons aimed to cultivate both accuracy and fluency (Brown, 2007, as cited in Lazaraton, 2014). To develop accuracy, Lazaraton (2014) recommends a game using *yes-no* and *wh*-questions, also known as *find someone who,* in which students are given a sheet of paper with characteristics or interests listed, such as *likes to cook; has a dog; plays the guitar*. Then, ELs must match each of these activities to someone in class by asking questions such as: *Do you like to cook? Do you have a dog? Do you play the guitar?* The first student to find classmates who answer in the affirmative to every question "wins." In another accuracy-building game, the learner assumes the identity of either a famous person, a certain food, or even a color; the class then asks the student questions to determine their identity, also using *yes/no* and *wh*-questions.

Drills are generally looked down upon in today's second language teaching environment because they're associated with the audiolingual approach, which centers on drills and memorization (Lazaraton, 2014). However, Brown, 2007, as cited in Lazaraton, 2014, asserts that drills can have their place in accuracy training if they are "short, simple, and snappy, used sparingly, and lead to more communicative activities" (p. 116). When providing feedback and correction for accuracy-based instruction, the teacher should alert the student of the error, and, ideally, allow self-correction, although this may not always be possible. Of course, peers may also correct each other, either overtly by supplying the correct answer, expressing a lack of understanding, or through facial expressions indicating confusion. Teachers can use various methods to help ELLs notice errors, such as changing facial expressions or gestures; hinting; echoing the mistake; repeating or asking for clarification; or rephrasing (Harmer, 2007b, as cited in Lazaraton, 2014).

According to Duff (2014), the communicative approach fosters fluency by providing learners with the opportunity to engage in authentic discourse, which can mean sharing with classmates about one's interests, opinions, experiences, and so forth, via speaking or writing, depending on the activity. Some teachers may not think fluency activities are necessary in class because ELLs will automatically become fluent simply by living in an English-dominated culture; however, given the linguistic island phenomenon, this isn't necessarily true. Thornbury, 2005, as cited in Lazarton, 2014, suggests that at least some of the following criteria should underpin fluency-development activities: *interactivity*; *productivity*—students use the target language to complete a task; *challenge*—learners feel a sense of pride and accomplishment afterward yet are still able

to use existing knowledge and tools; *safety*—ELLs feel challenged, yet safe from judgment and part of a nurturing classroom environment; *purposefulness*—the reason for the activity should be known and expectations clear; *authenticity*—activities should relate to students' lives or be interesting to them and the language should come "the real world," where words and meanings can be messy. According to Nunan (2014), task-based language teaching or activities (TBLT) can be effective for developing both accuracy and fluency, as it's typically interactive and learner-centered, involves pair or group work, and often requires negotiation of meaning. In the context of a classroom activity, a task is anything learners do to acquire language. Texts used for TBLT are usually produced for use outside of the classroom or are a combination of authentic and pedagogical, presenting various linguistic elements designed for students and simplifying language as needed. Furthermore, Plough and Gass (1993) have maintained that greater fluency can be achieved through repetitive tasks, although teachers should modify materials occasionally to prevent boredom. In general, according to Ellis (2008), *unfocused* tasks like role play, target fluency development, as they do not deliberately feature any particular linguistic form to practice. While certain grammar elements may be a part of the dialogue, they are not needed for successful completion of the task. In contrast, both fluency and accuracy development are targeted through *focused* tasks, in which a specific grammatical form is presented for acquisition, yet the task is still communicative and learning occurs as a byproduct of executing the task (Ellis, 2003).

In addition, information gap techniques (IGTs), a common task-based activity, have been shown to reduce learner inhibition and increase motivation to communicate in the target language (Afrizal, 2015). In IGTs, ELLs converse with one another to find the

missing elements or "gap," leading to increased learner engagement as students work together to close the gap (Afrizal, 2015). Lumengkewas (2004), as cited in Afrizal (2015) found that IGTs reduce speaking anxiety and increase L2 speaking comfort, resulting in greater motivation and more willingness to speak. However, teachers should be aware that IGTs may need more scaffolding and structure for use with beginning or low-intermediate learners. Less advanced learners have benefited from a combination of information gap tasks as well as interactional strategies (Van Batenburg, et al., 2019). In fact, Foster (1988), as cited in Van Batenberg, et al., 2019, warned that the communication breakdown and repair inherent in information gap activities may leave lower-level learners feeling inept. As a result, these learners may be better served with IG tasks that combine teacher interaction and scaffolding during instruction and practice (van Batenburg, et al., 2019).

Peer-to peer interaction improves oral proficiency. The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NSCALL) ran a so-called lab school involving a collaboration between Portland Community College's ESL program Portland State University's (PSU) researchers in order to study how adult ESLstudents learn. The program's focus was on beginning- and intermediate-level pair interactions. Researchers found that beginning-level learners can work effectively in pairs (Harris, 2005a; Garland, 2002), collaborating to complete tasks by asking questions, rephrasing and recasting, and utilizing circumlocution (Harris, 2005a). Interestingly, the learners' interaction changed when instructors approached the pair. Instead of continuing to try to resolve linguistic difficulties together, they either asked the teacher for help, became overly focused on accuracy, or one of the pair began speaking with the teacher (Garland, 2002). Curiously,

Steve Reder, one of the researchers at PSU, seemingly contradicted these findings by implying that although pair work facilitated speaking at the intermediate level and higher, beginners are better served speaking with teachers or more proficient speakers (Reder, 2005). His views on pair work seem to be supported by psychologist Lev Vygotsky, who posited that acquisition of language is accelerated when a more experienced interlocutore scaffolds dialogue for a less proficient one (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). In a similar vein, according to Nunan (2014), beginning or lower-level language learners undertaking a task tend to feel more secure and better able to self-correct with closed tasks, which have only one or just a few correct answers.

Interestingly, Ohta's (2001) research on pair work demonstrated that during discourse activities learners were able to co-create speech that was more advanced than what they could have generated individually. Swain & Lapkin (1998) found that when pairs collaborate to repair linguistic breakdowns or misunderstandings, learning is accelerated, as the example (in French with English translation) demonstrates below. Kim self-corrects during a conversation with Rick as they write a story:

Rick: ...et brosse.

(...and brushes)

Kim: Et SE brosse les dents...les ch-. No, wait a second. Isn't it elle se brosse les dents? And it's SE peigne. Elle se peigne.

(And brushes [emphasizes the reflexive] her teeth...her hair. No, wait a second. Isn't it she brushes her teeth? And it's combs [again emphasizes the reflexive]. She combs her hair.) (Swain & Lapkin, 1998, p. 331) *Do I need to use quote marks here?*

The results of these studies are not surprising given that Vygotsky concluded that "language develops primarily from social interaction" (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 25). Due to the fact that EFL learners' sole exposure to their target language may be restricted to the classroom, it is essential that teachers motivate and inspire ELLs' oral production by basing the curriculum on interactive, enjoyable speaking exercises (Shumin, 2002); examples include viewing audiovisual materials and re-enacting what was heard or seen.. Interviews are also helpful, as they allow learners to discover interesting personal facts about one another or to discuss a compelling topic from class (Chastain, 1988). Other fluency-fostering activities include viewing videos without dialogue and describing what was seen and using authentic materials like hotel brochures or menus to practice making reservations and ordering food. Gill (2016) encourages teachers to use dramatic skits, dialogues and other activities while teaching Asian ELLs. He notes students from these cultures find such activities so engaging that they tend to set aside worries about making errors or appearing foolish. As a result, they build confidence as well as oral production skills (Gill, 2016). Drama helps to nurture skill and confidence with speaking because rehearsing naturally involves repetition of dialogue containing linguistic and syntactical forms and patterns inherent in the target language, allowing learners to acquire these patterns subconsciously for use in different contexts later (Erdman, 1991). Although some might argue that dialogue repetition is not communicative, Gill's and Erdman's research demonstrates the benefits of this approach, especially for building confidence and fostering motivation in those who are reticent to speak, as noted above.

In addition, communicative activities using authentic speech encourage learners to develop informal, meaning-focused dialogues with one another without focusing too

much on form, resulting in improved fluency. Kao and O'Neill (1998) hold that such discourse is crucial to improving oral proficiency, as learners must be able to interact with one another well enough to complete the task or project at hand.

It is worth noting that even though most of the research I found showing a relationship between speaking anxiety and non-communicative classroom practices came from Asian countries, anxious speakers and the dearth of quality speaking instruction is a world-wide problem. For example, Al-wossabi (2016), uncovered some key factors inhibiting the development of oral proficiency in Saudi Arabian EFL university students, in particular:

1. an emphasis is on written responses during exams, with oral responses only required in the comparatively very few speaking courses offered;

2. an overfocus on accuracy at the expense of fluency, hampering spontaneous language development;

3. overlooking listening activities, which is a problem, as listening is the foundation for speaking;

5. negative or critical feedback from instructors, which could hinder speaking and demotivate learners; feedback should be supportive and inspiring.

To develop ELLs communicative competence, teachers are encouraged to provide more opportunity for speaking; ask students what they want to and are able to talk about; provide positive feedback; combine listening, reading and speaking activities; and utilize language functions (or speech acts) like apologies, greetings, requests, complaints, refusals, and the like (Al-wossabi 2016). Similarly, Khan & Ali (2010) found that college English learners in Pakistan are not given enough time in class to develop strong

speaking skills and are publicly reprimanded by instructors for making errors.

Suggestions for improving instruction include adding communicative speaking activities,

training teachers to be more encouraging and to provide positive feedback, fostering a

friendly classroom environment, and developing listening skills through

English-language media.

The use of technology in CLT. The use of technology to improve oral

proficiency has become increasingly common in many countries and classroom settings.

According to Abal (2012) adult ELLs who were anxious while talking to NSs realized a

steep decline in their anxiety after using Multi-User Virtual Environments (MUVE), an

online speech simulator. While Abal (2012) encourages teachers to use the software with

learners, he also believes ELLs should converse with NSs, as gaining oral proficiency

skills not only requires copious amounts of input (Krashen, 1981, 1994; Ellis, 2005) but

frequent use of the target language in the classroom as well, including as a medium for

instruction (Ellis, 2005).

Speaking is generally considered to be Japanese ELLs weakest language skill

compared with listening, reading, and writing, as students have relatively few

opportunities outside of class to converse and tend to feel anxious while doing so (Iio, et

al., 2019). However, these researchers have shown that when English students at a

Japanese university ELLs conversed with a robot through Robot Assisted Language

Learning (RALL), learners' speaking accuracy, fluency, and pronunciation markedly

improved. The study's authors theorized that because the robots have "bodies," users find

them to be more relatable than computers. For obvious reasons, students simply are not as

intimidated speaking to a robot as they may be with a human tutor; however, because the

robots' faces are expressionless, the ELLs cannot tell by looking at the robots if they made an error, as students often can with a teacher (Iio et al. 2019). English multimedia language teaching tools combining videos, sounds, words, and pictures can serve as crucial input needed by language learners. Indeed, researchers found that when teachers scaffolded tasks while using these instruments, L2 speaking proficiency increased, especially for accuracy, fluency, and complexity (BavaHarji et al., 2014).

Interestingly, human interaction may be a required ingredient in technology-aided learning. For instance, when ELLs used computer assisted learning (CALL) to improve speaking skills, both students and teachers reported that the consistent presence of instructors during lab activities helped learners to develop greater listening and speaking skills than if the technology were used alone (Zou, 2013). Because many instructors may not have the training or experience to know how to support students during these activities, teachers should receive training not only in the use of CALL technology but also on how to motivate, guide, and provide feedback to learners during these sessions (Zou, 2013).

Interaction in the target language. Kao and O'Neill's (1998) assertion that discourse is crucial for oral proficiency development is buttressed by **interactionist** principles, such as **focus on form** and **sociocultural** models. Vygotsky (1978, 1987), as cited in Tarone & Swierzbin (2009), theorizes language is learned when someone with greater linguistic knowledge and someone with slightly less co-construct a dialogue, for example. In addition, he posits that conscious attention to the particular linguistic form is required for acquisition. Likewise, Schmidt (1990), asserts the learner must consciously notice a language form to "convert input into intake" (p. 129). Both Vygotsky's and

Schmidt's views run contrary to Krashen's (1981; 1982; 1985) hypothesis that

comprehensible input alone, in the form of listening and reading, fosters *unconscious*

acquisition of language forms. According to Krashen & Terrell (1995), the most efficient

and least stressful path toward achieving spoken fluency is to receive enough engaging

and comprehensible input that speech will emerge on its own rather than being forced or

compelled. Speech does not have to be explicitly taught, because language is acquired,

not learned. Research in alignment with Krashen & Terrell found that when

beginning-level learners responded in writing instead of speaking at the start of class, a

marked improvement in speaking, reading, and writing skills resulted (Postovsky, 1974).

However, as Lightbown & Spada (2013) noted, while learners can go far with

comprehensible input only, certain language features may require direct instruction.

Furthermore, learners benefit from communicative activities that prioritize understanding

and expressing meaning.

   Reading to speak, language functions, speaking frames, and building schema.

Reading is crucial for acquiring a robust vocabulary, which in turn helps to develop other

language skills, including speaking (Ellis, 2005; Ediger, 2014). In addition,

comprehensible input in the form of reading assists with the subconscious assimilation of

language forms needed for speaking (Krashen, 1981, 1994). Metacognitive awareness

can be fostered when instructors teach about the overall **function** of language, such as the

phrases used in agreeing and disagreeing, stating opinions, clarifying, interrupting, stating

cause and effect, and summarizing, just to name a few (Lazaraton, 2014). In addition, the

use of **speaking frames** to scaffold various functions, such as asking for opinions—*what*

do you think about? what are your feelings on?— or to give opinions—*in my opinion* or *it*

seems to me—have been shown to reduce the number of repetitions, hesitations, false

starts, and pauses made by ELLs, while simultaneously improving grammatical accuracy

and increasing continuous, unbroken speech (Saienko & Nazarenko, 2021). Providing

lessons that activate learners' *schema*—what they already know about a topic—as well as

by having students research unfamiliar subjects prior to discussing them has been shown

to significantly improve the quality of discourse (Chastain, 1988; Shabani, 2013).

Another effective way to build schema is to connect the topic at hand to students'

personal experiences (Snow, 2014).

Pronunciation instruction within a communicative context.

According to Munro (2003), some NSs of English dislike accents—speech

differing from that of NSs—if it seems unintelligible or hard to understand.

Unfortunately, non-native English speakers in North America have been stereotyped,

harassed and discriminated against simply as a result of their accents. Not surprisingly,

Baran-Lucarz (2004) found that ELLs who are self-conscious about their English

pronunciation may suffer more anxiety while speaking and thus may not want to engage

in conversations as frequently as more confident learners. Munro (2003) cited research

showing that heavily accented speech can be understood by NSs who have the patience to

try harder to understand or who develop familiarity with that particular accent. Even so,

this project's purpose is to help teachers help students to develop oral proficiency to the

best of their abilities, which means explicitly teaching ELs how to produce speech that is

generally *intelligible* to NSs yet is not the *same* as NSs. Munro & Derwing (2001) as

cited in Hodgetts (2020) hold that expecting learners to achieve native-like pronunciation

is such an improbable goal that teachers are likely to abandon pronunciation instruction

entirely; fortunately, training ELLs to lose their L1 accents is unnecessary. Intelligible

speech is *not* synonymous with accent-free speech. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) define

intelligibility as " the extent to which a listener actually understands an utterance or

message" and *comprehensibility* as "a listener's perception of how difficult it is to

understand the utterance or message" (p. 32). Furthermore, the development of linguistic

competence is also greatly enhanced when ELs achieve more intelligibility in their

speech through training in word and sentence stress, rhythm, and pitch (Derwing, Munro,

& Wiebe, 1998; Field, 2005; Hahn, 2004; O. Kang, 2010; Setter, 2006; Munro &

Derwing 2001; Zelinski, 2006 & 2008).

    Researchers have found the following elements can make speech unintelligible:

    ♦ Failure to **stress** the appropriate word in a sentence or omitting the stress

entirely (Hahn, 2004);

    ♦ Improper word, or *lexical*, **stress** (Field, 2005);

    ♦ An atypical speech **rhythm** caused by incorrect syllable duration between

stressed and unstressed syllables (Setter, 2006);

    ♦ The use of final-position **consonants** that are non-standard or unclearly

enunciated (Zielinski, 2006) and in stressed syllables (Zielinski, 2008);

    ♦ Speech that is either too **fast** or too **slow** (O. Kang, 2010; Munro & Derwing,

2001);

    ♦ **Pauses** that are too many or too long (O. Kang, 2010);

    ♦ **Pitch** range that is too narrow (O. Kang, 2010)

Stress, rhythm, and intonation (or pitch) are examples of *suprasegmentals*, also

known as prosody, which are "speech sounds longer than phonemes" (Parker & Graham,

2009, p. 218). Derwing, Munro, & Wiebe (1998) advocate highlighting suprasegmentals for pronunciation instruction, as research has shown that ELLs trained in these "global" features are able to use them in spontaneous speech production. According to Field (2005), word stress is vital for intelligibility, with stressed syllables pronounced correctly and discretely from surrounding sounds (Zielinski, 2008). To achieve accurate rhythm, or sentence stress, prominence is usually placed on content words—nouns, main verbs, adverbs, and adjectives—while function words—determiners, pronouns and prepositions— receive less stress. Kinesthetic exercises, such as pulling a rubber band, clapping, or tapping on stressed syllables, can help ELLs with the correct placement of stress, along with listen and repeat activities (Goodwin, 2014).

Learners may also have trouble with speech rate—speaking too quickly, too slowly, or pausing at inappropriate times (Goodwin, 2014; O. Kang, 2010; Munro & Derwing, 2001). To help learners find the optimal speech rate, Goodwin (2014) advises teachers to chunk speech into logical *thought groups* (TGs), after which the speaker pauses before uttering the next group. TGs are approximately two to five words that form a unit of meaning. Below are two sentences. The first contains correctly marked TGs while the second does not. Each group is separated by a forward slash.

"I was speaking to him / on the phone yesterday."

"I was speaking to / him on the / phone yesterday." (p. 137)

In addition, many ELLs struggle with **pitch** variation, which may result in flat, monotone intonation (O. Kang, 2010) or potential misunderstandings. For example, prominence, or emphasis, should be placed on the word *when* in the question *when are you leaving*? for clarification on the time of departure. Exercises in which students stand

on their toes during a rise in pitch and bend at the knees for a fall in pitch can be useful for some learners, (Goodwin, 2014) as can speech analysis software that allows students to see pitch variations on a computer screen, which they can try to duplicate (Lewis & Pickering, 2004).

According to these researchers—teaching about *segmentals*—consonants and vowels—is also valuable, as it allows learners to self-correct by repeating mispronounced forms. When planning instruction on segmentals, Goodwin (2014) advocates prioritizing sounds that carry a high-functional load, meaning the contrasting phonemes appear in a relatively large number of words, such as /d, z/, as in *needs* versus *knees,* as opposed to sounds with low-functional load, such as /θ, ð/, as in thigh and thy. Regardless of which pronunciation features are taught, instruction should happen within the CLT framework, where the goal is to communicate, not to produce decontextualized sounds (Hodgetts, 2020). For example, role-plays and dialogues are a great way to teach correct stress, intonation, and rhythm. The instructor can select samples from an authentic text or speech and draw rising and falling pitch contours over words or sentences, representing different emotions or whether the sample is a question or declarative statement; syllable stress can be shown by placing small or large bubbles over words and slashes between thought groups to represent natural pauses. Of course, learners' L1 is also an important factor determining which pronunciation features instructors should target (Celce-Murcia, et al., 2010).

Pragmatic and sociocultural variables through a CLT framework

Pragmatics is concerned with the context surrounding what is said and the underlying beliefs, assumptions, and motives of the interlocutor (Birner, 2013).

According to Hinkel (2014), most ESL/EFL texts include lessons on pragmatic language

functions, such as requests, complaints, apologies, and the like using casual expressions,

idioms, and dialogues to convey meaning. However, typically absent from these texts are

explanations of how, when, and with whom to use these expressions. Without the explicit

teaching of sociocultural language norms, many students will think nothing of uttering

very casual expressions such as, *How's it going; What's up;* and *Later* to teachers,

principals, and deans. Blunders like these aren't just impolite. Using language that runs

contrary to societal norms can result in poor grades, missed opportunities for jobs, lower

salaries, stalled professional advancement, and the loss of social relationships. While the

following authentic example is not likely to result in any such dire outcome, it represents

a good example of pragmatic breakdown. A foreign guest is staying in an American

home (Celce-Murica & Olshtain, 2014, p. 425):

> *Hostess*: [holding a pot of coffee] Would you like a cup of coffee?
>
> *Guest*: I don't care.

The guest's reply confused the hostess because she did not know if he meant *yes*

or *no,* so she placed the coffee pot on the table without pouring any into the cups. The

hostess and guest seemed uncomfortable until another guest appeared, poured a cup of

coffee, and asked if anyone wanted some. The foreign guest, now appearing to

understand, reformulated his response, and said: "Yes, I want coffee, please."

Therefore, teaching culture along with other language skills raises ELLs

pragmatic and linguistic awareness and proficiency. Hinkel (2014) suggests ELLs learn

about sociocultural norms and pragmatic language forms through authentic interviews

with native or proficient speakers, gaining experience with these forms while

simultaneously honing speaking skills. She states that interviews are also valuable because they give learners a glimpse into the "invisible" beliefs and assumptions of the L2 society, which are inherent in all cultures. Sample questions may include the following (p. 404):

♦ Why do people ask you How are you and then not listen to the answer?

♦ Why do teachers say that students have to come on time if when students come late, they know that the missed material is their own loss?

♦ Why do Americans smile so much?

♦ When and why is it okay to call teachers/professors by their first names?

♦ Why do strangers say hello to me on the street?

♦ Why is it necessary to explain everything in so much detail in writing, or if my essay explains everything (!), wouldn't readers think that I view them as a little slow? Hinkel (2014) advises instructors to approve the questions prior to the interview.

Total Physical Response: learning through movement

One of the more unusual and intriguing teaching methods is Total Physical Response (TPR), which pairs listening with movement.Teachers use the imperative verb form while students enact the teacher's "commands" (Pinkasová, 2011). Furthermore**,** ELLs are not required to speak until they are ready, which may result in less anxiety and enhanced recollection of the content (Asher, 1966 & 1969). TPR is particularly beneficial to beginning-level children and adults to assist with vocabulary development (Asher, 1966, 1969; Krashen, 1998; Wolfe & Jones, 1982), and according to Krashen, (1998), it can be extremely effective for delivering comprehensible input, as the instructor's movement helps to make the message clearer. For instance, a teacher demonstrates or

asks a student to demonstrate actions, for instance: *turn off the light*; *jump up and down*; or *shut the door*, as students mimic her movements. Sometimes, the instructor brings in *realia* to supplement the actions. Learners are almost always silent during this stage, but eventually they will repeat the sentences if the language is simple and comprehensible. TPR is usually used in combination with other activities and techniques (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Calderón (1994) suggested a teacher utter simple commands, like *Take out a cup and saucer. Pour yourself a cup of coffee*; students repeat and pretend to do the actions. Next, the class acts out the movements while the teacher gives the commands. Learners practice the commands until they become automatic. If the ELLs possess rudimentary reading and writing skills, the teacher writes the actions on the chalkboard or Smartboard as the class reads and writes them, thereby helping to connect writing and speaking. Then, the instructor or a student reads each command as the class repeats each one in turn. Eventually, learners read the actions and perform them as the instructor checks for understanding and monitors oral production.

Pair and group work. Next, learners work in pairs or groups of four to read the commands. In groups of four, two students give commands and two respond physically, while the instructor checks for understanding and answers questions. Some sample sentences are:

1. Let's go to the store.

2. Open the door and get in your car.

3. Start the car.

4. Drive to the store.

5. Park the car.

6. Get out of the car.

7. Go into the store.

8. Put items into your shopping cart.

9. Stand in line at the checkout counter.

10. Pay for your items with a $50 dollar bill.

11. Hold out your hand for your change.

12. Walk out of the store

13. Put your groceries in the trunk.

13. Get into your car.

14. Start the car.

15. Drive home.

16. Bring the groceries inside.

17. Put the groceries away. (Calderón,1994)

Some studies using TPR have noted that learners who have used this method outperformed others when tested on all language skills as compared with others instructed through more standard methods (Asher, 1972; Wolfe & Jones 1982). The *Live Action English Interactive-TPR on a Computer (LAE)* is a 12-unit multimedia program showcasing examples of common situations, including one's morning routine, grocery shopping, cleaning, setting a table, and other situations. These scenarios are accompanied by TPR-based activities like watch; listen; interact; and watch and read, etc., which match the various scenarios. Through such activities, users practice and develop listening comprehension skills involving imperative verb forms while filling in the blanks,

practicing dictation, doing drag and drop exercises, reading, and placing sentences in the correct order using a combination of video and still photos (Choo, 2006).

The program gradually builds learners' language skills by starting with listening followed by reading, based on the TPR theory that learners need to process enough input through listening and reading prior to developing the productive output skills of writing and speaking (Choo, 2006). This researcher also notes that even if learners may not be able to repeat the actions correctly at first, they may be motivated by the consistent exposure to the language and the opportunities to practice. Krashen (1998) considers TPR to be an excellent language teaching approach for beginners and research by Wolfe & Jones (1992) supports his opinion. While learners can practice pronunciation skills through LAE, they are not required to speak beyond that. While Choo (2006) describes the language used in LAE as natural and practical and the exercises as engaging and motivating, she views the program as a supplementary tool to be used in combination with communicative classroom activities.

Moreover, Pinkasová (2011) reported high ratings from teachers who worked with adults using TPR activities. Instructors regarded TPR as fun, a great warm-up, effective with helping students remember language, a stress-reducer, and the creator of a more positive classroom environment. ELLs were not asked to speak; instead, they responded to commands from the teacher and spoke when ready, usually after 10 - 20 hours of instruction. Oral production started when learners began to repeat commands (Pinkasová, 2011).

This section investigated research-driven methods that have been shown to develop accuracy, fluency, and intelligibility in beginning to advanced second-language

learners—in particular, communicative language teaching strategies, total physical response, and the importance of teaching pragmatic and sociocultural awareness via the communicative method. The next section discusses how learner affect can either impede or expedite oral proficiency development.

Learner Affect and Oral Language Development

Gardner & MacIntyre (1993) define language anxiety as the unease felt when one is asked to use a language in which they lack proficiency. Finocchiaro et al. (1977) and Krashen (1985) hypothesize that motivation, self-esteem, and anxiety play a critical role in L2 learning, and those whose motivation and self-esteem are high and anxiety low usually experience greater success in achieving learning goals. Krashen's well-known *affective filter* hypothesis (1982) cautions that learners plagued with fear, anxiety, and low-self-esteem will have a high affective filter, blocking input from reaching the part of the brain responsible for language acquisition, even if the person understands the message. Conversely, learners who are not burdened by such negative states will have a lower filter and will seek out and absorb more input. Significantly, Arnold & Brown (1999) deemed anxiety the trait that most impedes learning, and fretting about being mistaken, stupid, or unintelligible strongly negatively impacts speaking ability (Brown, 2007). Burns & Hill (2013) found that learners showed more reluctance to speak when they didn't have enough time to silently reflect on the topic. Extra time may be needed because producing spontaneous language does not allow the opportunity to prepare, increasing "processing and production pressures," (p. 232). Furthermore, if a student's perception of what they can accomplish is below their actual capabilities, the quality or quantity of their speech will be constrained by this negative self-image. Also, learners

who are overly sensitive to social pressure will fear judgment and scorn by peers (Horowitz, et al., as cited in Burns & Hill, 2013). Interestingly, Zhang (2001), as cited in Burns & Hill (2013), found that male ELLs experienced greater speaking anxiety in and out of class. Therefore, it is important that instructors take these psychological factors into account when planning lessons instead of simply equating reluctance to speak with lack of motivation (Burns & Hill, 2013).

Teachers have more influence than they may realize regarding whether or not a learner experiences such negative affective traits. Many students are afraid of peers' reactions when they make errors, so instructors should cultivate an atmosphere of compassion and respect as well as establish a good rapport with individual students, thereby increasing comfort level and willingness to speak (Baran-Łucarz, 2014). The inevitable and normal mistakes that all language students make may cause extreme discomfort and timidity in some learners, to the point where discourse is completely stalled (Carter et al., 2015). This reticence to speak may have little or nothing to do with capability or motivation, but rather by the learner's personality or cultural background, possibly influencing their perceptions of students' and teachers' proper roles in the classroom (Jackson, 2002). Tsui (1996) suggests that teachers can employ strategies to reduce anxiety and encourage speech, such as:

♦ giving learners more time to answer questions;

♦ improving questioning styles;

♦ accepting different types of answers;

♦ utilizing peer support and group work;

♦ focusing on content over form;

♦ establishing good student/teacher relationships

Research has also found correlations between increased speech anxiety and the following factors: continuous evaluation and the fear of poor grades; few opportunities to use communicative English, perfectionism and low self-esteem, and the association of prestige with American and British accents. On the other hand, decreased speech anxiety accompanied a positive interaction with teachers, more opportunities to use communicative English, and extroversion (Khan, 2015). However, Chen et al. (2015), did *not* find a correlation between extraversion and introversion and oral proficiency. Rather, reduced speaking output was associated with being in an EFL setting, where learners have few if any natural opportunities to speak English outside of the classroom (Ringborm, 1980); being exposed to input that is not comprehensible, potentially stalling speaking; and learning English in a teacher-centered culture like China, which has historically discouraged students from voicing their ideas or opinions (Chen et al., 2015). Increased oral output leading to improved proficiency results when learners intentionally expose themselves to high quality input and output outside of class—listening and reading, practicing speaking to oneself, and possessing a strong motivation to learn and communicate in English. In order for teachers to help students develop strong speaking skills, it is important they are aware of the teaching techniques mentioned above (Chen et al., 2015).

Macintyre et al. (1998) have shown that willingness to communicate (WTC) in an L2 varies greatly among language learners and is often independent of competence in the target language. Encouraging a WTC should be among the primary goals of language instruction. Macintyre et al. (1998) expanded on McCroskey and Baer's (1985)

conceptualization of WTC in the L1 from speaking when one is able to do so to include more than 30 variables associated with various situational and trait behaviors. Examples include switching from informal chit-chat to more formal discourse; perceived communicative competence and communication anxiety, resulting in apprehension to speak; test anxiety; and fear of negative feedback by peers and the teacher. Similar to many other linguistic researchers, Macintyre et al., (1998) also found that speaking produced the greatest anxiety in ELLs and notes that learner affect, along with L1 cultural norms and expectations, can either strongly facilitate or hinder oral proficiency. In the next section, I discuss the specific pedagogical techniques that I will include in my staff development workshop.

Teaching oral proficiency techniques to instructors

My project, a professional development workshop (PD) discussed in detail in chapter 3, draws upon Knowles' principles of andragogy, which states that learners should be active participants rather than passive observers in the learning process (Knowles, 1992) and that adults are more engaged when learning about things relevant to their lives. For this reason, my workshop maximizes interaction among participants—instructors for adult English language learners—through the use of brainstorming and "think-alouds," as well as pair and small group activities and discussions. Finally, participants would likely find training on effective ways to teach speaking relevant to their careers.

The PD uses research-driven methods and activities gleaned from Chapter 2. Since it isn't practical or advisable to address all of the approaches and ideas from my literature review in a 10-hour workshop, I chose to include the ones I thought would have

the broadest appeal for my audience and be the easiest to implement in a typical adult ESL setting. Given that, participants will learn:

♦ the primary causes of speaking anxiety and ways in which teachers can help students lessen anxiety and develop this important skill;

♦ how a high affective filter may negatively impact motivation and even the ability to learn;

♦ ideas for using certain communicative approaches, such as information-gap activities, drama, role-play, and speaking frames to help lower the affective filter and build speaking proficiency,

♦ how to train ELLs on suprasegmental features to maximize intelligibility;

♦ an explanation of TPR and how this type of kinesthetic approach can enlarge vocabulary in beginning-level students;

♦ why the teaching of pragmatics and sociocultural awareness is so important and examples of a technique to hone both pragmatic awareness and speaking skill;

Summary and overview of chapter

I'm studying which speaking instructional methods are effective, engaging and minimize fear and anxiety in adult ESL learners in the United States, because I want to share what I've learned with my colleagues. Most scholarly research I've found on speaking skills takes place in either EFL university settings or in ESL/EFL K-12 classes, with comparatively few studies looking at the ESL adult population. However, the need for quality speaking instruction remains high, as academic requirements and training for ESL teachers vary widely across the country.

Developing oral proficiency in an L2 is probably the most challenging language skill facing adult learners. New arrivals to the United States register for ESL classes to learn how to "speak English," and learners' ultimate goal is usually to converse as fluently and accurately as possible. The increasing number of non-English speakers of all ages immigrating to the United States underscores the need for more research on how to develop adults' speaking skills.

This literature review delved into research about the ESL adult learner, their learning environment, and initiatives to provide quality instruction, as well as research-driven methods for enhancing learners' accuracy, fluency, intelligibility, and pragmatic awareness. The review also explored how learner affect, specifically anxiety and fear, can stymie speaking, and ways in which teachers can use this research to bolster oral proficiency in learners. Chapter 3 will describe the structure and content of my project—a 10-hour professional development workshop for adult ESL instructors.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

Chapter Two explored characteristics of the adult ESL learner, including the learning environment and initiatives to improve instruction; effective instructional methods for teaching speaking, the role of affect in oral proficiency development. I will use the research gleaned from my literature review to produce a 10-hour professional development workshop for ESL instructors who teach adults.

Project description

The aim of my project is to share effective research-based theories and strategies with colleagues on how to develop oral proficiency in ELLs in ways that are both engaging and anxiety-reducing. The imparting of best practices is needed because qualifications and training for adult instructors vary widely across the country (Eyring, 2014), and, according to Gill (2016), speaking is the most difficult skill for an adult EL to master.

I will plan a ten-hour professional development workshop, scheduled to be held on two consecutive Saturdays, five hours each day, with a 30-minute lunch break. A pre-assessment questionnaire will be emailed to all workshop participants about a week before the event and a post-assessment questionnaire will be given upon completion.

Day 1: Participants will understand how anxiety and a high affective filter may impede oral development and strategies to reduce learner anxiety; the importance of and how to implement the following communicative teaching strategies: information

gap-activities, drama/role-play, and total physical response. Through the use of slides, video, audio and pair work activities, participants will:

♦ understand what causes speaking anxiety and how to implement strategies to reduce it;

♦ learn how to use information-gap, dialogue, and role-play activities;

♦ learn how to implement the total physical response method to increase vocabulary development;

♦ how to execute a jigsaw reading and speaking activity;

♦ develop a role-play exercise using language functions and speaking frames

Day two: Participants will learn what constitutes intelligible speech and why it's important; the primary causes of unintelligible speech; what suprasegmentals are and how to create intelligible speech by practicing such prosodic features as word and sentence stress; speech rate, rhythm, and intonation; the importance of pragmatics and sociocultural awareness; and how to develop sociocultural awareness. Through the use of slides, video, audio and pair work activities, participants will learn:

♦ how to understand and word and sentence stress;

♦ how to recognize and mark thought groups;

♦ how to show intonation and pitch using rising and fall contours over words;

♦ how interviewing native speakers can raise sociocultural awareness while enhancing speaking;

Observed Needs

My proposed workshop comes from needs I've observed during my four years teaching English to adult immigrants. I noticed that speaking seemed to be a particularly

stressful and difficult activity for many of my students, regardless of their overall L2

language proficiency level. Even though most of my colleagues had earned some type of

TESOL certification or training beyond a bachelor's degree, it nevertheless seemed they

could benefit from additional training on how to improve oral proficiency in their EL.

Teachers, administrators, and stakeholders need to know that more time should be

allotted for speaking instruction, given that many of the students in adult ESL classes

must learn basic skills to work and function in the community, report speaking as one of

their primary language needs.

Choice of Method

The workshop follows the principles of UbD in Wiggin's and McTighe's

Understanding by Design (2005)*,* as well as Malcolm Knowles' theory of andragogy

(1992), as outlined below.

Learning Objectives

My PD is based on principles from Understanding by Design (UbD), in which

the learning objectives are determined first, followed by curriculum development and

goal assessment (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). In this case, the goal is to impart effective

speaking methods and instruction to those who teach adult ESL classes. Participants learn

techniques for teaching speaking to ELLs that have proven effective through current

linguistic research, as well as the importance of teaching pragmatics and sociocultural

norms. They gain knowledge of how factors such as L2 cultural background and affective

traits like anxiety, confidence, and self-esteem influence learners' willingness to speak as

well as methods that may be more effective for such ELLs. Ultimately, teachers will use the strategies in their classrooms.

In addition, my workshop draws upon Knowles' principles of andragogy, in particular, the assumption that learners should be active and engaged participants rather than passive observers in the learning process (Knowles, 1992). For example, I maximize interaction among participants through the use of brainstorming and "think-alouds," as well as pair and small group discussions and activities. Andragogy has at its core the idea that adults are more interested in learning about those things that are relevant to their lives and concerns (Knowles, 1992).

Effective professional development. Reiterating Knowles' adult-learning model, Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner (2017, p. 4), found that effective professional development (PD) should incorporate active learning practices and at least a few of the following traits:

1. Is content focused

2. Supports collaborative learning

3. Models proven practices

4. Provides coaching and expert support

5. Offers opportunities for feedback and reflection

6. Is of sustained duration

My workshop includes five of these: It uses <u>active</u> learning strategies, with participants collaborating in pairs and small groups to enact activities that enhance speaking and to discuss their experiences teaching oral proficiency; as the training centers on ways to build oral proficiency, it is clearly <u>content</u> focused; practices are <u>modeled</u> by

me and via relatively current video clips filmed in actual adult ESL classrooms; and participants have opportunities for <u>reflection</u> during a warm-up exercise when they recollect their own second language learning experiences; finally, my PD allows an opportunity for participants to provide <u>feedback</u> on what was learned during the two days and if they intend to use some of the practices with their students.

Schmoker (2021) maintains that while PD has generally not led to improvements in classroom instructional quality, staff development has the potential to be effective if some key best practices developed for the classroom were introduced during teacher training sessions. For instance, instructional practice of any kind, whether in the classroom or in PDs, should use methods proven to be effective, such as regular checks for understanding (Lemov, 2015; Payne, 2008); the use of just one or two initiatives until improvement occurs instead of trying to fix everything at once (Schmoker, 2018); experts showing teachers how to implement best practices, such as instructing on how to administer formative assessments through a role play activity; coach and retrain as needed (Schmoker, 2021); conduct follow-up observations and feedback to ensure lessons learned during the PD will not be put aside nor forgotten (Lemov, 2015; Payne 2008).

Audience and setting. I'll be delivering this PD to ESL instructors who teach non-credit workforce preparation classes at a local community college. The program's approximately 100 teachers all possess at least a bachelor's degree and many, perhaps most, have master's degrees in related areas such as applied linguistics, TESOL, or English language education. The college is located about 20 miles outside of Washington DC in Montgomery County, Maryland. Any adult immigrant (age 18+) who lives in the

county can enroll, regardless of immigration status, as long as they do not hold an F1 or J1 visa. The learner population is very diverse, reflecting the demographics of the area, and includes men and women ranging in age from 18-70, mostly from countries in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle-East. Students' educational backgrounds range from no high-school diploma to master's degrees; however, everyone has mastered the fundamentals of English reading and writing.

      Timeline. While I do not teach at the setting described above, (currently, I am not teaching) a friend and colleague who works there will determine if I can deliver my PD at the college during the spring semester of 2022. However, I will likely be employed during the winter or spring of 2022, in which case I will deliver the workshop during that time to my own co-workers.

Measuring Effectiveness

      In addition to the post-assessment questionnaire, which uses a Likert scale to measure how much participants have learned about L2 oral language development, I plan to email all participants three months after the workshop to determine how well implementation of the speaking techniques has worked in their classrooms. If any participants report negative experiences, I will schedule individual telephone or video conference sessions with them to gain feedback and insight into the challenges and issues they are reporting. Based on my findings, I may revise the contents of future professional development sessions on this topic to reflect what I've learned.

Summary and overview of chapter

      This chapter describes the professional development workshop I've created for my Capstone project, inspired by my research question : *Which are the best instructional*

practices teachers can use to engage adult English learners while minimizing anxiety and building oral proficiency? In this chapter, I've outlined the need for this particular instruction, an overview of the workshop, the research supporting it, the assessment methods, a timeline for implementation, and how effectiveness will be measured. In Chapter 4, I will reflect on my project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflections

Introduction

The guiding question for my capstone was: *Which are the best instructional practices teachers can use to build oral proficiency while minimizing anxiety and maximizing engagement?* This led me to plan and create a 10-hour professional development workshop (PD), delivered on two consecutive Saturdays, for instructors of adult English as Second Language (ESL) learners. In this context, *adult* refers to immigrants and refugees 18 years of age and older who are learning English primarily for communicatory—as opposed to academic—purposes. The workshop's purpose is to share with my colleagues research-based theories and strategies on how to develop oral proficiency in English-language learners (ELLs) in ways that are both engaging and anxiety-reducing.

I was inspired to choose this topic for a couple of reasons. The first stems from my own experiences studying Spanish in secondary school, where grammar was prioritized over speaking; unfortunately, my goal was to become fluent upon graduation. That did not happen. As it turned out, my reading and writing skills were well-developed, but my discourse was replete with hesitations, false-starts, and long pauses. Today, while most of my adult ESL students also report speaking as their primary learning goal, discourse activities and practice is secondary to other, more testable skills, particularly grammar and listening comprehension. Additionally, anxiety over accents or making errors in front of others can hinder the desire to hone this skill. Although speaking is considered by researchers to be the most difficult skill to master, oral language

development has been given less consideration in second language learning, teaching, and assessment. While many teachers are caring and skilled, taking great pride in their craft, others are not. Qualifications for adult ESL instructors in the United States vary so widely that many states do not even require a bachelor's degree, and the profession suffers from high-turnover.

Overview of Chapter

In this chapter, I will share highlights from my research, reflections I have had along the way, the specific literature and resources most useful for developing my project, implications and limitations of my research, ideas for future research, how best to communicate my findings, and my project's overall benefits to the profession.

Major Learnings

At first, I was overwhelmed by the sheer number of scholarly articles related to my research question and where I should place my focus. After narrowing my topic, I still had the following questions:

♦ Should I highlight accuracy, fluency, or pronuncation?

♦ Is pair work beneficial for learners of all proficiency levels?

♦ Should speaking instruction differ for ESL as opposed to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners? If so, in what way?

♦ To what degree should pronunciation instruction be differentiated based on the learner's first language (L1)?

♦ What are the primary causes of speaking anxiety and how can instructors help to lessen that anxiety?

♦ Which other language skills should be taught concurrently with speaking and how?

♦ How much input, via listening, do beginning ELLs need before they are encouraged to speak?

♦ Should learning approaches take into consideration first language (L1) culture and norms? For example, would students from teacher-centered cultures that prize accuracy above all be able to endure making the inevitable mistakes in front of others?

My take-away lessons: Even though I had worked with students from almost every continent during my four years as a teacher, I did not realize to what degree cultural norms could have on learners' willingness to speak in class. For example, in many cultures in Asia and the Middle-East, the medium of instruction is the students' L1; learning grammar rules is often prized far more than developing oral proficiency; and shaming students in front of the class for making errors is not considered bad pedagogy. Learning about these cultures' classroom practices propelled me to research which speaking activities would be particularly engaging or motivating for these students. I discovered that drama and dialogue activities work very well, because learners tend to become so immersed that they set aside worries over speaking "correctly." Additionally, while my literature review was quite broad, I knew I was going to have to select a few main methods and approaches to feature in my project's training materials. Research on creating effective PDs revealed that it is preferable to present fewer topics with more depth rather than many topics more superficially. The typical PD is usually less than a day, so participants are more likely to recall and be able to implement fewer items presented in more detail. Therefore, I chose to highlight discoveries that would likely have the broadest appeal to my audience and be the easiest to implement in a typical adult ESL setting. My other take-away occurred while researching the principles of

andragogy–how adults learn. Two principles really stood out for me: 1. Adults want to be able to use what they learn; 2. Lessons should involve active-learning. Consequently, the final design featured reflections, pair and group activities, and practical activities that could be implemented right away.

Revisiting the literature

While I gleaned so much knowledge from dozens of research articles, the most influential text for me was *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014). The chapters on second language speaking, developing accuracy and fluency, teaching pronunciation, culture & pragmatics, and task-based learning and teaching were especially beneficial. Specifically, I gained useful theoretical knowledge as well as practical ideas on how to build accurate, fluent, and intelligible speech. Examples include role-play; information-gap activities; using suprasegmental language features to create intelligible speech; how the teaching of language functions–the purpose of language–can develop metacognitive awareness in ELLs; and the importance of sociocultural awareness.

In addition, Betsy Parrish's Fall 2020 class, ESL 8160-01-Phonetics and Phonology, proved to contain a virtual treasure trove of activities on how to teach intelligible speech by focusing on suprasegmental language features, in particular:
♦ using small and large circles to teach word stress or clapping/tapping on the stressed syllables;
♦ the role of content and function words in sentence stress or rhythm; raising one's hands in the air on a content word to indicate more stress and bending at the knees on a function word to indicate less;

♦ developing proper speech rate and rhythm by "chunking" speech into thought groups using forward slashes to mark natural pauses;

♦ drawing rising or falling contour patterns over words and sentences to illustrate intonation and pitch.

Stephen Krashen's books and articles (Krashen, 1981; 1982; 1985; 1994) also proved highly influential in my research, especially relating to the causes of speech-related anxiety. His *affective filter* hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) suggests that language learners who are plagued with fear, anxiety, and low-self-esteem will have a high affective filter that interferes with or even blocks language acquisition, while those unburdened by such negative states will have a lower filter and hence an easier time learning. Krashen also thought quite highly of the total physical response (TPR) method, one of the main learning methods highlighted in my project. TPR is a kinesthetic approach that pairs listening with movement, building vocabulary in beginning-level learners (Asher, 1996, 1969). Krashen, (1998) considered this TPR extremely effective for delivering comprehensible input via the instructor's commands; furthermore, learner anxiety is lessened because speech is not required.

Lastly, my professional development seminar is heavily influenced by *Understanding by Design* (Wiggins & McTighe 2005), which states that learning objectives are determined first and curriculum and assessment follows from that. In addition, my seminar's entire design follows Knowles' (1992) hypothesis that adults should be active and engaged participants in the learning process and that subject material be relevant and important.

Implications and limitations

  Implications. My literature review contains ample evidence that ESL classes in

the United States generally need more and better speaking instruction; the project

stemming from this research shows how to create relevant lessons and activities.

Therefore, community language programs should be required to devote more time and

resources–including teacher training–to support this goal. These findings should be made

available not only to instructors but to program managers and funding bodies of

community ESL programs, usually non-profit organizations and local governments, as

well as stakeholders. An example of the latter are local businesses that would likely

prefer to hire workers who can communicate clearly and effectively.

  Limitations. The vast majority of studies into English L2 learning takes place in

academic settings. Therefore, the subjects of my research tended to be college or

university EFL learners outside of the United States. However, this may not be a major

limitation, as effective oral skills pedagogy can be applied to ESL settings in the U.S.

with none or few modifications.

Future Research Projects

  While my PD covers important ground, it is still just 10 hours of training over two

Saturdays, which naturally limits the amount of information I can convey. Future projects

expanding on what I uncovered could feature:

♦ activities specifically designed to boost accuracy, such as games using *yes-no* and

wh-questions;

♦ additional ways to use drama in the classroom, for example staging a game-show or a

one-act play;

♦ additional task-based learning activities, like projects and field trips;

♦ ideas on how to target certain segmental features, for instance the articulation of final-position consonants, which have a significant impact on intelligibility.

Communicating Results

I could make my project available–complete with the lesson plan, slide-shows, and materials–on the resource pages of relevant professional organizations, like TESOL International Association and its state affiliates, the Language Resource Center, and National Association for Bilingual Education, in addition to where I will be teaching.

Benefit to the Profession

While a cornucopia of materials detailing valuable and effective classroom speaking activities exists for anyone willing to seek them out, my project is potentially the only one designed as a staff development training that communicates the following: how a high-affective filter can block language acquisition, particularly speaking; a detailed description of specific methods, approaches and activities shown to effectively engage and motivate many of these learners enough to develop communicative competence.

Summary and Overview of Chapter

This chapter has shared my reflections on the important findings uncovered during research and development of this project; the project's implications and limitations; benefits of my work to the profession; ideas for transmitting this knowledge to others in the field; as well as suggestions for future research that expand on my groundwork. My research has led me to best practices that teachers can use to build oral proficiency in learners who suffer from anxiety, fear, or low self-confidence. My research

question was: *Which are the best instructional practices teachers can use to build oral proficiency while minimizing anxiety and maximizing engagement?* This question and the research that followed helped me to develop a 10-hour professional development seminar for instructors of adult ESL. I look forward to implementing it with my future students and sharing it with colleagues and others in the profession.

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