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Research Symposium Annual Edition

A collection of six research papers exploring three themes and issues presented at the Fall 2009 conference

With this issue we present the refereed proceedings of the 10th Annual Research Symposium, part of the 36th Annual TESL Ontario Conference held in Toronto in December 2009. The themes that provided the focus of the Research Symposium were:

- *Communicative Competence Revisited*
- *Technology: Trends and Issues*
- *Teachers in a Changing Classroom: Needs and Trends*

As in previous years, the three themes covered topical issues that affect the classrooms and practice of ESL professionals in varied ways. Teachers who encounter problems and challenges related to these themes on a daily basis in their classrooms look for background information and practical ideas that will help them meet their learners' needs and the needs of their own professional development. In organizing the Research Symposium around topical themes and publishing the proceedings, TESL Ontario offers ESL professionals relevant information on recent research and new initiatives to inform classroom practice and the development of the profession.

Following past practice, the different themes were selected in consultation with the TESL Ontario membership and in conjunction with the Ontario Regional Advisory Committee (ORLAC), the Ministry of Culture and Immigration and Citizenship Canada. Presenters were invited to submit a written version of their oral presentation after the Research Symposium. Readers reviewed the manuscripts; those in-

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cluded offer readers a focus on pedagogical challenges that classroom teachers, administrators, and other ESL professionals deal with on an ongoing basis in trying to provide learners with optimal learning conditions. We are confident that readers will find the selected papers interesting and relevant to their teaching and professional development. We hope that they will feel inspired by the ideas presented, launch their own inquiries into an aspect of their teaching context and then report their insights at future TESL Ontario conferences.

On behalf of TESL Ontario, we express our thanks to the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (Canada) and the Ministry of Culture and Immigration (Ontario) for supporting the research symposium and the publication of this special issue of *Contact*. Their commitment to this important event for ESL professionals has been a source of encouragement and strength for our association and its members over the past decade. We look forward to continued co-

operation and support from the different ministries involved in language, immigration, settlement and training issues. We also wish to thank all the presenters who participated in the different topics of the symposium for sharing their expertise and insights. Without them, we could not have organized the symposium and compiled these proceedings.

Finally, we thank the many individuals who contributed in one way or another to the success of the Research Symposium. We particularly wish to thank Gary Graves — his skills and commitment made this web edition possible — and TESL Ontario administrative and office staff for supporting us in organizing and preparing the Research Symposium and the opportunity to compile this refereed Research Symposium issue of *Contact*. Without their continuing support, our work would have been more difficult and considerably less pleasant. ❖

Hedy McGarrell

Robert Courchène

Co-editors

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Contact welcomes articles of general interest to association members, including announcements, reports, articles, calls for papers and news items.

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Introduction

This special, refereed issue of *Contact* presents contributions from the Research Symposium organized for TESL Ontario, December 2010. The symposium brought together a number of important experts from across Canada and the USA who shared their research findings on a number of themes and, where possible, considered potential implications and applications to classroom teaching at all levels. Contributions from all three themes of the 2010 Research Symposium are addressed in these proceedings:

The papers selected for inclusion examine a range of complex and often interrelated issues that are explored through different methodologies.

Theme 1 – Communicative Competence Revisited

Two papers from the *Communicative Competence Revisited* theme are included in these proceedings. The first paper, Keith Folse's "Communicative Competence and Grammar Classes Revisited: 1980 and 2010", discusses major changes that occurred over the past 30 years in the teaching of grammar in ESL classrooms. Folse compares some of his experiences in teaching grammar classes in 1980 and in 2010. In his discussion, he reflects on how Canale and Swain's work helped foster a growing emphasis on communicative competence rather than knowledge of rules in the teaching of grammar. Folse highlights six key differences that illustrate these changes.

The second paper on this theme, *From Communicative to Action-Oriented: New Perspectives for a New Millennium* by Enrica Pic-

cardo, examines whether the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR), used by 44 different countries, has been successful in achieving the goals of its developers. It discusses whether the announced aims have been attained, at least partially, and whether attitudes towards language learning and teaching, both among practitioners and researchers, have changed. Based on her involvement in the project "Encouraging the Culture of Evaluation among Practitioners (ECEP)" sponsored by the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe, Piccardo examines how the original notion of communication that formed the basis of the CEFR has evolved over the last decade to encompass a more inclusive view of communication including its linguistic, cognitive, emotional, cultural and social nature. Piccardo also examines how changes to the framework facilitate a more objective assessment of L2 ability (can-do statements) for students and support in developing more transparent rubrics for teachers' classroom observations. Feedback gathered from both students and researchers in member countries has contributed considerably to the widespread success and use of the CEFR.

Theme 2 – Technology: Trends and Issues

Two papers have been included under this theme. The first, *Clickers in the ESL Classroom: The Students' Perspective* by Walcir Cardoso, presents an exploratory study on the use of clickers, a commonly used technology in other subject-matter classrooms, in an English language learning context. Cardoso describes a case study he conducted in Brazil

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with adult learners who were introduced to the clicker technology. Student reactions indicate that, in their views, the use of clickers provided more immediate feedback, increased their participation in the classroom, and resulted in a more direct focus on course content. On the other hand, students were concerned that the course instructor had the ability to identify individual student responses (influencing the teacher's attitudes towards students) and that their responses might not be recorded. Overall, Cardoso concludes, clickers have a valuable role to play in L2 classroom.

In the second paper on this theme, Carol Chapelle in her paper *Evaluating Computer Technology for Language Learning* addresses the challenging question of whether computer technology leads to improved language learning compared to non-computer supported ways of language teaching and learning. While recognizing the inherent attraction technology has for many teachers, educators, publishers and the current generation of technology-savvy students, she questions the basis upon which claims are made for the technology advantage. Chapelle examines the question by describing some of the ways in which the effectiveness of technology has been investigated in second language studies. Examples of research include comparisons between classes that use recent technology and with classes that do not use such technology; surveys of teachers' and learners' opinions about computer-assisted language learning (CALL) materials; discourse analyses of learners' performance in computer-assisted learning tasks and interviews with learners about how they use technology inside and outside the classroom.

Chapelle suggests that issues beyond "traditional" or "computer-based" comparisons need to be considered as outcomes likely vary depending on the nature of participants but concludes that this initial research shows the way to accurate assessments of the quality of technology-based learning and teaching materials.

Theme 3 – Teachers in a Changing Classroom: Needs and Trends

Eve Haque and Ellen Cray in *Between Policy and Practice: Teachers in the LINC Classroom* explore how teachers in Language for Immigrants and Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs perceive the Canadian immigrant language training policy and the place this policy plays in their approach to teaching and assessing the learners in their classes. For their exploratory study, Haque and Cray draw on interview data they collected from LINC teachers to cover issues such as the extent to which teachers use the Benchmarks for assessing learners' progress in LINC programs and for selecting settlement themes in lesson planning; how teachers teach "Canadian values, rights and responsibilities" and how some of the constraints in teaching conditions affect the translation of LINC policy into teaching practice. Their work suggests that a gap exists for these teachers' classroom practice when translating the immigrant language training policy level into a curriculum that responds to the learner's needs in the three areas outlined in the CLB's.

Susan Parks in her paper *Using a WebCT Discussion Forum during the TESL*

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Practicum: Reflection as Social Practice, examines the role a web-based technology (WebCT) might play in promoting student-teacher reflection and, as a consequence fostering change, during teacher practicum segments. She proposes using online discussion groups as opposed to one-on-one teacher – student journaling commonly used in the past. Online discussion groups enable more participants (student teachers and their practicum supervisor) to post comments and to respond to those posted by other members of the group. In her study, Parks, using the social and cognitive components of framework (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2001) modified for her research, describes the type and content of student posts to fellow aspiring teachers during their fourth-year practicum. The author concludes her study by identifying the posts students used most frequently in their online discussions.

We have enjoyed preparing this Special Research Symposium Issue for readers of *Contact*. To grow, members of the TESL profession need to continue to investigate research and teaching practice, while striving for more sophisticated research questions and teaching techniques that allow them to meet the challenges encountered in their classrooms. We hope that the articles contained in this issue will inspire readers to experiment with a new methodology or new techniques in their classrooms. ❖

Hedy McGarrell
Robert Courchène
Co-editors

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COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE REVISITED

Communicative Competence and Grammar Classes Revisited: 1980 and 2010

By Keith Folse, University of Central Florida

Abstract

Thirty years have passed since Canale and Swain published their influential article Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing in 1980. Audiolingualism had just about faded away, and teachers were starting to talk about a more natural, less mechanical way to learn a language. As a result, English language classes changed, reflecting a shift in emphasis from learning language for the sake of learning knowledge to learning English to improve English Language Learners' (ELLs) ability to express themselves in English. In discussing the changes that occurred in the teaching of grammar, the author compares his experiences in teaching grammar classes in 1980 and in 2010. This discussion highlights six key differences in the teaching of grammar due to the growing emphasis on communicative competence that Canale and Swain's work helped foster.

In 1980, Canale and Swain published *Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing in Applied Linguistics*, a then new journal. This influential article reflected a major shift that was developing in English language teaching (ELT). To be certain, ELT is subject to the same predictable pendulum swings that often impact any educational field, but it was impossible in 1980 to predict that the growing emphasis on communicative competence, which stressed being able to use a language rather than just learn about it, would actually take hold and have such a huge impact on ELT. Thirty years later, communicative language teaching has changed the way English is taught, including what textbooks look like, what teachers and learners do in class, and how language learning is measured. This article chronicles these important changes within the context of one specific area of ELT, namely, the teaching of grammar, by comparing grammar classes of 1980 with those of 2010.

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What is communicative competence?

Dell Hymes (1966) first used *communicative competence* in a broad sense to refer to the ways in which native speakers of any language know how to use not just words but also intonation, gestures, and other linguistic and non-linguistic communication features to communicate a message in an intended way, e.g., politely, sarcastically, or pleadingly. This emphasis on sociocultural aspects of communicative competence was in contrast to the then prevailing language theories by Chomsky (1965), in which emphasis was placed on grammatical ability.

For teachers involved in either English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL), communicative competence has a much more practical meaning. For English language teachers, communicative competence refers to a learner's ability to use the target language to communicate (Savignon, 1976). In 2010, this does not seem at all like a new or revolutionary idea, but thirty years ago there was a much stronger emphasis on learning information about English than being able to use English for actual communication. For example, in my second teaching position as an ESL instructor in an intensive English program at a small private college in the U.S. from 1980 to 1984, my grammar tests routinely featured questions such as "Name five verbs that are not usually used in the present progressive tense" or "Can you name seven single-word modals?" Today, in contrast, tests would require application and usage more than rote information recall.

In their 1980 article, Canale and Swain discuss four areas that they consider to be key components of communicative competence: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic

competence. For Canale and Swain, grammatical competence means knowledge of the language itself, including grammatical rules, vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, and all types of linguistic information. Sociolinguistic competence refers to the learner's ability to master the appropriate language devices to indicate register, politeness, and style while accomplishing functions such as turn taking in a conversation or leave taking afterward. Discourse competence, simply put, involves mastery of cohesion and coherence in constructing a message involving multiple utterances or sentences. Finally, strategic competence includes appropriate application of verbal and non-verbal strategies that enable people to overcome communication breakdowns. Clearly, Canale and Swain's message was that being able to use a language was multi-faceted and involved more than just knowing language rules or memorizing dialogues.

Historical Context of Communicative Competence

New ESL or EFL teachers walk into classrooms today where curricula, textbooks, and assessments emphasize communication involving English, not just rote knowledge of English. Learners are expected to be able to use English for a certain purpose, whether it be to speak to a co-worker, apply for a job, pass a university entrance exam, or write a report. As a result, ESL and EFL courses are now geared around the communicative needs of the students, and teacher development programs now train teachers in communicative language teaching. What seems such an obvious goal for ELLs, that is, to be able to use the language for real communication purposes, was not the norm when Canale and Swain published their

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1980 article. In fact, emphasis on communication is a relatively new aspect in ELT, and its implementation is a direct result of work by early pioneers such as Paulston (1974), Savignon (1976), and Terrell (1977). These ideas were further popularized and taken to a worldwide audience by Krashen and Terrell (1983) and Krashen (1985, 1987, 1988).

ELT in 1980: A Historical Context

Any development should be examined within its historical context. The field of ELT has undergone enormous changes in the three decades since Canale and Swain (1980) wrote about the lack of correlation between learners' knowledge of English grammar patterns and their actual communication ability. That is, knowing a lot of information about English did not correlate with higher levels of actual proficiency in using the language to communicate.

To understand more clearly what ELT was like when Canale and Swain as well as Krashen and Terrell wrote their articles, I will compare features typical of the ESL program where I taught in 1980 with features common to more recent ESL and EFL positions where I have taught. Thirty years ago, I taught ESL in an intensive English program at the University of Southern Mississippi. The English Language Institute (ELI) was founded in 1947 and as such is one of the oldest English language programs in the US. A language course at this ELI consisted of five classes daily of one hour each.

“...knowing a lot of information about English did not correlate with higher levels of actual proficiency in using the language to communicate.”

The ELI was in its last year of using the audiolingual method for teaching, and students had a class each in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, pattern practices, and lab. These classes contained numerous drills (teacher-class, teacher-student, teacher-student-student) and dialogues (teacher-class and student-student). All classes practiced patterns, used very limited vocabulary, and manipulated linguistic features. In class exercises, there was usually only one desired, acceptable answer. Errors had no place, were not tolerated, and needed to be eliminated in speaking and writing. Very little original language use occurred in class, either by the students in speech or in writing. Spoken tasks and written worksheets focused on perfecting linguistic patterns from the drills.

The book that we used in the ELI grammar classes in 1980 was *English Sentence Structure* (Krohn, 1971), which was a very popular book at that time. *English Sentence Structure* was part of the Lado series of audiolingual-based books published by the University of Michigan and mentioned several times in Canale and Swain's article. It is worth noting that the University of Michigan is the home of perhaps the first intensive English program in the US (1941) and is where many of the original audiolingual teaching publications were developed, including *English Sentence Patterns* (Fries, 1958), *English Pattern Practices* (Lado, Fries, and Staff, 1958), *Vocabulary in Context* (Franklin, Meikle, Strain

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and Staff, 1964), and *English Conversation Practices* (Phinney, Hok, Minkewitz, and Nilsen, 1968).

How different were grammar lessons in textbooks then? The passive voice, a very common upper intermediate ELT grammar point, serves as an example. In a textbook today, the lesson on the passive voice would most likely begin with a sample of real writing or a real dialogue – probably selected from a large corpus of specific language usage such as university lectures, history textbooks, or friend-to-friend conversations, in which several examples of the passive voice occur. Students might be asked to notice the passive voice forms (which may be underlined or in bold). In some grammar books today, students may be asked to read the examples and then figure out how this language point is different from the English they had previously studied, i.e., they learn the grammar inductively. Learners would also be asked to consider the sociolinguistic context of the language, that is, who is saying what to whom and in what particular context. Is the grammar point (passive voice) used in every sentence? Is it used primarily for a certain topic? In the book's sample, is this grammar point used by one kind of person (e.g., a teacher) more than another

“Today’s teacher would likely be shocked to find that there are no fill-in-the-blank exercises, no extended discourse, no free speaking opportunities, and no pair work or group work interaction.”

(e.g., a student)? This presentation and initial interaction would be followed by several kinds of practice tasks, including both written and spoken practices, with some work in pairs or small groups to allow learners to use the passive voice in actual communication. The lesson would probably conclude with one or two consolidation exercises as review. Finally, many books would also include additional exercises on a CD or a website.

The 1980 lesson on the same grammar point offers an example of sharp contrast. The entire lesson on passive voice in *English Sentence Structure* (Krohn, 1971) consisted of just three pages. The first page and a half introduced the passive voice, including a listing of six sentences in six verb tenses in both active and passive voices. The second and third pages contained one long mechanical transformation drill. In this drill, students were given an active voice sentence and asked to make it passive. For example, given “They write letters every day,” students should produce “Letters are written every day.” Finally, the last page contained a note that passive sentences are used in place of the corresponding active sentences when the subject of the active sentence is unimportant or unknown. Today’s teacher would likely be shocked to find that there are no fill-in-the-blank exercises, no extended discourse, no free speaking opportunities, and no pair work or group work interaction. In audiolin-

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qual texts, there was practically no discussion of actual usage of the passive voice, and there were no real examples at either the sentence or extended discourse level (Celce-Murcia, 2007).

Reflecting the audiolingual method still in vogue in the early 1980s, students focused on grammatical competency to the exclusion of all other communicative competencies. Learning passive voice in 1980 was all about a learner's ability to manipulate the passive and active forms of any given verb. It was not at all about anyone's ability to use passive voice (or active voice) at the appropriate time in a manner suitable to accomplish a desired form of communication. It would be fair to say that the main difference is that grammatical competence prior to 1980 meant knowing *about* passive voice form, while today learners are expected to *know* passive voice so well that they can actually use it. This change in purpose of learning a language did not happen immediately as a result of Canale and Swain's work. In fact, the audiolingual method is still used in some schools.

Developments in Grammar Teaching

Many changes have occurred in various aspects of ELT, but perhaps the most notable area to have changed involves the role of grammar in English language classes in English language courses. In this section, I will enumerate six changes that have occurred in grammar teaching over the past three decades, focusing on how ELT is different now from how it was in my first ESL class in 1980.

1. The purpose of grammar in ELT

In the 1970s, grammar still equalled sentence patterns and was based around pat-

terns. Titles of popular textbooks even featured the word *patterns*, as in *English Sentence Patterns* (Fries, 1958), *English Pattern Practices* (Lado et al., 1958), *Vocabulary in Context* (Franklin et al., 1964), and *English Conversation Practices* (Phinney et al., 1968). The audiolingual method may have been waning, but teachers were trained to base their classes around pattern practices, pattern production, and rapid language drills involving these patterns.

Classroom practice of language to express a communicative purpose was rare or non-existent. ELLs repeated "I would like some coffee, but I don't want any sugar" not to express information about the beverage they wanted but rather to practice the linguistic distinction between using *some* for positive and *any* for negative meaning. When students wrote a short paragraph about the daily life of a good friend, the purpose was not to communicate what that person actually did every day but rather to practice the use of third person -s on all of the verbs in the paragraph. In parallel fashion, language tests consisted of discrete-items that tested a single grammar point, as in the following example:

No one _____ the piano as well as Susan.

- A. Play.
- B. Doesn't play.
- C. Can play.
- D. Is playing.

2. The significance of learner errors

In audiolingualism, any error was viewed as a serious deviation that had to be eradicated. Errors were a sign of lack of learn-

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ing, of some kind of problem. In 1967, Corder wrote of the real significance of learner errors; his work encouraged teachers to view learner errors as indicators of a transition in the learner's mind and not as errors that needed teacher intervention. Perhaps due to the grip that audiolingualism had on the field, teachers' and learners' negative view of learner errors persisted for many years to come.

The work of Corder and others, however, was in the end instrumental in the creation of the new field of Second Language Acquisition, where researchers began to study how learners actually acquire a language, focusing not just on the final product but the process along the way. Because of their work, learner errors came to be seen as a necessary part of the learning process and accepted as actual information about the development of a given part of a language in the learners' minds.

In the textbooks and curriculum that I used in 1980, the goal was eradicating language errors so that learners would produce perfect or nearly perfect utterances, not communicating real ideas. It is now recognized that errors in certain areas of grammar, such as prepositions and articles, are predictable and persistent despite any attempt by teachers to eradicate them; this knowledge should inform teaching.

**“These days most
ESL programs...
feature a
composition
course in which
students learn
about the process
and product of
good composing in
English.”**

3. The teaching of composition

In 1980, any writing that was done in an intensive English course was viewed as a welcome opportunity to practice grammar. In other words, there was no emphasis on students' ability to compose well enough to communicate their ideas through writing. Writing was not composing; instead, writing was an opportunity to practice and demonstrate mastery of grammar. ELT writing courses and assignments emphasized the learners' final product, not the writing process through which ELLs arrived at their final written product. As the emphasis on communicating ideas in a language took hold, there was a growing trend to focus more on the process of composing instead of merely the end product (Zamel, 1985; Raimes, 1991; Cumming, 2001).

In an influential article on teaching ESL writing, Zamel (1985) noted the new trend toward process-oriented ESL writing courses. These days most ESL programs, especially those in which students' overarching goal is to gain entrance to an academic institution, feature a composition course in which students learn about the process and product of good composing in English. To be certain, grammar still plays an important, albeit controversial role, in any ESL composition course today (Ferris, 1999, 2004; Truscott 1996, 2004), but the curriculum is now more likely guided by student needs, that is, the types of compositions that ELLs need to master, not just the grammatical features associated with those compositions.

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4. Knowledge about ESL grammar

In 1980, teachers and their students adhered for the most part to the grammar in their textbooks. Little thought was given to whether ELLs actually needed this grammar for any communicative purpose whatsoever. Doing well in an intensive English program often meant passing a high stakes test such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP), both of which included many question items on discrete grammar and vocabulary items. Grammar points were taught because they might supposedly appear on these exit exams, but I don't recall any debate as to which came first, the grammar points in the books or the grammar points in the tests. In other words, an unquestioned and self-perpetuating cycle of teaching to the test only reinforced the notion that these particular grammar points were indeed important.

For example, I remember that when I taught a lesson on modals, I taught that *have to* equals *must* and that *must* has two meanings: obligation (*You must do that*) and conclusion (*You must be from Sweden*). However, when the students then produced utterances such as "I must study tonight" in routine conversation, a statement which few speakers of North American English would use in conversation, no one corrected them. The grammar book indicated that this was a potential utterance, so it was tolerated.

As teachers began to recognize the importance of communicative competence and, therefore, students' actual communication needs, consideration was given to which grammatical structures ELLs actually needed to introduce themselves, to talk about their families, to apply for a job, or to pass a written essay for college entrance. Gradually, textbooks began

to consider when and how certain structures were used instead of just how to form them. The example of the present perfect tense, one of the most difficult grammar points for ELLs (Folse, 2009a) serves to illustrate the point. In addition to ELLs' questions about the form of this verb tense (e.g., *Why do you use have? Why is the negative have not lived instead of don't have lived?*), there is the important question of when native speakers actually use this tense. While most tenses have a relatively small set of purposes, the present perfect tense can be used for three seemingly mutually exclusive purposes—to express the present, to express the past, and to express the future (Folse, 2009b). In English, this tense is typically used to talk about a present situation, as in "I have lived in Florida since 1995," a past situation, as in "I have also lived in Japan," and a future situation, as in "After I have lived here for twenty years, I might retire." This verb tense must seem bizarre to ELLs whose languages have a very different way of expressing time or aspect, especially when they find that this one verb form can be used for the present, the past, and the future.

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) show how the use of the present perfect tense is often used to gain the floor in a group conversation. An example of this would be two people talking about vacation destinations when a third person speaks up to say, "I've been to France three times." At this point, one of the other interlocutors will likely add "Oh, really?" or some other filler to elicit further information.

Under the audiolingual framework, ELLs would produce ten sentences with the present perfect tense, but the sole purpose was to practice the correct form. Textbook authors now typically include an array of written and

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spoken tasks to practice grammar not for grammar's sake, but rather for some communicative purpose, such as the one Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman discuss for present perfect tense.

Ellis (2006) writes of an “understood” sort of grammar syllabus that many ELT textbook writers use in organizing their books. This hidden syllabus often includes the following grammar points in the following order: simple present tense of verb *to be*, simple present tense of other verbs, simple past of *to be*, simple past of regular verbs, simple past of irregular verbs, etc. As Ellis points out, there is often no rhyme or reason as to why one grammar feature is sequenced after another—except that is the way it has always been done.

Grammar textbooks sometimes omit important grammar points. Biber and Reppen (2002) use detailed analysis of hundreds of pieces of actual English language use to show how certain common grammatical features are still not covered in many popular grammar textbooks even though there is ample evidence that these grammatical features are commonly used and not easily grasped by ELLs. One interesting example from Biber and Reppen (2002) involves nouns used as adjectives to modify another noun, as in a *plastic dish*, where *plastic* as N1 is used to modify *dish* as N2. This seemingly easy grammar point would lead ELLs to

“...certain common grammatical features are still not covered in many popular grammar textbooks even though there is ample evidence that these grammatical features are commonly used.”

surmise that the meaning of this structure of N1 + N2 is that N2 is made of N1, i.e., the dish (N2) is made of plastic (N1). However, upon considering common noun phrases such as *winter day*, *history test*, *traffic problem*, and *population control*, it quickly becomes apparent that the relationship between the two nouns is semantically complex though grammatically simple, i.e., one noun goes in front of the other without any change in form of either noun, but the meaning of one noun in relation to the other is not clear, especially to a non-native speaker of English.

Computer technology now allows researchers to collect vast corpora of language samples and analyze them accurately and quickly to reveal the grammar that is actually used in English. Furthermore, separate analyses of written and spoken English show that spoken English has a greater number of different rules for syntax than written English (McCarthy and Carter, 1995). For instance, spoken English allows grammatical patterns such as incomplete sentences and interruptions that written English does not allow.

Comparisons of this information about corpus-based grammar usage with the little information available in 1980 reveals the marked differences in the information available to researchers and teachers in the two periods. With the availability today of multimillion-word corpora, including specialized databases of spoken language, academic language, or even university lectures, it is possible to identify the grammatical patterns most

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useful for ELLs' specific communication needs when exiting their English classes.

5. Types of activities in class – who talks to whom in class?

I would venture to say that almost all ESL teachers today include at least some pair work, small group work, or both in their daily lesson plans. However, when grammar was viewed as something to be learned almost for the sake of knowing it rather than as a tool for achieving communicative competence, most interaction in the grammar classroom was teacher-centred. Teachers presented grammar, students did some oral drills, and then students answered completion (i.e., fill in the blank) questions in student workbooks or teacher-generated worksheets. Today's grammar classes may feature some of these activities, but most classes also aim to have students actually use the grammatical structures for some communicative activities, very often in the form of pair or group work.

Canale and Swain (1980, p. 36) were prescient when they concluded that the field of ESL needed to work on the "development of classroom activities that encourage meaningful communication in the second language and are administratively feasible." Could they have imagined today's classes in which interactive tasks are the norm?

In the late 1980s, I attended a teacher workshop on using strip stories, a kind of jigsaw activity promoting meaningful communication along the lines proposed by Canale and Swain (1980). In this activity, each participant uses a unique part of a short joke or anecdote as part of a communicative activity in which all the students are to stand up, say their piece as many times as necessary, and then put themselves and, therefore the story, in the correct sequential order. ELLs practice grammar, vo-

cabulary, and pronunciation in this type of activity. In the workshop, all participants took part in a demonstration of this activity that I enjoyed very much. When it came time for questions, I distinctly remember asking, "But what does the teacher do? Won't the students all be talking and carrying on?" The answer to this question is "Well, yes, but that is the goal of the class – to get students speaking in English, right?" I was actually afraid of the possible "chaos" that might ensue!

I cringe now as I think back on my limited teacher mindset at the time, but I think I was typical of most ESL teachers then. In my original training from the 1970s and initial teaching job in 1980, teachers were not instructed to encourage students to talk to each other in grammar class unless they were doing a drill or checking homework. Though it is difficult for me to believe it now, I do not think I ever did pair work in my early classes. To be certain, I occasionally initiated a game as a whole class activity or in small teams, but in class, teachers taught and students studied. Teachers new to language teaching today may have a difficult time believing that teachers at one time wanted ELLs to be quiet, not talk, and to learn rules, not worry about applying them.

6. The integral role of vocabulary as part of grammatical competence

As someone very interested in the role of vocabulary in second language communicative competence, I have been especially happy to see the growing emphasis on vocabulary in ELT today. For decades, grammar was understood to be the main building block of any language. Now it is widely accepted that vocabulary is crucial to being able to function in a language and that grammar is not nearly as important as vocabulary when it comes to getting one's message across in a foreign language (Folse, 2004). Wilkins (1972) summarizes the

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situation best with his often quoted "While without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary *nothing* can be conveyed" (p. 111). Adult L2 learners are painfully aware of their plight. They see acquisition of vocabulary as their greatest source of problems (Green & Meara, 1995; Meara, 1980).

In the conclusion of their 1980 article, Canale and Swain's most important recommendation for further research was that a description of the communication needs of a given group of second language learners, including the speech community in which the second language is most likely to be used, be completed. They also recommended focusing on what peers talk about and what language forms are most frequently used. Thirty years later, with computer technology and large corpora of real language use, it is possible to analyze and then describe with accuracy the language needs for many groups of learners, including students who need academic language.

Data and analyses gained through corpus linguistics can inform of many important facts about actual language use. For example, such data can inform what vocabulary is used in history (or any subject) books, thus permitting teachers to plan lessons accordingly. Similarly, they provide information on the words and phrases that are used in formal academic papers and those used in informal conversations. They facilitate the identification of the most useful collocations for a given word and then help ELLs learn these common combinations. When teachers teach a certain grammar point, such as the present progressive tense, they can also teach students which verbs are most commonly used in this particular tense (Folse, forthcoming).

A concrete example of how corpus linguistics can inform teachers, curriculum writers, and textbook writers involves the language used in grammar books. When illustrat-

ing a verb tense, articles, or prepositions, for example, most grammar book authors strive to limit vocabulary in their work to allow ELLs to focus on the grammar point being introduced and not be distracted by new vocabulary. One of the most widely known ESL grammar book authors, Betty Azar (2007, p.10) confirms that in grammar-based teaching

New vocabulary is not introduced at the same time a new structure is introduced. Unfamiliar vocabulary can interfere with students' understanding the meaning of a grammar form. After the structure is well understood and practiced, new vocabulary is brought in, especially in contextualized exercises. When structures have common collocations (such as the passive with *get*, e.g., *get tired* or *get excited*), students are made aware of these collocations and practice them in typical contexts.

Though laudable, the intentional limiting of textbook vocabulary to words that the author thinks are common produces unnatural English. For example, Biber and Reppen (2002) found that the twelve most common lexical verbs are not covered extensively in grammar books. Instead, authors use vocabulary that illustrates the grammar point, e.g., using the verb *revolve* as in *The earth revolves around the sun* to illustrate the use of simple present tense for an action that is always true. While this usage is accurate, the textbook is dedicating space to teaching the verb *revolve* while giving disproportionately less attention (and in some cases no attention) to the top twelve lexical verbs, namely (in order of frequency) *get*, *go*, *say*, *know*, *think*, *see*, *want*, *come*, *mean*, *take*, *make*, and *give* (Biber & Reppen, 2002).

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In recent years, outstanding volumes on English grammar usage have been written based on large corpora. Two of the most notable works include *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (1999) and *Cambridge Grammar of English: A Comprehensive Guide Spoken and Written English* (2006). These texts are based on large corpus samples of real language. That is, these texts are based on what language users actually say and write, not what a teacher or researcher *thinks* they say. Teachers' intuitions will not suffice. For teachers and learners who want to investigate the usage of a certain word or phrase in a large corpus, two valuable sites are *Compleat Lexical Tutor* (Cobb, 2010) and *Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)* (Davies, 2010). The *Compleat Lexical Tutor* is a website with concordancer, vocabulary profiler, exercise maker, interactive exercises, and much more. COCA, which makes use of over 400 million words from American English from 1900 to the present, allows searches for an extensive number of possible pieces of information about different words or phrases.

In sum, a tremendous amount more is known about vocabulary than previously, and a major impetus that has pushed the field in this direction has been communicative competence. It is now widely recognized that with any grammatical structure, there is probably a set of words and phrases that tends to co-occur with that grammatical structure. In other words, there is a much stronger connection between a grammar point and vocabulary than was previously imagined. ESL teachers' top priority in a grammar class is to help students communicate more effectively; emphasizing both fluency and accuracy, and information from corpus linguistics is helping them identify the key vocabulary that accompanies the specific syntactic structures being taught.

Conclusion

The teaching of ESL has most certainly experienced major changes in the thirty years since the publication of Canale and Swain's (1980) *Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing*. Grammar is no longer viewed as mere pattern practice, teachers include pair work in daily lessons, and computer technology and specialized corpora now inform educators of the most common syntactic structures as well as the key vocabulary used that ELLs should learn in conjunction with a given grammatical structure.

Thirty years from now, what will our ESL grammar classrooms look like? Given all the changes that have occurred in these past three decades, it is difficult to imagine classrooms in 2040. In their article, Canale and Swain aimed to "question some of the existing principles and in turn to develop a somewhat modified set of principles ... for the consideration of communicative competence" (1). As teachers and researchers work on the age-old question of how best to teach a second language, language teachers will continue to question existing principles and only time will tell what new developments will emerge. ❖

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COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE REVISITED

From Communicative to Action-Oriented: New Perspectives For a New Millennium¹

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Abstract

Nearly a decade after the publication of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR), when looking at the European reality, it is important to explore the following questions: Have the announced aims been attained, at least partially? Have attitudes towards language learning and teaching, both among practitioners and researchers, changed? Based on my involvement in the project "Encouraging the Culture of Evaluation among Practitioners (ECEP)" sponsored by the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe, I focus this article on major concepts of the new philosophy that the CEFR has introduced in Europe, considering their impact both at the institutional level and in everyday teaching practices. In particular, I discuss the shift towards a more complex vision of language teaching and learning, which still considers communication as a major factor but which includes several other aspects of a linguistic, cognitive, emotional, cultural and social nature as well as general ideas of transparency, coherence and quality assurance in curricula for language programs.

The CEFR ten years after: Where are we now?

In less than a year, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) will celebrate its first ten years of existence. This is its "real" life, the one following paper publication, but as is the case for all the Council of Europe documents, a previous, virtual life existed. Back in the late 1990s a draft version of the CEFR was made available on the website produced by an international working party active from 1993 to 1996. This, in turn, was the result of a process which had been initiated at the beginning of the decade, in 1991, in

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1. I was working at the University of Grenoble (France) until July 2009, before assuming my present position in Toronto, so the perspective adopted is internal to Europe, as are the references to the research leading to the ECEP project of the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz, <http://ecep.ecml.at/>. I would like to thank professor Alister Cumming for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper as well as Merlin Charles for her help with linguistic revision and editing.

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Switzerland, when a Council of Europe symposium "Transparency and Coherence in Language Learning in Europe: objectives, evaluation, certification" took place in Rüschtikon, near Zurich, organized by several Swiss institutions.

As North (2007, p. 22) pointed out, "the main aim of the Symposium had been to investigate the feasibility of relating language courses and assessments in Europe to each other through some kind of common framework." In fact, the landscape of school certificates and language benchmarking across Europe had developed along diverse lines, thus often resulting in a rather blurred picture, where different institutions referred to such diverse proficiency levels as "beginners/intermediate/advanced" or to grades (be it in letters or all sorts of numeric scales, or a coded series of synthetic judgments). The idea was to develop an extensive, coherent and transparent reference tool to describe communicative language competences and language proficiency in order to overcome the ongoing vague professional discourse. In addition, another working group was set up to establish possible forms and functions of a European Language Portfolio, in which individuals could enter all their experiences and qualifications in the area of language learning, and to devise some Portfolio prototypes.

"What was meant to be a reference instrument for the comparability of language certificates now covers not just assessment, but also teaching and learning..."

The initial aims of the project were far less ambitious than the actual results might indicate. Indeed, the CEFR has no doubt had—and is still having—a major impact on language teaching practices throughout Europe and in many parts of the world beyond. It was John Trim who had a real "vision" and who was able to transform "a project which was, in a sense, technical to start with, into something vastly more ambitious and far-reaching" (Coste, 2007, p. 38). What was meant to be a reference instrument for the comparability of language certificates now covers not just assessment, but also teaching and learning—and does so with no methodological dogmatism, but rather as an instrument for dialogue and co-operation among different countries, with different educational and teaching traditions (Coste, 2007).

In considering the initial aim of the project, that of providing a tool for systematizing descriptions and for comparing exams and, above all, certifications provided by different agencies in different countries, it can be affirmed that the stated aims of the CEFR have been fully attained. From Moscow to Lisbon, from Reykjavik to Cyprus, every language teacher in Europe now speaks in terms of A1, B2 or C1. In turn, expressions like false beginner, beginner or intermediate have simply lost their significance.

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2. The term "practitioners" is used in this article as opposed to "researcher." In this sense it overlaps with the term "teacher." Here the two are thus to be considered as synonyms.

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Of course, at a deeper level, practitioners² are still struggling with the inevitable question, “Is your B1 the same as my B1?” But considering how different educational traditions are in Europe, sharing a common basis for understanding is already a remarkable result. At this point several projects are being conducted, aimed at fine-tuning the perceptions and therefore the coherent definitions of the levels.³

Moving to a higher taxonomic level, however, there is the core question of if and how the CEFR has changed both attitudes and practices in the field of language teaching and learning. Here there is a far more complex and diverse scenario. This situation relates to the extent to which teachers have been exposed to targeted professional development as well as to the quality of professional development itself. But this is not the whole picture; it is a simplified vision of the problem. The main issue is the attitude towards the CEFR, which links to both the nature of the document itself and to the educational as well as pedagogical culture of each country. While the implementation of the CEFR as a reference tool is spreading all over Europe and beyond, too often teachers are rather puzzled when they are faced with the conceptual density of this document. In fact, they usually tend to limit themselves to using the assessment grids just the way they are. In the process, they forget—or are unable—to see that the tool is really what they themselves will decide to make out of it. Indeed, the CEFR’s assessment grids are often used as a series of juxtaposed de-

scriptors, without considering (and adapting) them in light of different contexts, representations and teaching/learning cultures.

The principal deficiency that has been identified in the CEFR concerns the nature of the Framework as a tool for reference:

The CEFR is a descriptive not pre-scriptive framework. It does not tell practitioners what to do, or how to do it. It raises questions for reflection and offers options compatible with the vision and goals of the [Council of Europe] CoE. The standard introductory phrase to the different set of questions in the framework is: “Users of the Framework may wish to consider and where appropriate state.”

As it is not the function of the CEFR to lay down the objectives that users should pursue or the methods they should employ, it has to provide decision makers with options and reference points to stimulate reflection and facilitate the formulation of coherent objectives for their specific educational context. (Schärer, 2007, p.8).

The descriptive nature of the CEFR allows it to be considered as a meta-system able to provide reference points, to establish a metalan-

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3. Among the several projects, the most complete and specific one is the project which has produced a Manual for relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Manuel1_FR.asp, together with several related documents. Other projects are to be found at the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe website, http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/default_EN.asp

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guage common across educational sectors as well as national and linguistic boundaries, rather than as a tool to be implemented without further elaboration and adaptation to local circumstances (North, 2007, as cited in Schärer, 2007, p. 9). Moving from this tool — and in alignment with it — teachers are expected to reconsider their own teaching approaches in order to develop their own tools for assessment within their specific contexts, instead of adopting the tool itself wholesale and, worse, reducing it to a scale of proficiency.

Coste has recently explained this odd use of the CEFR by means of an enlightening figurative device. He talks of “a kind of reverse metonymy: instead of a part denoting the whole (like the old use of “a sail” to mean “a ship”), the whole designates a part: “the ship” means “the sail,” and “the framework” means “the levels of proficiency” (Coste, 2007, p. 41). He adds:

If people say “sail” when they mean “ship”, the reason may be that the sail is the thing they see first from a distance, and the thing which propels the whole by responding to the wind. In the Framework’s case, the six levels are clearly the most eye-catching feature, and the part most responsive to the trends of the moment. At the same time (in keeping with this simple metaphor), the sail, though it may provide propulsion, is nothing without the hull and its contents: the people it carries, who regulate the course.

I would like to go one step further with this image. No doubt the people who regulate the course are very important, but the type of ship itself makes a big difference. How different it is to steer a yacht compared to a cabin cruiser? How much more skill the former requires is widely known. In a sailing ship all different devices need to be taken into consideration as well as their interaction and interdependence: the inclination angle, the length of each rope, the extension of the sails, when it is better to increase or to reduce them, the act of operating the sails and being on the helm at the same time, on power and direction, and so on and so forth, until you arrive at the moment you need to cut down all sail power and to start the engine because no other solution is possible. This type of scenario is exactly what was envisaged for the CEFR: coping with a large quantity of diverse elements, which all play a role in the process. As in a sailing ship, none of them is meaningless and their synergy can be extremely powerful as well as “environmentally friendly.” This synergy is indeed what can help to move from communicative language teaching to an action-oriented approach.

Practitioners facing change: Threads observed and reasons for a project

Changes in pedagogy are not only the result of progress in research: They have always been connected to societal factors. Among these, dealing with change has never been an easy task. Europe has undergone a profound process of change since the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, and that process is still ongoing. The need for more extended communication to create a common space for dialogue and cooperation has been one of the key conditions underpinning the development of a shared reference tool. The CEFR has shown itself to be a

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powerful tool to introduce change, exerting considerable impact on language pedagogy and, generally, on education at different levels. As Schärer (2007, p. 10) observed,

Evidence is emerging that the visions and concepts at the heart of the CEFR do have a predominately positive effect on learning and teaching, but also that a sustained effort over a long period of time will be needed to implement the visions and concepts into the daily school routine. Europe and the “state-of-the-art” in language education have changed profoundly since 1991 and 2001. Certainly not all credit can be attributed to the CoE and the CEFR. There is evidence, however, that their contributions have been considerable.

Collective reflection on what researchers and experts have pointed out in various contexts, together with personal, hands-on experience in different areas of the diverse realities characterizing Europe, have been at the origin of the ECEP project, which is being conducted within the present program of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML). ECEP stands for “Encouraging the Culture of Evaluation among Professionals: The case of language teachers.” It is, as mentioned above, a project of the ECML, which, in turn, has been established through an enlarged mandate of the Council of Europe. The aim of the ECML is to support language policies set by the Council of Europe at different levels and to foster teacher development and applied research in language education.

ECEP is a four-year project, which is now at the half-way point. The publication of the final product will be in 2011. The project is integrated into the thematic strand “Evaluation” of the 2008-2011 program “Empowering language professionals. Competences, networks, impact, quality.” The ECEP international project team includes members who are actively involved in both research and teacher development in four different countries (France, Germany, Italy and Poland) plus additional consultants from Finland and Canada. The exploratory and piloting phases (November 2007 to May 2008) showed results which were quite homogeneous in the various countries and contexts despite differences in their cultures of teaching and learning, consistent with the problem pointed out by Coste above.

The data collected for this initial phase of the project included the exploration of the culture of evaluation in four different national contexts. This exploratory phase was conducted through:

- Exchanges with teachers (through interviews and questionnaires);
- Recordings from focus groups in secondary schools;
- Analyses of assessment formats and grids; and
- Analyses of French masters’ theses on assessment.

The results showed a rather ambivalent relationship to the CEFR: Teachers were all faced with an institutional injunction (which was more or less coercive according to each organization and national context), but this institutional demand resulted in different reactions

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among practitioners (sometimes even opposite ones). Some teachers resisted it, or at least were extremely critical, as they considered this document another burden on their already busy professional lives. Others, on the contrary, were extremely pleased to find their teaching and assessing practices valued and encouraged at last, finding a space for freedom of growth and progress. In between these two extremes, there were two main positions: “the spectators”, observing how things were going to develop, somehow attracted but still very cautious, and “the good students”, trying to study and understand such a complex document in order to exploit it for their own practices.

For nearly all of them, including the enthusiastic ones, the most visible part of the CECR (i.e., the global scale and, to a greater or lesser extent, the other scales of descriptors) was also the most important one. Only a small minority proceeded to explore the different key-concepts of the CEFR, often doing so out of personal interest, not because they had received any specific professional development, which inspired them to follow that path. A possible explanation for this trend is the paucity of reflective learning theory in ordinary teacher education, especially during in-service education, a common scenario also confirmed by other projects of the ECML (Fenner & Newby, 2006). Teachers' tendency to ignore theories behind the various pedagogical principles is a very risky attitude indeed, one that can leave them at the mercy of pedagogical dogma. Most

of the teachers encountered felt rather hesitant, asking themselves if what they were doing—and had been doing—suited the CEFR. This scenario, with some minor variations, was observed in all the countries involved in the initial phase of the project. According to the literature, there seemed to be a similar pattern in other countries as well.

Despite the differing reception, and consideration, of the CEFR itself as a change-fostering reference, several of its major threads are to be seen in language classes, implemented by different practitioners, be it at a conscious or unconscious level. The project team was therefore encouraged in pursuing the main aim of the ECEP project, that of building self-confidence among language teachers, whose image and mission too often suffer from social, technological and political changes. The idea was to enable them to develop a free and autonomous attitude towards the Common European Framework, beyond the

“The idea was to make [teachers] aware of the character of openness and flexibility that the philosophy of the CEFR intends to provide...”

“for or against” debates, to make them aware of the character of openness and flexibility that the philosophy of the CEFR intends to provide, and to support them by confirming the relevance of some of their most innovative pedagogical choices. The “for or against” debates have been observed at all levels, and they too often have ended up by hiding the very nature of the CEFR as just a framework, not at all prescriptive material. But above all, they hide the fact that the CEFR is not some kind of strange and disturbing ministerial construction, but rather the

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product of a rich pedagogical development achieved through diverse and multidisciplinary research as well as through numerous contributions from different cultures.

The ECEP project will produce a theoretical and practical reference tool for teacher educators, and therefore for teachers too. This tool will consist of two parts: (a) a guide to the CEFR, getting to the nitty-gritty of the key-concepts and to their links with (and impact on) assessment, and (b) a training kit, aimed at fostering reflection on these same concepts as well as at supporting practical implementation in teacher development sessions. The Guide is already in final draft form and has undergone a thorough process of sharing and revision by language professionals from all over the Council of Europe. The kit is presently under construction and will undergo the same large-scale revision before publication.

The CEFR: Non-dogmatic but challenging?

The sense of insecurity towards the CEFR, as discussed above, is not just the consequence of poor or lacking teacher development, even if this factor certainly plays a major role. There is another aspect that deserves greater attention. I am referring to the “*horror vacui*” or “horror of empty spaces” that seizes some practitioners when faced with the considerable freedom the CEFR allows them. This can be viewed as a consequence of the well-known attitude to search for “the” method, for some readymade or guaranteed solutions to be applied in language classes. Well, the CEFR claims exactly the opposite. Not only does it declare itself as open and non-dogmatic but above all, it is introducing in Europe a new “philosophy” with regards to language teach-

ing and learning. This new vision is having a noticeable impact on classroom reality and on language learning in general, inside and outside institutions, even though it requires a great commitment from practitioners, who are called to choose options and be decision-makers at all levels of the process, and from learners, who are made responsible for their own learning processes. By declaring itself as non-dogmatic, the CEFR does not intend to leave language educators unequipped for their profession and daily practices; on the contrary, teachers are faced with a very rewarding, though demanding role.

A closer look at the concepts underpinning this new vision of language teaching and learning is appropriate at this point. Probably the major parameter shift fostered by the CEFR concerns the role of learners and teachers in the process of language learning, the teachers being professionals, decision-makers, mentors and mediators, the learners bearing responsibility for the learning process in and out of the institution. In accepting the term “post-communicative foreign language learning/teaching” (Byram, 1988), there has been a move from Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to the Action-oriented Approach proposed by the CEFR. This move is strongly linked to the view of language and the theories of acquisition proposed by applied linguistics in recent years, urging that language education “need[s] to be expanded to take on board more general learning theories emanating in particular from the direction of cognitive psychology” (Newby, 2006, p.113). This Action-oriented Approach—in line with so-called post-communicative language teaching—is visibly linked to constructivism and this “in its various forms is at the core of principles relating to apparently diverse areas such as learner autonomy, intercultural awareness and grammar.”

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Practitioners should be aware that there is no such thing as theoretically neutral methodology (Newby, 2006, p.116) and that all different teaching methodologies are linked to a foundation theory. What characterizes the Action-oriented Approach and the threads indicated by the CEFR, however, is emphasis on the wealth and complexity of the underpinning theory. Constructivism can be viewed as the core reference theory, but many other theories have contributed to it. As the product of shared expertise and collective contributions, which brought together different pedagogical traditions in Europe, the CEFR was nurtured by diverse research and ended up incorporating different threads and forcibly providing coherence.

Drawing from diverse theories and research to move a step forward

In considering the development of language pedagogy research over the past few decades, methodologists have enriched their theoretical frameworks with several new areas of study. This tendency may be perceived by practitioners as another burden on their teaching load (Newby, 2006, p.113). In reality, this development does not have to be viewed as incremental, but rather as cyclical. With the introduction of CLT in the 1970s, grammatical competence was not to be seen as juxtaposed to communicative competence, although this was unfortunately the result of some misinterpreta-

tions of CLT (Fenner, 2006, p.11). Rather, grammatical competence is embedded within the more comprehensive concept of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Brown, 2001, p. 43). Language learning aims were to be considered “as redefined in terms of skills and performance” (Newby, 2006, p.113). In a similar way, the CEFR’s Action-oriented Approach has embedded the idea of communicative competence in a broader and deeper three-folded general competence scheme. This is rooted in the concept of “existential competence” (*savoir être*), in which learners are able not only to display declarative knowledge (*savoir*) by means of targeted skills and know-how (*savoir-faire*), but to increase and self-develop through the ability to learn how to learn (*savoir apprendre*).

This complex vision of general competence is paralleled by a complex vision of communicative language competence, which includes linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences. Bearing in mind the classical difference between competence and performance⁴, the CEFR includes what were previously called “the four skills,” now renamed “communicative activities,” as a component of overall language proficiency, but supplemented with two new communicative activities, “interaction” and “mediation.” The former, especially, is having a considerable impact on teaching practice. The idea of interaction helps practitioners move from a somewhat conventional, unilateral vision of communication, to a new dynamic view, where exchange and co-construction of texts—be they oral or written—

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4. In stressing this dichotomy I am referring both to notion of performance proposed by Chomsky and to the term communicative competence proposed by Hymes (which eventually describes language in terms of acts of communication), as they both, beyond all contrasts, focus on the description of the language in terms of use.

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are vital. With reference to underlying research, this is the concept that is directly linked to studies in discourse analysis, but not exclusively, as discussed below. The impact of sociocultural theory has also proved very strong, especially in some cultures, to the point that even the construction of learner autonomy is seen as a collaborative, social and interactive process (Fenner, 2006).

Furthermore, an Action-oriented Approach implies a real shift in paradigm from one of knowledge and disjunction to one of competence and complexity. Object and subject, reflection and action, learner and user are not separated, but united with the aim of using the language in more or less complex situations, e.g., from reading a leaflet to reading a play by William Shakespeare (Bourguignon, 2006, p. 63). But because action is unpredictable, teachers need to prepare learners to deal with unforeseen situations (Bourguignon, 2006; Markee, 1996; Tudor, 2001). This can be achieved by developing different strategies that are both language- and action-oriented. The notion of competence needs to be supplemented by the notion of dynamics—by constructing, modifying, adapting knowledge (*savoir*) as well as skills and know-how (*savoir-faire*) within actions (Tudor, 2001, p. 65).

“Object and subject, reflection and action, learner and user are not separated but united with the aim of using the language in more or less complex situations.”

This change in paradigm is in line with societal changes and with changes in the roles of teachers and learners (Piccardo, 2006). There is a move from communication to action or—to use a better term—to “communication,” as Bourguignon (2006) suggests, because the latter is not opposite to, but rather inclusive of, the former. At the European level, the notion of key competences for citizens is becoming a central policy issue (Parlement Européen, 2006; Cignatta, 2006). As opposed to simply transmitting knowledge, the purpose of school is to prepare students for social and professional life. The notion of professionalism as the ability to deal with uncertainty is emerging (Le Boterf, 2000) together with related professionally-oriented concepts such as situated action, specific action, complex action, differentiated competences, existential competence, ability to “put into action,” reflective dimension, and autonomy (Richer, 2009).

The notion of task to provide coherence

The language learner’s ability to communicate is realized through complex, collective tasks, where speaking and doing are intermingled, thus putting into practice an Action-oriented perspective on language. This ability to communicate linguistically sets in motion a strategic component that requires from the speaker reflexivity as well as autonomy (Richer, 2009, pp. 203-204). The notion of task is central in the CEFR, which devotes an entire chapter to the topic. Tasks bring together and organize

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the complexity of language learning and teaching. Nevertheless, tasks are described naturally as a feature of everyday life in the personal, public, educational or occupational domains (CEFR 2001, p. 157).

A *task* is defined as any purposeful action considered by an individual as necessary in order to achieve a given result in the context of a problem to be solved, an obligation to be fulfilled or an objective to be achieved. This definition would cover a wide range of actions such as moving a wardrobe, writing a book, obtaining certain conditions in the negotiation of a contract, playing a game of cards, ordering a meal in a restaurant, translating a foreign language text, or preparing a class newspaper through group work (CEFR, 2001, p.10). The term “task” refers to concrete experiences: “Task accomplishment by an individual involves the strategic activation of specific competences in order to carry out a set of purposeful actions in a particular domain with a clearly defined goal and a specific outcome” (CEFR, p. 157).

To accomplish a task, several elements are activated and play a vital role:

- General competence;
- Communicative language competences with their different components;
- Cognitive factors;
- Affective factors;
- General strategies;
- Communicative strategies; and
- Conditions and constraints.

Chapter 4 of the CEFR, which contains its descriptive scheme, is appropriately titled: “Language use and the language user/learner” (p.43). The dual perspective on learning and using the language emphasizes the individual and the social in combination. As a matter of fact, the importance given by the CEFR to the social nature of tasks shows the influence of socio-constructivism and sociocultural theory as underpinning concepts. The dual nature of the learning process as well as of language use is fundamental to the CEFR. The same duality is to be found in the expression “social actor” that the CEFR proposes. A metaphor to explain this might involve some kind of play where the script would be a sketch, an outline, aiming at scaffolding an actor able to involve the audience in an interactive performance, thereby constructing the play with them, in a constant balance between personal contribution and social adaptation. Interestingly, along similar lines, Ian Tudor chooses the metaphor of a “jam session” for the language class (Tudor, 2001). In the same way as in theatre the use of different codes is considered natural and inevitable, in task accomplishment one can rely on a greater or smaller amount of “language”, as other codes for communication—not to mention other “languages”—inevitably appear to a greater or smaller extent. As Fenner and Newby (2006, p. 114) explain,

Whereas the communicative approach saw the learner essentially as a user of language, post-communicative teaching has restated the fact that language learning is not merely a question of simulating the contexts and processing of the outside world, but... acknowledging that the classroom represents a very real world for the

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learner. Authenticity is no longer a vicarious state but one which can be embedded within classroom learning situations.

Or, the perspective could be reversed, and say, according to Shakespeare, that individuals are eventually aware that “all life is a stage.”

This open vision of language use and learning helps avoid the risk of reductionism as far as the notion of competence is concerned. Developing competences should not end up by producing utilitarian teaching in the sense of aiming only at short-term, training types of goals. Instead it should provide long-term core knowledge and intellectual tools, so that learners can cope with a variety of tasks and situations (Roegiers, 2000, p. 286).

The learner: A social actor between affect and cognition

As colleagues and I have stated,

the student, on whom the CEFR focuses, thus stands in between two dimensions, the individual, on the one hand, and the social, on the other. The former focuses on a more personal construction that requires the learner’s personal knowledge and skill; the second simply presents an exchange and mutual sharing process. Amid this duality, strategic roles become essential. (Piccardo, Berchoud, Cignatta, Mentz, Pamula, 2009).

The individual dimension includes two complementary components: affect and cognition. Any

task needs to make sense to the learner, and to be embedded in a realistic and familiar context. It needs to provide a scenario for the realization of a project with clearly established and culturally appropriate goals in order for the learner to engage in a strategically effective way. (CEFR, 2001, pp. 157-167; Nunan, 1988, 1993). Both components need to be triggered, the affective one through the nature of the scenario and goals, the cognitive one through the logical and targeted manipulation of language structures. As a result, the dichotomy between affect and cognition is overcome on an individual level. This disjuncture was one of the reasons for some misinterpretations of the communicative approach. On a social level the new focus on intercultural awareness—, which includes sociocultural knowledge and competence, but is by no means limited to these factors—opens a new perspective for language learning and teaching. An effective learner is somebody who can use appropriate and efficient strategies to accomplish diverse tasks successfully. The CEFR (2001) attaches considerable importance to learning strategies, which feature in several passages and skill evaluation charts (Chapters 2.1.5, 4 and 6). “A *strategy* is any organised, purposeful and regulated line of action chosen by an individual to carry out a task which he or she sets for himself or herself or with which he or she is confronted” (CEFR, p.10). Furthermore, the CEFR defines strategies as

...a means the language user exploits to mobilise and balance her or his resources, to activate skills and procedures, in order to fulfill the demands of communication in context and successfully complete the task in question in the most comprehensive or most economical way feasible (p. 57).

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This concept is the political base of education in Europe. (Parlement Européen, 2006; North, 2007; Schärer, 2007; European Parliament, 2008). In the present economic market, business requires good qualifications, flexibility, and knowing how to operate with unknown factors as well as how to progress and improve oneself over the lifespan. Learners who get good results know how to use efficient learning strategies. Strategies and knowledge awareness are also crucial to learners becoming autonomous (Holec, 1981; Wolff, 2003). These skills are useful for education and throughout life (Parlement Européen, 2006).

The dynamic notion that links all these aspects in the CEFR is the educational aim of “learning to learn” which is directly related to theories of learner autonomy (Holec, 1981; Kelly, 1953; Little, 1991). What the CEFR describes as “ability to learn” (*savoir apprendre*) goes beyond the traditional vision of autonomy as an exclusively individual capacity, embedding it instead in a more social and interactive perspective. Social exchange and interaction, together with a reflective individual attitude, allow learners to improve their language competence and to increase their cultural awareness. The CEFR stresses the link between language and culture (pp. 4-6, 43, 133-138, 168), nevertheless, not in the sense of piling up different competences, but rather by highlighting the notion of “awareness”: awareness of other cultures and consequently awareness of one’s own culture as well. This backwash effect—

which potentially happens whenever there is contact with “others”—is asserted throughout the CEFR. It is directly connected with the notion of dynamic construction of competence and with the notion of profiles, which are different linguistic and cultural landscapes.

Learning a new language: An unbalanced process within a changing system.

Linguistic competence is not constructed in a vacuum. Adopting a systemic theory⁵, the CEFR (2001) stresses that each new acquisition changes the previous situation, the previous landscape, and the previous system. The CEFR insists on flexible notions with respect to unbalanced and changing competencies. These are discussed in terms of “plurilingual” and “pluricultural” dimensions (p.133). For this reason, the CEFR introduces the notions of “profile” and “partial competences” (p. 135).

Individuals learn a language through a series of filters and mental procedures. The CEFR insists on this basic fact: Learning another language and the knowledge of another culture is not made to the detriment – or even independently – of a student’s own language. There is no such thing as two separate languages and cultures. On the contrary, each language modifies the other (or several others) and this process contributes to developing multilingual abilities and intercultural capacities for understanding (Hufeiser & Neuner, 2004).

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5. The term goes back to the title of a book written by Bertalanffy (1968) "General System theory: Foundations, Development, Applications," who wanted to bring together under one heading the organismic science that he had observed in his work as a biologist. The systems theory is an interdisciplinary theory about the nature of complex systems in nature, society, and science, and is a framework by which one can investigate and/or describe any group of objects that work together to produce some result.

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The notion of plurilingualism is a dynamic one (Stratilaki, 2005; Beacco & Byram, 2007). **Plurilingualism** is an individual's ability to develop “a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact.”(CEFR, 2001, p. 4) According to the type of communication required in a variety of situations, the individual can “call flexibly upon different parts of this competence to achieve effective communication with a particular interlocutor.” In contrast, **multilingualism** refers more specifically to the condition of a social group in which more than two languages co-exist. From its outset, the CEFR promotes a plurilingual approach, that is, a seamless approach to the acquisition or learning of a number of languages throughout the lifespan of the learner. This process involves constantly relating these languages to each other so as to build up a plurilingual competence, which includes a plurilingual repertoire. Knowledge of the shared values and beliefs held by social groups in other countries and regions, such as religious beliefs, taboos, assumed common history is seen as essential to intercultural communication in the CEFR (2001, p.11).

These multiple areas of knowledge vary from individual to individual. They may be culture-specific, but nevertheless also relate to more universal parameters and constants. Any

“The CEFR insists on this basic fact: Learning another language and the knowledge of another culture is not made to the detriment – or even independently – of a student’s own language.”

new knowledge is not simply added to the knowledge one had before but is conditioned by the nature, richness and structure of one's previous knowledge and, furthermore, serves to modify and restructure the latter, at least partially. Clearly, the knowledge that an individual has already acquired is directly relevant to language learning (CEFR, p. 11). This conceptualization is consistent with my initial point about the overarching competence fostered by the CEFR, the existential competence (*savoir être*), which draws on what Van Eck (1986) referred to as “optimal personal ability”, embracing culture, language and learning, and therefore learner autonomy, language competence and intercultural awareness. Such a dynamic vision has a considerable impact on assessment too.

Completing the circle: Assessment according to the CEFR

The framework of the CEFR provides for a systematic, coherent, and meaningful approach to evaluation. The way in which learners fulfil tasks allows teachers to determine their level of competence: “Different communicative activities will be assessed in an integrated manner within a global assessment, which takes into consideration not only the linguistic, but also the pragmatic dimension” (Bourguignon, 2006, p. 68, my translation). Teachers need to assess the way in which learners reach an action-oriented goal by using the language appropriately.

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The perspective adopted in the CEFR for devising assessment criteria—the well-known “can-do statements”—are consistent with the dynamic vision of language acquisition as well as with autonomous learning. The European language portfolio is the tool whereby reflexive attitudes and strategy acquisition in the process of language learning are most evident. The question of assessment is thoroughly addressed in the CEFR prompting teachers to adopt different and complementary perspectives and to consciously select the most suitable approach to each particular situation.

Above all, assessment is integrated with learning from the very beginning. The CEFR was originally meant to be a tool aiming at systematizing assessment, thereby fostering transparency and allowing comparability. Hence, if the different dimensions highlighted above are interrelated in all forms of language use and learning, then any act of language learning or teaching is in some way concerned with each of these dimensions: strategies, tasks, texts, individual general competences, communicative language competence, language activities, language processes, contexts and domains. At the same time, it is also possible in learning and teaching that the objective, and therefore assessment, may be focused on a particular component or sub-component. Other components can then be considered as means to an end or as aspects to be given more emphasis at other times, or as not being relevant to the circum-

stances. Learners, teachers, course designers, authors of teaching material and test designers are inevitably involved in this process of focusing on a particular dimension and deciding on the extent to which other dimensions should be considered and the various ways of taking them into account. (CEFR, p.10).

This view of assessment as integrated to the whole process of language learning and teaching is having the greatest impact on educational practices in Europe. Institutions have started with assessment and require new perspective s from practitioners. Practitioners in turn are becoming aware of the profound link between the new vision of assessment and the philosophy of the CEFR. This is the main reason why the CEFR is having such a strong impact on language education practices at all levels. It is also the main reason why certain practitioners still feel hesitant. They need to build and develop confidence based on the whole CEFR, on its key-concepts and not just on the evaluation scale or the assessment grids. This is also the main rationale for our ECEP project. Teachers need to feel fully equipped in order to face the new millennium. ❖

“The CEFR was originally meant to be a tool aiming at systematizing assessment... fostering transparency and allowing comparability.”

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TECHNOLOGY: TRENDS AND ISSUES

Clickers in Foreign Language Teaching: A Case Study

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Abstract

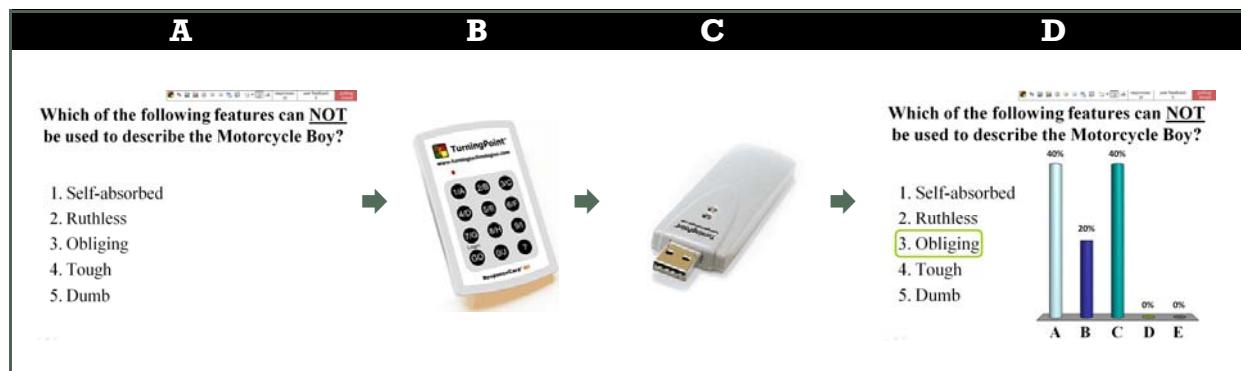
Clickers (or Classroom Response Systems) are becoming increasingly commonplace in educational settings, especially in science classrooms and academic lecture settings (e.g., Fies & Marshall, 2006). Surprisingly, the use of clickers is not as widespread in foreign and second language (L2) education (Tabak & Cardoso, 2009) and the number of studies that address the pedagogical potential of the technology in L2 settings is still scarce (Cutrim Schmid, 2007). One of the goals of this study is to address this gap in the literature by investigating English as a foreign language learners' perception of clickers and the apparent effect that this technology can have on learning outcomes. Overall, the results are consistent with the consensus that students perceive these devices as a positive addition to their classes, as their use increases participation and the general enjoyment of classes (Caldwell, 2007), contributes to learning (Bruff, 2009), fosters interaction (Mazur, 1997), and allows learners to self-assess and compare their performance with that of their peers (Bruff, 2009).

Although classroom response systems (clickers) have existed for more than four decades (Judson and Sawada, 2002), they have only recently received careful consideration as a tool to promote learning, particularly in large classrooms such as those found in introductory undergraduate courses (e.g., Caldwell, 2007). However, clickers are rarely used in the L2 classroom (Tabak & Cardoso, 2009), resulting in the scarcity of studies that investigate the use of these devices in L2 teaching (Cutrim Schmid, 2008) and the potential benefits that they could bring to learning outcomes.

Previous research findings suggest perceived pedagogical benefits resulting from the adoption of clickers in general lecture settings. More specifically, they indicate that clickers increase students' motivation (Blodgett, 2006; Caldwell, 2007) and participation (Blodgett, 2006; Kaleta & Joosten, 2007; Poulis, Massen, Robens, & Gilbert, 1998); foster self-assessment (Barnett, 2006; Blodgett, 2006; Bruff, 2009; Hoekstra, 2008) and interaction (Blodgett, 2006; Hall, Collier, Thomas, & Hilgers, 2005; Mazur, 1997); and contribute to learning (Abrahamson, 1999; Bruff, 2009). In an L2 envi-

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Figure 1. Clickers: method of operation.



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ronment, the work of Cutrim Schmid suggests relatively similar patterns in which clickers (in this case, the voting component of Promethean Interactive Whiteboard) assist in the learning process by allowing students to self-assess and compare their standing amongst peers (2007), and by increasing the scope of interactivity in the language classroom (2008).

One of the goals of this paper is to contribute to this evolving area of research by addressing one of the aspects of a more general research project on the use of response systems in L2 education: the learners' perceptions of the use of clickers. Through the use of a survey questionnaire and open-ended oral interviews, the study investigates how language learners view the use of the technology and its putative effects on motivation, involvement and participation in the course, assessment (including self-assessment), classroom interaction and potential learning gains.

Clickers: Definition and Method of Operation

Clickers are hand-held devices that resemble portable calculators in shape and size (see B in Figure 1). They operate in conjunction

with a receiver (C) and associated software. The teacher creates a multiple-choice question using the appropriate software (in the study being described, TurningPoint® by Turning Technologies, a Microsoft PowerPoint® plug-in), as illustrated in (A) in Figure 1 (clicker images used with permission from Turning Technologies). Students are then asked to select an answer by pressing the corresponding button on the keypad (B). During the period in which the polling is open, students' responses are sent wirelessly to a receiver (C) connected to a computer which, with the assistance of the associated software, conducts descriptive statistics (e.g., percentage distribution, mean, standard deviation, variance). Once the voting period is closed, the results are automatically projected on a screen (D), illustrating the correct answer, the percentage distribution of the responses across the choices, and other statistics deemed relevant or appropriate. Based on these responses and what they represent regarding the material being tested, the teacher decides how to proceed with the class: either go forward with the content material (in case the majority of the students selects the correct answer), or engage the students in general discussions and/or peer instruction activities, as recommended by Mazur (1997).

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Clickers have been used in classrooms for a variety of reasons and objectives: to promote and monitor attendance, to increase students' participation, to engage students in oral discussions, to stimulate the learning environment with periodic breaks, to test students' performance (including summative and formative assessment), to create a fun and enjoyable atmosphere, to check students' preparedness for what is to come, to survey students' opinions about specific topics or general demographic information, to increase interaction in the classroom (e.g., through "convince-your-neighbour" activities – peer teaching), to provide rapid feedback to students and instructors, to customize classes based on the students' knowledge and interests and, last but not least, to improve teaching and consequently learning. With the exception of a small number of studies that show clickers' potential to improve learning (Bruff, 2009; Judson & Sawada, 2002; Hall et al., 2005; see forthcoming discussion), the consensus in the clicker literature is that some of the objectives described above result in a positive effect on students' learning experience (Banks, 2006; Bruff, 2009; Caldwell, 2007; Fies & Marshall, 2006). Some of this literature will be reviewed in the discussion that follows.

Review of the Literature

Clickers in academic lecture settings

The vast majority of studies on the pedagogical use of clickers has been conducted in academic lecture settings (Cutrim Schmid, 2007; Tabak & Cardoso, 2009), involving a diversity of disciplines such as algebra (Blodgett, 2006), physics (Crouch & Mazur, 2001; Poulis et al., 1998), nursing (Halloran, 1995), psychology (Draper, 2002), law (Easton, 2009), general education (Johnson & Meckel-

borg, 2008), and English literature (Jenkins, 2007). For an overview of clickers as a pedagogical resource and a comprehensive list of more than 200 clicker-based studies in academic settings, see Bruff (2010). These studies reflect a prevalent pattern of clicker use as a pedagogical tool in education in that students and teachers consistently perceived them as positive additions to a course.

Blodgett (2006), for instance, investigated the implementation of a clicker-based system (Quizdom's Interactive Learning System) in five sections of a college algebra course at The University of Maine (United States), involving approximately 200 students. Using triangulation including attitude surveys and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, the study aimed to determine the students' and instructors' attitudes towards the pedagogical use of clickers, and whether the use of these devices led to an increase in academic achievement. Focusing exclusively on the perception aspect of her study, the results of survey analyses and open-ended interviews (n=23) indicated that, overall, the students viewed the technology as a positive addition to their learning experience. The clicker users believed that the use of the device :

1. Helped them stay attentive and attend more classes (increased motivation).
2. Encouraged them to be more active class participants (increased involvement).
3. Allowed them to obtain immediate feedback for their responses (self-assessment).
4. Enabled them to compare their performance with that of their peers (performance comparison).
5. Fostered interaction among the students

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and their peers and instructor (increased interaction).

6. Led participants to believe that they had learned more algebra content (learning gain).

A larger scale study with comparable results is that of Draper and Brown (2004), conducted at the University of Glasgow (United Kingdom) between 2001 and 2003. The study included a large selection of undergraduate disciplines in eight different departments (computing science, psychology, medicine, biology, philosophy, veterinary medicine, dental school, statistics), with group sizes ranging from 20 to 300 students for a total of more than 4,000 participants over the three-year period. The main goal of the study was to provide an overview of the experience of using a voting system in lectures, with a focus on how students and instructors perceived the technology. Employing a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection (i.e., observation of lectures, informal discussions, open-ended written and oral interviews, surveys), the results of the study showed an overall positive response to the use of clickers as pedagogical tools. More specifically, clicker users felt that the handsets:

1. Made classes fun and rewarding (motivation).
2. Made lectures more interactive and engaging (increased involvement).
3. Made students feel more at ease because of the (optional) anonymity of the system.
4. Gave students an idea of their ability to understand the discussion (self-assessment).

5. Gave students an idea of how they performed in relation to the rest of the class (performance comparison).
6. Allowed problem areas to be identified (self-assessment).
7. Resulted in a modest but valuable perceived increase in the quality of learning and teaching (learning gain).

Interestingly, the relative importance of the problems identified in the survey and interviews (e.g., teachers asking a clicker-based question merely for the sake of using the technology) considerably changed and improved over time while the benefits stayed fairly stable.

The literature on the use of clickers in academic lecture settings is replete with studies that substantiate the perceived benefits observed in these two studies. Accordingly, a common denominator among the majority of the available studies is the “ample converging evidence” that clickers are tools perceived as providing the following pedagogical benefits. They:

1. Increase students’ (and even teachers’) motivation and general interest in the class (Blodgett, 2006; Caldwell, 2007; Draper & Brown, 2009; Gauci, Dantas, Williams, & Kemm, 2009; Graham, Tripp, Seawright, & Joeckel, 2007; Hall et al., 2005; Hoffman & Goodwin, 2006; Johnson & Meckelborg, 2008; Penuel; Boscardin, Masyn, & Crawford, 2007; Poirier & Feldman, 2007; Preszler, Dawe, Shuster, & Shuster, 2007).
2. Are believed to increase involvement and participation inside and outside of the classroom (Barnett, 2006; Blodgett, 2006; Caldwell, 2007; Carnaghan & Webb, 2007; Draper & Brown, 2009;

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- Gauci et al., 2009; Graham et al., 2007; Hall et al., 2005; Hoffman & Goodwin, 2006; Johnson & Meckelborg, 2008; Kaleta & Joosten, 2007; Nagy-Shadman & Desrochers, 2008; Penuel et al., 2007; Poirier & Feldman, 2007; Poulis et al., 1998; Preszler et al., 2007; Suchman, Uchiyama, Smith, Bender, 2006; Trees & Jackson, 2007).
3. Allow learners to self-assess (Barnett, 2006; Blodgett, 2006; Caldwell, 2007; Carnaghan & Webb, 2007; Draper & Brown, 2009; Graham et al., 2007; Hall et al., 2005; Hoekstra, 2008; Johnson & Meckelborg, 2008; Kaleta & Joosten, 2007; Nagy-Shadman & Desrochers, 2008).
 4. Allow learners to compare their performance in relation to that of their peers in the same class (Barnett, 2006; Blodgett, 2006; Draper & Brown, 2009; Graham et al., 2007; Hall et al., 2005; Hoekstra, 2008; Johnson & Meckelborg, 2008).
 5. Foster interaction (Barnett, 2006; Blodgett, 2006; Caldwell, 2007; Carnaghan & Webb, 2007; Draper & Brown, 2009; Gauci et al., 2009; Graham et al., 2007; Hall et al., 2005; Hoffman & Goodwin, 2006; Johnson & Meckelborg, 2008; Kaleta & Joosten, 2007; Mazur, 1997; Nagy-Shadman & Desrochers, 2008; Penuel et al., 2007; Poirier & Feldman, 2007; Poulis et al., 1998; Suchman et al., 2006).
 6. Are believed to contribute to learning (Abrahamson, 1999; Barnett, 2006; Bruff, 2009; Carnaghan & Webb, 2007; Gauci et al., 2009; Hake, 1998; Hall et al., 2005; Kaleta & Joosten, 2007; Nagy-Shadman &

Desrochers, 2008; Poirier & Feldman, 2007; Poulis et al., 1998; Preszler et al., 2007; Suchman et al., 2006; Trees & Jackson, 2007).

In sum, the aforementioned studies identify six recurrent themes that permeate the majority of the current publications. These themes guided the elaboration of the methodology employed in this study.

Clickers in second or foreign language settings

An inspection of the literature on the use of clickers reveals that studies involving the use of clickers in a foreign or second language classroom are almost non-existent. Most references to clickers in the field relate to pedagogical demonstrations and presentations of their classroom applications (e.g., Corder, 2008; Tabak and Cardoso, 2009; Yoder-Kreger, 2009), and general reports stating that clickers have widespread educational applications in areas as specific as foreign language teaching (Bruff, 2009).

As indicated earlier, the vast majority of the studies available concentrate on large introductory courses (Cutrim Schmid, 2007) in which interactions among students and contact with the teacher are logistically difficult, a fact that is believed to reduce students' motivation and participation (Bruff, 2009). A possible explanation for this deficit might be the very nature of second language teaching, where classes are considerably smaller, thus allowing higher levels of interaction among students and the teacher. Moreover, most foreign language courses follow a communicative approach to language teaching (e.g., Savignon & Berns, 1984), an approach that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. As such, it assigns the stu-

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dent an active role in the learning process, one of discovering, processing and applying knowledge—"active learning" (Meyers & Jones, 1993). Coincidentally, interaction among students and the encouragement of active learning are some of the factors that are believed to contribute to increased academic achievement and the success of response systems in a clicker-assisted learning environment (Bruff, 2009; Mazur, 1997).

Among the few studies conducted in a L2 learning environment, two investigated the perceived pedagogical benefits of clickers using the ACTIVote, a component of Promethean Interactive Whiteboard, a variant of the response system illustrated in Figure 1 (for the sake of consistency, the term "clicker/s" will be used). In one of these studies, Cutrim Schmid (2007) set out to investigate the potential of clicker-based technology for assisting students in verifying their own progress and making comparisons with their peers. Using qualitative ethnographic methodology (including classroom observation, questionnaires, and oral interviews with students), the researcher intended to determine what types of interaction are produced when clickers are implemented, and how learners (as well as teachers and researchers) perceive the introduction of the technology in the classroom. Approximately 30 English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students from a variety of language backgrounds participated in the study, which was conducted at a British university. Focusing on the learners' perception of clickers, the results of the qualitative analysis confirmed findings from the general clicker literature that

show that the technology has the potential to boost the learner's self-esteem (motivation), to promote increased student engagement in the course (increased involvement), to provide immediate feedback (self-assessment), to allow students to compare their progress in relation to the other students (performance comparison), and to encourage collaboration (increased interaction). The study results were unclear about one of the "six recurring themes" observed in the clicker literature, namely the students' perception of learning gains.

“The study results were unclear about...the students' perception of learning gains.”

The second study (Cutrim Schmid, 2008) was conducted under the same conditions and using the same methodology adopted in the previous (2007) study. It also included approximately 30 students from different language backgrounds enrolled in an EAP program at a British university. The second study, however, focused on only one of the six themes identified as recurring in the clicker literature: the impact of clickers on interactivity (increased interaction). Based on analyses of classroom interaction data and learners' perceptions of clickers through questionnaires, the study presents data that suggest that the use of clickers increased the scope of interactivity in the language classroom, in which students participated more actively. Cutrim Schmid concludes that this is possibly due to the anonymity that characterizes the technology and the engaging nature of clickers. As was the case in her earlier study, Cutrim Schmid does not draw any conclusions about the effects of clickers on learning gains.

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In sum, studies on the use of classroom response systems in L2 settings seem to converge into at least five of the themes that characterize the general clicker literature. Overall, clickers are generally perceived as tools that increase learners' motivation, encourage more active participation in the class, allow learners to self-assess, assist students in verifying their standing amongst peers, and foster interactions.

Conclusion: Clickers in L2 teaching and learning gains

The literature on the use of clickers in L2 settings is still in its infancy. Despite the encouraging results presented in Cutrim Schmid (2007, 2008), whether they are generalizable to other communities of L2 learners remains an empirical question. One limitation of these studies is that they rely exclusively on qualitative methods of research (i.e., classroom observations, questionnaires, field notes, feedback from critical colleagues, semi-structured interviews). This limitation is further complicated by the fact that the researcher plays multiple roles as the teacher, the researcher, and a participant (i.e., the person who provides the teacher's perspective on clickers, based on field notes). Despite the convincing and positive results obtained in these preliminary studies, one could nonetheless still question the validity of using clickers (e.g., to foster interactivity) in the modern second or foreign language classroom, an environment that is intrinsically communicative and interactive, as discussed earlier.

The current body of research on clickers is also unclear about the extent to which the students' perceptions of learning gains can be quantitatively and/or qualitatively attested. Even the studies that show evidence of an increase in academic achievement, such as im-

proved grades in a course or higher scores in a test, are cautious about attributing the gain unequivocally to the use of the response system (Judson & Sawada, 2002). Some researchers attribute the positive effects observed to the more student-centred and active learning environment created through clickers, i.e., a consequence of the new method adopted and not necessarily the new tool (e.g., Bruff, 2009; see also Clark, 1983 for similar claims regarding new technology in education). Others, however, conceive the possibility that the results reflect a "Hawthorne Effect" because the students (and teachers) improve an aspect of their behaviour simply in response to the fact that they are being investigated (e.g., Caldwell, 2007).

The current study is part of a larger research project designed to address the gaps in the literature discussed in the above. The aims of the larger project are to:

1. Examine the students' perception of the use of clickers in foreign language learning, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research instruments.
2. Determine quantitatively whether the students' perception of a potential learning gain is attested in a specific skill in L2 acquisition, namely the learning of infrequent or academic vocabulary. The goal of the current study, however, is to address the first general question: What are the students' perceptions of the use of clickers?

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Based on the discussions in the preceding sections and the fact that there are currently very few studies that address students' percep-

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tions of and attitudes towards clickers in a L2 environment, this study attempts to contribute to the existing body of literature with new data and diversified quantitative and qualitative research instruments. Accordingly, the research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the students' perceptions of the use of clickers in a communicative L2 English environment? More specifically, following the six themes discussed earlier, do they believe that clickers: (a) increased their motivation and interest in the course? (b) increased their involvement and participation in the course? (c) allowed them to self-assess? (d) allowed them to compare their performance with that of their peers? (e) encouraged them to interact with their peers? (f) contributed to learning in general?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of using clickers in an L2 classroom?

Answers to the first set of questions result from a survey that was analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics. The second question was addressed through an analysis of open-ended oral interviews with the participants. It was hypothesized that the results would reflect those found in previous studies, thus confirming the six recurring themes observed in the general clicker literature.

“...there was an emphasis on the acquisition of ‘advanced’ vocabulary, defined by the teacher...”

Method

Target of Instruction

For this particular study on perception, the target of instruction can be considered any of the language skills taught in an advanced English L2 course: speaking, reading, listening, writing, and the subcomponents vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar, combined with higher-level stylistics and pragmatics. However, although classes were designed with the practice of these skills in mind, there was an emphasis on the acquisition of “advanced” vocabulary, defined by the teacher as “the type of word that we don’t often use, hear or read in our daily lives.”

A typical clicker-based activity, using Turning Technologies’ Turning-Point®, followed the following format:

1. A PowerPoint® slide was presented to the students with a question and a set of choices (for an illustration, see A in Figure 1).
2. Students analyzed the question and alternatives and selected what they believed was the correct answer within a specified amount of time as the complexity of the question required (a timer was sometimes displayed next to the question).
3. Results of the voting process were then displayed on the slide via a chart indicating the distribution of the results (see D in Figure 1).

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4. The teacher decided how the activity would proceed. If most students selected the correct answer, the teacher completed the activity by engaging the students in some pre-established follow-up tasks (e.g., choral repetition, questions for details), and then proceeded to the next activity. If many wrong answers occurred, the teacher engaged students in a variety of pedagogical activities that included "convince-your-neighbour activities" and group voting (one voting right per group of students). Clickers were not assigned to specific individuals in this study to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

Research Design

Table 1 illustrates the relevant component of a larger quasi-experimental study on the use of clickers, as mentioned earlier. The study took place during a three-month period, with eight weeks dedicated to the treatment (i.e., teaching with clickers). During the first week, the teachers and students were trained on the use of the technology, with a focus on how to use the system. From week two through nine, students were engaged in clicker-assisted classes. As shown in Table 1, the perception survey took place in week 10.

Participants

Thirty L2 English students participated in this study. The participants were recruited from two intact English classrooms in a private middle class language school in the city of Belem (Brazil), a community where English is rarely used outside of the classroom. They were native speakers of Brazilian Portuguese with an

Table 1. Design of the perception study on the use of clickers

Week 1	Training: Teachers, students
Weeks 2-9	Treatment: Clicker-assisted classes
Week 10	Data Collection: Perception survey + Oral interview

advanced level of proficiency in English. Proficiency was controlled merely to ensure that all participants were at a relatively similar level. They were enrolled in an "advanced" English class, as determined by the school, with approximately 500 hours of instruction at level 9 of a 10-level program. One semester remained for the completion of a certificate intended to enable students to function at an advanced level of English proficiency (e.g., they could teach in private language schools, work as tourist guides, and be credited in post-secondary education for foreign language requirements). The average age of the participants was 20.4 (standard deviation: 5.05), with a relatively balanced distribution of participants by gender (17 female, 13 male).

Although the focus of these "advanced" classes was on English morphosyntax, academic vocabulary, and the practice of higher-level oral communication skills, classes were often conducted in a communicative way in which participants were regularly involved in group activities and interactions with their peers and the teacher. None of the participants had used (or heard of) clickers before, thus had no prior experience with the technology when being introduced to it at the outset of the study.

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As is typical in research of this nature, standard research ethics protocols were observed, i.e., participants were given the option to decline to participate without any negative consequences; they were guaranteed that their participation was confidential and that only the researcher would have access to the interview materials.

Materials

A questionnaire survey and an open-ended oral interview were designed to collect data on students' perceptions of the use of the clickers. The survey consisted of multiple-choice items using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," measuring the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with a statement:

1. Strongly agree.
2. Agree.
3. Neutral.
4. Disagree.
5. Strongly disagree.

To guarantee confidentiality and avoid factors that could affect data collection or interpretation of the statements (e.g., the presence of the teacher, clicker malfunction, ignorance of a pertinent English word), the survey was administered without the presence of the teacher, on paper, and using the participants' native language, Portuguese. There were 20 items addressing specific questions about the students'

perceptions of the use of clickers in their English course. Based on the research questions addressed in this study, the relevant statements (in Portuguese) used were:

1. The use of clickers increased my motivation and interest in the course.
2. The use of clickers increased my involvement and participation in the course.
3. The use of clickers allowed me to see how I was doing in the course.
4. The use of clickers allowed me to see how I compared to other students in the course.
5. The use of clickers allowed me to interact with my classmates in the course.
6. The use of clickers made me learn a great deal.

“None of the participants had used (or heard of) clickers before, thus had no prior experience with the technology when being introduced to it.”

To maximize the effectiveness of the survey and to establish its reliability and validity, the questionnaire was piloted with 6 ESL students and later reviewed by another researcher not involved in the study.

For the open-ended oral interview, each participant engaged in a conversation in Portuguese with a research assistant about the following question: “In your experience, what are the strengths and weaknesses of using clickers in an L2 English classroom?” Whenever necessary, the answers were accompanied by associated follow-up questions. The responses were audio recorded using the built-in microphone of a desktop recorder, the Marantz

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PMD660 Portable Compact Flash Digital Recorder. The audio samples (recorded in WAV format, 16bit 44.1KHz mono, "CD quality") were then transferred to a computer for transcription and analysis.

Procedure

In week 1, as indicated in Table 1, the participants attended a workshop on how to use the clickers and associated technology. They learned how to answer the different types of questions available in the system (e.g., multiple choice, true or false, degrees of agreement through a Likert scale), and how to interpret the different types of visual feedback provided. The latter included flashing signs and graphic display of the results in bar charts. During the same week, the participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire consisting of general demographic questions such as age, gender, education. To assist in the resolution of potential problems in the analysis of the results, the questionnaire also included questions about the participants' previous experiences with English and clickers (if any), and their views on the use of technology in teaching. At the end of the study (Week 10), participants were invited to respond to a survey questionnaire involving a set of twenty statements regarding their perceptions of the use of clickers in their English classes. As described earlier, the questionnaire was administered on paper by a research assistant. This activity lasted approximately 15 minutes. After the survey, the participants were scheduled for an oral interview with the research assistant on a topic they had been informed of previously, i.e., their views on the strengths and weaknesses of using clickers in their English classes. The interviews, which lasted approximately 20 minutes, were audio-recorded and transcribed into standard Portu-

guese orthography using Transcriber (version 1.5), a tool for the transcription and annotation of speech. The transcribed responses were later categorized for the qualitative analysis into two main categories based on their perception of the strengths and weaknesses of the technology. Responses related to the strengths were further categorized according to the six pertinent themes discussed earlier (i.e., clickers increased motivation and interest in class, increased participation and involvement, promoted self-assessment, allowed learners to know how they compared to others, fostered interaction with classmates, and contributed to learning). The responses relating to weaknesses were categorized into themes depending on the nature of the response (e.g., uncertainty about the anonymity of the system, whether the clicker-based answers had been properly registered by the system). The analysis and categorization of the responses were carried out independently by two research assistants, and the researcher further compared and verified the results for inter-rater reliability. Only responses with similar evaluations from the two assistants were included in the study.

Results

Quantitative Survey Analysis

The data from the survey questionnaire were analyzed through a simple mean calculation with associated standard deviation (descriptive statistics). Accordingly, to answer the first research question, means were used to measure the participants' ratings of the statements utilized in the study. Table 2 illustrates the results for each of the six items selected. It also includes two additional related statements that addressed whether the participants be-

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Table 2. Survey results: Learners' perception of clickers

Question (theme)	Mean	Standard deviation
1. Increased motivation, interest in class	1.30	0.59
2. Increased participation, involvement in class	1.30	0.59
3. Promoted self-assessment	1.60	0.61
4. Allowed learners to know how they compared to others	1.13	0.34
5. Fostered interaction with classmates	2.96	0.60
6. Contributed to learning	1.40	0.49
7. Contributed to better grades	2.53	0.99
8. Would like other courses to use clickers	1.00	0.00

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lieved that clickers contributed to better grades, and whether they would like clickers to be used in other courses. As established earlier, results closer to "1" correspond to "I strongly agree" with the statement presented.

The results in Table 2 show that the ESL learners who participated in this study view the use of clickers positively, with a unanimous "strongly agree" for wanting to extend the use of clickers to other courses. The participants believe that clickers increased their motivation and interest in the class (1.3), increased their participation and involvement (1.30), promoted self-assessment of the content that they were learning (1.60), allowed them to compare their performance with that of their peers in the same learning environment (1.13), and contributed to learning (1.40). The only items that had neutral responses were the ones related to fostering interaction with classmates (2.96), and to contributing to better grades in the course (2.53).

Qualitative Survey Analysis

The answers to the set of open-ended questions related to "In your experience, what are the strengths and weaknesses of using clickers in an L2 English classroom?" were compiled into canonical quotes, each representing the general concepts conveyed in their responses. As described earlier, the participants' answers were initially compiled into two main categories reflecting their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the system (translated from Portuguese; answers related to the teacher's performance or pedagogical issues were ignored). To ensure consistency and suitable comparison, answers were further categorized, where possible, to reflect the six themes included in the research questions. No responses suggesting that the use of clickers promoted or increased interactions in the classroom occurred. In addition, the two items related to assessment (self-assessment and comparison with others) were combined into one theme (3) because, in most responses, one could not be dissociated from the other.

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Table 3. Perceived strengths of clickers

<p>1. Increased motivation, interest in the class (n = 26)</p> <p>a. “I think I became more interested in the class because I knew when I could be helpful and help others, and I also knew when I needed help.”</p> <p>b. “I like that we do things that we don’t usually do in other classes. I like it. It’s cool and my friends in the other classes are all jealous.”</p>
<p>2. Increased participation and involvement in and outside of class (n = 24)</p> <p>a. “I’m very shy in public, so I never say anything in class [...] I felt like I was being part of the discussions”.</p> <p>b. “I started reading the book more carefully because I knew that we were going to be checked for comprehension and words from the book in class.”</p>
<p>3. Assessment: self-assessment and ability to compare with peers (n = 21)</p> <p>a. “I found out right away how much I knew and how much I didn’t know; and then I could see how the others answered the same question”.</p> <p>b. “If I didn’t get an answer right, I was happy to know that the others didn’t get it right either. I was not the only stupid person in class.”</p>
<p>4. Contributed to learning (n = 19)</p> <p>a. “I think I learned more, especially about those difficult words from the novel. They’ll make me sound smart when I talk to native speakers”.</p> <p>b. “I’m not sure if I’m going to get a better grade in this course, but I feel like I’ve learned a lot more than in previous classes.”</p>
<p>5. Other strengths</p> <p>a. Immediate feedback (n = 7): “You usually know the correct answer right away. I think that helps you memorize the subject [...] better than tests”.</p> <p>b. Committed teacher (n = 3): “The teacher worked so hard to make sure we all understood the subject, and there was often another test to make sure we got what she meant”.</p> <p>c. Content coverage (n = 4): “It feels like we cover more concrete materials in class instead of just talking and talking.”</p>

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The following interview extracts in Table 3 illustrate the participants' views on the pedagogical benefits and strengths of clickers. With regards to increased motivation and interest in the class, the vast majority of the participants (n=26/30) contributed with statements such as "I think I became more interested in the class because I knew when I could be helpful and help others" (1a). Similar positive comments were also observed for the other themes considered; for example, most participants felt that their participation and involvement in the class increased (n=24/30), as one of the participants indicated: "I'm very shy in public, so I never say anything in class [...] I felt like I was being part of the discussions" (2a). In other interview passages, the majority of the participants agreed that clickers allowed them to self-assess and see how they compared with their peers (n=21/30), as exemplified by one of the participants' assertion that "[she] found out right away how much [she] knew and how much [she] didn't know [...], and then [she] could see how the others answered the same question" (3a). Interestingly, more than half of the participants suggested that the system contributed to learning (n=19/30), especially the learning of academic and infrequent vocabulary, or "those difficult words from the novel [Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*]" (4a). Finally, some of the responses stressed other benefits of the use of clickers, which were often perceived as tools that provide immediate feedback ("You usually know the correct answer right away" – 5a), make the teacher seem more committed to teaching ("The teacher worked so hard to make

**“Interestingly,
more than half of
the participants
suggested that
the system
contributed to
learning...”**

sure we all understood the subject" – 5b), and increase content coverage in the classroom ("It feels like we cover more concrete materials in class" – 5c).

Table 4 illustrates some of the perceived weaknesses of the response system. In general, the most cited shortcoming had to do with the inability of clickers to provide an indication that responses (new and modified ones) had been properly registered by the system (n = 9): "I would sometimes click an option and then change my mind and pick another answer, but I wasn't sure if my new answer had really been registered" (1a). Another less common perceived limitation related to confidentiality (n = 4): "The teacher said that there was no way of finding out who answered what, but I'm not sure... What if she decides to deduct points from those who got most answers wrong?" (2a). In this statement, the participant shared her concerns about the anonymity of the system and the possible negative consequences of the response.

To summarize, the results of the interview analysis corroborate in most aspects what was observed in the quantitative analysis: Students' attitudes towards clickers are favourable, despite the fact that there was no indication that clickers promoted in-class interactions. The reported weaknesses include the inability of the hardware or software to display whether the responses were properly recorded, and whether users of the system remained anonymous during and after the voting process.

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Table 4. Perceived weaknesses of clickers

<p>1. Unsure whether answers were recorded properly (n=9)</p> <p>a. "I would sometimes click an option and then change my mind and pick another answer, but I wasn't sure if my new answer had really been registered."</p> <p>b. "I always wondered if my answer had really been picked up by the computer."</p>
<p>2. Unsure about the anonymity of the system (n=4)</p> <p>a. "The teacher said that there was no way of finding out who answered what, but I'm not sure... What if she decides to deduct points from those who got most answers wrong?"</p> <p>b. "Are the answers really anonymous? Or is it like a cell phone: there's always a way of finding out who called."</p>

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Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this study was to examine students' perceptions of the use of a classroom response system in an L2 English classroom. Two general research questions guided this investigation: By means of a survey questionnaire, the first involved the participants' ratings of a set of statements addressing key factors around their experience using clickers (i.e., motivation, involvement, ability to self-assess and compare with others, interaction and learning outcome). The second question investigated the participants' assessment of their experience using clickers, with a focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the system through an open-ended oral interview. Based on current literature on students' perceptions of clickers, it was hypothesized that the effects found in an L2 learning environment would reflect those encountered in the investigation of the same tech-

nology being used in other disciplines. The results of the study demonstrate that the hypothesis was supported for most of the statements.

With regards to the first question, the overall results suggest that the participants view the use of clickers positively or at least with a degree of neutrality in all of the factors considered in the study: Students' ratings of the statements indicate that they believed the use of a response system in their classes increased motivation (1.30) and their participation in class (1.30), promoted self-assessment (1.60), allowed them to compare with their peers (1.13) and, more importantly, contributed to learning (1.4). The only relevant statement that was not rated as positively was the one asserting that clickers encouraged interaction with their peers (2.96).

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In general, the findings reported here are in line with previous research on the pedagogical use of clickers. For instance, Blodgett (2006) reported similar patterns in which the six themes listed above were rated positively by most algebra students who participated in her study. Comparable results were also obtained in Draper and Brown (2004), who analyzed and reported the perception of more than 4,000 students on the use of clickers, and in the majority of the studies found in the clicker literature (e.g., Barnett, 2006; Carnaghan et al., 2007; Gauci et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2006; Penuel et al. 2007; Preszler, 2007). With regards to the literature on the use of clickers specifically in L2 settings, even though the results reflect the patterns reported in the studies by Cutrim Schmid (2007, 2008), these results are not easily comparable with the ones presented as the researchers' conclusions are from a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews and questionnaire responses. Based on the overwhelming evidence that these studies provide on the perceived benefits of clickers, it is not surprising that similar beliefs and attitudes also hold for the L2 learning community under consideration.

As the nature and scope of this investigation focused on perceptions and beliefs, it would be difficult to explain why clickers are perceived so positively in the standard L2 context. The literature, however, is replete with plausible and pedagogically sound explanations to show why clickers and their associated instructional methods have a positive effect on

“In general, the findings reported here are in line with previous research on the pedagogical use of clickers.”

students' attitudes towards the technology and learning in general; these include the effects of the frequent use of structured questions followed by immediate feedback (Boyd, 1973), peer teaching or learning to teach (Mazur, 1997), novelty effect (Clark, 1983), sense of community within an integrationist approach (Tinto, 1993), the segmentation of lecture time into more manageable smaller units (MacManaway, 1970), as well as the notion of active learning, which suggests that students who actively engage (behaviourally and cognitively) with the material are more likely to recall information and consequently learn (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Bruner, 1961; Mayer, 2004). Chapelle (2001) offers an overview of how these concepts are explored in computer-assisted language teaching.

The second research question addressed the students' perception of the strengths and weaknesses of using a response system in their classes. Similar to the quantitative survey, students responded positively to the use of clickers in most of the themes identified and compiled for the analysis of the oral interview, as indicated in the selection of quotes transcribed in the results section. In addition, three students reported that even though they were unsure about whether their alleged achievements would be reflected in higher grades, they still felt they had learned more in the clicker-assisted classes than in other L2 English classes: “I'm not sure if I'm going to get a better grade in this course, but I feel like I've learned a lot more than in previous classes.” Similar failures

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in transferring the perception of learning gains to actual improvement in test scores have been reported in Bunce, van den Plas, and Havanki (2006). Interestingly, the students also rated as strengths three themes that were not directly addressed in the survey:

1. The clickers' ability to provide immediate feedback.
2. The perception of a more committed teacher.
3. The increased quantity (and possibly quality) of the content covered in the class.

The first perceived strength is a consequence of the adoption of clickers, an automated response system that was purposely designed to provide immediate feedback (Bruff, 2009). The second strength, the perception of a committed teacher, is one that has parallels in the literature (Knight and Wood, 2005) and which might also have an effect on the general perception of the technology. The last identified strength, content coverage, is another theme that distinguishes the L2 environment from the standard lecture halls that are mostly discussed in the clicker literature, as previously mentioned. Although the L2 students' responses give the impression that the quality and quantity of the material covered improved ("It feels like we cover more concrete materials in class instead of just talking and talking"), most available studies admit that administering clicker activities and then having students think about and discuss their answers jeopardizes their planning by monopolizing some of their limited class time (e.g., Blodgett, 2006; Bruff, 2009, Easton, 2009). Leaving aside the quantity versus quality dilemma (see Bruff, 2009 and Caldwell, 2007), the L2 stu-

dents' positive attitudes towards the way content is covered in a clicker-based class may be directly related to how they perceive the standard communicative language classroom, i.e., an environment in which oral activities are simply "just talking and talking," without any obvious evidence to the student of a structured, purposeful interaction.

The qualitative analysis also revealed some weaknesses of the response system. A usability issue was raised by nine students. Despite the fact that a green light flashes whenever a key is pressed on the clicker, there was no way of finding out whether the response had in fact been transmitted and properly recorded in the computation of the results ("I would sometimes click an option and then change my mind and pick another answer, but I wasn't sure if my new answer had really been registered"). Another issue involved the confidentiality of the responses and the repercussions of their actions ("The teacher said that there was no way of finding out who answered what, but I'm not sure... What if she decides to deduct points from those who got most answers wrong?") While these are certainly legitimate limitations of the system, the positive attitude of students (and teachers) towards clickers and the unanimous willingness to have the use of the clickers extended to other classes (mean: 1.00—see Table 2) indicate that they are prepared to tolerate the use of not-so-perfect clickers in exchange for the possibility that the technology and its associated methods may eventually lead to an improvement in learning. Whether the use of clickers has an effect on learning outcomes in an L2 environment will be addressed in a future study, as indicated earlier.

The computer-assisted learning literature (e.g., Nikolova, 2002; Warschauer, 1996) acknowledges the possibility that the optimistic perceptions of clicker-based technology and

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the evidence for higher academic achievement in test scores are ephemeral, merely a reflection of what Clark (1983: 453) defines as the novelty effect: "media do not directly influence learning," but the instructional methods associated with the technology do. Only an extensive longitudinal study that extends beyond the point where the novelty factor wears off will be able to address the issue. ❖

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TECHNOLOGY: TRENDS AND ISSUES

Evaluating computer technology for language learning

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Abstract

Many teachers, educators, and publishers are excited about the potentials for technology use in ESL, but how do they know whether technology can really help? Rigorous evaluation of any language learning materials and activities is difficult. Students learn English from a number of different sources, and therefore isolating the effects of any one factor is a challenge. This paper describes some of the ways in which the effectiveness of technology has been investigated in second language studies by drawing upon examples from research. Research includes comparisons between classes using technology and those that do not, surveys of teachers' and learners' opinions about computer-assisted language learning (CALL) materials, discourse analysis of learners' performance in computer-assisted learning tasks, and interviews with learners about how they use technology inside and outside the classroom.

“The Fastest Way to Learn a Language. Guaranteed.™”

This is the claim that is prominently displayed in advertisements for Rosetta Stone CD-ROM materials. It is perhaps a bit bolder but not altogether different from claims made on other language textbooks, CD-ROMs, and learning materials, all of which contain an evaluative statement or endorsement of the product, such as that the product will make language learning fast, easy or fun. The claim is typically that the material will help the language learner, will interest and engage the learner, or will make good use of learner's time. Such claims are an important part of the discourse of marketing in the context of publishing. They are one way of informing prospective buyers about the intended strengths of materials and courses, but because they are produced by publishers for the purpose of selling learning materials, it is unlikely that they hold any credibility.

Another example comes from Pimsleur courses:

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For Your Ears Only:

Learn like a spy! Pass for a native.

Pimsleur courses help people who need to speak another language quickly. Our courses took 40 years to develop and are now used by the FBI, CIA, and business professionals everywhere. They're so effective, you have nothing to lose!

Start speaking any language within 10 days or receive a full and courteous refund.

(Pimsleur Approach, n.d.)

The claim in the Pimsleur CDs that a learner will “pass for a native” speaker is unlikely to be taken as an important piece of data in the professional discourse about the critical period for language acquisition and ultimate attainment. Rather it is seen by most professionals as an incredible claim with no scientific basis generated by marketing specialists. Sheldon (1988) sees such excessive claims made by language course book publishers as an “attempt to make the volumes in question seem suitable for all learners in all situations” (p. 238), in other words, to make claims that any professional in applied linguistics would recognize as hyperbole at best.

If research in applied linguistics is to offer more meaningful and credible perspectives on the value of particular materials and classroom activities, applied linguists need to be able to pose useful questions and engage appropriate methodologies for discovering answers. In other words, if marketing specialists produce information that is not credible, applied linguists need methodologies for producing credible information. Such research should offer support for credible claims about what students learn, about the quality of materials, and the way

that students choose and learn through technology.

This need has been underscored where computer technology for language learning is concerned because, unlike the selection of course books, the selection of computer-assisted language learning can entail considerable change in the culture of the classroom. Moreover, the choice to use computer technology for language learning can mean that funding is needed to purchase and maintain equipment, materials and new pedagogies. It is not surprising then that many educators have asked the question about whether or not computer technology makes a difference in language learning. One way of posing the question is to ask whether students studying language online do as well as those who meet in face-to-face classes with teachers with respect to their language learning. Indeed, several such comparison studies have been conducted between how well students learn through computer-assisted language learning (CALL) compared to classroom instruction with a teacher. In such research, CALL can be defined as any language learning activity that draws upon computer technology such as interactive CD ROMS, websites for language learning, and tasks requiring communication on the Internet.

Comparison Studies

Comparing the effects of classroom instruction vs. computer-assisted language learning (CALL) may be more complex than it first appears in view of the many types of activities that learners might engage in under both conditions. Moreover, language learning is typically the result of participation in many types of learning activities. Nevertheless, a number of researchers have taken the challenge and conducted comparative research between class-

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room learning without technology and CALL. Enough of these studies have been done that professionals should be able to summarize what the research says about this issue. In the past, however, such summaries did not provide a clear, defensible consensus about what the research had found. According to Zhao (2003, p. 19) "it is reasonable to conclude that technology has been shown by the published empirical studies to be very effective in improving student language learning" based on a meta-analysis of nine CALL studies. In the same journal later that year, Burstn (2003) offered a different interpretation: "comparative studies reveal no conclusive evidence of any positive advantages associated with the use of media in general or of computers in particular" (p. 221) in the articles on IT effectiveness. Apparently, the answer depends upon which body of work is being analyzed from a quantitative, comparative perspective!

What is needed is a methodology for gathering and analyzing all the comparison studies that have been carried out since the 1970s, when computers began to be used for language learning. If this process is undertaken systematically, anyone who searches and reviews this body of work should obtain the same answer to the question. Meta-analysis is such a methodology for quantitative research. The use of meta-analysis in second language studies is demonstrated and discussed in an edited volume by Norris and Ortega (2006), and this proved useful for designing a meta-analysis of research comparing second language learning in traditional classrooms with that in CALL. Although meta-analysis as an analytic approach to synthesis of quantitative research results has been used for some time, it had not been used extensively in second language studies. The description of the process and the results have not yet been published (Grgurovic, Chapelle, &

Shelley, 2010; also see Grgurovic, 2007), but the principle facts about the process and the sample of studies that it yielded are the following:

- Time frame: 1970-2006.
- Computer search: 3 electronic databases (LLBA, ERIC, and DA).
- Manual search: 6 journals (*CALL*, *System*, *CALICO*, *ReCALL*, *LLT* and *TESOL Quarterly*).
- Research comparing language instruction with computer technology and instruction without technology.
- Contains unpublished literature.
- More than 200 studies were identified.
- 42 studies met the criteria for inclusion in the quantitative meta-analysis.
- 144 effect sizes were obtained because multiple tests were used in most studies.

A sample of forty-two studies is not very large; however, it is sufficient to ask about the consistency of performance of one group over the other. Moreover, most of the studies included more than one test of learner outcomes, for example, both reading and vocabulary might have been tested. Therefore, more than one statistical test of difference between the two groups was possible in many of the studies, allowing for a greater number of comparisons to be made. Unfortunately, however, the methodology of each of the 42 studies was not identical, and therefore the sample of studies had to be subdivided to reflect the methodologies that had been used. Each of the studies fits within

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Table 1. Four groups of studies that qualify for the meta-analysis

Group	Criteria	Contrast	Effect size statistics	N of Studies/ N of Effect Sizes	Effect Size
1.	Equivalence of groups found at pre-test	Experimental-control at post-test	Standardized mean difference	14/32	0.2572*
2.	Equivalence of groups not tested (without pre-tests)	Experimental-control at post-test	Standardized mean difference	14/81	0.0207
3.	Equivalence of groups not found at pre-test	Pre- and post-test for experimental group	Standardized mean gain	9/15	0.3291*
4.	Equivalence of groups not tested (with pre-tests)	Pre- and post-test for experimental group	Standardized mean gain	5/16	0.4232*

*Statistically significant effect size at $p < .05$

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one of four groups as shown in Table 1. The four groupings of the studies resulted in a considerably smaller number of studies that could be pooled to find a single answer to the question about effectiveness. Instead, an effect size, the statistical procedure used to estimate the magnitude of difference between the mean scores when groups are compared, had to be calculated for each group, giving four answers to the question rather than a single answer. It also meant that the original goal of finding one answer by summarizing across all of the studies could not be met. We had to look for four answers, each one depending on how the research had been conducted and reported because of the requirements of the meta-analysis.

The research design used in studies in the first (Group 1) probably reflects the way that most teachers, students, and researchers as-

sume the question should be addressed. Students were divided into two groups: an experimental and a control group. Both groups were tested on the abilities that were to be taught during the instructional treatment, and the pre-test scores of the two groups were compared with a finding that there was no significant difference between the two groups. In this design, the results are based on the contrast made between the groups' post-test performance, and the statistic calculated to do this is the standardized mean difference. In our sample, 14 studies used this design, many of which included more than one pre-test and post-test. As a result, the number of effect size statistics was larger at 32, as shown in Table 1.

The second group consisted of studies that compared a control and treatment group on their post-test scores as well, but in these stud-

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ies the equivalence of groups was not tested because pre-tests were not administered. In some studies, the groups were assumed to be equivalent because of the random assignment of participants to the two groups. In other cases, when the assignment of participants to groups was non-random, as was the case when intact classes were used, some researchers used measures of other variables in order to demonstrate the group equivalence. These differences in research design prompted the placement of these fourteen studies in the second group, even though the effect size statistics were calculated in the same way that they were for group one.

For the studies in the third and fourth groups, there was no reason to believe that the groups were equivalent at the beginning of the treatment period. In the studies in group 3, the researcher tested for equivalence of groups, but found that one group scored higher than the other did. In group four, even though pre-tests were given, the tests were not used to test equivalence. Without any reason to assume equivalence at pre-test, a comparison of post-test scores would not be meaningful, and therefore, we looked at the improvement made by the experimental group from pre- to post-test, using the standardized mean gain effect size.

The challenge is to understand the meaning of these statistics of standardized mean difference, effect size (groups 1 and 2) and standardized mean gain effect size (groups 3 and 4). According to Cohen (1988), small effect sizes are less than or equal to 0.2, medium effect sizes are around 0.5, and large effect sizes are equal to or higher than 0.8. From this perspective, there was a small positive effect size for the studies in group one. The technology-using students outperformed those in the teacher-led classrooms, and the effect was statistically significant, although small. There was no difference between the control and treatment groups in the second group of studies.

A different perspective is needed to interpret the magnitude of standardized mean gain effect size in groups 3 and 4 because pre- to post-test contrasts tend to be larger than experimental-control contrasts. We interpreted the results in view of previous research that used the same mean gain statistic. The effect size of 0.3291 is an indicator of some improvements made by CALL groups from pre- to post-tests. This result is also statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The fourth group has a larger effect size of 0.4232, indicating gains from pre- to post-tests for CALL groups.

This meta-analysis provides a quantitative answer to one question about language learning through technology. All of these steps, grouping, testing, and data analysis, are to support a claim about whether or not language learning through technology results in better, the same, or worse linguistic outcomes compared to classroom study. We found that when research was conducted using appropriate equivalence testing for the pre-test scores, small positive effect sizes were found in favour of the technology group. Moreover, when gain scores from pre-tests to post-tests are evaluated, statistically significant positive gains are found for the groups of students using technology. These findings justify a claim that the use of technology has been found to be positively associated with language learning.

However, this type of quantitative summary lacks the detail needed to use research results to improve instruction by developing better learning materials and tasks (Pederson, 1987). Many teachers and researchers in applied linguistics want to learn whether students and teachers like working on language learning through technology, and if so, why. An understanding of e.g., what aspects of the tasks help them to engage with the language, become more interested in language learning, gain insight into language learning strategies, is

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needed. In the terms used above, the claims we would like to be able to make about the materials concern a range of factors rather than simply claims about how learning outcomes from CALL compare to those obtained in classroom instruction. For example, one might like to be able to understand more clearly how the use of technology intersects with the planning of instruction, teachers' enthusiasm or other factors.

Applied Linguistics Research

To address the need for more detailed evaluation felt by English language teachers and researchers, many studies of CALL over the past decade have drawn upon theory and methods from other second language studies. The theoretical and methodological contributions have helped to expand the research methods from primarily relying on comparisons with classroom learning to a more complex understanding of learners' technology use. Research methods include focused interaction and discourse analysis as well as case studies relying on categories developed from perspectives in applied linguistics. Such research represents a range of perspectives on what should be studied and what counts as evidence in the field (Bachman, 2006; Duff, 2006).

Stakeholders' Judgments

One way of obtaining specific data about learners' technology use is to systematically gather stakeholders' judgments about important aspects of the learning activities.

"Stakeholders," in this case, refers to the teachers and students who use the materials, as well as evaluators and researchers who could add additional perspectives to the analysis. Jamieson and Chapelle (forthcoming) conducted a study aiming to gather such information about *Longman English Interactive* (Rost & Fuchs, 2004), which had undergone an elaborate process of development in order to incorporate best practices in CALL materials. *Longman English Interactive (LEI)* is a video-based multimedia program aimed at developing integrated language skills of beginning to intermediate learners, offering four levels of increasing difficulty. Each *LEI* level has 12-15 units, and each unit includes two video-clips that are accompanied by comprehension exercises. In addition to the video-based listening, each unit provides explanations and practice in listening, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, speaking, and reading.

Jamieson and Chapelle (forthcoming) were interested in investigating the appropriateness of these materials, which had been produced in New York, for learners in many different ESL and EFL contexts. They examined the opinions of stakeholders in a number of different contexts and compared the extent to which appropriateness evaluations were constant across settings. Appropriateness of CALL materials was defined in terms of the six criteria from theory and research in instructed SLA (language learning potential, meaning focus, learner fit, authenticity, impact, and practicality), as outlined by Chapelle (2001). In particular, the research sought to answer the follow-

“Many studies of CALL over the past decade have drawn upon theory and methods from other second language studies.”

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ing question: What is the evaluation of the CALL materials given by English language learners and their teachers in different institutional contexts for each of six criteria?

Opinions about these criteria were solicited by means of a survey designed specifically for this purpose from the teachers who chose the materials, and the language learners who used them. Teachers administered the surveys and the data gathered were interpreted to respond to the questions for the group as a whole and for different sites including those in and out of the United States. Two hundred and twenty-one students and ten teachers from six schools participated in the study. Three US schools had intensive English programs (Arizona, New Jersey, and New York). The majority of these students were immigrants or international students wanting to improve their English to attend an American college. Three non-US schools, in Chile, Japan, and Thailand had different kinds of programs. Students in Chile signed up for this special course; those in Japan were required to take the course as part of their college curriculum; those in Thailand were in an English teacher preparation program.

Based on the results of students' responses on surveys, descriptive statistics for each of the six criteria (language learning potential, meaning focus, learner fit, authenticity, impact, and practicality) indicated that overall the multimedia CALL materials were judged to have a moderately good level of appropriateness. However, descriptive statistics revealed differences among individual classes. Results of statistical testing of differences showed that the mean scores for classes in Japan were significantly lower on many criteria.

Through both surveys and interviews, teachers were asked how much they thought

that their students had improved as a result of their use of *LEI* in listening, vocabulary, speaking, grammar, pronunciation, and reading. Findings suggested that except for two of the three teachers in Japan, *LEI* had "good" language learning potential. All of the teachers felt that the learners were at least a little engaged in the story, although both survey and interview responses indicated teachers' in the United States perceived a more favourable and positive engagement on the part of their students than those outside the United States. Results indicated at least "good" learner fit based on responses to two questions "Do you think that the *LEI* level was appropriate for the students?" and "Would you like to use *LEI* again for a similar group of students?" Teachers' perspectives on authenticity were divided between positive in the United States to more negative outside the United States. All of the teachers indicated that they integrated *LEI* at least a little with their classroom instruction, and many of the teachers reported that the students liked *LEI* a lot or some, with only two of the teachers, in Japan, saying that the students only liked *LEI* a little. Finally, teachers varied widely in their levels of reported technical and logistical problems, which reflected differing levels of practicality of the materials by the teachers.

Overall, the findings that *LEI's* appropriateness was good held for all classes except for those in Japan, where results were mixed to negative. This finding in addition to the positive findings from other classes outside the US suggests that these state-of-the-art multimedia materials created in an English-speaking context were appropriate more broadly, but that this claim needs to be supported empirically rather than assumed to be true. It was not the case in all contexts.

This approach to evaluating CALL materials in a classroom setting also raised some important methodological issues. For example,

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should authenticity, i.e., the fidelity of the language in the materials compared to that which the students will use beyond the classroom, be valued in an EFL setting, and if so, how should it be operationalized? Second, an interesting problem for data analysis is how to reconcile conflicting findings from different data sources (e.g., surveys and interview data). Whereas a meta-analysis synthesizes data from different studies using specified statistical procedures, in this context, it was necessary to have a conceptual means of integrating any divergent findings from the different sources in an argument. Third, the goal of the project was to look at CALL use within classrooms, but because the majority of the teachers were using the software for the first time, the project in fact investigated a new practice rather than ongoing classroom events. Finally, it is unclear how these learners' and teachers' responses to the systematic surveys reflect what they really did and thought while they were actually working with the CALL materials. These questions are useful in helping to improve the current understanding of the process of evaluating learning activities for language learners. The question about learners' performance is addressed regularly in research examining learners' behaviour as they work on CALL activities.

Analyzing Learners' Performance

Applied linguists have a long tradition and well-developed methodologies for examin-

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ing classroom language—i.e., the language teachers and students engage in during classroom activities (Chaudron, 1988). The basic idea behind such research is that it is necessary to see in great detail the amount and type of language that learners are exposed to as well as what kind of opportunities they have for production. The same perspective and method has been applied to the study of language learning through technology, whether students are working individually on the computer or whether they are communicating with each other over the Internet. The latter has been a very active area of research recently (e.g., Magnan, 2008). In such research, the data can be straightforward to collect because the computer can be set to record students' communication with one another. The challenge is in finding an appropriate means of analyzing the data (Chapelle, 2003).

Various forms of focused discourse analysis have been used in studies to examine features such as negotiation of meaning as it appears in the learners' online conversations. The following example was recorded among learners who were engaged in a conversation in response to an information gap communication task that had been set by the researcher. The two students, communicating on voice chat via the Internet were in different locations. They were instructed to pool the information each one had about a graduate program at a university and to make a joint recommendation to their friend about graduate school.

1. Sumiko: Alright. So about our friend Harry.

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2. Andy: Yeah, I'm a little concerned about him. I don't know, I'm a little concerned about him. I think he should take some leadership courses so he can gain some confidence. It looks like he's got a choice. He's interested in either Stanford or MIT.
3. Sumiko: Pardon?
4. Andy: It looks like Harry is interested in Stanford and MIT.
5. Sumiko: Yeah.
6. Andy: I don't know exactly how much you know about Harry, but I do know some things about Harry. And ah, I think he's got a great personality...

(Sauro, 2001)

The negotiation of meaning is evident beginning in line three, when Sumiko indicates a misunderstanding of what Andy has said. These types of negotiation of meaning episodes provide opportunities for second language acquisition according to an interactionist perspective (Pica, 1994) and, therefore, in looking for these episodes, the researchers can get an idea of the quality of the task. The interesting finding in this and other such studies is that the learners use the written language as one way of providing help when communication breakdowns occur with the oral language. In other words, meaning is negotiated differently online.

Another interesting finding from research looking at computer-mediated communication in second language learning is that interactive written communication affords students time to stop, think, and self-correct during conversation (Pellettieri, 2000). Students' pauses

and corrections are observable behaviour that would be expected to be beneficial for language learners because they provide evidence that students are noticing particular linguistic features, such as morphosyntax and vocabulary, that cause the difficulties.

A second approach to discourse analysis of learner language focuses on specific linguistic features that learners appear to acquire through interactions. For example, in research on learners of French and German, Belz and Kininger (2003) followed the conversations that their American learners had with their peers in Germany and France, respectively, as they collaborated on projects for their classes. By recording and examining their students' choice of familiar vs. formal second person pronouns, they were able to see one aspect of their learners' pragmatic development. The learners started out using the formal form with their peers (e.g., in French, the student might ask her peer, "Qu'est ce-que vous pensez?"). Their peers' genuine reactions of annoyance to being addressed formally by peers helped to move the French learners gradually to the pragmatically appropriate choice.

Other aspects of learning that appear in such cross cultural interactions are relevant for learning about the intercultural competence of learners. Work in this area has tended to focus on miscommunication, but unlike linguistic communication breakdowns, analysis of these sequences suggests that once a culturally-based misunderstanding has occurred, recovery is not a given (Belz, 2003; Ware & Kramsch, 2005). Moreover, unlike linguistic communication breakdowns, culturally-based ones seem to be very difficult to repair, and more seriously, it is not evident what learners gain from engaging in such breakdowns. Because cross-cultural collaborative projects among students are made possible through the use of the Internet, the de-

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velopment of intercultural competence through such activities is an important area of study today. For example, research in this area finds that students attempting to complete an assignment such as discussing and writing about a film that both groups have watched can be difficult because of students' inability to engage in cross-culturally sensitive discussion (Thorne, 2003).

Getting the Big Picture

Some technology researchers have pointed out that these types of micro-level data from learners' interactions take place when, where and how they do because of factors that come prior to the activities that researchers might be studying. Moreover, the success of such interactions needs to be examined in view of broader goals for language learning such as the development of strategies for using information and communication technology as well as intercultural competence. Warschauer's (1999) research raises the issue that any learning that takes place through technology depends on learners' access to technology and choice of particular technologies for particular purposes. Individual and historical factors affect students' perceptions of technology possibilities, and these perceptions have implications for their learning (Thorne, 2003). If the claims researchers are interested in making about technology use for language learning are about learners' background, motivation, interests, knowledge, and access to tech-

nology, then what are the methods that can be used to study learners' technology use?

The main objective of the study was to discover the connection between the technologies that the teacher prompted the students to use and what they reported actually using. An-

other objective was to learn about the other technologies that they chose for communication in French and learning about French language and culture. Finally, we hoped to identify any indication that the students felt their French language or cultural knowledge increased as a result of using technology as well as how their motivation and reasons for learning French were related to technology use.

Overall results indicated that the students used the technologies that were suggested and assigned in class by the French teacher, but their feelings toward the technology use varied depending on their interest in and backgrounds with technology as well as on their goals for the

class. Students who stated they wanted to practice their speaking expressed the view that the technology use precluded opportunities for engaging in speaking practice. Overall, the initial analysis revealed that in the technology rich higher education environment, there was actually a large variation in personal reported use of a range of technology. The data suggest that it would be difficult to support categorical claims about such students as technology users for language learning. Moreover, technology use for language learning was connected to the stu-

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dents' past experiences and motivations for learning French.

Conclusion

It should be evident from the examples of research described here that there are many ways of studying whether or not—as well as how, when and why—technology might be useful for language learning. The approaches to research are probably as numerous as the types of claims that one might want to be able to make about technology. Whereas the first approach to research I discussed above aimed to summarize comparative technology effects across many studies, the case study approach to research demonstrates some of what is missed in attempting to do so. The methodology for investigating CALL depends upon the claims that one wishes to make.

Claims to be made about language learning materials extend beyond comparisons of CALL to teacher-led, face-to-face classes. Such claims differ depending upon the audience for the research results (Chapelle, 2007). Those not closely affiliated with language teaching tend to think of CALL in view of how it compares to “traditional” instruction. However, for teachers, materials developers and applied linguists, findings about comparisons are too general to be useful for the types of understanding desired. What all this research has in common, however, is that it provides a means of moving beyond the claims made by marketing departments in publishing companies to providing credible claims about the quality of language learning materials and activities. Such research is based on some systematic observation of students' use of technology for language learning or the reports from students and teachers about technology use. ❖

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TEACHERS IN A CHANGING CLASSROOM: NEEDS AND TRENDS

Between Policy and Practice: Teachers in the LINC Classroom

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Abstract

In this paper, we examine the question of how teachers in Language for Immigrants and Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs perceive the Canadian immigrant language training policy and the place this policy plays in the ways they teach and assess the learners in their classes. Drawing on interview data with LINC teachers, this exploratory study examines what emerges for LINC teachers as the gap between the immigrant language training policy level and the more specific “curricular” level in the process of translating LINC policy into classroom practice. Issues explored include the extent to which teachers use the Benchmarks for assessing learners’ progress in LINC programs and for selecting settlement themes in lesson planning. We also examine how teachers teach “Canadian values, rights and responsibilities” and how some of the constraints in teaching conditions affect the translation of LINC policy into teaching practice.

Language policies, like other types of policies, establish “categories, rules and regulations that influence everyday activities” (Gibb, 2008, p. 318). In this paper we investigate how the current Canadian immigrant language training policy establishes rules and regulations about language teaching that influence the everyday teaching practices of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in the immigrant language training context. That is, we will examine how this language policy is understood and implemented by classroom teachers and how policies have influenced the conditions of teachers’ working lives. The focus in this paper is on Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), a policy in place since 1992, which provides survival level language instruction for newcomers who lack proficiency in one of Canada’s official languages. In 1991 the federal government announced the need for improved settlement services to “help immigrants and refugees adapt to the new country and participate fully...” (Immigrant Policy and Program Development Branch (NILTP), 1991, p. 1) with policy announcements asserting that in order to integrate, newcomers needed to acquire survival level competence in

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an official language and knowledge of “shared Canadian values, rights and responsibilities” (NILTP, 1991, p. 2).

A full review of LINC is not within the scope of this paper. A number of researchers, including Burnaby (1996), Fleming (2007) Fox and Courchêne (2005), Haque and Cray (2006) and others, have explored various aspects of the LINC policy and programs. In the following we focus on the ways in which teachers have understood the requirement that LINC classes provide learners with first, a basic level of language instruction and, second, information about settlement along with an understanding of Canadian values. As LINC policy announcements and a number of official and quasi-official documents make clear, teachers are to address these dual requirements of successful integration in their classrooms.

To facilitate the implementation of LINC policy goals in language classes for newcomers to Canada, the federal government enlisted “experts in second language teaching and training, testing and measurement” (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2000, p. VI) to produce a set of benchmarks that teachers are required to use to structure their teaching and guide assessment of English proficiency. The result of this proc-

ess was the publication in 2000 of *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000 (CLB 2000)*, described in the introduction as “a descriptive scale of communicative proficiency,” and “a framework of reference for learning, teaching, programming and assessing adults’ English as a Second Language in Canada” (Pawlikowska-Smith, p. VIII). *CLB 2000* details twelve levels of competence with each level divided into four skills — speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Although *CLB 2000* provides teachers with an explicit set of benchmarks designed to help learners achieve “basic language competency”, there is little in the document and the attendant implementation documents, curriculum guidelines and related instructional resources that explicitly lays out what “Canadian values, rights and responsibilities are” or how to teach them.¹ Although settlement themes are provided in many of the related teaching materials

based on *CLB 2000*, there is a gap between the immigrant language training policy level and the more specific “curricular” level for LINC teachers, even though the LINC classroom is the site where teachers must concretize the federal government’s integrative policy goals as they are laid out in the immigration plan. This process of translating LINC policy into classroom practice is explored below. Specifically, the questions explored are:

“...there is a gap
between the
immigrant
language
training policy
level and the more
specific ‘curricular’
level for LINC
teachers...”

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1. The LINC Guidelines 1-6 and curriculum produced by the Toronto District Catholic School Board offers only a few suggestions of what Canadian values might be.

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- a) How, in bridging this policy gap, do teachers use the *CLB 2000* to guide their teaching, if they do use it?
- b) To what extent do teachers use the Benchmarks for assessing learners' progress in LINC programs and for selecting settlement themes in lesson planning?
- c) How do teachers teach "Canadian values, rights and responsibilities" and what are some of the constraints in teaching conditions which affect the realization of LINC policy into teaching practice?

Teachers and the policy to practice connection

Although the government's immigration plan outlines the policy goals for the LINC program, teachers must concretize the goals of the policy within the context of the *CLB 2000* in their classrooms. Stritikus (2003) has termed this the "policy to practice connection" (p. 30); that is, "Teachers must learn about the changes called forth by the policy, and process this new information in ways consistent with adopting elements of the policy into practice" (p. 34). The process involved is not straightforward as teachers cannot simply channel policy goals and directives into the classroom. Teachers' beliefs and ideologies as well as the local schooling context and teacher experience impinge on how teachers make the policy to practice connection; as well, teacher attitudes towards policy may shift over time (Stritikus, 2003, p. 48). Jennings (1996) underscores Stritikus' point that policy is not simply translated via the teacher into the classroom but that external factors such as the structure of schooling, conditions and circumstances of the teachers' work

and practitioners' existing beliefs and capacities affect their interpretation of policy, which in turn influences their practice (p. 15). In other words, policy is "largely what practitioners [teachers] perceive it to be rather than some external document or legislation" (Jennings, 1996, p.15), since what teachers bring to their encounters with policies influences how they perceive them. This introduces the specific question of how teachers in LINC programs perceive the Canadian immigrant language training policy and the place that policy plays in the ways they teach and assess the learners in their classes.

Methodology

As a preliminary study, this policy-to-practice path was traced by interviewing 25 LINC teachers² in a moderate-sized Ontario city that receives a large number of newcomers annually. All but one of the teachers were women, all those interviewed had university degrees and had completed TESL teacher education programs that qualified them for certification by the provincial professional organization, TESL Ontario. Several had graduate degrees in TESL or applied linguistics. Some of the teachers had as many as 20 years of classroom teaching experience while others were new to the profession. All but four were native speakers of English.

We located interviewees by speaking with program supervisors and asking if we could contact teachers to ask them if they were willing to let us observe a class and then talk to them. Interviewees were identified through snowball sampling techniques and we were able to visit a wide range of programs including those organized by school boards, community organizations and private schools. All interviews we conducted were individual, open-ended and lasted for a minimum of an hour.

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Teachers were encouraged to explore a wide range of issues related to teaching in LINC programs (see Appendix). In most cases, we were able to observe part or all of the LINC class on the day of the interview. All interviews were transcribed and the interviewers/researchers then located recurring themes. As a contained qualitative study, the findings in this paper can be considered as preliminary research for a future larger scale multi-method project.

What teachers said about *CLB 2000*

We first explored the place of the Benchmarks in the teachers' practice. The requirement to use the Benchmarks was made explicit by directives from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) and by the teachers' supervisors. The teachers interviewed were well aware of the requirement that *CLB 2000* should inform what they taught and how they assessed learners. In answer to the question "Do you use the Benchmarks?" Helen said, "You have to use Benchmarks." Similarly Paul replied, "We have all fallen into line," a perception shared by Donna, who said, "We have the Benchmarks we have to work with." As these quotations indicate, teachers were aware that they were required to use the Benchmarks as a basis for teaching and assessment, but ideas about how the Benchmarks were to be used were less consistent.

As the teachers interviewed indicated that they used the Benchmarks, we then tried to

determine how they used them or more aptly, "What does it mean to 'use' the Benchmarks?" Teachers identified three ways in which the Benchmarks were to be used. First, teachers recognized that they were to use them as the basis for assessing learners' proficiency and achievement. While initial assessment of newcomers is carried out by assessors who administer the Canadian Language Benchmark Assessment (CLBA) — a standardized test based on the Benchmarks — or the Canadian Language Benchmarks Placement Test (CLBPT) — a shorter version of the CLBA - to determine the LINC level at which learners are placed, teachers are responsible for assessment procedures that chart learners' progress through LINC levels. Two teachers viewed the Benchmarks as a *de facto* test. Paul's opinion was that "The Benchmarks themselves are outcome-based tests." Anna expressed a similar view; "Benchmarks are only the skills that you can test." These teachers, among others, saw *CLB 2000* as providing lists of discrete objectives in each of the four skill areas that could be readily translated into assessment tasks.

When determining whether or not an individual learner should be moved to the next level of LINC classes, teachers were required to find ways to translate what they knew of learner proficiency into a Benchmark-based report. There were some resources for teachers to use, most notably *On Target* (Mirra, 1998), a textbook with suggestions on assessment tasks designed for LINC teachers. Ida, who taught in a small off-site program, explained how she met this requirement,

“Teachers identified three ways in which the Benchmarks were to be used.”

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I am using the Benchmarks. I am using *On Target* now to do some more testing because at the end of June I will have to move some students up... so I use it [*On Target*] to justify placements.

However, not all the teachers believed that the Benchmarks allowed them to make accurate assessments of student proficiency. Vicky's view was that the Benchmarks were not "working the way they should" because students in a particular level did not necessarily fit the learner profile implicit in the level descriptors. For example, she said that for her LINC 4 students, the Benchmarks assigned to that class level, were too easy; she had to reinterpret the objectives to fit the class. Gina's view was the most extreme because she did not believe the Benchmarks were relevant to learners in her class. She stated that she managed assessment by "... doing it backwards," that is, she decided at what level learners should be placed and then she would "just plug in the Benchmarks that is [sic] going to get them into the class where I think they fit." The Benchmarks served to regulate the dimensions along which learners were assessed and the measures that marked their progression through the language training program. With the establishment and placement of these discrete learning objectives against which learners were judged, the Benchmarks had a clear curricular function as the bases for teaching and assessment; inevitably and naturally teachers "taught to" the Benchmarks.

Teachers identified the Benchmarks as the document that structured what and how they taught. The introduction to the Benchmarks indicates that they are "learned-centred," "task-based," "competency based" and that

they stress "community, study and work-related tasks (Pawlikowska-Smith, p. VII). Teachers often described the Benchmarks as providing a number of themes or topics, such as transportation, housing, medical care, banking and schooling that were to be taught in LINC classes. Much of the discussion about how the Benchmarks figured in their teaching focussed on how they planned their classes around these themes, which in fact are not in *CLB 2000* but in implementation documents such as *LINC Curriculum Guidelines* (Hajer, Robinson & Wild, 2002). Teachers discussed how they went about integrating various aspects of instruction into a particular theme. For example, Helen said she taught thematically in her class and when, for example, using housing as a theme, she

would bring in things like how to fill in an application for housing, how to fight an eviction, and I would bring someone [in]. And if you had fire in the house, if you had a security issue and we would talk about safety inside the house. Many things you can talk about.

Teachers were free to develop a theme in any number of ways and to include whatever language skills they might see as appropriate. Vicky expressed a common position: "We try to use the LINC themes as a foundation and work from there." Terry said that when she was working on a particular theme, she had to "throw in some structure, some grammar, some pronunciation." One teacher reported that she worked "within themes," which served, as another noted, as "guidelines... the basics." Some teachers used the Benchmarks to guide the teaching of skills. As Petra stated:

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I try to be sure that Benchmarks are covered in the reading, writing, and-speaking part of it. It may not happen on a daily basis, it may not happen on a monthly basis, but I do make sure that I do stay within those guidelines.

She then added the following caveat: “Depending on the needs [of your students], you might have to fudge around with Benchmarks a little bit.”

Rose saw the Benchmarks as providing a “good foundation,” but one that she never “depended on.” Laura, the most absolute in her allegiance to the Benchmarks, followed them

very closely...I set my outcomes according to the outcomes in the guidelines and that is what I am working toward when I am making my lesson plans...I use the resources listed in the LINC curriculum guide.

Whether it was themes, skills or grammar points, teachers viewed the Benchmarks as providing explicit guidance on what was to be taught in the LINC classroom. When asked to discuss the requirement that they use the *CLB 2000*, teachers made it clear that they were aware that the Benchmarks regulated what they must teach and what newcomers are supposed to learn.

There was a third required use of Benchmarks. Most of the teachers in the sample had to submit monthly reports on what they had planned and taught. These reports were based on the Benchmarks: indexing skills and activities to the *CLB 2000* descriptors. These reports were the means by which their institutions —

school boards, community organizations, or private schools — reported to CIC, which in turn monitored programs based on these monthly reports and attendance records. Gina summarized the reporting activity by saying,

So we fill out this monthly thing of what we have been working on and relate it to the themes. I don't know if mine is all that helpful, but I realize that the bosses have to account for what they are doing.”

Petra provided a more elaborated account:

Monthly they ask us to do a report about what happened in the class in terms of our performance outcomes and our teaching objectives for the month... That shows whatever we have done in class for that month. I do the usual reading and writing for the month.

Vicky felt that the monthly reports served not only as a way for CIC to monitor the LINC programs, but also ensured that teachers used the Benchmarks. She said that “there is a certain pressure you feel to conform to the LINC themes” because of the mandatory reporting. “You want,” she said, “to be adaptable, but you tend to stick fairly closely to the LINC themes.” This curtailment of flexibility related to her belief that the Benchmark themes were not relevant to many learners; she noted that “the higher the level (of LINC class), the less the themes are useful.” Tina concurred, stating that she referred to *CLB 2000* only when writing the reports and believed the Benchmark objectives would have been more appropriate for earlier immigrant groups, but not for the more edu-

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cated and motivated newcomers she had in her class.

The teachers identified three uses for the Benchmarks — as the basis for assessment, for teaching and for reporting; however, teachers found that the Benchmarks were not totally appropriate for any of these uses. First teachers reported that the Benchmarks did not fit the profile of the learners in their classes. Some learners already possessed some of the skills or knowledge that should be taught at that level. Others were in need of instruction in areas that are not identified in the Benchmarks. Assessment is equally problematic as teachers are not provided with a means of standardized assessment and must create their own tasks to measure achievement. The relevance of the Benchmarks is again an issue if teachers are assessing achievement and performance based on descriptors they do not believe reflect what learners need to learn or have learned. In both cases, when planning teaching and managing assessment, teachers used the Benchmarks; in the first case for ideas about what to teach and, as an occasional reference to ensure that they are on track and, in the case of assessment, as a means to report on what they have taught and what their students have achieved.

“The relevance of the Benchmarks is again an issue if teachers are assessing achievement and performance based on descriptors they do not believe reflect what learners need to learn or have learned.”

As LINC teachers prepared and taught their classes and assessed students, they were clearly aware of the Benchmarks, but as the interview data show, there were various understandings of how the Benchmarks were to be used. Teachers knew the Benchmarks were to be used as the basis for reporting student achievement and for planning their teaching, and they managed in light of these two requirements to find ways to ‘use’ Benchmarks. However, it became evident that even if teachers recognized the requirement, some did not believe that the Benchmarks were valid or useful. Bonnie’s evaluation of the Benchmarks was “what a pain...” while Wendy’s comment was that “the Benchmarks still need some work. You have to read an enormous amount of claptrap in order to understand what you need.” Although the federal government initiated the development of the CLB in tandem with the implementation of its newcomer settlement and language training policy, as a set of guidelines to help realize the government’s policy goals, the *CLB 2000* is interpreted and used in many ways by the LINC teachers, even as they remain aware of the important role the Benchmarks have for the regulation and structuring of their teaching and assessment.

What teachers taught

While the Benchmarks framed what teachers planned for their classrooms, they

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were not the only factor that influenced content and activities. Teachers related their teaching to settlement themes such as housing, transportation, and medical care but reported that they had to elaborate and supplement these topics. As Elaine explained, “So I looked at the LINC themes, the reading textbook, and the grammar textbook and tried to come up with a weekly theme.” She went on to say that the theme structured the teaching for the week but that she had to plan the full range of activities:

This week is home and family, so I gave them teepees, igloos, solar homes, underground homes, foster homes, and blended families... We just try and the vocabulary and the grammar... they will be looking for an apartment so that fits in with the theme.

Joan engaged in a similar process, trying

to make it [the class] worth their while with the different themes whether it be health or transportation or community... and you know I try to work with them.

Similarly, Vicky selected “a theme and then [drew] material from wherever” to develop appropriate and relevant activities. For some teachers, themes were selected based on what they determined learners needed or wanted to learn in their LINC classes. In some cases, there was congruence between the descriptors and objectives in *CLB 2000* and teachers’ perceptions of learners’ needs. For example Ida explains her rationale for choosing food as a theme:

The things that these people are really interested in are things like food for their family. So we are doing Canada’s food guide and healthy eating. They are quite concerned about what their children are eating and if it is healthy.

This is a view shared by Marie, who stated,

Often I will follow a LINC theme and find an article related to that. I teach some grammar and then we do a lot of conversation applying that grammar. That generally seems to be the sort of thing they are looking for.

Teachers often assumed that they understood what learners needed and that their teaching experience and professional training enabled them to make judgments about what was appropriate or useful for learners. Marie, for example, stated that her students failed to understand how important it was to develop their written English, and that her students’ lack of interest was “a miscalculation on their part.” Wendy, the teacher who relied most on her understanding of students’ needs, reported that she ignored the Benchmarks and assessment results instead trusting her “gut feeling” about what students needed and should be able to do. As she said, “I have been here for 15 years and I know what I’m doing.” Many teachers relied on their experience and on their intuition to determine what they taught, feeling that a document such as *CLB 2000* could not address the needs of a specific group of students whose needs, expectations, and preferences were understood by the teacher.

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Teachers varied in the importance they assigned to the teaching of grammar. Most teachers in the sample accepted that explicit grammar instruction was a central part of LINC instruction; particularly as it was laid out in such *CLB 2000* descriptors as, “Uses correct past tense with many common verbs” (*CLB 2000*, p. 12). However, several teachers were emphatic about the need for grammar instruction that was not integrated with a theme. Bev said that she taught a lot of grammar because students at the LINC 2 level needed explicit instruction on points such as past tense verbs, prepositions, and basic sentence structure, while Anna was convinced that learners “need it [grammar]. If they don’t have good grammar, they don’t speak well or write well and so we tend to emphasize grammar.”

Teachers differed in how they carried out grammar instruction. Several of the teachers attempted to integrate content and grammar. Elaine, when teaching about housing, found that when her class began an activity that focused on looking for an apartment, she was able to work on modals because “that fits in with the theme.” Connie used the Benchmarks to determine what grammar points learners should be learning: “...I will refer back to the curriculum to see where they are supposed to be. Is it reported speech at this point or is it just asking questions?”

**“Many teachers
relied on their
experience and
on their intuition
to determine
what they
taught...”**

Both Gina and Nate separated grammar instruction from thematic teaching. Gina said, “I try to ignore the (themes) and try to apply my themes afterwards” while Nate maintained that if he integrated explicit instruction with the themes, he feared that “the grammar might get lost in the themes. I like to keep them separate.” He summarized his view on the grammar by saying “I think that grammar is important and you can never get too good in grammar.” In short, many teachers drew heavily on settlement themes even when focusing on grammar instruction. For the most part, settlement themes were used for creating teaching content for “basic language competency” instruction in the LINC classroom; however, as will be discussed in the next section, many teachers also drew on the settlement themes in their attempt to realize the policy goals of teaching “Canadian values, rights and responsibilities.”

Teaching Settlement and Integration

During the interview, teachers were asked to discuss their understanding of settlement, integration and the “values, rights and responsibilities” that were to be communicated to learners in LINC classes. It was clear from their responses that teachers found it easier to define what qualified as settlement topics than to define and discuss what it means to integrate into Canadian society or what constitutes Canadian values. Given that these were central elements in the government’s policy goals, how teachers incorporated these topics into their

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teaching was a critical part of the policy to practice connection. Many teachers used the term 'survival' in their definition of settlement. Bev gave a succinct definition: "Settlement is defined as learning what you need to know in order to survive", or as Laura stated, newcomers need "settlement and survival language." Settlement education was seen as useful to the newly arrived who needed both language and information to address basic tasks around housing, transportation, and medical care. Donna detailed the tasks facing newcomers:

Settlement? Definitely — finding out about housing, dealing with housing problems, talking to the superintendent, finding new housing if they need it, dealing with schools, talking to the teachers about their children.

Teachers felt that the themes associated with LINC teaching were an appropriate basis for the teaching of settlement. Laura had recently addressed issues such as finding a family doctor, an issue she clearly identified as a settlement topic. Petra found the weather a topic of importance for newcomers:

We did talk about Canadian weather and how to dress for the weather. Things that you may not know from your own country. You have to have someone from Canada tell you. Things like today is a sunny, bright day, but it is not necessarily warm out. The students don't know that.

Lisa saw settlement issues as best taught through what she termed the "survival topics"

including transportation, medical care, and childcare.

However, teachers had much more difficulty defining and specifying what newcomers had to know and do in order to integrate into Canadian life. Ida saw integration as knowing "how to live in Canada...what language you need to pull that off." Nate's definition of integration centred on employment, as it did for other teachers, "I think it boils down to two things — first gaining language skills so that you can better integrate into the community and get a job."

A second definition of integration centred on the importance of newcomers learning about and becoming active in their local communities. For Rose, such involvement was an essential component of Canadian identity that newcomers needed to be aware of. Rose added that she emphasized to her students what Canadians "expect from them and how to deal with situations." Anna defined integration as "melding into society" indicating integration was more than "learning specific skills." Joan, along with several other teachers, focused not so much on community integration as contact with Canadians. She recounted two cases — one of a woman who began to talk to other mothers during her daughter's dance class and another who participated in the parent council of a local school. From this she concluded, "Here's some integration."

This belief that in order to integrate learners had to be involved in the community led teachers to complain that the cuts in funding for field trips made it more difficult for them to introduce learners to community resources. Theresa concurred: "Field trips address integration, things like going to the library or just finding the mainstream of Canadian society." Ida despaired that learners would not integrate because "...on weekends most of my students don't do anything" outside the home. Her solu-

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tion to this was to arrange a field trip to a local library as a place they could access community resources. Sarah also saw field trips as important:

You need to be introduced to the place that you live in. Field trips are a good way to this. Like the sugar bush, it is a neat thing...Some of these people do not go anywhere.

When asked how they helped learners acquire “Canadian values, rights and responsibilities” in the LINC classroom, teachers’ responses varied widely. Connie identified the values that newcomers needed to acquire as

things like personal space, personal hygiene... basic things and what I’ve done is put on the curriculum personal space, hygiene, manners, politeness, what is expected in Canada, the Canadian expectation.

She continued, “They need to know that garbage goes in the garbage can. Promptness; that is another thing I address.” This narrow definition of Canadian values was widespread among the teachers. Ida reported that after she had seen a group of newcomers leave garbage around a park, she had a class discussion about parks “that [are] used by everyone and you have to clean up after yourself.” She saw this as an example of teaching Canadian values. Joan too located values in terms of expected behaviours and attitudes, elaborating that she tried

...to impress on them things like being on time or being responsible to call

and say they’re sick or something like that. If you have a job and you didn’t show up day after day... that kind of thing. We also acknowledge different religious holidays, like Chinese New Year and something and wish everybody a.... I think that way we’re showing freedom of religion, respect for that.

In fact, holidays emerged as a major theme when teachers discussed Canadian values. Stella, like Joan, viewed knowledge of holidays as an indication of religious tolerance:

And the people when they are away for different holidays and we talk about respecting other people’s holidays and respects other people’s food.

Other teachers associated holidays with what it meant to be Canadian. Vicky said, “When we talk about Canadian values, I guess we are talking about holidays like Thanksgiving and Wintertlude.” Though she did wonder, if given Canada’s official policy on multiculturalism, she should even “talk about celebrating Christmas or even Thanksgiving.”

Several teachers viewed volunteering as an important Canadian value. Terry saw it as a central value and told her students that volunteering is “a value of our society” and that they needed to know that “We pay back and contribute to society. That is a big part of our culture. They need to see that.” This was a view echoed by Bonnie, who set up opportunities for the learners in her classes to volunteer because she felt this would integrate them into their communities.

Sarah spoke at length about Canadian values, saying that “tolerance is a big one.” She

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detailed a classroom incident in which Muslim students had found it difficult to believe that a Chinese student was not religious. Her commentary focused on her belief that

their [newcomers'] world view needs to be pried open a bit. Not just us and them, they do it that way. We are all here together and we need to find things that pull us together. Like, I like it that the first few words of our national anthem are 'our home.' That we share.

Clearly teachers found it difficult to articulate how integration was to be taught. While the themes they saw as integral to the LINC related teaching materials were interpreted as part of settlement education, there was little that could be used to guide the teaching of integration. When asked directly to define the values, rights and responsibilities that informed Canadian life, teachers struggled both to define what those were and to describe ways they could be taught. Given that explicit definitions of "Canadian values, rights and responsibilities" are absent from the *CLB 2000* and related LINC teaching materials - even as teaching these values remains a central government language policy training goal — it is not surprising that although teachers turned to the themes as part of settlement education, they relied on a range of haphazard and personal interpretations of values, rights and responsibilities as part of integration "education."

Teaching conditions and teacher constraints

The original focus of our research was on investigating how teachers in LINC programs used the *CLB 2000* to inform their teaching with particular attention given to their un-

derstanding of what newcomers to Canada needed in order to settle and integrate. During the interviews, a different area of interest emerged. While we, the interviewers, were concerned with discovering how teachers conceptualized the place of newcomer settlement and integration in the LINC classroom, teachers were eager to discuss how the LINC policy had affected their work conditions. To understand why teachers were dissatisfied, it is necessary to refer to the original policy framework for LINC and to consider how LINC programs were funded and managed. LINC programs were to provide immigrants with more flexible training options to fit their individual needs and circumstances;

- Achieve a better match between the training offered and individual needs through improved assessment and referrals; and
- Make language training available to a broader range of immigrants, regardless of their immigrant category or their labour market status or intentions. (NILTP, p. 1).

At the time of our research, CIC contracted with service provider organizations (SPOs), such as community organizations and school boards, to administer programs, many of which were off-site. SPOs had to submit proposals and budgets for language programs that satisfied the policy framework stipulations. In order to meet the requirement that programs be available and accessible, providers established programs at off-site locations in, for example, portable classrooms, school and church basements, community centres and office buildings. We interviewed one teacher who taught in a room so small that when a learner arrived late, everyone in the class had to stand to allow the

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latecomer to get to her seat. In another location, class discussion was punctuated by the sound of basketballs being bounced on the floor above. While such sites were often convenient for populations of learners, teachers found themselves isolated in cramped locations that lacked even minimal facilities and resources, such as photocopies, textbooks or computers. Because these off-site programs were small and the population of students diverse, teachers had multi-level classes, a situation that always poses challenges for teachers. The situation was even more challenging because of the policy of continuous enrolment, which satisfied the mandate of program accessibility as students did not have to wait until the beginning of a new term to begin language classes. This policy posed problems for teachers who then had to integrate students into the class throughout the term.

In one off-site program, we observed a class of about 20 registered students including literacy learners as well as students at LINC levels 1, 2, and 3 along with some ESL students.² The teacher moved among the groups, attempting to give some individual attention to students at the lower levels while organizing activities for higher level groups. Most classes were not this diverse, but many teachers did have to organize their teaching in inadequate spaces with few resources trying to address the needs of multi-levels classes. These factors served to isolate teachers, in part because there were often only one or two teachers in off-site programs. In his discussion about what influences the teaching of second and foreign language in the U.S., Crookes (1997) identified many issues that overlapped with those the LINC teachers

faced. A major constraint for teachers was their isolation; as Crookes (1997, p. 58) outlines,

Teachers are isolated by their subordinate status, the physical and tight scheduling restrictions which limit interactions, and the exclusion of lesson preparation and professional development as part of teachers' paid professional responsibilities.

The last part of this statement is particularly relevant to the situation of the LINC teachers who are paid a relatively low rate for classroom contact hours but not for lesson preparation and marking. Given that teachers had to prepare materials for students at different levels, this lack of paid preparation time was identified by interviewees as particularly vexing.

Equally vexing was the requirement that teachers be certificated by their professional organization, TESL Ontario. Teachers had to meet a number of certification requirements, including having completed a teacher education program from an institution recognized by TESL Ontario, participating in professional development activities and maintaining TESL Ontario membership and paying the fee required for certification. Many of the teachers found both the certification process and the fees excessive and burdensome.

Teachers felt that the LINC programs did not receive the funding they needed or deserved and that it was teachers who suffered the consequences of this lack of funding. Poor pay, little or no job security, lack of resources and inadequate facilities all influenced how and

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2. ESL students are provincially funded and may include citizens, diplomats, etc.

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what teachers taught. As Haque and Cray (2007, p. 641) have noted:

Clearly LINC teachers were... focused on the microlevel concerns of the classroom, finding creative ways to balance the externally imposed requirement of the Benchmarks with what their students wanted and within the range of contextual and constraining factors.

Conclusion

The federal government's newcomer language training program as it emerged from the 1991-1995 Immigration Plan centres on a two-pronged strategy of official language instruction for "basic language competency" and integrative instruction on "Canadian values, rights and responsibilities." However, even as this policy was concretized for instruction through the production of the *CLB 2000* and related teaching guidelines and materials, there was a curricular gap as the teaching of integration, particularly "Canadian values, rights and responsibilities" remained unspecified. Teaching within the regulating framework of the *CLB 2000* LINC teachers are the connection between policy and practice. As the interviews with teachers have shown, this is not a straightforward process; rather, various factors impinge upon how policy is or is not realized.

Interviews with LINC teachers show that the Benchmarks served as a set of reference points for LINC teachers that could not be ignored. LINC teachers' understanding and use of *CLB 2000*, to structure what is taught and how it is taught, as well as the indexing of student skills and classroom activities to the *CLB 2000*

for reporting purposes, clearly demonstrate the extent to which the Benchmarks not only regulated but also produced the classroom practices of the teachers. Furthermore, the reported and observed isolating and subordinating conditions under which some teachers worked had a direct impact on how they taught and approached their own personal and professional development as LINC teachers. Therefore, the foremost micro concerns of the classroom meant that the more long term goals of LINC policy, particularly the unspecified goal of integration as the teaching of "Canadian values, rights and responsibilities" could only be realized in a limited, ad hoc and often problematic way.

This paper shows that there are challenges for many LINC teachers in their task of translating policy into practice. Factors such as working conditions as well as lack of effective and clear curricula are obstacles, but it is the lack of clarity and specificity at the policy level regarding the "integration" of newcomers which is one of the biggest hurdles for LINC teachers in the policy to practice connection. From our findings, the problem lies in the conditions under which government policy is translated into teaching practice in the LINC classroom. In this understanding of the problem, ideal solutions would include clear translation of policy goals into concrete classroom objectives and teaching guidelines; increasing resources allocated to support LINC teachers and LINC teaching conditions as well as advocacy for uniformity across LINC teaching conditions. Ultimately, the results of this preliminary research study show that much more research is needed in this area; research which can in due course inform how teachers can best concretize government policy goals as effective teaching practice. ❖

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*Appendix: Guiding Interview Questions***Current employment:**

- Kind of program/class currently teaching?
- LINC level?
- Class population (level, gender, background, average time in Canada/time in LINC?)
- Textbooks used, materials, computer materials/access, etc.

Purpose of LINC (language and “integration” content):

- What do you see as the purpose/goals of the LINC program?
- How did you find out what these goals/purposes were?
- What level of language proficiency is expected/ mandated?
- How does LINC address issues of settlement and integration?
- How is settlement defined? And where?
- How is integration defined? And where?

Implementation and Practice of LINC:

- What do you think it is important to teach in LINC classes? In your preparation and planning, how do you address language and course content?
- What “language” do you teach? What is the focus of your “language” lessons? How do you decide what “language” to teach? How do you teach it?
- What do you teach about (content)? What is the focus of your teaching content? How do you teach it?
- Do you use any LINC materials in your class? Which ones? How do you use the materials?
- Do you develop your own teaching materials? If so, how do they reflect LINC’s focus on language and content? If not, why?

Focus on “integration”?

- Is LINC useful for newcomers’ integration into Canadian society?
- How do LINC’s definitions of settlement and integration fit with your understanding and classroom practice – particularly in terms of course content? (Show quotes).
- If you were free to teach anything and in any way, what would you change?

Section on personal and professional information:

- Educational background? Are your qualifications recognized by TESL ON (recent certification initiative – thoughts?)
- Teaching experience? Here/ Abroad?
- Other related work experience/history?
- Lived/ born abroad?
- Languages spoken – English 1st language? Do you consider yourself to be a NS or NNS of English? Proficiency level?

TEACHERS IN A CHANGING CLASSROOM: NEEDS AND TRENDS

Using a WebCT Discussion Forum during the TESL Practicum: Reflection as Social Practice

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Abstract

Within teacher education, reflection is widely used as a strategy to help teachers become more aware of their teaching practices and, as the case may be, to foster change. In the past, such reflection has typically involved individual journal writing with feedback from one other person, for example, a university supervisor during a practicum. More recently, however, the increasingly widespread availability of online discussion forums opens up the possibility of changing this relatively solitary endeavour into a broader social practice by enabling posts to be responded to by a larger audience. One framework which has been used to analyse the degree to which participants in a discussion forum may be engaging in co-construction of knowledge is that devised by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2001). The present study discusses how the social and cognitive components of this framework were adapted to analyze the posts of pre-service ESL teachers who engaged in a WebCT discussion forum during their practicum.

Due to what Lortie (1975) has referred to as “the apprenticeship of schooling,” students in teacher education programs arrive with well-established beliefs about what learning and teaching involves. As such beliefs act as a filter through which subsequent learning will be apprehended and judged, most teacher educators attempt to engage students in critical reflection to make them more aware of these beliefs and how they might influence their teaching practice (Farrell, 2007; Lockhard & Richards, 1994; Schön, 1983; Stanley, 1998; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). In the past, such reflection has typically involved individual journal writing with feedback from one other person, for example a university supervisor during a practicum. More recently, however, the advent of technological tools, in particular the discussion forum, makes possible virtual online communities where posts can be read and commented on by a larger number of participants. This broadening of the audience creates a context

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which can potentially lead to deeper reflection and enhancement of the process of knowledge construction (Paulus & Scherff, 2008).

More specifically as concerns current thinking about teacher education programs (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2006), the creation of such communities of learners can also provide one means of overcoming what has been referred to as the theory-practice dichotomy. Within traditional depictions of teacher education programs, the assumption is that pre-service teachers will learn about teaching in one context (the teacher education program), then apply what they have learned in another context (the practicum). Such a transmission perspective on learning fails, however, to take into account the socio-cultural complexities of the school environments where the work of teaching is carried out. Rather than view the difficulties encountered by pre-service teachers as problems of implementation, situations need to be created where they are afforded the opportunity to voice their concerns and make links with new ideas/coursework in the context of their actual teaching contexts. Such a socio-constructivist perspective to learning to teach may be best viewed as praxis, as suggested by Johnson (2006).

A number of educators (Murphy, 2000; Paulus & Scherff, 2008) maintain that online

communities are both conducive to facilitating socio-constructivist approaches to learning and fostering what has been referred to as anytime, anywhere learning (Lock, 2006). More specifically, as concerns pre-service teachers, the creation of online communities makes it possible to bring together individuals

who would in many instances be geographically dispersed. In terms of the theory-practice dichotomy, such communities could also serve to enable instructors whose courses are concurrent with a practicum (other than those who are directly in charge of a practicum) to engage pre-service teachers in reflections directly related to their teaching experiences.

The present article draws on data from a discussion forum activity engaged in by pre-service ESL teachers during an online seminar which took place during a practicum. Within the broader study one of the objectives was to analyse the posts to determine to what degree the latter were

actually interacting with each other and engaging in knowledge construction. As a prelude to this analysis, this article focuses on the framework of analysis, which was adapted from one originally proposed by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2001). Before proceeding with this, I will first briefly review studies within the domain of second language teacher education which have involved the use of asynchronous computer-mediated communication (ACMC), i.e., tools such as the dis-

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**“...the creation of
online
communities
makes it
possible to bring
together
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would in many
instances be
geographically
dispersed.”**

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discussion forum or email which do not involve real time exchanges. I will then provide an overview of the broader study from which the posts discussed herein were drawn. Following this, I will discuss why the Garrison et al. (2001) framework was selected for this analysis and how it was adapted.

Second Language Teacher Education and Studies involving ACMC tools

Although ACMC tools offer the possibility of creating an online community of learners, published studies related to second language teacher education are still fairly limited. Of those which have been published to date, most pertain to their use in the context of disciplinary coursework (Arnold & Ducate, 2006; Kamhi-Stein, 2000a; Sengupta, 2001; Pawan, Paulus, Yalcin, & Chang, 2003; Potts, 2005). Of particular note is the Arnold and Ducate (2006) study, which, as in the present case, drew on the framework developed by Garrison et al. (2001). In their study, the participants were university graduate teaching assistants enrolled in a foreign language teaching methodology course in two different universities. A total of 23 students, organized into groups of four or five, participated in the discussion forum. As explained by Arnold and Ducate, the main objective of the exchange was to "engage students in interactive reflection of class material and its practical applications as well as to provide a support network for the new and future teachers, where they could discuss their questions and concerns with other students also in the beginning of their teaching careers." (p. 46). Triggering questions related to the course material were

posed by the instructors but students were free to "take topics in any direction in which they were interested." (p. 46). Based on their analysis, Arnold and Ducate demonstrated that the exchanges provided evidence, to varying degrees, of both social presence (the degree to which students were actually interacting with each other) and cognitive presence (the degree to which knowledge constructive was in evidence).

Few studies involving the use of ACMC tools by participants concurrently involved in teaching, as in the case of a practicum, have emerged (Schalgal, Trathen, & Blanton, 1996; Yildirim & Kiraz, 1999; Kamhi-Stein, 2000b). Although these studies suggest that ACMC tools may be an interesting option for creating interactivity amongst participants, the analyses were primarily descriptive and anecdotal. Of note is that none involved a more systematic analysis of the content as made possible through the application of frameworks such as that proposed by Garrison et al. (2001). Such analyses are important to determine to what degree socially mediated interaction is actually taking place. Although discussion forums hold potential for creating communities of learners, certain studies have shown that posts can be largely isolated and knowledge construction limited (Henry, 1991).

Context for the Study

The present article is drawn from a study which involved pre-service teachers enrolled in a Bachelor of Education in TESL degree in a French medium university in the province of Quebec. In this province, undergraduate degrees in education are typically four years in length; within the French lan-

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guage school system, English as a Second Language (ESL) is an obligatory subject in both the elementary and secondary grades. In the fall session in 2008, 52 pre-service teachers were simultaneously enrolled in their fourth practicum (15 weeks in length) and an online seminar which involved a discussion forum. As within the university where this study was conducted, pre-service teachers were mainly supervised by university supervisors whose background was in teaching subjects in the French school system other than ESL, the forum provided a means of bringing together the TESL students to focus on issues related to ESL teaching.

For the discussion forum, the pre-service teachers were required to make a minimum of 8 posts of which three were supposed to initiate an exchange and the others to be responses to other posts. Although start and end dates were stipulated, the only other specification in this regard was that the posts should be spread out. Within the discussion forum, students could choose from a variety of topics which included such items as classroom management, maximizing the use of English, and the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the elementary and secondary grades. As students were involved in a practicum, it was suggested that they use the forum to seek advice on problems they were experiencing and/or share their successes. Students were specifically encouraged to ask questions to focus the discussion on a problem or an issue. Evaluation criteria also stipulated that posts which initiated a strand should be a minimum of 15 lines in length and responses a minimum of 10. They were also asked to make relevant links with theoretical concepts pertaining to second language

teaching and include a minimum of three references to published sources. Students were free to choose to post from amongst the various topics proposed; however, within each topic, they had to initiate the strands.

Data Collection

Data for the broader study were gathered from three sources:

1. A survey to ascertain students' perceptions of the discussion forum activity;
2. Semi-structured interviews; and
3. The WebCT posts.

As the present article focuses on the framework used to analyse the posts, only this data source will be considered in the following. In all, the 52 pre-service teachers posted a total of 632 messages. All posts were downloaded, photocopied, and organized in a binder according to the topic they covered. Examples of four posts from a strand involving the discussion of ICTs in the elementary grades are provided in Appendix A. As the researcher was also the instructor of the online seminar, to avoid conflict of interest the research portion of the study was conducted in the winter session 2009 once marks had been submitted and students were no longer in any of her classes.

Development of a Coding Framework for the Study

As previously noted, the framework originally developed by Garrison et al. (2001),

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which focuses on both social and cognitive presence, was selected to analyze the posts obtained for this study. Although, as discussed by Arnold and Ducate (2006), other frameworks have been used to analyze online discussions, Garrison et al.'s is the only one specifically designed for this purpose and, to date, is the one most widely used. As well, it provides categories for analyzing social presence, a necessary component for negotiating meaning and co-constructing knowledge. With respect to the present study, the first attempts at analysing the posts aimed at determining the fit between the original coding criteria and the data at hand¹. Although the categories for social presence were largely retained, a number of changes were made to those suggested for the analysis of cognitive presence. In the next two sections, I will present the Garrison et al. framework and discuss how it was adapted for the analysis of the posts of the present study. For purposes of illustration, reference will be made to the posts in the Appendix.

Analysis of Social Presence

An overview of the analysis of social presence for the present study is provided in Table 1. In keeping with the Garrison et al. (2001) study, social presence is analysed in terms of three criteria: emotional expression, open communication, and group cohesion.

Emotional expression refers to the degree to which participants express their feelings in relation to items discussed in their posts. With respect to the present study, this involved how the pre-service teachers felt, whether positively or negatively, about their experiences during their practicum. Although in the original Garrison et al. framework, two indicators were noted — self-disclosure and humour — in the present study, only the former was in evidence. In the Appendix, instances of emotional expression have been indicated in bold. Thus, within these posts, typical expressions as to how the pre-service teachers were orienting to their practicum experiences include the following: *That part was easy, That is when trouble started, ...they found it a challenge, This went well, I was wrong, I was disappointed*. Such expressions, especially those relating to personal difficulties, suggest that students felt sufficiently at ease within the context of the forum to risk stating what they were actually experiencing. As the practicum can be a stressful experience for students, it is noteworthy that students can use this venue to vent emotions (Paulus & Sherff, 2008).

Open Communication refers to the degree to which participants specifically address comments to each other (reciprocity) as well as the degree to which the comments are respectful. This category is further delineated in terms of whether the comments provide evidence of mutual awareness or recognition of each other's contributions; indicators of

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1. Pawan et al. (2003) note some of the difficulties involved in trying to strictly apply the Garrison et al. (2001) framework, to the coding of their data. Amongst other things, they point to the ambiguous nature of some of the proposed indicators for the subcategories pertaining to cognitive presence.

Table 1: Analysis of Social Presence

SOCIAL PRESENCE	
EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION	= ability/ confidence to express feelings related to practicum experience
Self-disclosure	e.g., That is when trouble started/ I was disappointed/ What was really interesting was that.../ It was a really great activity/ The students really enjoyed this project/ It worked well, but not as well as I had expected/ To my surprise, this was a great experience
OPEN COMMUNICATION	= reciprocal/respectful exchanges
Mutual Awareness	= directed at individuals
Use of reply function	Automatically generated number referring to a previous post
Salutation	e.g., Hello Isabelle/ Hi
Direct comment at individual	e.g., You could try doing an Internet Rally/ I strongly suggest that you.../ If I were you, I would have a serious talk with the principal about this
Direct question at individual	e.g., How are you evaluating them?/ What do you give your students to read?
Express sympathy	e.g., I am very sorry to hear you are going through this experience/ I hope it will help you a bit
Leave-taking	e.g., See you/ See ya/ Bye/ Best/ Keep me posted
Recognition of each other's contributions	= directed at individuals
Expressing agreement	e.g., I agree with you.../I completely agree/ Just like you.../ For sure you are not the only one in this situation
Expressing appreciation/ complimenting others	e.g., This sounds like an excellent project/ I like the envelope idea/ I really appreciate your concern and your suggestions!
Encouraging others	e.g., Best of luck with your practicum/ Try it! You'll see/ Annie, keep on experimenting with new approaches and learning from your experiences
Thanking	e.g., Thanks/ I really want to thank you for this strategy
GROUP COHESION	= directed at the group/ build/sustain presence of group commitment/ empathy
Salutations	e.g., Hello all/ Hi everyone/ Hello Everyone in Teacher Land/ Hi guys
Directing comment to group	e.g., I love how we are all using what we learned in Pedagogy / We all know how important and hard it is to keep control of our classes and work with negative leaders
Directing question to group	e.g., Do you have any strategy or technique I could use?/ Do you think this is a good idea?
Encouraging others	e.g., Keep up the good work everyone!/ Don't give up! Half of the practicum is done!
Thanking	e.g., Thank you/ Thanks to all of you for your comments and ideas. It feels really good to know we're not alone.
Leave-taking	e.g., Happy Trails!

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both as they emerged in the present study are provided in Table 1. In the Appendix, indicators of these two sub-categories are underlined. Thus, with respect to mutual awareness, examples include the following: *Hello Isabelle*, l. 67 (salutation), *You could try doing an Internet Rally*, l. 38 (directing comment at individual), *I hope it will help a little bit*, l. 106 (expressing sympathy), *See you*, l. 110 (leave-taking). With respect to recognition of each other's contributions, the following can be noted: *Just like you*, l. 68 (expressing agreement), *I wanted to share my experience with you just to reassure you that we all live the same experiences and also that students are unpredictable. Best of luck for your practicum!* ll. 78-79 (encouraging others). Such indicators, as embodied within discourse, provide concrete evidence that participants within the discussion forum were reading each other's posts, were attentive to the content, and were responding to the specifics of their messages.

In contrast to Open Communication, Group Cohesion refers to those indicators which are addressed to the group as a whole. Although in some studies the group referred to may be a small sub-group, within the present study it refers to all the students registered in the course. In contrast to Garrison et al.'s original study, where no specific indicators were given for this category, for the present study, several indicators similar to those used for Open Communication were identified as shown in Table 1. In the Appendix, examples in italics and underlined include the following: *Hello all*, l. 6 (salutation), *Do you have any strategy or technique I could use...*, l. 24 (directing question to group), *Thank you very much*, l. 28 (thanking). In the preceding examples, the last two are coded as instances of group cohesion as they both occurred in a

post which was initially addressed to the whole group as suggested by the salutation, *Hello all*. Indicators of group cohesion are important as at the level of audience, they suggest an awareness of the group and serve to build and sustain empathy and cohesion.

With respect to the analysis of posts, it is important to note that instances of a given type of indicator were coded once only. Thus, for example, in the case of a post where three items could be coded as *directing comment at individual*, the indicator would be checked but the actual number of occurrences would not be recorded. The objective of the analysis is to provide a profile of each post in terms of the density of indicators present in terms of type rather than tokens. In analysing the posts, it was further observed that certain tokens tended to be repeated perhaps due to the length of a post or a writer's stylistic preferences.

Analysis of Cognitive Presence

For an overview of the framework of cognitive presence retained for this study, refer to Table 2. As originally conceived, the framework devised by Garrison et al. (2001) was situated within a problem-solving perspective with the analysis of posts focused on four criteria: triggering, exploration, integration, and resolution. The first criterion, triggering, serves to identify a problem; exploration pertains to evidence within a post that relates to the further exploration of the problem; integration focuses more specifically on the discussion of possible solutions, and resolution to their testing. In contrast to the original study which focused on coursework, analysis of initial posts in the present study revealed problems of two different types. The

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Table 2: Analysis of Cognitive Presence

COGNITIVE PRESENCE		
<p>TRIGGERING Problem-oriented post – presenting background information/asking questions that culminates in a problem and genuine call for help to resolve it; initiates a strand.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying problem 	<p>TRIGGERING Issue-oriented post – presenting background information/asking questions that culminates in an invitation to discuss an issue; initiates a strand.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying issue 	<p>REPORTING Report-oriented post – presentation/discussion of an activity or experience related to practicum; initiates a strand.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing experience
<p>EXPLORATION Search for information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion of problem/giving view Suggestions for consideration Evoking references Evoking resources Evoking pedagogical principles/ concepts Evoking curriculum 	<p>EXPLORATION Discussion of issue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing experience Sharing view/ discussing issue generally Evoking references Evoking resources Evoking pedagogical principles/ concepts Evoking curriculum 	<p>EXPLORATION Discussion of point related to report-oriented post</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing experience Sharing view/ discussing issue generally Evoking references Evoking references Evoking pedagogical principles/ concepts Evoking curriculum
<p>INTEGRATION Suggestions for possible solution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Giving advice based on experience Evoking references Evoking resources Evoking pedagogical principles/ concepts Convergence among group members 		
<p>RESOLUTION Reporting of solution/ attempted solution to problem originally posed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reporting solution Evaluating solution Defending solution 		

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first type related to what might be termed genuine calls for help with respect to a problem pre-service teachers confronted within the context of their practicum. In the first post in the Appendix, for example, where Isabelle was grappling with the problem of getting her students to follow directions for an activity in the computer lab, a trigger of this type was posed in the following terms: *Do you have any strategy or technique I could use to bring students to be more autonomous when they want to look for information by themselves?* As illustrated in the post, the author provides background information in order to contextualize her problem.

In contrast to the above authentic calls for help, other posts provided triggers which could be better qualified as invitations to discuss an issue rather than any immediate need to resolve a problem. Typically, such posts provided a description of an activity carried out by a pre-service teacher during his/her practicum with a trigger which invited participants to further discuss an issue raised by the person who posted. Finally, initial posts were also identified which did not contain any overt triggers but merely reported on an activity or an experience which took place during the practicum. Such posts could generate responses but it was left up to the respondents to find a point of interest. In order to distinguish between these three types of initial posts, three categories, as shown in Table 2, were identified:

- a) Problem-oriented.
- b) Issue-oriented.
- c) Report-oriented.

With respect to the present study, responses to problem-oriented posts were further analysed in terms of whether the content pertained to the exploration, integration or resolution phases of problem-solving. However, in contrast to past studies where problems, posed within the context of coursework, tended to be hypothetical, pre-service teachers in the present study were dealing with concrete problems which surfaced in the context of their practicum. As students were in their fourth year, the problems voiced were often familiar to them; some had already wrestled with the same or similar problems and were able to give concrete advice. In view of these particularities, indicators from the original framework were adapted to fit the data of the present study. First, with respect to the exploration of the problem, two indicators, which drew on the original Garrison et al. study, were retained: *discussion of problem/giving view* and *suggestions for consideration*. However, in order to determine more precisely the nature of the arguments being evoked by participants, four other indicators were included: *evoking references*, *evoking resources*, *evoking pedagogical principles/concepts*, *evoking curriculum*. *Evoking references* refers to references to or quotes from published articles, book chapters, or books (whether in paper format or online). *Evoking resources* refers to references to both material resources (e.g., online teaching materials, lesson plans posted by participants) or human resources (e.g., teacher, counsellor). *Evoking pedagogical principles/concepts* refers to the use of theoretical notions and terms (e.g., *prior knowledge*, *differentiated instruction*, *multi-intelligences*, *zone of proximal development*, *scaffolding*, *modelling*) which could be used to justify certain approaches to teaching. *Evoking curriculum* refers to references to

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specific aspects of the Ministry program the students were using in view of bolstering the relevance to the point under discussion.

In contrast to the exploration phase, the integration phase was reserved for pre-service teachers' concrete solutions to the targeted problem based on their prior teaching experiences. As reflected in Table 2, evidence of such an orientation is coded as *giving advice based on experience*; as for the exploration phase, however, the inclusion of indicators such as *evoking references* were included as they provide additional information as to the informational resources participants were drawing on to justify their recommendations. A final indicator retained from Garrison et al.'s original framework — *convergence among group members* — suggests how participants may be rallying toward a certain solution.

With respect to resolution, this phase was reserved for a response from the pre-service teacher who had posed the original problem or from a participant who had been influenced by the online discussions relevant to the targeted problem and had tried out something with his/her own students. In other words, what one wants to know is whether or not any of the help given by participants in regard to the original targeted problem was of

“...the pre-service teachers of the present study were not simply discussing hypothetical problems, but grappling with problems related to the exigencies of their teaching contexts.”

use or whether alternative ways had been found to resolve the problem. For the resolution phase, the content of relevant posts was analyzed in terms of three indicators: *reporting solution*, *evaluating solution*, and *defending solution*. With respect to the issue-oriented or report-oriented posts, the analysis of the content of responses was limited to the exploration phase. Indicators for this phase are provided in Table 2.

Referring to the Appendix, three posts (numbers 209, 396, 417) are responses to Isabelle's original inquiry as to strategies which she could use to have her students work more independently in the computer lab. As in posts 209 and 417, the pre-service teachers provided help based on their actual experiences with students, both were coded as *giving advice based on experience*. More specifically, with respect to post 209, two other indicators retained were: *evoking resources* (i.e., the address for an internet site for quizzes) and *evoking pedagogical principles/concepts* (i.e., *prior knowledge*). Post 396 provides an example of a post which was coded for *discussion of problem/giving view*. As for the analysis of social presence, items for a given post were tallied in function of the type of indicator, not the number of tokens. Thus, if in a post, two websites were identified, the indicator *evoking resources* would be tallied once only.

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Conclusion

In this article, I have discussed how the Garrison et al. (2001) framework could be adapted to analyse social and cognitive presence in posts obtained from a discussion forum involving pre-service ESL teachers during a practicum. As discussed above, certain changes to the original criteria were made in order to account for the characteristics of the data and allow for a more meaningful profiling of the results. Of particular note are the changes which were made to the categories relevant to cognitive presence, where initial posts were coded in terms of whether they were problem-, issue-, or report-oriented. In contrast to past studies which have dealt with posts in the context of coursework, the pre-service teachers of the present study were not simply discussing hypothetical problems, but grappling with problems related to the exigencies of their teaching contexts. The proposed analysis makes it possible to see that pre-service teachers were indeed using the discussion forum as a resource for discussing their concerns.

Indicators for the categories on exploration, integration, and resolution were refined in order to highlight features specific to the posts produced by the pre-service teachers. Amongst other things, the proposed refinements make more salient how the pre-service teachers were variously drawing on their experiential knowledge of teaching and making links with theoretical concepts. Although online communities offer the potential for creating communities of learners, specific analyses of content such as the one proposed here will make it possible to more objectively

determine to what degree socially mediated knowledge construction is taking place. Within the broader study from which this article is drawn, the coding scheme outlined herein is currently being used to analyse the corpus of posts in order to better understand how and to what degree social and cognitive presence were in evidence during the discussion forum exchanges. ❖

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Appendix A: Examples of four posts from a strand involving the discussion of ICTs in the elementary grades

1 Posts extracted from one ICT (Elementary School) Strand*
 2
 3 Numéro du message 177
 4 Envoyé par Isabelle (xxx) le Dimanche, 5 Octobre, 2008 10:36
 5 Objet: A strategy for autonomy, please?!?
 6 Hello all,
 7 Last week, I went to the computer lab with one of my groups for a special project.
 8 Since it was my first time to the computer lab with students, I decided to go there
 9 beforehand to familiarize myself with the lab.
 10
 11 Once there with the students, I asked them to stay in line in front of me so I could
 12 have them sit in their teams. I am sure that if I had not done that, the students would have
 13 sit with their friend rather than their teams since I had formed them myself the previous
 14 class. **That part was easy.** Then, I had to explain the task. Before doing that, I asked the
 15 students not to turn on the computers so they could pay attention to the instructions. I
 16 showed them the grid they had to fill in and the websites they could use. However, almost
 17 every student did not use the suggested websites and decided to "google" the information
 18 they needed. It was okay, as long as the web sites were in English because they could feel
 19 involved in the process (Warschauer, 1997). **That is when trouble started.** There were a
 20 dozen hands raised, not finding out the information they wanted. Therefore, I had to tell
 21 every student to actually look on the web sites I suggested, because I built the grid
 22 according to the web sites: I knew all the information was there.
 23
 24 So of course, it is important to detail all the information the students need to
 25 perform the task. In the booklet, I described step by step every thing. However, I think
 26 that the students want to do everything too fast. They think their way is going to be the
 27 easiest, even if I tried to make the task as easy as possible for them. *Do you have any*
 28 *strategy or technique I could use to bring students to be more autonomous when they*
 29 *want to look for information by themselves?* Because in fact, I do not want to translate
 30 every thing they do not understand on their web sites. And I do not necessarily want them
 31 to do exactly as I have prescribed so I can let them some freedom.
 32 Thank you very much.
 33 Isabelle
 34
 35 Warschauer, M. (1997). The Internet for English Teaching: Guidelines for
 36 Teachers. The Internet TESL Journal. Retrieved October 5, 2008, from
 37 <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Warschauer-Internet.html>
 38
 39 Numéro du message 209 [Branche du numéro 177]
 40 Envoyé par Julia (xxx) le Lundi, 13 Octobre, 2008 12:33
 41 Objet: Re: A strategy for autonomy, please?!?
 42 Hi Isabelle,
 43 You could try doing an Internet Rally. You begin by designing your rally. It is like
 44 a car rally, but on the Internet. So, first, concerning the students prior knowledge, you
 45 brainstorm what a rally is, and how it works. You write their anticipations on the board.
 46 You tell them you are going to do an internet rally to verify their anticipations.

47
48 Depending on their reading and writing skills, you send them (in groups of two or
49 three) to the first website (one that you have chosen), and where they have to read (scan)
50 down the page to find a piece of information: they will need this 'piece' of information to
51 answer the first question on their list of questions (a list of tasks that you have previously
52 prepared). Once they answer the first question, your written instructions direct them to
53 click on a specific link on that page (predetermined by you) that will take them to the
54 next spot. Once they get to the next spot, they will again have a task to accomplish, and
55 information or answers to questions to write down on their rally paper. You can send
56 them to 10 different sites gathering information on a common theme. Because the
57 information they need can only be found on the sites you have sent them to, they will
58 have no reason to use Google or any other search engines. The first team to complete the
59 rally successfully wins, of course! This is an activity that can help them become aware of
60 what scanning is, and how scanning can be useful when doing research for other projects.
61 During a rally I designed based on the theme of the circus, at one site, they had to watch
62 and listen to a short video and answer the question "Why is the man so tall?" The answer
63 was "He is walking on stilts." Stilts was a new word for this particular group (who were
64 beginners, beginners), and **they found it a challenge**. Hope this suggestion can help you
65 design activities for the computer lab. Quizzes on www.englishclub.com are really fun to do
66 as well, and you can get them to print out the quiz so you can see their results. You can
67 also get them to listen to the news on www.englishclub.com and get them to answer
68 questions, report back, or have a discussion.

69 Best,
70 Julie

71
72 Numéro du message 396 [Branche du numéro 177]
73 Envoyé par Annie (xxx) le Dimanche, 16 Novembre, 2008 13:08
74 Objet: Re: A strategy for autonomy, please?!?
75 Hello Isabelle,

76 Just like you I went to the computer lab with my students for a Halloween web
77 quest. Before going to the lab, I explained the procedures to them, read the booklet and
78 formed the teams. To do so, I put cards in a box with different numbers and colours.
79 Then, they had to find their corresponding partner. **This went well**. However, I thought
80 that writing every step clearly in the booklet would have helped them in doing the web
81 quest. **I was wrong**. Students don't read. They do not understand that they have to follow
82 the instructions to find the correct answer. **They just want the easy way out!** Just like
83 you, they went on Google to find the answers when all they had to find was already
84 included in the web quest. **I was disappointed** because I really thought that they would
85 have read the instructions carefully and followed the procedures to ultimately come up
86 with the right answer. So I do not have any tips to provide you because I did not have a
87 successful experience with ICT activities. I wanted to share my experience with you just
88 to reassure you that we all live the same experiences and also that students are
89 unpredictable.

90 Best of luck for your praticum!
91 Annie

92

93 Numéro du message 417 [Branche du numéro 396]
94 Envoyé par Richard (xxx) le Mardi, 18 Novembre, 2008 13:54
95 Objet: Re: A strategy for autonomy, please?!?
96 Hello Isabelle,
97 I'm teaching a grade 6 enriched class. We went to the computer lab a couple of
98 times already. I'm observing the same thing. Students are going very fast through the
99 internet pages without reading the information. Actually, I found that students know a lot
100 about computers but few ever used it as a research tool. Of course, they all know what's
101 the hottest you tube clip of the month, they all know how to get to free online games but
102 most of them never read on the internet.
103
104 I use several ways to ensure that students are actually reading and researching in a
105 computer class.
106
107 First, I limit the number of sites they are allowed to go to and I make sure that those
108 sites contain the information I'm targeting.
109
110 Second, before I let the students venture by themselves, I model what is expected of
111 them with the lcd projector. I find it very difficult to achieve this if they stay at their
112 places, in front of the computer. Instead, I have them sit at the front of the class while I'm
113 modelling.
114
115 Third, I use a site I made to make sure that they can find the steps, the links of the
116 sites, a place to ask questions to me or to other students via a blog and a place to send the
117 research at the end of the class. That way, if they are not done in one class, they can go
118 back on my site the next class and download their to finish it.
119
120 I hope it will help a bit.
121
122 If you want to see my site and the project we did in the computer lab go to:
123 http://web.me.com/xxx/english_class/Welcome.html
124 See you