Issues in Language Instruction at the Applied English Center

A Journal for Practicing and Interpreting TESL at the University of Kansas

Introducing ILI@AEC
Editor's Introduction

This in-house e-journal is called *Issues in Language Instruction at the Applied English Center: A Journal for Practicing and Interpreting TESL at the University of Kansas* or *ILI@AEC* for short. This e-journal is intended to promote professional communication by serving as a platform for the development and exchange of ideas relevant to practicing and interpreting TESL at the University of Kansas. Copies will be emailed to all AEC faculty, staff, administrators, GTAs, and visiting scholars. A copy will also be placed in the shared folder under ILI@AEC.

The target audience of *ILI@AEC* is AEC faculty, staff, administrators, GTAs currently at the AEC, graduate students doing research at the AEC, and international visiting scholars at the AEC.

ILI@AEC focuses on language instruction, which necessarily extends to all professional activities relevant to running the AEC. If you work here, your professional activities are relevant to *ILI@AEC*. If you are doing research here, your work is relevant to *ILI@AEC*.

ILI@AEC is about practicing and interpreting our profession in the context of the Applied English Center at the University of Kansas. *ILI@AEC* can be a place to develop and get feedback on classroom materials, teaching strategies, and ideas for policy. *ILI@AEC* can be a platform for reinventing the way you approach TESL or simply for discovering professional interests of colleagues.

Content for *ILI@AEC* comes from you. Submissions can be as short as a paragraph or as long as an article or book chapter. Submitting to *ILI@AEC* is an excellent way to add to your professional development.

No extra work is needed! For example, you could submit an 'in-progress' version of your year-end reflection letter. You could also submit an abstract or session description for TESOL or for another conference you plan to attend. You can submit an unpublished article or a draft of an idea you are working on. You could also submit a draft of a chapter from your thesis, dissertation, or book you are writing. Classroom materials you are developing can also be submitted along with explanation for how to use the materials and why they are needed.

My role as editor of *ILI@AEC* is to promote professional communication among all faculty, staff, administrators, GTAs, graduate students doing research at the AEC, and international visiting scholars. I would like to publish as many ideas from as many of us as possible. Diversity in opinion and subject matter is a priority. *ILI@AEC* is a statement of the way we practice and interpret our profession. I would like for *ILI@AEC* to document our collective professional creativity and productivity at the Applied English Center.

Below I list topics relevant to *ILI@AEC*. This list is incomplete and intended only to give an idea of what to submit. If you have thoughts about any topic on this list, you have a submission topic for *ILI@AEC*.

35 Ideas for Submission Topics
1. Issues in teaching a particular class, skill, or level;
   Tutorials; Teaching grammar and vocabulary;
2. Issues in academic advising/counseling;
3. Issues in administration: The AEC, the IEP, Short-term Programs,
   Graduate Writing; Running the office (office management,
   accounting etc.); Administering the Proficiency Test and SPEAK
   test; Grading the proficiency test; etc.;

4. Issues in LEO and CALL;
5. Issues in teaching in the Graduate Writing Program;
6. Grant writing;
7. Working with Sponsored Students;
8. Placement within and Admission to the AEC (diagnostic tests, the proficiency test, etc.); Waiver policy and process;
9. On being a coordinator; Coordinating sections of a level/skill; Coordination more generally;
10. Curriculum Oversight Committee; Network meetings; Technology Committee; Other Committees; Faculty Meetings;
11. Technology support at the AEC or in classrooms;
12. Your current teaching philosophy or approach;
13. A write-up of a presentation you gave/plan to give;
14. A write-up of notes and comments on presentations, webinars, symposia, or workshops you attended;
15. An original article; Revised summary of articles you have written; A draft of a chapter from your dissertation or thesis or book; an 8.5X11 version of a poster with narrative appropriate for a conference;
16. A review of a (text)book, article(s), conference(s), workshop(s), webinar(s), symposium(a), etc.;
17. Summaries of a line of research (e.g., teaching listening comprehension, cognitive approaches to teaching grammar, using the L1 in the L2 classroom, content-based instruction, communicative approaches, task-based teaching, the learner-centered classroom, skill-based instruction, a particular theory in second language acquisition, Action Research in the language classroom, Teaching English for Academic Purposes, etc.);
18. Non-teaching (e.g., employment) issues relevant to AEC Faculty, Staff, Administration, GTAs, Visiting Scholars;
19. Outside-of-class opportunities for AEC students (conversation groups, trips, events, etc.);
20. ESL/EFL and language instruction in the 21st century;
21. The AEC within International Programs; The AEC within the University of Kansas; The AEC and TESOL, Modern Language Association, American Association of Applied Linguistics, Linguistic Society of America, The British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP), etc.;
22. Issues in teaching ESL as a non-native speaker of English;
23. Teaching ESL and the role of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, economic class, etc.;
24. Issues in grading: Essays, speeches, PowerPoint presentations, mid-semester reports, portfolios, the SPEAK test, the proficiency test, etc.;
25. Class size and student populations;
26. Comparative Language Teaching: TESL and teaching other languages (e.g., Portuguese, Italian, Cherokee, etc.); Teaching at the AEC and other institutions;
27. Best/Worst new idea in (a) language teaching, (b) academic advising/counseling, (c) IEP administration, (d) international education, (e) office management for an IEP, etc.;
28. Issues in doing research at the AEC;
29. On being a visiting scholar or GTA at the AEC;
30. Ideas for the Curriculum; Materials you have written for a level/skill;
31. Observations: Classroom, Counseling, etc.;
32. Evaluation: Faculty, Staff, Administration, GTAs; Class evaluations;
33. Workload and the Percentage System;
34. An idea you tried out in class

35. YOU: Reflections on your role at the AEC; Re-inventing yourself at the AEC; How your work here fits into your overall career track; Future plans as an ESL professional; Different influences in your work, etc.

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Submissions will be accepted on an on-going basis. The deadline for the submission of ideas for the next volume is December 17, 2012. The next volume will come out in 2013.

Please address submissions and questions to me: mberardo@ku.edu.

Elizabeth Gould
Research Questions into Organizational Culture and IEPs

Introduction

As employees of the AEC, dealing with "culture" is intrinsic to our daily lives. From the minute we walk in the door we see people from all over the world; people who look and dress differently than we do, who speak different languages, and who bring their own unique worldviews to our classrooms. We constantly interact with "culture" on the societal level. And while there are many definitions of culture, it can loosely be defined as a shared pattern of behavior, or to be more specific, "what a group learns over a period of time as that group solves its problems of survival in an external environment and its problems of internal integration" (Schein, 2010).

To reiterate, the above definition applies to culture on a societal level. But what if we take the concept of culture and apply it our own organization? Do we at the AEC have our own shared pattern of behavior? This is a question that interests me and has become the topic of my current research. The following article is a truncated version of the first chapter of my dissertation which explores the concept of organizational culture as it applies to Intensive English Programs.

Statement of the Problem

Communities around the world are becoming increasingly globalized. Advances in technology have created the opportunity to communicate and interact with people from many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds in a way that was not possible a century ago. Consequently, it is becoming increasingly necessary to find a common language with which to communicate and at least for the present, it seems English is the most pervasive of all the world languages. The widespread use of the English language has created an increase in the number of foreign students traveling to English-speaking countries to learn the language and matriculate in English-speaking educational institutions. Intensive English Programs (IEPs) play an important role in this process because they are typically responsible for judging the language ability and readiness of foreign students to enter standard university courses. Due to the ever-changing nuances of the global arena, not to mention domestic policy affecting non-immigrant students, IEPs have had to constantly change and adapt to meet the needs of international students.
An Intensive English Program, for the purposes of this paper will be defined as a program that teaches English to non-native speakers who are 18 years of age or older and

> "is administered by an accredited university or college and receives adequate
> support from its institution, which at a minimum would include provision for
> suitable staff, and office and classroom facilities. Although no single
> administrative pattern is required, the intensive program should be sufficiently
> independent to permit the smooth functioning of all its activities" (University and
> College Intensive English Programs, 2011).

An IEP usually holds a unique position within university hierarchies. Unlike other university departments, IEPs typically do not offer courses for credit nor are they degree-granting (Case, 1998). Additionally, faculty qualifications and workloads are often considerably different from faculty in other departments. For example, most university faculty are required to hold doctoral level degrees, whereas in

the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), a Masters in TESOL is considered the terminal degree (Carkin, 1997).

Another difference that separates Intensive English Programs from traditional university departments is the nature of study for students enrolled in the program. Students in an IEP usually study more intensively, in other words more hours per week, than other university students and these courses are often considered remedial (Case 1998). As a result of the uniqueness and contradiction to traditional universities' norms and values that often characterize IEPs, they are sometimes if not often marginalized (Case, 1998; Carkin, 1997). This marginalization frequently manifests in the exclusion of IEP administration and faculty from university-wide policy meetings and a limited allocation of resources (Carkin, 1997).

Perhaps because of this marginalization, Intensive English Programs have become distinct and separate units within the university which often results in policies and procedures that differ slightly or greatly from those at the parent university (Carkin, 1997). Consequently, IEP directors and other IEP administrators have the difficult task of managing an individual organization, as well as trying to ensure that the IEP's policies meet minimum university policy requirements.

In addition to marginalization, another challenge facing IEPs is that they are constantly changing and evolving based upon a number of variables including student backgrounds and objectives as well as political and economic climates (Kaplan, 1997). Despite the setbacks of 9/11 and the current global economic crisis, "international student enrollment at [U.S.] universities has risen to higher numbers than ever" (Pennington & Hoekje, 2010, p. 6). Nevertheless, international students are now looking for study abroad opportunities in countries that are perhaps more affordable and more accessible than the United States. This has made the international student market more competitive for U.S. universities and is causing universities to increase their international student recruiting budget (Pennington & Hoekje, 2010). Intensive English Programs play important roles in this process as many students must meet specific language requirements before being admitted into standard academic courses.

Due to the abovementioned challenges facing Intensive English Programs, it is important to have smooth-running institutions that can successfully complete their missions and reach established goals. However, in order to achieve this, it is first necessary
to have a clear understanding of the institution and how it operates. By applying current organizational culture theory to the field of IEP administration, this study may help IEP program administrators better understand the nature of their organizations and potentially help them apply that knowledge to improve program processes and address areas of weakness and needed change.

Theoretical Framework
The theoretical framework that is the basis for this study (my dissertation) is grounded in organizational culture research. The study of organizational culture has been ongoing for a number of years, but really picked up speed in the 1980s. Since then, many different ideas and theories have been presented related to the definition of organizational culture and whether or not it can be empirically tested, as well as the applications of organizational culture research. For the purposes of this study, specific paradigms were used to construct a theoretical framework. These paradigms will now be explained in more detail.

Edgar H. Schein (1990) developed the primary definition of culture that will be used for the purposes of this study. Schein (1990) defines culture has having three levels: observable artifacts, espoused values and basic underlying assumptions. Schein (1990) claims that in order to fully understand a culture, one must first determine the basic assumptions that drive the organization, because from these assumptions the other two levels are developed.

Bass and Avolio (1993) refer to Schein's (1990) definition of organizational culture but also apply transactional and transformational leadership theory in an effort to better categorize different types of organizational culture. They theorize that a pure transactional culture "focuses on everything in terms of explicit and implicit contractual relationships" (p. 116), whereas transformational cultures typically "promote a sense of purpose and a feeling of family" (p. 116). The authors' idea of an ideal organization is one that maintains a balanced mix of transactional and transformational values.

Based upon the idea that leaders must first understand their organizations in order to be able to successfully implement change initiatives, Bass and Avolio (1993) developed the Organizational Description Questionnaire (ODQ)® which upon completion by one or more people in an organization can provide a description of the organization as more transactional or transformational in nature and further categorizes the organization into one of nine typologies. The ultimate goal of the questionnaire is to give organizations insight into the structure of their organizational cultures, and help them identify areas of needed change that will lead them towards that ideal balance of transactional and transformational organizational culture.

Purpose of the Study

The intent of this concurrent mixed methods study is to examine the concept of organizational culture as it applies to Intensive English Programs. In the study, the Organizational Description Questionnaire (ODQ)® will be used to determine the dominant organizational culture that is revealed through the perceptions of organizational culture values of employees of an Intensive English Program in the United States. At the same time, a qualitative ethnographic study of the organizational culture of the Intensive English Program (IEP) will be conducted with the purpose of determining the dominant organizational culture that emerges from analysis of qualitative processes within the IEP. The reason for combining both quantitative and qualitative data is to better understand this research problem by converging both quantitative (broad numeric trends) and qualitative (detailed views) data.

Research Questions

RQ 1. What do the employees of the participating IEP perceive to be the dominant organizational culture?

RQ 2. What dominant organizational culture emerges from analysis of qualitative processes within the IEP?

RQ 3. What are the differences between the perceptions of the dominant organizational culture of IEP employees and the dominant organizational culture that emerges from analysis of qualitative processes?

Significance of the Study to Organizational Leadership

The significance of this study to the field of organizational leadership can perhaps be found in ideas presented by Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, and Sanders (1990) who state that much of the literature concerning organizational culture is anecdotal and that "there is…a dearth of ordinary research as taught by standard behavioral research methodology textbooks" (p. 286). They claim that quantitatively studying organizational culture "makes a fuzzy field at least somewhat accessible" (p. 313). Alvesson (1987) corroborates this idea with the suggestion that "to understand the meaning and consequences of occupational communities, and the work cultures connected with them, it is necessary to transcend the boundaries of a single organization" (p. 7). Though the amount of research looking at organizational culture from an empirical perspective has grown considerably since the late 1980s and early 1990s, additional studies can only add depth to the existing knowledge in the field, giving practitioners a greater pool of information to draw from for use in their own organizations.

Additionally, organizational culture theory and research has typically focused on business organizations. Empirical studies on organizational culture in different types of organizations such as those in education can add a broader perspective and greater understanding to the study of organizational culture. Intensive

English Programs are unique in that they serve a multi-cultural clientele which often means that their staff is multi-cultural. The necessity of accommodating such diverse groups of people naturally brings about many interesting challenges in organizational leadership. Additionally it can be assumed that the unique circumstances of IEPs will breed a distinctive organizational culture. By studying the organizational culture of IEPs, new insight can be added to the study of organizational culture.

Significance of the Study to Intensive English Program Research
To my knowledge, no study of this nature has been done in the field of Intensive English Program administration. According to Bass and Avolio (1993), "when trying to promote changes in an organization, leaders should first understand and respect the past, returning to it for inspiration, instruction, and identification of past objectives, principles, and strategies that still must be maintained" (p. 115). One could argue that this means gaining knowledge of the organization's culture. While some leaders of an IEP may have an intuitive knowledge of the culture, it is most likely on a subconscious level. It is possible that providing concrete evidence, thereby creating a tangible set of facts and data will bring this knowledge into a conscious reality that IEP leaders can use to implement change in their organizations. In other words, a study of this nature could help IEP administrators better understand the nature of their organizations, which would provide a foundation for instituting change.

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Diane Taveggia
The Vocabulary Notebook as Vehicle for Vocabulary Acquisition

Introduction

This past semester I conducted my dissertation research at Penn Valley Community College (PVCC) in Kansas City, Missouri. PVCC is located in the urban core of Kansas City, Missouri, and its academic English program serves primarily refugees and immigrants, as opposed to the international students that we work with at the Applied English Center. I chose to work with the students at PVCC because my roots as an ESL teacher are within the refugee and immigrant communities, and I enjoy maintaining my connection with these very interesting students.

My research is a mixed methods, design experiment. Design research is relatively new to the field of education (Bradley & Reinking, 2011; Reinking & Bradley, 2008). It involves implementing a theoretically solid intervention into variant contexts (Bradley & Reinking, 2011; Reinking & Bradley, 2008) for the purposes of seeing how the intervention plays out differently in these different contexts. As the intervention is implemented and carried out, researcher(s), classroom teacher(s) and students take note of what is working well and what is not, and modify the intervention on a constant and evolving basis in line with unique needs of the learners and teachers in a given context. As such, design research is considered to be both rooted in and generative of theory.

Quantitative data were collected via a pre- and post-test using the Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) (Nation, 1990; Schmitt, Schmitt & Clapham, 2001). The VLT assesses the overall size of a learner's vocabulary at the two, three, five, and ten thousand word family levels. It is estimated that a university student needs eight to nine (Schmitt, Jiang & Grabe, 2011) or even ten (Hazenberg & Hulstijn, 1996) thousand word families to be successful in university study.

Qualitative data were collected via interviews with the teacher and a focal group of five students, pre- and post-semester surveys and focus groups, classroom observations, and a reflective piece written by students at the end of the semester on their use of the vocabulary notebook.

The intervention consisted of learning to use a vocabulary notebook. Using a notebook, students have a place to collect data about words that they could then study from. The bulk of the notebook consisted of a section for a personal dictionary. Each week students chose ten words to research, finding definitional and contextual information about each, as well as collocations and other words in that word's family. A copy of a personal dictionary page can be found in Appendix 1. The remainder of the dictionary consisted of blank pages on which students could map the connections between words (word mapping) as well as conduct semantic feature analysis of groups of words. An example of each of these is included in Appendix 2.

The theoretical basis for much of the intervention can be categorized into a few broad categories. First, the connection between vocabulary and reading comprehension is solid. Vocabulary size and knowledge significantly predict reading comprehension (Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, & Watts-Taffe, 2006). Schmitt, Jiang, and Grabe (2011) find an almost linear relationship between vocabulary size and reading comprehension, at least in instances where readers have enough vocabulary to effect more than minimal comprehension. Readers who understand 90% of the words in a given text demonstrate 50% overall

comprehension of that text, while those who have 100% vocabulary coverage demonstrate 75% overall comprehension of the text. Readers did not demonstrate dramatic improvement at any point between 90% and 100% coverage; instead, overall comprehension increased as vocabulary coverage increased. This research suggests that vocabulary size, though not sufficient in and of itself, is a critical precursor to text comprehension.

Second, the idea of what it means to know a word is more complex than just knowing a definition of the word. Nation (2001) and Zimmerman (2009) consider the depth of knowledge that one might have regarding a single vocabulary item. Words have denotative and connotative values (thin versus skinny), vary in strength (murder versus butchery), co-locate in a variety of ways (put up versus put up with; back and forth, but not forth and back), are constrained grammatically (many tables but not much tables), have potentially misleading morphological structure (unbutton but not unravel), exist in variant forms (consider, consideration, considerable), and are appropriate or not to particular contexts (shut up versus be quiet). In addition, Qian (2000) finds that while vocabulary size (breadth) is highly correlated with reading comprehension, depth of knowledge about the words themselves makes a unique contribution to reading comprehension that cannot be attributed to vocabulary size alone.

Finally, explicit, in-class vocabulary instruction, while helpful and necessary, is slow and inefficient in building the vocabulary learners need if they are to successfully navigate academic text. In-class vocabulary learning often focuses on content-specific words, but a significant amount of general academic vocabulary will also create difficulties for ELLs. While teachers cannot teach all the words learners need to know, we can teach strategies that will help them uncover word meanings independently.

A number of independent vocabulary learning strategies can be taught in the language classroom. Learners skilled in the efficient and complementary use of electronic translators and English-only dictionaries (Schmitt & Schmitt, 1995; Zimmerman, 2009), derivation of word meaning from meaningful context (Folse, 2004), application of morphemic analysis (Baumann, Font, Edwards, & Boland, 2005; Zimmerman, 2009), and maintenance of a vocabulary notebook (Folse, 2004; Fowle, 2002; McCrostie, 2007; Schmitt & Schmitt, 1995; Walters and Bozkurt, 2009) are able to pursue word meanings in a more personal, purposeful way, thus allowing for the vocabulary development necessary for success in academic contexts. Thus, vocabulary instruction should focus on teaching these vocabulary learning strategies explicitly.

At PVCC, I introduced the vocabulary notebook strategy (VNS). The use of a vocabulary notebook both for collecting information about new words (depth of knowledge) and learning word meanings over time (retention) (Folse, 2004; Nation, 2001) allows learners to choose personally meaningful words to investigate and encourages the development of word consciousness, which Graves (2006) defines as awareness of and interest in words and their meanings (p 119, emphasis in the original). Once learners decide to enter a word in their notebooks, that word gains salience, increasing the likelihood that it will be noticed on future encounters. Because learners return to the vocabulary notebook repeatedly, adding newly acquired information about their words over time, they get the multiple (Nation, 1990) exposures to each word necessary in order for full acquisition to occur.

While the vocabulary notebook strategy requires active engagement with words, forces a number of exposures, and requires the deep processing of words necessary to really come to know a word, researchers have identified some limits to its implementation. Although McCrostie (2007) considers the VNS a step toward independent vocabulary learning, he finds that learners are poor at choosing words to pursue. Each unknown word was considered by learners to be of equal importance, irrespective of frequency and potential for use. Teacher input, at least in the initial stages, was necessary for helping learners develop criteria for choosing the words that would most benefit them.

Schmitt and Schmitt (1995) also called for a high level of teacher involvement in the vocabulary notebooks. First, they suggest that teachers take an active role in selecting words that students might want to include in their notebooks, taking into account both frequency data and potential for use. Next, they recommend that teachers review the notebooks periodically to ensure that students are not collecting erroneous data about words. This step allows instructors to gain insight into the types of errors that their students are making at the same time that it encourages learners to be wary of jumping to conclusions about words too quickly. Finally, they encourage instructors to privilege the notebooks by incorporating them into classroom activities.

Fowle (2002) notes that, via VNS, learners develop word consciousness and become active in their pursuit of words and knowledge about words; in addition, he found that learners developed more awareness about themselves as learners, as well as a sense of what strategies work best, by comparing their notebooks with those of their classmates. Learner autonomy, thus, was a peripheral but very positive effect of the vocabulary notebooks.

Finally, use of a vocabulary notebook in the classroom as an independent assignment actively engages learners in word study. Walters and Bozkurt (2009) found that learners who used them showed gains in both receptive and controlled productive use when compared to learners in the control group; in addition, treatment group learners used words that they had researched for the notebooks in their writing more frequently than their control counterparts. Students interviewed after the treatment period enthusiastically acknowledged the usefulness of the notebook in gaining vocabulary and reported enjoying the in-class activities that were centered on the notebook. Unfortunately, they did not think themselves likely to continue using a notebook on their own; they tended to frame the notebook as something only the really good students, who were really interested in learning a language, would do, and apparently they did not count themselves as part of this group. The vocabulary notebook was time consuming and very hard work, and those factors seemed to outweigh its usefulness for students. The participating teacher in this study, who found the VNS to be very useful in developing student vocabulary, was worried about the amount of class time it took. Although her students clearly enjoyed the class activities incorporating the notebooks, she did not think many of her students would continue the notebook once it was no longer assigned for a grade because of the intensity of the work

Over the course of the spring semester at PVCC, we did a wide variety of in-class activities including exploring ELL dictionaries to discover the wide variety of word data contained there, making and justifying connections between words (word mapping), and examining sentence context for clues to correct usage. For homework each week, students were doing a variety of assignments, including researching new words, creating word maps, and analyzing words for specific meaning features.

Preliminary Findings
Although data analysis is only partially complete, a number of themes are fairly clear at this point. First, although my focus was on academic language, the language of school, the students were far more interested in the vocabulary of their lives. When I asked during the focus group where they found words that they needed to know, they said at work or their children's school or on television. One young man who had attended two years of high school in Kansas City even distinguished between the vocabulary for daily living versus that of school. Another student who had always kept a vocabulary notebook, consisting of the new word and a translation, said that he kept school words in the notebook that I provided, but he added work and home words to his own notebook. In the beginning of the semester, students were asked to choose their words for study entirely on their own, and the majority of the words were more related to daily life than any of the vocabulary they were being exposed to in the academic setting of school.

Second, the vocabulary notebook as I gave it to the students was frustrating to them. Focal students complained that there were too many boxes. The structure I provided was a constraint that they found difficult to work with. One focal student, new to the academic study of English, had never kept a vocabulary notebook before and was very pleased with the notion of keeping track of her words. She came up with her own system that involved information from a number of sources, multiple tries at using the word correctly, and tips that her native speaking boyfriend provided her about the word.

In addition, it became very clear early on that students were able to work with the definitional information, but they could not use the words. We began looking at multiple contexts in which the word was used for clues as to usage. It was quite interesting because they really began to understand the kinds of things that you have to know about a word, particularly collocations and word families, if it is to be used correctly. Prior to this point, the students had been quite resistant to these ideas, and did not consider collocations or knowledge of word families at all useful in coming to know a word, but once we began examining contexts in which words actually occur, they realized the necessity of attending to them if they were to be able to actually use words correctly.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, students spoke of the stigma of not being proficient in the language, mentioning repeatedly that they wanted to have credibility, to be taken seriously, to be respected. The lack of vocabulary seemed to concern them far more than grammar, mostly because they talked about grammar as important in school, for writing, but did not necessarily see it as hindering their spoken communication. One focal student said that no one used correct grammar in social situations, so it did not matter, but if you did not have the words, people would know that you did not know things. This is interesting in light of student frustration with knowing the words but not being able to use them. In terms of the stigma attached to non-native proficiency, students saw it mostly in terms of a vocabulary issue.

Finally, when asked about what they might do if they encountered a word they did not understand, students spoke of strategies that would allow them to bypass the word. They could skip it, they could use another word that they knew, or they could use gestures. I could not get them to talk about the possibility of learning the word for future use, or their role in that endeavor. In my observer's comments I indicated that they seemed completely unable to see themselves as active, strategic participants in their own learning.

Conclusions and Implications for Practice
The vocabulary notebook, while not the tool for learning vocabulary I had envisioned, seemed to serve instead as a vehicle for talking about learning vocabulary and what constituted effective vocabulary study. It provided a forum for a great deal of conversation about words and what was important if you wanted to know words and remember words and use words. The students encountered a great deal of vocabulary theory, understanding the concepts of breadth and depth of knowledge. They came to realize the notion of deep processing in order to really own a word and the contextual analysis that has to happen if a new word is to be used productively. Although all of the focal students said that they would continue to use a notebook for vocabulary study, only two of the five told me that they would continue to use the notebook I had provided for them. All of the five, however, indicated that they had changed the kinds of information that they collected about new words and had strategies well in place to be better learners and users of new words.

We use a vocabulary notebook with the level one students here at the AEC, and we do many of the same types of activities. Because the level one students have so much less language than the students at PVCC, we are not able to have the rich conversations about words and word learning that the students at Penn Valley could engage in. That concerns me. We spend a good deal of time getting AEC students to understand how to use the vocabulary notebook, and it takes a few weeks into the semester until they can work independently on gathering word data that is meaningful and useful to them. Although we do many

of the same activities, we cannot have the explicit discussion about processes that we are engaging in and the reasons behind them. For example, both the PVCC students and the level one students do word mapping. With the Penn Valley students, we discussed the notion of deep processing of words as necessary in order to really gain a sense of the word, and they came to understand that definitional information was not enough. But we cannot have that same discussion in level one, and so the lessons learned, if any, are much more implicit. In addition, word mapping is generally making and justifying connections among words. Because we all see things slightly differently, students often see connections among words that I never would have thought of, but if they can justify their connection, all is well. With AEC level one students, justifying their connections is very difficult, and often they are unable to tell me why they think the words are semantically related. There is no doubt, though, that they are developing some strategies for learning vocabulary independently. Whether they continue to use them after moving on is questionable because of the rather arduous nature of the task.

Appendix 1

New Word:	Translation	POS
Definition:	My sentence:	
Other information		

New Word:	Translation	POS
Definition:	My sentence:	
Other information		

New Word:	Translation	POS
Definition:	My sentence:	
Other information		

New Word:	Translation	POS
Definition:	My sentence:	
Other information		

Appendix 2: Semantic Mapping
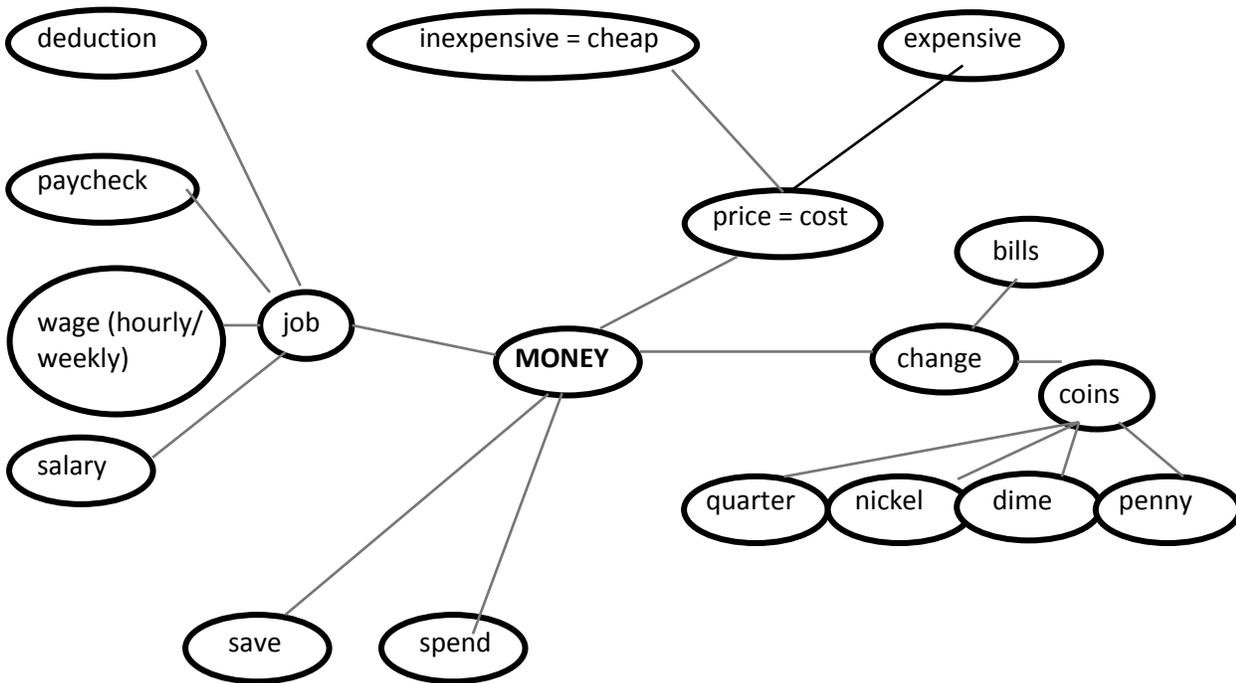
Appendix 2 Cont.: Semantic Feature Analysis

Noun ↓ Adjective →	reasonable	severe	artificial	terrible	healthy	Add an adjective
price	√	N/A	√	√	N/A	
adults	√	√ (= mean)	√ (with others)	√	√	
material	√ (price, quality)	N/A	√ (synthetics)	√ (ugly, poor quality)	N/A	
Add 5 nouns						

Appendix 2 Cont: Semantic Feature Analysis cont.

Vocabulary	People	Animals	Plants	Things
laugh	√	N/A (monkeys sound like)	N/A	N/A (baby doll)
cloudy	N/A	N/A	N/A	√ (the weather, the sky, a piece of glass)
relax	√ (body and mind)	√ (body only?)	N/A	? a car engine idles when stopped in traffic
alone	√	√	√	√
lonely = alone and sad	√	N/A	N/A	N/A
delicious				
funny				
play				
Add 2 more nouns, 2 more verbs, 2 more adjectives				

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Perrin Blackman
Stepping in the Same Stream Twice: A Dynamic Systems Look at Group Work in the ESL Classroom

The beauty of teaching is that no matter how many times you have taught the same course, you cannot go back and re-teach any class, even if you wish you could. Each class moves along in its own way like a stream, following a fairly predictable path while taking surprising (yet logical) turns and twists over time. Time, as far as we know, is irreversible, but by looking at your classroom as an open, self-organizing system whose flow emerges as it progresses, you can prepare for the next class by making some very effective changes – changes that may seem small but that have a significant impact on the identity of the class and the flow of learning that emerges over time.

Dynamic Systems Theory
Systems theory, also known as complexity theory, has recently been applied by the "soft sciences," much to the dismay of a few hard science academicians. Diane Larsen-Freeman first approached this topic in 1997 with her article *Chaos/Complexity and Second Language Acquisition*. In 2008, she also co-authored a book with Lynne Cameron titled *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics*. While describing the theory takes a great deal of time, there are a few basic tenets that can be understood and applied easily to any situation where emergence is desired. In this situation, I am interested in applying the theory to group dynamics in the classroom.

In his article, *Classroom Management: Creating 'Just the Right Amount' of Disturbance*, William Doll, author and Professor of Education at Louisiana State University, writes that open systems work best if they have the following components:

a. a critical, active mass,
b. only a few operating connections at any given time, and
c. a simple set of operating rules" (Doll 2000).

This scientific observation can be applied to other dynamic systems, such as students in the classroom, with the expectation that if conditions are favorable, language production will emerge. The key ingredients then would include:

a. A specific group of active, involved students
b. who have only a few methods of making connection,
c. and only a few rules to follow at a time.

Once the initial conditions are established, the instructor acts as a facilitator (steering the boat) while the students provide the energy to move along (rowing). Through the lens of complexity theory, we can see that the facilitator's job is not only to set up the boundaries and be aware of initial conditions, but also to monitor interactions to make sure that the system has just the right amount of input to remain at the "edge of chaos." Too much input, and the system (or classroom) dissolves into chaos. Too little, and entropy ensues. Allowing for mistakes, trial and error, false starts, resistance, and unpredictable variables is what keeps the class moving. Preventing too much of this "noise" is what keeps the project from deteriorating into a situation where the energy falters and participants lose sight of the group identity and begin to take

off on their own. The job of the facilitator then is to create and maintain conditions that are favorable to emergence, knowing that it *will* occur but that it is impossible to predict exactly what course it will take.

Facilitating Group Work

With these concepts in mind, I planned an activity for my level three grammar class. The task required the students to work in small groups in and outside of class to write a story. My goal was to elicit clear verbal and written expression using simple past, past progressive and past modals. I wanted my students to use the forms we had studied in an actual communicative setting where other students could give them immediate feedback with attention to grammatical structures. My secondary (and slightly surreptitious) goal was to expose them to group work in a comfortable multicultural setting before they had to do it on their own. I also wanted to find out the best possible arrangement of students for future group work that will take place outside of class.

The parameters were as follows:

1. Select a small character toy from my collection. (These included Lego people, small plastic animals and toy soldiers.)
2. Use at least five verbs from our weekly irregular verb list. (There were 15 to choose from.)
3. Write a story using simple past, past progressive, the words "there was" or "there were" and one past modal such as "should have." (Thus, one character had to make a mistake.)
4. I also gave each group a vehicle, such as a toy ambulance or helicopter to promote ideas about action.
5. Students were allowed to choose their group members, but they had to have at least 3 people, one of whom spoke a different language.

I gave each student an instruction sheet with blanks for the group members' names, including a place for one person who would write the story down in class and one whose job it would be to type the story and email it to the others. I also set out sample stories that my students had made in the past. At this point, the table was set and I got out of the way.

Returning to the three main ingredients, I now had:

1. A group of active, involved students;
2. Connections that were a bit unwieldy, but were limited to:
    a. Physical interaction between members of the group (talking/moving chairs)
    b. Students looking at the instructions
    c. Students looking at the example stories
    d. Students examining the toys
    e. Students looking through the list of irregular verbs, and
    f. A few students still wandering around trying to find a group
3. Perhaps a few too many rules, but time would tell.

As a facilitator in this learner-centered environment, my job now was to maintain a dynamic balance between order and chaos. In order to maintain overall stability, a system must be kept at the edge of chaos: that moment where everything is flowing and yet there is neither too much nor too little activity. Thus, my first task was to keep the class from becoming too active or chaotic. To do this, I watched to see if my goals were being met. Did they know what to do? Had they selected a scribe? If so, were they using past tense? Were they trying to include the grammar structures I wanted? Were they writing it down? Basically, were they becoming a cohesive group?

Initially, the biggest issue was that the groups were overly active. Each student had to sort out the instructions, get settled physically, and negotiate his or her role in the group. One group had a member who was both creating the story and doing all the writing. As I watched, another student offered to be the scribe while the first student dictated. "So, you'll type it up then," the new scribe said to a third student who agreed. This interaction pleased me immensely for two reasons. First, the student who took on the identity of group scribe had complained when he saw the toys. (He thought it was too childish.) Second, a sign of a healthy system is when participants start to establish personal identity and work out power dynamics between themselves based on their idea of their own ability and what the group identity requires. Thus, this student's power negotiation bonded the group and helped give it form.

For the most part, my job entailed moving from group to group reestablishing the parameters, reminding the students to use the specific grammar structures, and helping them spell vocabulary that emerged from using the toys: ambulance, helicopter, snake, duck, etc... I realized that the inclusion of the irregular verb list was creating confusion, so I revised this requirement and allowed them to use any verbs they wanted, telling them that they "could" use the list if they needed ideas, but that they "had to" include all the grammatical forms in their story. By releasing one requirement and reiterating another, I was able to direct their energy effectively. As the work progressed, language and ideas began to flow, and there were many questions, but at no point did I feel that the activity was so over stimulating as to be detrimental.

My next task was to make sure that the energy didn't die down throughout the remaining 30 minutes of class. The second law of thermodynamics states that dynamic systems naturally tend to move toward stability, so over time I knew that the energy would dissipate. I wanted to make sure that when the whistle blew (signaling that there were 10 minutes remaining) all the groups would be winding down their efforts but still working attentively.

With all the toys and the short time limit, entropy was not a problem, but there was a slight threat when one group member sat back in his chair and asked how long the story had to be. As a facilitator, one of my roles is to provide positive or negative feedback depending on my perceptions of their progress. To answer the student's question, I smiled and said, "Long," and I held up one of the examples from a previous class of a lower level showing 6-8 paragraphs. The student looked at the group's one-paragraph product and realized that there was more work to do. I suggested using more adjectives and descriptive words and phrases to develop the story. This is an example of positive feedback which is discussed below.

I also looked for students who seemed to be uninvolved and encouraged the group to "include everyone." However, one important aspect of systems theory is Richardson's 80/20 principle discussed by McClellan (2010). This posits that in a functional group approximately 20% of the active members will actively contribute to the output while the other 80% follow along. Even allowing for inactive members, this theory shows how leadership can emerge even in a small group. If the leadership rotates from time to time, this is not a threat to stability, so it's perfectly fine if several students just listen rather than talk at once.

As the project progressed, I continued my alternating role as both "noise reducer" and "noise amplifier" (Kennedy, 2010). This job requires the facilitator to employ a type of negative or positive feedback that is defined along the lines of systems dynamics. Negative feedback involves steering the group back to the basic rules and structural limitations in order to stabilize the system. The risk of too much negative feedback is that it can create "a zone of 'flattened-out' conversation that narcotizes the group…and establishes a consensus of indifference, in which no new ideas appear to be available" (Kennedy, 2010, p. 10). Positive feedback includes anything which "brings difference" such as encouraging moving on or moving in a new direction. The risk of too much positive feedback is that the system can become too

dynamic and lose focus. By balancing between these two extremes, I was able to maintain a classroom environment that was conducive to the emergence of the language structures I had selected.

In Retrospect
Looking back through the lens of complexity science, I reevaluated the lesson particularly in regard to the effect of initial conditions and the use of a simple set of operating rules. Initial conditions can be considered through a phenomenon popularly known as The Butterfly Effect. The term was coined by Edward Lorenz to describe his work with weather prediction in the 1960's (Gleick, 1987). He noticed with his computer calculations that a small change in initial conditions can lead to highly disparate results. Thus, while the relationship is not causative or predictable, we can be assured that details are more important in the beginning of a process because they help define the direction that the system will follow. First impressions are indeed lasting.

Conscious of this phenomenon, I had done a bit of groundwork before we engaged in this activity, mostly in regard to having students write creatively using the grammar structures we had been using each week. I also had previously put the students in pairs to work on less demanding activities. I had not done any actual group work with this class yet. Being sensitive to initial conditions in an ESL classroom always requires an awareness of cultural attitudes and expectations. In this classroom, I had four Muslim women, two of whom preferred to work and sit together; neither had interacted with males in the class unless they were required to. I was concerned about the comfort of one in particular who was fully covered. Before class that day, I asked her privately if she was comfortable working with men, and she said that she was a little shy, but that she would try and thanked me for asking. She ended up in a group with three men, but she (being dynamic and smart) jumped in and participated as much as the others. In fact, she seemed to take the lead in a group that included a man from Costa Rica, one from Ethiopia, and one from South Korea. In this case, a small bit of attention to initial conditions may have prevented what could have been a problematic outcome. However, I also noticed that her friend, another Muslim woman, seemed more reticent in her group which included mostly Saudi males who preferred to talk to each other rather than her. I hadn't had a chance to speak with her before the class, and I think that next time, I'll look more closely at how to head off any discomfort in this regard. I will probably assign students to groups rather than letting them decide.

In regard to keeping the operating rules simple, I see now that I could have explained the process better and perhaps introduced the parameters in a different order. I might also minimize the characters that they can use and avoid the irregular verb list, as it just seemed to increase confusion. One point I'm still debating about is the usage of toys. They generate a lot of playful energy, and students will use them as props to show interactions, but there is nearly always one very serious student who recoils at first. Perhaps simply explaining why I'm using toys from the start would head off this issue and elicit more cooperation in general, or I might start using pictures of real people and vehicles rather than toys.

What Emerged?
It is not possible to know every detail of what emerges from the workings of an open system. However, on an intuitive and immediate level, I was content with the lesson. One measure of success for an open system is that the group develops a sense of self-identity over time, and these groups had done just that. I could smell competition in the air when one group and then another started getting out their cameras to photograph the objects so they could illustrate their stories, which was not required.

When I packed up my books, students were still scribbling titles and correcting verb tenses and exchanging email addresses so they could polish and e-mail their stories to me. They had worked hard to use the grammar structures I listed, and they had all actively participated in the process of developing a product that they could take ownership in. They had also pushed themselves to interact socially in a small group and were taking steps to extend that social interaction outside of class in order to complete the

assignment. Clearly, they had given themselves much to consider as they continued their projects outside of class.

As the facilitator, I also had a great deal to think about after this class. I wondered which students had gotten the most out of the verbal part of the class and whether they were inspired or dismayed by the group work. In regard to writing, I wondered how much feedback they would need before their stories were presentable and whether one student would be burdened with proofreading the entire story. As we left the classroom, I was already drafting a questionnaire in my mind to ask them about their feelings regarding this group work, and I had quite a few ideas about how to revise the lesson.

In the short term: the stories required at least one major revision, but they were more extensive and creative than I had anticipated. Some groups had obviously collaborated outside of class and some had not. They all needed to meet once more in class to revise their work. Before we moved on to other group work, I created a survey to find out about their experience which we discussed in class before launching into further and more extensive study groups. On the last day of class, I handed out copies of all the stories combined so each student had one to take home. It was clear by their smiles that they were pleased to see their work in print, and that more had emerged from their interactions than I knew.

I know that when I revisit this lesson, I'll be able to manipulate the initial conditions more effectively. I'll try to minimize the amount of information on the instructions, and I'll spend more time setting up the activity and deciding which students to put in which groups. But even with the most meticulous plans, the beauty of working with an open system assures me that it isn't possible to have complete control over the direction and velocity of what emerges. In fact, attempts at total control run counter to the philosophy behind systems theory. As Heraclitus observed long ago, it isn't possible to step into the same stream twice. It is not the same water, and we will not be exactly the same people.

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Jacob Minniear   Jennifer Hornbaker

Toward a More Perfect Union: Increasing Student Assistant Efficacy through an Online Training Program

Using domestic student teaching assistants (SAs) in the ESOL classroom has been widely accepted as an effective tool for enhancing student learning. SAs have been shown to facilitate student participation in the classroom, foster students' confidence in interacting with native speakers, and serve as a connection to the local culture (Lynch & Anderson, 2001). To capitalize on the benefits afforded by SAs, the AEC has, since 2007, integrated SAs into level one courses. However, research literature underscores that, to maximize SA efficacy, SAs must be purposefully trained for their roles (Gube & Phillipson, 2011; Kachi & Choon-hwa, 2001; Underhill & McDonald, 2010; Williams, 1991). As new GTAs, we observed that the AEC's SAs represent a broad range of personalities, facilities, and experiences. Given these variances in SAs' skills, we found ourselves questioning to what standard of knowledge we could and should hold them. Defining such a standard would enable teachers to design class activities that most productively draw upon the strengths of SAs without overstepping the boundaries of their expertise. Three lines of inquiry arose out of this realization: 1) What are the expectations of SAs at the AEC? 2) Do the AEC's current, procedure-focused SA training practices satisfactorily prepare SAs to meet these expectations? If not, 3) how can the training program be improved to make the presence of SAs in the classroom more fruitful for students, teachers, and SAs alike?

In an effort to answer these questions, we assessed the SA program, hypothesizing that we would find evidence encouraging the development of a training resource to fill the gaps between SA expectations and performance. The evaluation included mirror questionnaires administered online to both teachers and SAs surveying their perceptions of SAs' pedagogical expertise, intercultural awareness, and English language knowledge, as well as the role of the SA. These questionnaires comprised thirty-eight questions scored on a five-point scale in addition to four open-ended questions coded for common themes. Level one students completed a 13-question online survey and participated in a focus group conversation. The online survey and the focus group conversation were in English. The focus groups were designed to elicit more in-depth opinions about student experiences with SAs than would be possible using the online survey alone.

The results from the questionnaires and student focus groups revealed that a more comprehensive training program for SAs may prove advantageous. Overall, teachers identified more areas for improvement than did SAs or students. Teacher and SA perceptions were especially discrepant with regard to SA language knowledge; teacher responses demonstrated a need for more explicit knowledge in terms of ESL reading, writing, and pronunciation concepts, while SAs felt their knowledge in these areas was satisfactory for their role. However, both groups agreed, as did level one students, that SAs would be better equipped for the ESL classroom if they possessed more extensive knowledge of grammatical rules. Both teachers and SAs also acknowledged a lack of clear expectations for SAs and weaknesses in SAs' pedagogical techniques, such as giving examples, explaining mistakes, and providing feedback in a way most conducive to student learning.

A common thread in SA feedback was the value of experience. SAs possessing previous experience working with international students and/or language learners reported feeling prepared to take on their responsibilities at the AEC; in contrast, others with less experience noted the time on the job it took to fully grasp student language abilities and successful cross-cultural communication strategies. Finally,

students, though openly appreciative of the cultural guidance provided by SAs and their polite, friendly demeanor in general, commented on their desire for SAs to exhibit dedication and professionalism in their interactions.

Using the teacher, SA, and student feedback to inform its design, we have developed an online SA training program to address the areas for improvement exposed by our research. Serving as both a pre-service program and a continuing resource for SAs, the training modules will feature video footage, veteran SA input, interactive presentations, and short assessments to maximize their engaging and informative qualities. Achieving these endeavors will thereby accomplish the end goal of realizing more effective partnerships between SAs and both teachers and students.

The program will consist of four modules: (1) responsibility/expectations, (2) intercultural interactions, (3) language skills, (4) pedagogical awareness. The flow of these modules is based in the finding that unclear expectations seem to lie at the root of SA shortcomings in the culture and language awareness necessary for sound practices in the ESOL classroom. Pinpointing the responsibilities required of SAs clarifies the linguistic and intercultural skills necessary for their success in the classroom. With a solid foundation in the former topics, SAs then can develop pedagogical techniques that enable more productive communication with students.

Modules for Student Assistant Training Program

(1) Responsibilities/Expectations

(2) Intercultural Interactions   (3) Language Skills

(4) Pedagogy for ESOL
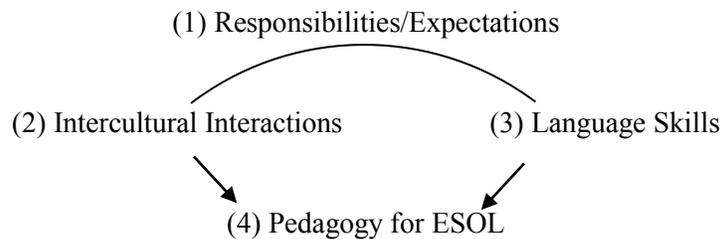
 More precisely, the goals of these modules are to:

1) orient SAs to the AEC, level one, and its students by defining student learning objectives and
SA expectations;
2) identify the concepts of explicit and implicit culture, bringing SAs to an understanding of how cultural customs affect student *and* SA behaviors, ideas, and learning styles;
3) provide an overview of the English language through the lens of SLA, driven by level one course syllabi;
4) introduce pedagogical strategies and topics relevant to language instruction, including negotiation, corrective feedback, wait time, and modeling.

Following the development of this training program, stage two of this research will aim to test its effectiveness. Beginning in the fall 2012 semester, all SAs will be required to complete the training program. A subsequent evaluation of the program will seek to investigate if the program meets the needs of the AEC. Specific questions are; 'Is the training program effective?' 'What role does prior experience play in training?' 'Will SAs employ the knowledge and techniques provided in training?' And 'are SAs, instructors, and students satisfied with the results of the training?'

Four types of assessment will supply the information to answer these questions: pre-test, post-test, satisfaction/feedback survey, and classroom observations. The SAs will participate in a brief training orientation and then will take a pre-test, which will cover the four areas of the training program. The SAs

will then have two weeks to complete the on-line training program with brief formative assessments after each module. After completing the training, the SAs will return for a training conclusion and a post-test, which will include a satisfaction survey. The last form of evaluation will be classroom observations with the aim of seeing how SAs interact in the classroom and if they use the knowledge obtained from training.

After the data collection, the results of both the pre-test and post-test will be compared with SAs' and teachers' perceptions and pre-test and post-test scores in general and by years of experience with the hope to support our hypotheses: 1) the training program can replace semesters of experience; 2) being a native or near-native speaker is not sufficient enough to be an SA; and 3) the classroom environment plays a substantial role is SAs' efficacy. With these data, we hope to better understand the importance of SAs, to enhance the use of SAs, and to inform future decisions in level one.

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Linda Pollock
Journal Writing Leads to Connectivity

When I was 12, I wanted a diary with a lock and key; the kind little sisters can't get into. Later in my teen years, I used to write each day's event in a small calendar. Throughout the years I have seen the value of journaling in my own life and more recently I have read articles about its benefits in a classroom. Therefore, when my students in Reading and Writing level 2 said they wanted to write more, I thought this might be a good idea. So, armed with small blue exam books and markers for their names, I explained to my class what we were going to do.

Every week I brought out their blue books and we wrote for 15 minutes. I wrote with them. They never read what I wrote but I set an example and showed them that I was *not* going to be grading or doing something else while *they* wrote, so I also journaled. By modeling the process of writing along with my students, I hope to have shown them that writing is part of my life.

Some students tried to get away with just writing a few sentences, but I would send them back to add a few more. The majority of the class, though, really did put their thoughts down. At the end of the semester they got to keep their booklets and many were encouraged by their improvement.

The topics varied over the semester. We sometimes wrote our opinions about what we were doing or we would elaborate on a vocabulary concept. The first entry, for instance, was for them to introduce themselves to me. Later, when we were studying how to write a listing paragraph, the topic was 'if I visit your country what two things should I see?"

I believe this is the third semester I have done this activity. This semester I added something different; I chose one or two entries to read out loud during our following class time. The students loved this and tried to guess who had written the chosen entry. They excelled because they wanted their entry to be read.

Because the goal of this exercise was to achieve a 'mind-to-pen connection' (idea from TESOL 2007 conference workshop), corrections were kept at a minimum if any, but I would always write a question or a feedback comment. In my experience, the students have improved in their writing speed, creativity, thought process and handwriting. Here is an example of a first and last entry from a former student.

"*I am xyx. I am from xyx. I have 33 years old. I am married. I have 3 children. I study math. I got master in math. I want to get PhD. I have been in the U. S. for 8 months.*"

Same student's last entry:

"*Some people think that the Renaissance as the beginning modern history.* (This was the statement they were to write about.) *I think this isn't exactly for two resons. First reson is the Renaissance isn't the first change in history. The world had many changes before the Renaissance. For example, the The Arabs made a lot of changes before the Renaissance. They made basic of scince, math and geography. The words "algebra" and "logarithm" come from Arabic language. Second reson I think this sentence isn't true. We can say Renaissance was important change in the history, but we can't say it is beginning of*

modern history because modern history all the world shared to made it. Finally, the Renaissance is great change in the world but it is not alone."

Journaling has been the key to getting to know my students better, communicating with them, creating community within my classroom, and even getting invitations to visit China and Saudi Arabia. Journaling is the key that unlocked creativity and connectivity in my classroom.

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Marcellino Berardo
When Placement is Irrelevant: A Counselor's Dilemma

Counselors help explain AEC policy to students. One of the most important policies at the AEC is the placement policy. Placement depends on different factors such as proficiency test scores, previous course work, grades, and teacher recommendations. The AEC considers these factors to move students up to the next level or pass them out of the program. In general, students are ecstatic when they pass, happy when they move up and less happy when they don't. On rare occasions, counselors come across a situation where this general rule does not apply. Placement is irrelevant.

As a counselor in spring 2012, I met with a Chinese student who made good progress. She advanced to ESLP 110 (plus grammar lab) from three 4th level classes. She had scores over 140 in Speaking/Listening, Grammar for Communication, and Reading/Writing. This is a classic fifth level, ESLP 110 student.

The student was significantly agitated. She couldn't stop crying even though she would only need to take one AEC class and a grammar lab. She continued to cry but said she had no problem with her placement. She was so upset because her proficiency test score for S/L dropped a few points. Her other scores improved.

She wanted to retest in Listening based on the small drop in her score and the A- she received in the class. It is AEC policy to consider a retest for those who get good grades but whose proficiency score drops for that skill. For this student, however, a retest in Listening wouldn't affect her placement.

I explained that even if she passed out of Listening from a retest, she still had to take ESLP 110 plus grammar lab because she still needed Reading/Writing and Grammar for Communication.[1] That didn't seem to matter to her because she accepted her placement. Her placement was not the issue.

Something was going on. Usually when a student progresses to the next level, understands his/her placement, and is happy with that placement, the counselor's work is done. From the perspective of the AEC, there is no problem. In this case, however, there was most definitely a problem.

The problem was that the student's parents saw a slight drop in their daughter's S/L score and told her they were going to bring her home because of her lower score. Her parents threatened to bring her back home based on a good solid score that had no negative effect on her placement at the AEC. I imagine her parents didn't see it that way, although that is exactly what it looks like from the AEC point of view.

The student tried to explain to her parents how the AEC works. She was in 5th level, the highest level. She could get an A or A- and not even have to take the proficiency test. She has a record of A's and A-'s at the AEC, so it was certainly possible for her to finish her English language requirements next semester. None of this mattered to her parents.

I sat and listened.

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[1] This policy has changed since the writing of this essay. The change in policy is not because of this student's case.

The student eventually explained to me that Chinese parents typically focus on test scores. Her parents saw a drop in one test score and nothing else mattered. The parents were not primarily concerned with the level their daughter was placed in. Their primary concern was the score, a number. In contrast, the AEC's primary concerns are placement into levels and moving students quickly through the program. Test scores help us place the students but we also consider previous AEC course work, grades, and teacher recommendations. In this particular case, the slight drop in the Listening test score was not affecting placement, so it had little meaning in this context.

I needed to consult with Sandra Issa, so I asked the student to wait a couple of minutes in the counseling cubicle while I talked over her situation with a colleague. Counselors often consult on cases because we get unusual or unique cases every semester.

The Dilemma

So, what does the responsible AEC counselor do? On the one hand the decision is easy to make. We do not retest the student based on complaints or threats from parents. We also don't retest if the student can't benefit from the new result.

To add to an easy "no retest" decision, we could evoke the Floodgate argument, which is; 'if you make an exception for one person, then everyone in that same situation will also want the exception. The Floodgates would open and there would be a mad rush to retest.' No one wants a "mad rush."

We had to consider a retest, however, because it is AEC policy to retest a student who did well in a skill but lost points on the proficiency test in that skill. In addition, the Floodgate argument was weak in this case because the situation was rare. In thirty-seven years of collective experience in counseling at the AEC, we can't recall any counseling cases where all four apply: (a) the student presents with extreme fear and anxiety; (b) the student is content with his/her placement; (c) the student is eligible to retest in one skill but the retest would be irrelevant to placement; (d) the student wants to retest for reasons other than placement.

The decision to retest hinged on whether a retest would benefit the student or not. To make our call, we had to re-examine what we mean by a student "benefitting" from a retest.

From the perspective of the AEC, a student can benefit if the test score can possibly place the student in a higher level or out of the program. There is, however, at least one other way a student can benefit from a retest. For this particular student, a retest would be a chance to improve her Listening score, which would greatly reduce undue fear and anxiety, undue from the perspective of the AEC. We had to weigh the immense meaning this particular test score had to the student against its relative insignificance to the student's placement.

After additional deliberation, we finally made the call to retest this student because the student met the conditions and would "benefit" from the retest. To this particular student, the benefit would be just as significant as moving up a level or exiting the program. The student's severe anxiety over an "irrelevant" test score would be an unnecessary aggravating factor in her continuing work at the AEC. We could temporarily alleviate the student's severe anxiety quickly and simply.

We did what we thought was in the best interest of this particular student at this particular time. Another lower score might begin the cycle again, but at that point we would have to offer advice or some other kind of assistance because there is no policy of retesting a retest.

As we continue to operate according to our placement and retest policies, once in a while, special situations arise. These special situations are most interesting about counseling at the AEC. These situations can also make for dilemmas that require policy, collaborative judgment calls, and a willingness to consider the student's point of view even when it does not appear to affect the student's placement or progress through our program.

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Current Research Interests and Presentation Proposals

Katie McClintic
Using Social Issues and Social Media to Inspire Language Learning

Teachers in large language programs such as ours often struggle with motivating our students to communicate in the target language. One way to do this is by using a content based approach for designing class lessons. More specifically, using content about global issues can not only help motivate students to communicate but also engage them on an emotional level. Incorporating topics dealing with global issues can motivate students to not just communicate their original opinions in the target language, but more importantly to think deeply about complex topics. This also serves to help students develop the critical thinking skills necessary to be successful students at an American university.

Another challenging aspect of teaching a generation of digital natives is keeping students engaged. In an age of Facebook facilitated revolutions and breaking news spreading at the speed of Twitter, opportunities exist for broadening student understanding of social issues through various interactive, multi-media platforms. Not only can students get up-to-the-minute updates on the content, but this level of interaction can keep students engaged in the learning process and provide real motivation for communicating in English.

Finally, by encouraging students to work collaboratively to create multi-media projects, and then share their projects with each other (or with a broader audience if they so choose), students can see in real time the power of their ideas AND the power of information spread in English. To get an example of how these ideas might be translated into an actual class lesson(s), you can explore a sample lesson entitled "The World Water Crisis" built through Google sites. The site provides an example of how one might scaffold a lesson by blending technology and in-class work. The site takes students through various steps of the learning process, from activating prior knowledge, introducing the topic with a web quest, and allowing students to learn more extensively about the topic through reading. In addition, you will find a sample rubric for assessing group work as well as a more detailed sample lesson plan. A number of additional teacher resources for using technology in class have also been included on the site. If you would like to hear more about the theoretical foundations to this approach, you can listen to the recorded presentation from the Philadelphia 2012 TESOL conference (just click on the link in the "Resources for Teachers" page).

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Summer Marvin   Katie McClintic

It's Alive! Blending Technology with Academic Materials for Engaged Learning

With the rise in Web 2.0-based tools being used in classrooms, the traditional teaching model of Presentation, Practice, and Production is quickly being pushed aside in favor of a "flipped" approach to teaching. A "flipped" lesson, made more widespread with the use of sites like Khan Academy and TEDed, allows teachers to focus more on interacting with students and problem-solving because students have already been presented with the lesson before entering the physical classroom. In other words, students construct meaning about topics outside the classroom, thus giving teachers more time to focus on guiding students in accomplishing a task.

Our research focuses on identifying and demonstrating specific ways to rejuvenate content-based academic materials using Web 2.0 tools such as Weebly, Google Sites, Quizlet, Online Magazines, and TED-Ed in an effort to maximize in-class learning while allowing students to negotiate meaning and learn autonomously. Our goals include empowering and equipping other teachers with appropriate resources and effective techniques for blending technology and pedagogy responsibly to suit the needs of the tech-savvy digital natives that are filling up today's classrooms. Our work is based on current academic experiences as we have endeavored to blend technology and pedagogy while meeting course specific outcomes in the IEP environment.

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Barbara L. Yoder

Issues in Teaching Visual Culture to University ESL Students

University art museums are challenged to cultivate culturally diverse audiences, including university ESL students. At the same time, university ESL teachers are challenged to provide students with authentic academic experiences that reinforce language skills and stimulate critical thinking. It is surprising then that scant attention has been paid to the potential for art museum-IEP collaborations when both sides have much to gain. As both an ESL teacher and art museum educator, I am working with Spencer Museum of Art staff to develop English for Academic Purposes materials that focus on visual culture. The collaboration brings together my two professions, TESL and art museum education. In addition to teaching at the Applied English Center, I write educational materials for museum exhibitions sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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Sandra Issa
Increasing Returns on Your Investment: Making Feedback Work

Writing instructors often devote hours to writing comments on students' papers only to find that the feedback is ignored in subsequent assignments. Why does this happen? How can we get students to incorporate the feedback we give them into future drafts and assignments? My session will present the findings of a two-part study exploring student responses to different kinds of feedback and exploring the ways in which instructors introduce feedback to students. I will share strategies for introducing and providing feedback that students will use based on the results of the study and research in the literature. Participants will leave the session with specific ideas about how to make their feedback more accessible, useful, and understandable to students.

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Sandra Issa   Mary McGuinness
Student Complaints about Faculty: Where to Start, Where to Go

What do you do if a student brings you a complaint about an instructor? Such complaints can create uncomfortable situations for students, instructors, and administrators. However, they can offer a learning experience for everyone involved. What are the first steps that should be taken when a student makes a complaint? What kind of follow-up is necessary? How do you create a system for handling complaints that works in everyone's best interests? We will address causes for student complaints, provide strategies for discussing the complaints with students and with instructors, and offer suggestions on how to establish procedures for handling these types of complaints.

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SPECIAL ISSUE: Call for ideas on Teaching Vocabulary
How do YOU teach vocabulary? How do coordinators handle vocabulary for the different levels and skills? How is vocabulary taught at the AEC? This is a call for essays, articles, thoughts, opinions, materials, and/or strategies on how vocabulary is taught at the AEC and/or how vocabulary should be taught here. Please submit your approach to teaching vocabulary to me directly: mberardo@ku.edu.

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Copy Editor: Service Opportunity

Issues in Language Instruction at the Applied English Center: A Journal for Practicing and Interpreting TESL at the University of Kansas is looking for a copy editor.

This is an opportunity for service to the AEC. There is no compensation other than the excitement of working with our colleagues' latest thoughts on practicing and interpreting TESL at the University of Kansas. If interested please contact me: mberardo@ku.edu.