Building Global Citizens: The Benefits of Teaching Towards Communicative Proficiency in the Foreign Language Classroom

Martha Aguirre
Illinois Wesleyan University

Leah Nillas, Faculty Advisor
Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/jwprc
Part of the Education Commons

https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/jwprc/2017/ESposters/8

This Event is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at The Ames Library at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.
©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.
Building Global Citizens: The Benefits of Teaching Towards Communicative Proficiency in the FL Classroom

Martha A. Aguirre and Leah Nillas*
Educational Studies, Illinois Wesleyan University

Research Question

- How does teaching towards communicative proficiency promote students’ language skills and performance in the classroom?

Literature Review

- Emphasizing the use of the target language (Thompson & Harrison, 2014) and communicative strategies by using gestures, cognates, scaffolding, etc, (Christie, 2016) improves language output.
- Incorporating authentic content and contexts promotes a connection to the language and culture (Shrum & Gilsan, 2000; Young, 1999; Weyers, 1999; Heron & Seay, 1991).
- Utilizing the framework of the national standards and proficiency guidelines help set realistic and attainable goals when assessing and measuring language development (Kaplan, 2016; Majhanovich, 2011). Moreover, the standards give students an opportunity to self-assess their language development (Dolosic, et al., 2016; Brown, 2014).

Methodology

- Participants were 23 students in a Spanish 1 urban classroom.
- During 16 weeks, the teacher used the ACTFL standards as a guide for creating lessons plans. After every 2/3 weeks, students were assessed on either their interpersonal speaking, presentational writing, or interpretive reading skills.
- The ACTFL World Readiness Standards, the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do statements, and the ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Learning Languages were used as a theoretical framework for this study.
- Data Analysis included analysis of student assessment samples, lesson plans or activities, and video recordings of lessons.

Communication Proficiency is “the ability to use language in real world situations in a spontaneous interaction and non-rehearsed context, acceptable and appropriate to native speakers of the language” (ACTFL, 2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpersonal</th>
<th>Interpretive</th>
<th>Presentational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two way communication where meaning can be negotiated and adjusted (Speaking/Listening or Reading/Writing)</td>
<td>One way communication where an author’s/speaker’s message is being interpreted. No negotiated meaning. (Reading/Listening)</td>
<td>One way communication where a speaker/author creates a message. No opportunity for negotiation of meaning. (Speaking/Writing)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. The 3 Modes of Communication (ACTFL, 2012)

Figure 2. Distribution of learning activities - The chart demonstrates that the modes of communication were consistently used in lessons. However, interpersonal writing activities are missing.

Results and Data Analysis

- The majority of classroom activities were interpersonal speaking (28.3%) and interpretive writing (20.8%). See Figure 2.
- 7.5% of activities directly focused on grammar which can inhibit the direct use of the target language (LeLoup, Ponterio, & Warford, 2013). See Figure 2.
- The class average on the interpretive reading quiz was 17.5/20 pts. The class struggled the most with detail recognition.
- ZPD was used as a teaching strategy in order to scaffold lessons and meet different learning needs.
- The use of cognates, images, and front-loading information prepared students for the communication activities in class (Christie, 2016; Moeller &Theiler, 2014).
- A large amount of activities in the lessons were student centered.

Conclusion

- Making use of authentic content and contexts allows for a stronger connection to the language and culture.
- Communicating in the target language 90% of the time while incorporating communicative strategies improves language output.
- Teaching towards communicative proficiency results to a more student centered learning environment.
- Further study should be more longitudinal to show the long term effects and should provide a comparison group.