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

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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.

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.