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Edited by:
Erin Guntly, Zoe Lam, Andrei Anghelescu, and Natalie Weber

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What do you see? Helping students understand seventeenth-century Baroque and Classical literary aesthetics

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Abstract: This article explores how using seventeenth-century European Baroque and French Classical visual art can help students grasp the complexities and meanings of the literary aesthetics embedded in seventeenth-century French tragedies.

1 Avoiding a tragedy

A useful starting point when teaching a seventeenth-century French tragedy seminar might be to simply ask students "what constitutes a tragedy for you?" From my own experience, the usual answer one often receives is "that's easy: someone always dies!" In the course of my tragedy seminar, one of my primary my goals will be to expand their limited, and sometimes erroneous, vision of what makes a play qualify as tragic. I like to tell students that a tragedy is the intense and often constrained space where the sublime and the horrific collide, or where hate and passion consume the heart of a main character until death. It is that beautiful yet terrifying intensity, that very tension within the play that makes the seventeenth-century French tragedy seminar one of my favourite classes to teach at the upper level. But attempting to familiarize non-native speakers as well as French speaking students with the works of seventeenth-century playwrights Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine is not an easy task. After all, the term for the genre itself, "tragedy," is often daunting and may even be enough to scare many of them away from registering into the course in the first place. Indeed, for most students today, seventeenth-century tragedies can all too easily be seen as irrelevant, unappealing, and ancient (and therefore boring) texts, which speak only of unrequited love, doomed families, and certain death.

If the badly tainted perception of what is a tragedy for students was not enough to steer them away from studying Early Modern French tragedies, the form itself can be a real impediment for students. Aside from the four centuries that create an enormous temporal divide between texts and today's students, between the then and the now, the text's old fashioned language coupled with the austere narrative form of these plays (the unfriendly alexandrine verse) always appear like insurmountable obstacles to students enrolled in any tragedy seminar. Indeed, let us be honest: for this generation of students raised with the vastly resourceful accessibility of the Internet, the expediency of the 5G, and the often monosyllabic narrative of modern texting, encountering foreign rhymes and deciphering alexandrines can be overwhelming if not plain terrifying, even more so when attempting to do it in a second language. How then is an Early Modernist, whose primary goal is to share her/his passion for these plays with students who already have a prejudicial notion of the tragic genre, how is that instructor to transmit and share with them the meaning but more importantly the beauty, the love and the hatred that live at the very core of these verses? In other words, how can one help make the difficult task

of reading a French tragedy, a more text-friendly, exciting and rewarding experience for them? My principal objective in the seventeenth-century French tragedy seminar is that at the end of the semester, students will have conquered their fear or discomfort toward the French alexandrine and feel confident in their abilities not only to understand the four hundred years old rhythmic narrative before them, but also to critically engage with the text. I hope to demonstrate how using seventeenth-century European Baroque and French Classical visual art (whether it be in the form of sculpture, painting or architecture) can be a useful and interactive teaching tool to help third and fourth year students grasp the complexities and meanings of the literary aesthetics embedded in seventeenth-century French tragedies.

2 Defining Corneille and Racine

An overall understanding of French Baroque and Classical aesthetics, which also characterizes the tragedies of Corneille and Racine, will provide students with a better knowledge and appreciation of the play's core issues. In Corneille's plays, for instance, the plot's main tension often centres around ideals of patriarchal glory, duty, and honour, all helping to create daring main characters—men but also surprisingly women (and in this way Corneille's tragedies can be read through a feminist lens[1])—that proudly display and even breathe a kind of virile heroism. It is no surprise that masculine qualities are inherent to Corneille's tragic plays; after all, in the *Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique*, published in 1660, the author himself defined tragedy as a masculine ideal:

> Tragedy's dignity calls for some worthy interest of the State, or some kind of passion that is more noble and more male than love, as are ambition and vengeance, and which instills greater sorrows than the loss of a mistress. […] but love must be content to occupy the second place in the poem, and leave the first place to questions of politic. (*La dignité de la tragédie demande quelque grand intérêt d'État, ou quelque passion plus noble et plus mâle que l'amour, telles que sont l'ambition et la vengeance, que la perte d'une maîtresse. [...] mais il faut que l'amour se contente du second rang dans le poème, et laisse à la politique le premier,* 824[2]).

While Corneille's tragedies promote a form of masculine idealism and his rather extroverted heroes are all about showing off the male qualities and passions (as defined by Corneille) that set them apart from ordinary human beings and that elevate them to a heroic level at the conclusion of the play, Racine's tragedies reflect a much more quiet, even suffocating atmosphere. Compared to Corneille's heroic characters, Racine's heroes are deprived of excessive showmanship. The excess present in these plays, rather, is that which derives from the love literally consuming Racinien characters. If Corneille's hero normally succeeds in surpassing those around him by overcoming or ignoring his amorous passion for the benefit of the State, Racine's hero fails utterly. Indeed, as the play unfolds, each of Racine's tragedies slowly develops a space where men and women, frustrated by their unrequited passion and doomed by the devastating

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[1] For feminist readings of Corneille's plays, see for instance C. Carlin's *Women Reading Corneille: Feminist Psychocriticisms of Le Cid* and Josephine Schmidt's *If There Are No More Heroes, There Are Heroines. A Feminist Critique of Corneille's Heroines,* 1637–1643.
[2] *Discours du poème dramatique*, *Oeuvres complètes*. This is my translation.

effects of their burning desire, attempt but in vain to prevail over their passion and change their tragic destiny. To help students envision the intrinsic hopelessness facing the Racinien hero as well the simplicity of the playwright's aesthetics, compared to Corneille's more boisterous style, I begin by showing them a *mise en scène* from one of Racine's tragedies, *Britannicus* (1669), directed by Brigitte Jaques-Wajeman in 2004 and performed by the company of the Comédie-française at the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier, in Paris. Upon gazing at the image of this modern and ultra minimalist décor, comprising only of two sofa chairs (side by each and situated centre stage), two rectangular tables (each one set against an opposite wall), two exit doors (opposite each other), and three stage walls completely bare and painted dark stone colour, students can observe immediately that the director wanted to stress the simplicity of Racine's style, its lack of superfluousness, as well as create a dramatic staging that strongly underlined how the characters are virtually confined and soon to be the victims of their sombre destiny.

3 Introducing Baroque Art

Now that students have a general sense of Corneille and Racine's contrasting styles, it is time to begin our exploration of the Baroque aesthetics in visual arts, which will lead eventually to a textual application. The Baroque aesthetics that define Corneille's narrative style and that is so vital to the comprehension of his dramatic concept will be quickly lost on most students. Therefore, before asking students to read *Le Cid*, the first of Corneille's three plays on our syllabus, I briefly outline for them the principal differences between Baroque and Classical styles. I say briefly, because in no way do I claim that my tragedy seminar is an art history course, nor that I am an art specialist. Nonetheless, one can still discuss essential characteristics of Early Modern European art and thus add another disciplinary approach to literary studies, making student-learning a more multidisciplinary and fulfilling experience. To that effect, I start by explaining that essentially, whether in literature or in visual arts, the Baroque refuses the straight line so cherished by Classical aesthetics in favour of the crooked line, and the moving line. Aside from emphasising movements, I tell them that it can also manifest itself by representing strong emotions, such as rage, pathos, and laughter. I add that it often displays strong contrasts of light and colour, and depicts images of the monstrous and the horrifying, such as those where violence and blood abound. Other Baroque traits can also be found in various themes underlining different ranges of emotions, such as humour and madness, or images relating to the theme of concealment, such as masks, disguises and illusions. Where Classial works tend to exploit simplicity and order, Baroque art may lean toward the superfluous and the chaotic. Finally, I explain that there is a space within its aesthetics for the body to be revealed, for nudity, and where the world is at times represented as upside down, as bizarre, and where the line between reality and allegory or fantasy may become blurred.

Since the first three plays to be discussed in our tragedy seminar will be those of a Baroque author, Pierre Corneille, following our discussion on general Baroque aesthetics, I proceed by showing students various images of European Baroque art. The first slide I usually select is one of Caravaggio's masterpieces, *Amor* (1602). At this stage, I simply ask them to carefully look at the image and to tell me what they see. I remind them to let themselves be guided in their reading of the image by the broad Baroque characteristics we have just discussed. It very is important to let them know that I am not looking for

them to elaborate on the *meanings* of these images, but rather that they must simply discuss what strikes them as obvious Baroque traits. At the beginning, students may feel a bit out of their comfort zone trying to articulate what for many will be a new experience. However, within a short time and some gentle encouragement, they quickly start to get excited about the image before them. *Amor* is indeed an excellent place to begin for the novice, since everything about Caravaggio's Cupid (smile, body, and teeth) appears crooked and thus defies the straight line so coveted by Classical taste. Before too long, students will comment on the distortion of his body, the remarkable contrast in dark and light, the movement of Cupid himself—who seems to be balancing gingerly on one foot—and the obvious humour depicted by the child's grin. Finally, they will also note the chaos of the setting (featuring musical instruments and a music score scattered on the floor) and the nudity of the adolescent boy, which is dramatically highlighted by the effect of the light. Caravaggio's crooked and playful Cupid is thus an excellent introduction to what constitutes a Baroque work.

Once students have this first experience under their belt, they move on to discuss another well-known Baroque masterpiece: *The Ecstasy of Saint-Teresa* (1647–1652) by Gian Lorenzo Bernini. From my experience, the sudden change of medium, from oil on canvas painting to marble sculpture, does not seem to impede students' ability to find Baroque characteristics in this image. On the contrary, they will immediately detect the movement of Saint-Teresa's garment (reflected in the many exaggerated curves and flowing lines of her habit). They will also note the intense emotion on the woman's face (depicted by her mouth half-opened, her eyes closed, and her head dropped back slightly, all signs of the mystique and erotic experience that is consuming her). The bright golden arrow (which has just penetrated her heart) is the cause of this powerful facial expression in which it is difficult to distinguish her pain from her pleasure. Finally, the golden rays coming down from heaven contrast the whiteness of Saint-Teresa's marble dress. But the exaggeration of the movement in the religious habit and intensity of the woman's feelings is what students will observe first and foremost in Bernini's famous Baroque piece.

Another of Bernini's work, *The Rape of Proserpina* (1621–1622), is also useful to help students understand some of the Baroque's characteristics. In this piece, it is the physical violence that strikes them most. Here, a nude Pluto, the god of the underworld, is powerfully grasping a young woman by the waist; his fingers are visibly imprinted in her skin, denoting the brutal strength and physical desire of the god. His victim is fighting back as best she can by pushing against his face with her hand, while a tear can be seen running down her cheek. Pluto has grabbed his victim's naked body in mid-air, showing impetuosity and speed. The muscles on his legs are contracted in an attempt to hold on to the young woman's body. This sculpture thus primarily accentuates the contrasting emotions of the couple (the god's burning desire against the young woman's fear) and the violence of their movements (his whole body is intent on forcing her into submission to rape her, while she is desperately trying to escape his powerful grasp). Finally, Pluto's expression denotes the intensity of his desire for the young woman, a desire completely out of control as portrayed by the craze in his eyes. However, his inability for self-restraint is also depicted by his beard and hair, which appear untamed and uncontrollable. For students then, this particular Bernini's sculpture is mostly Baroque by the very intensity of its violence.

Moving from sculpture to architecture, the final image on which students will be asked to comment is one that incorporates both Baroque and Neoclassical aesthetics:

Versailles' mirror gallery (1684), a project conceived by Louis XIV's architect Jules Mansart and decorated by the King's master painter Charles Le Brun. Normally students have no problems identifying the main Baroque components of this room: the majestic size of the gallery, its overabundance of gold, its oversized paintings on the ceiling, its infinite sense of natural incoming light, and the sheer number of immense mirrors on display. The multitude of mirrors creates a space where visitors, gardens, and surrounding grounds become reflected almost infinitely. In this way, the gallery is essentially Baroque because of that illusionary quality. Its spectacular décor is definitely aimed at overwhelming the visitors' senses. Although predominantly Baroque, I like to point out to my students that the obvious symmetrical layout of the mirror gallery foreshadows the strong Neoclassical taste that is beginning to appear in the late second half of the seventeenth-century, in the architecture of Versailles but also in European art in general, and one that is meant in part to reject the curved and moving line so typical of Baroque art.

4 Finding the Baroque in a Narrative

After that interactive exercise featuring some of Europe's most well known Baroque master pieces, students generally feel more confident and the discussion on what Baroque means more specifically in a textual narrative can now take place. Corneille's *Le Cid*[3], our first play on the programme, is probably the most Baroque of Corneille's tragedies. Based on the Baroque characteristics students detected earlier in the visual slides, I ask them whether they can pick out similar images in a scene I have selected from *Le Cid*. As in its visual manifestation, the Baroque in literature will reflect themes of horror, carnage, and violence, as well as show an outpouring of strong feelings and a vivid contrast of emotions. Since the Cornelian hero tends to dwell in his/her showmanship (whether in affairs of the States or love), their narrative usually stresses a lack of confinement or containment. Indeed, Corneille's narrative is colourful, even at times, superfluous in essence. It also contains an emphasis on images referring to dissimulation, mask, and illusion. Its manifestations of the monstrous and the brutality are often emphasised with the help of contrasts in colours or black and white. Being a narrative of movement, it refers to the instability of the world, its ever-changing nature. Many of these characteristics can be found in this passage, where the heroine Chimene explains to the King that she has just found the corpse of her father (killed in a duel by Chimene's lover, Rodrigue). She describes to the monarch how her father's dead body was asking her to seek revenge:

> Sire, my father is dead; and as he died
> I saw the *blood pour from his noble side*;
> *That blood* which often preserved your walls,
> *That blood* which often won your royal wars,
> *That blood*, which shed *still smokes in anger*,
> At being lost, not for you but another.
> What in the midst of flame war did not dare
> To shed, Rodrigue has, on the courtyard stair.

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[3]Corneille's play was first performed in 1637 as a tragicomedy, but published in 1648 (with few details modified) as a tragedy.

I ran to the place, *drained of strength and colour*,
And found him lifeless. Forgive my *pallor*,
Sire, my voice fails me in this tale, oppressed;
My tears and sighs should rather speak the rest.
Sire, honour too great attends my distress.
As I have said, I found him there, lifeless;
His side was pierced, and to rouse me truly
His blood in the dust inscribed my duty;
Or rather his valour, reduced to such a state,
Spoke to me through his wounds, urging haste;
And, to be heard by the most just of kings,
Lends me the *voice of those sad openings*.
[…]
My father is dead, and I ask vengeance,
For your interest not mine in this instance,
You lose by a death one of noble breath;
Avenge it by another, death for death.
Slay him, not for me, but for your crown,
For your grandeur, for your own renown*;*
Slay him, I say, Sire, for the royal good,
A man so proud of spilling noble blood. (II, 8; my emphasis)

In this passage, I like to discuss with students how Chimene's cry to avenge her father's death contains many characteristics of a Baroque narrative: the pathos and excess of her emotions (unable to speak, Chimene's "tears and sighs should rather speak the rest"), the carnage (her father's bloody body, his side "pierced," and her repeated demand to the King to "slay him"), the horror (the repetition of the word "blood," the opened wounds created by "th[e] sad openings" of Chimene's father, which are speaking to her of vengeance, the blood that writes on the ground Chimene's duty), the movement (the pouring and writing of the blood), and finally the contrast in colours (between the father's blood and his lack of colour, between his blood and the "palour" of the heroine). This excerpt truly helps students solidify their understanding of Baroque literary aesthetics.

5 Contrasting Baroque with Classical Art and Narrative

Throughout the next few weeks, students will have to read two more plays from Corneille and will become increasingly comfortable with finding and understanding Baroque images and characteristics in his narrative. They will no longer shy away from the alexandrines; in fact they seem to welcome the challenge and enjoy tackling head on the dramatic poem before them. By the time they are comfortable reading Corneille's tragedies, we move on to Racine's work. As much as Corneille offered students a world of heroic excess, of dramatic movements and contrasts, and of bloody descriptions, Racine's tragedies will appear more tamed in comparison. His space is one of intense containment, of repressed passions, of near silent agonies, all traits that are definitely not present in the boisterous Cornelian hero. Although Racine is often referred to as the perfect example of French Classical writing, his tragedies (not unlike Versailles) can reflect a blend of Baroque and Classical characteristics. As I did with Baroque images,

before attempting to discuss the first of Racine's plays on our syllabus, I introduce students to the general characteristics of French classicism: its taste for the straight line and for symmetry; its elegant, simple and natural style, without ornament, that embraces sobriety and rationality (thus its refusal of superfluous and excess); its return to Classical subject matter (mythology); its emphasis on the real and not the illusion; and its preference for containment which in turns leads to a troubling intensity.

To better acquaint students with those characteristics, I have them examine a series of images. The first one is Laurent de La Hyre's *Paysage avec la Paix embrassant la Justice* (Justice and Peace Embracing in a Landscape, 1654). In this image featuring two women dressed in togas embracing each other in a Classical décor, students will note the simplicity of the landscape, the straight lines, the French Classical taste for sobriety, and the natural setting. I then move on to a few images of Versailles' gardens, where students quickly comment on the use of symmetry throughout and on the straight lines.

After reading these images, students will then be expected to find similar characteristics in Racine's *Phèdre* (Phaedra, 1677), without a doubt Racine's most acclaimed tragedy. In this passage, taken from the beginning of the play, Phaedra is hiding from the sun, waiting to die of shame, for she is in love with her husband's son, Hippolyte. The weight of this incestuous passion (which has so far remained a secret) is literally slowly killing her. It is worth noting that Racine's tragedy featuring a shameful and criminal love finds its source in Classical mythology, of course, but this return to mythology, which was absent from Corneille, is much more than a simple Classical backdrop in this play. Indeed, although physically absent from the play, the gods and their direct influence on the main characters are felt throughout the play. For instance, at the beginning of the play, the reader discovers that both Phaedra and Hippolyte are the victims of a persecution by Venus: Phaedra burns for Hippolyte while he, who until now had remained untouched by any passion, feels the torments of love for the first time for the young Aricia, his father's prisoner. The gods exercise their power on the characters until the very end, for it is Neptune who will be directly responsible for Hippolyte's death at the conclusion of the play. The gods in Racine's tragedy thus completely control the destiny of humans. Both Phaedra and Hippolyte, under the power of Venus, love against their will; in this way their fate is sealed. In the following scene, prompted by her nurse and confidant Œnone, who despairs at seeing her mistress so close to death, Phaedra finally breaks her silence and utters the truth about her feelings for her stepson:

> Œnone: Do you love?
> Phaedra: I feel *all the furies of desire*.
> Œnone: For whom?
> Phaedra: You shall know all my deepest fire.
>   I love… *At the deadly name I tremble, shudder*.
>   I love….
> Œnone: Whom?
> Phaedra: The son of that Amazon mother:
>   You must know that prince I myself oppressed so long?
> Œnone: Hippolyte! You gods!
> Phaedra: Yes, him, you are not wrong.

Œnone: Just heaven! *All the blood's frozen in my veins*.
  O despair! O crime! O you race without shame!
  Unfortunate voyage! O, miserable shore!
  Why did you come then to this place of danger? (I, iii; my emphasis)

Students will notice that despite acknowledging her passion for Hyppolite, Phaedra never pronounces the name of the man she loves. She is simply physically unable to ("I love… At the deadly name I tremble, shudder"). While her passion ("all the furies of desire") for her stepson is consuming her against her will, the only power left for her is to refrain from naming him. This focus on control, on repressing the name of Hyppolite, on containment, is characteristic of French Classical traits. Students will also note the simplicity of Racine's language compared to Corneille's; his narrative is more sober and thus more attainable to students. While Racine's tragedy illustrates main Classical characteristics with its emphasis on containment (despite its eventual failure since everyone will finally learn the truth about Phaedra's passion and Hyppolite's love), its focus on Classical mythology, and its simple and elegant style, the play also features Baroque aesthetics. The references to the horror of her criminal love, the furies of her passion, the contrast or tension embedded in the images of "deepest fires" and frozen veins are all reminiscent of the Baroque, images which continue to permeate Phaedra's speech in the following reply:

Phaedra: Yes, him, you are not wrong.
  […]
  I saw him, *I blushed: I paled at the sight*:
  Pain swelled in my troubled heart outright:
  My eyes saw nothing: I couldn't speak for pain:
  I felt my whole body frozen, and in flame.
  I recognised Venus and her fearsome fires.
  Of a race whose remorseless torments she desires.
  […]
  When my mouth called on the name of the goddess,
  I adored Hippolyte: my vision of him endless,
  Even at the altars' foot where I lit the flame,
  I offered all to that god I dared not name.
  I avoided him everywhere. O height of misery!
  My eyes sought him in his father's reality.
  At last I dared to rise against my own being:
  I roused my courage to persecute, with feeling.
  Submitting to my husband, hiding pain instead,
  Caring for the fruits of our fatal marriage bed.
  Useless precaution! Cruel destiny!
  Brought by my husband to Troezen, only to see,
  Once more, the enemy that I'd sent away:
  My wound, still living, quickly bled again,
  It's no longer an ardour hidden in my veins:
  It's Venus fastening wholly on her prey.
  For my crime I now conceive a perfect terror:
  I view my life with hatred, my love with horror.

8

> Dying, I wish to protect my name by that act:
> *And conceal from* the *light a flame so black*. (I, iii; my emphasis)

Racine's Classical aesthetics can be seen in the simplicity of his syntax. But the playwright also makes Venus come alive in this passage, as she is clearly made solely responsible for Phaedra's passion. While the language is simple and elegant, and the narrative sober, Phaedra's attempts at containing her passion fail, as we suddenly face a woman unable to restrain her love narrative any longer. That very secret which Phaedra has been attempting to keep contained is finally unleashed. The movement of Phaedra's emotions from containment to revelation is transmitted through the many contrasting feelings within her ("blushed" against "paled"; her body "frozen" while "in flames"; she can see nothing but she sees him everywhere; her love for him is set against her self-hatred). In addition to these contrasting emotions, at the end of the passage we note that Phaedra emphasises the "horror" of her passion. Students will have little difficulties finding these Baroque characteristics in Phaedra's discourse. Having finally uttered the criminal and incestuous words, Phaedra will now drift in and out of despair. Indeed as the play progresses, we begin to see her move further and further away from the domain of reason, so dear to French classicism, and closer toward being a creature of excess,a Baroque creature, one that the other characters attempt, in vain, to flee.

6 The Result

Students in my tragedy seminar have told me on several occasions that the introduction to Baroque and Classical aesthetics I provide them in class with the aid of European visual art has helped them perform a more active reading of the plays and engage more critically with the text. They also gain a better appreciation and understanding of the plays' main issues. Certainly, these Early Modern aesthetics have reinforced for them the overall distinctions between both playwrights: Corneille's boisterous and proud heroes contrast Racine's more natural and psychologically complex characters. While the former creates heroes that tend to celebrate their egos and their ability to set themselves apart from the rest of humanity, the latter underlines their lack of power in controlling their own destiny. Resorting to Baroque and Classical aesthetics to help them gain that appreciation is just one way to make the genre of tragedy more interactive and a little less terrifying.

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The language classroom rebooted into "intercultural first spaces": Theory behind, and notes on, an oral assessment experiment

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Abstract: This paper argues by example that the language classroom needs to be moved out into the community, where students should be encouraged to negotiate meaning and identity in the target languge by means of handheld technologies and social media.

Keywords: Embodied learning, community-based learning, flexible learning, social media.

1   Introduction

I was quite pleased, last year, to receive the OWILT call for papers, which offered the following bulleted list as a working, and of course hardly exclusive, definition of what innovation in language teaching might entail:

- Flexible Learning in Language Classes
- Community-based (experiential) learning
- Innovative uses of technology in the language classroom
- Social media as a language learning tool.

My pleasure stemmed from the fact that over the last few years, and mostly in response to my dissatisfaction with the staleness of my own practice, I had been working to take my language classes in a direction informed by these very imperatives (or, at least, I have come to view them as imperatives). The OWILT conference would give me the opportunity to talk about some of the apparently innovative things I'd been trying. And for twenty minutes or so that's what I did.

In the second half of this paper I will discuss the oral assessment experiment on which I focussed at the conference. In the paper's opening few pages I'll concentrate – in more depth than I could at the conference – on some of the ideas informing not only that experiment, but my language teaching generally, such as they are.

2   From the multilingual subject to the intercultural first space

My first response to the aforementioned staleness I saw in my own teaching took the form of two questions:

- Who is today's university level foreign language learner? (I was sure I did not really know.)

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- Where could (and perhaps 'should') their classroom be? (I was sure of two things: that this was not in the cramped confines of the classrooms I was being assigned; and that I *really wanted* to know where it might be.)

I came up with a provisional list of answers, with the help of Claire Kramsch (or rather, with the help of some of her ideas), for the first question at least:

1. The foreign language learner is from somewhere. Another way of putting this is to say that "ethnic, class and sexual facticity matter in the language classroom." (This is certainly the case at my university. That being said, this is the answer – or fact – I deal with least in what follows.)
2. The learner is always in the process of becoming someone. Or otherwise put: every individual learner's identity is in process.
3. Language plays a crucial role in the negotiation of this identity. (And, the foreign language being learned – as distinguished from the mother tongue – offers unique opportunities for this process.)
4. Increasingly, technology, and especially social media, play an important role in the negotiation of numbers one through three.

Kramsch, if I understand her correctly, has recently acknowledged points one through three in her engagement with what she calls "the multilingual subject," a term she explains in terms of

> the fact that learning a language […] even outside the environment in which the language is taught engages not only the cognitive framework and their pragmatic communicative competence, but all kinds of subjective aspects including issues of identity […] [Learners] often find in that second or foreign language an outlet for all kinds of dreams and aspirations that they don't find in their own language. (Kramsch, 2012, p. 75)

That stale language teacher mentioned earlier (me) was pretty good at engaging his students' "cognitive framework and their pragmatic communicative competence." His students were good test takers, many of them even expert grammarians by the time he was finished with them. What he was not acknowledging – at least not sufficiently – and so was not engaging, were "the subjective aspects including issues of identity" that Kramsch highlights. And this lack of acknowledgement, in hindsight, worked to the detriment of his students' ability to communicate in personal and creative ways in the language he teaches: German. (A reality that became increasingly unacceptable for him and his students.)

According to Kramsch, we fail our students if we see language learning as "a question of accumulating labels." Rather, language learning is an engagement of the whole individual, and language teachers "should be more aware that the bodies they have in front of them are in fact acquiring the language with all their senses; not just their brains, but their eyes, ears, their touching, their smell" (Kramsch, 2012, p. 75). The fact that language acquisition involves the whole self, and so all the senses, bears on my second question above, the one regarding where the language classroom could (and perhaps 'should') be. It certainly demands that teachers provide their learners with

more than books, sound files and videos within, if you'll humor an academic pun, 'the prison house of language' that the classroom can so easily become. So much realia, let's be honest, is cross-cultural – as common here as it is there – and yet very few of the actual things encountered in everyday life whether in Beijing or Barcelona make it into the classroom to be named and discussed after being seen, touched and smelled. (And, of course, many culturally peculiar things are available the world over these days. Their appearance in the classroom – where these can be seen, heard, touched and smelled – should also be encouraged.)

I think implicit to Kramsch's argument for viewing the language learner as a 'multilingual subject' is an argument that goes beyond a call to enliven the traditional classroom environment. Indirectly she is arguing, I feel, for community-based, or experiential, learning, a useful definition of which highlights that: "all communities have intrinsic educational assets and resources that educators can use to enhance learning experiences for students" ("The Glossary," n.d.). It has always struck me as strange, and as a shame, that foreign language learning, and especially as it is practiced in the university setting, fails miserably at taking advantage of the embarrassment of experiential riches available in the community. Even when seen in terms of Kramsch's "acquiring labels," going out into a real world full of three-dimensional signifieds that can be experienced with all the senses has clear advantages for acquiring, and retaining, language structures and content. However, when we start to see language learners as whole subjects – that is as embodied and multi-sensory entities engaged in a process of identity becoming – then getting out into the community to experience its riches becomes a demand.

This demand is not so much for an "intercultural third space," I would argue, rather for encouraging and facilitating language learner access to what I'll call, for lack of a better phrase, the "intercultural first space"; that is: to the everyday environment in which individuals, whether from here or there, engage with common things and with others; and thereafter with and about those things that are not shared in common. This space is "first" precisely because so much of it is shared across cultures; and in a fundamental sense this is because the process of identity formation happens out in the shared everyday world, regardless of where this everyday world is situated on the planet. This world's shared reality, I would also argue, makes it a far better place from which to discuss and explore differences than in any classroom, no matter how well endowed – and often in spite of how well endowed – with "authentic" materials from the "target" culture that necessarily artificial space may be.

3   The language learner and new technologies of the self

Of course, the role that virtual spaces play in the process of identity negotiation and formation needs acknowledgement here. Undeniably, the media through which the process of subjective constitution occurs have changed radically over the past four decades. If I might be permitted to misappropriate a term used by Michel Foucault, what we've seen develop at a rapid pace are radically new "technologies of the self" that have opened up spaces for language use, and via this use identity development, that we as language teachers have a responsibility to understand and harness. While Foucault, were he alive, would certainly stress the pitfalls inherent to the personal devices and social media now saturating society globally – and these pitfalls are not lost on those of us who have ever had a student distracted, either by choice or not, by

their smart phone – he would also have to acknowledge the potential such media hold for just the kind of creative assertion of identity I see Claire Kramsch calling for in the language classroom. Indeed, much of not only the communicating, but moreover the "dreaming and aspiring," that our students do these days happens by means of social media, whether via text, tweet or Facebook post. Students assert their identities not only via language, of course, but also through files – whether visual or sound – that represent not only what they do, like or dislike, want and desire, but ultimately who they are. In a sense, language learners – with this certainly being the case for the vast majority of university students – are represented by avatars they are daily in the process of forming online. As language teachers, I believe we ignore the ontological role that these media plat today at our, and our learners', peril.

The smart phone is another example, I would argue, of an "intercultural first space," in as much as, no matter where you come from in the world, it is likely that you use one, and further that the one you use has the same functionality to that used by anyone from anywhere else. As with the experientially rich community outside the classroom, which I argued earlier is woefully underutilized as a language learning resource, the language teacher's task with these new media (and, for that matter, with any media) is to encourage and facilitate communication in the target language.

This can be done in the classroom, of course, but demands more than what has become common practice: allowing students to use online dictionaries. Facebook groups and the incorporation of tweeting into the curriculum, when done properly – with a task-based focus – are effective means by which students can represent themselves, and get to know their classmates, in the target language. I have tried all of these things – with varying degrees of success. And I encourage my colleagues to experiment with these new technologies of the self, too.

4   Das Experiment

Which brings me to the oral assessment 'experiment' I mentioned in my introduction, on which I presented at the OWILT conference, and which – for me at least, at least thus far – is unique in that it occurred in both of the "first intercultural spaces" I have discussed here; or, put otherwise, because it incorporated all four of the bullet points I referenced in my introduction, and which were included in the OWILT conferences call for papers as representing areas of innovation in language teaching: flexible learning; experiential learning; innovative use of technologies; and of social media.

A bit more relevant background:

I have always found oral assessment, especially at the beginner and intermediate levels, to be the least innovative part of the foreign language learning curriculum. In fact, I know oral assessment to be an exercise in frustration for all involved: students and teachers alike. This point has been hammered home to me on many occasions. The one that stands out occurred at a department meeting during which the student representative attending stood up to lament, on behalf of his colleagues, the artificiality of the oral assessment situation. This young man took the words right out of my mouth in outing what is a kind of dirty little secret in foreign language teaching: "You either ask us to prepare for an interview, or to prepare a skit or roll play, or both. Then you tell us to *make it natural*. To not memorize our answers or lines in advance. Well, I can

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tell you that's exactly what we all do because that's how to get the best mark. We don't learn or prove anything. And at the end of the process we can't express ourselves verbally in the language at all. And that isn't our fault." I agree with him.

In an effort to naturalize the artificiality of oral assessment, and informed by my desire to incorporate both more experiential and social media supported tasks into my curriculum, I last year offered my second-semester German students an alternative to the skit-based oral examination we normally use. This alternative, they were told, would involve:

- Meeting their classmates at Vancouver's Granville Island Public Market (a large and vibrant destination for locals and tourists alike and which contains stalls offering everything from local handicrafts to exotic spices to freshly caught seafood)
- Arranging, and navigating to, a meeting point of their choice in the market via text message
- Breaking up into smaller groups within which to "experience and discuss" the sights, sounds and smells of the place together for 45 minutes
- Record their experiences as photographs, videos, and sound files using their mobile devices
- Post these files, as much as possible in real time, to a Facebook page designed for the task
- Attend a short 'debrief chat' with their instructor (me) at a nearby café
- Do all these things as much as possible in German.

Seven of a group of 30 students signed up for this alternative. They hailed from: Mexico City; Salt Spring Island, BC; Seoul, Korea; Ningbo, China, Richmond, BC; Langley, BC; and Tokyo, Japan. There are a few things to know about this group. Five were female. With the exception of the students from Mexico and Japan, who had begun learning German in high school, all began their first level of German at my university and the same time, at which time they were absolute beginners. The group was surprisingly representative ethnically of the class as a whole: international students make up a large minority of our learners, with those from Asian backgrounds the largest international subgroup. And, all of these students were, not surprisingly – considering they signed up for such an assignment – highly-motivated.

Students were armed with their own smart phones, all of which had a camera with video and photo capability, a sound recording application, were screenshot capable, and had both the Facebook application and an online dictionary application.

Obviously, reporting here on the results of a task whose output took various digital forms could only be incomplete and underwhelming. Nevertheless, it is hoped the following transcriptions provide some idea of the richly experiential and linguistically productive time these students spent together in the market.
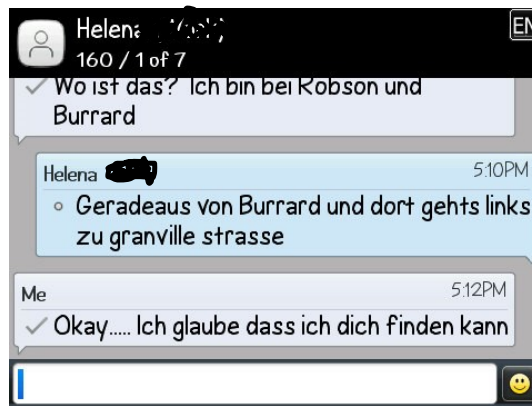
Figure 1 Screenshot of text message exchange between two participants

Their first task, which involved navigating to one another by text message, produced, among others, the following representative conversation between two participants, both of whom are ethnic Canadians:

Student A (5:07 PM): – Ich bin hier. – Hinter dem restaurant joes – Wohin gehts du? ☺

Student B (5:08 PM): – Wo ist das? Ich bin bei Robson und Burrard

Student A (5:10 PM): – Geradeaus von Burrard und dort geht links zu Granville strasse

Student B (5:12 PM): – Okay …. Ich glaube dass ich dich finden kann – Oder bin ich doof

In English their brief discussion reads:

Student A: – I'm here – Behind the restaurant joes – Where are you going? ☺

Student B: – Where is that? I'm near Robson and Burrard (streets)

Student A: – Straight from Burrard and then go left to Granville street

Student B: – Okay …. I think that I can find you – Or am I stupid

The first thing to note is that these students apparently cheated (or were not clear on the instructions), as they navigated to one another in another part of the city, from where they then travelled together by bus to the market. They nevertheless evidently found one another, as they arrived at the market on time. The conversation took a total of six minutes, with messages being sent back and forth at an interval of approximately two minutes. This is to say they generated their messages in relatively short order. The German shows some errors, but also a level of sophistication more than appropriate for

the level, especially considering the typing was done quickly and likely without double checking.

Student A asks: "Wohin gehts du?" She conjugates the verb incorrectly – it should read "gehst." (This might have been a typo, however.) She also gets the imperative wrong in her next text: "… und dort geht links zu Granville strasse." She should have written "… geh links …," and it should be "Granvillestrasse" (one word). That being said, her messages show solid German syntax – an achievement, as word order presents the greatest challenge for most beginner German learners.

But for a missing comma, Student B's texts are grammatically and syntactically correct. This student also uses a subordinate clause, the rule for which is, arguably, the hardest syntactical challenge native English speaking beginner German learners face. Her final question – "Oder bin ich doof[?]" – shows the ability for humor in the target language. A welcome sight that shows some personality and creativity, and at a very early stage in her process of learning German.

As already mentioned, students were given the rather vague instruction to "experience and discuss the sights, sounds and smells" on offer at the public market. The following is a transcription of a pair of students doing exactly this. The video lasts 1 minute 25 seconds and features the girl from Salt Spring Island, BC, (Student A), reporting on her dinner purchase to the student from Korea (Student B).

Student B: Hallo _____! Was kaufst du heute Abend?

Student A: Ich habe eine Salate gekauft mit Tomaten und Käse. Er ist …

Student B: Italienische. Italienische Salat.

Student A: Ja.

Student B: Und auch?

Student A: Ich habe Beeren gekauft. Die blauen.

Student B: Und warum kaufst du? Warum kaufst du ihn?

Student A: Weil sie sehr frisch und lecker sind.

Student B: Aha …

Student A: Und ich mag sie sehr.

Student B: Und auch … ich habe auch eine Salate von Maroc gekauft. Ich glaube, dass es hat Käse und Yams und ist ein bisschen salzig. … Und ich habe viel Hunger.

Student A: Ahhhh.

Student B: Ich mag diese Salat.

Student A: Cool.

Figure 2 Screenshot of Facebook page with video of participants discussing their food purchases

In English this exchange reads:

Student B: Hi _____! What are you buying this evening?

Student A: I have bought a salad with tomatoes and cheese. It's …

Student B: Italian. Italian Salad.

Student A: Yes.

Student B: And what else?

Student A: I have bought berries. The blue (ones).

Student B: And why do you buy? Why do you buy it?

Student A: Because they are fresh and delicious.

Student B: Aha …

Student A: And I like them a lot.

Student B: And also … I have also bought a salad from morocco. I think that it has cheese and yams and it's a bit salty. … And I'm really hungry.

Student A: Ahhhh.

Student B: I like this salad.

Student A: Cool.

What should be immediately obvious is that this exchange is quite natural – and certainly when compared with any other oral assessment I have been privy to – and also constitutes both embodied and experiential learning. Student A as interviewer and camera woman not only comes up with her questions ad hoc – the video, which was posted to Facebook shortly after being shot, makes it quite clear nothing was rehearsed in advance – but does so while using a video camera in a bustling space full of people, some of whom can be seen moving around behind her partner against the backdrop of stalls selling cheese, fruit and fish. As for Student B, she reports on food she is not only holding, but is currently eating; food in which she is personally invested, having decided on, and then purchased it. These purchases, of course, also communicate authentic information about the student's identity: about what she likes, but also about why she likes it. Her choices are all healthy: salads and fresh fruit. We learn why she's purchased them: she's concerned about health, but also has a taste for exotic things: an Italian salad, the other salad is Moroccan and "salty"; the berries are "fresh" and "delicious." She's bought so much food because "she is really hungry."

As with my first example (of a text message exchange), there are a few grammatical and syntactical errors; but again, the degree of sophistication shown is more than acceptable for the level – indeed, it would be very good even in a traditional skit or interview oral assessment.

While Student A asks her questions in the present tense: "Was kaufst du heute Abend?" (What are you buying this evening?) – which does not interfere with sense at all, but is awkward – Student B shows good control of the compound past tense (the *Perfekt*). She answers: "Ich habe eine Salate gekauft mit Tomaten und Käse." (I have bought a salad with tomatoes and cheese.) Then later: "Und auch … ich habe auch eine Salate von Maroc gekauft." (And also … I have also bought a salad from morocco.) Her salad should be masculine, which in the accusative case needed here would read *den Salat*; and there's some interference from French: the German word is *Marokko*. These are minor mistakes however, and are to be expected from oral communication at this level.

The two examples I have chosen to relate here are fairly representative of the overall submissions to the Facebook page, with the exception being that those students who began learning German at the high school level – namely a young lady from Mexico and young man from Japan – posted more and showed greater sophistication ion the German language. In addition to screen shots of text message exchanges and video conversations, students also posted captioned images and conversations recorded as sound files. Subsequent to the exercise, students were encouraged to, and indeed did, comment on one another's submissions. At the end of the process, the Facebook page was a rich and diverse document of their experiences.

5   Conclusion

Obviously, there are certain potential problems with such an assignment, the most serious of which concern its accessibility. Not all students can afford the extra time needed to take part. And there is also the question of costs additional to the regular curriculum, which at least extend to transportation. A further issue is that those students who took part were all highly motivated, with all but one of them being at least an A- student. While I am only speculating, I fear such an activity, if not made mandatory, would only attract highly-motivated learners. And, frankly, it is

problematic to *expect* students to move so far outside of the accepted language learning "comfort zone," as inadequate as that zone is.

In retrospect, however, I feel the experiment was very successful, and this precisely on account of being experiential and technologically innovative. In response to being asked to utilize the potential of new technologies of the self in a classroom extended out into the community – to inhabit both of the "intercultural first spaces" I discussed above – these students responded with more personal, creative and interesting German usage than I have seen at any other time in my teaching, at least by learners at this level. Measured as an oral assessment – and I unapologetically acknowledge that it was much more than that – this experiment was also a success. While I consider it impossible to take all artificiality out of such assessments, the students who took part here communicated orally with very little of the artificiality born of the advance preparation other forms of oral assessment cannot help but demand.

In sum: I will certainly offer the assignment again; and will work to refine it over coming years.

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Thinking outside the classroom for practicing Spanish[*]

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Abstract: This community outreach project brought together secondary and post-secondary students through a collaborative project focused on the learning/teaching of the Spanish language. A total of 19 volunteer undergraduates (the facilitators) offered language practice to 30 volunteer students from a local high school in Vancouver. The project addressed a need for additional Spanish practice at the school. Moreover, the project offered teaching experience to the undergraduates. The latter was relevant because when joining the project, the facilitators demonstrated interest in language teaching as a future prospect. Drawing on the curriculum provided by the Spanish schoolteacher, the facilitators prepared language practice rich in hands-on activities, visual cues, and movement. These moments of authentic communication in Spanish allowed the high school students to fully embody the instructional language (Holmes, 2009). Likewise, the activities engaged students in oral interaction that stressed the usage-based nature of language (Langacker, 1987; Tyler, 2012). The cultural component was integrated through the activities, songs, and traditional games that the students and facilitators played. The mentorship sessions were conducted in the newly created Spanish Club at the high school. In short, the high school students and facilitators collaboratively constructed learning opportunities (Lantolf, 2000) in Spanish and outside of the classroom. Results from a survey completed at the end of the mentorship showed an overall support for the project. The high school students appreciated the chance to practice and reinforce what they learned in class while the facilitators valued the teaching experience and the opportunity to strengthen their own use of Spanish. I discuss these results in terms of learner autonomy.

Keywords: Spanish, community project, mentorship, language teaching, embodied learning

1 Introduction

In Western Canada, a primarily Anglophone region, the teaching and learning of Spanish at the secondary and tertiary levels appears primarily contextualized as guided learning that takes place within a classroom environment. Although the number of native Spanish speakers is on the rise in this area of the country (Statistics Canada, 2007), access to members of the Hispanic community remains elusive for many students. This situation translates into few opportunities for Spanish learners to experience "spontaneous authentic speech" (i.e., exchange of non-modified, spontaneous input) produced with a communicative intention (Navarro, 2012, p. 1596). For the most part, a teacher and instructional materials (e.g., textbooks, electronic resources) mediate access to language and cultural input. And students learn to function in Spanish following the *initiation-response-feedback* interaction mode (Cook, 2002) prevalent in language classes. As a result, teachers tend to control the

communicative situation while students adopt a rather passive role. In practical terms, students become skilful at responding or following directions more than taking control to initiate a dialogue, ask questions, or complete linguistic functions that reveal more autonomy as language users.

There is also the curricular requirements of each program that teachers need to consider when planning lessons and designing practice activities. Students need to achieve mastery over the language curriculum that determines their promotion from one level to the next. Students' academic standing relies on their success when completing formal assessment. The difficulty of determining levels of linguistic performance makes it practical for teachers to measure comprehension and production of morphosyntactic constructions (e.g., tense or mood verb paradigms) rather than fluency. The latter appears more abstract for operationalization and measurement especially in multi-participant classes. This explains in part the over emphasis in instruction of the teaching of formal aspects of the language that still prevails.

A quick observation of textbooks (or other materials) reveals that learners process language from highly artificial contexts. Students read and listen to dialogues rich in formulaic language and with participants intervening in sequential order. Of course the aim is to present samples of pre-modified input that students can comprehend and teachers can utilize to draw attention on the grammar embedded in those interventions. Needless to say, these samples of Spanish only remotely exemplify what students will hear and process in an authentic dialogue. For one, Spanish is a pro-drop language i.e., native speakers favour omitting subject pronouns in oral discourse (e.g., Ø *fue a la casa* 'went home' but not *él fue a la casa* 'he went home'). The tendency is also for limiting the use of nominal phrases in subject position in sentences with transitive verbs (e.g., *el hombre* 'the man' [subject] *compró un libro* 'bought a book' [direct object]). Thus, provided that the referents have been clearly established in the discourse context, native Spanish speakers rely on the verb morphology to keep track of the agents (e.g., *compró un libro* 'bought a book') and/or the patients (e.g., *lo compró ayer* 'bought it yeaterday'). What this implies is that in naturalistic communicative contexts, students rarely hear sentences with both subjects and objects overtly realized (Azevedo, 2009; Hualde, Olarrea, Escobar, 2006; Wheatley, 2006). Yet, this is the kind of pedagogical input that is abundant in Spanish instructional materials. One can anticipate the many challenges learners likely face when participating in authentic conversations. Close attention to the discourse context may be their only cue to keep track of who did what and for what purpose.

As to the cultural component, textbook authors have made important contributions to inform learners about the customs, habits, and traditions of Iberian and Latin American communities. Textbooks contain colourful passages that inform about the traditional Hispanic family, habits for interacting in social contexts, and favourite food habits to name a few (Zayas-Bazán, Bacon, and García, 2014). What those passages scarcely reveal though are patterns of authentic language usage. Even teachers who adhere to a communicative approach to instruction know that underlying students' oral production, there are specific contents that require practice. Not in vain, Cook (2002) describes the interactions in the language classroom as a mock-up of true dialogues in real life.

Clearly, the nature of Spanish learning in a classroom context limits the activities available for practice. Moreover, there is pressure to prioritize activities that align with the programs of instruction so that students achieve the expected learning outcomes

successfully. And as already mentioned, teachers emphasize practice activities around formal aspects of the language that do not leave sufficient room to grasp the naturalness of spontaneous discourse in Spanish. It is important to note that it is by no means our intention to create a detrimental impression of classroom learning. There is already enough evidence that supports the benefits of studying a new language in a classroom setting vis-à-vis direct exposure to it in a naturalistic setting (Ellis, 2002; Lightbown and Spada, 2014). Our aim, instead, is to motivate teachers to explore ways to enrich instruction by increasing opportunities for students to engage in meaningful interactions in Spanish. How feasible is it to organize more interactional activities when lesson plans are already filled to the brim with content? When and how could teachers create spaces rich in communicative interactions?

The community outreach project reported here addressed these questions by offering volunteer undergraduate learners of Spanish and a group of high school students a unique opportunity to collaboratively construct learning (Lantolf, 2000). The project called FHIS-UHill was organized as a co-curricular activity and it enabled the undergraduates to facilitate oral Spanish practice at the high school. This community project was motivated by an emerging body of evidence that demonstrates positive effects of engaging language learners in activities beyond the classroom (Navarro, 2012, 2013; Navarro and Wang, 2015; Pelletieri, 2011). Overall, students decrease anxiety levels and increase their desire to speak the target language (willingness to communicate) as well as renew their appreciation for the culture and people of the target community as I review next.

2 Speaking the new language beyond the classroom: Current evidence

The literature on Spanish Community Service Learning (CSL) in the United States reports on the linguistic, personal, and social gains of students who interacted with native speakers outside the classroom (Boyle and Overfield, 1999; Caldwell, 2007; Hellebrandt and Varona, 1999). For example, Pellettieri (2011) observed that students who completed a series of tasks outside the classroom (e.g., speak with Spanish-speaking friends, acquaintances, and strangers from the community) increased their self-confidence in the use of Spanish, were more willing to speak the language, and increased spontaneous communication in Spanish. Pellettieri acknowledged that the evidence from her study would not be easily achievable through traditional methodology and urged instructors to engage learners outside of the classroom.

In Western Canada, there has been a series of studies that like the CSL experiences mentioned above have yielded positive results in terms of personal and linguistic gains. For example, 10 undergraduates from a Spanish conversation class learned about customs and traditions while conversing with seniors at a Hispanic center. The spontaneity with which the dyads unfolded could hardly compare with the conversations students were accustomed to having in class. By the end of the experience there was a general sense that "learners fully profited from the rare opportunity of authentic communication with Spanish native speakers beyond the confinement of the classroom" (Navarro, 2012, p. 1597). Likewise, 10 volunteer undergraduates who completed an online Spanish-English tandem with Chilean undergraduates also reported positive feedback from this co-curricular experience outside the classroom (Navarro, 2013). Students in Canada valued learning about Chilean university life and improving their oral discourse in Spanish.

Likewise, Navarro and Wang (2015) observed positive effects from an after class Mandarin-English tandem. Analyses of survey results showed that the tandem participants more than a control group increased in willingness to speak Mandarin inside (0.38 vs. 0.06) and outside (0.71 vs. 0.21) the classroom by the end of the tandem. This tendency likely resulted from the tandem participants feeling less anxious of speaking Mandarin beyond the classroom. In short, this evidence (albeit still preliminary) suggests that activities in which learners experience authentic communication beyond the classroom enrich traditional instruction. Most of all, learners appreciate the personal and linguistic gains from their participation in activities that despite their heterogeneity (in type and methods) have consistently yielded similar positive results. So if it is not the activity, is it the fact that the event happens outside the classroom? Is it the lack of supervision? Or is it the realization that there can be a meaningful use of a language one is studying? I address these questions in the conclusion.

3   The FHIS-UHill Spanish mentorship

This experiential learning project involved volunteer students attending Grades 10, 11, and 12 from University Hill Secondary (hereafter UHill) and volunteer undergraduates (the facilitators) from the Spanish program of the Department of French, Hispanic & Italian Studies (FHIS) at the University of British Columbia. Both cohorts were attending traditional Spanish instruction; hence, the project was conceived as an enrichment of the language and culture between two distinct groups of Spanish learners. For the UHill students, the focus of the practice was the lessons they had studied in the classroom. For the facilitators, the opportunity for enriched practice resulted from a review of aspects of language and culture that they had already studied and had used for preparing the oral activities, and (whenever necessary) explanations of those same language and cultural lessons. After receiving approval from the school administration, the project was scheduled to run during the 2013–2014 academic year.

3.1 The participants

A total of 19 facilitators participated in the mentorship. The number of students varied along the academic year with fewer participants during critical moments in a term (e.g., exam periods). On average, there were about 10 facilitators available per month. The students responded to an invitation sent electronically by the author. The message promoted the project as an opportunity for language instruction that was of interest for students who envisioned teaching as a future professional endeavour. To comply with regulations from the local school board, all facilitators obtained a Police Records Check that allowed them direct access to the school students. At UHill there were a total of 13 students from the senior levels. All students joined the project voluntarily and only received 1% of their total grade for participating. The teacher applied the percentage to any classroom-based task or test.

As to roles and responsibilities in the project, the author was responsible for the design of the project, the training of the facilitators, and the overall support for the implementation of the mentorship. The high school Spanish teacher was responsible for distributing the curricular content taught in her classes, supervising the sessions, and organizing a series of cultural events. Crucial for the coordination between the

school, the facilitators, and the author was the active participation of the Student Leader. This is a position fulfilled by selected undergraduate students who are prepared to assume major coordination and leadership roles in experiential learning projects that involve the university and community partners. In this capacity, the Student Leader maintained all participants informed and coordinated via email. For example, the facilitators received from the Student Leader the language curriculum to be practiced, the schedule of sessions, and also the schedule of cultural events. In turn, the Student Leader attended and delivered practice sessions and co-organized the cultural events. It is important to mention that a deliverable of the mentorship was the creation of the Spanish Club at UHill. This became the context where students and facilitators met twice per week for a total of 20 weeks. As explained below, the project was contextualized within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics and language learning and teaching (Holmes, 2009; Langacker, 1987; Littlemore, 2007; Tyler, 2012). In short, this community outreach project was an unconventional attempt to enrich Spanish instruction outside the classroom.

3.2 Embodied Spanish learning at UHill

The practice sessions were prepared with the idea that the UHill students would make active use of Spanish, but not in a formal classroom environment. The Spanish Club functioned in a lounge whose dimension and implementation were conducive to have the students work in small groups, sit on the floor, move around, stand in circles, dance, etc. They could also write information on portable boards, use audiovisual technology, and handle art supplies (e.g., color paper, scissors, crayons) to prepare simple flash cards or drawings. The facilitators planned activities with a strong hands-on component (e.g., spelling words on paper with cut out letters; grabbing objects identified by their colors, etc.), visual cues (e.g., pictures and flash cards for oral descriptions, movie clips), and movement (e.g., switching positions while standing, dancing, forming circles). The idea was to involve students cognitively and physically so that they could think, feel, and become physically in contact with the world around them. The underlying notion is that the imagery of bodily movements has a bearing on how we perceive and categorize the world around us. More specifically, the information learners process visually (e.g., watch a person run) or process physically (e.g., enact instructions to sit or stand up) has a facilitative effect in our comprehension of word meanings and their use (Ellis and Cadierno, 2009; Holmes, 2009; Tyler, 2012). As such, the students executed actions that involved taking objects in and out of a container to practice *poner* 'put in', *sacar* 'take out'; or placed objects in opposite locations to practice *arriba* 'above', *abajo* 'below', etc. During the 50 minutes that the sessions lasted, the UHill students embodied the Spanish language in ways the classroom rarely affords.

Although the idea was to integrate all language skills, there was an emphasis on listening comprehension and speaking through controlled responses (i.e., call and response activities), creative speech (i.e., open ended questions, unplanned discourse), singing songs, repeating tongue twisters, and playing games. As a result, the students became exposed to usage events that varied in frequency with which they heard and produced the vocabulary and grammatical forms. The underlying notion was that as humans, we are sensitive to input frequency i.e., the number of times we encounter and

register a language unit that may shape our learning process (Bybee, 2006; Ellis, 2008; Tyler, 2012).

As to the cultural component, this was integrated through many of the activities, songs, and games that the facilitators organized. For example, the facilitators had the students play traditional games (e.g., *El bachillerato, Romper la piñata*) that showed ludic aspects of the Hispanic community. The use of games was a recurrent activity to keep students engaged and enjoying a moment of camaraderie. Most of all, students perceived that the practice sessions were clearly not a formal time for instruction, but a way to have fun through the use and learning of the Spanish language. Worth mentioning are the three cultural events that enriched exposure to the customs and traditions of the Hispanic world. The first event involved the screening of a short Spanish-speaking movie subtitled in Spanish. The facilitators had the UHill students complete a series of follow up activities that included comprehension questions and acting out skits. In the second event, the students led by two graduate students from the same university learned to dance salsa steps. The third cultural event came to a closure of the project by the end of the academic year. The students and facilitators gathered in the schoolyard and played the traditional game *Romper la Piñata* 'Breaking of La Piñata'. Previously, the facilitators helped the students make the piñatas and stuff them with an assortment of candies and sweets (see pictures below).

Figure 1 Spanish movie night   **Figure 2** Breaking of La Piñata

Holmes (2009) maintains that by incorporating cultural elements (e.g., food, music, literary work) of the target community to the language-learning context, there is a restructuring of stereotypes and believes about that particular community (i.e., students become acculturated). I in principle concurred with this position. However, overriding entrenched stereotypes might require some strategic treatment by the teacher. Drawing on the experience at the UHill Spanish Club, I argue that presenting cultural contents associated with moments of amusement in the target language predisposed young learners positively.

As reported further below, students by and large were enthusiastic of having learned cultural traits about the Hispanic community and they pointed out those that had likely been the most fun (e.g., typical foods, salsa dancing). What is important to stress is that learners begin to appreciate that their way of thinking about certain notions (e.g., personal space, demonstrations of affection) may differ from those of the target community. Yet, such a gap does not need to represent a threat. By contrast, students become sensitive and value these cultural differences. As mentioned earlier, the sessions at the UHill Spanish Club became moments where the facilitators and the

students learned and had fun together and beyond the classroom. In the next section I report evidence of the reception that the larger educational community expressed for this idea.

4   The FHIS-UHill and its impact in the educational community

There is an inherent degree of uncertainty associated to the idea of trying new materials, new activities, new methods for teaching and learning. We become accustomed to the safety of our instructional practices to the point that we might feel reluctant to explore something unknown. The FHIS-UHill project was clearly an atypical experience that in its first version it kept all those involved juggling unpredictable events. Could Spanish be a sufficient reason to attract students from highly distinct communities to collaborate? How reliable could the facilitators appear to their high school counterparts? Would there be enough participants to justify the investment of time and resources? What sort of impact could the project have in the rest of the educational community?

In retrospect, it seems limiting to attribute the positive outcome of the project to a single factor (e.g., the Spanish language). A more realistic explanation suggests the cumulative effect of a series of factors (e.g., common interest for the language and culture, embodied language practice, opportunity to connect with senior students, experiencing language instruction) as an explanation for the satisfaction with which the project was received. For example, leading authorities from the local School Board publicly manifested an enthusiastic support for this initiative and the school administration envisions extending the mentorship to students in lower Grades. Coverage of one of the cultural events appeared on the electronic version of the Vancouver School Board newsletter informing the educational community at large of the partnership that university and secondary school learners established to practice the language and culture. But what do we know about the opinions and reactions of the participants?

In what follows I present results of a survey administered to both cohorts after the project finished. The aim was to motivate students to reflect about their participation in the mentorship and its impact as a learning experience. The survey inquired about what the participants learned, how much they liked Spanish after the event, how much their knowledge of the Hispanic culture increased, and whether they would recommend the mentorship to their peers. Typically reflection surveys aim to collect information on what the students who reached out to a community partner learned and their overall satisfaction with the experience. Voices from the community partners are less systematically collected. On this opportunity we determined that it was crucial to gather reflections from both groups, hence the UHill students were also included. The nature of the mentorship as an educational experience requires the full understanding of not just how the high school students reacted to an external intervention (i.e., the undergraduate students in their educational milieu), but of equal importance, the understanding of whether the UHill students perceived this intervention as valuable to the point that they would want to invite their peers to participate in the project. The reflection survey was circulated among all participants anonymously and completion was voluntary. In total, six facilitators and 15 UHill students returned their surveys completed as I explain next.

5   The FHIS-UHill and its impact on the student participants

The data from the post-mentorship survey are presented as follows. For each question, I report numerically the overall tendencies from both groups. In addition, I illustrate the tendencies with examples from the protocols collected. Comments on the main trends follow each table.

Table 1 Summary of what participants learned from the mentorship

Spanish facilitators	High school students
•(N = 3/6) *I learned that the students need an informal yet safe environment in which they can practice their Spanish freely and without the fear of making mistakes.* (#2, F, 19)	73% (N = 11/15) •*Helped me remember stuff learnt in class better.* (Grade 10, F, 15)
•(N = 2/6) *I learned some effective teaching strategies, such as using visual aids like flashcards or games on the whiteboard to keep the attention students.* (#5, F, 22)	20% (N = 3/15) •*How you sometimes just need to relax and let the Spanish flow*. (Grade 11, F, 16)
•(N = 1/6) *Learned how to think on my feet. Feelings went from nervous to more comfortable as I learned how to navigate the environment.* (#4, M, 21)	7% (N = 1/15) •*I learnt to cooperate with others and have fun with Spanish.*

To the question of what participants learned from the mentorship, both groups identified different yet interrelated aspects. In the case of the facilitators, Table 1 shows protocols that ranged from a view of the experience as a positive learning space to professional and personal gains. For example, three facilitators stressed the need to build non-threatening learning spaces where freedom to speak Spanish replaces an error-sanction format. The latter is unfortunately the kind of learning context often associated to Spanish learning (or any other language) in a classroom. Students are well aware that an instructor is constantly weighing their comprehension or production of Spanish. In other words, the opportunities for students to freely talk in Spanish are few considering that we have specific curricular objectives to achieve and time is a constant limitation. The fact that half of the participants mentioned the non-threatening environment at the UHill Spanish Club is reassuring (also see the reflection of a Grade 11 student). It is important to keep in mind that these facilitators are students who envision pursuing language teaching as a future prospect. Therefore, one might conjecture that having seen students behave linguistically in "an informal yet safe environment" might motivate them to reproduce a similar positive environment with their own future students.

Reflections from the UHill students revealed that to them the mentorship was a reinforcement of classroom learning. Considering the reflection of the tenth grade student that summarizes what 73% of her peers also shared that it was an effective

reminder of the Spanish learned in class. From the perspective of the project, this result is highly promising because it reveals that students perceived a direct benefit from their participation. As mentioned earlier, the FHIS-UHill project intended to augment the instruction students were receiving in the classroom and the overwhelming response from students appeared to confirm that it did. Whatever possibility there might be for a replication of the project (at UHill or any other institution) will need to consider this notably positive response. In what follows, I discuss the effect of participation in the project on the on the participants' increased liking of Spanish.

Table 2 Summary of the participants' reflections about their liking the Spanish language after the mentorship

Spanish facilitators	High school students
100% (N = 6/6) Yes	73% (N = 11/15) Yes
•Because I realize how many words and grammar concepts I actually know pretty well and how diverse the language is. Some of the students were even able to teach me some new things, which was exciting. (#6, M, 22)	*•I even use some Spanish with my friends or while playing video games!* *•I got to know so much more through the Spanish Club. I love it.* *•Yes because it is easier and more fun to understand.* (Grade 11, M, 15)
	13% (N = 2/15) No opinion
	•I can't say I like it more. I never really "liked" Spanish language to begin with. I see languages as something essential to one's life so I don't have much opinion about.
	13% (N = 2/15) About the same
	•About the same. I like it still.

Worth repeating is that the FHIS-UHill project included students whose needs for additional Spanish practice overlapped in important ways. Thus, the question about a possible increase in liking the language post-mentorship was pertinent to both groups. Any linguistic gains as a result of the mentorship would have an impact on both cohorts. Table 2 shows that all six undergraduates confirmed an increase in their liking of Spanish and a similar tendency was observed among 73% of the UHill respondents. Unfortunately, we lack data on the topic of liking Spanish prior to the experience, but we can assume that both groups were composed of motivated students who were already appreciative of the language.

It is perhaps more interesting to consider that although both groups ended up liking the language more, this reaction was motivated by different reasons. Take the case of the facilitators, for example, who performed a dual role as mentors and learners. At UHill, they were the more competent learners who supported their junior peers with practice and language explanations. Yet, they remained learners in their own university programs. The protocol #6, M, 22 in Table 2 suggests a possible effect of wearing two hats. On the one hand, the student realized how much Spanish he already knew, something that was certainly useful at UHill (*I realize how many words and grammar concepts I actually know pretty well*). On the other hand, there was an explicit

acknowledgement that there was still more to learn (*and how diverse the language is*). And interestingly enough, the facilitator acknowledged that some of this new knowledge came from the target population of the mentorship: the UHill students! The latter is a clear example of the sort of collaborative learning that defined the FHIS-UHill project. The facilitators helped their junior cohorts to improve their use of Spanish and, in turn, this group also helped the senior counterparts to advance their own use of Spanish.

For the UHill students an increased liking of Spanish after the experience was triggered by different reasons. Notice the student (Grade 11, M, 15) who mentioned using Spanish with friends and when playing video games. Clearly, these were activities in which the student engaged in using Spanish beyond the classroom much like what the facilitators were doing in the mentorship and the evidence discussed in Section 2. In other words, the general tendency observed among the UHill students aligned with the evidence that is beginning to emerge in Western Canada. Students who engage in activities using the target language beyond the classroom tend to increase their willingness to communicate in it as a result of experiencing moments of authentic target language usage (Navarro, 2012, 2013; Navarro and Wang, 2015). In the next section I report and discuss on the tendencies observed concerning the question about knowledge of the Hispanic culture after the experience.

Table 3 Summary of Participants' Reflections About Their Liking the Customs, Habits, and Values of the Hispanic Culture After the Mentorship

Spanish facilitators	High school students
100% (N = 6/6) No	80% (N = 12/15) Yes
Because I am Hispanic, my cultural knowledge remains the same after the experience. Nonetheless, I do believe the student's [sic] did learn a little bit more, especially through the films we watched.	•*I have learnt a lot about the Hispanic culture like the traditional Hispanic festivals.* •*One of my "facilitators" went to Spain "like" Spanish and we talked about her experience there.* Activities enjoyed most: Spanish movie night, the salsa dancing, La Piñata

The tendencies with respect to a possible increase in cultural knowledge differed between the two groups. While the facilitators acknowledged no change, the UHill students reported the opposite. For example, 83% of the students confirmed to have learned more about the class content that related to the culture of the Hispanic world. For example, one student mentioned learning about traditional Hispanic festivals while another stated that he/she learned about Spain from the personal experience narrated by one of the facilitators.

The UHill students also talked about the Spanish movie night as one of the most popular cultural activities organized. It is important to reiterate that in order to enrich the presence of cultural elements a movie screening and two additional activities (salsa dancing and Breaking La Piñata) were organized on different dates during the academic year. It is possible that the design of the movie screening in that it actively engaged students is what contributed most to the positive impact of the event. For

example, before the screening, the students reviewed key words and expressions so that they would be better prepared to comprehend the four and a half minute movie. There was also important discussion about the accent variety the students were going to listen to. Ideally the actors would need to speak a standard Spanish with sounds clearly articulated and spoken at a moderate speed. The use of subtitles in Spanish was also intended to reinforce comprehension. Finally, the simplicity of the story line that involved a woman and a man conversing in a supermarket and the unexpected turn of events at the end also contributed to the student's amusement. After the screening, the students worked with the facilitators in small groups and answered a series of comprehension questions. The goal was to make sure that all students comprehended the story and could use the thematic elements of the movie to prepare their own skits. At the end, the students performed their skits and received prizes for their participation.

As observed, the movie screening was a comprehensive instructional activity through which the students embodied the Spanish language cognitively, physically and even emotionally. The section that follows contains the participants' responses to the question of whether they would suggest the experience to their mates. Ideally, we would like to see more students joining the mentorship and there is no better endorsement than one coming from a student who has already gone through the experience.

Table 4 Summary of the participants' reflections of whether they would recommend the mentorship to the their peers

Spanish facilitators	High school students
100% (N = 6/6) Yes	93% (N = 14/15) Yes
Absolutely. Anyone with the slightest interesting [sic] in teaching or youth or even just Spanish can get something out of this experience. (#2, F, 19)	*•If they want to learn in a more interactive way with people of a higher level.* (G11, M, 15)
Yes, because it is a great way to help others in the community and to review your own Spanish vocabulary and grammar. Also, the students and volunteers were awesome and it was really fun! (#5, F, 22)	*•Language learning cannot progress just by following class material or doing homework. You definitely need extra help. Because they taught me a lot of Spanish and they are nice and patient.* (G10, F, 14)
	1/15 *Maybe* (G12, M, 17)

Table 4 shows that both groups overwhelmingly agreed to the idea of recommending the mentorship to their peers. All six facilitators and 93% of the UHill students responded affirmatively. No student responded negatively. There was a single UHill respondent who manifested uncertainty and unfortunately the student did not elaborate on his feelings about the project. The protocols from the facilitators stressed some of the building blocks of the mentorship as arguments to engage their own peers in this experiential learning opportunity. For example, they mentioned the teaching experience, the help to the community, and the possibility to work on their own Spanish by reviewing vocabulary and grammar. The UHill students also pointed out some crucial arguments of the project by first stressing the instructional nature of the

experience, the opportunity for interacting with more advanced learners, and the benefits of additional practice for enriching instruction. Clearly these were among the fundamental reasons that triggered the project and students captured them all accurately.

One last point has to do with the impression that both groups produced on each other and that certainly had a strong effect on the outcome of the experience. Consider the protocol from the facilitator #5 who described her fellow facilitators and the UHill students as "awesome". We can see an equally positive reflection in student (G10, F, 14) who identified the facilitators as "nice and patient". For a project that so heavily depended on collaborative learning, the opinion that the participants had of their teammates appeared to be a crucial aspect in the building of trust and positive interdependence (Stahl, 1994) that are necessary to make all participants welcome and appreciated.

6   Conclusion

The FHIS-UHill, an exploratory co-curricular activity that connected students from secondary and tertiary levels in the practice of Spanish, yielded positive results. Reflections from both cohorts were indicative of an overall consensus on the benefits of this experience. Learners at University Hill Secondary valued the mentorship, because it enhanced classroom instruction. The newly created Spanish Club was a nonjudgmental forum where the students and facilitators met to speak Spanish in a comfortable and relaxed manner. The undergraduates appreciated the opportunity to experience teaching and work on their own mastery of the Spanish language. Both cohorts overwhelmingly agreed to the idea of recommending the mentorship to their peers. This positive impression may help to incorporate even more participants the next time there is a replication of the mentorship. Summarizing, the evidence collected on this pilot version of the mentorship aligned with the studies reviewed in Section 2.

By retaking our initial idea to motivate Spanish teachers to enrich instruction by increasing opportunities for authentic interactions, we can see that a pattern is beginning to emerge in Western Canada. Most importantly, there is a growing tendency for students to report positive linguistic and personal gains from their intervention. Drawing on the variety of the projects and the consistency of the results, I claim that students' satisfaction has not been tied to one experiential learning activity in particular since similar observations have been collected across all of them. I acknowledge that like the activities, the students' reflections have not been collected using the same instrument. Thus, variability in data collection method is considered a drawback. In any case, our point here is to identify as a unifying element the degree of autonomy that learners achieve and that I argue underlies the linguistic and personal gains reported across projects.

Our initial observation suggests that student autonomy in projects beyond the classroom emerges from the combination of several factors. For example, during the FHIS-UHill mentorship, the facilitators functioned independently to a great degree. The high school Spanish teacher supervised the sessions, but she did not control or determine what the facilitators implemented for practice. Likewise, the nature of the UHill Spanish Club allowed the high school students to feel less constrained than they would normally feel in the classroom. What this means is that all participants likely

felt more in control (i.e., more autonomous) as well as more responsible for their participation that in turn boosted their self-esteem as Spanish users.

In other words, participation in the Spanish Club implied that the students took control of their linguistic participation. That is, both the facilitators and the high school students could ask questions, initiate the dialogues or stop interventions according to what was necessary at the time of communication. There was no instructor who led the interactions, but the students themselves organized their participation. I argue that this autonomy is in itself a reason for feeling that the use of the target language is meaningful and realistic.

Clearly, none of the complementary activities to the language classroom reviewed earlier happened in a native Spanish-speaking environment. So we feel hard-pressed to claim "true" authenticity for the linguistic interventions. However, the fact that the students have more independence to determine when and what they say in the target language adds an element of genuineness to the communicative situations. At UHill, the activities in which the facilitators and the high school students interacted were intended to embody the language more holistically; hence students could have a sense of living moments of authentic communication. Simply put, the activities students performed in the mentorship went beyond the mere repetition of coursework and the mechanical drilling type of exercise that often lacks any communicative purpose. The interventions students produced in the mentorship had a communicative and ludic motivation.

I close by citing a reflection written by a Grade 11 student. His words are revealing of the general sentiment of appreciation conveyed by the school students: *Thank you for your efforts. I really appreciate that students from UBC actually came and sat down to help us learn Spanish when they are so clearly busy enough.*

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Flexible learning in introductory Chinese language classes through the UBC Tandem Program

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Abstract: This pilot study was designed to explore whether flexible language practice through a Mandarin-English tandem would increase students' willingness to study the target language. A group of native Mandarin speakers and beginner undergraduate Mandarin learners volunteered to meet and exchange languages (i.e., in-tandem learning) after class. All students from the same class who declined to join the tandem functioned as control group. The tandem participants (the experimental group) and the control participants completed the Willingness to Communicate Survey (Pellettieri, 2011) at the beginning of the term and after the tandem finished. A comparative analysis of the results showed that, more than the control group, the tandem participants increased in willingness to communicate in Mandarin inside and outside of the classroom, and had a greater reduction of perceived anxiety to speak the language. The result suggested that offering students flexibility in practicing the language on topics that interest them helps to increase student willingness to practice and use the language.

Keywords: willingness to speak, Mandarin, tandem learning, flexible learning

1 Introduction

The present study explored the use of in-tandem learning (i.e., a pair of students exchanging languages each wants to learn from each other) as an additional component for a beginner Mandarin Chinese language class at the University of British Columbia. The tandem added flexibility to the practice and use of Mandarin because students combined in-class work with outside class practice. The latter increased opportunities for meaningful native/nonnative dialogues in Chinese. Traditionally, a Chinese language classroom supports the development of learner language through various pedagogical activities that enable learners to build language competence gradually. Among the instructional activities, there is preponderance for those that make formal aspects of Chinese more salient (e.g., word order, word formation). Even an activity oriented for student practice can seldom deviate from a focus on form and, more often than not, it will have the teacher leading the activity almost in its entirety (García Mayo and Pica, 2000). Clearly this is not a prerogative of the Chinese language classroom; it most certainly describes the instructional context of other languages such as Spanish (Navarro, 2014).

At no point do we disregard the value of creating supportive contexts for students to exercise communication in the additional language and, in this sense, we acknowledge the value of classroom instruction (Elis, 1994). Yet this does not mean that we are entirely satisfied with the current state of affairs. On the contrary, we support the idea of exploring the many areas in which instructors can turn language

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instruction into a meaningful and realistic experience. As we will see in the next section, studies from an experiential learning perspective have explored ways to increase students' exposure to authentic communication in the target language which, as a result, increased their autonomy as language users (Navarro, 2014 in preparation).

2   Speaking the target language freely outside the classroom

The literature on Spanish Community Service Learning (CSL) in the United States reports on the linguistic, personal, and social gains of students who interacted with native speakers outside the classroom (Boyle and Overfield, 1999; Caldwell, 2007; Hellebrandt and Varona, 1999). For example, Pellettieri (2011) observed that students who completed a series of tasks outside the classroom (e.g., speak with Spanish-speaking friends, acquaintances, and strangers from the community) increased their self-confidence in the use of Spanish, were more willing to speak the language, and increased their spontaneous communication in Spanish. Pellettieri acknowledged that the evidence from her study would not be easily achievable through traditional methodology and urged instructors to engage learners outside of the classroom.

In Western Canada, there has been a series of studies that, like the CSL experiences mentioned above, have yielded positive results in terms of personal and linguistic gains. For example, ten undergraduates from a Spanish conversation class learned about customs and traditions while conversing with seniors at a Hispanic center. The spontaneity with which the dyads unfolded could hardly compare with the conversations students were accustomed to having in class. By the end of the experience there was a general sense that "learners fully profited from the rare opportunity of authentic communication with Spanish native speakers beyond the confinement of the classroom" (Navarro, 2012, p. 1597). Similarly, ten volunteer undergraduates who completed an online Spanish-English tandem with Chilean undergraduates also reported positive feedback from this co-curricular experience outside the classroom (Navarro, 2013). Students in Canada valued learning about Chilean university life and improved their unplanned oral discourse in Spanish.

Further reinforcement of these findings was found in a community outreach project that gathered volunteer undergraduates and high school students to practice Spanish (Navarro, 2014). In a post-activity survey, the undergraduates appreciated the opportunity to collaboratively construct learning-centered relationships with the school students and to explore language teaching in an informal context. They also reported a more pedagogically-informed capacity to plan language activities, use instructional materials, and lead groups. The school students valued speaking Spanish outside class to reinforce content previously studied in class.

In short, there appears to be agreement with respect to the positive gains of having students complete educational projects beyond the classroom. Findings consistently suggest that students gain a new perspective regarding the target language and their role as language users.

3   The present study

This exploratory study investigated student participation in a co-curricular language activity. After class, volunteer Mandarin learners conversed with native Mandarin speakers in a Chinese-English tandem. We hypothesized that by engaging learners in a

tandem experience without teacher supervision, they would increase their enthusiasm to speak Mandarin (i.e., willingness to speak the target language). More precisely, by having Mandarin learners experience authentic communication in a safe and pleasant context without the typical classroom demands, they would become willing to speak the target language whenever possible. We operationalized willingness to communicate as a personality-based predisposition for speaking (or avoiding to speak) the target language whenever it is possible (McCroskey and Richmond, 1987).

The choice of a tandem as the flexible-learning component was triggered by the ample opportunities for students to work independently, producing spontaneous connected speech, and in a format of reciprocal collaboration (Navarro, 2013).

4 Methodology

4.1 Participants

The experimental group (EP) consisted of 12 undergraduate students from an introductory Mandarin Chinese class who joined a tandem voluntarily. They replied to an invitation to practice Mandarin with native Mandarin speakers after class. They also learned that the tandem would not grant them credits or extra marks for participation. In addition, there was a control group (CP) that consisted of 13 students from the same class who declined to participate in the tandem. The group of native Mandarin speakers (MS) was composed of 7 participants (2 males and 5 females) recruited from the existing UBC tandem Language Exchange Program. They all belonged to different study programs and spoke standard Mandarin Chinese.

4.2 Instrument

The instrument used to measure students' performance in the tandem was an adapted version of the Willingness to Communicate Survey (WTC, Pellettieri, 2011). The survey contained a series of statements to test students' preferences in the following six topics: WILLINGNESS to communicate INSIDE classroom; WILLINGNESS to communicate OUTSIDE classroom (i.e., the desire to freely speak in Mandarin); ANXIETY (i.e., discomfort of speaking in Mandarin); MOTIVATION (i.e., toward learning Mandarin) and ATTITUDE (i.e., toward the Chinese community); FREQUENCY (i.e., of communicating in Mandarin outside the classroom and class assignments); and Mandarin speaking ABILITY (i.e., belief of being capable of successfully speaking in different types of situations). The participants had to choose the statement that best described their preference from a Likert scale that ranged from 1 to 6.

4.3 Procedure

4.3.1 Tandem sessions

The seven native Mandarin speakers coordinated and set up schedules for a total of 14 one-hour tandem sessions. The sessions were scheduled on all five days of the week between noon and 6 p.m. to allow for a maximum flexibility. Four different locations on the university campus were chosen to suit the needs of different students. Some locations were closer to classrooms while others were closer to student residences. All

four locations were coffee shops or lounges rather than classrooms to reduce the anxiety often associated to formal instructional settings.

The learners were asked to sign up for at least two sessions for a total of two hours every week. They were also encouraged to go to different sessions before they decided on one speaker, or they could rotate speakers every session. With seven native Mandarin speakers of both genders and different personalities, the learners could choose the speaker with whom they felt the most comfortable. Overall the program was designed to maximize flexibility. However, a maximum of four learners per session was set. The purpose of this maximum was to ensure that each learner received at least some individual attention during each session. In the end, the experimental group attended approximately 15–32 hours of conversation sessions.

Students were encouraged—but not limited to—practicing the topics and grammatical patterns covered in class. Some students chose to go deeper and learn more about language forms explained in class, whereas others chose to learn about and practice colloquial forms. To support the native Mandarin speakers, copies of the course syllabus were distributed. They also received a copy of the instructional textbook and were instructed to review the five lessons selected for the term. They were not, however, required to follow the textbook.

4.3.2 Data collection

For the research component of the study, the experimental and the control groups completed the WTC survey online twice: at the beginning of the term (Pre-test) and at the end of the tandem (Post-test). The aim was to determine any possible change in preferences for both the tandem participants and the control group. Responses of statements for all six categories of the survey were averaged. We then compared the differences of averages for the pre-test and post-test for each category to establish possible variations in preferences between the beginning of the term and the end of the tandem. The overall tendencies are reported in the section that follows.

5   Results

In this section we report the major tendencies found in the tandem participants and the control group. The data correspond to the averages obtained for both groups in all six categories of the survey.

Figure 1 shows the average difference between post and pre-test in all six categories. The dark bars show that the EP, compared with the CP, increased in more willingness to communicate (i.e., the desire to speak Mandarin) inside the classroom (0.38 vs. 0.06) after the tandem. Similarly, they experienced greater increase in willingness to speak Mandarin beyond the classroom when compared with the control group at the end of the tandem (0.71 vs. 0.21). Both tendencies appeared in alignment with the reported scores for anxiety. The EP participants, compared with the CP, reported a greater reduction of their anxiety with respect to the use of Mandarin (0.58 vs. -0.03) after completion of the tandem. This means that the tandem experience helped the EP group to feel less apprehensive of speaking Mandarin in situations other than the protected classroom environment. These results offered preliminary support to the hypothesis that participation in the tandem experience would positively predispose learners for speaking Mandarin whenever possible.
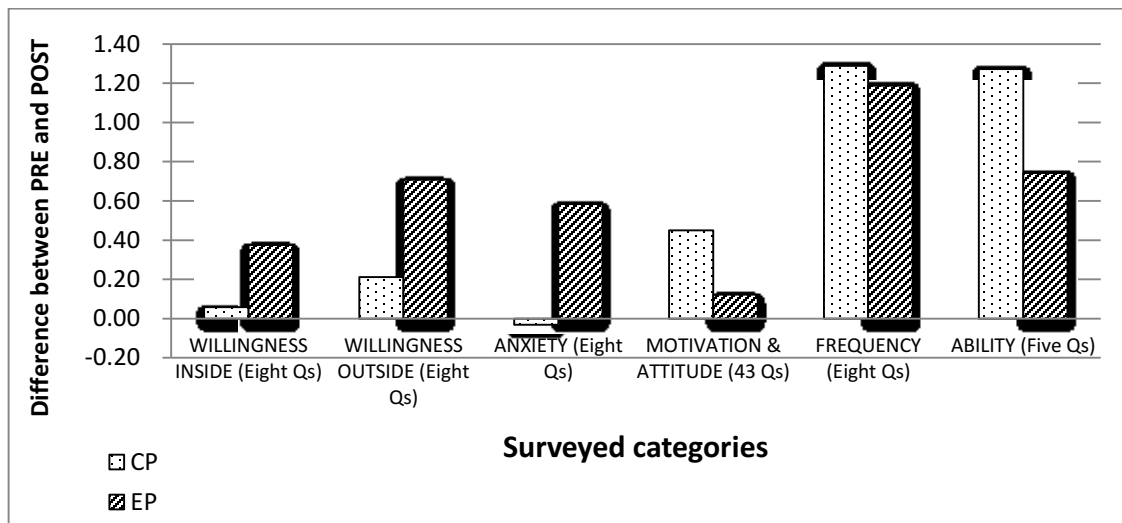
Figure 1 Average difference between the pre-test and post-test for the CP and EP in all six topics investigated.

Figure 1 also shows that the CP group scored higher than the EP in three categories. The white bars indicate that by the end of the term, the CP more than the EP increased in motivation and attitude (0.45 vs. 0.12). This result, however, requires consideration as explained below. As to frequency of target language use, the control group relative to the EP group also scored higher (1.29 vs. 1.19), and self-reported target language ability (1.27 vs. 0.74).

In Table 1 below we report the average pre- and post-test differences broken down for each individual category and drawing attention to what we regard as significant to understanding these results.

Table 1 EP and CP Pre- and Post-test Average Comparison

Surveyed Categories	Grp	Pre	Post	Diff.
1. Willingness to Communicate in Mandarin inside the Classroom				
Average for all eight questions	CP	4.63	4.68	0.06
	EP	4.48	4.85	0.38
2. Willingness to Communicate in Mandarin outside of the Classroom				
Average for all eight questions	CP	3.99	4.20	0.21
	EP	3.30	4.01	0.71
3. Language Anxiety				
Average for all eight questions	CP	4.82	4.78	-0.03
	EP	4.23	4.82	0.58

4. Motivations and Attitudes				
Average for all 43 questions	CP	3.34	3.79	0.45
	EP	3.40	3.52	0.12
5. Frequency of Speaking in Mandarin Outside of the Classroom				
Average for all eight questions	CP	2.61	3.89	1.29
	EP	2.32	3.51	1.19
6. Mandarin Speaking Ability				
Average for all five questions	CP	2.52	3.79	1.27
	EP	2.18	2.92	0.74

5.1 Willingness to communicate inside of the classroom

As shown in Table 1, the tandem participants scored a higher average difference for the desire to speak Mandarin inside the classroom compared with the pre- and post-test results of the CP group. Interestingly, however, the flexible learning component failed to boost students' willingness to ask their teacher when they have a question (the fifth question in the first category of the survey). Table 2 below shows that while the control group remained unchanged between the pre-and post-test, the EP group descended half a point (-0.50) in their willingness to ask their teacher. It is possible that after interacting with native speakers during the tandem sessions, students in the experimental group did not feel the need to address questions with the instructor. They could go to the tandem leaders. A future replication of the study will need to determine whether the latter was simply a random result or it may have a different motivation as discussed further below.

Table 2 Unimproved statement of the EP after the Tandem

Survey Statements	Grp	Pre	Post	Diff.
5. Speak with your teacher about a question you have.	CP	4.85	4.85	0.00
	EP	5.50	5.00	-0.50

5.2 Willingness to communicate outside of the classroom

We reported above that the EP outscored the CP in this category. It is worth mentioning that, in the pre-test, students in the CP group scored higher than the experimental group (3.99 vs. 3.30). Yet, the average difference between the beginning and the end of the flexible learning component suggested that there were more students in the experimental group (0.71) than in the CP group (0.21) that experienced a positive change in their desire to speak Mandarin outside the classroom. As we explain in the discussion section, the tendencies found in this category appear to converge with those in the frequency category. More precisely, the students who joined the tandem likely experienced a low frequency of target language use to begin with; the co-curricular activity was simply a way to reverse this situation.

5.3 Reduced anxiety

The most significant contrast between the two groups with respect to anxiety (i.e., discomfort of speaking in Mandarin) was linked to the statement about "speaking with native speaker friends and acquaintances outside of class" (see table 3 below). In the pre-test, the CP group scored (4.93) that nearly reached the scale of 5 (i.e., "moderately relaxed"), yet these students showed an increase in anxiety level by the post-test (4.62). Conversely, the tandem participants showed the opposite trend. They reported feeling somewhat relaxed before the tandem (4.00), but their average score nearly reached "moderately relaxed" (4.83) after the tandem.

Table 3 Least Anxiety for the Tandem Participants

Survey Statements	Grp	Pre	Post	Diff.
4. Speaking with native speaker friends and acquaintances outside of class.	CP	4.92	4.62	-0.31
	EP	4.00	4.83	0.83

5.4 Motivation and attitude

The category of motivation and attitude is the most complex of the WTC survey with a total of 43 statements. This category exams the participants' motivation to learn the target language, in this case, Mandarin, and attitude toward the target culture and community. Essentially, there are two types of statements, which draw out responses from two opposite directions. One type asks the respondents to identify if they agree or disagree with a statement that is intrinsically positive, e.g., "I love learning Mandarin." The second type asks the respondents to express their agreement with statements that are intrinsically negative, e.g., "I hate Mandarin." Although we appreciate the value of using semantic contrasts to observe consistency across responses, we also acknowledge that the wording of the statements may confuse respondents. Moreover, the scores conflate the notions of motivation toward learning Mandarin and attitude toward the language and culture (or community). With these caveats in mind, we decided to simply group the statements by their basic sense. Table 4 below reports the average of the statements grouped as positive and negative.

As shown in Table 4, for positive statements, both groups scored highest in the post-test. Also, for positive statement, the control group (0.32) scored relatively higher than the experimental group (0.25). It is possible that CP has gained more motivation throughout the term than EP. However, one possible explanation is that the CP was more motivated because they thought that they had much higher Mandarin proficiency at the time of the post-test. One piece of direct evidence for this explanation was the result for the last category of our survey: Ability. As it is shown in the next section, the CP group believed that their Mandarin improved more than what the EP participants believed. It is also interesting to observe that the scores for negative statements of the CP group increased more than those of the EP group. That is, students' negative attitude toward the target language has grown in the control group at the time of the post-test. This was not the case for the tandem participants whose negative attitude toward the target language very slightly decreased (0.01). In short, the result for the negative statements, when combined with the result for the positive statements, can mean that there are more variations of motivation in the CP group. Some students in

CP group may have higher motivation to study Mandarin and some may have developed stronger negative feelings about the language. On the other hand, the EP group was consistently improving as a whole group.

Table 4 Averages of positive and negative Motivation and Attitude, grouped

Survey Statement Types	Grp	Pre	Post	Diff.
Positive Statements	CP	4.83	5.16	0.32
	EP	4.65	4.89	0.25
Negative Statements	CP	1.85	2.43	0.58
	EP	2.15	2.14	-0.01

5.5 Frequency

The average difference between EP and CP in frequency (i.e., actual communication in Mandarin outside the classroom and class assignments) revealed an unexpected pattern. A closer look at individual statements revealed that both the EP and CP groups increased considerably from the pre- to the post-test (1.19 vs. 1.29). Yet it was the CP group—not the EP group—that scored highest overall. As we briefly advanced above, the CP group concentrated students who might be less in need of extra practice via the tandem activity. We deal with this topic further below.

5.6 Ability

For the Mandarin Speaking Ability category (i.e., the capacity to successfully perform in the target language), both groups scored higher in the post-test as shown in Table 1. The average difference, however, revealed that, at the time of the post-test, the participants in the CP group reported a greater increase in average than the EP (1.27 vs. 0.74) to perform according to the five statements of this category. That is, students who remained in the classroom believed that they have more gains in their command of Mandarin than did the students who participated in the tandem sessions. Of interest is that in the statement about the ability to carry out 5–10 minutes of informal conversation on familiar topics, the EP clearly exceeded the CP (see Table 5 below). The results for other survey statements such as beliefs about the ability to carry out a 20–30 minute conversations should be viewed with caution. Students at this level lack the linguistic resources to hold such an extended dialogue in Mandarin; their responses could be simple speculation.

Table 5 Differences in Ability Between the Experimental and the Control Participants

Survey Statement	Grp	Pre	Post	Diff.
Speak in short (5-10 minutes), informal conversations on familiar topics (e.g., family, weather, where you are from, etc.).	CP	3.69	4.46	0.77
	EP	3.08	4.42	1.33

6 Discussion

Preliminary evidence of this pilot study showed that the experimental group and the control group changed in different ways over the duration of the introductory Mandarin Chinese class. Results of students' responses collected in the WTC survey showed that students who completed the tandem and those in the control group have both experienced positive changes by the end of the term. Of special interest were the tendencies regarding the desire to freely choose to speak in Mandarin if given the opportunity (i.e., willingness to communicate). As reported above, the average difference between the pre- and post-test for the tandem participants was higher than that of the control group. In other words, more students in the experimental group than in the control group answered "very frequently willing" or "always willing" to the idea of speaking with a nonnative speaking classmate to complete a short class activity or of interacting with a native Mandarin-speaking friend. We interpret these tendencies in favour of the hypothesis that by engaging learners in a tandem experience outside class time, they increased their enthusiasm to speak Mandarin willfully. The tandem participants increased their desire to speak Mandarin both inside the classroom (except with teacher about a question). Why could this be so?

At a speculative level we could anticipate that a student who experienced authentic interaction in tandem might feel less inclined to address a doubt about usage (e.g., swear words) with the teacher. The formality of the classroom (cf. the tandem session) may dissuade students to ask about 'real' language expressions. Of importance is to consider the gains in self-confidence experienced by the tandem participants (i.e., they appeared less anxious) that predispose them to the idea of, for example, addressing a native-speaking stranger outside an instructional context. This is an interesting result that appears to stress the benefit of the tandem sessions. Students in the EP group (but not in the CP group) went through the experience of conversing in Mandarin with a person other than their instructor. This knowledge likely contributed to the realization that they could in fact function as Mandarin users to fulfill communicative functions beyond the traditional classroom drills. They therefore felt linguistically capable of reaching out to friends and acquaintances later on.

Despite the temptation to conclude in favour of the benefits of the tandem experience for an introductory Mandarin class, we cannot ignore that, for example, students in the control group, more so than in the experimental group, acknowledged communicating in Mandarin frequently. That is, more students who did not join the tandem self-reported actually communicating in Mandarin either "frequently, a few times a month" or "very frequently, a few times a week". One way to account for this tendency is to think that the control group actually had more students who are also doing some kind of interaction in the target language. That is, students who declined to

invest time after class to converse in Mandarin through tandem were those who, at the time, already spoke with Mandarin-speaking friends or acquaintances in non-instructional situations. Informal communication with students from the control group has revealed that quite a few students asked their native-Mandarin speaking friends to help them with their homework or consulted their relatives for character writing exercises. Thus, to the question of whether they felt more willing to communicate in Mandarin at the time of the post-test, they showed less variation because they continued to communicate frequently in the target language. In contrast, through the tandem, the experimental participants sought out increased opportunities to speak the language, something that they certainly did.

Interestingly, in the survey category of Mandarin Speaking Ability, it was the control group that perceived the greater increase in ability to communicate in Mandarin by the end of the introductory class. The tandem experience helped learners in the EP to increase their ability to conduct short, informal conversations, but the CP perceived an ability for sustaining longer conversations than the EP. We attribute this tendency to the fact that, in class practice, students produce complete utterances sequentially concatenated. Take the case of dialogues that students dramatize in oral practice in class, each student has a designated time to speak and students are expected to respect each other's turn. Clearly, this is not the case in naturalistic conversations outside the classroom. The spontaneity with which students need to produce language to request or clarify information on the spot prepares students for brief and fairly focused interventions. Furthermore, in authentic communicative situations students also learn that speakers often begin their turn with a false start, a truncated utterance, and on occasions body language suffices to convey a whole message.

Although the EP participants' utterances might be simpler and shorter than those of the control group, the theory suggests that they might have more syntactic differentiation and more authentic lexical choices (both of which we are unable to verify at present). This is possibly because the tandem participants might be reaching the bottom of the U-shape developmental process (Lightbown and Spada, 2014; McLaughlin, Rossman, and McLeod, 1983). Students in class, however, might still be simply speaking based on repetition of memorized chunks, or formulaic language. The students, even though they may understand less of what they are saying, still sound more fluent, and even proficient, being at the top left of the U-shape.

7 Conclusion

This pilot study's small participant pool and lack of random selection limit the generalization of its preliminary findings beyond its own participants. The major tendencies suggest, however, that a traditional beginner Mandarin class benefits by having a tandem as an instructional activity beyond the classroom. By the end of the experience, the EP group self-reported being positively predisposed to engage in communication in Mandarin both inside and outside the classroom. As is the case in experimental studies, our data also presented patterns that were less transparent and that should be addressed by a future replication of the investigation. For example, we must more clearly determine whether lower willingness to communicate in the target language (inside and outside the classroom) results from the students already experiencing a high frequency of communication in the target language at the time of testing. It would also be interesting to find out in future studies whether the high-

perceived ability by a group of CP participants would be reflected in their exam results and contribute to sustained interests in the Mandarin language classes.

In short, the study presented suggestive preliminary evidence that offering students flexibility in practicing the language on topics that interest them helped to increase students' willingness to practice and use the language beyond the classroom.

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Exploring the speaking body in the performance of spoken language: A theatre pedagogy for English language learning

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Abstract: Plasticity in language acquisition is typically associated with the brain and studied through neuroimaging research to examine how neural circuits connect with the mind in/for language development (Zhang and Wang, 2009). This paper introduces language learning plasticity in relation to the body where the quality of being plastic or pliable is shaped by movement and gesture. Drawing on my dissertation, this is a focus that examines proprioceptive awareness (or the sense of proprioception) and motor activity as the motivation for language learning. In recalling Brent Davis and Dennis Sumara's (2008) notion of transdisciplinary practice, the research intersects three independent areas of English language learning (ELL), settlement integration for newcomer-to-Canada youth (N2CY), and the evocative object of Jacques Lecoq's neutral mask (NM). In the realm of this study, transdisciplinary is defined as a research strategy that integrates divergent disciplines to act as a methodological exploration toward new developments of a whole project.[1] To address what, at first blush, may appear rather disparate areas of study, this paper offers a brief overview of each to demonstrate how the sum of their parts—when combined—can offer a viable applied language learning resource for contemporary ELL practice.

Keywords: Jacques Lecoq, Neutral Mask, Embodied Language, Nonverbal, Gesture, Newcomer-to-Canada Youth

1 Jacques Lecoq and the neutral mask

I begin with Jacques Lecoq's neutral mask as perhaps the aspect least familiar to readers outside alternative theatre and performance circles. Lecoq significantly influenced the development of 20th century actor training and practice. More than fifty years ago Lecoq, together with the expertise of sculptor Ameleto Sartori, designed the neutral mask. This fundamental object-exercise was developed as a pedagogical tool to reflect his founding principle that the body *knows* well before the mind is aware (Lecoq, 2000). At his renowned physical theatre school in Paris, France, the NM is used as the starting point for the 'journey' into the 'poetic language' of the body (Lecoq, 2000). It is deliberately referred to as a 'journey' for its metaphoric resemblance to an expedition into unknown terrain. The journey is also unique in that it is situated within the historical, socio-cultural, gendered, linguistic scripts that influence how each of our bodies move, re/act, imitate, and permeate the living expressions of our being-in-the-world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

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[1] In its more commonly recognized use, transdisciplinary research unites the expertise of different investigative teams, where each contributes their specific field 'know-how' to a study. Working in collaboration, the disciplines collectively trouble-shoot complexities that arise as result of coming together as a whole. The new assemblage, now a transformed entity, exceeds ('to go beyond' hence the prefix 'trans') the parameters of what each individual field contributed.

In the first semester of the first year, Lecoq suspends the facility of verbal language in order to begin a process of ***disponibilite*[2]** (both a state of openness and the freedom to receive) through the body *in* the mask. Facility here is meant in the sense of speech reflex as the foremost method of expression. The full-faced design of the mask covers the cavity of the mouth, preventing it from audible speech or sound. By insisting on the physical realities, Lecoq's methodology attempts to completely bypass the influence of psychological impositions placed on 'being' our body (Bradby, 2006, *xv*). At the School, the body is regarded as the student-actor's instrument. It is a place of learning that attempts to dispel notions of the body as the object below the view of the mind. The body does not reveal itself merely through the reach of vision nor of an interpretation of 'self' from the purview of the 'mind's eye'. Lecoq's training conveys that, first and foremost, we are *embodied* beings and our physical experience—"laws of movement"—in the world, shapes meaning-making (for thought) that is then further articulated and expressed through verbal language (Lecoq, 2000; Kemp, 2012, p. 78). The NM demonstrates how, in the absence of words—and consequently a thinking process—language already exists in the body.

Figure 1 The Neutral Mask originally conceived and designed by Jacques Lecoq and Ameleto Sartori

My interests in Lecoq's work are not solely academic. I am a practitioner and alumni of his international physical theatre school and bring two decades of practical experience to support the theory of my research. I believe revisioning the NM for ELL education can serve as a transformative teaching and learning resource to assist issues of acculturation *vis-à-vis* the growing student diversity in our schools.

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[2] Taken from the noun *disponibilité*, to be *disponible* is a word commonly used at the Lecoq School. Its English translation 'availability' does not do it much justice. In the Lecoquian sense, it pertains more to a "state of discovery, of openness, of freedom to receive" (Lecoq, 2000, 38). Emphasis is placed on *disponibilité* of the body from which to inform artistic decisions formed in the mind. *Disponibilité* works in association with its companion word *complicité.*

2   The how, what, and why

Prior to, and independent of, relatively new (scholarly) research endeavours into somatic study, neuroscience and embodied linguistics, Lecoq was developing a, rather radical (for the times), physical theatre training. He believed the actor's *lingua franca* is the body. Regarding the primacy of movement as the foundation for language meaning, the NM technique is used to re-sensitize (bring awareness) to the micro-processes of (non) conscious physical engagement that help evolve unique expression.

What neuroscience identifies as sensorimotor neural patterns, Lecoq called "circuits laid down in the body", integral in the physiology, musculature and individual body memory of the student-actor (Kemp, 2012; Lecoq, 2000, p. 45). Memory in this sense does not refer to the psychology of personal histories, but more to the body as storehouse of experiential knowledge triggering the imagination necessary to stimulate artistic creation.   Lecoq asserted that by implanting new physical circuits, new movement patterns could be shaped and integrated.

> Detached from your own face and words, both of which you can usually master in a social context, the body emerges as the only thing to guide you through the silence…There's no cheating with just your body. The neutral mask, which had originally allowed you to feel hidden, now exposes you. The mask that you wear in everyday life is gone, devoid of any purpose. You can feel each movement more intensely than before. You can no longer use your eyes to play psychological games and your whole head must now turn for you to look. Your gestures become bigger and slower. (Bradby, 2006, p. 105)

However, in order to attune to the language *of* the body, the student must first become familiar with the habits particular to their movements. Lecoq's pedagogy was a kind of reverse learning whereby a 'return to zero' (neutral) guides the student through a process of demystifying movement (Lecoq 2000). In the French language, *démystifier* shares the same English definition—to make less mysterious or clarify. Lecoq used *demystifier* (verb) as a way to get students to break down (demystify) complex thought and language processes that can inhibit movement by exploring physical equivalents to express the same sentiments. Why? The macro objective of the mask is to unpack social and cultural, practices that are reflected and etched on the body, to instead begin an awareness of self in relation to others. In other words, when stripped away from the divisions of verbal language, culture, class and gender, there is a universal [3] focus in which we identify basic shared human similarities that demonstrate where we are alike and how similar, we differ (Powell, 2007, 1084). The basic premise of the NM exercise is to become aware of "enculturated habits of socialized movement" from which to juxtapose neutral movement (return to zero) in

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[3] Lecoq often addressed aspects of his pedagogy with/in a 'universal' sense. This is in reference to the theatre's 'universal human needs', 'universal laws', 'universal language'. Lecoq is acknowledging on the one hand, the traditions and historical conventions upon which his teaching is based…of a dramatic landscape constructed upon common principles – and also what Lecoq's works necessitates the 'driving motors' – which have an ethical preoccupation with the power of theatre to break down barriers, to act as a unifying force—in/for the social. See Lecoq, 2000.

order to establish a unified oneness of "rediscovery" *(*Chamberlain and Yarrow, 2002, 27; Felner, 1972).

The mask is designed in such a way that it interprets no defining life expression or recognizable characteristics. It does not laugh or cry, nor is it sad or happy. It quite simply emits a sense of calmness and of balanced emotions, 'neutral' in nature. By identifying (in the sense of bringing awareness to) the repetition of movement, e.g. idiosyncratic movement, students begin to connect to the uniqueness of their physical instrument informed through biographical experience (Kemp, 2012).

In the context of theatre, the relationship between movement and memory can act as conduit for informing the actor's bodily disposition in the world for the stage (Murray 2003, p. 54). The significance of this approach is that by consciously choosing to reshape "muscular activity", implicates the physical circuits that, in turn, determine how we move to serve as a transformative process in altering a sense of self (Kemp 2012, p. 81). Herein lies what I know can be a strong intersectional correlation that links English language acquisition and proficiency as the dominant method of settlement integration with acculturative issues in the physiological *becoming* of hyphenated Canadian identity for newcomer youth.

3   'Enter text through the body'[4]

Figure 2 Field study: a reordering of linguistic meaning, here newcomer students in a mainstream English language learning (ELL) classroom explore speech-movement through the neutral mask. (Pascetta, 2015)

This research builds upon my Master's thesis (2009) titled, *Making Meaning through Movement: Language Learning in Refugee Youth Settlement*. There, I sought to shed

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[4] Speaking on the process of work, Lecoq explains, at his School "we enter a text through the body. We never sit around and discuss …we explore the different texts: working through movement." See Lecoq (2000), p. 137.

light on the intricacies that youth with limited prior learning confront not only in the acquisition of new language and adoption of new culture, but those they simultaneously face vis-à-vis the realities of instruction and curriculum content. I examined the word culture through two fields of reference. The first speaks "to the arts and higher learning…the second…is much more holistic and inclusive. It adopts a more anthropological approach: life-ways, patterned events, and belief systems all understood as part of culture" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 10). I considered the double meaning of 'school culture' in relation to the socially dynamic foreign-language classroom situated within the hegemonic culture of schooling (McLaren, 1998).

In my doctoral dissertation I further the research by focusing specifically on ELL curricula of mainstream education. Integrating the non-verbal movement based methods of the NM as a supplemental in the language learning classroom seeks to assist with integration and adaptation strategies. The work troubles dominant learning structures reliant on linguistic meaning, or, meaning derived and based on words and sentences (Johnson 2007, p. 8). This examines a paradoxical space of silence before speech in an effort to expose the notion of alterity in linguistic practices. Regarding the primacy of movement as the foundation for language meaning, NM serves as the motivation for language in the pre-reflective bodily experience. In the context of schools and schooling, the multilingual, diverse, and multiple faiths that populate our classrooms, can also be sources of conflict. I argue, given the climate of global migration, language education needs a theory of embodiment that reflects the unique diversities of those settling in the country. Drawing from students' experiential knowledge, this taps into a core fundamental pedagogical principal that learning builds on what learners already know. A pedagogy that incorporates the bodily-kinaesthetic creates awareness of the visual-spatial, the intra/interpersonal, i.e. the living, breathing, exchanges of experience, negotiated by the body, *for* language learning—all of which are a part of literacy.

4   Gesture for Speech

I integrate aspects of Lecoq's pedagogy to demonstrate how the sensorimotor system and verbal speech share a critical relationship expressed through the "theatre of the body" (Damasio, 1999).[5] Lecoq's work concerns itself with the physical motivation of the body's role in the production of the speaking narrative—before the assemblage of coded signs, signals and symbolizations of represented movement, 'short-cuts', if you will, often used in social communication (Foster, 1996, p. *xv*; Langer, 1957, p. 41). Some people would argue that this 'suspension' is impossible. However, similar to Lecoq, I am seeking to create a potential space in language learning curricula, for the possibility. Through analysis of movement, the neutral mask is a 'bottom up' rather than a 'top down' process of learning language.   This considers how socially recognizable movements reproduce themselves in language. By this I mean, the neutral mask transposes speech through physical mannerisms such as when a wagging

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[5] I borrow the Damasio's metaphor 'theatre of the body' for its connotative meaning in relationship with my Lecoquian context. Damasio's employs it more in the sense of emotions that are played out through the body, whereas feelings play out in the theatre of the mind. Damasio is distinguishing between the biological distinctions that separate emotion, feeling of emotion from the sense of oneself feeling emotion. See Damasio (1999), p. 8.

finger conveys 'no' or a reprimand, a forcefully outstretched hand suggests 'stop', a 'thumbs up' can mean 'okay, cool, right on'. More engaged body speech includes insinuating 'states of being', for instance, the way arms folded across the chest signifies disapproval or authoritative defiance. The head cocked to one side can imply inquisitiveness. The neck bent back, which forces the gaze upwards while stretching both arms upwards towards the heavens may imply mercy, help, or perhaps even desperation. These are some examples of represented movements examined as corporeal syntax consisting of gestures and postures *vis-à-vis* personalized movement and the idiosyncratic ways in which we move (the swinging of arms, the weight bearing shift of our hips, the heel-toe stride of our gait) (Buckley, 2009, p. 263). Each belongs to personally-coded movements that I correlate to an awareness of the body-self in language or rather feel language already existing in their bodies. This allows the newcomer student to identify the body-of-cultural-origin in the new language and not feel the need to modify movement and the physical "sense of who they are" under the influence of the dominant language structure (Lacroix, 2004, p. 156). The design of my research is to help diminish a "starting over and rebuilding" of their subjectivity in preserving cultural *re*-presented positions they may feel, or be compelled, to occupy in order to "fit in" (Lacroix, 2004, p. 156). I use NM as a learning source from which to comparatively conceptualize social body narratives in English *for* language learning.

5   Settlement integration and newcomer youth

Figure 3 Making meaning through movement with non-drama students using modified Lecoquian techniques. (Pascetta, 2015)

Within the diversity of our classrooms, the three dimensional, visible, manifest embodied reality of physical flesh can also be the primary, boundary crossing of difference. Marked by traces, the oppressed body, the colonized body, the gender-compromised body, and equally, upholding the body of affluence, and /or of social acceptance, these continue to be the paradigms that subordinate, *other*, and estrange the bodies in our classrooms. An idealized, if not ephemeral space, NM exposes how our differences are fundamentally similar through the biologic connection of our bodies.

Drawing upon newcomer students' body of culture as the storehouse of their *experiential knowledge*, differentiates the application of spoken English language from the performance of its cultural ethos.

Exploring the experience of language, my research seeks to expose a critical learning space between current English instruction frameworks and issues of acculturation. I argue there is disproportionate focus on acquisition of, and proficiency in, the speaking of English as the measureable determinant to establish newcomer students' successful integration. As the *newcomer body* becomes further distanced from its country-of-origin mother tongue, my research asks: is the body contextualized by the appropriate social parameters of language? Or rather, is the body provocatively appropriated in order to fit into language of the new social? Faced with the challenges of integration, does ELL curricula inadvertently contribute to a bodily *othering* of self to self—and consequently a *dis*embodied[6] voice for the new language? I believe inclusion of an embodied component to language learning offers newcomer students agency in meaning-making processes of the new, dominant, language cultural capital.

In the theatre training context of Lecoq's School, NM is primarily used as a teaching tool to awaken students to the physical relationship they already have with the world. However the evocative object not only allows the body in the mask to become the eyes, ears, face and voice *for* language *in* advance *of* the learning, neutral space brings awareness to the social noise and politics that complicate the body and identity. Consequently, the impossibility of 'neutral' is the very first discovery students make— followed by the accompanying improbability of sustaining anything resembling neutrality for any length of time (Frost and Yarrow, 1990/2007, p. 156). In its simplest form NM is a method that demonstrates how in the 'in-between' negotiation of languages there is visceral connection to the semiotic.

At a glance, my research could be summarized as a qualitative study that seeks to transpose an arts-based pedagogy into mainstream education. I am certainly not the first to re-contextualize theatre strategies or advocate for the performing arts as a framework from which to draw social parallels. However, as both a physical theatre artist and a doctoral student, I wear two hats in this, my dissertation 'journey'. The academic side of the study attempts to disrupt the traditional approach to language learning of mainstream education and how it conceives of newcomers' settlement. I am aware of the disruption that NM poses to mainstream pedagogy, as well as the risks of transferring a completely experiential-based work beyond its theatre-performance origins. Thus, I propose to examine both the disruptions and the risk-taking in an effort to address how a non-traditional teaching and learning practice originating outside an institutionalized system of schooling can be tolerated and indeed, welcomed, by the institution.

We are living in an era of unprecedented change. The crisscross of national boundaries, fusion of global socio-cultural exchange and technological advancements are proceeding at a rate of no parallel in human history. With the increase of global

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[6] To be clear, as human beings we are always bodied, i.e. we can never be *dis*embodied. When I write dis-embodied here, I am using the prefix 'dis' to express the ways in which education moves away from, as in creating of distance, in relation to the body in teaching and learning practices. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson identify disembodiment as conceptual aspects that remain "contents of mind" yet "not crucially shaped or given any significant inferential content by the body." See Lakoff and Johnson (1999) p. 37.

migration this research re-evaluates the spaces between cultures, language, and identity in the 21st century. It is significantly relevant to ELL education and applied linguistics for what it offers in the way of new curriculum directions evolving the relationship between literacy, culture and learning. In a broader context it could be equally applicable to areas of sociology, anthropology (im/migration studies), or critical performance pedagogy, performance ethnography, and gender performance studies in the humanities.

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Creating and measuring the effectiveness of a blended learning environment for beginner-level language courses at UBC

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Abstract: This paper discusses the use of technology to implement a blended learning environment in first- and second-year language classes at UBC, Okanagan campus. It draws from an ongoing research project called *Using Mobile Technology to Increase Target Language Interaction in Beginner Language Classes.* The project is a comparative study of the effectiveness of pilot blended courses in three different languages offered at UBC: French, German, and Japanese. In the first stage, beginner-level language classes were delivered using a traditional faceto-face (F2F) approach combining large-group lectures and small-group labs or tutorials; in the next stage, a blended learning environment was created through the addition of online lectures and activities, in an attempt to increase F2F interaction between students and instructors and allow greater time for active language production. As current research on blended learning assessment advocates the use of a holistic focus and a mixed methodology (Blake et al., 2008; Bluic et al., 2007; Burston, 2003; Chenoweth et al., 2008; Rovai, 2004; Sharpe & Benfield, 2005; Sweeney et al., 2004), the project aims to explore possible correlations between, as well as changes in, overall language competence, student satisfaction, community cohesiveness, students' preferred learning styles, and intercultural development. We will address the motivations to create pilot blended language courses at UBC Okanagan and the potential benefits and impacts of such courses on pedagogy, instructor workload, and overall student performance and satisfaction. Technical aspects of producing and distributing online material will be discussed, as well as the challenges created by transferring content from the lecture onto an online platform. Although the project is still ongoing, preliminary comparative results appear positive.

Keywords: Blended learning, French language, Japanese language

1 Introduction

UBC's Okanagan campus has seen its enrolment figures grow exponentially over the last seven years. Since most students enrol in our first- and second-year language classes in order to fulfill the mandatory BA language other than English requirement, this has meant growing enrolment pressures, particularly on the French and Spanish programs. During that time, there has been no significant investment in language program faculty resources to offset the number of incoming students needing to fulfill the language requirement.[1] The result of these pressures has been a gradual increase in class sizes and the consequent inevitable change in the modes of delivery of beginner-level language courses. Each language program has dealt with this change differently. Spanish courses now have about 50 students per section, delivered in three hours of

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[1] In French, for example, the number of students in language-requirement courses has increased from 239 in 2005 to 506 in 2013.

lecture with the use of in-class assistants. Beginner-level French classes are run with 75 to 90 students in the lecture portion of the course, which meets for one hour a week; students are then split into smaller tutorials of 30 students each, which meet twice a week for an additional two hours. Because of lower enrolment pressures, Japanese and German courses have generally remained at a lower student count of 35 to 40, which remains much higher than the cap of 24 students at the Vancouver campus, for example. In French courses, the increased number of students has somewhat eroded the ability to engage in meaningful student-instructor interaction, since students cannot always be assured of their instructor's attention and prompt feedback in the large classroom. The same difficulty persists in the lab sections for Japanese and for the tutorial sections in French. Lab and tutorial class sizes, which range from 24 to 35 students, are not an ideal setting to create the kind of close interaction necessary for developing greater oral fluency.

Language programs at the UBC Okanagan campus do not have a standardized model of delivery, but most language courses have been reduced from four contact hours to three,[2] with the exception of Japanese courses, which have maintained the additional lab hour. In the French program, the loss of the lab hour has meant that courses tend to privilege grammar, reading and writing, and there has been a reduction in time spent for speaking practice in most of our beginner-level courses. Obviously, from a pedagogical perspective, this is not a desirable situation. While commercial products[3] could be used to assist in oral practice and supplement the courses, students would, in effect, be asked to pay extra to get more so-called "speaking" practice. This also means that at the most difficult level of language acquisition (speaking whole sentences in a conversation, for instance) students would be left on their own instead of having the instructors with the most experience direct them. We felt that a different solution was necessary. The lack of standardized contact hours in language classes has also created a situation where there are workload inequities, since language faculty in French, German, and Spanish have three contact hours weekly, while Japanese instructors have four.

In this context, we have begun the implementation of a blended learning environment in first- and second-year language classes. This effort is connected to an ongoing research project called *Using Mobile Technology to Increase Target Language Interaction in Beginner Language Classes*, which is being funded by a UBCO Centre for Teaching and Learning's *Innovations in Teaching and Learning* research grant. It is a comparative study of the effectiveness of pilot blended courses in French, Japanese and German.

We have used the term "blended learning" in our project, but often this is called "flipped", "hybrid", or "flexible" learning. In order to clarify, and following several recent published studies, we would like to borrow Horn and Staker's (2011) definition:

> Blended learning is any time a student learns at least in part at a supervised brick-andmortar location away from home and at least in part through online delivery with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace (Horn & Staker, 2011, p. 3).

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[2] The reduction of contact hours in language classes is a historical carry-over from Okanagan University College, before it became a part of the UBC system in 2005.

[3] For instance, products such as *Tell-me-more™*, *Rosetta Stone™*, and Pearson's *My Lab™*.

Our initial motivation to deploy pilot blended courses came from institutional factors as well as pedagogical considerations. One of our main concerns was the limited amount of time that could be dedicated to improve students' oral skills in our classes. The question for us was how to increase face-to-face student-instructor interaction time, without increasing labour costs for the university, teaching loads for the instructors, or costs for students. In particular, for French, the consideration was to regain the hour of language practice that was lost when labs ceased to be offered. For Japanese, the consideration was one of class size and instructor workload; that is—to be able to reduce the class size for language labs without adding to the instructor's workload. In both cases, the drive was to increase the time for meaningful language practice within the available contact hours.

One solution that appealed to us was the use of technology to create blended versions of our courses. Since grammar explanations do not vary from year to year, they could easily be provided online, and, online platforms are more than adequate to handle self-graded rote practice exercises such as sentence transformation, verb conjugation, and fill in the blanks. We estimated that even a relatively small shift online would free up face-to-face time for instructors, so that they could provide either more interactive activities in the lectures or more sections of tutorials with smaller class sizes. When we turned to recent literature on the subject of blended teaching and learning in language courses, what we found was encouraging.

2   Review of online learning research

In 2010, researchers with the US Department of Education published a meta-analysis and comprehensive review of research studies evaluating online education (Means, 2010). The researchers found 1000 comparative empirical studies published in major academic journals and books over a twelve-year period, of which 51 qualified for statistical analysis. Results revealed that "students in online conditions performed modestly better, on average, than those learning the same material through traditional face-to-face instruction" (Means, 2010, p. xiv). Similar results can be found in a more recent research review. Digital education researchers Kevin Oliver and Dallas Stallings (2014) state that some studies comparing blended online to traditional face-toface learning show blended models to be equivalent, and others show it to be somewhat improved (Oliver & Stallings, 2014, p. 58). We have not found any research or reviews of research showing blended to be less effective than traditional face-to-face instruction.

Comparisons of fully online to blended online learning provide similar results. The older Department of Education review found that blended instruction increased student learning significantly more than fully online instruction. They caution though, that the apparent differences between blended learning and fully online learning may be attributable to increased learning time or changes in instructional elements rather than the media per se. Oliver and Stallings cite the Department of Education review data, and supplement the older findings with their own observations about more recent publications:

> The lack of significance in comparisons of educational technology environments is common, as often the same pedagogy is simply replicated in different formats resulting in the same learning (Oliver & Stallings, 2014, p. 58).

These initial findings gave us the assurance we needed to move forward with our project, since they established that online learning could be, at the very least, as effective as face-to-face learning.

With more specific regard to studies of post-secondary language courses, both our instructional design and our research design have been adapted from a series of studies by Chenoweth, Murday and Uchida on Carnegie-Mellon's Language Online blended learning project. Using the same sample from beginner and intermediate French and Spanish courses (thirteen online sections, twenty-one fully face-to-face sections, eleven instructors, 354 students over five semesters), Chenoweth et al. have published two different studies. One is a quantitative empirical study on student outcomes comparing the blended to the fully face-to-face versions (2006), and the other is a comparative quantitative and qualitative study of student and instructor satisfaction (2008). The student learning outcomes for the blended and face-to-face courses were roughly equivalent (though statistically inconclusive). The satisfaction study showed that students were more satisfied with the blended courses (mainly because of ease of scheduling,) and that both students and instructors were happier with the personal connections they were able to make through the more individualized, smaller, face-to-face meetings via the blended courses. Issues that came up for both instructors and students stemmed primarily from instructional design flaws caused by a lack of experience with online learning and technology that seems quaintly improbable 14 years later. Lessons from this study that remain current include the importance of clearly and realistically framing course requirements, and technological troubleshooting procedures.

We have taken and adapted from these two studies two main approaches: to look at both student outcomes and satisfaction via a combination of quantitative and qualitative instruments for our research; and to put more emphasis on the face-to-face component, while keeping the digital component in our curricular design simple. To this end, we have kept online materials that are easy to follow chronologically (i.e., in Japanese, drills are scheduled to time out to force better time management), and that are low stakes (students get participation points for doing the drills on time). Graded tests and quizzes are live, on paper. We have kept paper textbooks and workbooks. Our grammar lectures are still lectures, since we have chosen linear video rather than multi-directional or self-directional html pages. We have made these videos easily accessible on mobile devices across both Apple and Android platforms. We are still having some technical difficulties with online drills and homework submission, mainly because UBC does not yet support the Blackboard app for mobile devices, and because Blackboard itself has not navigated the jump to mobile technology well, nor in a timely manner.

3   Potential outcomes

The research portion of this project is preliminary—we are attempting to replicate the "does no harm" results of other studies, in order to justify the changes we are making to our course design, while fishing for any correlations (and we are casting the net widely) to frame future research on this management process. At this point in our study, based on the research reviews, we are predicting that for students, the switch to a blended format should:

- Increase flexibility in course scheduling.
- Increase synchronous live spoken interaction in the target language, which should improve oral competence and promote classroom cohesion.
- Increase satisfaction with courses and instructors.
- Make it easier to review for exams.
- Make it easier to keep up when absent.
- Allow students to adjust materials to match previous learning (students do not have to sit through lectures on things they already know), therefore increasing autonomy and responsibility.

For administration, the switch to a blended format should:

- Reduce the use of classroom space (this would require the scheduling process to become somewhat more flexible than it is at the moment).
- Increase FTEs because of fewer scheduling conflicts.
- Increase program quality without adding labour costs.

For instructors, depending on their language and existing conditions, blended formats should:

- Reduce teaching hours for Japanese courses from four to three, making teaching loads equitable.
- Make the face-to-face sessions more interactive since repetitive parts are reduced.
- Increase time for speaking practice without increasing workload or having to find resources to hire TAs or the time to train them.

In terms of our study design and implementation, as most current research on blended learning assessment advocates using both a holistic focus and a mixed methodology,[4] we used quantitative and qualitative instruments to measure and assess global changes in the following criteria:

- Overall language competence.
- Oral competence.
- Student satisfaction.
- Instructor satisfaction.
- Institutional and administrative satisfaction.
- Community cohesiveness.
- Students' preferred learning styles.
- Intercultural development.

During the first stage, while we were developing online materials for the pilot courses, we taught our classes live, and gathered data from student participant

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[4] See Blake et al. (2008); Bluic et al. (2007); Burston (2003); Chenoweth et al. (2008); Rovai (2004); Sharpe & Benfield (2005); Sweeney et al. (2004).

volunteers—our control group. During the second stage, we moved all the grammar explanations to an online platform in the form of short video clips; we also added self-grading practice exercises. Again, we recruited student participant volunteers. The course content, tests, and assignments were the same for both versions of the courses. After classes ended participants from test and control groups filled out lifestyle questionnaires, which assessed their study, work, and commuting patterns, as well as the extent to which they used mobile devices to study. After the final exam, participants were asked to complete Rovai's Classroom Community Scale (CCS), Kolb's Learning Style Inventory, and The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) online. In order to compare results from the control and test group, we also collected students' grades, and information from the UBC Okanagan Teaching Effectiveness Questionnaire (TEQ). In Japanese 200, students also completed a pre- and post-course oral examination.

4   Existing models

In the current model for French, there is one lecture and two tutorials per week. Lectures are 50 minutes long, and have 75 to 90 students. Class time alternates between grammar explanation, question and answer, small group, and large group practice. The exercises practiced in the lecture portion tend to be of a more mechanical nature, generally. Students also meet for two hours during the week in smaller tutorial sections of 30 students, in which they practice their oral and aural skills, and have the opportunity to engage in guided or open-ended conversations, and in language creation exercises.

In Japanese, there are four scheduled contact hours per week for groups of 35 students. One of the four hours is a scheduled language lab. The language labs are held in a specially designated classroom that has computers and tables for group work, but since there are 35 people in each lab, it often just becomes an extra class for group work, rather than a place to really practice speaking with the instructor. In the larger first-year Japanese courses with multiple sections, attempts were made in the past to increase the number of labs and to decrease the numbers of students in them, but this resulted in either increased teaching loads or in making the lecture parts of classes large and unwieldy.

In German, student numbers have varied from 30 to 80 over the past six years as diverse delivery models were utilized in order to meet demands for increased enrollment or student demand. Most recently, the beginners' language course had 40 students, but no extra hour to divide this group into two smaller lab sections. Seen over time, then, the increased teaching loads or unwieldy and large classes mirrored some of the issues faced by Japanese.

For the pilot blended version of these courses, French added one hour of online work to the course, and Japanese moved two hours of lecture content online. For French 103, the online material consisted of video lectures of two to fifteen minutes each, and of online pre-test (rote) activities. Students had to view the video clips that contained grammar explanations, and complete the pre-test activities before coming to class. In the lecture, the first five minutes or so were used to answer questions pertaining to the online work, and the rest of the lecture time was used for active language practice. In Japanese, the online material for the pilot course consisted of approximately 30 minutes of lecture videos (on grammar points) and 90 minutes of

online practice (including listening and dictation exercises). The students had two hours of scheduled face-to-face time—one was a large-group session for quizzes, tests, grammar questions, textbook pair-work and group pronunciation practice, while the other hour was a small-group language lab session. The instructor, then, was in charge of three face-to-face hours (one whole-group session and two small-group lab sessions). The labs were further divided into four stations so that students, in groups of three or four, would get twelve minutes of intense conversation practice with the instructor, and 36 minutes of flashcards, games, or other group task-based activities to work on independently.

5 Media development

Because the grant received for this project was a research grant, and not a development grant, there was no funding for the production of course materials. As a result, all of the development was done on top of the regular teaching load, on private time with private equipment. As a starting point for producing the French videos, a series of previously developed PowerPoint™ presentations were used. The PowerPoint™ files contained animations inherent to the software as well as frame-by-frame animation. For the final movie file, a voice overlay was recorded separately using Audacity™, then Xilisoft PowerPoint to Video Converter™ was used to combine the sound files with the timed PowerPoint™ presentations, and to turn the presentation files into movie files. The main challenge became the need to make the online lectures work on mobile devices, which meant that the PowerPoint™ files had to be (visually) reformatted so they would work well on a much smaller screen. The change of medium and the loss of live clarification time meant that in most cases, the flow of the grammar explanations also needed to be restructured. The advantage, however, was that each grammatical structure could be explained in much more detail than possible in a timed live-classroom context.

The Japanese lecture videos were made very differently. Old-fashioned hand-drawn frameby-frame animation was done using photocopy paper, washable markers and a flat-bed scanner. Images were drawn, then scanned into iPhoto™, edited, and then dropped into iMovie™ one frame at a time. Sound was captured into ProTools™ for editing. iTunes™ was then utilized to place the edited sound files into iMovie™. The rendered iMovie™ files were exported as smallsized movies for mobile devices and as large HD videos for computers, and students were given the option to download whichever file size they wanted—from within Connect or from Dropbox™.

For the online environment in the French course, separate folders were created for each chapter of the textbook, where students found a link to the pre-test exercises and to all the video lectures for the lesson. The pre-tests were mainly fill-in-the-blank type exercises. Students were instructed to watch the online video, and then complete the pre-test exercises as preparation for the live lecture, during which the grammatical structures would be practiced. The pre-tests were open for the duration of the course, and students could return to them as many times as they wanted. They were encouraged to continue to improve their scores during the semester (they received a two percent bonus if they achieved an overall score of 90% or more).

For the Japanese blended course, students were expected to do a more extensive series of exercises because a larger portion of the total course hours was allocated online. The chapters and their grammar points were divided into three units. Each unit

was two weeks long, contained two chapters and ended with a chapter test (there were three chapter tests instead of a mid-term). Each chapter had five to six grammar points. Each grammar point had its own three to five minute explanation video and a Blackboard quiz with a number of questions that students could repeat till they got 100 percent, but only until the cut-off point (which was the morning before the live lecture class). The quiz questions started with simple recognition exercises and gradually got more complex. Many question types were utilized—matching, fill in the blanks (for conjugation, spelling, clozes, sentence completion), and jumbled sentence questions. Listening questions with short clips and multiple choice questions were created using the textbook listening files, which publishers permitted us to place on Blackboard. Textbook dialogues and pairwork practice exercises, and any questions students had about the grammar points, were dealt with in the live lecture period, which was how the online segments were connected to the live segments.

6 Initial results

Our present results use data that includes average grades and the course evaluation results from the university for each individual French and Japanese course taught by the authors.[5]

In terms of average grades, the French results are very encouraging. Students in the blended course performed better in all aspects of the course, as well as in the tutorials. These results must be taken in context however; since most students in term 1 (the control group) had not been studying French for four months (during the summer break), while those in the test group had likely completed the previous course, FREN 102, in November. When compared to historical grade averages for FREN 103, however, the blended course still shows the highest grade average for sections taught by the author over the last three years (a four percent increase, overall).[6] This result is noteworthy as the content of the course has not been changed significantly over that time. The Japanese results are less conclusive, but far from discouraging. When attendance and participation marks are removed, the average overall examination scores are almost perfectly equivalent between the control group and the test group. There were, however, issues with scheduling for the test group and the data collection will be repeated next time the blended course is run.

The course evaluation data is from too small a sample size to be statistically significant, but is still very useful feedback for planning improvements (an action research format). We have summarized the quantitative aspect of the TEQ using the 'good course' and the 'good instructor' categories. While the reasons for the scores cannot be fully explained at this point, it was interesting to note that students' perception of the blended courses and of the instructors seemed affected negatively (even though their performance in the course was on par with historical averages).

Students' written comments in the qualitative section of the TEQs have also been coded to assess the level of satisfaction with the online material. We classified

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[5] We do not have access to grades or course evaluation comments for other instructors' courses, even for different sections of the same course that run at the same time or share a common final exam. Due to staffing issues, there are no results for German.

[6] The historical final grades for the face-to-face version of FREN 103 were as follows: 2010 W1, 73.1%; 2011 W1, 68.9%; 2013 W1, 70.2%. For the blended version of the course: 2013 W2, 74.8%.

responses in three categories: positive response, negative response, and no comment. Only comments that were explicitly about the quality and effectiveness of the online material were included.

Of the students who responded to the questionnaire, 50% had no comments related to the online material. Those who commented were overwhelmingly in favour of the content, and only a few, in French, objected specifically to the online lectures. For the French class, the TEQ comments that were the most critical had to do with the live lecture. Four out of 24 students explicitly stated that they did not feel it necessary to go to the lectures since all of the material was provided online. Similar comments occurred in the reviews for the Japanese blended course, where two out of six students said the live lecture hour was, "boring" or "not useful." This suggests that the pedagogical link between the online study and the live practice in the lecture was not adequately framed for students, and that the live lectures did not use the time that was freed-up creatively enough to engage students. This then recommends, for future iterations of the course, to be more explicit about the pedagogical framework of the blended course. It also suggests that the challenge is to reinvent the live lecture to make it much more interactive and engaging for students.

For the Japanese course, there were two other main issues that became apparent when comparing the control group and the test group TEQ comments. Three out of nine students complained about the other students in the labs in the control group, while four out of six students stated specifically that they enjoyed the interaction in the labs in the test group. This suggests that the smaller groups in the labs, which allowed for better adjustments for ability and personality, worked better socially. Also, in the control group one student commented that they really liked having the grammar explained in Japanese (and then translations given if the students were not following), while for the blended course one student specifically complained that there was not enough Japanese spoken. This indicates that the addition of Japanese voice-overs for the videos —so that students may listen to the grammatical explanations in Japanese as well as in English— may be valuable.

7   Conclusions

The major problem with this project as a research study is its small sample size. Judging by the Department of Education review cited earlier, this problem appears to be endemic to the field. Only 51 out of 1000 peer-reviewed published papers had large enough sample sizes and rigorous enough methodologies to qualify for meta-analysis. While inconclusive, the small set of results we have collected so far does show, however, that we are entirely on track to replicating previous research.

For the future though, it recommends a change of focus. Research already shows that blended learning is a viable model of delivery, and that constructivist, communicative, content- or taskbased, student-centered learning is not new. While ESL teachers have been developing materials and TESOL researchers publishing research on it for a long time, it remains difficult to add labour-intensive individual communicative learning to courses in a university setting because of very rigid administrative parameters. These include: accreditation, transferability, minimum student numbers and increasing FTE targets, traditionally defined teaching loads, long-held customs regarding classroom contact hours, province-wide articulated adoption of grammarbased textbooks, classrooms that are not well designed for language courses,

increasingly limited classroom availability, equipment and resource (budget) limitations, and university-wide mandatory written examinations with compulsory departmental examination percentage weight ranges. And while there is an expectation for pedagogical innovation on the part of the university, administrative systems have not kept up with the growing demand for a more flexible approach to teaching and learning, and can actually work to discourage innovation.

We suspect that, instead of trying to grow our sample size and repeat the same set of comparative research questions, it might be far more interesting (and innovative) to assess management practices in a larger-scale adoption of blended learning across a program, programs, or a department. In other words, our research project is morphing organically from pedagogical innovation to management innovation. Given our position between a proverbial rock and a hard place, we would like to experiment with ways to adjust administrative practices in order to implement best teaching practices already proven by researchers, but in a way that is beneficial to all stakeholders: students, instructors, and administration.

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Feedback (and forth) in a university
English for Academic Purposes (EAP) class

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Abstract: This paper describes a small action research project – an instructional change – related to providing university ESL students with feedback on their written work. The intent was to make the feedback more interactive, more dialogic, and involved providing readings oriented towards student agency as well as a protocol that students were asked to follow which mediated the nature and quantity of the feedback I provided.

Keywords: academic writing; feedback; dialogic; EAP; mediation

1 Introduction

The prompt for the study was the desire on my part to engage more interactively in the feedback process with undergraduate students who are learning to write academically. I take seriously what Markee (2004) has referred to as **'**zones of interactional transition'; what O'Donnell (2013) calls 'the pedagogical encounter'; Tharp and Gallimore (1988) the "instructional conversation, and what others have called 'the contact zone' (cf Doherty and Mayer, 2003; Pratt, 1991). I am referring to those potentially transformational moments when an instructor interacts directly with a student. How can I make the most of that encounter?

Evaluating a student's work is an intimate act (Lerner, 2005) — leaving a mark not only on the person's artifact but also on the writer herself. Whether the student attends to the written feedback or tosses the paper, the evaluation has had *some* effect, cognitive and affective. Here I provide the details of a small action research project—a curricular effort, really—that I conducted with a recent class of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students. This project did provoke *and continues to provoke* my efforts to introduce change into my own feedback practice—with the development of my students in mind.

2 Terms

A note on terms: *Corrective* feedback has always had a punitive ring to it (for me) and conflicts somewhat with my leaning towards the principles of hybrid voices and intercultural rhetoric (Steinman, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009). *Suggestive* feedback might describe more closely what I intend my practice to be. That is, I try to make distinct what is actually incorrect and leads to confusion or lack of comprehension, and what might be simply a different way of making or supporting a point. The student then determines what to make of the feedback. So I am trying to think about *dialogic* feedback rather than corrective feedback.

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3 Context and participants

My context for this present study is a university credit ESL/EAP class. All the students have ESL backgrounds and most are beyond first year and are in a wide range of faculties and programs across the university. They self-select into this course. The course runs a full year and is offered in a fully face to face format. Electronic communication occurs only on listserv posts and e-mails, as needed. The twenty students represent fifteen different first languages (L1's)—almost a record in my classes. Their diverse L1's, the range of programs, and the differences in ages and stages (ages ranging from 18 to 50, stages ranging from first year to several who have degrees from other countries) make it even more likely that their approaches to writing, to academic writing, and then to academic writing in English will be equally diverse.

4 Past practice

In my long career as an ESL teacher, my marking strategies have varied but generally fell on the side of global correction—direct correction with efforts to balance 50/50 between content and form. Sometimes I used a rubric that made evident to the student (and to me) how the mark was reached; other times not. Sometimes I provided opportunities (and extra marks) for revisions; other times, and most often times, not. We forged ahead with an array of writing genres—no time for revisiting. My hopes were, I think, that students would transfer what they noticed from one assignment to the next assignment. The times I did require revisions incorporating the feedback I provided, the results seemed like a rote exercise with little energy or will on the part of the students. They were not particularly interested in building on their previous work. It seemed as though they were channeling the ancient mariner:

> I take the hint from the ancient mariner who told his tale in order to be rid of it. I too will tell my tale for once and never hark back ever more. I will write a bold "Finis" at the end, and shut the book with a bang!" *(Antin, 1912, Introduction)*

5 New practice

The nature and intention of the course kit that I assembled for the class I am discussing today required me to adapt my feedback. Everything about the course was dialogic—all readings related quite closely to students' lives as bi-and multilingual university students—lives past, lives present, lives future; and, whenever possible, students were afforded maximum agency and input. They were to be the knowers as often as I was. All readings deal with language and languages. Examples include several academic articles you may recognize: written about university ESL students by Leki (1992), by Morell (2007), by Zappa-Hollman (2007), by Lu (2011); newspaper articles on language such as Semeniuk's piece on Bilingualism (2013); poetry about language such as "Marsh Languages" by Margaret Atwood (1995), and language memoirs like Bharati Mukherjee's (2004). We listened to TED talks about the linguistic genius of babies (Kuhl, 2010) and read magazine articles about out of the box teaching methodologies such as "Crazy English" by Evan Osnos in the *New Yorker* magazine.

The course readings included multiple genres and content all relevant to the lives and times of students who are learning and writing in a language other than their mother tongue. Following this intent, the oral presentation topic for the first semester was to

relate a critical language learning (literacy incident) that mediated (as an affordance or as a constraint) their acquiring of one of their languages. Students were asked to make some connections to one or several of the course readings. The second semester oral presentation was a contrastive analysis between their first language and English, a topic in which, supremely, they are the genuine knowers/experts.

Making thinking evident and trying to foster dialogic feedback and forth was attempted in several ways. There was group focus on frequent errors from each particular assignment. On slides, I present errors or ambiguities from the papers students wrote that week and together we determine how the sentence, the phrase or the general point might be improved. This has always engaged students because the models are authentic and the route to the improved version takes an inductive and in my view more retentive and attentive route. If a similar error comes up in the next assignment (obviously in a different context/sentence/essay) we revisit the original slide and link it so students can see that this issue has already been discussed and they can add this second layer of confirmation.

This practice makes thinking public (student thinking and teacher thinking) and makes writing public. It opens the discussion to all students working towards perhaps a group zone of proximal development (ZPD). I was inspired by the Zimmerman and Kitsantas article (2002) which examined modeling and its effect on writers.

But this is post evaluation and I was still concerned with making the marking-on-paper action more *inter*action. That is, my desire was to move from student action followed by teacher action into dialogic [↔] interaction. To continue this space for voice and agency, I examined the literature on feedback to see how I could make room for collaboration of some sort with the students on their writing. Since everyone is present for the in-class writing and all is fresh in their minds as they write, and there *is* energy about the writing at that moment—that is, momentum, investment, online processing—I designed two assignments during which time was allotted for reviewing their work and making evident to me what parts they had concerns about.

Secondly, as part of the writing assignment, students were asked, before handing in their work, to indicate those parts they felt particularly unsure of (underline once). As always, I provided feedback, but this time it was *minimal feedback* (Haswell, 1983) based in part on concerns expressed by students as they wrote. (Please see Figure 1 below.) The encounter, the zone, was extended by one or two interactions (at a meta-level) when compared to my previous practice. I responded to their concerns and often there was a further response by the student. The feedback became more dialogic, dynamic, emergent, and particular to the student's claimed needs rather than her assumed (by me) needs. Engaging in this dialogue (while writing and then responding to feedback) comprised part of the student's grade.

6   Student reaction

Students were engaged in the process. Because I handed out sheets when there were twenty minutes left in the writing and told them to complete the sheets worth five marks, students got better at timing themselves. In order to complete the worksheet, they had to review their essays for which they most often do not leave time. Even if they had not had the *form* to fill out, this forced review time would have been valuable. Underlining the parts they were unsure of- indicating the nature of their concern if they could.

7   Student data sheet

1. In your essay, please **<u>underline</u>** any phrase(s), word(s), idea or punctuation mark(s) that you are unsure of.

2. Then answer these questions by circling a number
   1 = not confident   4 = confident
   In writing this essay, I feel confident about
   Content   1 2 3 4
   Structure/organization   1 2 3 4
   Grammar   1 2 3 4
   Vocabulary   1 2 3 4

3. In this essay, I am concerned about_____

4. I would have liked more time (circle)   yes   no

Figure 1 Student data sheet

And then there was a space provided for "anything you would like me to know". My hope was that they would internalize somewhat the process and the dimensions, albeit reductive, of structure, content, vocabulary and grammar. Students were shockingly honest and quite hard on themselves within the four dimensions. They underlined micro issues like form of words, or transitions they were unsure of. On the sheet and even on their papers in the margins wrote things like:

1. Should I have explained more here?
2. Should I have used an example?
3. I feel I am using the same vocabulary over and over.

An unexpected and very gratifying consequence is that this practice, this form, seemed to open up space for continuing dialogue post assignment. I did not continue this in the winter semester, yet almost 50% of the students continued to underline and to pose questions on their winter semester assignments. I was delighted.

To keep the language dialogue going, and extending the experience of feedback and forth, I fortuitously came across a column in the *Globe and Mail* newspaper called "Fluent in the language of errors" (2014) about grammatical mistakes in the newspaper that drive readers crazy. Sylvia Stead, the public editor, categorized the types of errors about which readers had complained. Stead specified terms like "dangling participles" and "redundancies" further making public the writing process. In this column Stead demonstrated in a compelling and instructive way that professional writers also make errors. I asked students over the course of the following week or so to locate in their academic texts or newspapers or campus literature anything that seemed to them to be errors—redundancy, subject-verb agreement, and the like, matters we had discussed in class or not.

8   Opportunity

This created opportunities for students to write emails to me- submitting something with a link or a copy and what they thought the error was. I responded to each briefly agreeing with their correction or else pointing out why it was not an error and that they should look for another one. When I received one that actually was an error, I put it up on a

slide in the next class to see if the others could determine what the problem was, what they would call it, and how they would correct it. This was fun and I called the exercise "Oops". Oops became the subject line of many messages and it was a way to engage in some one-to-one dialogue albeit electronic with each student.

9 My response

Herein I have described a small change that seemed to improve the tenor of the class and the nature of my interactions with students. I will definitely engage in this activity again. This small study is informed by Vygotskian sociocultural theory –primarily the concepts of: self-regulation (I hoped students would engage in this way with their writing beyond my class); zone of proximal development (an interaction that was better calibrated by the students posing their questions and underlining concerns); and mediation (the forms mediated my marking and their learning).

10 Teacher essay

This article seems to have morphed more of a *teacher essay*—what Sharkey (2004) referred to as *conceptual teacher research*. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) refer to teachers reflecting on their experience to construct an argument about teaching learning and schooling It is personal and retrospective; it selects and analyzes events from an ongoing stream of classroom life; it locates a single teacher's experience in relationship to the teacher's own practice (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1993, p. 36).

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