

Effective Language Acquisition in EFL Settings

Adquisición eficaz del idioma en entornos de inglés como lengua extranjera

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Abstract

The acquisition of a language is a complex process that involves more than just repetition and memorization of vocabulary and grammar structures. It requires interaction and exposure to real-world activities, which allow people to fluently communicate using social and academic language (Chomsky, 1956; Vygotsky 1978). Learning a new language also involves some processes that happen in the brain, which are activated and better developed when people are exposed to a foreign language.

Keywords: Language acquisition, Interaction, Real-world activities, Communication, Social language

Resumen

La adquisición de un idioma es un proceso complejo que implica más que la simple repetición y memorización de vocabulario y estructuras gramaticales. Requiere interacción y exposición a actividades del mundo real, que permiten a las personas comunicarse con fluidez utilizando el lenguaje social y académico (Chomsky, 1956; Vygotsky 1978). Aprender un nuevo idioma también implica algunos procesos que suceden en el cerebro, que se activan y se desarrollan mejor cuando las personas están expuestas a un idioma extranjero.

Palabras clave: Adquisición del lenguaje, Interacción, Actividades del mundo real, Comunicación, Lenguaje social.

Introducción

Through the years, many researchers have argued that a language is acquired in a natural and unconscious sequence through “direct interaction with the society and individuals around” (Vygotsky, 1978). Hence, in order to acquire a new language, English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers need to create conditions that promote interaction with more capable people to enhance language production. According to Vygotsky and his theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), social interaction exposes English Language Learners (ELL) to more complex structures and vocabulary as well as challenging situations, which support them to move from their current level of language proficiency (Vygotsky, 1978) in a natural and repetitive order.

Language Acquisition and Effective Instruction for ELLs

Acquiring a new language involves more than just memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules. It requires meaningful interaction and exposure to real-life situations that help learners communicate fluently in both social and academic settings (Chomsky, 1956; Vygotsky, 1978). The brain plays an important role in this process, as it activates cognitive functions when individuals are exposed to a foreign language, leading to further development of language skills. In his Natural Order Hypothesis (1982), Krashen argued that language acquisition follows a natural and predictable sequence. The first stage is preproduction, where learners develop receptive skills like listening and reading to understand the language. As they move into the speech emergent stage, they begin to use language more actively through speaking and writing. In the final advanced stage, learners can engage in abstract thinking and grasp complex academic language structures (Krashen, 1983). These stages offer valuable guidance for ESL/EFL teachers to cater to different proficiency levels, helping students succeed academically while improving their language skills.

Cooperative learning strategies are a vital part of this process. They encourage interaction between students, especially with more capable peers, which helps them develop both cognitive and linguistic skills (Slavin, 1985; Kagan, 1989). By using these strategies, teachers can support English language learners (ELLs) by considering the role their first language (L1) plays in language acquisition. Research consistently shows that learners who receive support in their native language perform better in acquiring a second language. The Iceberg Theory (Cummins, 1984) suggests that linking L1 and L2 helps students transfer knowledge effectively. This connection fosters the development of both basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). ESL/EFL teachers need to understand this process and create environments that encourage positive transfers from students' first language to their second language, supporting their language development.

Affective Filter Hypothesis

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) emphasizes the importance of emotional factors in language learning. When students experience anxiety or boredom, it can hinder their ability to acquire a language, even if the input is understandable. Therefore, teachers need to be aware of their students' interests, learning styles, and personal backgrounds. By creating an engaging and low-risk classroom environment, they can minimize negative emotional factors and facilitate language learning. Thomas and Collier's (1995) prism model offers a useful framework for understanding students' biographies. This model highlights four key dimensions—affective, cognitive, academic, and linguistic—that influence a student's learning experience. By addressing these dimensions, teachers can better support students and ensure that their instruction meets their needs.

Biography-Driven Instruction (BDI). Biography-driven instruction (BDI) is an approach that uses students' personal backgrounds and experiences as a foundation for learning. It helps teachers build a more responsive and inclusive classroom environment, fostering both academic and

communicative success (Herrera & Murry, 2014). BDI is designed to connect instruction to students' cultural and linguistic strengths, creating a supportive learning atmosphere. The BDI approach has three key stages: activation, connection, and affirmation.

Activation Stage: In this phase, teachers activate and assess students' prior knowledge and experiences. By encouraging students to share their existing knowledge, teachers can help them become more engaged in the learning process. This stage also helps teachers recognize the value of students' biographies, which contributes to a more inclusive and authentic learning environment (Perez, Holmes, Miller, & Fanning, 2012).

Connection Stage: Teachers use the information gathered from the activation stage to create groupings and learning activities that are both meaningful and engaging. Cooperative learning strategies (Kagan, 1986) and hands-on activities encourage students to interact with each other and the material in ways that support their individual learning needs. Visual aids and interactive methods also provide students with diverse ways to engage with content.

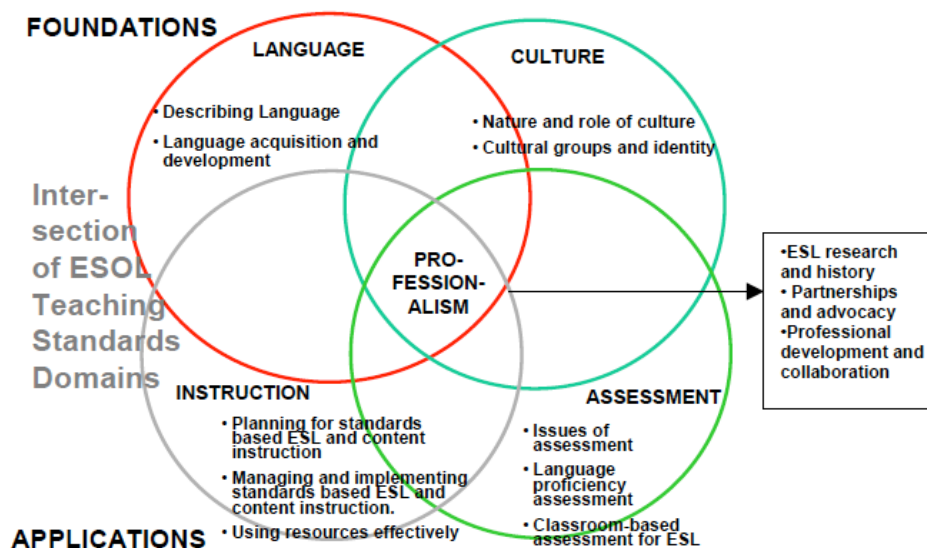
Affirmation Stage: The final phase celebrates students' progress by recognizing both their language and content gains. Teachers use strategies that promote reflection, personal connections, and the use of complex experiences in real-world contexts. Authentic assessment allows students to demonstrate their understanding in ways that reinforce their language development (Perez, Holmes, Miller, & Fanning, 2012). This stage ensures that students' learning is recognized and celebrated in a meaningful way.

Teaching Strategies

To better understand students' backgrounds, teachers can use tools like the "Biography Card" and "Biography Bloom" (Herrera, Kavimandan, & Holmes, 2011). These strategies help teachers gather essential information about students' cultural, academic, and linguistic

backgrounds, providing a more complete view of their students. With this information, teachers can plan lessons that:

Foster authentic interactions between students and more capable peers. Encourage literacy and language development, drawing on students' first language and cultural knowledge. Create a classroom atmosphere that reduces anxiety and promotes engagement. By integrating these strategies with an understanding of TESOL and CREDE standards, teachers can better meet the needs of all students, helping them acquire high levels of language proficiency while maintaining a positive and engaging learning environment.



TESOL Standards

Those standards are categorized into five domains: Language, Culture, Instruction, Assessment, and Professionalism (TESOL, 2003). The domains are divided into individual standards, with a total of thirteen, which are also divided into three performance indicators: approaches standard, meets standards, and exceeds standard. Fig. 1 is a visual support to understand how the TESOL domains and standards are interconnected.

CREDE Standards

Those standards emerged to support education and diversity for effective pedagogy and learning. The CREDE standards “express the principles of effective pedagogy for all students [...] but for students at risk of educational failure, effective classroom implementation of the standards is vital” (CREDE, 1996). Students at risk include learners’ struggles due to cultural, language, racial, or economic factors. CREDE standards are divided into five categories: (a) joint productive activities, (b) language development, (c) contextualization, (d) challenging activities, and (e) instructional conversation.

Source: TESOL/NCATE Program Standards (2003). Teachers of English of Speakers of Others Languages (TESOL), Inc

Application

The research was conducted during one study term (two months) in two different educational institutions. It was applied to a group of five students in an ESL class at the Freshman Academic Success School in Junction City, Kansas. The students were from different countries (Puerto Rico, Pulao, and Mexico), and all of them had different cultural and academic backgrounds. The second group of students was an EFL class at Universidad Estatal de Milagro in Milagro, Ecuador. In this group, all students were Ecuadorian but from different cities (Milagro, El Triunfo, Naranjito, La Troncal). Both groups were assessed in two different periods, at the beginning and the end of the research. The assessment instances allow us to follow the process of language acquisition.

Research Method & Teaching Instruments

- Pre-Assessment Strategy
 - Inclusive lesson plan
 - Observation
-

- Interview Portfolio
- Tests

The application of BDI has allowed us to document valuable information about our students' biographies. This information has guided us to plan and accommodate our lessons, considering appropriate teaching tools and educational resources that give each student access to the same challenging curricula. BDI has also provided us with specific and effective strategies, which have helped our students to achieve language and content objectives through three essential instructional periods: activation, connection, and affirmation.

Application & Results

The following strategies were applied to different students in a middle school in The United States to demonstrate how education based on cultural issues and students' biographies supports students in developing a second language and understanding their learning dynamics.

Strategy: Biography-Card Strategy

Sample #1

Learning
preference for
group
configuration

Sociocultural Dimension

What I miss the most from my country is my family

What I like about US is Cold

On weekend, I normally Ver Anime

I really enjoy Anime and video games

I am (identity): different

My family is my father, mother, two brothers & sister

Academic Dimension

My previous school's name is: José Félix Galán

I think I am very good in (subject-areas): Science, Communication, Spanish, Mathematics

I experienced struggles with (subject-areas): Mathematics, Science

Cognitive Dimension

I enjoy activities, which involve:

 Reading

 Writing

 Visuals & Graphics

 Doing

 Listening & Music

I prefer to work:

☒ Individually

☐ Small groups

☒ Pairs

☐ Whole class

Linguistic Dimension

I consider my first language proficiency is:

	1	2	3	4	5
Listening					
Reading					
Speaking					
Writing					

I consider my English language proficiency is:

	1	2	3	4	5
Listening					
Reading					
Speaking					
Writing					

Name: Fernando

Grade: 9th

Age: 14

Country or origin: Brazil

Time in US: 3 months

Spanish
Sneaker

Pre-Production stage
of SLA

An adaptation of the biography card completed by a ninth grade student from Puerto Rico at Freshman Academic Success School in Junction City, Kansas

Sample #2

Spanish Speaker

Sociocultural Dimension

What I miss the most from my country is family

What I like about US is houses

On weekend, I normally hang out with friends

I really enjoy music and travelling

I am (identity): Hispanic/Latino

My family is funny/awesome/lovely

unique/big

> Live with parents

Academic Dimension

My previous school's name is: Marcelino Canino Canino

I think I am very good in (subject-areas): Health

I experienced struggles with (subject-areas): Math

Cognitive Dimension

I enjoy activities, which involve:


Reading


Writing


Visuals & Graphics


Doing


Listening & Music

I prefer to work:

☐ Individually ☒ Small groups ☐ Pairs ☐ Whole class

Linguistic Dimension

I consider my first language proficiency is:

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Listening: Good

Reading: Good

Speaking: Good

Writing: Good

I consider my English language proficiency is: Good

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Listening: Good

Reading: Good

Speaking: Good

Writing: Good

Good social skills / need to work on

Other: assess through writing

Speech Emerge stage of SLA

An adaptation of the biography card completed by a ninth grade student from Puerto Rico at Freshman Academic Success School in Junction City, Kansas

Sample #3

Student's Interests

Sociocultural Dimension

What I miss the most from my country is family here parents live in Palau

What I like about US is school

On weekend, I normally sleeping and watching TV

I really enjoy swimming and exercise

I am (identity): Palau

My family is My family is from Palau (live with the uncle, aunt)

Academic Dimension

My previous school's name is: George B. Harris

I think I am very good in (subject-areas): History

I experienced struggles with (subject-areas): Math

Cognitive Dimension

I enjoy activities, which involve:


Reading


Writing


Visuals & Graphics


Doing


Listening & Music

I prefer to work:

☐ Individually ☒ Small groups ☐ Pairs ☐ Whole class

Linguistic Dimension

I consider my first language proficiency is:

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Listening: Good

Reading: Good

Speaking: Good

Writing: Good

I consider my English language proficiency is: in L1

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Listening: Good

Reading: Good

Speaking: Good

Writing: Good

Good social & academic abilities

Good understanding / need to work on production

Insights from the individual interviews

An adaptation of the biography card completed by a ninth-grade student from Pulao as a Freshman, Academic Success School in Junction City, Kansas

Tesol Domain Achieves With This Strategy

“Domain 2: Culture

Candidates know, understand, and use the major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to the nature and role of culture and cultural groups to construct learning environments that support English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students’ cultural identities, language and literacy development, and content-area achievement [...]

Standard 2.a.: Cultural groups and identity. Candidates know, understand, and use knowledge of major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to the nature and role of culture in language development and academic achievement that support individual students’ learning” (TESOL, 2003, p.17).

Discussion

The biography card, a strategy proposed by Herrera, Kavimandan, and Holmes (2011), plays a crucial role in promoting culturally responsive teaching for English Language Learners (ELLs). Rooted in the prism model by Thomas and Collier (1997), it helps gather valuable information about students’ backgrounds, enabling the creation of low-risk, authentic learning environments that facilitate language acquisition. This strategy fosters communication between teachers and students, allowing for personalized instructional adjustments based on each student’s affective, social, and academic needs in both their first (L1) and second (L2) languages.

During our practicum internship, we implemented the biography card with ninth-grade students at Freshman Academic Success School, which provided us with useful insights to adapt our teaching. The strategy helped us account for students’ diverse academic and language

proficiency levels, learning preferences, and sociocultural identities. We designed a template for the biography card based on the prism model, incorporating prompts that explored the cognitive, linguistic, and sociocultural dimensions of each student. We also included visuals to better capture the students' language proficiency levels in both their native and second languages.

The biography card revealed important information that allowed us to reflect on the need for effective group configurations in the classroom. It helped us understand that all students, regardless of their language proficiency, benefit from strategies that incorporate visual and kinesthetic learning. Based on our analysis of the students' sociocultural dimensions and individual interviews, we noticed that one student was struggling to adapt to the new culture and educational system. This student, who had been in the United States for a shorter time, was showing signs of disengagement in class. To address this, we adjusted our lesson plans to involve this student in group configurations with peers from the same country, which helped him feel more comfortable and secure in his interactions.

These adaptations were aligned with key theories of language acquisition. Vygotsky's (1978) theory emphasizes that language is acquired through social interaction, particularly with more capable peers. By grouping students according to linguistic background, we created opportunities for language development through cooperative learning. The information gathered from the biography card also supported the use of hands-on activities, which proved beneficial for students who process information through visual and kinesthetic means.

Additionally, we incorporated the Iceberg Theory (Cummins, 1984), which suggests that students' proficiency in their first language supports second language acquisition. Allowing students to interact and express themselves in their L1 helped foster positive linguistic transfers between their languages, enhancing both their academic success and language proficiency. This approach encouraged the development of common underlying proficiency in both languages, ultimately facilitating more effective language learning for our ELL students.

CREDE Standards and Indicators

This strategy helped us to promote language development, and it supported us to accomplish the Contextualization Indicator from the CREDE Standard. “Making Meaning: Connecting school to student’s lives. Connect teaching and curriculum to students’ experiences and skills of home and community” (Herrera, 2014).

CREDE STANDARDS AND INDICATORS
CONTEXTUALIZATION
“The teacher: begins activities with what students already know from home, community, and school. Designs instructional activities that are meaningful to students in terms of local community norms and knowledge, acquires knowledge of local norms and knowledge by talking to students, parents or family members, community members, and by reading pertinent documents, assists students to connect and apply their learning to home and community. plans jointly with students to design community-based learning activities provides opportunities for parents or families to participate in classroom instructional activities. varies activities to include students’ preferences, from collective and cooperative to individual and competitive, varies styles of conversation and participation to include students’ cultural preferences, such as co-narration, call-and-response, and choral, among others.(CREDE, n.d.)”

This information has been retrieved from: <http://manoa.hawaii.edu/coe/credenational/the-crede-five-standards-for-effective-pedagogy-and-learning/>

Discussion

We consider that the biography-driven strategy is perfectly aligned with the contextualization standard of the biography-driven performance rubrics at an integrating level. This strategy provided us with pre-assessment instances to document valuable insights about our students' background knowledge to accommodate language instruction focused on specific contexts. This information helped us to create conditions that involve all students' biographies.

Moreover, it will become an essential part of our future instruction, considering the positive results it brings to instructional practice. It will become the communication means between our students and us as well as the starting point of our instruction with any new group of students. Also, we plan to use this strategy to promote parent involvement and as a record to document students' linguistic growth through the course.

Biography-Driven Lesson Plan

Sample # 1

**Preparation**

**Book:** Oxford Picture Dictionary for the Content Areas
TOPIC: Displaying and Comparing Data
Grade Level: 9th Course
Content Area: Math and Technology
Total # of Students: 5
PEPSI Ahh! Stages:

P: 1	I: 0
EP: 2	Ah: 0
S: 2	

Content Objectives (CO): Our mission will be to:

- ❖ Explore new terms relate to displaying and comparing data
- ❖ Understand the importance research, graph, and data in real-life tasks
- ❖ Examine different ways to use graph according to each students' reality

Language Objectives (LO): We will do this by:

- ✎ Individually, brainstorming ideas about their current knowledge relate to the key vocabulary by writing or drawing using the Magic Book strategy.
- 🗨 In small groups, discussing ideas to confirm understanding of the definition of each term and its importance in everyday tasks.
- ✎ Individually, matching pictures and definitions/importance of new terms using visuals, sticky notes, and Magic Book strategy.
- 🗨, 🗂, ✎ In pairs, orally discussing and jointing down ideas for using data analysis and graph in real-life task according to students reality.

Key Vocabulary (8 maximum):

- | | |
|--------------|----------------|
| ❖ Population | ❖ Bar graph |
| ❖ Sample | ❖ Circle graph |
| ❖ Mode | ❖ Tree diagram |
| ❖ Median | |
| ❖ Mean | |

Materials needed:

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------|
| • Course Book | • Markers, pencil, colors |
| • Construction Paper | • Glue and scissors |
| • Visuals/Pictures | • Sticky Notes |



Activation: A Canvas of Opportunity: Before the Lesson
(Informing Instruction)

Directions:

- Provide students the material and guide them through the process of constructing their magic book.
- Categorize students using color rubber band depending on their linguistic abilities and level of PEPSI Ahh!
- Ask students to make groups, considering that members should have different color rubber band.
- Present students the key vocabulary and ask them to individually write each term down on the eight central boxes of their Magic Book.
- Have students individually brainstorm ideas that they associate with the academic vocabulary, encourage them to use any visual representation, words, and their native language that facilitate them to express.
- Allow some time for students to discuss their ideas with their group, encourage them to use their L1 and to continue recording some more ideas on paper.
- Teacher works as a silent observer, while monitoring the activity and jointing down any relevant students' insights that may guide their future instruction.



Affirming: A Gallery of Understanding: After the Lesson
(Summative Assessment of Student Learning)

Directions:

- After students have confirmed/disconfirmed their original thoughts about the target vocabulary words, have them discuss their new insights about the words.
- Provide students an additional sticky note to orally discuss ideas about the application of the new term in everyday task, encourage students to relate them to their unique reality, interests, and preferences (Pop music, anime, exercise, TV shows)
- Ask one students' per group to share the most interesting ideas shared among their groups, emphasizing interests and preferences.
- Ask students to individually write down the definition and a realistic application of the concepts, encourage them to look for a relevant application according to their own reality.
- Teachers use the reverse side of the Magic book to provide feedback, encouraging students to self-assess their academic and linguistic growth and to keep their Magic Book for future use as a study tool.



***Connections: The Broad & Narrow Strokes of Learning:
During the Lesson*** (Formative Assessment)

Directions:

- Once all students have finished sharing their ideas with small group, continue with the lesson.
- Give students some visuals/pictures and sticky notes with the definition and importance of the key terms to match and glue them with the words on their magic book, encourage them to find support in their groups to understand the definitions on the side flags.
- As a whole class, invite students to share and compare their answers, while teacher confirm/disconfirm them through meaningful and comprehensible insights.
- Teacher provide students some example of realistic application of the new concepts, considering students' biographies and interests

Tesol domain achieved

“Domain 1: Language

Candidates know, understand, and use the major concepts, theories, and research related to the nature and acquisition of language to construct learning environments that support English Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) students’ language and literacy development and content-area achievement [...]

Standard 1.a.: Candidates demonstrate an understanding of language as a system and demonstrate a high level of competence in helping ESOL students acquire and use English in listening, speaking, reading, and writing for social and academic purposes (TESOL, 2003, p. 5)

Discussion

After analyzing the information from the biography card strategy and individual student interviews, we reflected on how this data could enhance our instruction to accommodate each student’s unique needs. We recognize that every student brings different experiences and strengths to the classroom (Herrera & Murry, 2014). Drawing from our academic and teaching experiences, we planned lessons that would support language acquisition and content learning by using cooperative learning strategies in a content-vocabulary math class at Freshman Success Academic School.

To address varying levels of language proficiency, we categorized students using color wristbands based on their linguistic information from the biography cards. This helped us group students effectively. For instance, student #1, who was in the pre-production stage of second language acquisition (SLA), was grouped with Spanish-speaking peers in the speech emergence stage. This arrangement allowed student #1 to receive language support and reduce anxiety associated with recent immigration and struggles in English communication.

The groupings also benefited students #2 and #3, who were tasked with providing comprehensible input to support student #1's language development. Additionally, we learned from the biography cards that all students preferred visual and hands-on activities. We incorporated these preferences into our lesson by using various resources, such as pictures, a magic book strategy, and sticky notes, to present new information.

We encouraged students to use their native language as a bridge for transferring social and academic language skills from L1 to L2. Throughout the lesson, students were encouraged to discuss and confirm their understanding in a cooperative setting. We also adapted the lesson to cater to students' interests, such as anime for student #1, pop music for student #2, and exercise for student #3. This approach helped increase motivation and engagement by connecting the lesson to their interests.

The lesson was grounded in key theories of language acquisition. Krashen's affective filter hypothesis helped us understand how to address negative affective factors, such as anxiety, that hindered student #1's language acquisition. By fostering social interaction and creating a comfortable learning environment, we supported unconscious language learning.

Additionally, we used Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978) to guide our groupings, ensuring that students interacted meaningfully with more capable peers to advance their language skills. The lesson was designed to consider both Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in L1, facilitating effective language transfers to L2 and enhancing academic knowledge.

Through this lesson, we aimed to connect students' prior knowledge to new concepts, fostering meaningful learning experiences that reflected their unique backgrounds (Herrera, BDI,

2010). Encouraging the use of their L1-supported cognitive processes, helping them accelerate their English proficiency, in line with Cummins' iceberg theory (1984).

CREDE Standards and Indicators

This lesson plan also helped us to promote language development and it supported us to effectively accomplish the CREDE standard: Challenging Activities. "Teaching Complex Thinking. Challenge students toward cognitive complexity" (Herrera, 2014).

CREDE STANDARDS AND INDICATORS
CHALLENGING ACTIVITIES
"The teacher: assures that students – for each instructional topic – see the whole picture as a basis for understanding the parts. Presents challenging standards for student performance. Designs instructional tasks that advance student understanding to more complex levels. Assists students to accomplish more complex understanding by building from their previous success. Gives clear, direct feedback about how student performance compares with the challenging standards. "The teacher: Arranges the classroom to accommodate conversation between the teacher and a small group of students on a regular and frequent basis. Has a clear academic goal that guides conversation with students. Ensures that student talk occurs at higher rates than teacher talk. Guides conversation to include students' views, judgments, and rationales using text evidence and other substantive support. Ensures that all students are included in the conversation according to their preferences. Listens carefully to assess levels of students' understanding.

Assists students' learning throughout the conversation by questioning, restating, praising, encouraging, etc.

Guides the students to prepare a product that indicates the Instructional Conversation's goal was achieved. (CREDE, n.d.)" (CREDE, n.d.)"

This information has been retrieved from: <http://manoa.hawaii.edu/coe/credenational/the-crede-five-standards-for-effective-pedagogy-and-learning/>

Discussion

We consider that this artifact is aligned with the Challenging Activities Standard of the biography-driven performance rubric at an integrated level. This lesson will be a strong guide for our future classes to accommodate our instruction, considering students' prior knowledge, to go from the known to the unknown. It clearly states content and language objectives co-dependently, which will support the acquisition of a language through content-area.

This lesson plan reflects an engaging and low-risk learning ecology that lowers students' affective filter through different challenges and cooperative learning strategies. Those strategies involve the application of a certain level of high-order thinking and integrated skills to enhance language while achieving national curriculum and course standards. Considering our teaching experiences and the insights gained throughout our master's program education, we believe that the application of the biography card strategy will give us valuable information to accommodate our planning and programming according to our specific group of students. It will be the starting point for planning responsive lessons in Ecuador.

Conclusion

Language acquisition goes far beyond memorizing words and grammar; it's a multifaceted process that thrives on social engagement, real-life exposure, and emotional readiness. Educational theorists like Vygotsky and Krashen emphasize how interaction, guidance, and a supportive environment contribute significantly to language learning success.

Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) underscores the importance of learning in a social context, where students benefit from engaging with more knowledgeable individuals who help them build language skills step-by-step. Krashen's Natural Order Hypothesis suggests that learners progress from understanding language to actively using it in speech and writing, and his Affective Filter Hypothesis argues that anxiety and low motivation can block language acquisition. Therefore, creating a relaxed, engaging environment is essential for reducing students' inhibitions and encouraging participation.

Cummins' Common Underlying Proficiency model supports using a learner's first language (L1) as a foundation for the second language (L2), helping learners draw from what they already know in their L1. Teachers can take advantage of this by promoting cross-language connections, allowing students to bridge familiar concepts to new ones, which improves both confidence and comprehension.

One practical approach that aligns with these theories is Biography-Driven Instruction (BDI) from Herrera and Murry. This culturally responsive method draws on students' backgrounds, making learning more relevant and accessible. Using tools like Biography Cards, teachers gather insights into students' cultural and linguistic experiences, which they then incorporate into lessons. BDI follows three stages: activation, where teachers tap into students' prior knowledge; connection, where meaningful engagement is fostered; and affirmation, where students' progress is acknowledged and celebrated.

Supporting these practices, TESOL and CREDE standards guide teachers in creating inclusive classrooms that prioritize diversity. TESOL standards cover language, culture, instruction, assessment, and professionalism, while CREDE focuses on collaborative and contextualized learning. By combining these standards with a biography-driven approach, teachers can create a rich, responsive environment that supports language development for students from all backgrounds.

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