Capstone ESL Portfolio

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Abstract

This portfolio aims to demonstrate my understanding of how to best serve English language learners (ELLs) in the United States. Reflecting upon the theoretical knowledge I learned at Peabody College and teaching experiences I gained in Nashville, I develop my own vision of good teaching of ELL students.

This portfolio consists of three parts: 1) philosophy of teaching, 2) TESOL standards for ESL/EFL teachers and 3) implications, challenges, and new directions. In the first part, I present my philosophy of teaching based on the overarching theory of Vygotsky's sociocultural view of learning. In the second part, I address the TESOL standard in the following eight domains: planning, instructing, assessing, identity and context, language proficiency, learning, content and commitment and professionalism. I demonstrate my understanding of each domain using one to three artifacts I created through my course work. In the last part, I illustrate my vision for future classrooms, identify challenges and problems I will be facing, and propose new directions and plans to meet the challenges.

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Philosophy of Teaching

My study experience at Peabody College and my teaching experience both in China and the U.S. have come together to shape my vision of a good teacher. While theorists, researchers, linguistics have built a theoretical base for my teaching repertoire, exchange of ideas, classroom observations and my teaching experiences have formed practical guidelines for my future teaching.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural View of Learning

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning stresses the critical role social interaction plays in the process of learning (Farr, 2014). This theory serves as an overarching theory for my teaching philosophy, which is defined by two major tenets: 1) learning is determined by social and historical contexts; 2) learning is achieved through interaction and scaffolding.

Learning is determined by social and historical contexts. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory claims that people's learning is determined by the their parents, peers, communities, and the culture at large. As sociocultural factors represent what culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students love, what makes them laugh and how they define themselves as individuals (Herrera, Pérez & Escamilla, 2010), teachers need to accommodate students' sociocultural needs to support their learning growth.

Leaning about students' sociocultural backgrounds. According to Herrera et al. (2010), teachers' understanding of the family's values, beliefs and goals provides them with better insight into the behaviors and learning patterns of CLD students, thus enhancing their instructional practice. I help my students progress by learning about the historical backgrounds of their families through visits to their households, conversations with their parents, or conducting classroom activities to learn about their family lives. According to Risko & Walker-

Dahlhouse (2012), if students' cultural identities are valued, they serve as resources for promoting their learning. Thus, I also validate my students' native cultures and languages: I allow native language use in class, arrange books of students' native languages and put up posters about my students' native culture around the classroom; I create a "culturally relevant curriculum" (Gay, 2010) by integrating their background and family funds of knowledge as a springboard for new knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992; L. Pray, personal communication, October 16, 2013).

    Building good relationships. Another important perspective in attending to students' sociocultural area is building good relationships. According to Risko & Walker-Dahlhouse (2012), "genuine caring" involves responding to students' needs (e.g., academic, social, emotional and language) and developing trusting relationships with others. When students know that the teacher cares for them, they feel safer and tend to better be able to use their time for learning (Wood, 1999). Therefore, teachers that develop good relationships with students can not only help with disciplinary actions, but can also contribute to students' academic success. In my classroom, I spend time getting to know my students and develop a caring and trusting relationship with them. According to Allen (2007), building a trusting relationship with parents can help students attain academic success. Thus, to gain parent support for students' learning, I also develop good relationships and mutual trust with their parents. For example, in my Chinese as a Foreign Language Kindergarten (CSLK) classroom, I talk to the parents during class break and after class, to answer their questions, know their expectations, and ask for their needs. More importantly, living up to our words can significantly promote the mutual trust. Once I have promised a parent something, I will try my best to do it.

Creating a safe environment. Since students are learning in a social environment, there are numerous affective variables that will affect students' learning. According to Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, anxiety can raise a learner's affective filter, thus hampering fluency in second language acquisition. In order to lower my students' anxiety, I create a welcoming environment in the classroom. My duty is to "show care" (M. Collins, personal communication, November 20, 2013) and let them know it is ok to make mistakes. I convey the message to my students that errors cannot be avoided, and that the fact that they make mistakes does not mean they are deficient; instead it shows they have knowledge (L. Rothermund, personal communication, November 20, 2013). I also let them know that mistakes help them learn, and that I will be available and helpful for them at any time.

Learning is achieved through interaction and scaffolding. According to Vygotsky (1978), social interaction plays an underlying role in cognitive development. People learn things first through interaction with others, and then the knowledge becomes internalized through the individuals. Another important aspect of Vygotsky's theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). He defines the ZPD as the distance between the "actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86, as cited in Galloway, 2001). If teachers provide scaffolding, learners will reach their potential and achieve higher academic levels. Therefore, student learning is achieved both through interaction and scaffolding.

Social constructivism and problem-posing" education. Prior to coming to the United States, I held the belief that teachers should be the only resource of knowledge and they feed students with what they know so that the students learn. However, my experience in the United

States proved the naivety of my previous belief. In graduate school classes, the teacher allotted a large portion of class time to student discussion and questions; the teachers welcomed students' questions and queries, and tried to work on solving the problems together with the whole class. Besides my experience at Peabody, I noticed that some teachers frequently asked for peer talk in terms of pair work and group work in class during my field observation.

This way of building knowledge that I experienced is validated by Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism and Freire's (2000) "problem-posing" education, both of which emphasize thinking and searching for knowledge through dialogue and interaction, as well as teachers' and students' joint responsibility for the learning process. In this case, teachers are no longer the only source of knowledge, and students are not the only ones who are receiving knowledge—teachers are also learners. Teachers and students construct knowledge together. As Wood (1999) mentioned, "academic productivity requires social productivity;" in other words, students make learning progress through interaction with others. To achieve academic productivity in my classroom, I become a "guide on the side", instead of a "sage on the stage." I promote a student-centered classroom where everyone works together as a learning community. I give my students ample opportunities to construct knowledge by themselves while scaffolding them during the learning process. For example, I ask my students to work in pairs, or small/large groups during one class; when students are working, I circulate around the classroom to check in with each group and ask them questions to guide them towards the answer. In this way, I promote student-student dialogue as well as teacher-student talk. I also encourage my students to challenge what they are learning and "think outside the box" to promote their higher-order thinking skills. Instead of talking all the time as an authoritative teacher, I believe student-centered teaching can bring about greater learning outcomes.

Scaffolding through the GRR Model. According to Vygotsky, a student at the ZPD can accomplish a task that he might not be able to achieve by himself with the scaffolding of a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO); the scaffolding can be gradually removed when the student gains the competence to do the task on his own (Galloway, 2001). In a language classroom, the MKO frequently refers to a proficient interlocutor or a more proficient peer. Thus, I employ the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) Model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983)—"I do it" "We do it" "You do it together" "You do it alone". In the beginning of doing a task, I model how to do it, and then I have my students do it with me before I assign them into groups; finally the students do the task alone. In this model, students get the scaffolding from a proficient interlocutor (me) as well as from more proficient peers (classmates) and finally become able to do the task alone, thus acquiring a new skill. I always believe my students can do more than they think, so I never water down my curriculum. I assign tasks that contain "high-status" knowledge to my students and use teaching material that promotes higher-level thinking (L. Pray, personal communication, October 16, 2013). When they encounter difficulties, I will employ the GRR model to guide them through the process step by step.

Providing differentiated instruction. Since every student has his or her particular traits and interests, teachers should tailor their instruction to students' different learning traits to meet their needs (Smith & Throne, 2009). The Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols* also stated that "same does not imply equal" (de Jong, 2011), which means the same instruction does not lead to equity; instruction should vary, and accommodations should be made. Under the prerequisite of never watering down the curriculum, I adjust the curriculum or my teaching methods according to my students' traits and needs. One way of differentiated instruction, for example, can be grouping students according to their pre-assessment results and allotting different activities and

tasks to the groups and then rotating (Pendergrass, 2014). I also monitor how it works while implementing differentiated instruction, and make necessary revision to improve my instruction.

Making use of multimedia. Through my entire literacy education, I was immersed in traditional printed text. However, as the media plays an increasingly powerful role in the lives of young people (Carnegie Council, 1995), there is an urgent need to integrate technology and multimedia into reading instruction. On the one hand, compared to traditional printed texts, multimedia texts such as photos, songs and videos can better motivate students' interest in learning; on the other hand, teaching students through multimedia texts can equip them with the knowledge they needed to comprehend the real world.

In my Reading and Learning with Print and New Media class, Dr. Pendergrass shared with us how we can make use of multimedia to enrich our instruction and to benefit students. She showed us examples of teachers using music and videos to teach printed articles and poems; she also told us about students using Twitter to express their thoughts about a book they have read. These examples of teaching broadened my vision of teaching literacy. I think students will find such instruction more fun and become more engaged, and can learn better than by reading a traditional printed text. In designing my lesson plan The Great Chicago Fire, I integrated printed texts as well as media texts including pictures, songs and a video; I also provided opportunities for students to create their own online project—a Glogster; For my CSLK class, I use a variety of multimedia (pictures, drawings, songs, videos, Quizlet etc.) for my kids to learn and review what they learn in the class.

Conclusion

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, along with theories and research from other researchers and scholars, serves as a foundation of my view of teaching ELL students. As I follow my path in teaching ELLs, I will keep on learning new things and adding to my theoretical repertoire.

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TESOL Standards

Domain: Planning

Standard 1: Teachers plan instruction to promote learning and meet learner goals, and modify plans to assure learner engagement and achievement.

Lesson planning is a process every teacher will go through. It is particularly essential for novice teachers who have just started the teaching path. Planning a lesson can help teachers align their instruction with state standards, thus making learning more purposeful. Planning also gives teachers time to take into account different learner traits and think of possibilities to differentiate instruction, thus better engaging students and helping them reach the optimal learning outcome.

The artifact I chose to use for this domain is a 3-Genre Lesson Plan called The Great Chicago Fire (see Artifact A) I designed last spring for the course entitled Reading and Learning with Print and New Media. This lesson plan covers a mini-unit for a 6th grade English Language Arts class. A notable feature of this lesson plan is that it contains multiple genres of text and incorporates various types of new media that will engage students and make learning more fun.

Teachers should plan their instruction for several compelling reasons. First, lesson planning serves as a great tool for teachers to align instruction with state or district standards, pinpointing the content objectives and language objectives in correspondence with standards. For example, in my lesson plan, I used Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for 6th grade English Language Arts & Literacy as my guideline. I then developed the content objectives and language objectives based on the CCSS. When the **curriculum** is strongly tied with standards, **learning** becomes more purposeful and students' achievement can be more clearly observed.

Second, through lesson planning, teachers can better address **learners**' interests and needs, making the classroom more engaging. While doing lesson planning, teachers take into

account **learners**' interests and **learner** traits that they collected information about during previous lessons, and design class activities to engage all **learners**. Children in this generation are surrounded by multimedia everyday, and I learned from my professors that teachers can take advantage of multimedia to promote student **learning**. Thus, while doing the lesson planning for The Great Chicago Fire, I incorporate several types of multimedia to keep my students engaged in **learning**. For example, in The Great Chicago Fire lesson plan, students listen to songs about the Great Chicago Fire, analyze pictures, and create a Glogster using a collection/collage of pictures, video clips, captions, and written pieces. Compared to the traditional way of teaching students language arts only by texts, instruction incorporated with multimedia creates a more engaging **learning environment**.

Planning instruction gives teachers a clear picture of what part of the lesson can serve as **assessment**. Authentic **assessment** is thus integrated into instruction. In my lesson plan, there are several activities that can work as **assessments**. In Exit Card Reflection, I ask students to write about something they learned in the first lesson about the Great Chicago Fire and their predictions for the story. Through this activity, I **assess** my students' vocabulary and writing ability of language functions, for example, retelling past events and making predictions. The result of this **assessment** can further inform my instruction, helping me modify my future plans to accommodate the different needs of my students.

For novice teachers like me, lesson planning is of particular significance. There are many situations where novice teachers, due to lack of experience, do not know how to act. Lesson planning ahead of time can help novice teachers predict possible variables and think of ways to tackle them. Teaching is a responsibility, and lesson planning plays a critical role in that responsibility, both for students and teachers.

Domain: Instructing

Standard 2: Teachers create supportive environments that engage all learners in purposeful learning and promote respectful classroom interactions.

Students learn within a sociocultural context. When students' sociocultural needs are taken care of, they make huge progress in learning. Therefore, teachers should make the classroom a welcoming and supportive environment. In the classroom, ELLs' identities are affirmed, and their funds of knowledge are valued; teachers scaffold learning and provide help whenever needed. While taking care of learners' needs, teachers are also responsible to promote students' higher-order thinking to engage students in purposeful learning. To help my learners achieve purposeful learning, I adopt the Gradual Release of Responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) where I guide my learners through "Focus Lesson (I do it)" "Guided Instruction (We do it)" "Collaborative (You do it together)" and "Independent (You do it alone)". I will illustrate my strategies to engage learners in purposeful learning and facilitate group work below.

In my lesson plan (see Artifact B), I selected the text The Arrival by Shaun Tan and designed a variety of activities based on this graphic novel in a 6th grade ESL classroom. This novel talks about the experience of an immigrant—what he sees and how he feels when moving into a new country. Since all the students in the class are from immigrant families and have culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, they are able to make connections to the novel with their own experiences; meanwhile, the ELLs' identities and experiences are validated. Thus, a welcoming environment is built.

First, I have the students watch a video clip, which provides the first few pages of the book with background music. Multimedia is a good way to engage **learners** in the beginning of the class. After showing the video clip, I explain to the students that our goal for this lesson is to

look into the experience of immigrants. By setting the goal of the lesson, students know that they are **learning** for specific purposes. Following the video, I open the book, show several pages to the students, and ask them what they notice about the book and how this book is different from other books they have read. After the students expressed their opinion, I explained to them that The Arrival is a novel with only pictures and that they can use their prior knowledge and experiences to interpret the book. In the following activities, I model how to Think Aloud and how to read a poem, and circulate the classroom to check in with group work. By asking students questions, I start to get them thinking, which is an essential part of their **learning**; by explaining and modeling during the first activities, I provide scaffolding and build a supportive **learning environment**.

In the lesson plan, I developed content objectives and language objectives based on the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy. I teach under the framework of the **curriculum**, and in the meantime designed activities to best meet my students' **learning** goals. My students are all ELLs, so I selected texts and designed activities to activate their funds of knowledge and provided scaffolding to help them develop the skills they need to learn. I think while teachers should use the **curriculum** as a general guideline, they need to individualize the lessons to best accommodate students' **learning** needs and achieve their **learning** goals.

In this lesson, many activities and assignments can serve as authentic **assessments**. For example, when students are doing group discussion, I can record their discussion and analyze each student's oral language skills; through the stories students write about themselves, I can **assess** their stages of written language.

Domain: Assessing

Standard 3: Teachers recognize the importance of and are able to gather and interpret information about learning and performance to promote the continuous intellectual and linguistic development of each other. Teachers use knowledge of student performance to make decisions about planning and instruction "on the spot" and for the future. Teachers involve learners in determining what will be assessed and provide constructive feedback to learners, based on assessments of their learning.

Assessment is an indispensible part in teaching and learning. Without assessment, teachers will never know whether or how well the students have mastered the knowledge they are supposed to learn. By assessment I mean not only the summative assessment at the end of the semester, but also the authentic, informal, and ongoing assessment throughout the whole semester in the classroom. Informal assessment has several advantages over the standardized testing: it can take place at anytime in the classroom and through observation, students' written journals and their oral performance on completing tasks; it is more authentic and contains multiple valid indicators, thus giving teachers a holistic picture of how students are processing; it is also conducted in a low-anxiety learning environment where students can demonstrate their true ability and proficiency. Both standardized assessments and informal assessments are informative to teachers' instruction. They are only effective for improving student learning if followed by constructive feedback and effective instructional responses such as reviewing and re-teaching.

The artifact I chose for this domain is the Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM) (see Artifact C). On January 29th all students in the 2013 ELL program conducted a group assessment on the incoming students at the English Language Center (ELC) at Vanderbilt

University. I, together with three colleagues, assessed three ELC students on their oral English

language proficiency. Two students (Yuki and Sakura) are from Japan and the other (Neely) is

from Nepal. The assessment started with a self-introduction of each member, followed by a

group activity of planning a trip to the museum in Nashville, and ended up with a Q&A session.

The whole assessment was in an informal environment and each group had a native English

speaking facilitator for the conversation. After the learners left, our group had a discussion of the

scores in each domain on the SOLOM and our thoughts about this group assessment.

By observing Yuki, Sakura and Neely's oral English performance using the SOLOM, I

obtained a general picture of the oral proficiency of the three **learners** in terms of

comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. By comparing and discussing

the scores we had for the three **learners** domain by domain, we came to a consensus of the

learners' oral proficiency and were able to provide more concise results. These results are

informative for the students' **learning** because they show which part the students will

specifically need to work on to improve their oral English. And the ELC will provide them with

differentiated **learning** opportunities based on the **assessment** results.

Through conducting the SOLOM, I also realized the importance of a safe and welcoming

learning environment. During our observation, the facilitator was smiling at the **learners** all the

time and prompted the conversations very naturally as if they were not in an **assessment**

environment. The facilitator also made many connections to the students' personal life

experiences so that they had a lot to share with the whole group. In this **learning environment**,

the **learners** were able to demonstrate their real oral proficiency because their affective filters

were kept low. This informed me that in my future **assessment**, whether it is informal or

summative, I should strive to create a non-threatening and facilitating **learning environment** to

lower my students' anxiety, thus enabling them to demonstrate their real proficiency. Only in this

way can I get more accurate information about my students' **learning** process and make

instructional adaptations based on students' needs.

Most of the time in an ELL classroom, teachers are required to teach under a certain

curriculum. While teachers should teach the **curriculum**, it is also their duty to adapt the

curriculum and differentiate instruction based on the different **assessment** results of the

students. For example, both Neely and Sakura scored relatively low on pronunciation while Yuki

scored average on all domains. In this case, while the teacher is implementing the same

curriculum for these three **learners**, he may focus more on improving Neely's and Sakura's

pronunciation than on Yuki's. The teacher can do this by providing a variety of feedback on their

pronunciation, or assigning them some extra exercises on pronunciation for them to practice if

they are highly motivated.

Domain: Identity and Context

Standard 4: Teachers understand the importance of who learners are and how their communities, heritages and goals shape learning and expectations of learning. Teachers recognize the importance how context contributes to identity formation and therefore influences learning. Teachers use this knowledge of identity and settings in planning, instructing, and assessing.

According to Herrera, Perez & Escamilla (2010), there are four dimensions that play a critical role in the school success of students learning English: the linguistic dimension, the academic dimension, the sociocultural dimension and the cognitive dimension. The sociocultural dimension represents what CLD students love, what makes them laugh and how they define themselves as individuals (Herrera et al., 2010). The sociocultural context—learners' households, heritages, communities and school environments—shapes the learners' identity and learning, affecting their learning outcomes. Only if the sociocultural factors affecting English language learners are taken into consideration and their identities are affirmed will the students be motivated to make use of their knowledge in the linguistic, academic and cognitive dimensions and develop their English literacy. Thus, I see the sociocultural dimension as the foundation for the other three dimensions of English language learners' biography.

I selected two projects for this domain. The first one is the Community Literacies project (see Artifact D). For this project, I studied demographic information about the Hispanic community in Nashville and went on a Community Literacy fieldtrip to Nolensville Pike, where I gathered community literacy artifacts from the Latino community and conducted an interview with a Cuban immigrant who is the owner of a computer repair store. After returning from the

trip, I analyzed the artifacts and the interview, and discussed methods on how ELL teachers can build community literacies into the classroom.

The second project is the Interview and Experience Paper (see Artifact E). During one of my field trips, I visited Tusculum Elementary School, which serves 649 students speaking more than 25 languages. At Tusculum, my cohort and I conducted an interview with the school principals and key players; I also observed a 4th grader class integrated with native English speakers and English language **learners**. Finally, I analyzed the data and reflected on the visit.

Through conducting the Community Literacy project, I realized the importance of incorporating **learners**' cultural backgrounds and their community literacies into the classroom to promote their **learning**. Many Hispanic **learners** live in high linguistic and cultural isolation: they live in the Hispanic community and their parents speak only Spanish at home because neither of them can speak English well; however, these **learners** go to U.S. schools where English is the only language of instruction, and they receive education of U.S. mainstream cultures, which are very unfamiliar to them because they are different from their own community culture. The cultural and linguistic isolation hinders their motivation and causes frustrations, which result in poor **learning** outcomes. Therefore, to keep my **learners** motivated and make them feel valued, I will incorporate their community cultures and family fund of knowledge (Moll, Amanti & Gonzalez, 1992) into my instruction. For example, I will make my **learners** do translation activities based on the community literacy artifacts I collected, or dividing my **learners** into groups based on their family occupation and specialization. By doing these activities, I am making connections to my **learners**' backgrounds and their family knowledge, so they will feel more motivated and become active participants in their **learning**.

As schools and classrooms serve as an important social context for students' **learning**, it is essential to make them an optimal **learning environment**. To affirm students' identities, the school can show the welcoming and affirming signal through its signs, posters, as will as the languages it uses. Tusculum Elementary sets a good example. At the gate, there is a bilingual sign saying "Thanks for getting your child to school on time"; in the hallway and classroom, I saw various kinds of visual displays such as the world map and posters of kids with different skin colors. These all create a **learning environment** where students' identities and diversity are affirmed. In such a **learning environment**, students feel valued by the school and teachers and feel more motivated to learn.

To validate my students' identities and the valuable knowledge they bring to the classroom, I will adapt the **curriculum** to a "culturally relevant" one by integrating my students' background and family funds of knowledge as a springboard for new knowledge (Nieto & Bode, 2008; Risko & Walker-Dahlhouse, 2012). While making sure my students learn the same skills as required by the **curriculum**, I will select topics that are relevant to my students' cultural identities and backgrounds; I will also use multilingual texts to promote their skills both in L1 and L2. In occasions where teachers have minimal freedom to adapt the topic, I will create links between my students' background knowledge and the topic we are **learning**.

The knowledge of identity I gained by interviewing my students' community members and observing the community they live in makes it necessary to adapt my **assessment**. Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds face a double-challenge in language and culture presented in **assessments**, especially in standardized tests. Many **assessments** are designed for the mainstream students and do not take into consideration English language **learners**. Thus, for English language **learners**, such **assessments** contain many cultural concepts

and items they never experienced in their own culture. Also, since most of the **assessments** are

only in English, there is a great likelihood that the test-takers fail because they know the concept

in their native language, but not in English. Therefore, to make sure the **assessments** I give to my

students truly reflect their abilities, I will make accommodations on the **assessments** for my

students by, for example, examining the test items to avoid cultural biases, allowing my students

to use bilingual dictionaries, and extending the administration time.

Domain: Language Proficiency

Standard 5: Teachers demonstrate proficiency in social, business/workplace and academic English. Proficiency in speaking, listening, reading and writing means that a teacher is functionally equivalent to a native speaker with some higher education.

I grew up as a native Chinese speaker. I started to learn English at the age of 10. I have been learning or being exposed to English in a variety of settings: school, language institutes, exchange programs, traveling, and study abroad. All the experiences contributed to me becoming highly proficient in speaking, listening, reading and writing. A total TOEFL score of 109 demonstrated my language ability in these four domains. In addition to my advanced English proficiency, I have other unique talents: through interests and efforts, I became a fluent speaker of German and possess basic knowledge of Spanish. By comparing and contrasting these languages, I developed my multilingual skills and linguistic and metalinguistic awareness; as a second language learner of English myself, I am very familiar with the second language acquisition (SLA) process, and am therefore sensitive to the needs of English language learners.

During the two-year study at Vanderbilt University, I made audio recordings in many occasions such as taking about movies, conducting interviews and discussing the topic of one of my theses. Artifact F is an example that demonstrates my aural and oral proficiency in social English. Since I am a second-year graduate student at Vanderbilt University, I have read a massive amount of academic papers in different educational fields, and have written dozens of academic papers, essays and case studies. These works, including this portfolio, demonstrate my high proficiency in academic reading and writing.

It is important for ELL teachers to have high English language proficiency. English language **learners** listen to teachers talk in class every day: teachers give instructions, do

modeling, and provide help in class all the time, creating an important **learning environment** where **learners** interact with the English language. To build a stimulating **learning environment** for the **learners**, teachers have to possess native-like proficiency because they serve as role models in the classroom. If teachers themselves do not have native-like proficiency, it is very likely to have a negative impact on the **learners**, making it difficult for them to acquire native-like English.

Teachers with native-like English proficiency also have the ability to extract and address critical Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1979) from the **curriculum** that students need to acquire. They are proficient about when and where to use which vocabulary, enabling students to use proper English in different occasions.

In addition, teachers who have high proficiency in English can better **assess** students. On the SOLOM form, it is stated in the directions that "The SOLOM should only be administered by persons who themselves score at level "4" or above in all categories in the language being **assessed**" (SOLOM). Teachers with high proficiency in English, when **assessing** students, can provide more accurate information about **learners**' current stage in English language development, as well as **learners**' language skills such as fluency, use of language functions and patterns and structures.

Domain: Learning

Standard 6: Teachers draw on their knowledge of language and adult language learning to understand the processes by which learners acquire a new language in and out of classroom settings. They use this knowledge to support adult language learning.

In order to teach language well, English language teachers must equip themselves with adequate knowledge in linguistics and second language acquisition (SLA). Understanding the system of language, the differences between how people learn their first and second language, as well as the differences between child and adult second language learning is essential for teachers to support learners' language leaning and maximize their learning outcomes in the English language classroom.

The artifact I chose for this domain is the Case Study of a Non-Native English Speaker (see Artifact G), a project I did for my Educational Linguistics and SLA class in the first semester. The **learner** I observed and analyzed is a Chinese graduate student at Vanderbilt University. In the project, I described my **learner**'s **learner** characteristics as well as her oral and written language abilities, **assessed** her current stage of SLA, discussed the theoretical perspectives that appeared to affect her SLA, and designed a specific instructional plan to best meet her needs and characteristics.

In the case study, I discussed my **learner**'s SLA in the linguistic, behaviorist, cognitive and sociocultural perspectives. The cognitive perspective and the sociocultural approaches seemed to be two main factors that influenced my **learner**'s English language **learning** overtime. The cognitive "information-processing" (DeKeyser, 1998, 2001, 2007) model in my **learner**'s English **learning** is evident: she was given by her instructor declarative grammar knowledge, after which she practiced the grammar rules through both oral and written exercises.

Eventually, her grammar knowledge became automatized through ample authentic practice in the

United States. In the sociocultural perspective, my **learner** improved her writing and speaking

skills by interacting with her professors, English instructors, classmates and roommates. Thus,

my **learner**'s English **learning** is "cognitive activity and it is social activity" (Swain, 2000).

Having the theoretical framework of my **learners**' second language **learning** in mind, I

can provide a **learning environment** that best supports their **learning**. For example, for my

learner in the case study, I will create a **learning environment** that best accommodates her

cognitive **learning** and interaction with others. I will give her ample opportunities to use the

language with her peers and with me, and provide authentic situations where she can practice

speaking and writing in English for real life.

The understanding of the **learner** characteristics and the theoretical frameworks that

affect my **learner**'s second language **learning** laid a strong foundation for designing an

instructional plan most suitable for my **learner**. Considering my **learner**'s goal to become a

fluent speaker and better writer and the cognitive and sociocultural factors influencing her

learning, I designed a content-based communicative English speaking and writing class for her.

I will tailor the **curriculum** and incorporate more authentic speaking and writing tasks with a

focus on meaning for my **learner**; I will also include more social interactions in forms of group

work and student-centered **learning** in the **curriculum**, improving her oral and written English

through negotiating meanings with her peers and me.

Based on my **learner**'s **learning** goals to improve her communicative skills, most

assessment for her will be an ongoing and integral part of my instruction. It will be informal,

communicative and authentic. I will **assess** my **learner** by observing and monitoring her

performance in classroom discussions, interviews, authentic speaking and writing assignments.

By reflecting on the results of the **assessments**, I will adapt my instruction to better meet her

needs and regularly provide her with feedback on how to better improve her **learning**.

Domain: Content

Standard 7: Teachers understand that language learning is most likely to occur when learners are trying to use the language for genuine communicative purposes. Teachers understand that the content of the language courser is the language that learners need in order to listen, to talk about, to read and write about a subject matter or content area. Teachers design their lessons to help learners acquire the language they need to successfully communicate in the subject or content areas they want/need to learn about.

The primary function of language is communication (Brandl, 2007). We use language to order food, make friends, and tell people an interesting event that happened in the past; we also use language for academic purposes. We use language to communicate with other people and learn knowledge in specific content areas. Thus, language learning should be in authentic situations and serve content-area learning purposes. For English language learners who have an urgent need to communicate and learn about content areas, a content-based communicative classroom will be an optimal learning environment. Furthermore, students show most motivation to learn if the content topic is relevant to their daily lives and their needs. Thus, in choosing content topics, teachers have the responsibility to select topics with which students can make connections to their own lives.

The artifact I chose for this domain is a lesson plan entitled Booking a Hotel Room (see Artifact H) for the Adult ESL class I am currently teaching at Belmont Church. I chose this topic because I think it is very useful for my learners. Since they are all adults and come from all around the world all the way to the United States, I believe they have all had some experiences traveling to other places; and whenever they travel, they need to find accommodation. The lesson plan has both content objectives and language objectives. In the lesson, students will mainly

learn key vocabulary related hotel booking, how to select a hotel of their needs, and how to make hotel reservations and confirmations on the phone.

This lesson overall provides an authentic **learning environment** for my **learners**, since it is tightly related to their real life experiences. To engage my **learners**, I start the lesson by activating their prior knowledge by asking them questions about their own traveling experiences. I then made connections to their **learning** by linking the skills they will learn in this lesson to their upcoming spring break. I also designed various content-based activities such as reading information on an authentic hotel-booking website, listening to dialogues of making a hotel reservation, a debate about which hotel to choose, and a game called *I'm Looking for a Hotel* where my **learners** talk with "receptionists" to find hotels that best meet their needs. All the authentic activities engage **learners** in **learning** for real-life purposes. They help **learners** acquire communicative skills that will be useful in their lives in reading, writing, listening and speaking.

The Adult English classes at Belmont do not have to follow a specific **curriculum**. This gives teachers much freedom to design their own **curriculum** over the semester. My mentor (the main teacher) and I (the associate teacher), sharing the same belief that our students have adequate grammar skills, but need more chances to speak English through authentic use, strive to build a **learning environment** for our students where they have ample opportunities to listen and talk to each other, exchange information, and use English for communicative purposes. We design a content-rich **curriculum** that incorporates reading, writing, listening and speaking. The Booking a Hotel Room lesson plan fits in well in the **curriculum**, improving students' communicative skills in the content areas they want to learn about.

In the lesson plan, there are multiple **assessments** presented. Most of the **assessments** are observational and integrated in instruction. For example, I can **assess** students through their fluency in the dialogues about hotel booking, their answers to the questions asked about the tasks, and their ability to find the right hotel demonstrated in the game. These informal **assessments** provide me with adequate information about students' understanding of the topic and their oral proficiency in the content area. Based on the **assessment** information, I can tailor my instruction to meet different needs of the **learners** in the following classes.

Domain: Commitment and Professionalism

Standard 8: Teachers continue to grow in their understanding of the relationship of second language teaching and learning to the community of English language teaching professionals, the broader teaching community, and communities at large, and use these understandings to inform and change themselves and these communities.

Teachers are also learners. I see myself as a life-long learner constantly learning from professional development, from my peers and from my students. According to Grossman's (1990) "Model of Teacher Knowledge", teacher knowledge consists of four parts: subject matter knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and knowledge of contexts. Tailoring this "Model of Teacher Knowledge" to my case in becoming a good English language teacher, I continuously strive to improve my English language proficiency and develop my general pedagogical knowledge such as learners and learning and curriculum and instruction; I make every effort to learn how to best teach English as a second or foreign language in and outside my classroom, and learn about my learners' sociocultural context including the community, the school and the district.

For this domain I chose three artifacts, all demonstrating my continuous commitment to become more professional through learning from my classes at Peabody College, from other teaching professionals, and from the broader teaching community in Tennessee.

The first artifact is my reflection on the Tennessee Foreign Language Teaching Association (TFLTA) conference (see Artifact I). I attended the TFLTA conference in the fall of 2014 where I attended three sessions. I learned some new ideas from other language teachers from Tennessee while also providing critical comments on the sessions I attended.

The second artifact is a synthesis paper I wrote for my class Analysis of Teaching (see Artifact J). In this paper, I discussed the three biggest take-aways in the class through peer discussion as well as the Observation and Interview Analysis Project embedded in the class. They form my vision of a good teacher.

The last artifact for this domain is three observational reports in three foreign language classes of German, Spanish and Chinese (see Artifact K)— all at different levels. In these reports, I observed teachers and students, evaluated the lesson and critically commented on teachers' teaching. These reports inform my own second or foreign language teaching in the classroom.

I strive to enrich my knowledge of **learners** and **learning**. In the synthesis paper, I discussed the importance of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) and "problem-posing" education (Freire, 2000). **Learners** will achieve maximal **learning** through social interaction and problem solving with their peers and teachers in the classroom. In the paper, Ms. Porter's class set a good example of effective **learning**: she frequently asked for peer talk to solve problems, and constantly circulated around the classroom to provide scaffolding. In her classroom, Ms. Porter was fostering both student-student talk and teacher-student talk. This **learning** through social interaction worked out pretty well because the **learners** were engaged all the time and had a sense of accomplishment when they solved the problems. Emphasizing dialogues and interaction to build knowledge in the **learning** process is one of my biggest take-aways from the observation and is a guideline I will abide by in my own classroom.

Learning how to build an engaging and supportive **learning environment** is another thing I have been working hard on. From the TFLTA conference, I learned that teachers can use a variety of multimedia resources such as videos and music to create an engaging environment in

the language classroom; from the observational reports, I learned that teachers can build a supportive environment that can maximize student **learning** through the integration of listening, speaking, reading and writing, a rich variety of activities and personalization of materials to make them relevant to students' lives. Through **learning** from teachers at different school sites and the broader teaching community in Tennessee, I keep improving my own ability to build a supportive **learning environment** for my students.

What I learned from the TFLTA conference and the observation of other teachers also informs me how to adapt my **curriculum** to align it with my **learners**' experiences and their needs. In my classroom, I will incorporate the use of multimedia into my **curriculum** to enrich my students' **learning**; based on the **curriculum**, I will also design a variety of activities that integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing to develop my students' overall English proficiency.

On the TFLTA conference, I noticed that there were sessions about language **assessment** on second/foreign language **learners**. However, due to scheduling reasons, I was not able to attend those sessions. In my future career development, I will continue attending professional conferences in the field of second/foreign language teaching, and gain new knowledge of **assessment** from other professionals in my field. I believe through **learning** with my peers and the broader teaching community, I will always keep my knowledge of **assessment** updated and make the best use of it to promote student growth.

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Implications, Challenges, and New Directions

My vision for future classroom

My two-year study experience at Peabody College, along with my interaction with the broader teaching community in Nashville, Tennessee through my practicum, part-time job and volunteering experiences, shaped my perception and understanding of being a good teacher. As I continue to build my teaching repertoire through various learning opportunities, I look forward to my future career and have a vision of my ideal future classroom. Below, I will talk about what my ideal classroom will look like in terms of learning environment, students and myself as the classroom teacher.

My classroom is a welcoming, supportive and student-centered learning environment. In the classroom, visuals that affirm students' identities are posted around the wall. These visuals include world maps, pictures of student's home countries, and students' own drawings. Students are allowed to use their native language to communicate with their peers and share their family stories with the whole class on a weekly basis. Building a welcoming environment is essential because it takes care of students' sociocultural factors, which I believe is the most important dimension responsible for students' school success. During class, student's affective filters are kept low because they have good rapport with me and see themselves learning by making mistakes. The classroom is also student-centered with minimal teacher talk where students are doing most of the work, learning collaboratively to construct knowledge.

My students enjoy the learning process and value every learning opportunity I give them. They love reading and speaking out their opinions confidently. They always challenge me with higher-order questions about the text we read. To solve the problems, everyone is engaged and there is lots of information exchange going on. In the learning process, my students also have

ample opportunities to use learning strategies such as critical thinking, using graphic organizers and self-monitoring to make their learning more effective (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2010).

As the classroom teacher, I show "genuine caring"(Risko & Walker-Dahlhouse, 2012) to my students, responding to their academic, social, emotional and language needs and develop mutual trust with them. In learning, I have clear language and content objectives and will make clear to them what they should be able to do after each lesson. In learning new content, I activate their schema by making connections to their experiences; when they lack the schema to the topic they are learning, I will build background knowledge through introductory activities. During the lesson, I will use effective scaffolding techniques to help them comprehend the materials. I monitor each student's learning by using observational protocols and on-going, formative assessments and differentiate my instruction based on my students' needs.

Challenges I will encounter in my future teaching

Teaching is not easy. During my practices, I came across problems and difficulties when applying theory to practice. Thus, while visualizing the ideal classroom in my future teaching, I also see numerous challenges that I will be facing with my teaching, students and parents, the school, and even broader discourses.

Prior to studying at Peabody College, I had been learning in teacher-centered classrooms for 16 years. I sat with another 50-60 students in one classroom, with the teacher lecturing most of the time on the podium. Chances were slim for peer interaction or student-teacher interaction—the teacher was the only source of knowledge. With teacher-centered instruction so deeply rooted in my education, I developed a belief that teachers should be the only source of knowledge and lecturing was the only way to deliver a lesson. According to Pajares (1992), teachers' educational beliefs are well established before students go to college; the beliefs are

formed early and difficult to alter with aging. Even though I learned in multiple classes at

Vanderbilt University about student-centered instruction and how it benefits students, I still tend

to go back to teacher-centered instruction and talk more than my students do. This tendency

happens both in my lesson planning and actual instruction. Thus, I predict the tendency of

referring back to teacher-centered instruction and balancing teacher talk and student talk as a

challenge for me in my future instruction.

Another challenge I foresee in my future classroom is the use of multimedia. As

mentioned in my teaching philosophy, integrating multimedia into instruction keeps students

more engaged and can help them achieve better learning outcomes. However, it can also pose

challenges. For many teachers, how to use technology can be a headache. In my field practicum,

I intended to show my students some videos to elicit their prior knowledge, but had trouble

getting the projector to show work. Such problems with technology cause frustration in the

classroom and disrupt the flow of the lesson. In addition, some students might lack the

knowledge of how to use technology safely and properly. If they access improper information

through technology, the result can be detrimental. In my future teachings with multimedia, such

problems are very likely to arise and will be a challenge for me to prevent these problems from

occurring.

Reaching out to students' parents and communities can also present a challenge for me. It

might not be hard for me to pay an initial visit to students' households and have informal

interviews with their parents to gain information about students' cultural and linguistic

backgrounds. However, to develop long-term mutual trust and a collaborative relationship with

parents, teachers need to regularly pay home visits, write letters and make phone calls to the

parents. This consumes lots of energy and time for a teacher. Sometimes when the parents do not

speak English, effective communication might be hard to achieve. All these factors contribute to the difficulty of maintaining a long-term relationship with the parents.

Last but not least, the current laws and regulations concerning English language learners, which affect the whole climate among schools in Tennessee, constitute an enormous challenge for English language teachers. The English-only policy and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act view "language as a problem" instead of a "resource" (Ruiz, 1984). Pressure for ELLs to perform better in English testing caused a shift away from a bilingual approach to an English-only approach, making linguistic and cultural diversity no longer viewed as productive resources in schools (de Jong, 2011). As an ELL teacher with a pluralist view, I must on the one hand work on my students' English proficiency, especially their academic proficiency, to help them achieve adequate yearly process (AYP); on the other hand, I will think about how to bring their valuable multilingual and multicultural assets into the classroom under the pressure of these laws and regulations.

How I will meet the challenges

To meet the challenges mentioned above, I will take every opportunity to learn, to observe, and to think from literature, professional development, my own teaching experiences, and the broader community of English language teaching.

During my two-year study experience at Peabody College, I had the opportunity to read thousands of books and articles in the field of teaching English language learners. The literature laid a solid theoretical foundation and shaped my views of good teaching. As I move forward in my career path, I will continue to enrich my theoretical basis by reading literature in this field, and keep abreast with the most newly updated research in the field of TESOL to inform my classroom practices.

I will also continue my learning through trial and error in my own teaching experience. As a novice teacher, every lesson is an experiment; every lesson is an opportunity for me to try out my lesson plans, into which I incorporate theories I believe will be most effective and beneficial to students' learning. After each lesson, I will reflect on what worked out well and what did not, analyze the possible causes, revise my activities and try again next time. I believe only by continuously experimenting and reflecting can I grow as a teacher.

Furthermore, I see professional development as an invaluable resource for furthering my learning. I will continue learning from my fellow teachers, from English language teaching professionals, and from the broader teaching community. In my future school, I will constantly exchange my ideas of teaching with more experienced teachers, observe and reflect on their demonstration of teaching, and develop my own classroom practice. I will also be actively involved in the broader teaching community, attending professional language teaching conferences and training sessions to learn cutting-edge teaching methods and how to use certain types of technology to incorporate multimedia in the classroom. I will work with other educators who share the same pluralistic view in shaping the discourse of teaching culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. I hope one day I can present my pluralistic view and methods of teaching CLD learners to the broader teaching community.

Final Remarks

In this portfolio, I stated my philosophy of teaching under the theoretical framework of

Vygotsky's sociocultural view of learning, and demonstrated my professional understanding of

the TESOL standards through projects I did for the two-year master's study at Peabody College.

I then identified my vision of future teaching as well as challenges I will encounter. Finally, I

proposed new directions and plans to address the challenges. As a prospective graduate student

from Peabody College, I have gained an in-depth theoretical understanding of teaching English

to speakers of other languages; as a novice teacher, I have been gaining practical experience

from teaching different age groups at multiple schools. Both theory and practice keep informing

my teaching and shaping my view of a good teacher. Equipped with theory and practice, and the

will to continue learning from professional development and the broader teaching community, I

believe I am ready to embark upon a new journey of becoming a professional teacher in the field

of TESOL.

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