CAPSTONE ESL PORTFOLIO

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Abstract

The Capstone ESL Portfolio demonstrates my professional knowledge and teaching competence of how to learn together with English Language Learners (ELLs) in my future classroom. I collect my past two-year work and reflect upon my knowledge and practice in order to better fulfill my role as an ELL teacher and support students' learning.

The portfolio contains three sections: 1) statement of teaching philosophy 2) showcase of artifacts demonstrating my interpretation of TESOL standards for ESL/EFL teachers of adults and 3) reflection on future development. **In the first section**, I synthesize across Vivian Cook's theory of multicompetence and L2 use, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, and Jim Cummin's interdependence theory. Corresponding with their thinking, I discuss how they influence me as a language teacher. **In the second section**, I provide artifacts to demonstrate my understanding of each domain of the TESOL standards. I illustrate the relevance to the domain by focusing specifically on learners and learning, learning environment, curriculum, and assessment. **In the third section**, I reflect upon my past two-year study in the program of English language learners and identify direction for my continued professional development.

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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

James Baldwin in his *A Talk to Teachers* narrates:

> The purpose of education, finally, is to create a person the ability to look at the
> world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this
> is white, to decide whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of
> the universe, and then to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own
> identity.

As a language teacher, I have always been exploring what kind of belief I should hold of
language teaching and what teaching practice I should conduct could lead me to this ultimate
goal. During the past study in my program, three powerful language learning theories have been
most influential for me to reflect on my learning and teaching experience. They allow me to
envision what a successful language teaching means to me. First of all, Cook's (1991)
multicompetence and L2 user theory transforms me into a faithful admirer for people who speak
other than one language. I used to believe a successful English language learner is someone who
speaks and sounds like the native speaker. Not until I read Vivian Cook's theories of
multicompetence and L2 user (1991) did a new world open up to me. He does not seek the goal
of being as close as monolingual native speakers; instead, he believes L2 users possess particular
knowledge that is not shared either by L1 monolinguals or by L2 monolinguals (Scott, 2010). I
favor this attitude as it empowers both language learners and teachers and affirms the privilege
of non-native speakers. The second theory comes from one of the major themes of Vygotsky. His
theoretical framework contends that social interaction plays an important role in students'

cognitive development. As I believe, learning is a social behavior. Students not only learn from

teachers, but also learn from peer interactions. The utterances involved in these social

interactions once mastered by students will be internalized eventually. In addition, Jim

Cummin's interdependence theory sheds light on the choice of language for my future ELL

classroom teaching. Native language should be seen as an asset to foster their L2 learning.

Multicompetence and Learning Goals

My English learning experience helps me gain the intercultural competence and navigate

two different linguocultural worlds. On this basis, I strongly attach myself to Cook's (1991)

theoretical framework called multicompetence, which emphasizes the knowledge of two or more

languages of a person. His notion of multicompetence no longer bases on the monolingual native

speaker. Instead, he proposes a new term, L2 user and defines it as "any person who uses another

language than his or her first language (L1)" (Cook, 2002). L2 users are believed to have L1

knowledge different from monolingual speakers and L2 knowledge different from native

speakers' knowledge of that language (Cook, 2008).

The idea of multicompetent L2 users makes me rethink the role of English language

learners in my class. They should not be considered as deficient native speakers but rather a

group of individuals who can move between their native language and the target language, and

their native culture and the target culture. In my teaching, I do not set native speakers as the

model for my students. Native proficiency is not an attainable goal for English language learners.

Instead, I emphasize the goal of communicative competence that enables students to interpret

and enact appropriate social behavior in the production of the target language (Canale and

Swain, 1980). Students should be exposed to the richness of L2 use and grow awareness of the

interaction of native language and target language. **I create my classroom** as a place where

students can establish a unique perspective to appreciate and reflect on language acquisition as they migrate between languages and cultures.

Building on the framework of multicompetence, learning goals are divided into two categories, external goals and internal goals. External goals concern the language use outside of the classroom while internal goals relate to the knowledge of language and students' mental development (Cook, 2005). Internal goals, such as teaching cultural, racial, and ethnic sensitivity or emphasis of the benefits of multicompetence, fail to get due attention in modern classrooms (Choong, 2006). Students cannot achieve these internal goals without teachers' influence. **My role as a teacher** is to lead students to explore beliefs and experiences concerning language learning, to appreciate diverse expressions of target language and compare different stances due to cultural, political and institutional conflicts embedded in language. This is a good way to help students construct linguistic and cultural identities. Pavlenko (2003) notes identity construction occurs in language learning. English language learners coming to a new country often struggle with their true identity. I believe language has the power to shape personality and help English language learners to reconstruct identity. Students bring their culture and understanding influenced by family, community and national values to classroom, which might not be observable to them. **My job** is to make the invisible visible. I respect my students' identities and their stances on different issues. I want students to link their prior knowledge to the new learning, to their inner selves and to the outside world. Part of English language learning is to explore questions that arise naturally from encountering a new language and culture (Scott, 2011). By dealing with these questions and reconciling two different cultures, students are given the opportunities to critically reflect on the use of language and what they perceive in their life.

Eventually I want my student to develop into self-dependent critical thinkers with global awareness and being able to construct identity through language learning.

Sociocultural Theory and Learning Environment

Sociocultural theory has a substantial impact in today's classroom teaching. It was first proposed by Russian psychologist L.S. Vygotsky. In sociocultural theory, Vygotsky argues that the most important forms of human cognitive development results from the interaction within social and material environment (Lantolf, 2000). In general, sociocultural theory maintains that learning occurs when people interact with the environment. In another word, for pedagogical purpose, how to construct an environment that makes learning occur is a predominant task for teachers.

One key aspect of sociocultural theory is zone of proximal development (ZPD). It indicates "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" (Vygotsky, 1980). Two kinds of development are involved in the ZPD, achieved development and potential development. If students in class are given tasks too easy for them, they can quick finish the task on their own and achieve development. However, the process might be boring and tedious. While if students are given tasks too challenging, they can be frustrated and lose patience. With guidance and instructions students could get the task done otherwise not achieved as beyond their ability limit. An important finding of ZPD is that collaborative learning, particularly in instructional settings, precedes and shapes development (Lantolf, 2000). It informs me of the necessity to create a collaborative environment where peers can promote each other's learning.

However, a cooperative and collaborative environment cannot necessarily ensure an engaging participation. Lave and Wenger (1991) in their "community of practice" proposes the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP). It also puts an emphasis on the significance of sociocultural settings. LPP is "the core of the learning that takes place" and learning is embedded in activity, context and culture (Lave and Wenger, 1991). They suggest a learning curriculum entail learning resources in everyday practice approachable to learners. When not isolated from authentic contexts or settings, knowledge can be presented. **In my English language teaching**, it is important for me to use authentic materials and create daily simulations to let students learn the language and feel the way it is used. While today's most classroom tasks are out of context and given for grammatical or lexical purposes, I prioritize learning activities related to students' daily life and their needs. Therefore, students are enabled to acquire and develop knowledge in authentic domain activities. When participants are given concrete contexts and able to share understanding concerning what they are doing and making sense of it, participation happens in the "community of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

When students are first exposed to a language, it is a brand new world and fresh experience for them. Language is not only a code; it is more than a cultural and social practice. Another importance of legitimate peripherality lies in the development of constructively naïve perspective and questions (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Students are "newcomers" to the new language and new culture. Their inexperience and ignorance is an asset and should be valued. In Lave and Wenger's belief, this asset can only be exploited when supported by experienced practitioners who both understand its limitations and value its role (1991). I, as the teacher, assume this role. It is **my responsibility** to share my language experience and stories with my students. As a more capable role, I lead students to go through the process from the peripheral

margin of the community to the new world center. Through an active participation of language learning within a social context, eventually all my students believe themselves to be the experts of the world they are living in.

Interdependence Theory and Language Choice

An overarching problem that has not achieved a consensus among teachers is the language choice in the classroom. In this sense, I argue for Jim Cummins's interdependence hypothesis. Cummins contends that two languages (L1 and L2) are not separate and isolated. They reinforce each other through interdependence and transfer (De Jong, 2011). A common underlying proficiency (CUP) is posited to show the interdependence of a bilingual's proficiency of L1 and L2 concerning literacy-related aspects (Cummins, 1996). The CUP model is illustrated in the metaphor of iceberg. The two visible peaks of the iceberg represent the surface features of L1 and L2, which are usually conversational or less demanding; a larger mass not visible indicates those more cognitive language tasks that require higher-order thinking skills (Cummins, 1996). As the model shows, "when both languages reach equal levels and there is a large below-the-surface mass, benefits accrue to those individuals over their unilingual counterparts" (Roessingh and Kover, 2003). Influenced by this framework, first language remains as a resource for a second language learning and this is not a unidirectional way. The acquisition and developmental knowledge on the second language has influences on the first language and literacy.

Learning two languages allows me to see two totally different worlds. Students' first language should be valued and encouraged especially when they feel difficult to express themselves in L2. As L1 and L2 have bilateral influence (De Jong, 2011), **in my classroom** I involve L1 literacy materials so that students' literacy can be expanded on the base of

bidirectional learning. Besides, I give students the opportunities to discuss complex issues using L1. I bring world issues into my daily classroom. By showing two stances in two languages on the same topic, I urge students to think critically about the world we are living in. **My role as a teacher** is to ask the right questions and to make them show what they can do with what they know. However, on the other hand, I do understand language choice can be flexible depending on the context I teach. In an ESL classroom, I need to tap into students' L1 knowledge as much as possible to foster their literacy and language development. While in an EFL classroom, for example if I teach back in China, I need to give students lots of exposure to target language.

Cummins's (2000) research shows that transfer also involves the use of language-specific strategies if languages are related. For example, Spanish and English share some word use and word spelling. Even in terms of Chinese, it shares some concepts with English counterparts. It is a great opportunity for students to explore either similarities or differences through a functional view of language. I believe when students review their learning acquisition process and evaluate the language-specific learning strategies, this self-dependent analysis will foster their learning outcome and repair problems in their learning. On the other hand, it also helps me improve my professional growth as a teacher. Their reflection work gives me good suggestions in how to reach them and set realistic targets. Partnering with my students builds the route to their learning success and my teaching success.

Conclusion

My teaching philosophy requires me, first of all, to think what I want for my students through my language teaching before I go to the classroom. Students do not have to possess a native-like proficiency. They are privileged non-native speakers and should be encouraged to promote their multicompetence. In order to make this goal achieved, I create a constructively

collaborative community where students can be engaging participators and actively involve

themselves into real-world context language use. I encourage first language use in my teaching

as it can be both beneficial for students' second language acquisition and their reflection on

language use.

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Domain 1: Planning

Teachers plan instruction to promote learning and meet learner goals, and modify plans to assure learner engagement and achievement. It is essential for an ESL teacher to begin teaching with learner needs in mind and prepare to make modifications according to students' academic performance.

As known to all, to establish a building first starts from a planning map. Prior to planning, designers have to take into account the clients' needs and think how to make their design blend in with the surrounding environment (Wiggins and McTighe, 2001). Designing to designers is what planning instruction is to teachers. What do students need to know? What should they be able to do with teachers' instructions? Similar to the clients' needs, learning goals and student needs direct instruction planning. As planning goes, teachers also need to modify their plans whenever new thoughts or problems occur. In the end, plans are designed to ensure students can be engaged in class activities and academically achieved.

To demonstrate my professional understanding of planning, I designed a mini-unit lesson plan (See Artifact A) that is aimed to lead students in exploration of how to appreciate poetry. Poetry is a well-recognized subject as it best showcases language as an art through its rhymes, picturesque words and different figures of speech. In the mini-unit (3 lessons), I chose *The Road Not Taken* by *Robert Frost*, partly for it embeds powerful inspiration that could have a positive influence on students. In order for them to experience the poetic function of language and the pleasure of reading verses, I included multimodal texts and integrate technology and media to serve learning goals, with essential strategies to scaffold their reading.

It is crucial to consider **learner** needs and desired results (Wiggins and McTighe, 2001) while simultaneously combining them together as planning instruction progresses. Normally,

students find it difficult to understand poetry or unnecessary to learn it as they do not talk in that way any more. However, reading poems is conducive to **learning** English because English is a musical language. To analyze language structure and features helps with reading and writing skills. Considering the knowledge that can be brought to the classroom by English language learners, I adapted the lesson plan and included another learning goal, to encourage different interpretations of the poem. It is very likely when ELLs read the poem, their prior life experience will inspire other connections different from those of native speakers. For example, in my lesson plan **learners** were encouraged to compare their recordings with Frost's and among classmates. This activity attempts to inform them that individual interpretation is acceptable, and further ELLs are given opportunities to reveal their own way of dealing with cultural and linguistic meanings. The other example *The Five Word Picture Poem,* in the second class session, required **learners** to write down their own poems using rhymes. ELLs were encouraged to create it in their native language. Through encouraging multilingual language use and interpretations and class sharing, I create a collaborative and welcoming **learning environment** where **learners** could draw on others' **learning** experience and feel comfortable to express their own minds.

The mini-unit lesson, when designed, targets at 7th graders. So I chose grade 7 English Language Art Standards to guide my content and language objectives. During this grade period, the **curriculum** requires students to determine figures of speech and analyze structures of a poem. I chose multimedia to present materials so that students will not easily get bored and lose concentration. This is especially important for ELLs. Part of my job is to help them overcome fear of reading English and improve their interest in learning. With materials carefully chosen and adapted, multimedia technology improves students' engagement with the texts. To align with the English art **curriculum**, I also incorporated multi-genre texts and design activities and tasks

that allow students to practice reading, listening and writing skills. Each lesson provides reading strategies necessary to address problems occurred in reading the poem.

In order to assess students' understanding of the poem and their ability to use reading strategies, I use both formative and summative **assessment** in a variety of forms. The **assessment** is compatible with and complementary to class instructions. It includes making comparisons and visual maps, creating a comic strip story and multilingual poems, and a final project to write their understanding of the poem after three lessons. By making **assessments** less stressful and more entertaining, I create a comfort zone that appeals to multiple intelligences and allows both ELLs and native learners to voice individual responses. All the **assessments** in the lesson plan require students to once again consciously employ reading strategies that are practiced in class so that in the long run, the strategies serve as scaffolding while students encounter different texts.

Domain 2: Instructing

Teachers create supportive environments that engage all learners in purposeful learning and promote respectful classroom interactions. A successful establishment of a purposeful classroom starts with teachers' sensitivity to structured lessons with meaningful and communicative learning goals in mind. Without the guidance of purposes, it is difficult for teachers to create a supportive and engaging learning environment. As I contend, learning is a social behavior. The basis of any healthy social interactions, I think, lies in mutual respect. This is particularly significant with regards to a classroom full of culturally diverse students.

To demonstrate my knowledge of the recognition of purposeful teaching, I attached a lesson plan (See Artifact B) I designed for my practicum class teaching as the evidence. All of the students I taught are spouses or partners of visiting scholars or students who are currently at Vanderbilt.

Purposes include both content and language objectives as shown in the lesson plan. They are easy to understand and well conveyed to **learners**. In my 30-minute teaching period, I set reachable goals for them. One of the advantages to teach adult learners is that their cognitive ability enables them to pay attention to what I stated as our learning goals. They can quickly grasp the idea and its relevance. When **learners** learn with purposes in mind, they are more likely to develop self-awareness of what they are **learning** and monitor their comprehension. In future teaching, I ensure I do not wrap up too many concepts or ideas in one learning goal. My teaching purposes center on **learning**, instead of fulfillment of tasks.

I choose topics relevant to students' life experience and make sure I give clear instructions or guided practice before I implement a task. Therefore, students are able to develop language growth and conceptual depth in an engaging and supportive **learning environment**.

During the class, prior to students' attempts to describe their favorite dish, I asked them to brainstorm together with me about what aspects they can start. This proved to be a smart strategy. As their discussion went on, several pairs showed great interest in the other's cultural backgrounds and why the dish was done in that way. Their language became productive in order to ask for information and clarification. As an ELL teacher, it is momentous to choose relevant topics and plan instructional events so that I can place my learners in a purposeful and mutual **learning environment** where they show curiosity of different cultures and respect to each other.

Predetermined lesson goals might result in adaption of **curriculum**. To ensure students could better master vocabulary through word comparing and contrasting, I added new vocabulary other than those required ones. It not only shows I have high expectations of my **learners**, but also I see **curriculum** as an adjustable way to facilitate **learning** instead of some benchmarks students must reach. It is a step backward in education if objectives are replaced with standards (Fisher and Frey, 2011). With clear teaching objectives, I know what exactly to assess and whether an **assessment** I identify could reveal what students have mastered. The activity I designed required students to apply their new knowledge to a meaningful and productive pair conversation. Students made mistakes occasionally but were able to provided support to each other. It is acceptable or even productive for students to make mistakes and have the time and support to correct them, which leads to a more solid understanding, known as productive failure (Kapur, 2008). To align with this work, it conveys my intention of using **assessment** – to assess what students know and teach them grow from their mistakes.

Domain 3: Assessing

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 learner. 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 assessment of their learning. Traditional paper-and-pencil tests are no longer suited for today's modern classrooms. Information and data gathered from tasks administered on a regular basis in class and formal or informal assessments provide vital evidence for teachers to measure student attainment of learning outcomes. As a result of information interpretation and data analysis, high-quality, corrective instructions must be followed to remedy learning problems and errors identified in the analysis (Guskey, 1997). On the other hand, teachers make adjustments to their plans and instructions, and provide corrective feedback to facilitate learning progress and accommodate differences of students with varied intelligences and language proficiencies.

My professionalism in the knowledge of assessing is supported by three artifacts I did. The first Artifact C comes from a case study of a non-native English speaker for the course *EDUC 2550 Linguistics/ Second Language Acquisition In the Classroom*. I collected and analyzed linguistic data reflecting her English acquisition with both speech and written samples. The second Artifact D includes four SOLOM (Student Oral Language Observation Matrix) sheets that I used to measure English oral proficiency of four adult learners. The third Artifact E shows my final self-evaluation on a course I took last year *EDUC 3050 Advanced Social and Philosophical Aspects of Education.*

It is a time-costing job to sort all the data collected from **learners**' class performance and assessments, but it turns out to worth my efforts. In the case study, I observed my learner's interaction with the teacher in class, her performance in class assignments and assessments. I collected her journals and speech samples and could notice errors sit almost everywhere. When I analyzed and synthesized all the data, however, I found she was actually making a great and quick progress. In my future teaching, I will keep collecting and gathering immediate and valuable data to inform my understanding of student **learning** progress. Class observation, formative and summative **assessments**, student cumulative files and state test results allow me to have a thorough and holistic view of how **learners** are doing on their **learning** outcome. With the ability to gather and correctly interpret the data, I know when to adjust pacing, what point my **learners** still have problems with and how I could make better instructional decisions to provide them appropriate scaffolding. As a result, I could review my teaching and make necessary modification for future **learners**. Further, I designed a specific instructional plan for my learner, addressing her language needs I identified earlier in her oral and written samples. With it as guidance, for my ELLs ahead, I can completely build it into **curriculum** design to promote student language skills.

Collecting data and evidence of student learning also creates more grouping possibilities that could benefit students' **learning** and a productive **learning environment**. In the artifact of SOLOM assessments, I rated four adult English language learners regarding five language mains- listening comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, grammar and pronunciation to determine their current oral proficiency level. With the assessment results, I will be able to come up with grouping plans that suit the desired results of different oral language tasks. Another important

profit is that a proper grouping method promotes mutual learning attainment so that each **learner** feels they are making contributions to the whole class **learning**.

As an ELL teacher in the future, I will require students to do periodical self-**assessment**s and final evaluations of themselves. As I mentioned in my Artifact E, I graded myself in terms of my performance and explained the reason behind it. During this grading process, I referred back to grading policy, connected it to my work done for the course and to what extent I learned and what I still did not understand. It is reflective and educational to think all of this through. Now let me shift the focus from the perspective of learners to teachers. I will require my learners to regularly reflect on their **learning** and do self-assessments, so I am able to accumulate their reflections to periodically adapt **curriculum** to their needs and concerns. This is also a showcase of their participation in my instructional and assessing decisions. Besides, it improves student self-awareness of their learning problems and outcomes to develop their independent learning ability.

Assessment must be valid and reliable. After we raters used the SOLOM, though personally I affirmed its advantage of assessing students for communicative purposes, we discovered possible drawbacks of using it as well. Therefore, it is important to make sure the **assessment** I design and use should be less biased towards my ELLs. I will integrate as various assessments as possible and interpret data in a meaningful way to promote assessment validity and reliability. A skillful and efficient teacher can link teaching, learning and assessment together during one limited class period time. In order to fulfill the expectation, I strongly embrace the use of authentic **assessment** and am going to use it more in my future ESL class. It is part of the instruction and reflects individual progress within the learning context (Hurley and

Tinajero, 2001). Therefore, I can give constructive feedback in time that aligns with my teaching

plans and student learning goals.

Domain 4: Identity and Context

Teachers understand the importance of who learners are and how their communities, heritages and goals shape their 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. It is believed that lower academic achievement of English language learners might come from the disconnection of instruction and curriculum to students' native cultural and linguistic knowledge (Jiménez and Rose, 2010). Faced with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, teachers need to capitalize on students' cultural and linguistic experience and bridge the gap between academic classrooms and their home environments.

It is essential to know the community **learners** live and the cultural heritages they possess. Reared in a particular culture, no one can be unbiased at all. As an ESL teacher, I have to leave my comfort zone and question my own assumptions. I need to identify the strengths and struggles my students have. Experiencing Kurdish culture and listening to people's stories entirely broke up my assumptions about the Kurds, whom I had thought must be of great needs and sympathy. What I saw and what I heard, however, is their efforts to conserve their own heritage and simultaneously, to accommodate themselves into American mainstream. They endeavor to be informed and aspire to make contributions to their new neighborhoods (See Artifact F). It is important to witness my **learners** are growing up in an environment where they are highly expected. I see their desire as an "affective filter" (Krashen, 1982) that could be used in class and motives their **learning**. On the other hand, studying household knowledge will help interpret my **learners**' academic performance and non-verbal behavior. In Aran Berwari Simulation (See Artifact G), I was offered an opportunity to go through a simulation where I

talked to a mother of an English learner who was considered likely to have learning disability. The simulation experience made me realize that it is of great significance to converse with family members. The past they had and the way they live could be immediately constructive in classroom teaching. After I talked to the mother, I understood it was not because she was not willing to, but her understanding of school-family relationship and English proficiency influenced her participation in the child's learning. She thought her child's academic progress was entirely based on school learning and her child's hard work afterwards. Her response is a good demonstration as Lareau (1978) indicates in the work, that the relationship between families and schools is class-related: dependence on the teacher to educate children in lower-class and working-class families while cooperative instructions between parents and teachers in middle-class families. As an ELL teacher, I understand most of my English language learners come from lower-class and middle-class families. Therefore, it is my job to reach families and convince them an ideal family-school relationship is the integration of family life and school life, despite the possibility of communication barriers. Parents need to involve in children's study as home study backs up **learning** at school.

With an increased knowledge of learners' family, community and cultural background, I could better create a supportive **learning environment** for my ELLs. While I was exploring the Kurdish community, I saw posters and menus written in Arabic and tasted local food at a dessert store. It was a completely refreshing and educational experience for me. Aligned with the research that teachers who build upon students' home and community knowledge or their funds of knowledge are able to organize a high-quality classroom instruction (Risko, 2012), the exploration made me aware that community literacy and students' native culture serve as good resource in classroom teaching to reach my ELLs and break up the dividing lines between

mainstream and minority culture. By drawing on students' knowledge of their native culture and what they daily see and experience, I could structure a welcome **learning environment** where my **learners** feel comfortable to give their ideas, participate in discussions, and interact and collaborate with others on class projects.

As I believe, my knowledge of contexts within school, state and at national levels will have an influence on my interpretation of **curriculum** and **assessment**. Inspired by my Advanced Social and Philosophical Aspects of Education course, I created two charts, a concept map of Chinese system (See Artifact H) and a graph that illustrates why critical thinking is discouraged within Chinese context (Artifact I). The project gives me a panorama of how contexts and power relations impact classroom teaching and learning through a top-down manner. Building on my work, I discover teaching is merely a small part that is embedded in a complicated network where there are different participants, power relations, and cultural traditions and expectations, influencing teaching and learning. As an ELL teacher, I understand the **curriculum** and **assessment** design do not reflect the needs of my English language learners. Therefore, with a larger context in mind, I could use this "context" knowledge to better read the **curriculum** and **assessment**. In order to fill the gap between what the **curriculum** wants me to teach and what the **assessment** wants me to assess and my learners to know, I will make content materials more comprehensible and provide opportunities for ELLs to access their first languages and cultural resources. With regards to **assessment**, another overarching point is how I interpret what English proficiency means for English language learners. Considering learners from diverse backgrounds, it is not reasonable to set native speakers as a model or benchmark for them. Their linguistic and cultural advantages provide them a unique perspective to appreciate and reflect on

what they are learning. My job is, in compliance with my own belief, to design curriculum and

assessment that could showcase that unique perspective.

Domain 5: Language Proficiency

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. Right now I am experiencing by far the most transformational moment in my life. Thanks to the further study in the U.S., I have the opportunity to learn crucial language learning and teaching theories and feel how language is used in daily life context. Therefore, I am able to review my past language learning experience and reflect upon it as an English language learner and a language teacher candidate as well. This process is greatly educational and inspiring as it informs me a brand new understanding of language proficiency. Language proficiency is more than the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Further, it entails the ability to interpret and say the appropriate thing in a certain social situation (Brandl, 2008) and the ability to adjust discourse patterns based on different contexts and targeted audience in terms of all four language mains – listening, speaking, reading and speaking.

In this part, I use three paper documents and one audio file to showcase my English proficiency. Artifact J is an informal writing to express my love for Philadelphia. It is subjective and emotional for my own sake. Artifact K is an academic evaluation synthesis of a local public school in Nashville. I went on a school field trip and interviewed key players in the school and observed one class. I gathered information from teachers and others who work in the schools to know their belief of how ELLs learn a new language and how EL programs are implemented and see how the school partners with local communities. These two artifacts show my ability to express my needs and emotions in an informal writing and the ability to synthesize and reorganize information in a formal writing. In Artifact L, I interviewed an English language

learned to know her linguistic and cultural background for my course *EDUC 2560 Language assessment of English Language Learners*, which shows my competence to conduct a conversation and effectively communicate my intention using listening and speaking skills. At last, I attached my resume to present my knowledge of language and formatting on the basis of writing purpose (See Artifact M). In conclusion, the artifacts I listed display my language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in an integrated manner.

My English language proficiency as the above shows strongly attaches to my belief of what a good language competence is as mentioned by Brandl (2008): 1) linguistic competence, the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, 2) sociolinguistic competence, the ability to function appropriately in social occasions, 3) discourse competence, the ability to conduct a conversation in a consistent and coherent way, and 4) strategic competence, the ability to repair communication problems and effectively communicate ideas. In order to realize the four goals, I integrate academic contents and language learning skills in the **curriculum** to ensure my **learners** could promote their academic language proficiency and linguistic skills simultaneously. While planning my lessons, I make sure I involve teaching strategies in the **curriculum**. I design oral and written tasks that combine more than one of reading, listening writing and speaking skills.

I create a communicative **learning environment** where students' native language is allowed in the classroom. They are encouraged to communicate their needs and ideas in and out of class despite their likely limited English proficiency. I will increase the proportion of alternative **assessments** while I evaluate my learners. I will lead them through different genres and ask them to develop their own responses. I will attempt to bring real-world situations to my classroom and ask students to converse based on contexts they are in.

Domain 6: Learning

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. As a good language learner, I believe a comprehensive mastery of language knowledge indicates the ability to analyze structures of language, to interpret socio-cultural meanings embedded in language and to internalize language for identity construction. Part of my job as a language teacher is to differentiate individual language learning performance and lead my students through their acquisition process using my knowledge of language and second language acquisition. Therefore, I look at stages and sequences in students' language acquisition and their language growth in the subsystems, they are, phonetics, phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax and pragmatics. I examine student errors and think what these errors indicate and in what way they inform me of how to implement my instructions to scaffold their language learning. I want my students to feel the beauty and power of language so that they are willing to attach themselves to independent learning.

In my first academic year, I went to Eakin Elementary School to observe how an English language learner, Cindy, acquired English and witnessed her inspiring language growth. During the semester, I observed her language performance, determined her language stage development and assessed her non-linguistic features, cognitive level, motivation, and the like both in and out of class (See Artifact C).

I place strong value on presenting myself as a loving, caring and considerate teacher in front of my students. My vitality and charisma, to some extent, is likely to influence and even determine the attitudes of my **learners** towards language and language learning. Studies show

attitude and motivation in many cases can best predict success in second language learning

(Norton and Toohey, 2001). This can be seen in Cindy's case. Her teacher is the biggest drive

that promotes her to be better achieving. Learning from the interaction between Cindy and her

teacher, I will establish meaningful relationships with all my **learners**. I advocate for caring

about students' well-being and personal life. More than that, however, I embrace cultural

responsive caring for my **learners** by modeling academic, social, moral and personal behaviors

and values for them to emulate (Gay, 2010). Students feel obligated to be worthy of being

honored and therefore, motived and passionate to learn the language. I will be so proud of myself

if I were the reason my **learners** work hard on learning a language.

As a language teacher, it is important to use the knowledge of second language

acquisition in instructing **learners** to support their **learning**. With my knowledge of language

subsystems and second language acquisition theories, I collected her language-use examples and

analyzed oral and written performance in detail. Building on my analysis results, I designed an

instructional plan for her. My knowledge of language and second language acquisition allows me

to have a clear vision of her learning progress. In my future teaching, I will keep using the

knowledge to interpret student language acquisition performance and monitor their learning

progresses. Students might show different paces of language development and on this basis, I

could come up with individualized effective instructions and strategies to appeal to their

learning needs. For English language learners particular, creating a friendly **learning**

environment is conducive to their participation in class teamwork and out-of-class activities. I

promote equity and mutual respect among students. Despite cultural differences, native students

are willing to serve as "ambassadors" to help ELLs learn the language and get familiar with their

new environment.

It is also of great significance to use my knowledge of second language acquisition in **curriculum** design and **assessment**. As mentioned earlier, I tie my instruction to students' stage of language development. Knowing this information allows me to carefully interpret the **curriculum** and the data collected from **assessment.** In order to engage my learners, I will adapt curriculum language and content, if necessary, to make texts culturally responsive and comprehensible. I will use valid and authentic **assessment** that allows them to work within their zone of proximal development- "the distance between the actual development 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" (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, by reflecting students' stage of language acquisition and adjusting curriculum and assessment, I help them move through the acquisition levels and create possible scenarios where they can tap into and promote their higher-level thinking skills.

Domain 7: Content

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 course 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. I believe one of the important goals for ELLs to learn English is let their voice be heard both in and outside of the classroom. I emphasize communicative language teaching (Brandl, 2008) based on the theory that the primary goal for learners is to develop communicative competence (Hymes, 1971). I combine content objectives and language objectives to ensure students could learn academic contents through language support and vice versa. I value the idea of authenticity and design my lessons aimed to reflect real-life situations and demands to help students well function in their own life.

I listed three artifacts to support my demonstration in the domain of content. The first artifact is an observation report I did in an intermediate Chinese class (See Artifact N). It was an EFL (English as a foreign language) class not exactly the same as an ESL class, but I find they share the big idea of language teaching. The second artifact is a reflection paper I wrote for the course SLA 310 Foreign Language Learning and Teaching with its focus on how to promote listening comprehension (See Artifact O). The last one shows a collection of need analysis from my students in GES (General English for Spouse/partner) class (See Artifact P).

A communicative approach to language learning and teaching enables **learners** to connect to life situations and produce language for the purpose of communication. As the Artifact N shows, the teacher started the class by asking students their regular eating behavior.

As the class went on, she kept connecting the topic to their life experience and created a situation for pairs to practice new words and sentence patterns, which helps them make best of what they experience every day that necessitate communication possibilities. What an EFL class and an ESL class share in common is **learners** learn or acquire language in order to express ideas and needs. Considering the purpose of genuine communication, I provide **learners** ample opportunities to practice language use and promote cooperative **learning environment** in my class. To create cooperative and interactive **learning** experiences facilitates the exchange of information between **learners**. Further, the communicative approach realizes the transition from receptive language use to productive language use. This is when **learners** are able to internalize the vocabulary and structure and produce language for communication purposes.

I believe it is important to bring authentic materials to my ESL classroom. Based on my learning experience and observation of ELL classes, I find the English we are exposed to is, to some extent, perfect English. What we hear is planned speech without any mistakes or hesitations, which fails to model real-world language usage for students (Oura, 2001). What we read from academic textbooks is complex sentences embedded with jargons not approachable to students. I stated this concern in my reflection paper (See artifact O) regarding listening comprehension. In fact, I am thinking to find outside authentic language resources that could link back to **curriculum** and students' prior knowledge, so that what I am teaching makes more sense to my **learners**. I will introduce materials from authentic resources that reflect real-world language use and involve them in the practical use of language. They can be authentic visuals, TV and audio broadcasts, and speeches.

Another problem that concerns me is that the current **curriculum** might be deficient as it fails to include the needs of ELL families. According to the analysis collection (See Artifact P),

students show interest in language usage of daily life norms, such as visiting the doctor, going to grocery stores and ordering food in a restaurant. Besides, considering most ELLs play the role of translators in their families, they assume special responsibility different from native speakers. Therefore, I encourage learners to bring documents or audio data they encounter in restaurants, grocery stores, banks and hospitals. This not only enables students to consciously process the information they are seeing or hearing everyday, but also narrows the disparity between the **curriculum** designed for English teaching and the authentic contexts they are living in.

In terms of **assessment** for the purpose of authentic language use, I promote authentic assessment that emphasizes **learners** do know instead of what they do not know. In the GES class, I asked students to describe their favorite dish to assess what they learn from that class (See Artifact B). It is part of my instruction as well as an authentic assessment that allows students to develop responses themselves. In future teaching, I will keep using authentic **assessment** as the primary means to monitor my learners' learning progress.

Domain 8: Commitment and Professionalism

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. Teaching is not unidirectional, but bidirectional. Teachers not only teach students, but also are learning from the interactions with different participants in education, such as students, teacher colleagues and school administrators. The knowledge that teachers gain from these participants should be used to improve their teaching quality, promote their knowing of the world and advocate for teaching as a professionalized activity.

I have a strong conviction that belief and knowledge determine one's commitment to ultimate goals and professional competencies. Put in educational field, it means teaching belief and teacher knowledge build the foundation for teacher performance. Last year I went to Eakin Elementary School to observe a 3rd grade teacher. Observing her allows me to witness how she translated her teaching belief and teacher knowledge into commitment to her profession (See Artifact Q). It is a valuable experience as it connects the theories I learn from class to real-world teaching practice. Her showcase of teacher knowledge (Grossman, 1990) shapes her professional identity and navigates her performance both inside and outside of the classroom. Encouraged by her and the readings I explored for my course *Analysis of Teaching*, I created a chart that illustrate my understanding of how teaching belief, teacher knowledge and teacher identity interact within a real teaching scenario (See Artifact R). With this network in mind, it inspires me to understand my role in teaching profession. My teaching belief is going to implicitly influence my way to treat **learners**, how I create **learning** experiences and a **learning**

environment, and how to interpret **curriculum** and design **assessment** associated with standards. I affirm my own belief that my **learners** can be great achievers when they are placed in a supportive **learning environment** and scaffolded by culturally responsive **curriculum** and **assessment**.

It is healthy to promote teacher collaboration and exchange ideas with other teachers. After graduation, I will keep internalizing the pedagogical knowledge I learned at school and developing my knowing about my **learners** and current research on interpreting **curriculum** and **assessment**. Last year I attended two sessions at Tennessee Foreign Language Teaching Association Conference. They were addressed by in-service teachers. I found it very insightful to hear how other teachers design activities and how they understand the challenges facing today's teachers and students (See Artifact S). At the conference, I talked to a teacher next to me who taught Spanish in a high school. She shared her teaching experience and we discussed how we would react if learners did not have interest in learning a language. Despite varied teaching and learning backgrounds, we shared a common goal towards students. We aspire to produce a **learning environment** where learners are willing to learn, adapt **curriculum** and implement **assessment** that are able to demonstrate what students know instead of what they do not know. Observing veteran teachers and communicating with other teachers informs me an enormous sense of mission as a member in teacher community. Teaching is a professional expertise. Each individual teacher should strive to make the community more powerful through drawing on each other's experiences.

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Implications for Teaching

As a graduate student at Peabody, the best college of education in the U.S., it might be offensive to say I wasn't intended to be a teacher to start my career. After almost two years' study, however, I myself feel so amazed at my transformation inside. Now I keep telling myself, " You must be a teacher!" I believe I have learned crucial ideals in language learning and teaching theories in my past study and have internalized them to be part of me. Undoubtedly, it is my responsibility to realize those ideals in my classroom to benefit my future students and let more and more educators be informed and inspired.

How to Bridge Theory and Practice

I used to be an anti-theory person as I believed theories are isolated from real-world practice. Not until I spent a semester observing a non-native speaker did I discovered that her English learning process could be interpreted by the theories I learned in class. There was an amazing match between what I saw in the classroom and what I learned from the readings. As my new learning continues to occur, I find three most meaningful things I will keep doing in my future teaching to bridge theory and practice-

1) Keenly observe students and periodically reflect on my own teaching. The ability to observe learning process helps determine my instructions and adjust my pacing. Not only students need to develop self-awareness of their study, **I as a teacher** need to monitor my teaching to reflect on what I did well and what I did not.

2) Real-world classroom practice. Not all the language learning and teaching theories are suitable for my classroom. I see **my classroom** as a laboratory where I could test different theories and find out which of them work for my students.

3) <u>Informal talk</u>. It is necessary to conduct regular informal conversations with students and families. I believe this is one of the best ways to build meaningful relationships with them. I enjoy talking with English language learners and their family members. Every time I talk to them, I have something to learn. Their life stories inform me new perspectives to interpret the world I am living in.

My Ideal Classroom

As a language teacher, I believe the ultimate goal of teaching English is to equip my students with communicative competence and critical thinking skills to better prepare them for future challenges.

Reviewing my own English learning experience, I appreciate the possibility of language learning to shape me as an individual. I want my students to feel the power of language not only through a linguistic lens but also a social and cultural practice that happens in my classroom. As shown by my *Artifact A*, I designed a lesson that enables students to appreciate the beauty of language through the analysis of language structure and features. Besides, various interpretations of the poems based on their own connections are encouraged. **I want to build my classroom** where my students learn to express in English, think critically in English, eventually stand between their native language and English, thereby reconstructing their personality.

Students' active engagement is a fundamental prerequisite for learning to occur. In a traditional language learning classroom, students are passive receivers expecting knowledge to be fed. **In my class**, I see students as creators. My instruction is task based and I design tasks in real-world contexts. Tasks are conducted through pair or group work for the purpose of communicative use of English. As shown by my *Artifact B* and *Artifact N*, I realize when students feel what they learn is strongly related to their lives, it is easier to process new

information based on their prior knowledge. Further, cooperative learning is more likely to promote students' productive use of a foreign language. By collaborative work, it will be a good opportunity for students to monitor each other's learning and facilitate mutual outcome.

Effective language teaching develops critical thinking skills. Unlike other subjects, language is more of a social and cultural practice other than academic study. As shown by my *Artifact A* and *Artifact O*, I understand a good language teaching could bring the possibility to foster students' growing understanding of language as well as the society we are living in. Therefore, I bring authentic reading and listening materials on a variety of topics and even complex issues into my classroom. By showing two stances in native language and English on the same topic, I urge students to think critically about the things going on in this world. **My role as a teacher** is to offer guided practice and design a learning environment where my students ask the right questions and show what they can do with what they know.

My classroom is where mutual growth happens. Students not only need to learn English, but to be aware how they acquire a foreign language. As shown by my self-assessment in *Artifact E*, it is educational to reflect on my own learning progress. I believe when students review their learning process, this self-dependent analysis will foster their learning outcome and repair problems. In addition, it also helps me improve my professional growth as a teacher. Their reflection provide me with feedback on how to better reach them and to set realistic targets. Partnering with my students build the route to learning success.

When I am in the class, I am a facilitator instead of a decision maker. I will post my students' work to the classroom wall to reminds them how good they are. I want my students to love language and feel the chemical reaction of language acquisition on them. Students need to be active learners and value teamwork. With language learning granting students an acute

sensitivity to world issues, they need to come up with their own interpretations by weighing different perspectives. I want my students not only to be successful language learners, but also critical thinkers for being part of the world community.

Continued Development

Considering the growing number of English language learners in the country, I am very much concerned with how I can truly help them and their community accommodate to the new environment. I want to figure out ways to use translation as a channel to link students to the community and the American world. In my prior learning, we are encouraged to have ELLs do translation to help them improve language skills so that they can better perform in content areas. This sounds to me as unidirectional by taking advantage of community resources in classroom teaching. Actually based on my understanding, I see translation as a bidirectional way that could bring profits to ELLs and their community. I want to promote ELLs using what they know to reach out to their community with a sense of responsibility.

As an ELL teacher, I will develop translation activities for academic and authentic purposes as well. I suggest local government collaborate with diverse communities to launch projects that could involve English language learners studying in the schools. For example, as I used to intern at Nashville Public Library during summer vacation, I know the world relief groups would come monthly and have a tour in the library. Every time there would be one translator; however, due to the large number of visitors, many of them could not gain the information timely as it was difficult for one translator to take care of everyone. In this case, students could be a great help. For one thing, the guide at the library speaks at a low speed considering whom s/he is facing is not native speakers. It would be a real opportunity for ELLs to learn English in a real case. For another, it allows them to serve their own community and to

be the part of the American society. I want my students to feel they are valued because of their unique ability to transfer between two or more languages.

Another problem I would love to explore more is teacher collaboration. In class, we spent much time on discussing ways to promote cooperative and collaborative learning. With increasingly more English language learners in the school, I encourage teachers to be cooperative more than ever. When novice teachers start their teaching career, there are mentors assigned to provide suggestions and feedback. Personally, I do not think this is enough. Newcomers are not familiar with teacher and school expectations while neither do we know parent expectations. In my mind, both novice and experienced teachers in the same grade could share their lesson plans and talk about what strategies work well and not well for ELLs in their class. We could even create a database and sort it according to cultural backgrounds. Every teacher could write down their reflections on teaching ELLs. It can include each teacher's discoveries of ELL students in their class. Teachers could meet every other week and talk about their discoveries. It seems to time costing, but in the long run, I believe we could general regular rules of teaching ELLs within a particular school context.

Conclusion

Thanks to the past two-year study in the program of English Language Learners, it enables me to discover the true meaning of education to me. Education does not indicate a teacher goes to the front and talks for the whole class period. A teacher is neither a mistake-corrector to standardize individual students nor a savior aimed to change their daily lives. I want to be the kind of teacher that when I walk out of the classroom, I am confident and proud to say my children do **learn** something in my class.

Theoretically, I believe I am equipped with the best ideals of teaching in educational field. Faced with English language learners who probably come from diverse cultural backgrounds, I need to be loving and culturally responsive caring. In classroom teaching, I will capitalize on their prior knowledge and native culture to foster their language and content learning. I need to be a good observer and notice students' language development stages. I will adjust my instructions accordingly to best appeal to students' learning needs. The program teaches me crucial language teaching and learning theories, teaching strategies and classroom activities I could employ and pedagogical instruments I could refer to. I value my classroom observation and real-world practicum teaching experiences as they first let me feel how teaching feels like. Even with all the powerful theories and ideals I internalize, I am still not confident to say I am ready to go out to the real world and be a teacher. However, teaching is a highly professionalized expertise. It is not possible to wait for a start until everything is ready. In another word, there is no absolute "ready" in this world.

I know what is ahead will not be a perfect start, but I will not evade it. Instead, I will embrace all the challenges and obstacles in my first years of teaching. That is when my learning occurs and my teaching career starts in a real sense.