

UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À TROIS-RIVIÈRES

THE USE OF GAMES TO HELP HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS PRACTICE THEIR
ORAL PRODUCTION SKILLS IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

ESSAI

PRÉSENTÉ

COMME EXIGENCE PARTIELLE

DE LA

MAÎTRISE EN ENSEIGNEMENT (ANGLAIS LANGUE SECONDE)

PAR

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TABLE OF CONTENT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
TABLE OF CONTENT	iii
LIST OF TABLES	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS.....	vii
SUMMARY	viii
RÉSUMÉ	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I	3
BACKGROUND OF ISSUE	3
1.1 Getting teenaged students to speak up in class.....	7
CHAPTER II.....	11
REFERENCE FRAMEWORK.....	11
2.1 Communicative language teaching.....	11
2.2 The use of play/games in learning.....	12
2.3 The use of play/games in the ESL classroom.....	13
2.4 Communicative language teaching in the classroom.....	18
2.5 Peer/peer interaction in the L2 classroom.....	19
2.6 The lack of authentic practice in L2 classroom learning.....	19
2.7 Grammar instruction in the communicative classroom.....	21
2.8 Teacher beliefs.....	22
2.9 The need for explicit grammar teaching in different languages.....	24
2.10 Students communicating in the ESL classroom.....	26
2.11 Possible influences of a game context on a students’ Willingness to Communicate.....	28

2.12 The language learning benefits of games in English outside the classroom	29
2.13 Student Engagement	30
CHAPTER III	32
METHODOLOGY	32
3.1 Context and participants	32
3.2 Activity	33
3.3 Reasoning behind the choice of activity	35
3.4 Procedure	36
3.5 Data collection and data treatment	40
CHAPTER IV	43
RESULTS	43
5.1 Results	43
5.2 Improvements	46
CONCLUSION	48
REFERENCES	55
APPENDIX A - LESSON PLAN - MURDER IN THE CLASSROOM	59
APPENDIX B - WORKSHEET	64

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 - Factors That Influence Students Speaking in a ESL Classroom	14
Table 2 - Students' Opinions on the Use of Games to Help Develop Their English Speaking Skills	15

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 - Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)	12
Figure 2 - Categories Drawn From León and Cely (2010) Data Analysis.....	16
Figure 3 - MacIntyre, Clément, Dornyei, & Noels' (1998) WTC	28

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

- C1.....Competency 1 (Interacts orally In English)
C2.....Competency 2 (Reinvests understanding of texts)
C3.....Competency 3 (Writes and produces texts)
CLT....Communicative Language Teaching
EE.....Extramural English
EESL...Enriched English as a Second Language
ESL....English as a Second Language
FL.....Foreign Language
FonF...Focus on Form
FonFS..Focus on Forms
FonM...Focus on Meaning
L1.....First Language
L2.....Second Language
MEES..Ministère de l'éducation et enseignement supérieur
PFEQ...Programme de formation de l'école québécoise
POL....Progression of Learning
QEP....Québec Education Program
WTC...Willingness to Communicate
ZPD.... Zone of Proximal Development

SUMMARY

The need to be able to communicate in English cannot be circumvented in this globalized world; having the capacity to speak and understand English gives someone the opportunity to interact with people from around the world. The English language has thus become the lingua franca and is now primordial in numerous fields such as business, culture, science, and education.

Although French is the official language of the province of Québec, the need to communicate in English is important for the same aforementioned reasons. English is a mandatory school subject for all students in the Quebec school system. Students are required to take English classes from grade one (in elementary school) all the way to the end of their secondary studies.

From Grammar-Translation Method to Audio-Lingualism Method and now Communicative Language Teaching, the teaching of English as a second language (ESL) has been linked to various different teaching approaches. The objective here is to examine a type of activity that can assist in the teaching of ESL. The goal was to examine the effectiveness, how it could get students to interact in English and have them use functional language in a specific context. The role of games or play in teaching ESL fits that description perfectly. The essay begins with my motivations. The theoretical framework behind the use of games in the language classroom is also discussed. To help explain the concept of game/play in an ESL classroom, a murder-mystery game/activity is described thoroughly. The fruition of the murder-mystery activity is then analyzed. Certain improvements to the activity are discussed as the completion of the activity can be considered a mitigated success.

RÉSUMÉ

Communiquer en anglais est un incontournable en 2018. La langue anglaise, fait désormais office de lingua franca est primordiale dans de nombreux domaines tels que le monde des affaires, la culture, les sciences et l'éducation. La capacité de communiquer en anglais permet de communiquer avec une grande partie d'humains sur la planète.

Bien que le français soit la langue officielle du Québec, les jeunes québécois sont également de jeunes nord-américains. L'anglais est une matière scolaire obligatoire de la première année (du primaire) jusqu'à la fin de leurs études secondaires.

De la méthode grammaire et traduction jusqu'à l'audio-orale en passant par l'approche communicative, l'enseignement de l'anglais en tant que langue seconde a pris plusieurs chemins au Québec. L'objectif de cet essai est d'examiner l'efficacité d'une activité-type afin de voir si les élèves seront enthousiasmés et poussés à interagir en anglais. Le rôle du jeu correspond parfaitement à cette description. Nous débuterons d'abord avec les motivations derrière le choix du sujet. Le cadre théorique traitera de l'état actuel de l'enseignement de l'anglais langue seconde au Québec et des bienfaits du jeu dans l'apprentissage. La présentation d'une activité de type meurtre et mystère y est décrite. La réalisation de l'activité est ensuite analysée. Par la suite, certaines améliorations sont discutées alors que la tenue de l'activité s'est malheureusement avérée limitée.

INTRODUCTION

In teaching ESL for a number of years now, mainly to adult native speakers of French, I have noticed a persistent pattern. The students who did more to acquire the language than the simple English classes at school seem to reach a higher level of acquisition than the other students who basically went through the motions of their various English courses. By doing more, I am referring to going on trips, student exchanges, watching television in English – some sort of extracurricular contact with the language and not necessarily extracurricular grammar study. The writing of this essay gives me a unique opportunity to further investigate this experience further. Specifically, the observation leads to certain questions about the learning of English in a classroom setting.

- Can the inner workings of the language classroom also be linked to the little progress made by some ESL students?
- Is the importance of explicit grammar teaching culturally-based?
- What changes could be made to current teaching methods to improve the way English is taught in Québec's ESL classrooms?

During my second practicum, my goal was to try and render the contact the students had with the English language as communicative as possible. I wanted to steer away from a more focus-on-form (FonF) approach and get the students to communicate in English as much as possible. I intended to use an English-only approach, inside and outside the classroom. Most ESL teachers can agree that it is sometimes difficult to get the students to communicate in English inside the ESL classroom. I started thinking about what ways I could encourage the students to use English. To reach the objective, the students would need to see communicating in English (in class) as a needed and fun action. The use of games or play seemed an ideal choice as teenagers and games are a winning combination. Furthermore, the use of a pleasurable activity in the classroom might resemble one of the activities that students do, on their own, outside class to improve their English. I had in fact used games in my teaching prior to this

practicum. The game/play context seemed to make the students more relaxed, less shy, and definitely less conscious about their knowledge (or what they consider as being a lack of knowledge) of the English language. For these reasons, I chose to investigate the influence of games/play on my students' willingness to communicate in English in an ESL classroom environment. I believe that games can become engaging activities where students can feel free to practice their English skills in a context where not all students feel comfortable (the classroom environment). My professional objective was to see my beliefs were actually more than an impression.

The first chapter of this essay will deal with the background of the issue, what is the motivation behind this intervention. The reference framework will then explain the theory and research linked to the evoked themes. The third chapter will explain the selected methodology. The fourth chapter will deal with the results of the research, an interpretation of the results, and finally possible modifications. The final chapter, by way of a conclusion, will identify the teaching competencies developed during the intervention process as well as the writing process.

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND OF ISSUE

While the ultimate goal of learning a language is being able to communicate in the studied language, I have noticed a few awkward pedagogical choices throughout my teaching experience. For example, I have met numerous novice ESL learners that could recite a long list of irregular verbs by heart (infinitive, past tense, and past participle - choose, chose, chosen, etc.). This knowledge seemed to be the remains of past institutional English classes. Learning irregular verbs and grammatical elements is not awkward. Grammar constitutes the code of any language and without this code, communication can be impeded. Irregular verbs are also a very important grammatical feature of the English language. What can be considered awkward about these students' acquisition of irregular verbs is the fact that many of them would be incapable of putting these verbs into grammatical past-tense sentences. Furthermore, a large majority would be incapable of using a participle in a sentence. Strangely, their English teachers believed that these verbs should be studied, even though the students' abilities clearly demonstrated that they were nowhere near ready to acquire this grammatical feature. Is it possible that the time and effort these students expended on the learning the irregular verbs could have been spent on something much more useful for them?

As previously mentioned, other ESL students had developed better English skills due to factors such as traveling to environments where English is spoken. However, some students improved their English skills through more accessible measures such as playing videos games, listening to music, watching television, and so on. Some external contact with the language ultimately seems necessary to develop a degree of true competence. How is it that learners can better acquire a second or foreign language

outside the classroom environment than inside? My first thoughts were directed to the weaknesses of the classroom environment.

I come from a Francophone home and I attended an English elementary and high school. I believe that my English skills are similar to those of native speakers. I have no memory of learning straight outright English grammar like that being taught in some of the ESL classes in the province's schools. I am absolutely certain that I was never asked to memorize irregular verbs. Could the fact that some teachers are asking students to learn grammatical features unrelated to their needs or level constitute one of the weaknesses of the L2 classroom environment?

I was truly surprised to see my associate teacher during my second practicum still asking her students to learn irregular verbs by heart. With communicative competence being the norm, I thought that this was an activity from a bygone era. The first MEES professional teaching competency linked to the act of teaching states that a teacher must "act as a professional inheritor, critic and interpreter of knowledge or culture when teaching students" (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001, p.57). My question is then, why are some teachers still asking their students to learn irregular verbs by heart? The Québec Education Program (QEP) better known under its French title *Programme de formation de l'école québécoise* (PFEQ) is a tool "designed to provide a common-core basic education, and hinges on the development of competencies by students, with the goal of using knowledge effectively in carrying out tasks and real-life activities" (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001). However the QEP makes no mention on when or how students need to master English irregular verbs. Furthermore in what type of real-life situation will ESL learners have to recite the simple past tense form and past participle form of irregular verbs? Nonetheless, during my practicum, I witnessed many teachers (not just my associate teacher) who chose to test their students' rote memory skills by having them recite irregular verb forms. Furthermore I am not certain as to how these teachers evaluate these irregular verb tests. As previously mentioned the

QEP is based on the development of competencies. The ESL curriculum focuses on developing three different competencies:

- Interacts orally in English (C1),
- Reinvests understanding of texts (C2),
- Writes and produces texts (C3).

All skills are not seen as equal according to the QEP. For Secondary 1 to 3 the *Interacts orally in English* competency is worth 40% of the students' grade. The other two competencies have the same weight of 30%. For secondary 4 and 5 students, the 3 competencies all have the same importance - 34%, 33%, 33%. The importance placed on the oral interaction competency, particularly in cycle one, is further evidence that communicative competence is at the heart of the province's QEP.

Then how should a teacher go about and categorize the students' results on irregular verb tests? The results cannot be placed under any of the three competencies. The topic of student evaluation is related to the fifth professional teaching competency: to evaluate student progress in learning the subject content and mastering the related competencies. Ideally when evaluating students' competencies teachers should place students "in situations designed to activate the resources required to implement a competency, while the teacher observes their actions and work, and identifies and retains indicators so as to give feedback, trigger adaptations and support the students' motivation and efforts" (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001, p. 84).

My critical judgement asks why is the practice of testing the students' knowledge of irregular verbs so common, although its need is not mentioned anywhere in the QEP, nor does it meet the QEP's competency-based evaluation criteria. Is it because the current ESL teachers were also asked to learn them by heart when they were students in school? If so, this could be more evidence for the maxim that "teachers teach the way they were taught." I chose to focus on the teaching of the irregular verbs forms,

but I could have also focused on other recurring grammatical-ESL themes such as the mastering of various verb tenses (present continuous versus simple present or the simple past versus present perfect). Again the teaching of these aspects (as I have experienced them) seems to be very widespread although there is no mention of them in the QEP. Support for my observations can be found in Jean and Simard's (2011) investigation on the province's ESL teachers' and high school students' beliefs and perceptions of grammar instruction. Their classroom observations discovered that French as a second language (FSL) and ESL students were "exposed to grammar instruction 34% of the total class time (one grammar-related intervention every 4 minutes and 45 seconds)" (p.472). In other words, the equivalent of one out of every three classes is spent on explicit grammar instruction. According to the researchers, "it was also disappointing to us that mechanical drills are the most familiar types of grammar exercise among high school students in a teaching context where government instructional guidelines have been considerably influenced by communicative, socio-constructivist, and competency-based approaches. Traditional teaching still seems to prevail in this context despite efforts to move away from it" (p.479).

As a "professional inheritor, critic and interpreter" (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001, p.57) of the ESL teaching profession I am compelled to investigate if my observations about students who seemingly have developed better English skills due to some sort of external contact with the language has some validity. In a monolingual area such as Québec City, it is quite difficult to come into contact with an actual English speaker. For example, Quebec City is 95% French speaking, 1.5% English speaking, and 3.5% of the population speaks another mother tongue (Le Monde diplomatique, 2012). Having an opportunity to speak with a unilingual Anglophone in Québec City (outside the tourist areas) is extremely rare. However coming into contact with the English language has never been so easy. It might then be interesting to identify the type of contact students have with the English language outside their ESL classrooms as well as the reasons that motivate this contact. Jensen (2017) uses the term *extramural*

English (EE) to refer “to English that users engage in various forms outside the classroom” (p.2). The embodiment of this contact is highly personal (watching television or movies, playing video games, listening to music, and so on). Whatever its form, the author believes that the primary reason why students engage in EE is not the potential language-learning benefits, but rather to communicate with others, to be entertained, and challenged. The benefits of this contact with English language (for the students) seem to outweigh the possible language barriers encountered due to their status of ESL learners. If the students are willing to spend some of their personal time on these activities and if these activities do indeed lead to increased English skills why not import them into the classroom? Clearly these activities motivate the students and they seem to aid in the learning of English.

1.1 Getting teenaged students to speak up in class

As mentioned previously, the need to communicate in English is quite evident. The need for proper English skills is no different for ESL speakers of teenage years. I have personally experienced the challenge of getting certain students to speak up in class. Teenage students have the reputation for being “apathetic and inhibited in activities which involve oral skills” (León and Cely, 2010, p. 11). Multiple reasons can explain this perception; here is one possible explanation:

Most of them don't like being seen as different. Acceptance by their peer group is very important. If asked a question in class, they may not want to answer in case they are seen by their friends as not smart enough or, alternatively, too smart. Teenagers are often shy and self-conscious and feel embarrassed if asked to do activities like miming or performing. (Pearson Education, p.4)

Could the students' reticence to practice their oral competencies in class also be linked to the weaknesses of learning ESL in a classroom environment? If they are afraid to speak English in one of the few environments that encourages them to do so, how do students expect to increase their English skills? If teenage students have a certain

aversion for speaking in class, how can a teacher go about and encourage them to do so? One such example is to place the students in pairs or small groups. Pairs or smaller groups will also help with the shyer students. These circumstances allow students to work in English with a reduced risk of being embarrassed. Another possibility is to have the students play games.

Playing games has “always been one of everybody’s favourite things to do in class, both for teachers and students” (Mora & Lopera, 2001, p. 75). Mora & Lopera (2001) have identified four main reasons why teachers normally choose to play games in class:

1. Set a relaxed atmosphere: There are times when either our students or we (the teacher) may be tense or tired. What is better than bringing a fun activity for all of us to enjoy.
2. Add variety: To avoid monotony, we decide to play something. That way our students will think that our classes are more ‘dynamic’ and ‘interesting’.
3. Reward the class: Yes, your course seems to be working fine, they participate a lot, and do their homework. A game is a good alternative to keep them motivated.
4. Forget to plan: Well, it’s time to rely upon the ultimate classroom resource: Take a game and play during that class (p.76-77).

Unfortunately, these reasons do not express a particularly sound didactical acumen to explain why teachers should use games in class. In fact many of these reasons express a reasoning linked to classroom management rather than classroom pedagogy.

Nonetheless, Moora & Lopera (2001) have also identified numerous advantages of using games in an L2 classroom setting:

1. Games promote socialization, group-work, and the creation of values. As games imply following rules, players realize the importance of mutual respect and cooperation as keys to succeed.
2. Games enable students to gain self-confidence, as they feel interested in participating. Therefore, classroom interaction becomes more natural and more people get involved in it, not just the same people all the time.

3. Games help develop critical thinking. In most games, you need to find, categorize, codify, and decodify (sic) information, solve problems, or make decisions.
4. Games make room for a more natural use of the L2, as all participants need to use the language so they can play well.
5. Games lower tension and anxiety in students. That helps create a better classroom atmosphere where more learning processes will take place.
6. Games are flexible enough to suit different ages or proficiency levels. They can be easily integrated into the syllabus.
7. Games do not go out of fashion as fast as textbooks or other materials do (p.77-78).

A very good reason to use games in an ESL classroom is summed up by Ariza (2001) when she states “as they play games, students stop thinking about language and begin using it in a spontaneous and natural manner within the classroom” (p.7). Indeed there seems to be something about the act of playing games that gets teenage students to come out of their shell. If managed properly, could the act of playing games be a beneficial tool to help students practice their oral skills? These numerous advantages have led me to believe that the use of games in my teaching can potentially be helpful.

The reasoning behind this probe is quite simple. It is my belief that increased English skill levels can be obtained by an increased use of the language. The challenge of the ESL teacher is to create learning activities that will lead to a student-motivated use of English. These lessons must be about using the language and not simply studying the language. However, for various reasons, teenagers can sometimes seem afraid to speak up in class. As mentioned the use of games in an ESL class can have numerous advantages. The MEES’ third professional teaching competency involves the development of “teaching/learning situations that are appropriate to the students concerned and the subject content with a view to developing the competencies targeted in the programs of study” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001, p.69). Therefore, the goal of this essay is to investigate if a lesson based around a game context can encourage students to practice their oral English skills in a classroom. The choice of executing an

activity drawn from a game context is also related to the fourth teaching professional competency: “To pilot teaching/learning situations that are appropriate to the students concerned and to the subject content with a view to developing the competencies targeted in the programs of study” (Gouvernement du Québec, p.79).

CHAPTER II

REFERENCE FRAMEWORK

This section will focus on various concepts, their definitions as well as relevant scholarly literature focusing on the themes of language teaching, the concept of play (related to the education field), and the students' willingness to practice their oral skills in the L2 classroom.

2.1 Communicative language teaching

Different approaches have been used through the years to teach second or foreign languages. Nowadays the prevalent teaching approach is known as the communicative language teaching (CLT). According to Richards (2006), CLT sets as its goal the development of communicative competence. The author describes communicative competence as:

- Knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions,
- Knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g., knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication),
- Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g., narratives, reports, interviews, conversations),
- Knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (e.g., through using different kinds of communication strategies) (p.3).

As Sauvignon (2002) states, "communicative needs provide the framework for elaborating program goals" (p.4). Relatedly, the goal of the ESL program in Québec is

to have the students and teacher work together to develop communicative competence (p.607).

2.2 The use of play/games in learning

Defining what constitutes play is not an easy task. Nonetheless, one common belief about play is that it “often has to do with enjoyment and relaxation” (Cook, 1997). Very few students would be unmotivated by learning tasks filled with joy and relaxation. But can students really learn through play? Vygotsky (1978) explained that in real life, meaning is seen as more important than action, but during play the roles are inverted.

According to Vygotsky (1978), children enjoy play because the subordination to the rules is pleasurable. The play environment also creates a zone of proximal development (ZPD) for the child: “In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself” (p. 102). The concept of the ZPD is defined 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” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

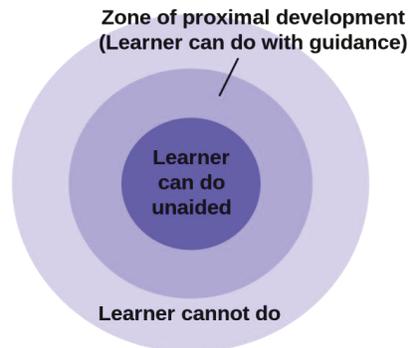


Figure 1 - Zone of Proximal Development (from Wikipedia, 2018)

The concept of the ZPD is shown in figure 1. The inner circle is the task that a learner can perform unaided whereas the outer circle represents tasks that the learner is unable to perform. The ZPD is represented by the middle circle. As shown, with guidance, the learner can increase his or her development level. It is believed that when a student is in the ZPD, assistance will give the student the needed “boost” to achieve the task. The ZPD is sometimes referred to as *scaffolding* (term coined by Wood, Bruner & Ross (1976)). With the benefit of scaffolding, a student can perform a more advanced task. Once the student has learned to master the task, the scaffolding can then be removed. For example, a teacher who writes the questions to ask during a role play on the blackboard is providing some scaffolding for the students. The students perform the role play with the aid of the written questions. Hopefully, this is sufficient for the students to remember the information for future use.

2.3 The use of play/games in the ESL classroom

León and Cely (2010) researched the use of games in the ESL classroom. These researchers also believed that their students “didn’t speak fluently or freely because they felt afraid of their partners’ jokes” (p.18). Furthermore, they mention that their

students “were shy and nervous about expressing themselves in front of the class” (p.18). The researchers’ point of view is also shared by a large majority of students (82%) who participated in this study. Additionally, the same students mentioned that speaking was the most difficult skill to develop.

If the students consider this skill the most difficult to develop, the researchers wanted to know how much speaking the students were actually doing in class. To no surprise, 76% of the students said they *sometimes* spoke English and 15% stated they *never* spoke English in class. These numbers greatly surpass the number of students who said they *almost always* spoke English in class (3%) and *always* spoke English in class (6%). What factors interfered with the students’ speaking in class? The results (shown in Table 2) indicate three important causes: 1) lack of vocabulary, 2) shyness, and 3) fear of humiliation.

Table 1
Factors That Influence Students’ Speaking in a ESL Classroom

Item	Students	Percentage
Fear of humiliation	5	15%
Lack of vocabulary	16	48%
Shyness	9	27%
Put it in practice	1	3%
Didn’t answer	2	6%

León and Cely (2010) then attempted to see the influence of games through an action research process in a classroom. During the process, the students played three different games. The first was what the researchers call a *sharing and caring game*. In these types of games students are encouraged to “share personal feelings and experiences with other class members” (p.17). The students also played a *guessing and speculating*

game, where one student has certain information and the others must find it out. The third game was a *story game*. In this context, the students are asked to share written or narrated stories with their classmates. The study then tried to determine what strategies could be used to encourage the students to speak up.

The results show that 58% of the students “preferred games and highlighted advantages of playing them” (p.20). Why did the students consider games to be part of the solution to practicing their speaking skills? The results (shown in Table 3) indicate that students consider that games allow for: better learning, overcoming shyness, better vocabulary, increased self-confidence, and so on.

Table 2
Students' Opinions on the Use of Games to Help Develop
Their English Speaking Skills

Item	Students	Percentage
Not to speak much in English	1	1.56
To learn vocabulary	7	10.94
To overcome shyness	12	18.75
To help to understand English better	5	7.81
To learn more	15	23.44
To get the students interest	2	3.13
Students' integration	4	6.25
Self-confidence to express him or herself	6	9.38
To be evaluated during the class	1	1.56
To improve the speaking of English	6	9.38
More concentration	1	1.56
To have fun in class	1	1.56
To learn to pronounce	1	1.56
To develop creativity	2	3.13

According to León and Cely (2010), the use of games in the ESL classroom to encourage teenagers to improve their speaking skills can be seen from two perspectives: the students' and the teacher's. Based on their analysis, the researchers were able to identify one category and two subcategories of the positive effects games have on ESL students and teachers (shown in Figure 2).

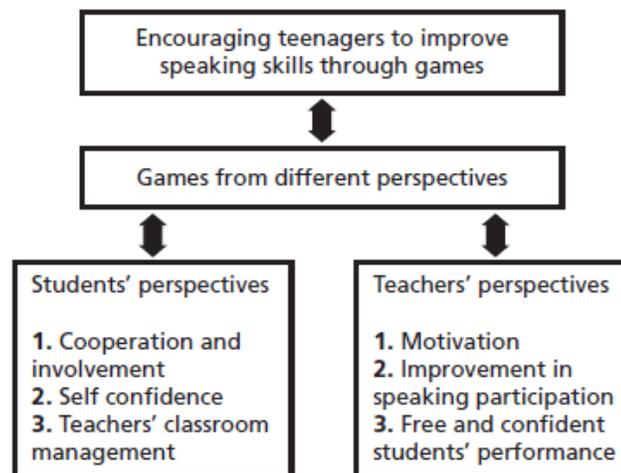


Figure 2 - Categories Drawn From León and Cely (2010)

Data Analysis - Benefits of the use of Games in an ESL Classroom

Based on the students' opinions, the advantages of using games as a tool to practice speaking could be regrouped into three basic categories:

1. Cooperation and involvement: The students worked together while participating in the different games. The students were able to cooperate to help themselves better understand English. The students were also involved in activities that were motivating for them.

2. Self-confidence: The game format helped the students overcome their shyness to speak English in class.
3. Teacher's classroom motivation: The students mentioned that they learned English thanks to the activities implemented in class but also by the way the teachers managed them.

From the teachers' point of view, three categories also emerged as to the use of games in their classroom in order to encourage the students to speak up in class.

1. Motivation: The positive atmosphere observed in class seemed to motivate the students to speak and perform with more freedom and confidence.
2. Improvement in speaking participation: The more relaxed atmosphere seemed to lower the students' tension and anxiety resulting in greater participation. The enthusiasm created by the game context influenced even the shyer and apathetic students.
3. Free and confident student performance: The laid-back context caused the teachers to use jokes and mimicry in their explanations. This made the students feel at ease, which caused them to make jokes as well.

To conclude, the act of playing games was beneficial for the teachers as well as for the students, thus indicating that games can be a viable option to help students practice their oral skills. However the study does not mention if practicing led to any meaningful learning. It definitely helped to make the students more comfortable when it came time to practice. If the expression "practice makes perfect" has any truth to it, the act of playing the game can be helpful not only to their skills, but also to their attitude towards speaking English in class.

2.4 Communicative language teaching in the classroom

The focus in CLT is put on the learner and his or her needs. In the classroom, based on these needs, real communication opportunities allow the students to learn the language authentically. Unfortunately, the reality of teaching and managing a class can sometimes clash with the CLT teaching philosophy. The first concern is how the language spoken in class is similar or dissimilar to that found in a naturalistic language learning environment. On that topic, here are 10 features that Walsh (2002) lists as being prevalent in the second language or foreign language classroom context:

1. Teachers largely control the topic of discussion;
2. Teachers often control both content and procedure;
3. Teachers usually control who may participate and when;
4. Students take their cues from teachers;
5. Role relationships between teachers and learners are unequal;
6. Teachers are responsible for managing the interaction which occurs;
7. Teachers talk most of the time;
8. Teachers modify their talk to learners;
9. Learners rarely modify their talk to teachers;
10. Teachers ask questions (to which they know the answers) most of the time (p.4).

The lecture aspect that emerges from these 10 features may be better suited for school subjects where learning is more content-driven such as geography, history, and math. L2 learning, according to the CLT approach, is far from content-driven. Communicating in the language, as it is spoken by native speakers, is an essential element. If the CLT approach is based on communication; is it not unusual that the person with the highest English skill level in the class (the teacher) is the person doing the most communicating? This aspect can definitely be considered a weakness of the CLT approach in the classroom. Shouldn't the people who would gain the most from the communicative aspect of the approach be doing the majority of the communicating? What would we say of a Physical Education teacher who joins a student basketball game and because of his or her skill set completely dominates the court?

2.5 Peer/peer interaction in the L2 classroom

The interaction between the teacher and the students is not the only interaction that can assist in the learning of a language in a classroom setting. According to the PFEQ, “the classroom is an interactive, collaborative and investigative community of learners in which students are responsible for actively participating in their learning (p.609)”. Authentic peer-peer interaction is also important in CLT classroom methodology, but what exactly do we know about peer-peer interaction in an ESL classroom context? Researchers Springer and Collins (2008) set out to identify how peer-peer interaction in the language classroom differs from interaction in the “outside” world. Furthermore, the researchers wanted to know how the different types of interaction (inside and outside the classroom) contribute to the acquisition of an L2.

They discovered that in the classroom, despite the communicative goals or the parameters of the class, peer-peer interaction focused mainly on language. The focus on language was so important that it often conflicted with the completion of communicative tasks. However, outside the classroom, the very same learners focused mostly on communicating. Springer and Collins (2008) conclude that outside the classroom, language is used as a communication tool rather than an object of study and reflection. While communicating in English outside the classroom, the learners were made aware that despite some deficient aspects of their English language skills, they could be understood by native speakers. In other words, outside the class, the students were no longer just students of English but also speakers of the language.

2.6 The lack of authentic practice in L2 classroom learning

The aspect of speaking the language -not just studying it- is very interesting indeed. Pérez-Vidal (2015) wanted to see the effect of extended contact in a more naturalistic

context compared to the study of a language in a classroom setting. The contribution of both contexts was studied as a group of Spanish-speaking university students (studying English as a FL in Spain) went to an English-speaking country for a semester abroad. The students were tested three times over a period of a year and a half. The first test was at the very start of their university studies; they were tested again at the end of their second semester. The third test was conducted after a stay abroad. The results showed that the students made significant improvements on five out of six oral measurements (focusing on fluency and accuracy) and six out of seven written measurements (focusing on fluency, accuracy and complexity). The significant English skill improvement of the participants after the 3-month immersion is not astonishing. The improvements of their language skills also suggest that classroom language learning needs to be enhanced with some sort of genuine communication in the studied language.

The topic of using the studied language –and not simply studying it- is also addressed in Keppie, Lindberg, & Thomason (2015). The researchers compared the French skills of American French as FL university students who had been on a 6-month study abroad program in France compared to the French skills of their colleagues who had not participated in the study abroad program. The specific goal was to see the effect on the students' fluency. Their findings suggest “that foreign immersion (not to be confused with at-home immersion programs) encourages more L2 fluency than formal education alone” (p.58).

The fact that the students who participated in an immersion program outperformed their peers that did not participate in such programs is not a great surprise. The opportunity to practice the language shows the need for a teaching methodology that focuses on language use.

2.7 Grammar instruction in the communicative classroom

The topic of grammar instruction in the communicative language classroom has been thoroughly documented through the years. The on-going debate among researchers and teachers deals with the aspect of how much time and effort must be put on the direct learning of grammar in a communicative context. Some believe that separate attention to grammar elements is necessary while others believe only corrective feedback is sufficient. The teaching/learning of a L2 grammar can be categorized into 3 different types of approaches. These contrasting approaches differ on how much time and effort a teacher needs to direct the learners' attention to conscious learning of grammar while also focusing on the need to communicate in the L2.

The first approach is called *focus on meaning* (FonM). This approach states that "L2 instruction corresponds with the noninterface view; by providing exposure to rich input and meaningful use of the L2 in context, which is intended to lead to incidental acquisition of the L2" (Ollerhead and Oosthuizen, 2005, p.63). According to this approach, an L2 learner should thus learn language in a manner similar to how an infant/child learns to master his or her first language (L1). The second approach is called *focus on form* (FonF), this is when "students spend much of their time working on isolated linguistic structures in a sequence predetermined externally and imposed on them by a syllabus designer or textbook writer" (Doughty & Long, 2003, p.64). The reasoning behind the FonF approach is that the mere exposure to the L2 is insufficient for learners to master L2 grammatical elements; some direct focus is necessary to master this grammar. The two approaches agree that L2 learning derives from natural exposure to the L2. The view on the learning/teaching of grammatical elements is what sets these two approaches apart. The third approach is called *focus on forms* (FonFS). Contrarily to the two other approaches, FonFS considers that "classroom foreign or second language learning derives from general cognitive processes, and thus entails the

learning of a skill – hence its being characterized as a ‘skills-learning approach’” (Sheen, 2002, p.303). FonFS is made up of three different stages:

1. providing understanding of the grammar by a variety of means (including explanation in the L1, pointing out the differences between the L1 and the L2);
2. exercises entailing using the grammar in both non-communicative and communicative activities for both comprehension and production;
3. providing frequent opportunities for communicative use of grammar to promote automatic, accurate, use (Sheen, 2002, p.304).

2.8 Teacher beliefs

CLT became prevalent in the 1980s. The fact that some Québec ESL teachers are still opting for more a FonF approach can be considered intriguing. What teachers believe and their actual classroom practice can sometimes differ. The discrepancies between a teacher’s belief and his or her actions in the classroom have been a topic of research over the last decade. Borg (2003) states: "teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs" (p. 81). The mismatch between language teachers’ beliefs about language learning and their focus on grammar elements has also been documented. Phipps and Borg (2009) discovered that teachers sometimes practiced contrary to their beliefs. This was often caused by learner expectations and preferences and classroom management concerns. A teacher’s own experiences as a learner can also have an impact (positively or negatively) on a teacher’s beliefs. These influences can be well established by the time teachers go to university (Holt Reynolds, 1992). Furthermore, what goes on in a classroom is greatly influenced by a teacher’s beliefs, his or her preferred teaching

method, and his or her personal views on learning. These factors may have a greater influence than the effects of teacher education (Richardson, 1996).

The extent of time dedicated to grammar teaching in ESL teaching can be seen as surprising since explicit grammar instruction in English-speaking countries is a subject of much debate. These debates have brought a “decline in the explicit teaching of English grammar” (Jeurissen, 2013, p. 301). If native speakers of English learn to read, write, speak, and listen in English with little explicit grammar instruction, why do second language learners of English need to learn explicit grammar rules? Are the province’s ESL teachers outpopping the Pope when it comes to explicit grammar instruction? The explicit teaching of grammar is not proscribed. Grammar is important as it is the structure of the language; without structure, communication would be impossible.

This cross-cultural aspect about a teacher’s point of view about the need for grammar instruction is highly interesting. Schulz (2001) compared FL teacher perceptions regarding the role of explicit grammar study and error correction in two different cultures (Colombia and the U.S.). According to the researcher’s data, 71% of Colombian teachers indicated “that a FL improves most quickly if students study and practice grammar rules” (p.254). Meanwhile, only 38% of the American teachers believed this to be true. Overall Schultz’s data showed that Colombian students and teachers viewed traditional language teaching as more favourable. They had stronger beliefs on the need for explicit grammar instruction. Again, the breakdown according to the teacher’s mother tongue and schooling is not made available by the researcher.

2.9 The need for explicit grammar teaching in different languages

As previously mentioned, the teaching of grammar holds quite an important place in the teaching of ESL in the province of Québec. This can be considered as surprising as the Ministry ESL program, being entirely based on communicative competence, makes no mention of the explicit teaching of grammar. Communicative competence can perhaps be indirectly improved through the explicit teaching of grammar, but the explicit teaching of grammar does not necessarily lead to communicative competence. As mentioned, children who attend English school are subject to very little explicit grammar instruction at school whereas children who attend French school undergo much explicit grammar instruction. This brings up a very interesting question: can explicit grammar instruction be language-based? Is the need of explicit grammar instruction the same for all languages?

A comparison of the MEES' elementary school POL for the English (Gouvernement du Québec, 2017a) and French school systems (Gouvernement du Québec, 2017b) clearly shows the importance of explicit grammar instruction for each language. The French language program has a competency entitled *Écrire des textes variés*. This competency has numerous subsections such as *lexique, orthographe, conjugaison, accords, syntaxe et punctuation, and organisation et cohérence du texte*. For example, under the *conjugaison* subsection we see that children finishing their 2nd grade should have memorized the different conjugations of the following verbs: *aimer, aller, avoir, dire, être, faire (present de l'indicatif)*. Also, children finishing the 4th grade should have learned and memorized all the different conjugations of the verbs *aller, avoir, and être (temps simple)*. Meanwhile the English Language Arts program at the elementary-school level has a competency entitled Conventions of Written and Media Language. The grammar related objectives (found under the heading - Understanding the Conventions of Written Language) are far less precise than the French language

objectives. For example, children at the end of the 2nd grade should express thoughts, ideas, and information in simple sentences using: subject, verb, modifier. At the end of 4th grade students should be using consistent verbs tenses and correct pronoun references. It is important to mention that the English elementary level POL does not mention any verbs, or verb tenses that need to be learned or memorized at any point.

We can also examine the reference documents required to adequately learn French and English at the elementary and secondary school level. Due to the numerous grammar-related objectives enumerated in the previous paragraph young Francophone students in school refer to documents such as the *Bescherelle* (which is made up of three separate volumes – *L'art de conjuguer* (a reference guide on verb conjugation), *La grammaire pour tous* (a reference guide on French syntax, sentence structure, the application of proper grammar to sentences, and punctuation) and *l'Orthographe pour tous* (a reference guide on French spellings). It is important to mention that the first version of *L'art de conjuguer* (originally called *Le Véritable Manuel des conjugaisons ou la science des conjugaisons mise à la portée de tout le monde*) was published in 1842. Interestingly, *Bescherelle* makes a similar English document for French speakers trying to learn ESL. To my knowledge, however, no reference document has equivalent significance for young students wishing to improve their English grammar skills. In fact, the only indispensable reference document for young children in English schools is a standard English dictionary.

Francophone children regularly undergo dictation exercises at school. *Dictée* (as it is called in French) “is a school exercise that aims at testing the mastery of French orthography and grammar. Since many features of French grammar are distinguished in writing but not in speech, this can be a challenging task” (Wikipedia, Dictation exercises). The *Dictée Paul Gérin-Lajoie* (P.G.L) is a Canadian educative project where students try to improve their mastery of the French language. There is no such type of orthography and grammar competition for Anglophone children. This type of

structured competition for school children can be compared to the English spelling bees. It is important to mention that spelling bees focus solely on the spelling of words.

2.10 Students communicating in the ESL classroom

Using a highly communicative methodology in an L2 or FL classroom is essential in CLT. However, the best communicative curriculum does not ensure successful language learning. One important variable remains – the students’ reaction to the curriculum. Ultimately, it is the learner who ensures successful language learning. As we have seen, communication is at the heart of CLT. To ensure language learning the student must be willing to communicate in the L2. MacIntyre, Clément, Dornyei, and Noels (1998) define Willingness to Communicate (WTC) as “a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2” (p.547). The authors have chosen a pyramid (Figure 2) to illustrate the concept.

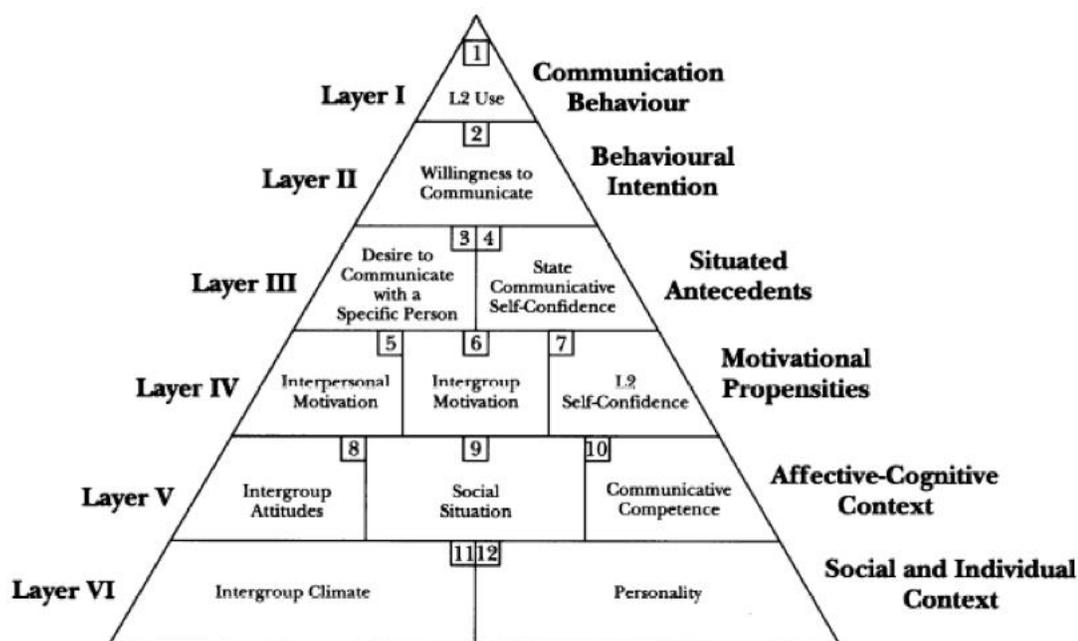


Figure 1

Conceptualization of a learner's Willingness to Communicate in a Second Language (from MacIntyre, *et al.* (1998))

The tip of the pyramid (Box 1- L2 use) is the moment of communication. That moment is influenced by many factors (total of 12 boxes). A speaker's WTC in a certain situation is based on enduring factors (including personality, intergroup attitudes, and L2 confidence) and situational factors (including desire to speak to a specific person, and knowledge of the topic). The enduring factors are stable, deep-rooted influences that are based on the speaking environment or the speaker's personality. These factors would have the same effect for any conversational situation. The base of the pyramid is made up of the factors with the most influence (e.g. the speaker's personality). When a L2 learner sees the factors of one layer as positive, he or she will move up a layer. The upper layers are made up of factors linked to the communication situation at hand, such as the speaker's knowledge of a topic. These factors are temporal and depend on

the speaking context. The learner will finally engage in the act of speaking once all layers are considered as positive.

MacIntyre, *et al.* (1998) state that “a program that fails to produce students who are willing to use the language is simply a failed program” (p.547). This comment can be considered quite harsh as half of the pyramid is based on factors the teacher has very little control over (student’s personality, intergroup climate and attitudes, social situation). Perhaps a good English teacher could bring forth conditions that might make students reconsider a few of these factors.

2.11 Possible influences of a game context on a students’ Willingness to Communicate

The act of playing a game in an L2 should influence the students’ WTC in certain aspects of the situated antecedents and motivational propensities (layers III and IV). Situational components “are based on the affective and cognitive contexts of intergroup interaction and ultimately lead to self-confidence and a desire to interact with a particular person” (p.550). The aspect of *state communicative self-confidence* (box 4) is one aspect where the act of playing a game may have some influence. The authors place a distinction between *state communicative self-confidence*, *L2 self-confidence* (box 7), and *communicative competence* (box 10). *State self-confidence* fluctuates in intensity and time. An increase or decrease in the speaker’s anxiety will thus influence the speaker’s WTC. For example, WTC increases as the topic of conversation is seen as comfortable and reassuring for the speaker. On the other hand, *L2 self-confidence* is constituted of two components: the first being the speaker’s evaluation of his or her mastery of the L2. The second component corresponds to language anxiety, more specifically the level of discomfort experienced by the speaker when using the L2. Lastly, *communicative competence* (box 10) is considered to be the knowledge and

skills required for communication in the L2. It is important to mention that it is the speaker's perception of his or her competence and not the speaker's actual competence that influences the WTC

The *social situation* (box 9) can also have a certain influence on the students' WTC in a game context. The setting is broken down into five factors: 1) participants, 2) setting, 3) purpose, 4) topic, and 5) channel of communication. A participant's age, gender, and social class as well as the relationship (e.g. level of intimacy) between the participants can influence WTC. The setting refers to the place (workplace, school, home, etc.) and time of communication. The purpose of communication refers to the communication intention. The authors identify four categories of purpose: 1) to persuade, 2) to transfer information, 3) to entertain, and 4) to reveal self. The topic of conversation will significantly influence a speaker's WTC. The more familiar a speaker is with a topic, the more likely the speaker will want to communicate. The channel of communication refers to the medium used to communicate.

Enjoyment and satisfaction in learning and using the L2 may encourage the students to apply a more intense and thorough effort to the communication process. This attitude could develop as a result of positive experiences in the L2 classroom. A student with a positive attitude might find the game context enjoyable because the act of communicating is perceived as inherently interesting and challenging.

2.12 The language learning benefits of games in English outside the classroom

Jensen (2017) wanted to investigate the potential language learning benefits of contact with English outside the school environment or EE. She specifically wanted to see if EE contact correlated with vocabulary learning outcomes. The results indicated that the children's main contact with EE consisted of listening to music, watching television,

and gaming. The benefits of gaming were further investigated. Her findings demonstrated that the most popular language mode used by the participants was playing video games where both oral and written English were used. The results demonstrated that gaming with written and spoken English was significantly related to English vocabulary scores. The result is not surprising as the researcher states “the gamer is motivated to understand the input since paying attention to the language in many cases will help him/her advance in the game (p.13).” The motivational factor is thus the engine that brings on the incidental learning of English because the children play video games purely for pleasure. She believes that games put performance ahead of competence, and action before words and text, which essentially means that gamers are learning by doing. because they have better English skills. Thus, the students with better English skill levels might chose to play video games in English because their skill level allows them to fully enjoy themselves while doing so.

2.13 Student Engagement

One way to promote successful learning and help students gain from their educational experience has been to observe how students engage in the learning process. As the advantages of engagement are identified it becomes easier to improve student engagement and therefore increasing positive student outcomes. Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris (2004) definition of school engagement is englobed into 3 categories:

- i. *behavioural engagement* - student participation;
- ii. *emotional engagement* - positive and negative reactions to the school environment and its participant;
- iii. *cognitive engagement* - the student’s personal investment in learning.

These three types of engagement can further be broken down into subcategories.

Behaviorial engagement can be further broken down into:

- i. Positive conduct which corresponds to following rules and class norms;
- ii. Involvement in learning and academic tasks which corresponds to behaviour such as effort, persistence, attention, asking questions, etc.;
- iii. Participation in school-related activities which corresponds to participation in athletics or school governance.

Emotional engagement can be further broken down into:

- i. The students' affective reactions or in other words student interest boredom, anxiety, sadness, and happiness.
- ii. Emotional reactions are positive or negative feelings toward the school and its' staff.
- iii. School identification deals with the students' attachment to the school environment.

Cognitive engagement can be further broken down into:

- i. A psychological component which englobes the student's investment in learning and their motivation to learn.
- ii. A cognitive component which involves how students are "strategic" when thinking and studying (ex. self-regulated learning, metacognition, application of learning strategies).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

As demonstrated by León and Cely (2010), play can have very positive outcomes on the teaching and learning of ESL. For this essay, the goal was also to delve into the role of play in the teaching of ESL. Ideally, the context needed to be interpreted as pleasurable for the learners and educational for the teacher. According to the Vygotskian theory of play, the students needed to see completing the task as more important (pleasurable) than its meaning. In other words, the students needed to be motivated more by performing the task than by its educational benefits. Hopefully the enjoyment factor of the game context would help the students view their WTC as positive and stimulate participation. Furthermore, the task should be highly communicative and solicit oral skills (speaking and listening).

The specific goal was to observe the students' WTC during the activity. Simply stated - would the students freely participate in a game activity? The ultimate goal was to see if playing games stimulates the use of oral English in class, especially with the students who rarely speak in class. Furthermore this undertaking would also help in developing my grasp of the third professional teaching competency which deals with the development of teaching/learning situations. Piloting teaching/learning situations (the fourth professional teaching competency) would also be at the heart of this activity.

3.1 Context and participants

The activity was conducted at L'École secondaire Jean-de-Brébeuf. Brébeuf, as it is generally called, is located in Limoilou, an inner-city neighbourhood in Québec City.

It is a rather multicultural school with well-known music and sports programs. The school caters to students from Secondary 3 to Secondary 5, although the music and sports programs also welcome Secondary 1 and 2 students.

The intervention was conducted in the Secondary Three English Option group (n = 24, average age 14 years old). The English Option group is different than the normal ESL class. This is an elective course that students choose as part of their course load (they also have their mandatory English class). Since it is not a regular ESL class, the teacher does not have to respect the 3 Ministry ESL competencies (C1- Interacts orally in English, C2 - Reinvests understanding of texts, C3 - Writes and produces texts). The teacher is free to evaluate the students in a way he or she chooses. The general philosophy of this class is to expand on the notions that the students see during their regular ESL class. The main goal is to have them practice their skills. For example, very little focus is put on the teaching of grammar. The goal is to have the students put their knowledge to use. The English Option class draws mainly two different clienteles. The first being students that enjoy and excel in English and the other being students who have some difficulties and would like to improve their English skills. The mix of the two clienteles makes for a strange combination. For example, some students say the activities are too simple and others too difficult. Furthermore, the weaker students can sometimes be self-conscious of their skill level compared to their stronger classmates.

3.2 Activity

A murder mystery theme was chosen as the game/play activity. During this type of activity, different roles are given to various players. A narrator (in this case the teacher) explains a murder context to the participants; all players have some sort of link to the

victim. Background information is attributed to each role. One of the participants is unknowingly playing the murderer. By asking various questions the participants are able to shed some light on the context and try to determine who the murderer is. The highly communicative aspect of the role play activity corresponds perfectly to a CLT activity because the students need to communicate information from one another in order to solve the mystery. The interactive aspect of the activity also corresponds to the first competence of QEP (Interacts Orally in English). A crime-related role play activity was something the students were already familiar with. Their regular teacher had used a variation of role play games on a few occasions beforehand.

The murder mystery activity was greatly modeled on the *Murder in The Classroom* activity presented by Graine Lavin (2006) at the website OneStopEnglish.com. The website provides the backdrop and the tools for the activity (See appendix A), but it gives the teacher leeway in the way to use the activity. Seven characters are needed in order to find the culprit. Four additional character cards (whose information to solving the crime is non-vital) are provided. The students are each assigned the role of one of these characters (See Appendix A). The students also receive a worksheet to help take down the information given to them through the question and answer process (see Appendix B). The worksheet is basically a grid with the headings: name, motive, alibi, and clue listed horizontally and the character names listed vertically. As the goal of the activity is to discover the murderer and his or her motive, the worksheet is a vital tool to aid the students in their process.

The *Murder in the classroom* is split into five different steps:

Step 1 - Teacher explains that the students will play a murder mystery game;

Step 2 - Character cards are distributed to the students;

Step 3 - Students receive their worksheet;

Step 4 - Mingling activity, individually students ask each other questions to collect information;

Step 5 - Students (as a group) try to discover the murderer and his or her motive.

3.3 Reasoning behind the choice of activity

Graine Lavin's *Murder in The Classroom* (2006) activity was selected for the intervention for a few reasons. A game can take on various forms - video games, board games, sports, etc. A role play format was selected because it was a format the students were already familiar with, as their regular teacher had used a few previously during the school year. The format was also chosen for its highly communicative nature - to complete the task the students would need to use all four skills (reading, speaking, listening, and to a lesser extent writing) and also the QEP three ESL competencies. The theme of murder and mystery is a classic for teenagers; horror movies, which cater generally to teenagers, exemplify their enthusiasm for the theme. As mentioned previously, the *Murder in The Classroom* activity gives the teacher much freedom. For example, the website states the activity is suitable for pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced students. As the activity focuses on the resolution of a crime that happened in the past, knowledge of past tense verbs is a prerequisite. Many verb tenses are appropriate for the task such as the simple past (ex. I was in the gymnasium when I heard...) or the past progressive/continuous (ex. At the time of the murder, I was talking...).

Some of the students in the English Option group were quite comfortable with more challenging verb tenses, but that was not the case for all the students. Given the disparity of the skill level between certain students, my associate teacher and I came to the conclusion that the activity should focus solely on the simple past tense. The simple past was definitely not mastered by all the students, but it was a verb tense that all the

students were familiar with. The goal was to communicate. Therefore mastery of the simple past was not a prerequisite for the activity. The students were given a context in which the verb tense could be practised and where they would be having fun doing so. The research goal was to view the students' WTC in English during the activity and not their mastery of the simple past.

This activity was also chosen because the students would be working in smaller groups (the activity is suitable for groups of 7 to 11 students). As mentioned previously, smaller groups can help shyer students overcome their fear of speaking to the whole class.

3.4 Procedure

Once the normal greetings of the class were completed, the students were then informed that they would be playing a murder and mystery role play. The first question that the students were asked was if everyone knew what a murder and mystery role play activity consisted of. Through various questions and answers, the students were made aware of what was expected of them (ex. Have you ever heard of a murder and mystery role play activity? Who has ever played a game like this? How are they played?). Once the students understood the task, it was time to give them the context of the murder.

The murder and mystery activity was greatly modeled after the *Murder in The Classroom* activity available at the website OneStopEnglish.com. To aid teachers, OneStopEnglish.com furnishes a PowerPoint presentation that presents the context of the murder mystery role play activity. The murder context was then presented to the students. Here is the information found on the PowerPoint slide:

During a school reunion a scream is heard from one of the classrooms. It's 8:30 pm. A few minutes later the dead body of Ms. Eliza McGowan, a cranky old English teacher, is found. She was hit on the head. Also found were a number of items that may lead us to the killer: a book written by one of her ex-students, Simon Donnelly, a photograph of one of her fellow teachers, a young man called Saul Sheen, and a handkerchief with the initials I.W. At the moment these are the three main suspects but everyone who was at the party and saw or spoke to Ms. McGowan needs to be questioned.

The slide was read aloud and the students were asked about their comprehension of the text. Special attention was placed on the vocabulary words 1) *cranky* and 2) *handkerchief*, as these words have some importance in the completion of the game. A slide of the character Grumpy from Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (in a stereotypical pose) was shown to help the students understand the word cranky. A prop was used to show a handkerchief. Once the murder context was clear, the students received their worksheet. The students were asked if they understood the headings on the handout. Did the students understand these 3 vocabulary words (*motive*, *alibi*, and *clue*)? The words *motive* and *alibi* should be easier to understand as they are cognates for the French words *motivation* and *alibi*. The word *clue* has no French cognate, but a link to the popular board game of the same name was made. As mentioned previously, the group had worked on several activities dealing with crime and mystery during the school year. This was a short review. The following definitions for the words were inserted into the role play context PowerPoint presentation.

1. Motive: what motivated the killer to commit the crime?

Example: I killed Mr. O (name used by students to refer to me) because he made us work too hard.

2. Alibi: someone who or something that can confirm that a person cannot be responsible for a crime.

Example: I did not commit the crime. Ms. Marie-Claude (the students' regular teacher) is my alibi. We were at the restaurant together.

3. Clue: something that helps a person solve a mystery or puzzle.

Example: To catch Mr. O's killer, it is important to find clues.

The goal was to get the students into action as quickly as possible. Time was precious as this was my last class with the English Option group (end of the practicum). The students were also ready to do more than listen. Once the needed vocabulary was discussed, the students were divided into three groups (eight students per group). The groups were formed with the help of the website <http://chir.ag/projects/team-maker/>. I believed that I would get better participation if the groups were made randomly rather than if the students chose their partners themselves. Previously, I had let the students choose their partners and the outcome of the activities seemed diminished as the students chose friends and that led to behaviour problems. I thought that the students would probably refrain from such behaviour and focus on the task at hand if they were grouped together with students they were less familiar with. Since it was contrary to the normal class procedure, I was ready to receive any complaints. Surprisingly, the students were curious as to how the website worked, so dividing the group went off without a hitch. Furthermore, assigning the students to their groups with the help of the website was very efficient; there was no wasted time as to who was with whom. The members of teams were projected on the Smartboard.

As there were 24 students in class, the class was divided into three groups of eight. One additional character was added to the seven main characters. The groups were colour coded (red, yellow, and white). The colour corresponded to the photocopied handout the members of each group received. That way it was much easier for the students to know who was a member of what group. The different roles were also assigned randomly. I asked the first 3 students (one from each group as listed on the team break down from the team building website) to come to the front of the class to get their handouts. This was explained as I said, "Student A, Student B, and Student C please come to front of the class please. You will be playing the role of Simon Donnelly.

Student D, Student E, and Student F please come to the front of the class. You will be playing the role of Saul Sheen”. This was repeated until all the roles were assigned. As mentioned, the handout consisted of a short description of their role, their relationship with the victim, and their various actions the night of the murder. As they were given their handout, the students were asked to join their group in a certain area in the classroom. Members of the white team were asked to go the back of the class, members of the red team were asked to stay in the middle of the class, and the members of the yellow team were asked to stay in front of the blackboard.

Once all the students received their handout and read their role description, it was almost time to put the students to work. I just needed to make sure the students understood their role descriptions. I asked if there were any difficult vocabulary words that caused comprehension problems in their role description. I wandered from group to group in case some students were too shy to ask a question in front of the whole class. No students asked for assistance. The students were then made aware of what they needed to do during the next step of the activity. The next step was the mingling activity. The students needed to mingle with their teammates and ask questions in order to establish whether the teammate’s character had a motive to kill the victim, if they had an alibi or what possible clue could lead to solving the crime. I then asked what questions a good detective would ask to find the needed answers. Special attention was made to ensure the questions were only in the simple past tense. Here are the sample questions given by the students that were written on the blackboard for use during the activity:

What was your relationship with the victim/Ms. McGowan?

Why were you at the party?

When was the last time you saw the victim/Ms. McGowan?

Where were you when you heard the victim/Ms. McGowan scream?

Once the questions to ask were clear, I reminded the students to write down the answers as they would be important for the next step of the activity. They would come together as a large group and try to figure out who the murderer was and what his or her motive was. At this moment the students went about to ask their teammates the needed questions.

3.5 Data collection and data treatment

The next steps were extremely important as they were the base of my experimentation. How were the students going to react to the activity? The goal was to observe their WTC to communicate in English. I wanted to observe if the game context would influence the students' WTC. I specifically wanted to focus more on the shyer, weaker students who rarely or never spoke in class. Would the game/play context influence their WTC in English?

A tool would be needed in order to judge the students' engagement in the game activity. Based on the concept of school engagement developed by Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris (2004) and Schlechty (2002), the Metiri Group have developed a student engagement level hierarchy in a booklet entitled *Student Engagement* (n.d.). Here is their description of the five student engagement levels:

i. Intrinsically Engaged Learners

- Student sees the activity as personally meaningful.
- The student's level of interest is sufficiently high that he persists in the face of difficulty.
- The student finds the task sufficiently challenging that he believes he will accomplish something of worth by doing it.
- The student's emphasis is on optimum performance and on "getting it right"

ii. Tactically Engaged Learners

- The official reason for the work is not the reason the student does the work, she substitutes her own goals for the goals of the work.
- The substituted goals are instrumental - grades, class rank, college acceptance, and parental approval.
- The focus is on what it takes to get the desired personal outcome rather than on the nature of the task itself-satisfactions are extrinsic.
- If the task does not promise to meet the extrinsic goal, the student will abandon it.

iii. Compliant Students

- The work has no meaning to the student and is not connected to what does have meaning.
- There are no substitute goals for the student.
- The student seeks to avoid either confrontation or approbation.
- The emphasis is on minimums and exit requirements: "What do I have to do to get this over and get out?"

iv. Withdrawn Students

- The student is disengaged from current classroom activities and goals. The student is thinking about other things or is emotionally withdrawn from the action.
- The student rejects both the official goals and the official means of achieving the goals.
- The student feels unable to do what is being asked, or is uncertain about what is being asked.

v. Defiant

- The student is disengaged from current classroom activities and goals.
- The student is actively engaged in another agenda.
- The student creates her own means and her own goals.

- The student's rebellion is usually seen in acting out-and often in encouraging others to rebel (pp.6-7).

The results would thus be a description of the students' engagement in the activity based on observations provided based on the student engagement scale. Since the goal of the essay was to observe the students' WTC during the activity some subtleties in the description were impossible to define. No matter what prompted their WTC, I wanted to see the students in action. Nevertheless, during my 13 weeks of teaching these students, I had come to know the group rather well. Since it was rather small; I knew all the students by their first names. I was aware of their English-skill level and had been witness to the efforts they had exerted on various previous projects. Based on these descriptions and the knowledge I had gained during my practicum, I would be able to compare the students' previous engagement levels with their level of engagement during the game activity.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This next chapter will focus on the results of the game/play activity followed by possible improvements to consider.

5.1 Results

As mentioned, the activity had 5 steps, but the students mainly participated in the last 2: the mingling step and the group deduction step. During the mingling phase, the students asked each other questions and took down notes. During the second phase the students came together as a group to discuss who the possible murderer was. The goal was to see if a lesson based around a game context could increase the students' WTC in English.

It is impossible to say that all the students spoke English during the mingling phase, but overall it seemed like it was conducted in English. I went around the class to observe, but my presence might have prompted the students to use English when I was close and to use French when I went away. If there were indeed students who spoke French during this phase, they went through several hurdles to do so. The information provided on the character descriptions was provided in English only. The questions (that students asked each other) were written on the board in English only. If French was spoken, it was because these students went out of their way to do so. Furthermore, the students handed in their worksheets once the activity was completed. Some students had chosen not to fill in their worksheets (6 worksheets were blank). All the worksheets that were completed were done so in English. I can only deduce that most to all students used English during the mingling phase. During this step the students' engagement in

this task can be judged as good. The students followed the instructions rather well and its fruition was done to my delight.

During the second phase, things went a little off course. The students seemed to enjoy the experience. Two out of three groups (red team and white team) spoke English and stayed on task. However the yellow team quickly had members on task and others no longer on task and speaking French. According to the student engagement descriptions developed by the Metiri Group, these 2 students can be considered as *withdrawn*. They were definitely disengaged from the classroom activity. This situation brought on a little issue. Should the researcher intervene if the students do not focus on the task at hand? Should the researcher allow the students to continue with what they were doing or should he or she encourage the group to remain on task? The goal was to observe the students' participation; if they did not participate, should that be considered as a sign that the task did not stimulating them? However, students drifting off target and using their L1 is not something that is totally uncommon for an ESL teacher. It is something that occurs almost daily in class. It definitely was a common factor with the English Option group. It was decided that the teacher should remind the students that they needed to concentrate on the task at hand and use English.

Not being on task was not a question of skill, as one of the students no longer focused on the task and speaking French was one of the students with the most skill on the yellow team. This student is well-known for not fully applying himself in class. He is often reminded that he cannot put his head down on the desk and sleep. His non-participation is probably not linked to his WTC but rather to his engagement level. It is a shame because the dynamics of the yellow group would have probably changed had he decided to participate. It is difficult to rate the other students as no other student in the yellow group decided to speak up and continue the task at hand. Before being reminded to focus on the task at hand, two students in the yellow group spoke in French while the others just sat down and listened quietly. I believe the silent students could

be rated as *compliant*. As described, these students seek to avoid confrontation or approbation. Not one other member of the yellow team felt the need to get the group back on track. I reminded the yellow team what they needed to do and how to do it. They complied, but with very limited enthusiasm.

In the red group, during the discussion phase one of the stronger students took the lead and like a good detective started asking questions to all the others. He started to put the pieces of puzzle together. Unfortunately, he did most of the speaking; the other students basically followed. Classifying this student is difficult, because he is one of the rare students in the English Option Group that participated fully. Was his motivation intrinsic or tactical? I believe his engagement to be intrinsic as he seemed to be personally engaged in the process. However, only he would be able to answer this question. It is also difficult to rate the other students in the group. Is their limited participation linked to *compliance*, being *withdrawn* or simply not being able to get a word in? It is entirely possible that some of the silent students could be categorized as compliant. They might have felt threatened by the stronger student's skill set and chose to remain silent. Their perception of their skill level compared to the stronger student's might be linked to their silence.

The white team worked rather well. Unlike the red team, not one member took the lead. The lead was taken by three to four team members. Rating their level of engagement is also quite difficult; were these students intrinsically or tactically engaged? Some of the more engaged students were students that participated regularly during other classes. However, one of the more engaged students was a relatively new student to the class (he started to attend the English Option class approximately a month previously). The student was from Brazil and his French skills are not as advanced as his English skills. He seemed to enjoy the activity and participated greatly, more than he had in prior class activities. Can his seemingly increased participation be linked to the activity? The answer can only be interpreted; he might have participated more because he was in a

smaller group or simply because he was in a good mood that day. Although the lead was taken by a small group, the weaker and shyer students in the group were generally content with following the lead of the stronger students and mainly participating when asked to do so.

As for the outcome of the activity, two teams (the white and yellow team) were able to correctly identify the murderer. A little discussion with the 3 groups and the teacher followed, but as during the discussion phase, participation was limited. The stronger students took the lead to explain their group's decision. During the discussion, the students talked about the activity and their appreciation. The students said they enjoyed the activity and would like to have an opportunity to do another similar activity in the future. As to why the students liked the activity, only one student volunteered an answer. He mentioned that he liked the activity because everybody had a role to play and that the students needed to cooperate to find the murderer. This comment is probably linked to the fact that, as mentioned previously, their regular teacher also conducted crime role plays. However her format is much freer than the one used in this investigation.

5.2 Improvements

All in all, the activity and sequencing went well. After having performed the activity once here are some changes to the activity that might be interesting to consider. The goal of planning and playing a game was mainly to get everyone to practice their oral skills. Would the enjoyment from a game help some students overcome their shyness and increase their WTC in English?

The first modification has to do with the number of members per group. Having groups with 8 members probably was not ideal. The number is too high to get the shyer students to come out of their shells. The students who were already comfortable

speaking English seemed to fully enjoy themselves. They probably would have participated in any activity. The shyer students also said they enjoyed the activity, and they probably did. However, their level of enjoyment was not enough to get them to participate. Once the mingling activity was completed, it might have been better to first split the small groups (8 members) into two teams of four for a short period. After an initial discussion period the two groups could merge together and compare their thoughts. The even smaller groups might have helped the self-conscious students.

It would be interesting to see if these shyer students would have participated more if the activity would have been in their mother tongue. Maybe the language barrier is not the sole reason that explains their level of participation. As mentioned by MacIntyre, et al. (1998) personality is one of the broadest and most influential factors to consider when measuring a student's WTC.

The random distribution of team members probably did not help the shyer students. Some students might have participated more if they had felt more comfortable. However, as mentioned previously, the random distribution also had some positive effects.

Even the choice of the activity can be criticized. The *Murder in the Classroom* activity was extremely structured. The students were not challenged in their English use. During the mingling phase, students read questions off the board and read the answer from their character description sheet. The regular teacher had done crime/role play activities during the school year. It was one of the few activities the group really seemed to appreciate and the participation level showed. This format of a murder mystery role play activity was new to them; it was more prepared and scripted than what they had done previously. Actually, the role play format used by the teacher probably led to more spontaneous use of English. During her format, a crime or mystery is explained (usually from the headlines). The class breaks down into groups of four. One group is

designated as the possible culprits. They must then work together on a common alibi. As the culprits work on their alibi, the others take on the role of investigators. Their goal is to come up with questions that will contradict the culprits' alibi. Once the alibi and the questions are ready, the culprit group is split up. One member from the culprit group is assigned to an investigator group. Once all questions are asked, the culprits change investigator group. They are now asked a new set of questions. Once all the culprits have been questioned, the investigators compare answers. After that, the teacher asks the investigator groups individually if the culprits are guilty or innocent. The teacher also asks the investigators to explain their reasoning. Other than the vocabulary linked to the initial crime, the students are free to use the language they prefer. The freer use of English would be something interesting to research.

The constraints of the studied activity did not lead to much use of improvised English. During the mingling phase, the students mainly read questions off the board and answered by reading the information off their character descriptions. Even though they spoke English, it would be a stretch to consider their use as spontaneous and natural.

As for the collection of data a discussion was held after the activity was finished. The students volunteered their responses. It might have been more interesting to have a survey (once the activity was complete) where the students could rate their appreciation and their level of engagement.

CONCLUSION

In order to enhance teacher training and professionalize the craft of teaching, the MEES has identified twelve core professional competencies that an aspiring teacher must possess. These competencies relate to the actions implicit to teaching, rather than

subject-specific, pedagogical and didactic knowledge. This essay project has helped me gain a certain perspective on a number of these competencies.

The first professional competency, which deals with the foundations of teaching, states that a teacher must “act as a professional inheritor, critic and interpreter of knowledge or culture when teaching students” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001, p.57). The goal of this competency is to render teaching significant in the eyes of the students. As I have mentioned, I was greatly surprised to see so much outright grammar teaching during my practicum. This is quite contrary to what I have been accustomed to during my studies. Throughout my studying of language teaching, CLT has been the archetype of what a L2 teacher should strive for. There is definitely a place for grammar teaching in CLT, but its ubiquity from my teaching observations has left me quite perplexed. From these observations, I have wondered if the students can or will make links between the grammatical elements and their communicative purpose. On this topic, the competency also explains the academism where a teacher merely transmits “information, as though knowledge of a [sic] content automatically means that students have acquired learning. If the students do not understand, or if they do not transfer their learning to other contexts, it is therefore their own fault” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001, p.58). The teacher’s role is therefore to facilitate learning by the use of proven concepts and methods. The teacher must adopt a “critical approach to the subject matter” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001, p.59). Not only does the teacher need to be critical of the subject matter, but he or she needs to “cast a critical look at his or her origins, cultural practices and social role” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001, p.62). This aspect is probably a source of reluctance of viewing grammar in my class mainly with theoretical explanations and fill-in-the-blank type exercises. I have had the frustrating experience of teaching grammatical elements, reviewing the elements and testing the elements on exams to finally notice that some students do not use them when they should. It was interesting to put a name (academism) on a practice that I had perceived.

This essay has allowed me to learn that there is some scientific proof to the maxim “teachers teach the way they were taught”. The concept of teacher beliefs explains that a teacher’s own experience as a learner can also have an impact on a teacher’s beliefs. Other factors can also influence teachers such their personal views on learning, classroom management, learner expectations and so on. Unfortunately, these factors can have a greater influence than teacher education. As my beliefs are linked to my personal experience, I also understand why my vision of ESL teaching can sometimes differ from that of other ESL teachers.

This essay has also allowed me to learn much about the QEP. I have much better knowledge of the three ESL competencies and especially on how I should go about and evaluate them.

The second MEES professional teaching competency mentions the importance “to communicate clearly in the language of instruction, both orally and in writing, using correct grammar, in various contexts related to teaching” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001, p.63). During both my practicums I chose to speak only English with the students inside and outside the class. The conclusions of certain studies relayed in this essay mention the importance of using the language and not simply studying it. These studies have strengthened my resolve to continue with this approach in the future. As possibly one of the sole embodiments of Anglophone culture that the students have readily access to – especially in a highly Francophone environment such as Québec City - the occasions to actually use English in an authentic communicative context are extremely limited.

The third of the MEES’ 12 professional competencies targets developing “teaching/learning situations that are appropriate to the students concerned and the subject content with a view to developing the competencies targeted in the programs of study” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001, p.69). I believe the murder mystery activity

corresponded perfectly to this criterion. One of the features of the competency is that teachers take “into account the prerequisites, representations, social differences (i.e. gender, ethnic origin, socioeconomic and cultural differences), needs and special interests of the students when developing teaching/learning situations” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001, p.74). Firstly, the game format and the choice of a murder mystery role play activity clearly took into account the students’ interests. The communicative aspect of the activity also corresponded greatly to a CLT ESL activity.

The use of the students’ pre-existing knowledge is also featured in this competency. The *Murder in The Classroom* activity was chosen (and slightly modified) to have the students practice the simple past. Not all the students mastered the simple past, but it was definitely a verb tense that they had seen previously in class and well within their grasp.

Another feature of this competency is that teachers are responsible “for the methods they use to instruct and educate those students. They must therefore be able to show that they have used the best methods for the context” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001, p.72). Research showed that games allow for cooperation, involvement, self-confidence, and so on. The students who participated in the experimentation stated that they enjoyed the task. There definitely was cooperation and involvement from most students. The findings relayed in León and Cely (2010) investigation proclaimed that 19% of the students said the use of games in their ESL class helped them overcome their shyness (p.21). However it is difficult to verify if this is what I experienced. Albeit my activity did not attain the goal I had set (getting the shy students to speak up in class) but by researching the theme of play in the field of education I know that the use of games in the ESL classroom is still highly appropriate. I will continue to opt for the use of games in my teaching activities. If I want to have the shy students increase their WTC I know have a better idea of what needs to be done to reach that goal. My murder mystery activity was not the miracle cure, but I will continue to persevere. The

writing of this essay has clearly made me reflect on the choices of what and how I will teach in my class.

The third professional competency “To pilot teaching/learning situations that are appropriate to the students concerned and to the subject content with a view to developing the competencies targeted in the programs of study” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001, p.79) is closely related to the previous competency. This is probably where I have gained the most from the essay process. According to the MEES, teachers should be able to create “conditions in which students can engage in meaningful problem situations, tasks or projects, based on their cognitive, emotional and social characteristics” (Gouvernement du Québec, p.80). This feature is divided into three different factors influencing the students’ learning. To begin, the teacher must create an imbalance, in other words the tasks that cannot be solved directly; the task must present obstacles that must be surmounted. The *Murder in The Classroom* activity provided such conditions. A great deal of communicating was necessary to discover the killer and his or her motivations. The second factor to consider in the competency’s definition is stimulating students. Making the students feel comfortable and confident was at the core of the experimentation. The premise being that the game format would stimulate the students, which would then prompt greater participation. Lastly, the third factor deals with organization. Seeing that the activity was linked to the writing of this essay I had put a lot of thought into the sequencing and the organization of the activity, much more than if the activity had not been linked to my essay. I went over all the details (PowerPoint presentation, colour-coded handouts, problem vocabulary, forming teams, props, and so on) with my associate teacher to ensure everything went as smoothly as possible. Other than the non-participation of a few students, I can say the organization of the activity was a great success. I believe the activity was well-explained and no student was unaware of the task to accomplish. Another feature of the fourth teaching competency is to encourage team work. The *Murder in The Classroom* activity was selected because it allowed for smaller team participation. As

stated early the use of smaller groups can help the shyer students feel more comfortable and thusly increase participation. The writing of essay has made me reflect on how to go about and organize and administer my activities. It has been especially beneficial for my teaching to identify the three different factors for ideal learning activities developed in this professional teaching competency - 1) creating an imbalance, 2) stimulating students, and 3) being organized.

Other than to help develop my teaching competencies, the goal of this essay - in essence - was to investigate if a lesson based around a game context could increase a teenaged student's motivation to practice his or her oral English skills in a classroom. In other words, are games a good premise to get teenagers to speak up in the ESL class? Based on my observations during the activity, the answer is yes and no.

The participation factor was unfortunately not as significant as anticipated. During the group discussion activity, the more assertive group members participated and the more self-conscience students were content with a limited participation. Unfortunately, it was more of a *business-as-usual* situation. The reach of these observations is quite limited as the game/play activity was conducted on only one group. The results might differ with a different group.

Whatever the results obtained, the game/play context asked that all students communicate in English - which they did much more than if they were working on mechanical drills in a traditional classroom setting. The premise of this investigation was to demonstrate the need to prioritize highly communicative activities rather than explicit grammar instruction. Another intention was to demonstrate the need to speak the language and not simply study it in order to one day become more proficient. I believe the use of games by ESL teachers allow for both.

I believe firmly that the use of games in the classroom is a great way to get the students to participate in class. Asking the shyer students to come out of their shell after one game/play activity was probably overly ambitious. MacIntyre et al. (1998) did state that personality is the factor that has the most influence on a speaker's WTC in a L2. It is entirely possible that the same shy students do not speak up much in other classes when using their mother tongue.

If there is truth to the expression *old habits die hard*, a few more occasions might be needed to obtain the desired results. After all, León and Cely (2010) had their students play three different games during their experimentation. Despite the mitigated success of the activity to get the shyer students to speak up, the activity can still be seen as successful. The activity corresponded to CLT guidelines and the students were able to practice their knowledge of simple past verbs in a motivating context. Hopefully, the outcome might be considered more positive if some of the proposed modifications to the activity or the sequencing of the activity are considered.

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APPENDIX A - LESSON PLAN - MURDER IN THE CLASSROOM

Murder in the classroom: Teacher's notes

Skills: Reading, speaking, listening

Grammar: Past tenses, past continuous action interrupted by a past simple action.

Level: Pre-intermediate +

Age group: Teens/young adults

Materials: Character cards, worksheet

Time: +/- 50 minutes

Procedure:

Step one:

Explain to the class that you are going to play a murder mystery game. Everyone will be a character in the game and one of them is the murderer! Give them the background information:

Background Information:

During a school reunion a scream is heard from one of the classrooms. It's 8:30 pm. A few minutes later the dead body of Miss Eliza McGowan, a cranky old English teacher, is found. She has been hit on the head. Also found were a number of items that may lead us to the killer: a book written by one of her ex-students, Simon Donnelly, a photograph of one of her fellow teachers, a young man called Saul Sheen, and a handkerchief with the initials I.W. At the moment these are the three main suspects but everyone who was at the party and saw or spoke to Miss McGowan needs to be questioned.

Step two:

You need 7 students to play the game. The main character cards all contain clues to working out the mystery. For bigger groups use the supplementary cards (they contain no real clues) or for groups of fourteen or more, split the students into two groups and play the game as a competition to see who can work out the mystery first.

Give each student a character card. They need to read and memorize the information. The aim is to act out the game, become the character and not to just read the information from the card. At this point answer any questions students might have about their character.

Step three:

Hand out the worksheets, explain to the class they need to collect information about everyone who was at the party and fill any relevant information on the sheet. At this point go over key vocabulary: alibi, motive, clue. etc.

Elicit from the class the questions they need to ask and write on the board for reference:

What is your name?

Why were you at the party?

What was your relationship with Ms. McGowan?

When did you last see Ms. McGowan?

What were you doing when you heard the scream?

Step four:

This stage is a mingling activity with students asking questions and collecting information. Monitor the language used at this point and correct where necessary.

Step five:

When the students have spoken to everyone who was at the party, have them go back into their original groups. Take back the character cards. Using the information they have collected, the students try to work out *who* killed Ms. McGowan and *why* they did it. This part of the lesson usually leads to some lively discussion, most students will quickly guess who the killer is but the information needs to be carefully looked at to work out the why.

Solution

Mr. Green is Saul Sheen's father; he and Miss McGowan had a relationship in college. Miss McGowan has always kept it a secret but after the last argument with Saul she plans to tell him the truth. She tells Mr. Green about her plan and they argue. Louise King overhears them. Mr. Green is furious and it is he who follows Miss McGowan to the classroom and hits her over the head. He wasn't in his office when everyone heard the scream, that's why when Saul Sheen knocked on the door he got no answer.

Main character cards: these 7 cards need to be used to solve the mystery

Your name is Simon Donnelly; you are an ex-student.

Memories of Miss McGowan: She was a very tough teacher, she made you do extra writing assignments and she said you had talent but you hated all the extra work. But now you're grateful, you're a writer, you have just written a new book and you dedicated it to Miss McGowan.

Last time you saw Miss McGowan: You saw Miss McGowan at about 7 pm, you gave her a copy of your new book and she was pleased.

When you heard the scream: You were talking to Louise King, another ex-student.

Your name is Louise King; you are an ex-student.

Memories of Miss McGowan: You thought she was an old hag, you hated her class, she gave too much homework, she made you hate school so you stopped going. You didn't do your exams and now you work in a chicken factory. You think it's all Miss McGowan's fault. You're glad she's dead!

Last time you saw Miss McGowan: You went outside for a cigarette at about 8 pm, you saw her with Mr. Green, it looked like they were arguing and it seemed serious. Anyway, they were talking about someone called Paul or Raul or something.....you couldn't hear very well.

When you heard the scream: You were glad for the distraction; you were trying to escape from boring Simon Donnelly.

Your name is Saul Sheen; you are a teacher at the school.

Opinion of Miss McGowan: She was a very serious woman, she wasn't easy to like. Last time you saw Miss McGowan: Nobody at school knows this but Miss McGowan was your mother, she gave you up for adoption when you were a baby. You were having an argument because she wouldn't tell you who your father was. It was about 7:30 pm. When you heard the scream: You were looking for Mr. Green, the headmaster, you knocked on his office door but there was no answer.

Your name is Ivan Williams; you are the caretaker at the school.

Opinion of Miss McGowan: You thought that she was a very classy lady; it surprised you that she wasn't married. You wanted to invite her to dinner but you were afraid she would say no.

Last time you saw Miss McGowan: You saw her arguing with Mr. Sheen. You never liked him; he was always upsetting poor Miss McGowan. You went to see if she was okay, you loaned her your handkerchief, you always carry one because you have allergies. When you heard the scream: You were cleaning the floor in the men's toilets.

Your name is Lily Simmons; you are an ex-student.

Memories of Miss McGowan: She was a very scary teacher, most of the students worked hard because they were afraid of her. You did very well in English and, because of Miss McGowan, you are training to be a teacher.

Last time you saw Miss McGowan: You spoke to her briefly at about 7:45, you were telling her about your studies, she didn't seem interested, she kept looking around, then she saw Mr. Green and said she had to go. You thought she was a bit rude.

When you heard the scream: You were dancing in the Sports Hall with some of the other ex-students.

Your name is Edward Green, you are the headmaster at the school.

Opinion of Miss McGowan: You have known Miss McGowan since you were both students in college, you thought she was a wonderful woman, you will miss her very much.

Last time you saw Miss McGowan: You were very busy this evening, you didn't see Miss McGowan.

When you heard the scream: You were in your office working on the computer.

Your name is Patricia Woods, you are a teacher at the school.

Opinion of Miss McGowan: She was a good teacher but she didn't have very many friends.

Last time you saw Miss McGowan: She was walking to her classroom, it was about 8:15 pm and she looked upset. You think she was crying; she was wiping her eyes with a handkerchief.

When you heard the scream: You were serving drinks with some of the other teachers in the Sports Hall.

Supplementary character cards: these cards can be used for larger groups, they don't contain information for solving the mystery

Your name is Janice Carroll, you are a teacher at the school.

Opinion of Ms. McGowan: You only just started at the school so you didn't really know Ms. McGowan.

Last time you saw Ms. McGowan: You didn't see Ms. McGowan at all.

When you heard the scream: You were talking to some of the other new teachers in the Sports Hall.

Your name is Mike Newell, you are an ex-student.

Opinion of Ms. McGowan: She wasn't one of your teachers when you were at school but you always heard from your friends that she was very strict.

Last time you saw Ms. McGowan: Early in the evening, the party was just starting.

When you heard the scream: You were getting something to drink in the Sports Hall.

Your name is Judy Hall, you are an ex-student.

Opinion of Ms. McGowan: She was very strict, not very friendly, most of the students were afraid of her.

Last time you saw Ms. McGowan: When you arrived at the party, before 7 pm. When you heard the scream: In the Sports Hall dancing with an old school friend, Lily Simmons.

Your name is Hal Johnson, you are the receptionist at the school.

Opinion of Ms. McGowan: She was a polite woman, not very friendly but you didn't have any problems with her.

Last time you saw Ms. McGowan: This afternoon while we were getting ready for the party. You arrived late for the party and you didn't see her all evening.

When you heard the scream: You were washing your hands in the men's room.

