The P-E-E-R Approach to Second Language Acquisition Facilitation: Assessment and Technology

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Before we start...

- What I am presenting here today is the result of my almost 20 years of teaching and my research in second language acquisition.
- These two areas have molded my own approach to language acquisition facilitation.
- The principles that guide my research and teaching:
  - Best Practices
  - Sound design
  - Teamwork (Professional Learning Communities)
Before we start...

- what I am presenting today is part of the approach I call
  - The P-E-E-R Approach to Second Language Acquisition Facilitation
- This is a brief introduction to it.
- This workshop is divided in two parts.
  - Information about the approach and
  - Team discussion of the implications of this approach for classroom implementation
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- You have noticed that I do not use the word and/or the standard definition of “teaching”.
- In this approach, we are not teachers in the dictionary definition of the word:
  - “Showing or helping someone to learn how to do something, giving instructions, guiding in the study of something, providing with knowledge, causing to know or understand” (in Brown, 2007)
- We view teaching as:
  - “guiding and facilitating learning, enabling the learner to learn, setting the conditions for learning” (Brown, 2007)
- We are facilitators of second language acquisition or
  - in terms the Communicative Language Teaching: resources
  - In terms of the Community Language Learning: leaders
  - Along the lines of PI: Grammar and SLA specialists
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- Research in SLA has demonstrated that even when we “teach” grammar structures, vocabulary, pragmatic rules, etc.; learners follow certain processes of acquisition naturally.
- ACTFL standards are the result of this research and work in the classroom.
- These processes are dynamic, but slow (Lee & VanPatten, 2003).
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- Formal instruction aids students to accelerate these processes.
- Teachers help the acceleration by providing an environment where language acquisition can take place.
- So, as we advance in our knowledge of SLA; we face a paradigm shift:
  - We stop being teachers to become Second Language Acquisition Facilitators (SLAFs) (term coined by my students of Methods of Teaching World Languages at the University of Wisconsin, La Crosse in the Fall of 2009)
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- This approach is eclectic and draws from three previous approaches to language teaching:
  - Community Language Learning (CLL) for classroom arrangement (LaForge, 1971).
  - Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Savignon, 1972) for Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing, and Culture.
  - Processing Instruction (PI) (VanPatten, 1996) for Grammar explanation.
What does PEER mean?

P for Preparation

- Students must prepare for specific class-content at home.
  - Browse, look for familiar words, familiar structures, find new items, etc.

E for Exposure

- Students must be exposed to the content as much as possible during class and from the textbook.
  - Contact time is essential for students to have enough exposure to the language. The less time off they have, the more we expose them to the language.
  - The use of the target language all the time is also a must. If they do not hear you or themselves speaking target language, they will not be exposed to it.
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- **E for Enforcement**
  - As facilitators, we must enforce language use and content review at all times.
    - Meaningful activities and not mechanical drills
    - Homework assignments that are linked to the objectives of the class (i.e., meaningful not mechanical) at all times.
    - Tons of Group activities that require the use of the Target Language (by instructors and students alike) inside and outside the classroom.

- **R for Review**
  - Students must review and use old content during and after the first exposure.
    - Recycling and not repeating of presentation of content must be present in our lesson objectives.
    - Homework assignments must always have items that make use of previous content to provide an indirect review.
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- Recycling ≠ Repetition

- The three-readings of content in the PEER Approach
  - The first (R1) happens during preparation.
  - The second (R2) during class.
  - The third (R3) while doing the homework assignments
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- Recycling (not repetition)
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- Assessment, evaluation, and testing of language ability
  - A test is an instrument to prove people’s capabilities or to establish their credentials (McNamara, 2000).
  - The work of SLA has prompted those in language assessment to take a broader view of what assessment means– to include more variables when attempting to determine language proficiency and achievement (Cohen, 1994)
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- The purpose of assessment
  - To build assessment instruments, it is helpful to have some explicit notion of what the instrument is assessing and how it might be labeled (Cohen, 1994).
  - There are different ways to classify a single assessment instrument.
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- Administrative
  - General assessment of a program
  - Placement of students into levels/sections
  - Exemption
  - Certification
  - Promotion
  - E.g., Spanish placement tests, Program Assessment, GenEd Assessment, etc.
    - These are usually called assessment/evaluation
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- Instructional
  - Diagnosis
  - Evidence of progress
  - Feedback to the respondent
  - Evaluation of teaching or curriculum
  - E.g., impromptu quizzes, homework assignments, unit exams, final exams, etc.
    - These are usually called tests
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- Research
  - evaluation
  - experimentation
  - Knowledge about language learning and language use
  - E.g., grammaticality judgment tasks, surveys, Labovian interviews, identification tasks, OPI, etc.
  - These are usually called instruments
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- Components of a test (from Lee & VanPatten, 2003)
  - Relevance:
    - A test must match the course and curriculum goals/objectives
  - Acceptability/validity:
    - Learners must feel that they were evaluated fairly and about what they are learning.
  - Comparability:
    - Tests must yield similar results when applied to multiple sections of the same course.
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- Wash-back effect
  - It is when a test becomes more important than the processes of acquisition, so teachers teach to the test not for learning.
  - It happens when teachers feel that they are being evaluated only on the basis of the numbers yielded by the test.
  - Evaluation of teaching efficacy is based on overall grade distribution.
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- It is avoided when teachers transfer the responsibility of learning/acquiring to the learner.
- It is also minimized when teachers have a voice and participate in the construction of high-stakes testing/assessment.
  - In the classroom, institution, and even at the national level
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- In sum, assessment is for improvement of our own teaching, not for showing how good we are at teaching (Aguilar Sanchez, A., 2011 personal communication)
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- Technology and language assessment
  - I will not dwell in definition of technology, but rather talk about the implications of using it for assessment and teaching purposes.
  - Software (technology) needs to be based on relevant pedagogical and design principles for it to be effective (Liu, Moore, Graham & Lee, 2003).
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- Material designers need to assess critically both the features that characterize a potentially new type of literacy (i.e., the way learners interact with and respond to computers) and the effects of the computer’s pedagogical capabilities (Salaberry, 2000).

- Assessment of the use of technology for language learning needs to be based on the analysis of how specific pedagogical objectives are achieved by means of the manipulation of specific characteristics of the technological tools (Salaberry, 2000).
Based on Aguilar-Sánchez, J., McNulty & Lee’s (2007) suggestions and recommendations that
Computers will not replace instructors any time soon,
Computers are not better than instructors at delivering grammar instruction using a processing approach
Some grammar instruction could be removed from the classroom and placed on the computer.
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- Class time should be given over to activities that require face-to-face human interaction, preferably, task-based information exchange communicative activities (Lee, 2000; Lee and VanPatten, 2003).
The PEER Approach to SLA Facilitation does that.

- It transfers the time that was once spent on Grammar explanation to activities outside the classroom with the aid of technology.
- It transfers the responsibility of learning/acquiring back to the learner.
- The teacher makes a concerted effort to facilitate and mimic natural situations for the learner to acquire the language for meaningful communication.
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- Assessment is viewed as a tool for improvement of this facilitation, not a tool to measure how much a teacher can teach.
  - Teacher participate in the creation, evaluation and reformulation of the content of tests.
  - Tests and assessment tools are based on the learning objectives of the course series, not isolated.
  - Normal curves are used to determine whether proficiency is being attained, so placement of students could be done more efficiently.
  - Ideally, multi-sectional courses are seen as one course, not multiple courses due to multiple instructors.
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- Teachers use data gathered from the test as means to improve their facilitation and or to determine students proficiency and not as an end result. (Because we are in an academic setting, we have to be very careful with the recognition of the effort. It might produce grade inflation).
- Learners are given the opportunity to demonstrate that they have achieved a learning outcome without inflating his/her grade.
- Tests are constructed with a “Big Picture” idea to be able to answer high-stakes questions (e.g. General Education Assessment) rather than having multiple tests.
Because languages are socialization devices, the facilitation, assessment, and improvement of the curriculum is done in teams.

These teams take into consideration data gathered through the experience in the classroom.

Administrators are well aware of what goes on in the classroom and work with the “variation” found within generation of students.
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- We all work towards the same common goal:
  - Facilitating Language Acquisition
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- When to assess?

At home
In the classroom
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- When to use technology to assess?

  At home
  In the classroom
Let’s think about assessment and technology in the Department of Modern Languages specifically in the Spanish sequence SPA101-SPA202.

- Use the handout A to guide your discussion (15 minutes).

What suggestions would your team give to the administration in order to achieve our goal:

- Second Language Acquisition of Spanish in the classroom.
- ACTFL Scale of language proficiency as a measurement tool.

- Use handout B to organize your suggestions (15 minutes).
References


