Praxis: Do I Practice what I Believe?
A Course in Research in the Language Classroom for the English Language Teacher Education Program at Universidad Centroamericana, Nicaragua

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Abstract

I have asked myself to describe my teaching beliefs and analyze my teaching practice in order to see if the two are congruent and if in fact I do have a teaching praxis. This is a professional paper about course development based on a classroom research project. First, through a discussion of theories, experiences, and observations I describe my teaching beliefs. Second, I describe the Research in English Language Teaching course that I designed and taught to a group fourth year student teachers at the Universidad Centroamericana in Nicaragua. This description is based on a selection of student writings, lesson plans, and the syllabus. Third, I assess my teaching praxis based on self-evaluation and student feedback in the form of a questionnaire. The goal of this paper is to answer my professional question: putting my beliefs into practice, could I set up a classroom environment where materials are presented in a meaningful way, each student’s voice is heard and students apply their knowledge to their lives?

ERIC descriptors
Creative Teaching
Cross Cultural Training
Cultural Education
Curriculum Development
Language Dominance
Preservice Teacher Education
Teaching Methods
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Forward

Whether a two room wooden structure along a river passage, a large urban three-floor brick building with barred windows, an inner courtyard of flora and fountains surrounded by an old stone quadrangle, or a wooden platform in a tree; in every country I have visited, people go to school. It can be said that school is the largest institute in the world. When I travel, I find myself wondering how is it that within a world that has such a vast spectrum of religious, political, social, cultural and linguistic differences, the institute of school appeals to many nations. Going back in time, the student-teacher interchange is an image that exists in religious and secular works both in writing and art from prehistoric through eastern and western history until present day. Historical images of such interchange include: a teacher on a mountain speaking to his students below, a teacher and students sitting under a tree, a teacher sitting with his students around a table, and a teacher sitting cross-legged on a pillow with rows of students facing him.¹ One can argue that what I just described is non-sequential or arbitrary in that I’ve linked religion, philosophy and mathematics teachers from works such as books and paintings over a 3,000 year span. However, when I asked myself to think of historical images of teacher-student interaction, this is what came to mind. Certainly, the nature of teacher-student interaction has changed throughout history and in different regions of our world for various reasons. Yet my observation remains, the teacher-student relationship continues to exist worldwide in the institution called school. According to the Digest of Education Statistics, 2001: “In 1997, 1.2 billion students were enrolled in schools around the

¹ The images I am referring to are Moses on the mountaintop; Buddha, Socrates, and Newton; Jesus at the last supper; and the Dalai Lama in study with monks.
Which leads me to ask you, the reader, what images come to mind when you think of teacher-student interaction? What has been your own experience?

Allow me to leap forward in my time machine to the present, to talk about myself as a teacher and a student. I have come to believe that who I am in the classroom is a reflection of who I am in daily life and that the classroom experience can be meaningful when it speaks to this authenticity. As a student, I want to be heard and as a teacher I want to create a space that fosters each voice being heard. bell hooks said, “Professors who embrace the challenge of self-actualization will be better able to create pedagogical practices that engage students, providing them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply.”

It is with these words in mind that I have asked myself to describe my teaching beliefs and analyze my teaching practice in order to see if the two are congruent and if in fact I do have a teaching praxis, in other words, do I practice what I believe?

**Introduction**

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The following research project is a description of the process of the Research in English Language Teaching course that I developed and taught for a group of twenty, fourth year undergraduate students in the Teaching English as a Foreign Language program at the Universidad Centroamerica in Managua, Nicaragua. In preparing this course my expected result was that each student would find a topic of interest related to their own experience in English Language Teaching to present in a poster session and a final research paper. Therefore, the purpose of my research project is twofold: 1) to learn about creating a classroom community where each student’s voice is heard and 2) preparing materials and activities that allow for each student to make meaning for themselves.

Selection and justification
In 1991, English replaced Russian as the required foreign language throughout the five years of public secondary education in Nicaragua. There are over 1,000 public high school English teachers in Nicaragua in addition to private school, language institute and university English teachers. There are two universities that offer a degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language: Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Nicaragua – Managua and Universidad Centroamericana. Universidad Centroamericana is said to be the most prestigious university in the country. Located in the center of the capital, Managua, the campus has a long tradition of leading student demonstrations; receiving lecturers and speakers from around the world; organizing exhibits and cultural performances, and other activities of interest to university students. In an educational system that is divided into public and private from primary through university and a society that has been called a modern feudal system, Universidad Centroamericana is a rare hybrid due to the combination of prestige and tuition subsidies. This means that the student body includes a diverse socioeconomic mix of students that range from poor rural public schools to rich urban private schools. This diversity brings a wealth of experiences, perspectives and challenges to the classroom.

In September 2002 I was offered a position at Universidad Centroamericana to teach the course: “Research in English Language Teaching”. This group of students had been preparing for four years to become English teachers in Nicaragua. This course was taught in the final quarter of the program. Prior to my course, I was told by the department that this was a difficult group, first, instructors viewed their overall English proficiency level as low; second, the students had a tendency to complain to the department about courses and instructors. The four students that I spoke with prior to the
course confided that they were not satisfied with the program and no longer wanted to become English teachers. I worked to be neutral to the opinions that the department and the students shared with me. I understood from my own experiences as a student, teacher and administrator that the various concerns expressed to me are commonplace. It is human nature to critique our experiences and in doing so, may focus on the negative in one conversation, omitting the positive.

In my final year of undergraduate studies ten years ago, I felt this panic about what I would do with my life and wondered if the degree I had chosen would help me get a job. Now, as the Academic Director of an institute in Nicaragua and a teacher trainer throughout the country, I am aware of some of the difficulties that teachers and administrators face such as low salaries, limited resources, large classes and inadequate school facilities. Consequently, a student studying to become a teacher may start questioning their career choice as they look more closely at the institution of school in Nicaragua: as a student in the university classroom as well as in their teaching practicum. I wanted to teach a course that would be useful for students who are preparing to become teachers. I wanted the students to know, through my example, that being a teacher is a wonderful privilege, an art to be crafted. I wanted to find a way to channel their observations and critiques of their own experiences as students into a self-reflective teaching practice. I saw this as the perfect opportunity to find out to what extent my beliefs in Critical Pedagogies, Language Politics, and Brain-based learning, could be practiced using techniques such as the Way of Council, Freirean problem-solving and Constructivism to promote a meaningful learning environment for students studying to become English teachers.
Therefore, this paper entails: first, a description of my teaching beliefs based on a literature review, my experience and graduate program studies; second, an analysis of my teaching practice in this course based on a description of my syllabus and lesson plans and how this unfolded according to selected student writings for each module, and third, an evaluation of my teaching praxis based on self-evaluation and student feedback in the form of a questionnaire. The goal of this paper is to answer my professional question: putting my beliefs into practice, could I set up a classroom environment where materials are presented in a meaningful way, each student’s voice is heard and students apply their knowledge to their lives?

**Guiding Questions and Objectives for this Research Project**

Guiding Questions:

- What role do I, the teacher, play in creating a meaningful learning environment?
- What role does each student play in creating a meaningful learning environment?
- What role does the material or content of the course play in creating a meaningful learning environment?
- To what extent and when is material chosen by me, the students as a group, each student individually?
- How do the materials that I select affect the learning environment?
- How does student voice relate to making meaning?
- How does meaningful learning take place?
- Why did this group of students start the course with hesitancy and end the course with enthusiasm? What transformation took place? How did this transformation occur?

Objectives:

The general objective of this research project is:

To assess whether my teaching practices are congruent with my teaching beliefs in which student voice and meaningful learning is core.

Specific objectives in this research project are:

- To define my teaching beliefs and how these were practiced throughout the course.
- To examine selected writings of students to assess how students make meaning in the course.
- To exemplify that student voice is critical to making meaning.
- To exemplify that materials/course content which relate to real life are critical to making meaning.

Chapter One: My Teaching Beliefs

I. Identity, Voice & Culture

My mother recounts a story of me pointing at a military truck that was rolling down the street during the 1970 FLQ\(^4\) crisis in Quebec and I muttered the baby sound “uh”.

One of my earliest memories is of sitting on my dad’s shoulders while demonstrating against apartheid in front of the South African embassy in Ottawa.

\(^4\)Front de Liberacion de Quebec (FLQ): a group of radical separatists who used terrorist methods. The government used military forces to protect government installations throughout the province of Quebec.
In grade four and grade six the Ottawa-Carlton school board organized school exchanges to promote bilingual, intercultural understanding amongst young Canadians. Anglophone students stayed with francophone families for one week and vice-versa. We wrote pen pal letters in each others first language and learned about hobbies and daily life. In elementary school I studied the history of Canada from the fur trade through the British-French war and the establishment of the Dominion of Canada.

My father was born in Montreal, a bilingual city and lived two years in France. From infancy, I learned French and English songs and stories side by side. My understanding of the complex relation between French and English Canadians was fostered by what I experienced both inside and outside of the classroom. I was taught how the geo-political lines moved back and forth on the historical maps of the country. But I didn’t see a map of Canada that identified the location of every First Nations’ reservation or explained the treaties between the English settlers and First Nations peoples and the movement of those geo-political lines. In 1991 during the Oka crisis in Quebec, Nelson Mandela spoke in Montreal and reminded us that the South African apartheid system was modeled after the Canadian reservation system. I wasn’t surprised, but I wish I had learned it in school. My identity let me know that there was more to the history of Canada than what I learned in elementary school:

“There is a sociological term which can be found in Canadian textbooks named ‘The Sixties Scoop’. A sociologist chose this catchy phrase to define the phenomenon from which hundreds of thousands of Native Canadian and American children were taken from their homes and adopted into white families. I have been told that the liberalism of the

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5 First Nations: Refers to the various tribes of peoples who migrated from Asia over the Bering Strait and settled in the Americas, about 10,000 years ago. Other terms include Native Indians and Native Americans.
6 Oka crisis: The mayor of the town Oka, Quebec wanted to build a golf course over the ancient burial grounds of the neighbouring Ghanasatakwe Indian community.
1960s was well-intentioned. Better futures for under-privileged children. When my parents adopted me, we left the Northwest Territories and returned to Southern Canada. The only thing I heard about First Nations people while growing up in our white, middle class suburb was drunk Indian jokes. One time in elementary school my sister teased me in front of some classmates at recess. She said something like, ‘well, you don’t count anyways because you are adopted.’ Then she went on to call me an ‘Indian-giver’. This is a slang expression which means you give something then take it back again. I was really ashamed. Ever since I could remember I knew that I was adopted, this I accepted as mine. However, I didn’t want anyone to know that I was Metis\textsuperscript{7}. Thankful for my light skin, I was angry that my sister pulled off my mask.”\textsuperscript{8}

This anger came from my fear of not being accepted by others. At some point, I interpreted aspects of my identity as different and consequently, negative. Difference, in itself, is not inherently negative. How difference is perceived is at issue.

It can be an empowering feeling to reveal likeness to others: to rally together in a celebration or struggle to overcome a common problem or to identify an injustice towards others and support their struggle. Yet when the voices around us do not address ones own struggle with identity there can be fear of speaking out. In her paper, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action”, Audre Lorde expresses her fear “because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger”.\textsuperscript{9} The danger lies in the consequences of “self-revelation”. What will be the reaction of others?

The teacher has the wonderful opportunity of putting information out there that allows students to see multiple views of existence. In doing so, each student can take what speaks to them and name their experience thus finding ways to speak about self and

\textsuperscript{7} Metis: First used to describe the children born to French trappers and Cree women. The term is derived from the French word “moitié”; pejorative “half-breed”.
\textsuperscript{9} Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 42.
understand others. Existence is always present but how this existence is interpreted by self and others is a changing variable.

In healing and wellness, we are told to look within. To know, forgive, accept, appreciate and embrace self in order to do so with others. This can be extended to the wellness of education: to start with self and move outwards. The movement from self to other may seem linear, however it is cyclical. Self moves among group creating a multifaceted identity that incorporates layers of existence. Can self be seen apart from group? Without a comparative basis, can I describe myself? Melody Noll addresses these two questions in her paper, “Personal Identity Narrative”:

“As a small child I knew exactly who I was: smart, tough, determined, self-assured, self-aware, intuitive, creative, powerful, and full of joy and vision. Somewhere around three or four, however, I became increasingly aware that the influence of those around me began to impinge upon my happy self, unraveling all that I’d known and loved. Deepak Chopra states in How to Know God that it is our task as human beings to spend our lives “discovering who we are” – and discovering who we are can only be done within the context of “the group.”

How is our view of self created and how does this view change? A young child’s world is likely to include the family and the neighbourhood. As the child develops, this world expands to include larger circles. An example of this is shown in the diagram of concentric circles of identity below. Circles become larger to indicate that there are more people in the group. If you see self at the center of this diagram then the distance between self and other in larger circles is greater. This diagram demonstrates that we belong to various groups from which we learn our identity. The groups that are

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11 I drew this diagram myself however, the concept is popular.
represented are but some. As Melody points out, our perception of self is challenged as we move within these circles.

**Concentric Circles of Identity:**

These groups or circles are part of our culture. Can one step outside of culture? Is it possible to use language without a cultural context? In an *Young Citizens Afterschool English Program*\(^\text{12}\) that I designed for public school students in Managua, Nicaragua, I prepared the following five-stage structure linking cognitive development, age and concentric circles of identity. In this program, students move from one stage to the next according to age. Thus, each concentric circle is relative to the participants’ age and experience. In stage one, students are encouraged to explore self through tactile activities

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\(^{12}\) *Young Citizens Afterschool English Program:* The purpose of this program was to invite corporate and out of country sponsors to support at-risk children and youth in the form of tuition, textbooks and uniforms.
such as art and play. The content of stages two through five are defined by the teacher
guiding students
through language skills topics related to the concentric circle of each stage. For example,
in stage two, the teacher would guide seven and eight year olds to talk about what family
meant to each of them.

**Young Citizens Afterschool Program**

**Five Stages (ages 5-14)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage One</th>
<th>Ages 5-6</th>
<th><strong>Self</strong>: Tactile exploration; playtime in a safe environment where each student explores their abilities through music, art and exercise.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage Two</td>
<td>Ages 7-8</td>
<td><strong>Family</strong>: Personal values, self-esteem; language skills topics such as a typical day in my house, food that we eat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Three</td>
<td>Ages 9-10</td>
<td><strong>Neighbourhood</strong>: Interacting with others, social values; language skills topics such as the classroom, compare my house/your house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Four</td>
<td>Ages 11-12</td>
<td><strong>City</strong>: Interacting as groups; language skills topics such as jobs, transportation, characteristics of the capital city, Managua.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Five</td>
<td>Ages 13-14</td>
<td><strong>Nation</strong>: National identity; language skills topics such as defining what is Nicaraguan and how to portray Nicaragua to others such as the U.S. families who sponsor teens to study in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This program was designed as an outreach project from which the institute where I worked would seek sponsors for each child. Each sponsor would pay for the child’s public school tuition, school uniform, school supplies, and the Afterschool English Program tuition. This program was directed at children who lived in an orphanage. Some of whom were adopted into families in the United States or sponsored by American families to pursue post-secondary studies. My belief was that Nicaraguan English
teachers would provide the English language needed for Spanish-speaking Nicaraguan students to speak about themselves in English and define what each concentric circle means to them as they participated in the program and interacted with North American people. For these reasons, it was important that the students in this program could speak about themselves in English and define who they were from their own cultural contexts.

There is the danger in TESOL to represent the dominant English speaking cultures and expect students of other cultures to identify, embrace, or accept these cultures without naming their own. As an Academic Consultant of the Oxford University Press – Latin America in Nicaragua, I often found myself wondering how exciting it would be to present a textbook to teachers that had a unit on Nicaragua. Schneidwind and Davidson said that “language majority students can come to believe that their languages and culture(s) are superior if they experience it as the norm.”13 Therefore “language minority” students can come to believe the opposite when they are not represented.

I had the opportunity of working with English teachers at the Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University in Nicaragua while they were setting up an interdepartmental English program for the undergraduate degree programs. The teachers designing the program and the student body included Creole, Miskito, Sumu, Rama and Mestizo people. It was a thrill for me to read their first locally developed textbook that includes maps, photos, and descriptions of local people, places, food and activities because it gave this community a voice of authority in the classroom.

II. Language, Globalization & Synergy

In describing his difficulty with writing a book about the role of English

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13 Nancy Schneidwind and Ellen Davidson, Open Mind to Equality (1998), 19.
language today, David Crystal says “there is no more intimate or more sensitive an index of identity than language.”

If the language classroom is a place to learn to speak about self, we are exploring an intimate issue. The ways in which teachers set up the parameters of using language in the classroom can hinder or help this exploration. Why are students learning English?

“The US linguist Braj Kachru has suggested that we think of the spread of English around the world as three concentric circles, representing different ways in which the language has been acquired and is currently used: the inner circle refers to the traditional bases of English, where it is the primary language.; the outer circle involves the earlier phases of the spread of English in non-native settings, where the language has become part of a country’s chief institutions.; and the expanding circle involves those nations which recognize the importance of English as an international language.”

Though these circles are not exclusive, this is a model which addresses where English comes from and what role it plays in different countries. Given the current influence of English at the global level, teachers can: one) be aware of the various forms of English that exist, two) look at English in relation to the identity of students and the role that English plays in society.

In Nicaragua, Creole English is a widely spoken language, native to the Caribbean coast of the country. In the Research in English Language Teaching course, we had an interesting discussion about the use of L1 in the classroom which led to the question: “Which English?” Canagarajah challenges us to think about how we transport English from Kachru’s inner and outer circles into the expanding circle. What strikes me in my current teaching is the importance of looking at my native Canadian English and how I bring this into a Nicaraguan classroom; “The ways in which classroom discourse is

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15 Ibid., 53-54.
influenced by community linguistic norms again remind us that we cannot isolate the classroom from the society which it is situated and to know that students do not take off their culture when they walk into the classroom as they take off their coat. In short, teachers and students alike come into the classroom with their own ideas, perspectives, values, and assumptions. The art of language education involves weaving each of these voices into one classroom experience.

Yongming Tang’s Synergic Enquiry Methodology is the most complete explanation of how to create an inclusive classroom that I have read:

**Synergic Enquiry Model**

**Process of Differentiation:**
- Phase one – Self-knowing
- Phase two – Other knowing

**Process of Integration:**
- Phase three – Polarity holding
- Phase four – Polarity transcending

Synergic Enquiry is composed of two major processes: the process of differentiation and the process of integration. The process of differentiation includes phase one: self-knowing and phase two: other-knowing. In phase one, we look at our own consciousness. When a situation arises it is important to understand one’s own consciousness which influences perspective and behaviour. By asking ourselves what, how and why we can look at our own behaviour: physical manifestations such as customs and language, mental perspectives such as rationale and reasoning, and the underlying assumptions of such. In phase two, we try to understand the other consciousness. To do so it is critical to suspend judgment on others. By asking the same what, how, and why

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questions we can try to see things from another’s perspective. In doing so, we can further our understanding of our own consciousness. “In other words, Other-Knowing leads to Self-Knowing. To know one culture, one has to know two.”17 Thus, in the process of differentiation we recognize that differences exist. The process of integration refers to a process whereby “differentiated entities” begin to work with one another to produce new outcomes. After the process of differentiation, polarities exist. The purpose of integration is to achieve synergy between polarities. “Synergy is a process whereby social interaction and relationship takes place on the basis of inclusiveness, a process that encourages the expansion of context such that the essences of all find meaningful expression. In doing so, it ingeniously treats diversity as a source of wisdom rather than a source of friction and conflict.”18 In phase three, polarity-holding, we need to hold the two consciousnesses, self and other, as equals. Often, there is difference. What is important is the ability to hold this creative tension until we feel comfortable about treating them as equally valid and legitimate. As soon as we learn to embody two distinctively different consciousnesses, and are able to use both consciousnesses to influence our behaviour, we have reached phase four, polarity-transcending. In which we have expanded and thus transformed our consciousness. Enabling us to see the world differently, search for new alternatives and create outcomes collaboratively. “Synergy supports a perspective of contextual and ever-emerging reality rather than objective, absolute reality. Synergy, as a concept then, suggests that reality can be created according to the gifts of engaged individuals.”19 In its

18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
As Giroux states above, the process of globalization is producing shifts and changes in cultures and nations. I would add that these shifts have always existed but at a slower pace. In our industrialized and technology oriented era, change happens at an accelerated rate. Tang suggests through Synergy Enquiry that we can transcend change and create systems which speak to everyone. In Paula Green’s U.N. Speech, “Peacekeeping: A Global Imperative” she discussed the inevitability of conflict, intervention, and the roles that we can play to help build inter-ethnic dialogue among educators.

“Take these programs home and provide new models of cooperation and collaboration in which tolerance and respect for difference (are key)... Conflict is a natural part of life, our differences can be a fascinating part of our growth, expand our thinking, push our creativity and enlarge our vision... It is violent conflict or war that we hope is possible to change. Our challenge is to learn to embrace differences as enrichment for our mind and enhancement for our societies.”

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III. Meaningful Learning: The Brain & Constructivism

Meaningful learning comes from the connections that each student makes to their own experiences using their previous knowledge to interpret, apply and live what is being taught in the classroom. We create our own meaning based on ongoing cognitive and affective experience. The question is not can we learn the question is: can we learn in the classroom? The brain is constantly processing information. Making meaning in life is a result of the constant processing of experience. “The search for meaning is survival oriented and basic to the human brain. The brain needs and automatically registers the familiar while simultaneously searching for and responding to novel stimuli.”22 The brain is capable of performing several tasks at once yet the traditional classroom often inhibits learning by ignoring the brain’s natural learning processes. There is the tendency to isolate skills, for example, individual courses for reading, writing, listening & speaking. Have you ever found yourself wondering how to isolate one skill in order to teach it without relying on other skills? As a native English speaker teaching in Asia and Central America, I have often been assigned to teach Conversation English or Listening & Speaking skills. Many nights I have sat at my desk trying to prepare a lesson that focuses on listening. I often start with a song or a poem or a short story. I make a list of new vocabulary, I frame the vocabulary in sentences, I make a list of sentence structures and then I remind myself that this is a listening lesson not a grammar lesson. I choose a theme related to the song, poem or story (based on the list of themes that students created at the beginning of the course) and invite students to free-write as the warm-up activity.

As the lesson plan unfolds, I find myself including writing, vocabulary, reading, listening and speaking. Thus, my listening lesson plan becomes a multi-skills lesson plan.

“...researchers confirm that people are meaning makers. The search for meaning cannot be stopped, only channeled and focused. Learners are patterning, or perceiving and creating meanings, all the time in one way or another. Teachers cannot stop but can influence the direction. Students need to create meaningful and personally relevant patterns ie: whole-language approach to reading, thematic teaching, integration of curriculum and life-relevant approaches to learning.”

Imagine if driver’s education was divided by skill: In classroom A, students learn to look at the road; in classroom B, students learn to listen for traffic noise; in classroom C, students learn to manage the steering wheel and in classroom D, students learn to operate the foot pedals. And an optional class on managing the gear shift. How much longer would it take to learn how to drive and how much more confusing or difficult would it be in practice? Isolating skills is not the brain’s natural way of working. The brain is a parallel processor, it can perform several activities at once, such as looking at the road, listening for traffic, steering the wheel and operating the foot pedals. “Learning occurs on a number of levels and in a variety of manners – this is the nature of complexity.”

It is common to assess what students have learned through written tests. I can remember “cramming” the night before mid-term and final exams in both high school and university. I would review all of my notes and memorize as many facts as I could. Although I haven’t found this to be a very effective study technique or learning experience, I have found myself setting up a similar situation for my students. For example, I told my students to memorize the irregular past tense of go, buy, and speak. I assessed their knowledge with a fill-in the blank test. The test had ten past tense

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23 Ibid., 90.
sentences with the infinitive of the verb (go, buy, speak). Students were expected to replace the infinitive with the past tense. A sentence such as:

1. Yesterday, Carlos and I _________ (go) to the store.

I assigned one point for every correct sentence and gave the students a grade out of ten points. In this activity, I have assessed students’ surface knowledge. I have set up the information in such a way that students do not need to know the meaning of the sentence, they do not have to make connections beyond go-went. What Caine & Caine explain in their book, *Making Connections*, is the importance of tapping into natural knowledge which is described as, the coming together of information, felt meaning and deep meaning.

Felt meaning can be when a song, poem or story “that we have been reading begins to make sense; the ‘aha’ experience which accompanies insight; or when a lesson plan falls into place; we perceive a ‘gestalt’ or a coming together of parts in a way that fits”. Deep meaning is the experience we have when those vast amounts of initially unrelated or seemingly random information and activities are assimilated. New information is connected to what we already know and grasp. Natural knowledge frames the way we observe and perceive the world. We acquire natural knowledge by increasing the number and quality of interconnections in the brain that natural knowledge has acquired. Knowing this, what activities could I prepare so that my students practice the use of irregular past tense verbs thus, making connections to knowledge they already have and therefore retaining these words? Would it not be more useful for me to offer patterns, such as irregular past tense verbs, using a real-life context?

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25 Caine & Caine, *Making Connections*
Lakoff says that we are born with the capacity to recognize many patterns almost instantly: lines, edges, light and dark, colour, frequency and pitch of sounds, and other basic sensory qualities. We have innate capacities to respond to ritual and many types of communication. And basic-level categories derived from our notion of our own bodies operating in the world such as the notion of inside and outside. And this is long before we start going to school.

Brain research concludes that all learning is experiential. The brain is constantly testing experience against what is already known. In the classroom, the following three elements are constantly interacting: the way in which teachers set up the learning environment, student motivation, and course content. As teachers how can we capitalize on the natural capacity of the brain to discern patterns and make connections? Active processing is the consolidation and internalization of information by the learner in a way that is both personally meaningful and conceptually coherent. The elements of active processing are:

1. Teacher: Teachers orchestrate the immersion of the learner in complex, interactive experiences that are both rich and real.
2. Student: Students’ intrinsic motivation called “relaxed alertness” is present.
3. Content: Content is presented in such a way that students experience intensive analysis so that the learner gains insight about the problem, ways to be approached, and learning in general.

This is not a linear model, each element contributes to the other two and all three are constantly interacting in order to capitalize on experience. I have often thought of learning as separate from real life. That knowledge is something we attain from books.
void of feeling and emotion. According to Jean Paiget’s Cognitive Development Theory, the development of logical thinking is derived from and built upon the accomplishments of four continuous stages of development from birth to fifteen years of age in which we assimilate information through the senses, processing it, and acting on it, we come to understand relationships between objects, self and the world. “The main activities of the cognitive system are directed to making sense of and dealing with the ongoing interactions between the individual and the world.”

The brain is a social brain, all the regions interact and we become who we are through our interactions with the community and the environment; partly receptive and partly generative: we discover and we create. Vygotsky said “One of our fundamental tasks as educators, therefore, is to better appreciate the social construction of knowledge”. Vygotsky’s Social Cognition learning model asserts that culture is the prime determinant of individual development. Humans are the only species to have created culture, and every human child develops in the context of a culture. First, through culture children acquire much of the content of their thinking and second, the surrounding culture provides a child with the processes or means of their thinking. Vygotsky refers to these means as the tools of intellectual adaptation. Since children learn much through interaction, curricula should be designed to emphasize interaction between learners and learning tasks. Caine & Caine describe Vygotsky’s Theory of Social Learning as “(Learning made) meaningful by being packaged in relevant, complex, and highly socially interactive experiences.”

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27 Caine and Caine, 47.
The brain has a built-in organizer. We are constantly receiving information. Each of us filters this information in a process called metacognition. Metacognition is the way in which each of us receive, store and classify information. In this way, we create categories naturally. As we mature and learn, we create, build on, and add to our natural categories. Each brain is unique. We have the same set of systems, including our senses and basic emotions, yet they are integrated differently in every brain. Each of us has our own ways of constructing meaning. An example of this is the mind map: Write the word tree in the middle of a sheet of paper and brainstorm all of the words that you associate with “tree”. Compare this to a partner or a group of people. You will find similarities but no two people create the same mind map. Do the activity again five years later and compare your own two mind maps. Again, you will see differences. The physical structure of the brain changes as a result of experience which means that as we continue to learn and grow we become more unique. Thus, by ignoring the personal world of the learner, educators actually inhibit the effective functioning of the brain. Therefore, self-concept cannot be divorced from learning and this includes the emotional self.

“Self is a uniquely organized system made up of beliefs, biases, memories, predispositions, expectations, knowledge, fears, reactions, behaviours, talents, and meanings. “Shifting our understanding of these things and ideas also means shifting our organization of self. We suggest that all new learning, at other than surface levels of meaning, automatically results in major interaction with both cognition and self-perception.”  

We shouldn’t avoid dealing with deep meanings because they involve passion and the apparent absence of logic. These meanings are operating constantly. We should look at how to deal with them productively and effectively if learning is to be improved and  

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28 Caine & Caine, 136.
connections in the brain maximized. “Emotions and cognition cannot be separated”.\textsuperscript{29} Emotions are also crucial to memory because they facilitate the storage and recall of information and cannot be switched on and off; they operate on many levels like the weather. Therefore, an abstract representation of a concept may evoke feelings or emotions based on memory and the links that are being made in the brain. It is “impossible to isolate the cognitive from the affective domain, the emotional climate in the class must be monitored on a consistent basis – using effective communication strategies, student and teacher reflection, and metacognition processes.”\textsuperscript{30} Since learning is a physiological process of sorting constant input, everyday can make a difference. Knowing this, I feel a responsibility as a teacher to make a conscientious effort in the classroom each day.

Vygotsky is considered the father of Constructivism. “Constructivist teaching practices help learners to internalize and reshape, or transform new information. Transformation occurs through the creation of new understandings that result from the emergence of new cognitive structures.”\textsuperscript{31} The following are attributes of a constructivist classroom taken from Brooks & Brooks, \textit{The Case for Constructivist Classrooms}:

\textbf{Constructivist Classrooms}  
Curriculum is presented whole to part with emphasis on big concepts. Pursuit of student questions is highly valued. Curricular activities rely heavily on primary sources of data and manipulative materials. Students are viewed as thinkers with emerging theories about the world. Teachers generally behave in an interactive manner, mediating the environment for students. Teachers seek the students’ points of view in order to understand students’ present conceptions for use in subsequent lessons.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 90.  
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 90.  
\textsuperscript{31} Jacqueline Brooks and Martin G. Brooks, \textit{The Case for Constructivist Classrooms} (Virginia, USA: ASCD 1999), 15.
Assessment of student learning is interwoven with teaching and occurs through teacher observations of students at work and through student exhibitions and portfolios. Students primarily work in groups.

Brain-based learning shares components of constructivism and the process of metacognition: how we think about thinking. In the language classroom, students must have a way to relate to the language in terms of what is personally important, and this means acknowledging both the emotional impact and deeply held needs and drives. When we ignore the emotional components of what we teach, we deprive students of meaningfulness. Meaningful knowledge gives students permission to transcend the insights of their teachers. This is a holistic approach to education.

The core principles of brain-based learning state that:

1. The brain is a parallel processor, meaning it can perform several activities at once, like tasting and smelling.
2. Learning engages the whole physiology.
3. The search for meaning is innate.
4. The search for meaning comes through patterning.
5. Emotions are critical to patterning.
6. The brain processes wholes and parts simultaneously.
7. Learning involves both focused attention and peripheral perception.
8. Learning involves both conscious and unconscious processes.
9. We have two types of memory: spatial and rote.
10. We understand best when facts are embedded in natural, spatial memory.
11. Learning is enhanced by challenge and inhibited by threat.
12. Each brain is unique.

Brain-based learning focuses on experiential and thematic mapping. Learners experience physical movement, social interactions, practical projects, use of language and creative enterprises. Students learn from their entire ongoing experience. The fact is always embedded in multiple contexts and a subject is related to many issues and ideas. 

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32 Caine & Caine
building conceptual understanding is my goal then understanding my context is needed. “We need to relate what we learn to what we know but we cannot afford to reduce it to what we currently think and feel.” Yongming Tang refers to this as synergy “the process of inclusiveness and consciousness expansion”. This is the art of capitalizing on experience. Thus, meaningful teaching comes from meaningful learning. To achieve this, the classroom experience must relate to real life.

IV. Community & the Language Classroom

There are many approaches to education which address the learner as a whole person such as Community Language Learning, Counseling Learning, Whole Language, Liberatory Teaching and the Participatory Approach. In the Participatory Approach, Paulo Freire and other liberatory educators have outlined a method of teaching that raises students’ critical consciousness of language and the world around them. Using content and materials from their own lives, students are motivated to take responsibility for their own learning and to see themselves as actors in the reality of this world. In doing so, learning becomes an important tool for improving students’ lives, promoting social action in their communities, and creating the reality they envision.

The Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, said “The goal of education is human liberation”. He believed that the purpose of education was to help illiterate people participate fully in social and political life. In the 1950s he pioneered an approach for teaching literacy skills to urban poor and rural peasants where learning to read involved learning to read “the world” as well as “the word”. Freire based his literacy lessons on real-life experiences, engaging learners in dialogue about key words representing

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33Ibid., 158.
problematic issues in their lives in order to foster critical analysis of these issues. He encouraged his students to look critically at the world, and question why they were poor and powerless. In Freire’s classes, called “culture circles”, students learned through group that culture and society are created by everyone; by clarifying situations or seeking actions arising from that clarification, students learned that they were active members of society and as active members they had the power to change it. Freire addressed the “culture of silence” and suggested that learners confront their insistence on quiet and control and participate actively in learning situations. Freire called this cycle of action-reflection-action by which individuals create culture and society “praxis”: the process of consciousness, practice and reflective practice in experience. Praxis includes: self-determination, independence, self-confidence, creativity, rationality, and trusting others. Freire distinguishes three different levels of consciousness: Magical consciousness, Naive consciousness, and Critical consciousness. He defines critical consciousness as the point in which learners reject passivity and work to collaborate outcomes collectively.

His literacy programs were extremely successful; in 30 hours of instruction, former illiterate people were able to read and write well enough to gain the right to vote and many became involved in the political processes in their communities and regions. Indeed, Freire was so successful that his work was seen as threatening by the Brazilian military and he was forced into exile in 1964 after a military coup, unable to return to Brazil for eight years. He has worked in many countries and his philosophy and techniques were adapted to many contexts, including Nicaragua.

After the Sandinista led revolution in 1979, civil war erupted in Nicaragua. Like any country in civil conflict there are many hardships as leaders with differing visions problem-solve in this aggressive manner. Certainly, Nicaragua during the 1980s was no exception. However, a positive
effort during this time was a nationwide literacy campaign. Young urban people, primarily secondary school students, went to the countryside to volunteer teach people how to read using and adapting Freirean techniques. During this time, literacy rose to 77%, a 27% increase from the 1970s. According to Literacy Theory, the ways people read and write vary according to the task, situation, purpose, and relationship between reader, writer, and setting. Particular practices and beliefs about literacy for a given society depend on a range of cultural, social and political factors. The literacy campaign in the 1980s in Nicaragua has cultural, social and political similarities to the Brazilian literacy campaign in the 1950s, perhaps making Freirean techniques conducive to the context.

One of the main activities used in the Participatory Approach is “problem-posing”, an exercise that encourages critical thinking and social action. There are three steps to this activity:

**Problem-posing**
1. Listening
2. Dialogue
   a. Describe the situation
   b. Define the problem
   c. Personalize/share experiences
   d. Analyze root causes
   e. Strategize solution
3. Action

In the first step, Listening, the teacher asks students to identify course content that they would like to focus on, usually based on the problems and issues of daily life that are important to them. In the second step, Dialogue, students go through five discussion questions that help them to identify the root causes of problems and strategize solutions for overcoming them. In the final step, Action, students may take action inside or outside the classroom based on the solutions they identified, and share the outcome with their
classmates. The facilitator helps learners define their goals, helps them pursue the knowledge and skills they need and helps them act to achieve their goals. Problem-posing focuses on critical reflection and action in order to create new realities.

“The goal is action outside the classroom to address participants’ concerns; content is meaningful to the extent that it enables learners to make changes in their lives. This means that reality is not seen as static or immutable; learners can do more than adapt to it. Thus literacy is not the end in itself, but rather a means for participants to shape reality, accomplishing their own goals. Skills are taught in service of action for change rather than as independent, isolated objectives.”34

Freire’s philosophy and methods were interesting not only to literacy educators, but to English and other foreign language educators, as well as educators in other fields. English language educators who work with recent immigrants and refugees in countries such as the United States and Canada often combine basic literacy training with English language training, and have adapted Freire’s methods to include English language teaching. Two ESL educators at the University of Massachusetts, U.S.A., Elsa Auerbach and Linda Wallerstein, adapted Freire’s Participatory Approach to English language teaching. In their book, *Making Meaning: Making Change*, they outlined the principles for the Participatory Approach in language education:

Students are engaged in course development at every stage of the process, from identifying issues and generating content, to producing materials and evaluating learning.

- The classroom is a model of the world. What happens inside the classroom shapes the possibilities outside the classroom.
- Students focus on their strengths and experience, not their inadequacies
- The teacher is problem-poser, not problem-solver
- Content comes from the students’ experience; it goes back to the social context of their lives

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Althea Danielski and I have adapted Freirean based liberatory teaching to the EFL classroom. She works in Niger and I work in Nicaragua. Over the past year, we have created a dialogue about our teaching. One of the challenges we have encountered is our own role as a foreign teacher while creating space for students’ cultures and contexts in the classroom. In Freire’s problem-posing - listening phase the educator immerses self in the community of students to become familiar with daily reality. The educator selects core groups of shared issues with evocative power and strong emotional responses that become the backbone of the (literacy) curriculum. The educator distills these themes into codes such as pictures imaging real situations: photo, picture, drawing, newspaper cutting, advertisement, or word. Codes are depicted so that they are depersonalized and objective but immediately recognizable. These problems are then presented in two-sided ways. A discussion of codes can lead to learners move towards critical consciousness.

Freire was a Brazilian educator who started this technique in Brazil. I have spoken with Nicaraguan educators who practice Freirean based techniques in Nicaragua. As an EFL teacher, I am not working in my home country and I would hesitate to select a group of core issues for my students. Though the use of codes can be powerful, I suggest that students create codes not teachers. I would like to emphasize the importance of listening to students and what they have to say, taken from an observation I made about my own teaching during my Interim Year Teaching Practicum (IYTP) in February 2002:

“I am learning to confront my perfectionism and my tendency to self-sabotage. Given a situation where I am competing, particularly with myself, I over-exert myself for fear of failing. And when I think it’s not possible to shine, I hide. Knowing this, I am trying to lessen my expectations of perfection. Letting go of this pressure to be the best allows me to look at my teaching in a different way. I realize that I have bad days and that this is okay. I cannot be a superstar teacher everyday. But this does not mean that I can justify my lack of trying to improve my
skills either. I am learning that planning is key to success. Without planning, there is no direction. It is my responsibility to invest time into planning my classes. This represents the respect that I have for my students as does their individual efforts to be on time and participate in class demonstrate respect through my eyes. I no longer see my class as something that starts when I put my objectives on the board and finishes when the bell rings. I realize the egocentrism with which I have taught my lessons for the past seven years. It was my assumption that EFL students were attending class to listen to my storytelling, “hear the native speaker”. From my IYTP visit and some Way of Council and CLL techniques that I have practiced since then, I have learned the importance of my students hearing themselves. As I was gently reminded in February: ‘They are learning English, not me’. When I am attentive, the power of each student’s voice strikes me so deeply.”

Freire’s vision has been adapted for second language, workplace, health and peace education internationally. As Auerbach and Wallerstein have explained, their adaptation of this approach includes student involvement in curriculum development. What many educators have done is take the underlying outlook of Freire’s methodology and develop tools to implement techniques such as problem-posing according to their own situation. I do believe it is important to immerse myself in the community in which I am teaching, to be familiar with the languages and cultures that I am working in. As Auerbach says “Teachers need to study community analysis and models of community change.” How do communities structure themselves? How do they change? How does a newcomer, an EFL teacher from abroad for example, identify and work within the community? How can classroom instruction model itself on key issues of community life? bell hooks’ transformative teaching is an example of a teaching style which is based on an awareness of the differences which exist in our world and contains a fundamental respect for multiculturalism. hooks describes her teaching practice:

“In the classroom setting that I have witnessed the power of transformative pedagogy rooted in a respect for multiculturalism. Working with a critical pedagogy based on my understanding of Freire’s teaching, I enter the classroom, with the assumption that we must build ‘community’ in order to create a climate of openness and intellectual rigor. Rather than focusing on issues of safety. I think that a feeling of community creates a sense that there is a shared commitment and common good that binds us. What we all ideally share is the desire to learn – to receive actively knowledge that enhances our intellectual development and our capacity to live more fully in the world.”

One way to build community in the classroom is through the practice of the Way of Council. The four intentions of council are Speak from the Heart, Listen from the Heart, Be Spontaneous, and Be lean of Expression. By sitting in a circle, the traditional classroom setting has been transformed into a space that is more conducive to communicating. Usually, a discussion is opened by the facilitator who speaks from the heart and then invites the group to do so. A talking piece is passed around the circle, allowing for each person to speak in turn. The talking piece is used similar to the talking stick of many Indian tribes used for centuries as a means of just and impartial hearing. The talking stick was commonly used in council circles to decide who has the right to speak. “Whoever holds the talking stick has within his hands the power of words. Only he can speak while he holds the stick, and the other council members must remain silent. The eagle feather tied to the stick gives him courage and the wisdom to speak truthfully and wisely. The rabbit fur on the end of the stick, reminds him that his words must come from his heart.”

The practice of council helps us to stop thinking and listen to others. When we memorize dialogues or conversation patterns we are waiting for a word cue to start speaking. Such grammar-based approaches to language teaching have shifted over

the past twenty years. The Way of Council addresses the heart of a learner-centered
curriculum. Each student has the opportunity to speak and be heard. In turn, by listening
to others; suspending judgment, holding what others say, our worlds expand and
transformation can take place.

Bonnie Mennell taught me a Way of Council activity that I have been practicing for
one year. I will describe this in the following chapter and how this practice enriched the
Research in Language Teaching course for myself and my students. Topics can be
extracted for problem-posing activities where students strategize solutions for problems
that they have identified; the teacher can be a recorder and through recording students
words, grammar, reading and writing activities can be prepared from authentic, student-
generated themes.

In addition to the classroom context, I have also practiced the Way of Council in
meetings that I have facilitated, thus intertwining my classroom experience with “real
life”. This has been very important for me as an Academic Director. In an administrative
position, leading a team of 26 teachers and 8 support staff, the power hierarchy is ever
present and the temptation to assert my ability to make unilateral decisions dangles “like
a carrot in front of my nose”. What the Way of Council has taught me is the importance
of community. In listening to others, my consciousness is expanded, and when I speak it
is in turn, amongst the circle of colleagues. Having listened to what others have said, it
would be difficult for me to make a unilateral decision. The circle has made me feel a
part of a larger whole. It is now difficult for me to imagine setting up a situation where I
put myself at the front of the room, distanced from my colleagues or from my students.

V. Teacher As Course Developer: Some Food for Thought
Freire said that every curriculum reflects a particular view of the world, whether or not it is explicitly acknowledged. **Education is never neutral.** It can either serve to perpetuate existing social relations or to challenge them. He invites us to “participate in the transformation of our students worlds.” It is my belief that language is a tool for empowerment. Therefore, in building a student-centered course that encourages personal voice and critical thinking I am inviting students to explore how teaching and learning English can promote community building and social change.

To have a student-centered classroom I need to ask myself questions such as:

- Who am I teaching? Why are my students learning English?
- What is the current school system? How did it emerge? Who does it benefit?
- Do I situate learning in my students’ cultures?

According to Adult Learning Theory and the principle of self-directed learning; adult education is most effective when it’s experience-centered, related to learners’ real needs and directed by learners themselves. David Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle describes the learning process as a four step cycle: 1) You have a *concrete experience* about which 2) you *reflect* and make *observations* from which 3) you form *abstract concepts* and generalizations that lead to 4) hypothesis for which you structure tests (i.e. *experiments*) that lead to new experiences. An example of the Experiential Learning Cylce is: 1) I ask my students to step outside and look at the sidewalk 2) then come in and draw what they saw on a piece of paper 3) I explain the geometry term “parallel lines” 4) from which students will go back outside and use their own experimentation, relating experience to abstract concepts. Critical pedagogies situate teaching in the learners realities, to provoke conceptual inquiry into self and society. Drawing from students’ previous knowledge,
new concepts can be embodied and the distance between expert and student, knower and learner, is lessened.

In the I-Thou-It triangle, the three elements; teacher, content, student are interconnected:

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 I

 Thou       It
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A teacher is aware of who she is teaching and what she is teaching. As knower, she is transcending information to students through vehicles which speak to each student, paying attention to different learning styles and the individual within the whole. The student takes responsibility for her learning, taking what the teacher shares and the materials presented to draw her own conclusions.

Although some liberatory educators argue that in an authentic student-centered environment, a teacher cannot control where the course goes. I disagree. It is true that each course is unique as content and process flow from what each student brings and seeks. However, the teacher is a knower and has a responsibility to provide helpful shortcuts for students. By designing a course curriculum map, outline, or reading list based on subject-matter knowledge, the teacher has a list of what she knows and can share with students easily. An adult person learning English most likely does not have the five years of time that a child born into a native English speaking family has to acquire language proficiency. If only for reasons of time, it may not be in service of the students to allow complete freedom in the direction of a course. We should look for ways to share subject-matter knowledge in such a way that reaches different learning
styles. The role of negotiation is important in order to include the authentic experience of each student in the group while maintaining structure.

Students can be involved by preparing their own course goals and expectations alongside the teacher; discussions and problem-solving can be led by students; and assignments can be structured in such a way that students choose what to research. In these ways, the teacher is not controlling the outcomes of the course and allows for students to direct the unfolding of the course content. Thus, the course can relate in a meaningful way to students’ everyday reality and therefore enable students to achieve their own purposes.

I want to create a classroom where:

Students feel comfortable in sharing what is important to them.
I provide structures for getting at students’ concerns.
I represent issues in a form that will facilitate dialogue.
I help to structure exploration of the issues, modeling and presenting choices for learning activities.
I encourage sharing of student experience, knowledge, ideas and opinions.

In doing so, students are involved in determining both the content and direction of their education. In turn, teachers can learn from one another. We can broaden our perspectives through sharing experiences in conferences, written accounts of our practices and informal networks. Papers such as this one can be shared in on-line discussion groups or graduate seminars.
Chapter Two: My Teaching Practice – A Research in Language Teaching Course

I. Designing the Course

I was approached by the department two weeks prior to the start date of the final quarter of 2002 to teach the course “Research in English Language Teaching”. I was given the pensum for the program that listed all of the courses that students receive throughout the four years. This was the second research course for this group of students. The students would be doing their student teaching practicum and a technical writing course during the quarter as well. I met with the department director, program coordinator and teacher of the previous research course to discuss the course objectives. The director confided that the program was in metamorphosis, gradual changes had been implemented over the past two years and this group was experiencing a transition from the old program to the new program. I was told that I could design the course as I saw fit, the only requirement being that the students write an academic research paper at the end of 96 classroom hours. I knew that students were not accustomed to writing essays in either English or Spanish and that the high school and university testing and assessment system favoured multiple choice and short answer tests. I asked about the philosophy of the program and how the course I would be teaching fit into the program. The program coordinator explained that students have the choice of taking a final exam or writing a thesis at the end of the program and that over the years only two students have chosen to write a thesis. This course was meant to be an opportunity for students to write an academic paper. I took notes of what was said during this thirty-minute conversation.

While leaving the department, I bumped into a colleague from another institute who was going to be a student in my Research course. She introduced me to three of her
classmates. I asked them about the program. In this brief encounter they told me that the program was disorganized, many teachers didn’t come prepared to class, and they didn’t want to be teachers anymore. I blushed as I thought of how many times I came to class unprepared, hoping that my good nature and storytelling would get me through the hour. I became very pensive as I walked through the campus. I was going to be teaching students studying to become teachers. Not only what I taught but how I taught would be highly critiqued. I thought about what the department told me, I thought about the courses I had taken in graduate school and I realized I didn’t know anything about Research. I started to regret accepting this position at a prestigious university. I had ten days to hand in my syllabus and fourteen days until the first day of class. I called my friend to cancel my weekend trip and went home to study.

First, I did a brainstorm to find out what I knew about research, as the page started to fill-up my mood brightened. Then I looked through my books and binders to see what kind of material I had. I made a list of possible topics related to Research in English Language Teaching and came up with the following course content objectives:

Content objectives:
Recognize and use research terminology
Read samples of quantitative and qualitative classroom research
Describe the process of classroom research
Look at issues related to research with a critical eye
Define own teaching philosophy and the relation to research being implemented

I thought about my first years of teaching. What would have been useful for me? I visualized my first day of teaching and the emotions that came with it. Drawing from my own Teaching Beliefs, I decided that “Research in English Language Teaching” means looking at our own learning and teaching experiences with a critical eye. The guiding
questions for the course would be: Who do we teach? What do we teach? How do we teach?

I knew that this would be the first time that this group of students would be writing a paper of more than three pages in English. I thought about what “Academic Research” might mean to my students and what kinds of English teaching materials they have access to. I remembered that the FORUM magazine is widely distributed throughout the country, the articles are reader friendly and that each student could sign up to receive the quarterly issues for free. I also found a book of case studies where each teacher describes a situation in the language classroom, how they problem-solved and comments by an educator about their solutions. I chose the following reading materials:

The Reading Package:
   a. Case studies on classroom research
   b. Journal articles on classroom research
   c. Articles on research methodology
   d. Articles on pedagogy

I realized that in order to write a research paper at the end of the course, students would need to be able to prepare a framework describing their teaching philosophy and their teaching practice. Therefore, two primary elements for the course became peer feedback and self-reflection. From this, I prepared the general course objectives:

   General Objectives:
   Through reading a series of case studies and articles directed at research and classroom teaching, students will be able to prepare an action research project and write a research based academic journal article.

I reread my notes from the department meeting, as the four students’ words rang through my head “we don’t want to be teachers anymore”. I decided that these students needed some encouragement about their new profession and that I could lead by example.

However, in order to be effective, I would have to make a commitment to them and be
consistent throughout the course. I thought about the I-Thou-It triangle and came up with the following vow to myself:

I – teacher: Through my example I will demonstrate to my students that being a teacher is a worthy profession. To do so, I will write out my lesson plans each day, have realia for students to look at and borrow each day, and arrive at least five minutes before class starts each day.

Thou – student: I will pay attention to all students, whether shy or outspoken and remember that each person has something important to contribute. I will learn each student’s name and visit their teaching practicum classroom once during the course.

It – content: I will select topics and readings that relate to the new teacher’s experience. I will do the readings before each class just as I expect each student to. I will prepare practical activities in which students can explore the themes and relate topics to their own learning and teaching experiences.

In order to peak students curiosity, encourage them to explore learning and teaching and enjoy the process would involve commitment on my part. I crossed off the upcoming twelve Sundays from my calendar and wrote Research prep in the little squares of my agenda. I spent the following ten days rereading books, articles and notes in my teaching files. Many of which I discussed in the first chapter of this paper. I divided the course into four modules:

Module I: Who do we teach? Why do we teach? (21 hours)

Module II: What do I teach? Classroom Observation (19 hours)

Module III: How do I teach? Action Research (29 hours)

Module IV: How do I teach (part two) – The Journal Article (27 hours)

The 96 hours were distributed in 36 classes over a period of three months. The syllabus served as a framework for the course which included objectives, guiding questions and daily readings. (See Appendix 1) When the department told me that one copy of the syllabus is made available for students from which they each photocopy, I decided to
splurge and make twenty copies myself. It was important to me that each student received a copy of the syllabus. I saw this as the blueprint for the course, I was the architect and the students would be the builders and interior designers.

II. Implementing the Course

What role do I, the teacher, play in creating a meaningful learning environment?

I am an educator. In being so, it is my role to share the knowledge that I have in this field. It is also my role to find helpful shortcuts for adult learners. To find ways to present the subject matter in a clear, user-friendly manner that reaches multiple learning styles. And if I can do this thoughtfully with meaning, each student can feel secure, relaxed, and interested thus, enjoying and participating in class. It is also my role to create an environment where each student feels that their voice is heard and present activities in such a way that students are interested in looking at the subject matter. Key to my efforts of encouraging personal voice, I introduced the class to The Way of Council. On the first day of class I opened the course with a Council circle. I explained the Four Intentions which I had drawn on poster board and taped onto the wall:

- Speak from the Heart
- Listen from the Heart
- Be Spontaneous
- Be Lean of Expression

I gave each student a piece of paper and asked them to write a question that they would like to ask a classmate, me or answer themselves. I wrote a question too. We put our questions in a box in the middle of the circle, then, each of us drew a paper and took a minute to reflect on the question. I started the circle by reading the question I had drawn
out loud: “Do you still want to be an English teacher?” and responded from the heart. As we went around the circle, people spoke and I listened. I learned a lot that day about my students needs and how I could present the materials in a meaningful way. One student mentioned that teachers seem like islands, isolated from one another, even though they teach in classrooms next to one another. From this, I remembered to invite three colleagues as guest speakers to our class. I gave each colleague the syllabus and asked them to choose the day they would like to visit us. (See Appendix 2: Day 1)

Throughout the course, we would start or end the class in a Council circle to foster community and promote active listening around language teaching issues. On the day of the Poster Session at the 10th Annual NICATESOL conference, we did a Council circle afterwards. One by one, each student expressed their surprise, joy and appreciation for their accomplishments in the Research Course. “I’ve always thought that some other teachers know more than me and that maybe I didn’t have anything to add to their knowledge but with the poster session my view changed. I learned that I could express my ideas with other teachers.” (Taken from Appendix 6, Question 10) Through encouraging discussion on deeper issues, at deeper levels, students built their confidence and saw themselves as experts of their own experiences. (See Appendix 2: Day 1)

Meaningful learning takes place when I am able to sit back amongst the students and let them explore the issues. Seating arrangement plays a large role in orchestrating this effectively. Using circles, where there is eye contact and I am at eye level with my students encourages equality amongst us. In addition, knowing when to gather as a large

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58 Poster session: I was impressed with the experience of doing one myself in the graduate course, Second Language Acquisition. I found the course theory to be challenging and was amazed at how many connections I made. I considered that my students might feel the same challenge in my course. I borrowed a lot from my instructor, Elka Todeva, when teaching this Research course.
circle or move into smaller circles is important and recognizing when I should join groups and where I should sit is key. “In general it was comfortable for she let us sit where we wanted in two rows. She also had us sit in small and big circles. I think circles provided the best chance for us to be listened to and learn from each other.” (Taken from Appendix 6, Question 4) When I sit quietly and attentively, I am empowering students. My quietness creates room for them to speak without interruption. My attentiveness acknowledges that I am interested in what they are saying.

**What role does each student play in creating a meaningful learning environment?**

Although a teacher can provide the framework from which each student builds, each student needs to take responsibility for their own learning. To do so, students benefit from self-reflection, teamwork, and class participation. In order to achieve this, I would prepare experiential learning activities that involved every member of the class. This meant that each student had a role to play and time was allocated in class to reflect upon their role. I learned a great reading activity from the book “Educating Esme”. I chose to do this activity on Day 3 since the reading for that day was “What Readers Look For”. In groups of five, students read and discussed a passage that I had chosen ahead of time and photocopied. Each member of the group was assigned a different task for the discussion. For example, the Literary Luminary looked for interesting or difficult words and the Discussion Director led the small group discussion. I was the facilitator. After I introduced the activity, I quietly circulated. In this way, it was the responsibility of each student to take part in the learning experience. The experiential learning cycle was completed by:
1. Concrete Experience: Doing the reading roles activity.

2. Reflective Observation: A free-write or small group discussion based on the reading roles activity.

3. Generalization: Discussion of the reading “What Readers Look For”.

4. Active Experimentation: How each student took this outside of our classroom and into their own classroom.

Having written the first three steps on the board and explained what we were doing, the activities unfolded without my interference. I stayed present, an active listener, while the students worked with one another.

Students worked in pairs, small groups and large groups on a daily basis. I observed a sense of responsibility to one another that grew over the duration of the course. Initially, few students brought the daily reading to class. By the end of Module One, students were familiar with sitting in small discussion groups that they led themselves and as I circulated I saw that most students had the reading highlighted and scribbled on. After the first two days of class, I didn’t mention again that it was required to do the daily reading before coming to class, I believe that students took this upon themselves in part, to be an involved member in group with information and ideas to offer in discussions.

“First of all, from what I observed from Sarah’s class I realized that she places emphasis on all students in the activities. The students interact most of the time during the class to such a point that the students are really involved become actors in the whole learning process, students recollect ideas or information shared in each group in order to share them with the whole group.

Apart from this, students have to take initiatives or be responsible for their own learning by studying daily in order to be prepared to participate actively in the group discussions, they have to change groups from time to time. She also brings interesting topics about which she not only invites us to discuss in groups, but also to reflect deeply by writing answers
because she believes that this technique enables shy students to be in better condition to take part in the discussions.” (Alfonse Jean Onel, *Classroom Management*, Final Research Paper, 11 December 2002, p.1)

**What role does the material or content of the course play in creating a meaningful learning environment?**

Jack Millett suggests that by letting students know what is expected in class anxiety is decreased and students are more apt to learn. He recommends that information be given in class in three different ways to speak to different learning styles. In an effort to be clear and lessen confusion and anxiety about what we were doing each day:

- I wrote the topic and activities on the board which I read aloud at the beginning of class,
- I put realia on the back wall and around the room pertaining to the topic of the day, 
- I reminded students periodically that the topics and readings for each day were on the syllabus which they were asked to bring to class each day, and
- I taped the lesson plans onto the wall at the end of each week, retyped according to what we did that day.

I kept these three aspects of classroom lay-out consistent throughout the 36 days of class. At the end of module one, we added the visuals made by students and students were encouraged to put up things related to English Language learning and teaching on the walls. I wanted students to know what we were working on so that they could reflect on
the process as both a learner and a teacher: What did I experience as a student? How
would I set this up if I was the teacher? I found that by having both a plan for the course,
the syllabus and reading list, and a plan for each day, the lesson plan, I was giving
structure to the course, like the frame of a house, to support students in their exploration
of themes and content.

“Second, she (Sarah) is preoccupied for the progress of students by
making sure that they read the materials daily and by checking their
understanding of the questions assigned to each group. I also think her
methodology contributes to the creation of a good atmosphere of learning
because it makes the class dynamic and attractive. By encouraging
students to do different activities daily makes the class interesting, the
students are always kept busy and motivated, the class is not boring that’s
the reason why the students don’t sleep but always stay awakened. Apart
from this, she always encourages them to manifest interest for research
because by doing research from time to time we learn better and know
more.

Next, she thinks students can manifest interest in learning if the class is
decorated and alive. She makes them feel confident in themselves by
encouraging them to be creative and always insists on the necessity to
reflect about their teaching in order to find out their deficiencies or
weaknesses so as to improve. By displaying their posters on the
classroom walls and invites visitors to appreciate them. Something that
really calls my attention is that she always makes an effort to get the
students interested in doing research and to attend class everday.”
(Alfonse Jean Onel, Classroom Management, Final Research Paper, 11
December 2002, p.2)

To what extent and when is material chosen by me, the students as a group, each
student individually?

The readings for the course were chosen one hundred percent by me. I prepared
the course syllabus prior to the first day of class and this included the selection of daily
readings. Students did not have input in this apart from the short, informal conversation
that I had had with four students after meeting with the department to discuss designing
the course. However, I do believe that their comments gave me some food for thought
while selecting readings for the course. Being immersed in the community, having worked in Nicaragua for four years with teachers who had graduated from the same program, I felt that I heard their voices when they spoke to me that day. Their comments prompted me to talk with colleagues who had recently graduated from the program and ask about their Research classes. Three teachers gave me suggestions that I incorporated into the course.

On one level, I had chosen the material. I had chosen a selection of readings that incorporated the theory I wanted my students to learn. I had defined what Research meant to me and the Subject Matter knowledge I could share. However, how we practiced and applied the theory in classroom activities involved both teacher and student input. Therefore, the Action System knowledge was guided not only by me, but also the students as a group and individually:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Matter Knowledge</th>
<th>Theory: Engaged Pedagogy</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Where is this stated and by whom?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generalization</strong> (Theory): Selected by teacher</td>
<td><strong>Step in the Experiential Learning Cycle</strong></td>
<td>An Excerpt from bell hooks’ “Teaching to Transgress”</td>
<td>Selected before the course started</td>
<td>In the syllabus that I designed before the course started.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflection/ Observation</strong>: Selected by teacher and interpreted by students</td>
<td><strong>Material</strong></td>
<td>Guiding questions in which students reflect on the activity they just practiced and relate this to the reading.</td>
<td>General guiding questions selected before the course started; specific guiding questions during the week that the theory would be taught</td>
<td>General questions: In the syllabus that I designed. Specific questions: Written by me in the lesson plan and on the board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concrete Experience</strong>: Selected by student(s) or teacher</td>
<td><strong>Time Frame</strong></td>
<td>Selected during the week it would be taught</td>
<td>Written by me in the lesson plan and on the board but selected by either students or teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 51 |
Interestingly, though I controlled the selection of reading materials, 100% of students who submitted the Student Questionnaire said that the reading materials related to real life and the course related to real life. (See Appendix 6: Results of the Student Questionnaire – question 6 & 7) Thus, the lack of student involvement in materials selection doesn’t seem to hinder my objective of “situating the classroom in real life”. I attribute this to two things: First, I drew from the cultural context of my students when I selected the reading materials and designed the course; second, each class included a combination of theory (subject matter knowledge) and practice (action system knowledge).

**How do the materials that I select affect the learning environment?**

The Module I readings reflect my teaching beliefs as discussed in Chapter One. If you look at the readings for Module I (Appendix 1: The Syllabus) and compare this with the student learnings for Module I (Appendix 4: Student Learnings) you will note that they are closely linked. As we went around the classroom to share the learnings of Module I, the majority of students voiced Brain-based learning, Engaged Pedagogy, Case Studies or Classroom Management. The reading materials that I selected for the course were central to the activities and themes of discussion for each day of class. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the topics of students’ learnings reflect the reading materials that I have selected.

I would like to point out the importance of setting up activities in which students can interpret the materials in their own ways and come up with their own conclusions. Thus, the topics generated are greatly influenced by my selection but the content of the class, how each student interprets the materials and makes meaning, is directed by

“by providing students with meaningful materials teachers are setting the necessary conditions so that students become active participants in the classroom and in their societal context. Through the use of meaningful materials we are preparing our students to become “critical” or to have a “critical eye”. As a result of this they, will not become conformists on what society is trying to inculcate in them. Therefore, materials that are “thought provoking” perhaps will stir positive emotions on students, and they will feel propelled to become active participants in the classroom as to express their experiences and beliefs. Furthermore, they might feel the need to become active participants in their society through the enforcement of casting their votes and becoming members of the different associations encountered in their societal context.”

The materials that I chose challenged students to look at their classrooms as a microcosm of society; to see teaching as a profession of responsibility and reward, to recognize that the time each student spends in our classrooms is time that is either invested or lost.

“It is important to recognize that the practice of Engaged Pedagogy goes beyond promoting students’ talk. It goes even further since the goal is to allow students to assume responsibility for their own learning – letting them become autonomous learners. Here I see a connection with the constructivist perspective which views learners actively engaged in making meaning. By teaching with this approach, we not only give importance to what our students already know (prior knowledge) but also we look for what they can analyze and share. In this way we are enhancing our students to become critical thinkers in order to change the reality by applying what they learn by sharing.

All in all, what I have mentioned here is what has been most relevant for me in module I. And I see a lot of connections among the different concepts that we studied and discussed in class. I am happy to be able to see that linking because of its importance to the construction of my own teaching philosophy.” (Juan Rostran, *Engaged Pedagogy and the importance of its practice*, Module I assignment, 30 October 2002, p.3-4)

**How does student voice relate to making meaning?**

The class began at 7am and we often started the morning with free-writing. Paul Levasseur has taught me about writing my way into speaking and I have found it to be
very effective. I would write a word, question, or statement on the board related to the
topic of the day and invite students to free-write. As the course continued, free-writing
grew from five to fifteen minutes and paragraphs turned into pages. I found that starting
the class by eliciting students’ previous knowledge in an informal written piece, lessened
tension and anxiety as students were writing for themselves. They knew that I would not
be reading their writing and it would not be graded. I encouraged students to write in
their notebooks so that they would have their free-writing to refer to, alongside notes
taken in class as reference for the assignments they would hand-in. Thus, emphasizing
that their personal voice was as valuable as experts.

To make meaning something has to be meaningful to the individual. Therefore,
the starting point is self-exploration. In Module I we discussed readings and key
concepts of Holistic Education so that each student could explore what was meaningful
for them in the context of language teaching. I prepared activities such as “Your Coat of
Arms” and “the Identity Collage” (See Appendix 2, Day 2 and 22) so that students could
reflect on who they are and how they came to be who they are. I gave a short lecture on
“The Synergic Enquiry Model” and we made reference to synergy in the classroom
throughout the course. Using the concentric circles of identity that I described in chapter
one, I would pose reflective questions to my students about the interaction of self,
community, world, etc., in the classroom experience. I encouraged my students to use I
statements and speak for themselves. In this way, students saw personal voice as key to
making meaning.

“Therefore, my aim forever is to complete a cycle of self-discovery and
self-actualization in order to be as sure as possible of what exactly I intend
to do as an educator in my country. After reading some papers on
“engaged pedagogy” (bell hooks), I found out two important things: one,
my strong need to find key answers to build up my teaching philosophy; two, my great interest in this not-so-unfamiliar concept.

Then, what could it be that I’m looking for? The question on top of this essay is one of my starting points: Am I teaching only skills and strategies to use a language that is not very much spoken in their country, or am I helping them and myself grow as individuals through the learning of that language? Up to what extent do the abilities and skills the curriculum “requires” me to teach relate to students reality and experiences? Do they provoke critical thinking and action-taking around the topics they have to deal with in everyday life?

Engaged, participatory, holistic or liberatory pedagogy seems to present a promising proposal for taking action and starting changing my world. I have to heal myself before attempting to do so with my students, who expect me to give them more than a hand.” (Alejandra Guzman, Am I “engaging students in the subject matter of the curriculum” or “human beings in learning and acting”?, Module I assignment, 2 October 2002)

**How does meaningful learning take place?**

Meaningful learning takes place when we link the classroom experience to real life. In the following excerpt Juan explains how he made connections between the Research Course, other courses he was studying, courses he was teaching, colleagues’ experiences and professional development in order to answer his research question:

“Little by little I began to implement other strategies, some of them I had already known about. I also began to pay careful attention to the way my teachers managed mistakes in our TEFL program courses. In addition to this, sharing with my colleagues was extremely helpful to change the situation in my classroom. Attending workshops for EFL teachers has proved to be very valuable as well. Finally, I realized that each teacher must learn, experiment with, and then choose the strategies that best work for our students. Self revision was necessary.” (Juan Rostran, *The Treatment of Oral Mistakes in the English Language Classroom*, Final Research Paper, 11 December 2002, p.4)

The general objective of this course was first, to complete an Action Research project. In my class, Action Research was defined as the self-reflective process of choosing a short segment of class, 10-15 minutes, where a significant incident
happened and examining why this was significant. The second part of the objective, after completing the Action Research project, was for students to write a final research paper based on a topic of interest in the language classroom. This process made the learning experience meaningful as students chose final research paper topics that were personally relevant.

Borrowing from the I-thou-it model and reflective teaching practices, one of my objectives was to teach a course that would be meaningful for students who are preparing to become teachers. Throughout the course, I encouraged students to do research which was relevant to their classroom experience. I wanted students to be empowered to write as knowers and problem-solve. In Maria Auxiliadora’s research she comes up with “some conclusions and recommendations to authorities, teachers and also to students about the type of textbook they can choose to teach or learn English in a better way.” (Final Research Paper, p. 9) She has written as a voice of authority of her own experience and is providing solutions for a problem in language teaching which she and many educators in Nicaragua face.

“I have said in my introduction the great challenge that I have in finding an appropriate English book for my classes... It seems very easy to say ‘let’s change our English textbook’. For people who have not been in touch with secondary education, it is likely to be very easy to change. However, many questions arise when thinking about this issue. I have to think in terms not only of contents or grammatical structures. I could dare to say that those are the easiest things to think about. Any experienced English teacher could teach grammatical structures for first year even without using a textbook. I think the most important thing to take into account is the usefulness of the textbook when motivating students to perform well in English class as well as the practicality of those contents when thinking of the abilities the learner must have in real life. Where am I going to find the answers? Should I look for them in a printing company? Do the authorities have the responses about what textbook is
suitable for the students? Can school principals tell the type of text students can use to be motivated and at the same time to develop their abilities in using English? If a physician is about to give a prescription should he ask to someone else about the symptoms instead of the sick person?” (Maria Auxiliadora Maradiaga, *What kind of textbook would be suitable for first year students of the Aldeas SOS Herman Gmeiner School in Managua*, Final Research Paper, 11 December 2002, p.8-9)

**Why did this group of students start the course with hesitancy and end the course with enthusiasm? What transformation took place? How did this transformation occur?**

In the EFL institutes that I have worked in, it is common that Conversation English classes are fun whereas courses that involve reading and writing are serious, difficult or boring. I believe that many students started this course with hesitancy because the course name “Research in English Language Teaching” does not evoke images of creative exploration, particularly when Research meant studying others and not studying self. I believe that a transformation took place gradually over the 96 hours of class as each student experienced “Research in English Language Teaching” to be “interesting, practical, useful, meaningful, and innovative” amongst other things. (See Appendix 6, Question 19) As each student started to make meaning, and learn techniques that would be useful for their own classrooms, a transformation occurred.

In the month of November, I visited each student in their teaching practicum for one 45 or 50 minute period to: 1) do a written ethnography, 2) discuss their teaching experience after the visit, and 3) know their teaching contexts. The written ethnography was a document for them to consider when writing their Action Research Project. Visiting each student helped me be better informed to assess their Action Research Project. It also gave me a chance to spend some time one on one with each student and see them as teachers.
When I set up situations in which my students could see me as human, flawed, a learner, I was demonstrating that an effective teacher is not perfect but a co-learner. I offered myself to my students for inspection. To start Module II: Classroom Observation, I brought an unflattering video of myself doing a demo lesson in a Conversation English class. I made several mistakes in the lesson, particularly around Classroom Management. Opening up a discussion about my demo lesson, allowing students to critique my work, helped me teach through example how to “take constructive criticism” and be “a reflective teacher”. I emphasized that where each of us started at the beginning of the course was not so important but rather how far each of us moved forward in our learnings. What impressed me the most was that many students didn’t feel capable of writing a three page descriptive paper at the beginning of the course but by the end of the course each student wrote an insightful ten page research paper.

III. Conclusion: My Teaching Praxis Assessed

When looking at how successful I am as a teacher, I am eager to read student feedback. Teaching a course is like directing a play. The script may be genius but the performance a flop. I am clear about my teaching beliefs and how integral these are to who I am. I realized through teaching this course, that in order to have teaching practices that are congruent with my beliefs, I need to be an active member of the classroom community, willing to have my teaching scrutinized and prepared to do my part each day. Practicing what I believe requires planning, self-reflection, a willingness to be open and human, and above all genuine.

I was not a perfect teacher. I had my bad days. But what I learned is that through reflective teaching and putting my beliefs into my students’ cultural contexts, I could set
up a classroom environment where materials were presented in a meaningful way, each student’s voice was heard and students applied their knowledge to their lives. In writing this paper I have realized the following about my teaching beliefs and my teaching practice: I have voiced my teaching beliefs in accordance to the four phases of the synergic enquiry model and I designed the four modules of the Research course accordingly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Teaching Beliefs</th>
<th>My Teaching Practice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Identity, Culture &amp; Voice</td>
<td>Module I: Who do I teach? Why do I teach?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synergic Enquiry Model:</td>
<td>Objective: Self in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase one - knowing self</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Language, Globalization &amp; Synergy</td>
<td>Module II: What do I teach?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synergic Enquiry Model:</td>
<td>Classroom Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase two - knowing other</td>
<td>Objective: Data collection through peer observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivism</td>
<td>Objective: Data collection through self observation – holding the difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synergic Enquiry Model:</td>
<td>between my teaching practice and other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase three – polarity holding</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(self and other as different)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Community &amp; The Language Classroom</td>
<td>Module IV: How do I teach (part two) – The Journal Article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synergic Enquiry Model:</td>
<td>Objective: Write a research paper that includes self and peer observation –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase four – transcend difference</td>
<td>integrating other to improve my practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(embody self and other)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is my Teaching Praxis, as demonstrated in the “Research in English Language Teaching” course? In short, my teaching beliefs come from my life experience and reflection on my life experience fosters my teaching practice. According to my students, my teaching praxis is:

*She uses Engaged Pedagogy or anything with other name that gives importance to meaningful learning, constructivism and student voice.*
Communicative Environments all students felt free in the classroom there no inhibitions

Synergy, it encourages values for creating outcomes collaboratively

I think the teacher was a counselor in the class.

To become more aware of what we do in our teaching to become reflective and better.

Learning by experiencing and reflecting.

Builted student confidence – work in group. Develop engaged pedagogy. Student voice.

Learn and practice Engaged Pedagogy. Enhance students’ voice.

Developing engaged pedagogy in the classroom and building students confidence.

Teacher and students as an one single person, work. Real-life situation part of teaching.

Learning through experience and learning through teaching.

She tried to prepare us with different and valuable materials that encourage us to practice mainly what is engaged pedagogy.

(Taken from Appendix 6, Question 11)

What I’ve learned is that the skills my students have identified above are natural. People who have influenced my teaching have taught me with these skills, I have taught this course with these skills, and so the cycle continues. Teaching by connecting classroom concepts to real life makes sense. It is taking the difficult or the painful out of the classroom experience. Why start with parallel lines on the board? Take a look at the sidewalk first.

Once I realized that knowledge is not separate from but integral to what I already know, I became confident in being an expert of my own experience. My teaching became authentic because it came from who I am. This makes the classroom experience interesting. Standing in front of the room, talking and writing is tiring. Sitting amongst students, putting open-ended questions and generative themes out there for each person to
chew on was fascinating. Students can’t help but be interested when asked to think about and talk about themselves and know that people are really listening. I have learned so much about being a student and teacher in Nicaragua by being a part of this classroom community.

I challenge myself to fine tune these skills in order to maintain my teaching praxis in which student voice and meaningful learning is core. In doing so, it is my goal to become a quiet entity who gently and confidently guides my students with tools that I have inherited. Therefore, empowering my students to invest in their own tools, to become their own carpenters and build what they need.
Bibliography


Appendix
Appendix 1: The Syllabus

UNIVERSIDAD CENTROAMERICANA
Facultad de Humanidades, Centro Superior de Idiomas
Carrera Enseñanza Del Inglés Como Lengua Extranjera

Course: Research in English Language Teaching
Instructor: Sarah Renata Wright, M.A. TESOL (candidate)
Quarter: September 20 – December 10, 2002
Schedule: Mon. and Wed., 7-9:50am; Friday, 7-8:50am – 96 hours
Office hours: To be announced

General Objectives:
Through reading a series of case studies and articles directed at research and classroom teaching, students will be able to prepare an action research project and write a research based academic journal article.

Content objectives:
- Recognize and use research terminology
- Read samples of quantitative and qualitative classroom research
- Describe the process of classroom research
- Look at issues related to research with a critical eye
- Define own teaching philosophy and the relation to research being implemented

Application objectives:
- Prepare and present an action research project
- Write a classroom-based research journal article

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module I: Who do we teach? Why do we teach?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of this module is to identify our own reasons for teaching, see our role and our students’ roles as players in the classroom drama within the context of current philosophies of pedagogy and cognitive development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>Engaged Pedagogy, p.13-22, Teaching to Transgress – Education as the Practice of Freedom, bell hooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>What Readers Look For, p.206-215, In Our Own Words – A Guide with Readings for Student Writer, Rebecca Mlynarczyk and Steven B. Haber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 5</td>
<td>Accessing the Brain’s Potential, p.3-23, Making Connections – Teaching and the Human Brain, Renate Nummela Caine and Geoffrey Caine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 6</td>
<td>Instructor-Student Interaction: Teacher, Friend or Other?, p.121-124, Teaching In Action, Annette Lyn Dobler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 7</td>
<td>Stimulating Participation in a College Classroom, p.139-142, Kaoru Iseno (TIA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 8</td>
<td>Designing a Curriculum based on Student Needs, p.96-100, Maureen Snow Andrade (TIA)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21 hours
**Module II: What do I teach? Classroom Observation**

The purpose of this module is to identify the role of classroom observation and other instruments within the context of research methodology. Readings include journal articles that use these instruments to collect data for research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 9</td>
<td>Teacher Observation in Second Language Teacher Education, p.43-61, Richard Day (SLTE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 10</td>
<td>Clinical Supervision of language teaching: the supervisor as trainer and educator, p.167-181, Stephen Gaies and Roger Bowers (SLTE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 11</td>
<td>“Let’s See”: Contrasting conversations about teaching, p.182-197, John F. Fanselow (SLTE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 12</td>
<td>Testing Writing in the EFL Classroom: Student Expectations by Nahla Nola Bacha (FORUM)</td>
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<td>Day 13</td>
<td>Language Anxiety &amp; Classroom Dynamics: A Study of Adult Learners by Anna Turula (FORUM)</td>
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<td>Day 14</td>
<td>Using Self-assessment for Evaluation by Richard Watson Todd (FORUM)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 15</td>
<td>The Introduction of Course Objectives and Criteria Referenced Tests, p.101-104, Maureen Snow Andrade (TIA)</td>
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19 hours

**Module III: How do I teach? Action Research**

The purpose of this module is to prepare an action research project based on the teaching practicum and integrating the concepts and skills acquired in Module I and II. Sample projects will be viewed by video for class discussion and analysis.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 16</td>
<td>Action Research in the Language Classroom, p.62-81, David Nunan (SLTE)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Day 17</td>
<td>Teacher Development through reflective teaching, p.202-214, Leo Bartlett (SLTE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 18</td>
<td>Clashing Codes: Negotiating Classroom Interaction, p.125-146, Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching, A. Suresh Canagarajah</td>
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<td>Day 19</td>
<td>Errors and Corrective Feedback: Updated Theory and Classroom Practice by William Ancker (FORUM)</td>
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<td>Day 20</td>
<td>Real Life Problem-Solving: A Collaborative Learning Activity by Karen Englander (FORUM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 21</td>
<td>Altering Teacher Talk, p.30-34, Kimberly A. Marshall (TIA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 22</td>
<td>Using Collages with Ethiopian Immigrant Students, p.164-168, Eleanor Aviron (TIA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 23</td>
<td>Teaching Dictionary Skills at the Junior High School Level, p.355-359, Janice Tibbetts (TIA)</td>
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<td>Day 24</td>
<td>The Teaching of Writing Skills to Foreign Language Learners, p.249-255, Mairead Cassidy (TIA)</td>
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<td>Day 25</td>
<td>The Role of Learner Diaries: A Saudi Arabian Perspective, p. 169-175, Bill Whitfield and John Pollard (TIA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 26</td>
<td>Gallery of Action Research Projects</td>
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29 hours
Module IV: How do I teach (part two) - The Journal Article

The purpose of this module is to identify who writes about English language teaching and how to publish a journal article. Based on the various samples of journal articles in the reading package, excerpts from “A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations” and the writing course, students will write a research based journal article.

Day 27  Introduction to Academic Journal Writing
Day 28  A Cognitive Model for Teaching Reading Comprehension by He Ji Sheng (FORUM)
Day 29  From Page to Stage: Lord of the Flies by Helen Lucas and Tuomas Hiltunen (FORUM)
Day 30  Gender Differences in Teaching Styles by Paul Bress (FORUM)
Day 31  Sample Abstracts From Other Journals (FORUM)
Day 32  Teaching Conversation with Trivia by Micheal J. Crawford (FORUM)
Day 33  Vocabulary Practice Games by Shalva Shaptoshvili (FORUM)
Day 34  The Script-based Approach by Lautar0 I. Caceres & Katica Obilinovic (FORUM)
Day 35  Final Presentations
Day 36  Final Presentations
27 hours

Classroom Management:
Teacher’s Expectations:
- Attend and participate in every class.
- Do the required reading before coming to class.
- Prepare and present an action research project.
- Write and submit a research-based journal article.
- Participate in final presentations.

Students Expectations:
To be done as a group on the first day of class.

Evaluation System: Detailed instructions for each assignment will be given in class.
Action Research Project  50
Journal Article  40
Final Presentation  10
Participation  Mandatory

The Reading Package:
  a. Case studies on classroom research
  b. Journal articles on classroom research
  c. Articles on research methodology
  d. Articles on pedagogy

Students are expected to do the daily reading prior to each class. The readings have been selected to meet the goals of the course and are the basis for discussion and course assignments.
Appendix 2: Lesson Plans

Day one – Introduction

Warm-up
a. Use index cards to create sentence on wall.
   Sentence:
b. Five-minute free-write based on sentence
c. Discuss with a partner

Way of Council
Write a question about teaching that you would like to answer or have someone in the class answer. Put papers in the macaroni box in the middle of the room, each person pulls out one. 2 minutes each to talk about the topic. I start. Pass watch to me when time is up. Go around entire circle. Pass to the left.

After the activity ask students to write for five minutes on the following questions:
What do you think my teaching philosophy is?
Why did I choose this activity?
What were the group dynamics?
How did you feel during the activity?

Tell students that they will be sharing an excerpt from this writing with the class.
After they write, in groups of 4, read an excerpt of your writing to your group. Students practice active listening then comment on each others’ words. Allow time for dialogue amongst the group.

Introduce the syllabus
Give each student a syllabus. 5 minutes to read it. Then open the circle for discussion and clarification.
Students expectations - I’ve told you my expectations, what are yours?

Arrange photocopies of the reading package for Monday.

Discuss Reading strategies for the daily readings:
While reading, jot notes in the margin, underline, ask questions, re-read, etc.. (give them some reading strategies) Meet a classmate or form a peer study group.
After you do the reading, look at what you wrote today in class.

Day two – Engaged Pedagogy (3 hours)

1. Identity - Your Coat of Arms
Draw a shield with six quadrants. Draw a picture that represents the answer to each question:
What is one personal value you would never discard?
What is the one thing you value in other people?
What do you regard as your greatest achievement until now?
What do you offer to people around you?
What would you like people to remember you for?
What is the most valuable thing you have received from your own culture?
-share in groups of 5; then put on the wall under “Process of Integration”
2. Engaged Pedagogy, reading
In groups of 5 define 13 concepts from the reading
Question: What is the relation between identity (knowing self) and pedagogy? (p.15) – free-write and discussion

3. Lecture
- The Synergic Inquiry Model
- My teaching practice
- Praxis: action and reflection

4. Reading Roles -taken from Educating Esmé (p.118)
Each group is giving a story strip. Each member of the group has a different role. From this they guess the story. Then come back together as a large group to tell the story.

Five reading roles:
Discussion Director – makes up questions about the book
Literary Luminary – reads aloud notable parts
Language lover – defines what she determines to be the hardest words
Practical Predictor – predicts what will happen next
Process checker – sums it up and keeps track of everyone’s participation

Read section
Follow instructions on role
Discussion director starts
Is this the beginning/middle/end of the reading?
Return to the larger group
Each group assigns a reader to read passage aloud -sum it up & present if it’s begin/mid/end and what happens next
Questions from discussion director; any hard words (cultural schema)

Questions: Which ts have had a big impact on you? Why?
Describe your first teaching interview.
If you were asked “What kind of classroom environment will you create?” how would you answer?

After the activity ask students to write for five minutes on the following questions:
What was the purpose of this activity?
What were the reading strategies being used?
What were the group dynamics?
How did you feel during the activity?

Tell students that they will be sharing an excerpt from this writing with the class.
Get back into the larger circle and invite Ss to read an excerpt. Go question by question or around the circle. Practice active listening.

5. Discuss Syllabus (from day one)

Day three: What Readers Look For (3 hours)

1. What Readers Look For (Reading)
- With a partner discuss Activity 1, #1-2
- With same partner discuss your ratings of sample I-IV in Activity 2
- Which is the best? Weakest? Does your partner agree/disagree? How do your ratings compare with Steven Haber’s?
- Respond to the first draft “My Friend Marek”, p.212 – use peer response sheet
- Compare your responses with a partner
- Read the second draft then discuss your answers with a partner

2. Reflection from day two
If you were asked “What kind of classroom environment will you create?” how would you answer?
   a. Revising: Read your first draft. Take 15 minutes and revise it.
      Take into consideration the Strategies for Revising from p.210
   b. Peer Response: Give it to a partner. Use the peer response sheet as a guide. (p.211-212)

3. Academic Journal Article
Read the journal article “Language Anxiety & Classroom Dynamics: A Study of Adult Learners”
- What did the author do to write this article? Make a list. Share with a partner.
- Read both handouts:
  Some things Anna Turula Knew and Action Research – why?
- Re-read the syllabus and the objectives for each module.
- How will this course prepare you to write a journal article?
- As a teacher or learner, what interests you about the classroom?

Students questions from day two regarding syllabus:
Action Research: Why? How does this relate to Academic Research?
How does what we are doing now relate to Research?

Day 22: Using Collage

1. Collage (45 min.)
   In groups of 4.
   Make a 3-D collage (i.e.: a box)
   The outside represents: how people see you on the outside
   The inside represents: how you really are on the inside
   (check reading for exact wording)

2. Gallery Walk
   In groups of 8.
   Share boxes with group.
   Go outside and put boxes on sidewalk.
   Pick up a box that you haven’t seen and find the person who made it

3. Discuss Article (case study) – in groups of 8
   a. Look at the context: Ethiopian students in Israel (L1, L2, L3)
   b. Compare to Nicaragua: Caribbean coast – language, cultural groups

4. Whole group Discussion
   Use of Art in the classroom: Self-expression
   Point out socio-cultural context(s) of being “shy”
5. Action Research project
   - steps of report; deadline
   - ss who don’t teach (teach make-up class or substitute at CCNN)
   - my observation schedule

Remind 4 Ss about their problem-solving task. (for next Monday)

Module 3 Assignment: Action Research Project

PART ONE: In action research peer group (groups of 4)

Follow Stages 3, 4 and 5 of Action Research Article
Stage 3: Look at tables 1 and 2 (p.71-72): teacher / learner
Stage 4:
   - Step one – select area or aspect of teaching which interests you and analyze, monitor
     particular issues related to aspect selected
   - Step two: analyze 10-15 minute piece of your lesson
   - Should be a “critical incident” or problem or trying something new
   - Step 3: feedback – summarize your results for your peer group
   - Q: what did you discover about your own teaching as a result of your self-analysis?
Stage 5:
   - Step one- peer group discussion: A.R. as a professional development tool
   - Refer to stage 3 and stage 1, step 3 (likes/dislikes – Nestor’s video) – own
     preconceptions,
     value judgments, and theoretical perspectives

PART TWO: To be handed-in

Write a 3-5 page report, typed, double-spaced, in Times New Roman, 12 point font, pages
numbered in bottom right hand corner, cover page includes your name, my name, course name
and date (ask Ian about specifics)

Report should include Stage Four, steps 1-3 and Stage Five, step 1.
You may include theory from the course readings and other materials to support your
observations.

PART THREE: To be presented on November 22nd

Stage 5:
   - Step 3 – 5 minute oral presentation about your Action Research Project
   - Step 2 – Nominate your area for investigation: Final Research Paper

Due date: Friday, November 22nd, 2002 (7AM)

Evaluation: 40% of final grade
   a. Content and Process
   b. Technical writing and lay-out
Appendix 3: Schedule for Student Teacher Visits

In the month of November, I visited each student for one 45 or 50 minute period to: 1) do a written ethnography, 2) discuss their teaching experience after the visit 3) know their teaching contexts and be better informed to assess their action research project.

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<td>UCA (demo in Research class)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Saddyz</td>
<td>Milton</td>
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Aldeas SOS: High School for low-income students, funded by the German Corporation

ANS: American Nicaraguan School, private bilingual school offers K-12 and Communicative English Program for children, teens and adults on Saturdays

Ave Maria College: Private four year bilingual college offers Communicative English Program for children, teens and adults on Saturdays.

CCNN: The Binational Center offers Communicative English courses for children, teens and adults

ETA: English Institute, Communicative English Program for children, teens and adults

UCA: Universidad Centroamericana offers Communicative English Program for children, teens and adults
Appendix 4: Student Learnings

Module I: Learnings (Day 8, transcribed by Sarah)
Ma. Lourdes: Case studies, application of teaching
Mayra: Case studies, could happen to one of us – ideas for resolution, classroom management
Nestor: Things that I’m for and against – look for models; what’s best for ts and Ss (especially Ss)
Felicita: The brain and how it functions, the learning process – to make it relaxing and fun
Alphonse: Motivation – some Ss don’t show interest – how to help them become successful
Cinthya: Case studies; take into account for ts, motivation – create a nice environment for Ss; didn’t realize how important ts attitude is
Emma: Language anxiety – my experience here when I first came to the university, personality factors
Sandra: Classroom Management, lack of Ss motivation; recognize Ss problems in order to overcome them
Milton: Taking Ss needs into account; why are we doing and what are we doing? (interdependence); cognitive psychology, each brain is unique
Juan: Thinking about the kind of teacher I am; survey last Friday – tend to be authoritarian and want to change: Engaged Pedagogy
Carlos: Observation, know the needs and wants of Ss; reaction of both ts and Ss; how to reflect on this – not have antagonistic education but brain compatible
Saddyz: Brain-based learning; new perspectives based on readings
Wendy: How we as teachers can be observant and interact with Ss – my Ss are there because parents send them – low motivation

Module I: Visuals (Day 9)
Juan: Elements of Engaged Pedagogy
Nestor: Surface Knowledge/meaningful Knowledge
Sandra: Classroom Management – getting to the traffic light
Alejandra: Liberatory Teaching
Maria Lourdes: Accessing the Brain’s Potential
Milton: The Big Bs in Learning
Emma: Learnings reflected in Teachings
Carlos: Learning and teaching Collage
Felicita: The Factory Model of Education
Cinthya: Technology and English language learning

Module I: Essay Topics (Day 9)
A few things about Observation, Carlos
Am I “engaging students in the subject matter of the curriculum” or “human beings in learning and acting”?, Alejandra
Class Management, Sandra
Classroom Management, Mayra
Engaged Pedagogy and the Importance of its Practice, Juan
Improving Motivation in Brain-based Learning, Meylin
Learning Process, Lourdes
Language Anxiety and Classroom Dynamics: Adult Learners, Emma
Memory and learning, Ma. Lourdes
My Learning Experience, Ma. Auxiliadora
Needs of the Generation, Cinthya
Surface Knowledge vs. Meaningful Knowledge: Which is better?, Nestor
Teachers’ Motivation vs. Students’ Motivation, Felicita
The Factory Model of Education, Alphonse
The Importance of Motivation in the Learning Process, Alphonse
The Positive Relationship between Teachers and Students, Laura
The Relationship between Teachers and Students, Elwin

**Module II: Learnings** (Day 15, transcribed by Sarah)
Nestor: Teacher Talk
Mayra: Motivation in the classroom: Ss interest and how T motivates
Dolores: Teacher Talk and fear of not knowing the answer
Cinthya: T-Ss interaction, first time teaching at SOS
Milton: Activities and topics T uses according to Ss age, gender, level, Time management
Alejandra: T-Ss interaction / S-S interaction
Juan: activities related to one another: promoting Ss participation
Elwin: T-S / S-S interaction
Sandra: Techniques to keep Ss attention
Lourdes: T-S interaction and motivation of SS in class
Alphonse: Assessment that T uses and why
Wendy: T-S interaction – seating arrangement/grouping, motivation related to content and activities
Meylin: S-T interaction; Ss interested in topic
Saddyz: How T keeps Ss involved. Looking at activities
Emma: Type of activities T will use in class, activities related to topic
Felicita: What can I do to help shy students? (note: refers to class as “family”)
Ma Lourdes: Ss involvement in class (teaching grammar and going back to basics with Ss)
Laura: Positive relationship between Ss and T; Brain-based activities

**Module III: Action Research Project** (Day 27)
A report on ELT, Saddyz
Building a positive relationship with students, Laura
Classroom management and interaction, Alfonse
Classroom management: How to choose the proper tasks, Carlos
Diving into speaking vs. writing into speaking, Nestor
Effective ways of giving instructions and explanations, Sandra
External factors that can cause variations on lesson plan, Meylin
How effective or efficient am I at setting up group work?, Elwin
Integrating slow and introverted students into the different classroom activities, Felicita
Managing disruptive students, Juan
Relationship between teacher’s explanation and student’s proficiency, Milton
The contents in materials chosen by teachers provides the necessary conditions for students to be active participants not only in classroom settings but also in their societal context, Dolores
The relationship between lesson planning and actual teaching, Alejandra
Translation Method, Lourdes
Using appropriate teaching skills and meaningful activities, Maria Lourdes
What advantages do my students get if I become less teacher centered?, Emma

**Module IV: Poster Session** (Day 31)
Action Research and cognitive psychology in the language classroom presented by Milton
Brain-based learning presented by Cinthya, Felicita, Laura & Maria Lourdes
Elements of Engaged Pedagogy presented by Alejandra, Dolores, Juan & Mayra
Multiple Intelligences and Learning Styles presented by Lourdes & Maria Auxiliadora
Our mission in the teaching process presented by Emma & Saddyz
Surface Knowledge vs. Meaningful Knowledge presented by Carlos & Elwin
Teaching to the needs of our generation presented by Nestor & Sandra
What a good teacher should know about presented by Meylin & Wendy
Appendix 5: Student Questionnaire

Research Course, UCA
Name: _______________
Student Feedback
Date: ________________

Please take 40 minutes to fill-out the following feedback form.

1. What were the objectives of the course?

2. Did the instructor complete the course objectives as stated in the syllabus?
   Yes_____  No_____
   If no, which objectives were not covered?

3. What are your main learnings from this course?

4. How did the teacher set up the learning environment? Describe.

5. To what extent did the teacher use the reading package?
   100% ____  80% ____  60% ____  40% ____  20% ____  other _____

6. Did the reading materials relate to real life? Yes _____  No _____
   If yes, explain:

7. Did the course relate to real life? Yes _____  No _____
   If yes, give examples:

8. Did the teacher create room for each student voice in the course? Yes ___ No ___
   If yes, how:
   If no, what do you think hindered student voice:

9. Did the teacher create a student-centered learning environment? Yes ___ No ___
   If yes, give examples:

10. Was this a meaningful learning experience for you? Why or why not?

11. What is the teaching praxis of your teacher?
12. Did the teacher practice Engaged Pedagogy during this course? Yes ___ No ___  
If yes, explain:

13. Was your voice heard in this course? Yes ____ No ____  
Please give examples:

14. Which aspects of the course were positive for you?

15. What do you recommend that the teacher do differently next time?

16. Which of the following tasks were useful for you? (Please check ✓)  
____ Module I essay  ____ Module I visual  
____ Module II essay  ____ Classroom Observation  
____ Module III essay  ____ Poster Session  
____ Final Research Project

17. What would you have liked to do in this course that wasn’t covered?

18. What will you take from this course that will help you in your teaching practice?

19. Choose one word to describe:  
a. Research Class _______________  
b. Research teacher – student interaction _______________  
c. Research student – student interaction _______________

20. Why do you think the teacher assigned the poster session? How is this related to her teaching praxis?

21. How many of your classes in this program have been taught with the same/similar approach? ______  Please name each course:

22. Are there any aspects of this approach that should be adopted by teachers in this program? Yes _____ No _____  
If yes, describe:

23. Any other comments:  

Sarah Renata Wright  
M.A. TESOL Candidate  
School For International Training  
Data: Student Voice & Meaningful Learning
Appendix 6: Results of the Student Questionnaire
Research Course, UCA
Student Feedback

The following thirteen students participated in the student questionnaire. Their answers are recorded in the order that their names appear. Their words have been transcribed as they wrote them:

Alejandra
Elwin
Dolores
Emma
Meylin
Saddyz
Cinthya
Sandra
Wendy
Maria Auxiliadora
Lourdes
Milton
Felicitia

1. What were the objectives of the course?

Help the students to know through different processes about their own teaching in order for them to find an area of it that they would like to do research on.

Prepare an action research project and write a research based academic journal article.

To learn the process of writing an action research project and a journal article.

Recognize and use research terminology. Read samples of quantitative and qualitative classroom research. Prepare and present action research

To be able to prepare an Action Research project and write a research based academic journal article.

Raise awareness on teaching, our teaching, by doing a research project and learn about terminology.

Be able to prepare an Action Research project. Describe the process of Action Research.

To be able to write an action research project. To be able to identify the reasons for teaching.

To be able to prepare an action research project and write a research based academic journal article. Recognize and use research terminology.

Students will be able to prepare an action research project and write a research based academic journal article.
Give students knowledge about what topics research and also how to do a research the process that it involves.

Linking theory and practice to prepare an Action Research project and a journal article, recognize and using research terminology.

To prepare ourselves in order to be able to write an action research project and an academic journal article. Both paper should be based on the knowledge that we acquired during the course.

2. Did the instructor complete the course objectives as stated in the syllabus?
   
   Yes  13
   No  0

3. What are your main learnings from this course?

   I know in more detail what I need to improve in my teaching
   I know of some ways I can do that more effectively
   I realized how important student voice is

   The critical eye developed through the readings and the improvement of my teaching philosophy.

   The process of actions research
   Acquired the ability to reflect
   Acquired my teaching philosophy developed through the materials that I received.

   I was able to recognize and discover some aspects about my own teaching.

   Identify my own teaching skills.
   Write an action research project.

   Raising awareness of my teaching. New techniques used on us by the teacher.

   I learned to write an Action Research project. Team work. Improve my teaching.

   I got the necessary skills to write an action Research project. To identify our own teaching philosophy.
   Team work. To be an observer and our own critic in our classroom in order to improve our teaching.

   Describe the process of teaching through an action research project.

   I learnt to find myself as a teacher, to have a clear idea about the fields of research in English.

   Being able to see myself through other peoples eyes – my students also – and change in order to improve my teaching praxis and behaviour.

   I learnt a lot, but what I really learnt and enjoyed at the same time wa about engaged pedagogy and becoming a reflective teacher.
4. How did the teacher set up the learning environment? Describe.

In general it was comfortable for she let us sit where we wanted in two rows. She also had us sit in small and big circles. I think circles provided the best chance for us to be listened to and learn from each other.

The environment was very communicative. The class was guided in a cooperative way in which we shared what we know.

Always used different seating arrangements.
Provided copies of lesson plans
Always gave or wrote instructions on the board.

Group work, whole discussion

No comment.

As real as possible, everything focused on us as teachers. We would experience after reading over certain concepts in teaching.

She made us feel comfortable in class all the activities we did she gave us interesting readings – real life case

She gave us the necessary bibliography to be able to study all the terminology related with our course. She made us to feel comfortable to talk about our opinions: semi-circle, group work, pair work.

She gave us confidence and we worked in small groups most part of the course so there were a lot of interaction.

Very comfortable and I liked because I learnt to teach in a comfortable way and successful.
It was an excellent environment she tried to get all students involved during the class session, she made all of us participate.

Group discussion, teamwork (quiz show and vocabulary game); using visual to case the speaking skill (visuals and collages) the little box to learn about other and oneself.

We worked in different sitting arrangement like in a big circle, in group of 4, in pairs or divided into two teams.

5. To what extent did the teacher use the reading package?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>100%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>Other: 95%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
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<td><strong>3</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>

6. Did the reading materials relate to real life?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
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</table>
If yes, explain:

All the readings had to do with real life problems that we as teachers (mainly) face in our careers. Some were more difficult than others. Some gave us the tools to do research, some just helped us to realize what to do research on and how.

They presented the possible problems we as teachers can face in the future and give alternatives and activities that we can use in the future.

All the material we received was related to teaching, process of research

The readings were taken from real situations for example, the case study, Forum magazine

Because case studies were part of the reading material. Many of them (all of them) represented issues that we can face in the English classroom.

They were related to other teachers’ experience that will help us reflect on teaching and approaches/techniques used for solving problems.

All the readings always supported the different case were interesting and we learned.

The readings always supported by examples that really related to our situation.

The case studies presented similar situations and problems we face within our classroom both as students and as a teacher.

I said yes because we always were reading about problems that happen in teaching. Ex: Students motivation, interaction student-teacher

We read different journal articles about the different problems and possible solutions to topics related with teaching.

In Forum articles and the case studies shows everyday life experiences and circumstances of real teachers.

The majority of the reading assignments were based on some teachers’ experiences in different countries.

7. Did the course relate to real life?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
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</table>

If yes, give examples:

Because of what I said above and basically because if we did what we were intended to do we learned many things about our teaching; our needs and strengths.

It help us to modify and define the problematic we face as teacher, and the weaknesses in our philosophy.

Experience from teachers that helped us to reflect on our teaching practices.
Ethnography study

Because, everything that we did was related with our techniques and philosophies.

When teaching and doing research on ourselves, our teaching, will help us reflect on how we are doing, and how we can improve.

Yes, Action Research made me reflect about my own teaching experience. And how to improve in the future.

The action research we did was based on our own classroom.

The action research we made reflecting on our own teaching and their finding possible solutions for it.

Yes, because through theory which we put in practice our teaching practicum

Well, as we are future teacher we studied about the different components and problems that the teaching process face.

Doing an analysis of my own teaching practice and teamwork is part of any teacher’s professional profile.

Our papers were based on our own teachers observation class. It means that we were working closed related to what we do as teachers or students.

8. Did the teacher create room for each student voice in the course?

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>13</td>
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</table>

If yes, how:

Again, the use of a whole class circle in which one by one all students were to speak as well as the use of peer groups, provided that room. Also, the teachers attitude helped in that process; she was always open to give a hand to us or just listen to what we needed to say, in or out of class.

She created peer groups in which each student have to talk about the different situations of the class.

Yes, at the end of each class we used an activity that is called “Way of Council”.

I could express my opinion through the plenary session.

She seated us in a circle and we started talking.

She would sit us in a circle and each one of us would talk about our experience with certain activity or topic.

She let us participate all the time. We expressed our opinions.
The seating arrangement let us talk. Everybody had opportunity to express our views. Also we felt that our opinions were important in the learning process.

Whole class activity, at the end of each class we usually made a circle where each student can express themselves.

I don’t have word, but I like your class. You always were friendly with all us.

I really liked the way she make all of us involve or take part in the class because that’s important the teacher-student interaction.

Encouraging participation, expressing what we’ve learned; Module 1 visual and poster session and quiz show.

When everybody was expected to participate in the whole class plenary that we had every day class.

9. Did the teacher create a student-centered learning environment?

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<th>Yes</th>
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</table>

Most of the activities were intended for us to understand and treat the materials ourselves. Discussion questions, roles for each student, free-writing and then sharing ideas, all helped to create that environment.

After the reading, in class there was a discussion most of the time my peers related the topics with their experience in teaching, so it functioned every time as a problem solving activity.

We practiced a lot of group work, collaborative learning, way of council, free write

Basically the class was done by us (students)

Actually everyone of us had the opportunity to say something during the class. For example, while being in circles or in pairs.

All the activities were focused on our learning.

Everybody participated. Ex: how the chairs were arranged.

After readings, every student expressed what he learned and then other students supported that opinion.

We had the opportunity to work in group and develop critical thinking by discussing and sharing ideas.

Yes, because teacher always encouraged all students to participate in class through that we can learn more.

Most of the time we were engage in doing assignment but the teacher was always giving feedback.

The teacher was not a lecturer, but a guide for student to find meaning on their own; example, module 1 visual.
Students were the ones in charge of make comments, at the same time as create our own philosophy.

**10. Was this a meaningful learning experience for you? Why or why not?**

Definitely yes. Because many things did touch my deepest ideas about education and life, because I used not only my eyes but also my mouth and hands to read and understand the content, and because of the real life aspect, it was a meaningful experience to me.

Yes, because I have no experience in teaching, so I tried to analyze the situations and try to solve the problem and avoid them for me in the future.

Yes, throughout the development of the course everything we read, practiced and wrote was based on our experiences as teachers, “our world”

Yes, it was. I learned a lot from the self analysis.

Yes it was, because we learnt by our own experiences we experience real life situations which is better for me as a future.

A lot I would say, I was always reflecting on every activity the teacher would. How I could take it to my teaching.

Yes. This course is very important for my new teaching.

Of course, To our teaching what we learned is so important because we can now recognize our aptitudes and our weaknesses too.

Observing my own teaching I find out many aspect of my teaching that needed to be improved.

Yes, because I felt that learnt a lot and I will said that I put in practice all taught.

Of course, she was the first teacher that truly motivate myself and really appreciate my efforts when doing assignments.

Yes, it was. I’ve always thought that some other teachers know more than me and that maybe I didn’t have anything to add to their knowledge but with the poster session my view changed. I learned that I could express my ideas with other teachers.

Yet it was because it helped me to fulfill my expectation as a future teacher.

**11. What is the teaching praxis of your teacher?**

She uses Engaged Pedagogy or anything with other name that gives importance to meaningful learning, constructivism and student voice.

Communicative Environments all students felt free in the classroom there no inhibitions

Synergy, it encourages values for creating outcomes collaboratively

I think the teacher was a counselor in the class.

To become more aware of what we do in our teaching to become reflective and better.
Learning by experiencing and reflecting.

Builted student confidence – work in group. Develop engaged pedagogy. Student voice.

Learn and practice Engaged Pedagogy. Enhance students’ voice.

Developing engaged pedagogy in the classroom and building students confidence.

No comment.

Teacher and students as an one single person, work. Real-life situation part of teaching.

Learning through experience and learning through teaching.

She tried to prepare us with different and valuable materials that encourage us to practice mainly what is engaged pedagogy.

**12. Did the teacher practice Engaged Pedagogy during the course?**

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<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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</table>

**If yes, explain:**
She used activities that promoted students’ voice in order to reach the class objectives. A lot of group work and reflection; openness from the teachers part to listen to questions, comments, suggestions, practice and theory made a good match through the teacher’s guidance.

She gave importance to what students expressed in the discussion and the written assignments.

Teacher was always interested in what the students had to say about materials and activities. Teacher always asked students how they felt. Interested in students problems.

As a student, I could be involved in the class. I had the opportunity to participate and give my opinion about the different readings.

We practiced what it is liberatory education, teacher as a healer, to be students centered classroom creators.

She would let us be active student teachers by doing things ourselves. An ethnography report, for example, we would experience it.

Yes she gave us enough opportunity to express ourselves in many ways, written, orally, etc..

There was freedom of talking and freedom of using different learning styles.

Of course because we were taught by following what it is to become more reflective in our teaching style and improve it.

No comment.
The teacher always take into account students point of view she considered very important what students think.

The course was not about storing knowledge but learning from others and myself.

Certainly there were many characteristics of Engaged Pedagogy in this course such as the liberatory education, the participatory spaces, becoming more reflectives upon what we do etc.

13. **Was your voice heard in the course?**

<table>
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<th>Yes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Please give examples:**
I had the opportunity to talk to the teacher in and out of class about my questions as a teacher and a student. Questions related to the class and the field (teaching) itself. She was always able to listen, explain, clarify, question or guide in any aspect I needed to.

In the group work when I gave my opinion about a topic or situation, and when the teacher asked me about the topic and assignments.

If I had problems with a deadline she would always provide new opportunities so I could present assignments on a later date.
She was always eager to know what I had to say about different things.

When I was asked to give my opinion.

At NICATESOL

Teacher asked new ways to address students. The visual.

After we wrote an essay we gave comments about it.
When we wrote journals, essays and when we presented our visuals. We could express our views.

We had the opportunity to express how we felt before handing in a given assignment.

When I was doing the research about lack of motivation in my teaching practicum and poster session I like it a lot.

When the teacher ask me for feedback I respond, during our class discussion. I was given opportunity to express myself.

Module 1 visual; poster session; The Way of Council
Because I didn’t express any comment about the class, the methodology or the assignment.

14. **Which aspects of the course were positive for you?**

The teacher’s availability and general praxis, the contents, the assignments

The demonstration in some activities, The Quiz Show, The Gallery Walk
The materials we read. The practice and how to apply this to our teaching

I discovered aspects about my own teaching. Share with classmates.

The collage ‘cause we had the opportunity to know each other. It was a very special moment.

I would say all of them.

Flexibility, sharing, self-reliance


Teacher providing feedback both written and orally.

Teacher and students interaction.

The different readings, the teacher behaviour.

Sharing ideas with my classmates, learning from them; I didn’t feel less experienced or that they were better than me.

The opportunity to express myself in an artistic way designing posters, etc.

15. What do you recommend that the teacher do differently next time?

That she be more explicit about research (its methods and goals) before undertaking the final project. That the assignments were worth less.

No comment.

The only thing I felt uncomfortable about was the fact that all of our assignments were due in the last four weeks of the quarter. I felt very pressured and stress out at the end of the quarter.

Grade all the work/assignments since the beginning of the course.

Everything was okay for me.

No comment.

Encourage the student to participate. Quiz Show.

In Quiz show assign every student a role. Everybody can share knowledge.

No comment.

Nothing because her class is very interesting and she encouraged all the time.

I think she is a good teacher, so she doesn’t need to change.

Nothing, the teaching-learning process was excellent and innovative. I intend to use many of the activities in my own teaching praxis.
Could be better for the students if the teacher distribute the score along all the assignments that students have to carry out during the course.

16. Which of the following tasks were useful for you. (Please check)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Out of 13 students who responded:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Module I essay</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module I visual</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Observation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module II essay</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module III essay</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poster Session</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Research project</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. What would you have liked to do in this course that wasn’t covered?

Read, discuss and learn more about other research methods.

No comment.

Maybe more about Engaged Pedagogy. More about Holistic teaching and teaching to transgress.

Presentations about the readings.

From my point of view we covered the most important points.

No comment.

Nothing.

No comment.

No comment.

Everything I liked.

To have more teacher observation, to check each time what I have improve or need to improve.

Practicing the Q-sort and the KPSI model.

The final presentation of our final paper.

18. What will you take from this course that will help you in your teaching practice?

If I can all of the activities, some techniques (e.g. for using the board, using group work, free-writing, etc.) and of course my reflections and general learnings from the readings.

The presentations of the class. How she explained and the organization of the activities and the arrangement of the class.
I acquired my teaching philosophy through the process of digesting “Engaged Pedagogy”. I will take into account what is Engaged Pedagogy and ethnography study.

I believe that the three module were the most important aspects of the class.

As I said before, the methods/techniques used in this course.

Everything.

Recommendations from class observations. Do research of our own classrooms to improve our teaching.

No comment.

Poster session and Module III.

The different theories studied related with teaching. The type of interaction between teacher and students.

Ethnography study; sharing students’ knowledge, experience; being able to listen to my colleagues feedback as well.

The fact that applying real materials or readings associated to real life are more understandable.

19. Choose one word to describe:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Class</th>
<th>Teacher-Student Interaction</th>
<th>Student-Student Interaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>interesting &amp; practical</td>
<td>open</td>
<td>productive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identify my own view of teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a process</td>
<td>collaborative learning</td>
<td>sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>useful</td>
<td>excellent</td>
<td>meaningful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>investigation</td>
<td>interchange</td>
<td>conscious</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yes

Yes

useful

knowledge

knowledge

innovative

analysis

adequate

motivation/learning

positive

positive

reflective

amazing

learning

cooperative

encouraging

autonomy

20. Why do you think the teacher assigned the poster session? How is this related to her teaching praxis?

Because of many things; she wanted us to express our ideas in a visual way to learn to be more professional in our work, to work in teams, to reflect our learnings. All of this is totally connected to Engaged Pedagogy because it’s mostly students’ work and reflection on their experiences and new learnings what took them to the final product.
To share with teacher what we have learned in the course. Sometimes we need to see, hear and touch in order to learn. Collaborative learning, synergy as a group, we were able to create in a tangible way what we learned and to pass it on to our peers.

I believe she assigned it because she wanted us to be involved in the class. Moreover, we were able to learn from a visual what was part of the class.

To get involve closer in our field that is English teaching.

To let us see the different ways to teach something new and interesting ways. Using different ways students use to learn (visuals). This is something she uses that will help us in our teaching.

It give you confidence in the subject matter.

She probably assigned it to help us discover our philosophy our view of what teaching is.

Each student learn differently and through presenting our poster we express what really interested us and how we learned it. Also we worked like a group in order to design a poster that reflected our ideas and some theories.

Because it helped me to support my teaching praxis it is related because I used it sometimes.

She make us do something that really work for her and share it with us. By the way, I really liked it was new for me but interesting.

Students before learning is not about storaging (banking system), through poster session we could learn more about what being an EFL/ESL teacher implies, being in touch with the topic (being involved).

In order to open our eyes and mind to be able to express our intellectual capacity.

**21. How many of your classes in this program have been taught with the same/similar approach?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of classes</th>
<th>Name of each course</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Investigacion Cientifica, Methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>My 3 Methodology classes, Critical Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Methodology 1, 2, 3; Curriculum design, Research (Unfortunately there are few)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Methodology, Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Methodology, Didactics, Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pedagogy, Methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Methodology 1, 2, 3; Curriculum design, Applied Linguistics,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
22. Are there any aspects of this approach that should be adopted by teachers in this program?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</table>

If yes, describe:
Teachers’ serious compromise to listen to students; putting that into practice in class
Fostering activities that do make students reflect on their experiences and new learnings
Reflections are very important for improvement they can be done abstractly as the visual and poster session or explicitly by essays.

Way of Council
Choosing meaningful materials

In this program is important that teachers give students the opportunity to express themselves and try to avoid being teacher centered.

The fact that a liberatory education reinforce teacher and students interaction in order to create a better class environment.

They should make us active learners as well as them, active teachers. They shouldn’t be lame. Not that all are like that, but some won’t take their time to plan and teach.

Visuals.

I think if all teachers teach in the way that you teach all us will be a good teacher and students and over all good and friendly person.

The teacher students interaction, the relation that topics have with our teaching field, and how the teacher motive students to do the best.

Students’ feedback, guest speakers, taking into account real-life situation; puttingh theory and practice for a more meaningful learning.

23. Any other comments:

By availability I mean not just time devoted to counseling and/or help, but accessibility to material. I don’t know if it’s not valid to say this (due to teacher’s praxis) but sometimes her “mood” changed the attitude of the whole class – in a negative way. I liked her openness and directness.

No comment.

I am glad that Sarah decided and accepted to teach this course. I learned so many aspects of teaching I didn’t know about. It was a pleasure having you as a teacher.

It was a great class. I have learned from it. Thanks for everything.
No comment.

That the administration wasn’t fully supportive with the teacher’s praxis.

No comment.

No comment.

Therefore, as a teacher, meaningful teaching comes from my ability to create room for each student’s voice, empowering my students to invest in their own tools, to become their own carpenters and build what they need.

No comment.

Thank you for your teaching I enjoy your friendship.

Thanks for everything, you motive me to do the best of me, to reach the goal of become a great teacher and to keep on researching and acquire more knowledge.

No comment.