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Creative Collaborations in Adult ESL Classrooms: Three Community Language Tutors' Pre-Understandings, Contradictions, and Growth Points

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This study draws upon Mindful L2 Teacher Education (Johnson & Golombek, 2016) to explore how volunteer community tutors of adult English as a Second Language (ESL) conceptualize and enact their roles as creative teachers. Through three case studies, I explore community language teachers' pre-understandings, contradictions, and growth points. Findings revealed that tutors felt obligated to use survival ESL and grammar-based frameworks for teaching. Contradictions included their frustration with inconsistent student attendance, their fatigue creating lessons, and their feelings of isolation. Research on teacher education for community volunteers is important so that volunteers feel emotionally and pedagogically supported as they commit to teaching learners who otherwise might not have access to language instruction, including adults with immigrant and refugee backgrounds.

Volunteer community tutors are primary instructors for adult language learners with immigrant and refugee backgrounds (Henrichsen, 2010). However, volunteer tutors typically do not have access to the same professional development opportunities as their professionally trained counterparts. Despite findings that teacher training impacts student learning, few studies examine volunteer training in adult literacy programs (Whitehead, 2009; Doyle, 2021).

The present study addresses these gaps by drawing upon Mindful L2 Teacher Education (Johnson & Golombek, 2016) to explore how volunteer community tutors of adult English as a Second Language (ESL) conceptualize and enact their roles as creative teachers. Through three case studies involving participant observation and interviews with volunteer teachers in community language classrooms, I examine the following questions:

1. What "pre-understandings" (Johnson & Golombek, 2016) about language and language learning do community volunteers reveal as they apply their pedagogical training to materials design and lesson planning? Specifically, what do they envision as the goals of their lessons, and how do they enact these goals in the classroom?
2. What "growth points" (Johnson & Golombek, 2016; McNeill, 2000, 2005) or contradictions do community tutors experience as they make sense of what is happening in their classrooms?

I begin by reviewing bodies of literature on creative approaches to teaching language and tutor/teacher ideologies. After the literature review, I introduce a case study of three classrooms, describing the context and teachers involved in each, as well as methods for data collection and analysis. Then, guided by research question 1, I report on the initial observations

of each teacher's lesson. For each, I point out the teachers' intent, the meaning-making affordances for students, and opportunities for future growth. Afterward, following research question 2, I describe the creative activities teachers developed (including some in collaboration with me, the participant-observer and a volunteer teacher in another adult ESL classroom), focusing on meaning-making affordances for students and the insights teachers shared in interviews. I end by suggesting that community teachers/tutors of adult language learners can benefit from collaborative, creative learning communities.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Community Literacy Volunteer Training

The oft-cited gaps between state and federal funding per K-12 student ($7,500 in 1998) compared to that per adult basic education student ($310) continue to widen (Nelson Christoph, 2009, p. 82), leading literacy programs to rely on volunteers. However, volunteers should be well trained in order to provide adult students with access to quality instruction. A body of literature has investigated the roles of community volunteers in literacy programs for adults with immigrant/refugee backgrounds. However, most studies focus on learning outcomes; few studies examine and evaluate volunteer training in adult literacy programs (Whitehead, 2009; Doyle, 2021). Studying volunteers is important because they continue to be the primary instructors for these learners (Henrichsen, 2010), partially because adult literacy programs tend to operate on "shoestring budgets" (Perry & Hart, 2012, p. 111; see also Anderson et al., 2009; McKenna & Fitzpatrick, 2004; Sandman-Hurley, 2008). These shoestring budgets lead many programs to decide to employ volunteer tutors rather than staff teachers.

Volunteers often decide to teach in literacy programs for humanitarian reasons, including the belief that literacy contributes to social justice (O'Connor, 2018). But social justice is not an automatic outcome of good intentions. As many have pointed out, good volunteer intentions do not guarantee positive outcomes for student learning (Belzer, 2006; Burt et al., 2008). Students' learning suffers when their volunteer instructors are not trained, and underprepared teachers lacking teaching competencies can do "more harm than good" in ESL programs (Durham & Kim, 2019, p. 6; see also Chao & Kuntz, 2013; Henrichsen, 2010; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003; Perry & Hart, 2012). However, despite the importance of training, volunteer teachers are not given adequate training or professional support (Ho, 2017, p. ii; Webb, 2018).

Some programs offer limited pre-service tutor training, but this does not always transfer to teaching practice (Belzer, 2006). Therefore, less pre-service training and more ongoing "just-in-time" (Belzer, 2006) or "systematic, ongoing" (Durham & Kim, 2019, p. 8) training based on the specific needs and strengths of students and tutors would more effectively facilitate tutors' professional growth. In a case study, Perry (2013) attributed a volunteer's success to personal dispositions (such as cultural sensitivity) as well as professional development, including self-education, seeking mentoring and outside expertise, and purposeful reflection on her teaching. Durham & Kim (2019) also emphasize the importance of giving volunteers the opportunity to share. These studies indicate that teachers' training should include not only pre-service introductions, but consistent support during their instructional practice, including invitations to reflect and dialogue about their teaching.

Teacher Cognition: Mindful L2 Teacher Education

Even professionally trained language teachers enter the profession with "largely unarticulated, yet deeply ingrained, everyday concepts about language, language learning, and language teaching" (Johnson & Golombek, 2016, p. 517). These *everyday concepts*, grounded in teachers' personal histories and lived experiences, are often theoretically misinformed and at times in tension with *academic concepts* related to pedagogy (Johnson & Golombek, 2020, p. 444). Understanding teachers' deeply ingrained concepts helps illuminate their teaching reasoning (Johnson, 1999), or the "the complex ways in which teachers figure out how to teach a particular topic, with a particular group of students, at a particular time, in a particular classroom, within a particular school" (Johnson & Golombek, 2016, p. 7). In other words, teacher understandings, though tacit, will impact how and what they teach and how they interact with students. This is true for beginning and experienced teachers alike (Johnson & Golombek, 2016, p. 12; Kanno & Stuart, 2011, p. 250).

Johnson and Golombek (2016) introduce the construct of "Mindful L2 Teacher Education" as a way for teacher educators to create mediated opportunities for teacher growth by "exposing teachers to psychological tools" (p. 164) as they merge their theoretical, pedagogical, and content knowledge. Grounded heavily in sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986), Mindful L2 Teacher Education involves a teacher educator intervening intentionally with a practicing teacher, helping them restructure their everyday concepts as they engage in (and dialogue about) acts of teaching. Other literature more extensively addresses sociocultural theory's critical relation to Mindful L2 Teacher Education, including sociocultural approaches to L2 teacher education (Johnson, 2009), Vygotsky-influenced examples of L2 teacher professional development (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, 2018), and the dialectic underpinnings of Vygotsky's theories as they relate to L2 teacher development (Johnson & Golombek, 2020.) As Johnson and Golombek (2016) summarize it:

> Mindful L2 Teacher Education entails attention to what teachers bring to their learning-to-teach experiences (pre-understandings), how teachers are experiencing what they are learning (*perezhivanie*), the emergent, contingent, and responsive nature of teacher/teacher educator mediation (responsive mediation), the development of new understandings (concept development) in situations where teachers' pre-understandings are inadequate, and the mediational means (mediational spaces, tools, and activities) through which teachers begin to reconceptualize how they think about and attempt to enact their instructional practices in the setting in which they teach. (p. 170)

It is the role of teacher educators to be aware of their own understandings and facilitate a dialogue that will allow teachers to bridge their everyday concepts and academic concepts, leading to transformed teaching practices.

Emerging L2 teachers may experience contradictions when they find that "[w]hat is imparted in teacher education programs, or in literature advocating particular approaches to or goals in language teaching, may be at odds with the larger sociocultural, institutional, and historical discourses shaping a particular teaching context" (Johnson & Golombek, 2016, p. 12). Johnson and Golombek (2016) evoke McNeill's (2000, 2005) construct of "growth points"—or the "contradictions" between what a teacher envisions happening and what actually happens during teaching—as opportunities for teacher educators to initiate thoughtful

dialogue with teachers-in-training. When a teacher educator offers responsive mediation to address the growth point, the emerging teacher can transform their practice.

Emotions are also closely tied to how teachers experience contradictions. First, experiencing contradictions can lead to an emotional response. Johnson and Golombek (2016) observe that the pre-service/novice teachers' "maturing capabilities are expressed as intensely emotional 'highs and lows' that emerge from being asked to perform as self-directed teachers before they have the necessary competence to do so" (p. 43). Community volunteers are often tasked with teaching before they have had any professional development. These contradictions can result in cognitive/emotional dissonance or instability, leading teachers to experience "a crisis of confidence" or even blame their students or themselves (p. 45). Teachers' emotions may also provide insight into how they are making sense of the contradictions they experience. According to Johnson and Golombek (2016), teachers reveal their contradictions through "emotionally indexing language and behavior in such moments" (p. 45). Therefore, attention to teachers' emotional language can help teacher educators understand the contradictions teachers face and how they make sense of them. Finally, the emotions of teacher educators are important, and it is important for teacher-educators to "stay attuned to our own subjectivities in the emergent, relational interactions we co-construct with teachers" (p. 43). Because of the close relationship between emotions and contradictions, teacher educators can be most effective when they are highly attuned to their teacher mentees' emotions and experiences, as well as their own.

Obuchenie, *Perezhivanie*, and Growth Points

The emotions of teachers and learners come together and provide a nexus for collaborative dialogue. Taking a Vygotskian approach to teacher education, Johnson (2015) and Johnson and Golombek (2016) consider *obuchenie*, or the collaborative teaching/learning relationships and dialogue which involves a teacher educator mediating novice L2 teachers as they teach and learn. In order for a teacher educator to engage in the dialogue of *obucheni*e, they must understand teachers' pre-understandings, or "the competence learners bring to bear on a novel event or experience" (Johnson, 2015, p. 517; Miller, 2011, p. 377). Teachers' pre-understandings can be accessed through *perezhivanie*, Vygotsky's term for their subjective interpretations of their lived experiences (Johnson & Golombek, 2016, p. 42). *Perezhivanie* captures "the emotional and visceral impact of lived experiences on the prism through which all future experiences are refracted" (p. 42). Both *obuchenie* and *perezhivanie* can be enacted and revealed through dialogue. In one study, Johnson (2015) reported that a teacher educator recognized a team of teachers' pre-understandings of the concept of parallelism, and dialogically pushed them to broaden their understanding of the theme and how to teach it (p. 525). In sum, carrying out *obuchenie* requires teacher trainers to "attend to what our teachers bring to our interactions: where they are coming from and how they understand what they are experiencing" (Johnson & Golombek, 2016, p. 42), as well as their own emotional responses. Mindful education involves understanding not just what teachers are doing in the classroom, but why and how they feel about it, and working intentionally and reciprocally with teachers to grow together.

Freirean Reciprocal Dialogue

Understanding teachers' pre-understandings, experiences, and other ideologies is important because these things impact teaching methods. In the context of agrarian reform, Freire asserts that "methodological failings can always be traced to ideological errors" (Goulet, 2005, p. x), though problematic ideologies—such as paternalism and "non-reciprocity between experts and 'helpees'" (p. x)—are often implicit. In *Education for Critical Consciousness*, Freire (1974) considers how to train teachers working with historically marginalized adults to teach effectively while also developing attitudes of respect and reciprocity with their students. In his introduction to the 2005 edition of Freire, Goulet remarks that a teacher's "ability to dialogue with educatees in a mode of reciprocity" is the mark of a successful educator (p. xii). Reciprocal dialogue—which involves an attitude of respect and collaborative problem-solving—is important between teachers and students as well as between teachers and teacher educators.

Freire (1974) offers educators ideas of what reciprocal dialogue can look like, both ideologically and pedagogically. Ideologically, he emphasizes the importance of developing "horizontal relationships" and finding "solutions with the people and never for them or imposed on them" (p. 13). Pedagogically, he recommends incorporating into lessons culture circles, dialogues, group debates, stimulating visuals, and themes chosen by groups rather than by the teacher. However, incorporating these elements into lessons is not enough to transform teaching into "education rather than domestication" (Freire, 1974, p. 45). These pedagogical elements, while important, are "the purely technical aspect of the procedure" (Freire, 1974, p. 45). Teaching pedagogy is much easier than creating new attitudes—attitudes of dialogue—especially if they were absent in our own educational experiences (p. 45). For this reason, it is as important to for teacher educators to mediate attitudes and dialogue, not just emphasize the details of a pedagogical approach.

Creativity in Language Learning by Focusing on Unknown Meanings

In researching creativity with second language learners "in the periphery" (such as Karen refugees from Burma), Tin (2011, 2013, 2015, 2018) models classroom activities that promote reciprocal, collaborative, attitudes and activities. She argues that, following communicative approaches, traditional language learning tasks focus on talking about *known meaning*. For example, learners are given a sentence structure such as "there is/there are" and asked to describe what they see in a picture. Even traditional learning tasks that invite students to share new information with an interlocutor, such as referential questions that invite learners to share information about their families with their partners, tend to prioritize known meaning, since the information is not new to the person sharing it. Tin argues that students should instead be invited to focus on *unknown meanings*, or meaning "new to self." Along with increasing learner motivation, focusing on these new meanings allow learners to broaden existing vocabulary and grammar and combine words in unfamiliar ways.

Tin (2013) proposes that strategic use of formal and semantic constraints can promote creativity, which she defines as "the playful use of language to construct new and surprising meaning" (p. 387; see also Tin, 2011). In constraint tasks, learners are prompted to search among unknown (or not-yet-articulated, I would suggest) ideas to construct meaning. In Tin's method, learners engage in an *idea generation* phase and an *idea exploration* phase. In the idea generation phase, they generate language and language forms without knowing exactly what the goals of the final tasks will be or the meaning their forms will take. In the idea exploration

phase that follows, the instructor reveals a constraint, and the learners are encouraged to construct new meaning within this constraint.

Tin (2013) cites a number of examples in her own work. For example, in the idea generation phase, students write adjectives corresponding to the first letters of each other's names (p. 392). Moving into the idea exploration phase, they use the adjectives to write a poem about the members of a class to help learn each other's names and build community. Another example is when learners talked about their life and learning goals in the idea generation phase. Then, they wrote about their life dreams in haiku form.

In sum, while many communicative tasks prioritize communicating known meanings, these creative activities have the goal of constructing new or unknown meanings, partially by playing or stretching what is known. In a sense, this is a form of scaffolding. The approach gives students agency to generate language relevant to them while still providing guidance through a semantic theme or grammatical structure. The constraints are not all imposed at once, and they invite playing with language and generating new forms. Linguistically, students are working with a lot of new vocabulary, but they are generating it themselves or learning it from their classmates, rather than memorizing it from a list or a textbook. They are working with grammatical forms, but they apply their own content to the forms, rather than using pre-generated content (about fictional textbook characters, for example) to practice the form. In this way, they are producing new meanings and using language playfully, creatively, and authentically.

Gaps

Literature reveals that volunteer community language teachers tend not to have access to the same professional development opportunities as their professionally trained counterparts, such as K-12 or university instructors, even though volunteer community tutors are largely responsible for providing language instruction to community-based adult language learners with immigrant and refugee backgrounds. Teacher education research across contexts suggests that reciprocal dialogue between students and teachers, and between teachers and teacher educators, can lead to growth. This dialogue should not just take place as pre-service training but continue systematically as new teachers provide instruction. Teacher educators can target contradictions or growth points as opportunities for reciprocal dialogue. Along with addressing attitudes and emotions, the act of facilitating creative activities which move beyond "known meaning" may be a way for teachers to promote reciprocal dialogue in the language classroom.

This study addresses gaps in the existing literature by exploring Mindful L2 Teacher Education with community language teachers, engaging them in reciprocal dialogue as they plan and deliver lessons for adults with immigrant and refugee backgrounds. Specifically, this study explores volunteer teachers' evolving pre-understandings and the contradictions they experience as they engage in mediated collaboration to facilitate creative language learning activities.

METHODS

Theoretical Framework

This study explores how participating in a collaborative, creative approach to lesson planning through the Tin's constraints model can enrichen the pedagogical and creative complexity of lessons teachers create while cultivating horizontal (Freire, 1974, p. 40) relationships between learners and teachers. Data are analyzed using key themes from Johnson and Golombek's (2016) Mindful L2 Teacher Education, such as pre-understandings and growth points.

Teaching Context

Literacy and Justice for All

All classes where research took place were offered through Literacy and Justice for All (LJA, a pseudonym), a local nonprofit providing five different literacy programs in Tucson, Arizona. One of these programs, ELAA (English Language Acquisition for Adults), offers dozens of adult English classes across the city of Tucson each semester, all staffed by teams of volunteers. From January through May 2019, when data were collected, over 30 volunteers were teaching as many classes at public schools, libraries, and community centers. The ELAA program has three main staff members, one of whom is in charge of coaching volunteers. Volunteers are expected to commit to at least 12 hours of pre-service training, followed by professional development and coaching each semester. The pre-service training focuses on communicative teaching activities, respecting adults' diverse background knowledge and experiences, and engaging students with thoughtful activities.

As a volunteer teacher at LJA myself, I participated in the twelve-hour training in 2015 and have collaborated with LJA staff to offer several professional development workshops since then. When recruiting teachers to participate, I explained both my professional background in second language teaching/learning and my role as a fellow language teacher and volunteer. During this study, I was a graduate student and LJA volunteer, and I currently work as a certified high school teacher at a local public school which hosts LJA classes. I am a young white woman and native speaker of English. I am also a language learner (fluent in Spanish and German), and my educational background is in teaching and second language acquisition. In addition to living abroad in Spanish-speaking and German-speaking countries, I have taught in German and US public schools, mostly with adults and K-12 students with immigrant and refugee backgrounds. LJA's focus on offering classes to all individuals, regardless of their immigration status or ability to pay, led me to volunteer there originally.

LJA does not accept federal funding, and as a result, is not mandated to require standardized testing. Most importantly, the organization does not have to ask participants for any form of documentation to participate. Because individuals in the community can attend classes free of charge regardless of documentation status, many learners attend who wouldn't have access to other language classes. Each site described below is one of the locations where LJA offers free classes to community members. The sites were chosen because they are all in very different parts of town, yet they are all taught by LJA volunteers.

Centro de Recursos Familiar|Family Resource Center

On the thirteen-mile drive from the local university to the El Centro (a pseudonym), the road markers change from miles to kilometers. El Centro is affiliated with the local public

school district and offers free breakfasts and lunches, as well as activities for parents and families. With a poverty rate of nearly 44%, the Tucson zip code in which it is located is economically the poorest in the state and also faces issues of pollution, water injustice, and gentrification. The classrooms feature white boards, tables, and chairs, but no Wi-Fi or other technology.

Pam (a pseudonym), who has been volunteering with LJA for almost two years, retired in her late fifties from a prosperous career as an engineer. Warm weather, food, culture, relaxed traffic, and a "pocket of blue" drew her to Tucson from a colder, more crowded city, and she decided to volunteer at a nonprofit to "give back to and connect with [her] community." As a native speaker of Japanese, Pam remembers learning English as a young child when she moved to the United States. She points out that because of her background, language learning is "personal" for her and that she should probably also learn Spanish, because all of her students speak it. However, she also quickly points out that she wants them to speak only English in her classroom.

After attending two training sessions, she assisted in an adult classroom for a few months, and then became the sole teacher for an intermediate ESL class. She shares that she loves her students but finds the preparation daunting. "There is such a wide world of options, that you really don't know where to start," she explains. Often, she starts by choosing a theme that is practical to her students, like going to the doctor or getting a job. "You have to go find the materials and it's never exactly right, and so I end up copying, pasting, editing," she laughs at the list she has rattled off, "and trying to make it relevant." Pam estimates spending six hours a week searching for and modifying materials for her class, which meets twice a week for 90 minutes, but she struggles to create "continuity" in her curriculum. Feeling isolated, she volunteered to participate in a collaborative research project about designing creative lessons in adult ESL classrooms.

Luz Library

Located along a bus route and in proximity to numerous stores and apartment complexes in a dynamic part of central Tucson, Luz Library is a popular destination. It, along with other public libraries in Pima county, is guarded by an armed security guard who assumed an active role in enforcing library policies, such as making sure tables and chairs were arranged appropriately. Students, in the past, have been notably concerned with the presence of the uniformed guard. Students in this class came to Tucson from all over the world and include partners of visiting scholars affiliated with the university, long-term residents who have built families in Tucson, and asylum seekers. The classroom doubles as a community meeting room and has long tables, chairs, and white boards.

Sally (a pseudonym), who retired many years ago, is a white woman in her eighties with a background teaching at community colleges. She has been volunteering at LJA for 11 years and prides herself on her grammar background. In her early twenties, she taught French at the high school level and studied Russian for fun. Eventually, she taught Russian and French as an instructor at the college level. She also taught mainstream grammar and English courses at a junior college in the American South. Before she started at LJA, she completed 12 hours of pre-service training dedicated to principles of "English Language Acquisition for Adults." More recently, she has been partnered with a young Brazilian teacher with significant teaching experience. Observing her co-teacher's engaging lessons motivated her to learn more.

Cactus Azul

Cactus Azul (a pseudonym) is a public high school on the far east side of town which has a family resource center on its campus. The adults who attend the ESL classes are mostly female Spanish-speaking immigrants from a variety of countries.

The teacher, Bonnie (a pseudonym), is a white woman in her sixties and self-described "new empty nester." In the past, she lived abroad in the United Arab Emirates for eight years while her husband worked in a STEM field. During that time, she homeschooled her four children and tutored English while teaching herself Arabic. Though she doesn't feel she has a strong degree of fluency, she found that learning basic Arabic improved the quality of her everyday life by allowing her to communicate with others. She also completed an online Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages (TESOL) certificate, but before starting to tutor at LJA, she had only worked one-on-one with learners, rather than facilitating an entire class. She has been volunteering with LJA on and off for four years.

DATA COLLECTION

Data include at least six classroom observations per teacher, one individual 60-minute teacher interview, numerous informal communications (unrecorded conversations), and student artifacts. I also conducted one 60-minute group interview with small groups of students and 20-minute written student surveys.

I observed at least six consecutive sessions (90-120 minutes each) for each of the class contexts, for a total of 30 hours of participant observation across three classrooms. After the fifth session of each class, I conducted an interview. In addition to the formal, audio-recorded interviews, I communicated weekly with teachers via phone, text, or email between the observed teaching sessions. I recorded notes from these conversations (which most often included discussions of content and teaching plans) in my field notes, but I did not audio record the communications. Class sessions were organized as follows:

Visit 1: I introduced myself, explained the project, and gave students an informed consent form about the project to take home. During class, I recorded notes about how many students were there, how long they worked on each activity, and what materials they used. I noted what the teacher said and what the students were asked to do.

Visits 2-5: I observed classes, taking notes as before. Sometimes, I led parts of the lesson and collected artifacts from student work.

Visit 6: I conducted a survey (which took approximately 30 minutes) and a 60-minute interview (group discussion)/survey about students' reactions to the creative project. With students' consent, I audio recorded interviews for the purpose of transcribing them later.

On the day of student interviews, I asked students permission to record and revisited the purpose of the study, following the procedures approved by the IRB (Institutional Review Board). All students who had participated in the classes were invited to participate in the interviews. A total of 24 students participated. I gave students interview questions in English and Spanish and allowed them to discuss the questions in small groups of three to four. After they had discussed the questions, we came together as a group and I debriefed with them,

inviting them to share more and allowing them to elaborate on themes I thought I heard emerge. I audio recorded the small group discussions and the large group debrief.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Before, after, and between sessions, I communicated with teachers about plans and debriefed the sessions. I did not audio record these interviews, but I recorded the content of the discussions in my field notes. I audio recorded and transcribed student interviews, and I member checked the results by sharing my own observations and preliminary findings with participants and asking for their thoughts and feedback.

At the end of the five sessions, I conducted more extensive teacher interviews. Interviews were audio recorded and lasted approximately 60 minutes. I asked teachers questions about their teaching backgrounds and experiences, classroom practices and rules, teaching decisions, views about creativity and critical thinking, and understanding of students. After completing the interviews, I transcribed them and coded them according to the following themes which emerged from the dialogues and from Johnson and Golombek's (2016) work on Mindful L2 Teacher Education: pre-understandings, dissonance/contradictions, beliefs and practice about materials/lesson design, beliefs about goals of ESL instruction/curriculum, teacher gatekeeping roles, student needs, and motivations and goals for teaching. As I present the results from the observations, I interweave the comments and perspectives teachers shared in interviews and conversations throughout the semester.

How Community Tutors Envision and Enact their Roles: Initial Observations

Luz Library: Sally

Sally introduces her lesson by telling students it is grammar hour. She divides students into five groups and gives each group a grammar worksheet with one of the following five themes: 1) three parts of English verbs, 2) examples of past, present, and present perfect tenses, 3) when "since" is used, 4) when "for" is used, 5) how to make comparisons with short adjectives, 5) how contractions are used with the present perfect tense.

The group I'm with is tasked with making comparisons. They have to compare three circles according to size (big, bigger, biggest) and three pictures of money ($1, $20, and $100) according to expense (expensive, more expensive, most expensive). One of the students in my group argues that the answers should be "cheap, expensive, and more expensive." The instructor corrects him.

Each group draws their answers on the board. The instructor then tells the whole group they will be reviewing last week's grammar, focusing on tenses or grammatical themes a doctor might use. The review includes 1) irregular verbs, 2) differences between "since" and "for," 3) comparative and superlatives, and 4) use of contractions in the present tense. After this review, the instructor introduces new grammar: irregular verbs. She tells students their goal is to learn five irregular verbs for each class meeting. She explained that she decided to ask them to learn five verbs because a former student told her this had helped her learn English. This week's verbs are "get," "give," "have," "come," and "see."

After this, the instructor divides students into A's and B's. She gives them a list of phrasal verbs ("get away," "give up," "give in," "come across," "see to," "have over") and goes over each verb for the whole group. Students are given a worksheet where they ask and answer questions using these verbs. For homework, she gives students a worksheet on using phrasal

verbs that she made up herself. The top instructs students to practice the phrasal verbs "get," "give," "have," "come," and "see" by guessing the meanings and filling in blanks, as in "I didn't think he was telling the truth. He didn't <u>come across</u> as an honest person."

Sally's lesson plans reflect her pre-understandings that grammar is a key piece of language instruction. As she shares in our communications, these pre-understandings result from her *perezhivanie*, or experiences learning languages herself. However, she experiences contradictions which challenge this notion as she observes her co-teacher, an experienced language teacher, engage students in communicative activities. These contradictions, she explained, led her to seek additional professional development workshops and try to incorporate more communicative opportunities into her lessons. Sally shared a lesson plan with me and explained the ways she hoped to incorporate communicative principles into her plan. In the grammar exercise, she intended to have students work in small groups to determine the grammar rules, and then teach what they learned to their classmates in other groups. She hoped to have them discuss the meanings of phrasal verbs with their partners and work together to guess how they were used.

Sally's class structure also reveals her pre-understandings of the role of a teacher. She maintained close control of the class and mainly lectured. The emotions she expressed in the classroom were closely related to students' performance, as she explained to them that she "liked" or "was displeased" at their homework, and that she was "excited" when she heard them use a grammar concept.

Family Resource Center: Pam

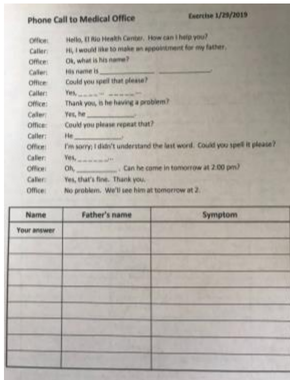
It is Tuesday, January 28th. Eight students (seven females and one male) are present in Pam's class. The tables are lined in a row in front of the board. Behind them are rows of tables with computers. Pam asks me to sit in the back, at one of the computers. All students are Spanish speakers. The instructor writes the class objectives on the board: 1) Learning English alphabet pronunciation, 2) Practice making doctor appointments.

Pam tells the class they are going to practice making a doctor's appointment over the phone. She asks students when they need to make appointments in English. As they think, she writes a list on the board: appointments, emergencies, school, shopping/stores, call in sick, order food, pay bills. Pam mentions that spelling the alphabet in English is important. She passes out a worksheet with the alphabet on it. Next to each letter is a noun that starts with that letter and a picture of the noun. Pam leads the class in practicing saying each letter and spelling words. On the back of the worksheet, Pam has written out an "English alphabet pronunciation for Spanish speakers." Next to each letter of the alphabet, she has typed how it might be pronounced in Spanish (*ei*, *bi*, *si*, etc.).

The class brainstorms potential questions a doctor might ask a patient: What's wrong? What's your name? Do you have insurance? Then, Pam passes out a worksheet on medical symptoms. The two-columned worksheet lists 38 medical symptoms such as "pain," "tingling," "shortness of breath," and "convulsions." As a class, students write translations next to the vocabulary words and go over the meaning. Fifty minutes into the class, she passes out a worksheet with a dialogue on it about making an appointment for a father over the phone.

Then, Pam gives students a word written on a strip of paper. She asks them to spell it out, reminding them to slow down and answer requests for clarification. Examples include "headache," "vomiting," "numbness," "dizziness," "diarrhea." They do this activity as a group, and she calls on individual students to respond. After this activity, Pam and I model

the dialogue. In pairs, they practice a phone call to a medical office, repeating and spelling out words. Then they switch partners two to three times, spending the rest of the class (about 30 minutes) on the activity.



Phone Call to Medical Office Exercise 1/29/2019

Office: Hello, El Rio Health Center. How can I help you?
Caller: Hi, I would like to make an appointment for my father.
Office: Ok, what is his name?
Caller: His name is ____________ ____________.
Office: Could you spell that please?
Caller: Yes, "_ _ _ _" "_ _ _ _ _"
Office: Thank you, is he having a problem?
Caller: Yes, he ____________.
Office: Could you please repeat that?
Caller: He ____________.
Office: I'm sorry; I didn't understand the last word. Could you spell it please?
Caller: Yes, "_ _ _ _ _ _ _"
Office: Oh, ____________. Can he come in tomorrow at 2:00 pm?
Caller: Yes, that's fine. Thank you.
Office: No problem. We'll see him at tomorrow at 2.

Name	Father's name	Symptom
Your answer		

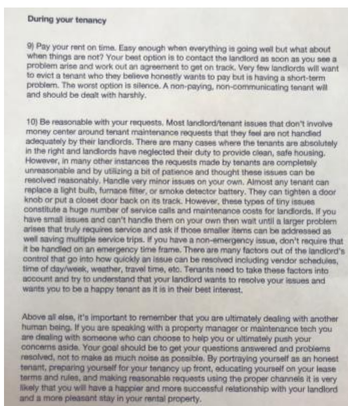
Figure 1: *Phone Call to Medical Office*

Pam's lesson reflects her pre-understandings of instruction and what students need to learn. She told me she is committed to teaching as much as possible, and she plans lengthy lessons which address multiple themes. Pam has clearly spent a lot of time preparing her lessons, and she reports investing several hours per week into creating her own worksheet materials. She has attended as many professional development workshops as possible, and she seeks to keep lessons interactive by having students dialogue about their preferences through partner interviews before she introduces the grammar.

One of Pam's strongest pre-understandings relates to the role of English in instruction. She is firmly convinced that instruction should be in English only, and that students should only speak English in class. However, this belief leads to a contradiction, as she also wants to find ways for students to bring in their own knowledge into the classroom.

Cactus Azul: Bonnie

Bonnie is leading an activity on being a tenant. She brings in three paragraphs of a text (Figure 2) which will form the base for a reading and discussion activity. She divides the group into three, gives each group one paragraph, and has them read it together. Then, she asks her students to share what they read with the other students in the class. As they talk, Bonnie writes down key vocabulary words and clarifies their meaning.



During your tenancy

9) Pay your rent on time. Easy enough when everything is going well but what about when things are not? Your best option is to contact the landlord as soon as you see a problem arise and work out an agreement to get on track. Very few landlords will want to evict a tenant who they believe honestly wants to pay but is having a short-term problem. The worst option is silence. A non-paying, non-communicating tenant will and should be dealt with harshly.

10) Be reasonable with your requests. Most landlord/tenant issues that don't involve money center around tenant maintenance requests that they feel are not handled adequately by their landlords. There are many cases where the tenants are absolutely in the right and landlords have neglected their duty to provide clean, safe housing. However, in many other instances the requests made by tenants are completely unreasonable and by utilizing a bit of patience and thought these issues can be resolved reasonably. Handle very minor issues on your own. Almost any tenant can replace a light bulb, furnace filter, or smoke detector battery. They can tighten a door knob or put a closet door back on its track. However, these types of tiny issues constitute a huge number of service calls and maintenance costs for landlords. If you have small issues and can't handle them on your own then wait until a larger problem arises that truly requires service and ask if those smaller items can be addressed as well saving multiple service trips. If you have a non-emergency issue, don't require that it be handled on an emergency time frame. There are many factors out of the landlord's control that go into how quickly an issue can be resolved including vendor schedules, time of day/week, weather, travel time, etc. Tenants need to take these factors into account and try to understand that your landlord wants to resolve your issues and wants you to be a happy tenant as it is in their best interest.

Above all else, it's important to remember that you are ultimately dealing with another human being. If you are speaking with a property manager or maintenance tech you are dealing with someone who can choose to help you or ultimately push your concerns aside. Your goal should be to get your questions answered and problems resolved, not to make as much noise as possible. By portraying yourself as an honest tenant, preparing yourself for your tenancy up front, educating yourself on your lease terms and rules, and making reasonable requests using the proper channels it is very likely that you will have a happier and more successful relationship with your landlord and a more pleasant stay in your rental property.

Figure 2: *During Your Tenancy*

Bonnie's choice of text and activity reflects her pre-understanding/*perezhivanie* of who students are (in this case, tenants) and what they need to learn as such. Though the "jigsaw" activity (of dividing the text into three parts and assigning one part to each group) is a pedagogically-sound approach to teaching reading, the content of the text reflected only the landlord's view on tenancy. When I asked Bonnie about her choice of text, which addresses readers (presumably tenants) in the imperative and favors the interests of landlords, she explained that she was seeking to find a text with an appropriate reading level that addressed a relatable issue and was not necessarily thinking about her students' positionality. She perceived the topic (renting) as relevant to learners' lives but did not analyze the text itself or consider how the students might feel when reading it.

Summary: Tutors' Practices and Ideologies

The initial observations and surrounding conversations revealed community tutors' pre-understandings about who students are, how they should learn, and content and approach to language teaching. In the next section, I describe the creative collaboration phase, where I explore whether these pre-understandings resulted in any contradictions as teachers incorporated more creative, collaborative activities and fewer survival themes into instruction.

CREATIVE COLLABORATION PHASE: PRESENTATION OF PROJECTS

For the creative collaboration phase of the project, I asked teachers if they would allow me to collaborate with them to create and/or teach activities using Tin's model of constraints, described in the literature review. The goal of using Tin's model was to provide teachers with another framework for planning lessons—using communication and exploration of unknown meanings, rather than survival and grammar—as starting points. This model challenges the veneration of "survival" themes for language learning. For this phase, I explained the theory and purpose of the creative approaches, and I showed some examples from my own classroom (which was also affiliated with LJA and featured students with similar demographics and language proficiency as the teachers' own students). Then, I asked the teachers to develop their own lessons using this framework.

Got Anger?

> Idea generation: Students brainstorm words that have to do with anger, emotions, culture, and strategies on a mind map before listening to a radio piece on anger.
> Idea exploration: Students use the mind map to write an acrostic poem using the title of the piece we have discussed, *Got Anger?*

For this task, which I created as a sample, we used Tin's constraint method as a pre-reading and reading exercise about a short National Public Radio clip titled *Got Anger?* In the idea generation phase, each group created a mind map on themes from the text: anger, culture, emotions, and strategies. They were instructed to write any words or phrases that came to mind related to these key words.

After discussing the mind map, we listened to the radio clip. After students had comprehended the text, we moved to the next phase in Tin's model. In the idea exploration

phase, students took the title of the text they had just read and, using each other's words as well as the discussion from the board, wrote their own acrostic poems on the theme. Then, they performed their poems, compared them, and discussed similarities and differences.

Sally/Luz Library: Who's Speaking?

In Luz Library, Sally chose a constraints task related to phone conversations.

> Idea generation: Students write down a problem on a Post-it note.
> Idea exploration: Students role-play a phone dialogue between two individuals (of their choice) discussing that problem.

Pam/El Centro: Ask the Doctor

> Idea generation: Students write out health conditions on Post-it notes.
> Idea exploration: Students write a comic strip dialogue between a doctor and patient about one of the health problems.

In our creative collaboration, Pam wanted to continue on the theme of health, since she had been teaching it in the previous several weeks. After considering potential activities, Pam found a *Calvin and Hobbes* cartoon for the students. She explained that she liked it because it contains everyday language and deals with the theme of going to the doctor.

We began the lesson by asking students to brainstorm illnesses. Their responses were creative and surpassed any that we would have conjured, including "hyperthyroidism," "gestational diabetes," and "gout." She then led a lesson on the cartoon in which she pre-taught vocabulary, after which the students read the comic and engaged in comprehension discussion questions. Finally, students wrote their own doctor-patient interaction as a cartoon using one of the illnesses they had generated at the beginning of class.

Pam led the discussion and introduced the *Calvin and Hobbes* cartoon, which we modeled as a dialogue and then students repeated. Students were highly engaged when discussing differences between health care in Mexico and in the United States. They all laughed when one student complained that American doctors always prescribed Tylenol for everything. Several students later represented and referred to this shared joke when they drew their comics. Students used many advanced expressions from the cartoon, such as "That does it!" and "couch potato."

Bonnie/Cactus Azul: Student Stories

Bonnie admitted that she struggled initially to think of a "creative activity," but she knew she wanted it to involve writing, since students had shared writing goals. I recommended finding a way to center student stories, and we brainstormed some creative writing exercises that would invite students to draw from their own experiences. These exercises led to a series of engaging lessons in which students brainstormed, wrote, peer-reviewed, and performed their texts.

> Idea generation: Students did a speaking activity about what they saw, heard, tasted, smelled, or touched during key events in their lives.

Idea exploration: Students chose one of the moments from the speaking activity and expanded it into a story or anecdote to share with the class. Here is one example:

San Carlos, Sonora

Some of the most beautiful beaches of Sonora are located five and a half hours away from Tucson, AZ. The most characteristic symbol of San Carlos is the Tetakawi Hills, which means "goat breast" in Yaqui dialect. I like to climb it and see the whole panorama from the top of the hills.

One of my beloved beaches is Playa los Algodones, Cotton Beach, where you can find amazing dunes and also you can rent horses. It is a dreamy experience to have a horse back ride early in the morning along the beach. Feeling the air in your face with your hair loose is where you can touch the freedom of your soul. You can visit and swim with the dolphins if you like the cold water. But the most enchanting thing is the sunset, oh! What a wonderful experience and you can tell it is recognized world wide.

In that area, you can find San Jose de Guaymas, a place where you can find 450 year old Sahuaros, they are very huge and impressive. You need up to four people holding hands to surround them. And lastly, what I liked the most is that I lived there for four whole years, and I felt that I was a princess riding four wheelers, motorcycles, horses, yachts, and enjoying the wonderful companionship of my family and friends.

This student in a beginning ESL class not only created a robust text to share with her peers about a place she loved, but she used powerful imagery to portray the freedom of riding a horse with one's hair loose and the magnificence of a saguaro whose circumference was as big as four grown adults' outspread arms. She also characterized herself as feeling like a "princess," which notably contrasts with the reader's positioning in the teacher-chosen text about how tenants should behave towards landlords. Bonnie reported feeling impressed and moved by the variety of stories students told, and she reported that students' success and enthusiasm inspired her to facilitate another creative writing unit in the future.

Pam/El Centro: *Roses are Red…*

Idea generation: Students brainstorm words that rhyme with "blue."
Idea exploration: Students use their list to write a variation of a *Roses are red…* poem

For Valentine's Day, Pam wanted to do a creative activity with origami, one of her hobbies. She also wanted to go over a love song for fun. Together, we brainstormed ways to transition from these exercises to a task where students got to create something of their own. As students came in, Pam had them select origami papers and cut them out while they waited

for class to start. Then, we began by asking them to brainstorm words that rhymed with "blue"; Pam wrote their responses on the board as they spoke out. Pam introduced them to the famous Valentine's poem *Roses are red…* and a few other versions. Then, she asked them to complete the phrase "Love is ____," and introduced them to the song *L-O-V-E*. They read along with the lyrics and sang as she played it for them. Finally, she introduced the activity: writing a Valentine's card to a person of their choice. She invited them to use their *Roses are red…* poems, their "Love is ____" poems, or any of the terms of endearment we had written on the board. Students chose to write to their partners and children, and some took extra paper home to finish the activity. Since this was a personal activity, I felt it was inappropriate to ask to take pictures, but two students volunteered their work for me (Figure 3).

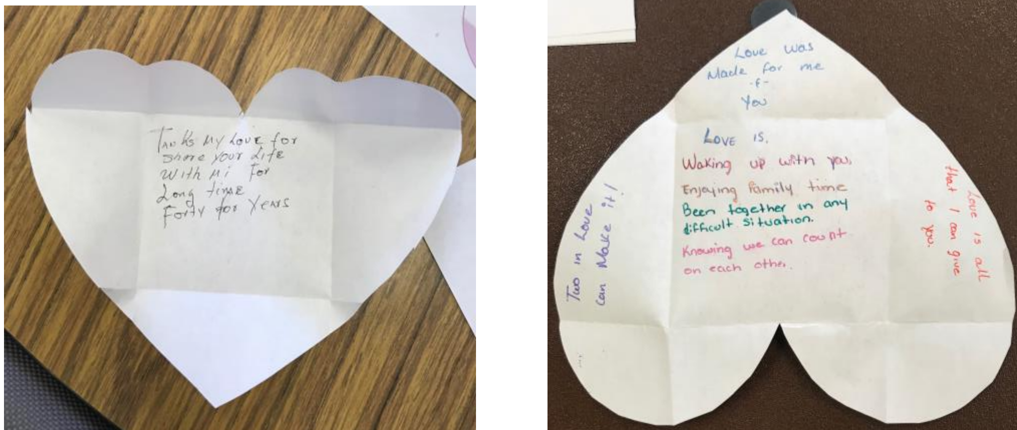


Figure 3: *Valentines*

DIALOGUING AND DEBRIEFING: PRE-UNDERSTANDINGS, CONTRADICTIONS, AND GROWTH POINTS

Pre-Understanding: Teaching as Giving Back

In their interviews, teachers indicated they perceived volunteer teaching as a way to "give back to," "get involved with," and "connect with" the community, particularly in retirement or during life seasons when they had more free time. However, they experienced dissonance when they realized how much time teaching took. Pam explained, "I thought I would have so much time after I retired, but that hasn't turned out to be the case." She laughs, "There are still only 24 hours in the day." Pam sighed as she lamented that finding relevant materials "the hardest part, and I think that takes me way more time than I thought it would." She estimated spending an average of five or six hours a week looking for lessons. Even after tutoring for five years, Bonnie agreed that planning "takes a lot of time" and can feel overwhelming.

The understanding of teaching as giving back also led to emotional dissonance when students attended irregularly. Pam lamented that it was hard to plan because "you plan and then a totally different group of students shows up." Even when I explained that an abundance of literature confirmed that so-called "irregular" attendance is part of the context of teaching community-based classes to adults with busy lives and many responsibilities, she asked me to add a question in the student interviews about why attendance was irregular. She was concerned that it had to do with her teaching or students' disinterest. When we talked to students, they affirmed that appointments, transportation, and life in general were the reasons

students sometimes participated irregularly. Pam understood in theory that her students were engaged and prioritized learning but were also busy adults juggling multiple responsibilities. However, she still experienced their attendance as a conflict, as her *perezhivanie* indicated that she still didn't fully understand why students couldn't block out the time to attend consistently. The teachers found it overwhelming that "giving back" took so much time and that students didn't always acknowledge their hard work by attending regularly.

Pre-Understanding: English Only

Pam and Bonnie held the opinion that their students should speak English only in order to learn most effectively, and they brought this pre-understanding into their first days of class. When I asked about class expectations, Pam explained, "I do tell the students and have told them that this is an English—an intermediate ESL class, and therefore, we will all speak English." When asked about classroom expectations or rules, Bonnie and her co-teacher, Kathy, also shared that "[W]e don't have a whole lot of rules. […]. "Obviously we talked to them about trying to use English as much as possible as opposed to Spanish." Bonnie's co-teacher added that:

> I feel like that [speaking Spanish] is a crutch that's hard for them to let go of. It's easy to sort of swing back to that, and sometimes they start off trying to explain to another student that's maybe a little bit lost, and then it sort of devolves into using that all the time.

Bonnie remembered how students in her class "got themselves back on track" when another person in the group didn't speak Spanish, and made sure to include them using English, even if they also used Spanish. By referring to students' native language as "a crutch," and stating that "obviously" English was the goal, the teachers reveal their understanding of English as the preferred language in the classroom.

The "English Only" ideologies also contradict teachers' beliefs about including students in curricular decisions. Though the teachers consult their students about what they would like to learn—with all three reporting surveying students about class themes on the first day of class—they imposed this "English Only" expectation early on. Pam says, "I told them at the beginning, and I reinforced it during the first few classes, and I think they pretty much get it to the point where they're telling each other, '[N]o Spanish.'" I asked Pam how the students reacted to this expectation, and she said, "They agreed because they wanted to improve their English." The other teachers, too, reported having an English-only policy that students agreed to (but didn't always follow) for the same reason. Like Pam, Bonnie established this expectation. In fact, in the student interviews (which, for the sake of space, are part of another project), Bonnie's students quickly noted "English Only" was the classroom rule. When I asked who had established this rule—the students or the teacher—they quickly answered in unison, some giggling a little, and said, "The teacher!" Thus, the students perceived "English Only" as one of the few rules of their English class. Bonnie explained that she established this rule to keep students "focused" on learning English, and she viewed Spanish as distracting them from their goal. On the other hand, Pam's *perezhivanie* likened using Spanish with disrespect. While talking about how much she loves her students, she equated speaking Spanish with disinterest and lack of focus, sharing that "other classes are not as respectful" and "talk in Spanish."

However, teachers' convictions about "English Only" policies stand in opposition to their realization that using other languages can help their students. Pam concedes that "If [using other languages] will help someone get the lesson, then I think it's valid," and says she has told her students, "We will all speak English, although you know, you can look up words on the phone and you can help your neighbor if you need to in Spanish if they don't understand." She also explained that she sometimes asks students about songs or poems in their home countries. Sally reported a flexible stance towards other languages. She echoed Pam's sentiment, saying that "although I certainly encourage them to use English, I notice particularly with the Spanish-speaking students, once in a while one of them can explain something that works really well for another student, so I don't have any problem with that at all." Still, Sally was only willing to admit that additional languages were valuable "every once in a while," as if by chance. In addition, Sally shared that "[O]ne time we had to insist that three speakers of Thai not sit together because they talked […] among themselves, and that was distracting." When I asked Sally if she was concerned about the conversations because they were in Thai or for other reasons, Sally only responded that "[T]here was a certain disruptive factor" to the students conversing in Thai. As a result, she not only asked them to speak in English, but asked them not to sit together at all in order to give her a stronger sense of control of the classroom environment.

Pre-Understanding: Language as Structure

Teachers revealed an understanding of language as the structure of the language. In practice as well as in our conversations, this came out as prioritizing grammar instruction and equating "teaching English" with "teaching grammar." Sally articulated this sentiment when I asked her about her goals for teaching:

> What I'm interested in is making the most of every minute in these classes for the students because their exposure is so slight and their need is so huge. Part of what I choose is dependent upon hearing them talk to each other or try to talk in class and seeing what could be given as an exercise. For instance, some time ago, I think maybe it was last fall, I became aware that there was a real need to teach the comparative because they weren't comfortable with that and it wasn't coming out. So if I observe or listen to something then I try to teach it. And then I just try to think about which area of grammar I could give them that would be most helpful.

In describing how she identified student needs, Sally focused solely on grammar, mentioning that the comparative and phrasal verbs as recent topics would be most helpful to her students. It is important to note that Sally is a grammar aficionada, and even corrected her own grammar within the course of the interview. For example, when talking about classroom expectations and the Thai learners she had separated, Sally said, "[T]hey talked—betwe—well this would be among—themselves. They talked *among* themselves." When I asked if she focused on grammar because of the need or personal interest, Sally admitted that her interests and experiences with grammar motivated her to focus heavily on grammar in her own classroom, and she used grammar as a starting point for lesson planning.

The belief that language teaching is about teaching the structures of language caused dissonance when teachers felt they were not prepared with background knowledge about language. Pam explained:

> Because […] language is not my background, then I have to refresh myself on like, what is a modal, and what does it mean and what are the rules? And so I have to learn it all over again before I can even begin to think about putting together a lesson. So, it's work.

In a different interview, Bonnie expressed the same sentiment, sharing, "[S]ometimes it's about understanding the grammar points because I don't understand the grammar points and I want to make sure I understand because I don't understand them. It takes a lot of time." Both teachers believed that they had to learn rules about a language before they could teach it, and therefore spent a lot of their preparation time trying to understand grammatical rules rather than on other things.

Critical Thinking Not a Goal/Outcome of Instruction

In addition, the pre-understanding of language as structure formed a lens through which tutors interpreted what was going on in the classroom and their roles. For one, it framed their understanding of critical thinking as a means to analyze grammar. When asked if critical thinking played a role in the classroom—either as a goal or an outcome of teaching—all of the teachers referenced other language skills, specifically grammar. Sally expressed that she did "not see it as an outcome," adding that "[I]t would be an outcome if they become more competent in the language, but it's certainly not the goal. That's down the road when they have larger vocabularies." Pam also likened critical thinking to grammar, answering, "Well I think they have to do critical thinking if they are going to use grammar correctly. I thought they got it, but they're still putting "s" where it doesn't belong." These instructors both thought of critical thinking as dependent on language structure and vocabulary.

Similarly, when I asked Bonnie about critical thinking, she responded:

> I think they're getting to the point where we can do more of that [critical thinking], but I feel like language wise […], LJA generally deals with lower functioning [pauses, dissatisfied with this word choice] people with less English […] These guys [in this class] are going pretty well, but they usually come in very— lacking confidence and not hardly being able to speak, so I'm not sure about critical thinking.

Thus, Bonnie also indicated a pre-understanding that grammatical understanding should precede critical thinking. She also noted that she has never specifically or directly emphasized critical thinking in her classes, partially because it is "not part of the assessment checklist." When I asked her about the assessment checklists, she explained that she and her co-teachers looked at curriculum guides "usually from some English textbook that we're not using" and compared them to their own lessons to see if they were covering certain grammar points. Because textbooks list grammatical concepts on their checklists, and not critical thinking, she explained, the teachers do not emphasize it as much. Yet despite Bonnie's perception that her students' proficiency was low, they produced and performed texts which included rich imagery and sophisticated literary devices. In addition, the student participating in her creative lesson described feeling like "a princess," which is not how students were portrayed in the landlord/tenant text the teacher had chosen.

Yet despite claims that students were not ready to think critically, Bonnie did report students engaging in critical thinking. She described how her students talked about prejudices

and stereotypes, the Border Patrol, and their process of coming to believe that whether someone is "nice" or unfriendly has more to do with the individual than their skin color. In addition, the teachers' belief that language was about language structure contradicted, at times, their other asserted desire to connect classroom content with students' lives, leaving them to focus on structure, not politics. Pam explained:

> We try not to go into anything political […] I know we don't go into anything that would require them to say they are or are not citizens, so if we go into border issues, immigration, and refugee, I'm thinking we are getting kind of close to that line.

The goal to remain "neutral" contradicts literature that suggests language and language learning are never neutral. In fact, Pam herself described politics (the "pocket of blue" in Tucson) as one of the reasons she moved to the city and got involved in tutoring, but she doesn't see it as impacting her teaching practice.

Confidence as a Main Goal

Equating "language teaching" and "grammar teaching" also contradicted teachers' beliefs that communication and confidence are also critical goals and outcomes of language courses. Sally, for example, named "greater confidence in speaking" as her learning goal, emphasizing that confidence is "absolutely the greatest goal." Bonnie, too, shared that, "I've been encouraged having a few students say things, like 'I have more confidence.' I'm encouraged that they're getting into the community more, talking more. That's probably the best part." When I asked her if she saw encouraging such confidence as one of our roles as teachers, she affirmed:

> I feel like that's more important than anything to me, because they can have bad grammar, but if they're confident, they will learn, and I've found that with my own language learning, like if I had a lack of confidence or people put me down for trying to speak, you kind of don't want to try, but I think when people say "oh you speak such great Arabic," then I'd be like "oh really?" I'd keep trying, keep making a fool of myself. But I think definitely—our classes do that a lot because we do a lot of encouragement.

By saying that "they can have bad grammar, but if they're confident, they will learn," Bonnie contradicted the importance she had placed on grammar. Sally, on the other hand, saw grammar as the means to greater confidence in speaking. Teachers' belief that language teaching was about teaching structure acted as a lens through which they interpreted what was going on in the classroom. This belief allowed them to justify "not going into anything political" and not focusing on critical thinking, other than as a means to analyze grammar.

Professional Isolation

Another growth point that teachers acknowledged was their lack of professional development. Though they held strong beliefs about language (such as the importance of speaking English only and learning grammatical structures), they also admitted having limited knowledge about how they worked. Both Pam and Bonnie confessed to spending a lot of time trying to understand the grammar they wanted to teach, and Pam said she would like to understand

"more theory of how languages are learned." Both teachers indicated spending an exceptional amount of time preparing for classes. As Pam described it:

> There is such a wide world of options, that you really don't know where to start, and I think they put together a curriculum for the first two days […] but as far as teaching a lot of the topics you want to cover, like grammar, like modals, there is no unit. You have to go find the materials and it's never exactly right. And so I ended up copy/pasting, editing (laughs) and trying to make it relevant.

The combination of teaching alone and not having pedagogical training led to a sense of isolation. Pam, who had been a volunteer tutor for about a year, talked a lot about the unexpected isolation that she experienced while teaching and how collaboration helped ease these feelings. "Not having a co-tutor or assistant or anything, I'm kind of on my own," she explained, "so it really helped" to participate in collaborative lesson planning during this project. She also noted that the collaboration "made me focus more on lesson prep. So I really had to pay attention and not leave everything till the last minute." Pam expressed a desire for more collaboration, saying being paired with a co-teacher "would have been preferable instead of jumping in" to teaching on her own. She also recommends pairing "beginners" to teaching with tutors who "understand more theory of how languages are learned." Both teachers saw collaboration and training as a means of combatting the professional isolation they experienced as community tutors.

Affordances of Creative Approach

At the end of the interviews, I asked teachers how they felt about the creative collaborations, and whether the creative activities they designed allowed students to interact with language in different ways than other materials. Pam answered that "I think it offered them an opportunity to share their knowledge, what they have learned, and to display it in a fun format. And it also gave them an opportunity to share their sense of humor." We discussed students' jokes about American doctors always prescribing Tylenol, and how this joke showed up in multiple students' comic strips. After the Valentine activity, Pam was touched that students wanted to take more Valentine cards home to work on outside of class, reported feeling "encouraged when they all took at least one more. They actually thought it was fun enough to do at home." She also noted that "[students] like to show what they know. They like to be able to be creative, come up with fun things that they share. They enjoy sharing what they've learned."

Bonnie added that the collaborations allowed her to focus on teaching principles, such as letting students talk more and giving them time to answer. She said that after co-teaching, "I realized I need to do more of the listening and let them talk." She felt that a unit on poetry that she subsequently developed "worked so well because I gave them a lot of time, a lot more time than I normally would, and I feel like they really appreciated that." In addition, when they did poetry, she "was sort of consciously thinking how to build it up." She worked with limericks and rhymes, and noted that, "[W]e didn't focus on grammar so much, we were focusing more on practicing reading, writing, performing." Observing others put teaching principles into practice—like we did in the collaborations—is important because, as Johnson and Golombek (2016) note, "Even teachers who are conceptually committed to a certain instructional approach may still struggle with implementing activities in their classrooms that

align with that approach for various reasons, eventually reproducing the very practices that they had hoped to change" (p. 115). Bonnie noticed this when she said:

> I feel sometimes I get kind of—I'm sensitive about student-teacher talking ratio and I know the students are supposed to talk more, but I get excited, or I get off on, 'gee I really want to teach them this,' and I just really need to slow down.

Working collaboratively to design and teach creative activities allowed her to focus on letting students talk more—a principle she valued but couldn't always implement in the classroom.

FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES AND CONCLUSIONS

Though much research on ESL teachers and tutors has focused on novice or pre-service teachers, this study is unique because the participants who self-selected into the study were all retirees who had some (in some cases, years of) teaching experience at LJA. Despite their experience, they had not been professionally trained as teachers and still viewed themselves as emerging teachers in various ways. Initial observations and discussions with tutors revealed that they felt obligated to use certain frameworks for teaching. Most commonly, they felt obligated to teach grammar and survival themes using English only. Tin's idea generation and idea exploration phases give teachers a new framework for organizing lessons which focuses on communication and creativity, rather than content and structure, as points of departure for language learning, thus expanding their understandings of what students can do with language. Mediated conversations support teachers in reflecting on the impact of their choices (from "English Only" rules to classroom themes and assumptions) on students.

Reciprocal dialogue with teachers throughout the course revealed the pre-understandings, contradictions, and growth points they experienced as they taught. Among other things, they revealed their understandings of language as form and survival content, and their belief that English should be the only language present in classes. Contradictions included their frustration with inconsistent student attendance, their insecurity and exhaustion in creating lessons, and their feelings of isolation. Future research could consider the roles of professional learning communities for teachers. In some cases, volunteers are excluded from professional learning communities, making teachers feel isolated in spaces where they could otherwise enjoy creative freedom and space to play, and removing critical opportunities for mediated dialogue with teacher colleagues (Doyle, 2021).

Future research should also consider teachers' positionalities and professional understandings. The community volunteers in this study were committed to growing as teachers, but they understood teaching as mastery of English grammar and pedagogy, without reflecting on their positionalities as middle/upper class, (mostly) white, (mostly native) speakers of English. As a result, they missed opportunities to listen to students and hear about their lived experiences. For example, Bonnie created a pedagogically effective "jigsaw" activity, but the content was problematic, as it instructed readers to be more considerate of their landlords. This text addressed students as struggling tenants, but when these same students were given the chance to write their own texts, they shared stories of their weddings, humorous encounters with language, and the joy of "feeling the air in your face with your hair loose" while riding horses. Future work should consider teacher and student positionalities, examining effective examples of reciprocal student and teacher dialogues.

Adult language learners take time away from their busy lives to attend language classes, and they deserve high quality, engaging instruction. Community volunteers offer their time and commitment to teaching learners, such as immigrant and refugee adults, who otherwise might not have access to language instruction. Their work is important not only to the adults they teach, but to the organizations which mobilize them. Quality, mediated teacher education should be available to them, not only so that they can become more effective, reflective teachers, but so that they are emotionally supported within a community as they grow.

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