A Profile of Exemplary ESL Teachers in PR

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Abstract

This paper presents results from a qualitative study of exemplary teachers of English as a second language (ESL) in Puerto Rico. Fourteen teachers were participants in this multi-case study in the northwest region of the Island. The teachers were studied on the basis of reflective journals, interviews, and documents, all of which served to examine their theoretical orientation, approach to teaching, and classroom management practices. The findings show very similar results with respect to the themes that denote the theoretical orientation that guides the teachers' approach to teaching and reveal interesting variations in their approach to the actual enactment of the curriculum. The research analysis also disclosed specific characteristics and tendencies that constitute a prototype model of these exemplary ESL teachers.

Background

Since the annexation of Puerto Rico by the United States following the Spanish American War in 1898, many governmental administrative policy changes have had a profound effect on the public school system and the public's perception of the learning and teaching of English (López Yustos, 1997; Maldonado, 2000). Concerns about the teaching of English are still the subject of debate after more than a century of educational reforms concerning the language of instruction and the teaching of English on the Island, (Peréa & García Coll, 2007; Pousada, 1999). In fact, many historical researchers report that Puerto Ricans have had a relationship with the teaching of the English language that has fluctuated from acquiescent to contentious and on to enthusiastic acceptance (López Yustos, 1997; Maldonado, 2000; Pousada, 1999; Resnick, 1993).

Historically, there have been opposing views; for example, some believe that teaching and learning English involves matters of cultural and national identity and have expressed their opposition to English language imposition. After all, Puerto Rico is culturally a Spanish speaking country and the teaching of English is mandated by law as a subject requirement in all academic programs at all levels of instruction in Puerto Rico. On the other hand, many believe that the world's reality demands knowing more than one language and that Puerto Rico is socially and politically bound to the United States. They argue in favor of compulsory English language teaching and are concerned that this goal is not being achieved. Moreover, there are those that assume a practical stance and view the learning of English as essential for individual and the collective well-being. They suggest that learning English should be improved with qualified teachers and appropriate teaching methods. Obviously from a theoretical standpoint, one can defend or perhaps reject anyone of these views but from a realistic stance, one must conclude that there is some truth and validity to all these positions and sentiments.

Problem

Today, Puerto Ricans still hold a spectrum of opinions and attitudes about learning and teaching English, however, both English and Spanish are recognized official languages of Puerto Rico. Spanish is used as the primary language but most Puerto Ricans agree that in today's global economy, learning English is essential to obtaining academic and financial success. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that

English is an accepted academic-subject requirement in all academic programs, at all levels of instruction, 72% of Puerto Rico's population admits to speaking very little English; and 83% of high school graduates do not consider themselves bilingual (Bauman & Graf, 2003; Shin & Bruno, 2003). According to Puerto Rico's Department of Education (DE), a majority of students at all levels of instruction are not mastering fundamental English communication skills. The DE reports that approximately one third of students obtain deficient scores on English achievement tests (PRDE, 2005).

The concerns about inadequate results on achievement scores and doubts about the effectiveness of the ESL curriculum have prompted Puerto Rico's DE to institute reforms aimed at improving the quality of ESL teaching. The DE claims that today's English language instruction has transcended the problems of the past 100 years and is now guided by a comprehensive curriculum that promotes excellence by emphasizing realistic learning expectations for students and professional standards of excellence for English teachers (PRDE, 2003). However, in spite of the fact that the DE has made improving the teaching of English a priority by allocating funds and dedicating time and efforts to reforming the ESL curriculum, the lack of positive English language achievement results continues to be a major problem.

Purpose and Justification

The purpose of the study was to document and describe the teaching practices of exemplary ESL teachers within the context of Puerto Rico. The study focused on features that characterize teacher practice: a) the theoretical orientation, b) approach to teaching, c) classroom management practices, and d) other features that might surface from investigation and that characterize exemplary ESL teachers in Puerto Rico. The resulting research information was documented and the cross-case analysis identified the characteristics and tendencies that distinguish the exemplary ESL teachers.

The information on academic achievement cited in the previous paragraphs points to a realistic concern that cannot be overlooked. However, the information also suggests that while some teachers may be failing in their mission of teaching English as a second language, others are having a positive impact. Identifying these exemplary teachers and revealing how they are having a positive effect on student achievement is a very useful research endeavor. Moreover, documenting the particular characteristics and pedagogical practices that distinguish them can serve practical purposes for the improvement of teaching practices.

Research identifies the teacher as a primary factor that accounts for the success or failure of academic achievement (Eggen & Kauchak, 1999). Stronge (2007) states that "teachers directly affect how students learn, what they learn, how much they learn, and the ways they interact with one another and the world around them" (p. ix). Consequently, the identification and documentation of exemplary teacher practice has the potential to provide a body of knowledge that can be used for professional development and teacher preparation programs (Berliner, 1994a; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986; Johnson, 2005).

Research Procedure and Participants

The primary goal of this research was to develop a prototype model of Puerto Rico's exemplary ESL teachers. Toward this end, the investigation was guided by research encompassing expertise as it relates to the practice of teaching English as a second language (ESL). The investigation used a multi-case study design that provides for the collection, organization, and interpretation of the research data and assists in the possible identification of emerging themes (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995; Tesch, 1990; Yin, 2003). The first stage of the investigation included documenting and

organizing the information into narratives of the individual-cases, while the second stage involved cross-case analysis.

The teachers for the qualitative study were 14 teachers selected from the Mayaguez School Region. School authorities were asked to identify and recommend exemplary ESL teachers based on indicators, such as: effectiveness, skills, creativity, innovation, autonomy, collaboration; and in addition, meet the following criteria: a) be in active service as an ESL teacher, b) have a minimum of five years of ESL teaching experience at the secondary level (7th to 12th grades), c) hold English teacher certification by PRDE, d) be recognized as exemplary ESL teachers by school authorities, e) have a positive impact on students' academic achievement in English language skills. Thirty-three teachers were recommended as possible participants, and fourteen teachers expressed their willingness to participate in the study. Participants were asked to submit a written journal in which they reflected on their teacher practice. An audio-taped interview of each participant was conducted; in the interview, participants described their teaching practice and spoke freely about the elements they consider essential to exemplary ESL teaching. The participants were also asked to submit any document that they felt might help illustrate a particular teaching practice.

The 14 teachers provided information about their personal characteristics, the problems they recalled when they began to teach, their current working conditions, and their teaching current strategies as well as opinions about the effects of teacher education and experience with regard to the quality of their teaching practices. Besides responding to the request for information through a writing journal, each of the 14 teachers was interviewed for information about themes related to the main features of the research study. All interviews were taped and transcribed and participants were asked to confirm that the transcriptions appropriately reflected their responses to the questions posed. The research information was organized into themes and categories and sharpened by using the method of triangulation, which allows for verification and cross checking of data by using multiple sources of information. The interpretational qualitative analytical procedure involved individual-case analysis and cross-case analysis which is an effort to construct meaning across cases. The procedure included making notes and narrative descriptions, identifying themes and categories, and finding patterns and variations which eventually led to construction of a comprehensive and holistic interpretation of the research.

Conceptual Framework

Several strands of research are relevant to this study on exemplary ESL teaching; however, the most comprehensive strand refers to research on teaching expertise. Sternberg and Horvath's (1995) prototype view of expert teaching (PVET) was used as a model for the conceptual framework of this investigation. Sternberg and Horvath recognize the importance of research on expertise in different professional domains, and proposed that the complex nature of teaching required a specific prototype model that included three main features: 1) the expert teacher's breadth and depth of knowledge, 2) the expert teacher's use of knowledge to effectively manage teaching situations, and 3) the expert teacher's ability to apply knowledge to solve problems.

However, Sternberg and Horvath also propose that teaching expertise is composed by the similarity of expert teachers to one another rather than by a set of necessary and sufficient features, which makes the PVET model different from other models of expertise that tend to emphasize rigorous standards that individuals must meet in order to be categorized as experts in a professional domain. It is important to note, however, that while Sternberg and Horvath's PVET model uses features that correspond to their psychological research, this study incorporates features that relate to teacher practice.

Thus, theoretical orientation corresponds to the teacher's knowledge base, teaching approach corresponds to their efficiency, and classroom management strategy to the teacher's insight. The investigation also considered other features of teacher practice that surfaced from the research data.

The information that emerged from each individual case was analyzed to identify and classify the teaching practices of each individual. Subsequently, the comparative analysis led to the identification of the common characteristics, themes, and tendencies that exemplify the participants in this study. Ultimately, the investigative procedure led to the development of a descriptive prototype model of exemplary ESL teachers which is presented and discussed in the following paragraphs.

Discussion of Results

The analysis of the data revealed specific characteristics and nine tendencies that distinguish exemplary ESL teachers in Puerto Rico. However, it is pertinent to point out that the categories and characteristics presented have been separated for research and analytical purposes, yet these elements actually overlap and are interdependent. Thus, it is appropriate to view the findings as an integrative, interdependent, and holistic description of exemplary ESL teachers as proposed in the research design. Table 1 summarizes the tendencies that distinguish exemplary ESL teachers in Puerto Rico:

Table 1: Summary of Tendencies

Tendencies
Theoretical Orientation
Tendency # 1: Participants adhere to convictions based on a pragmatic-progressive theoretical orientation
Tendency # 2: Participants conform to a social-constructivist orientation toward learning and teaching.
Tendency # 3: Participants credit their commitment to their profession and their continuous pursuit of professional development as the primary factor in their advancement as exemplary teachers.
Approach to Teaching
Tendency # 4: Participants reveal a marked preference for personal and social models of teaching.
Tendency # 5: Participants rely heavily on personal and professional experience and practice an eclectic approach to ESL teaching.
Tendency # 6: Participants' teacher-role and teaching-style can be described as that of facilitator, collaborator, and coordinator of learning.
Classroom Management
Tendency # 7: Participants distinguish motivation as a primary goal and a key element of successful ESL teaching and learning.
Tendency # 8: Participants display convictions and practices that confirm the importance of affective variables in teaching ESL.
Other Features
Tendency # 9: Participants are self sufficient and have an independent spirit.

Tendency # 1: Participants adhere to convictions based on a pragmatic-progressive theoretical orientation.

Essential aspects of the learning and teaching process, such as, methods, models, styles, and skills, strategies student/teacher roles, locus of learning, and other factors are influenced or controlled by the teacher's theoretical base (Brown, 1994; Brown, 2000; Eggan & Kauchak, 1999; Nunan, 1999; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Richards 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Roberts, 1998; Schunk, 2004). A qualitative study using classroom observations and teacher interviews to examine ESL teachers' beliefs, thoughts, and principles regarding classroom interaction confirmed the relevance and determinative role of teacher beliefs in teaching practice. Research findings suggest that teachers hold a network of beliefs

regarding classroom interaction that are supported by personal, philosophical, and professional orientations. Accordingly, teachers' beliefs play a crucial role in the way they plan, execute, and evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching (Mori, 2000).

Historically, general theoretical orientations have advanced propositions about knowledge and general philosophies that range from: a) idealism - that suggest the rethinking of latent ideas; b) realism - that insist that knowledge consists of sensation and abstraction; c) pragmatism - that promote experience and the use of the scientific method, and d) existentialism which advocates the freedom of personal choice and individual perception (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998). The major philosophies have led to four corresponding theoretical orientations of education: a) perennialism – which proposes the mastery of timeless information passed down through the ages, b) essentialism – which proposes the mastery of essential academic disciplines, skills, concepts, and principles, c) progressivism – which proposes the mastery of problem solving and scientific inquiry as well as active and relevant learning, and d) reconstructionism – which proposes the mastery of the subjects and skills to solve society's problems (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Schunk, 2004). Each orientation establishes an educational proposal which implies answers to the fundamental questions of the purposes, goals, and objectives of education. Using these categories and based on the analysis of the research data obtained, it can be concluded that the participants in this study display convictions that correspond to a pragmatic-progressive theoretical orientation.

Tendency # 2: Participants conform to a social-constructivist orientation toward learning and teaching.

The philosophies about knowledge and corresponding theoretical orientations of education mentioned previously have also led to four major approaches to learning and instruction: a) behaviorist – views learning as a change in form or frequency of behavior as a consequence of environmental conditioning, b) cognitive – views learning as the acquisition of knowledge and cognitive structures due to information processing by the association and the reorganization of prior knowledge, c) constructivist – views learning as taking place in contexts that learners form or construct through their own experience of the environment, d) humanistic – views learning as the result of the individual's ability to make choices and seek control over their lives (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Schunk, 2004). The participants in this study were found to practice a constructivist orientation; this orientation views learning as taking place in social contexts where learners form or construct meaning from experiences and exposure to the environment. The teaching and learning process is perceived as an active process in which instruction focuses on negotiating meaning through collaborative learning activities within realistic settings (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Schunk, 2004). In order to help the learners acquire the capacity to learn more readily and effectively, this orientation also holds that students should take an active role while the teacher takes on a passive role (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2004).

A qualitative research design was conducted to determine Puerto Rico-ESL teachers' philosophy on the nature of language and language learning, their preferred methodologies, and whether their individual teaching styles aligned with the DE's ESL curriculum, which is based on a constructivist paradigm. Twenty ESL teachers from the secondary level participated in the investigation. As instruments for the investigation, personal written statements, a reflexive journal entry, and survey questionnaires were administered. The study found that the teachers' philosophy was in alignment with the ESL curriculum, yet some of the actual teaching methods and styles were assessed to be in need of alignment with the official curriculum's constructivist paradigm. The research concluded that further study is needed

to identify the disparity between constructivist paradigms stated in the DE's official curriculum, the teacher's expressed preference for a constructivist orientation, and the actual classroom curriculum (Lugo Colón, 2007). Although this research is not conclusive in terms of actual teaching practices, it is in alignment with the present investigation which also found a preference of ESL teachers for a constructivist orientation toward learning and teaching.

Tendency # 3: Participants credit their commitment to their profession and their continuous pursuit of professional development as the primary factor in their advancement as exemplary teachers.

The research conclusions about expertise hold important implications for the field of teaching. Research has enabled an understanding that expertise, regardless of professional domain, results from the acquisition of knowledge from a variety of sources through instruction or training. And, research on expertise has shown that the development of skills for practical uses, and the acquisition of experience through deliberate practice directed at improvement of performance lead to expertise (Connell, Sheridan, & Gardner, 2003; Ericsson & Smith, 1991). Research also indicates that expertise constitutes acquiring competencies, factual knowledge, and coordinated skills that enable individuals to exhibit intentional behaviors more readily and efficiently than non-experts (Connell, Sheridan, & Gardner, 2003; Ericsson, 1996).

The conclusions regarding professional commitment and development summarized in Tendency # 3 are consistent with the conclusions of research on expertise which used teacher interviews and compared the data to generate the teaching strategies of expert teachers (Cambell, 1990). Cambell's research summarized its conclusions into eight qualities shared by expert teachers: 1) exhibited a strong sense of mission, 2) were continually seeking avenues to improve their teaching, 3) possessed a holistic view of teaching, 4) exhibited a high degree of personal and professional efficacy, 5) sought out and maintained a peer support system which supported and reinforced their sense of mission, 6) were supported in their career choices by significant people in their lives, 7) had a strong sense of professional autonomy, and 8) did not allow the external environment to interfere with their mission.

A similar study examined the beliefs, knowledge, and practices of three exemplary teachers in different Taiwanese settings; using qualitative research methods, the research collected data via classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of pertinent documentation. The research identified five themes in teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices of teaching indigenous students: a) self-confidence and commitment, b) differentiated expectations, c) cultural pedagogy, d) character development, and e) an ethics of care. The study also revealed that the teachers relied on their accumulated experiences to develop expertise (Yen, 2006). These conclusions are in sync with the present investigation which concludes that a teacher's commitment to his or her profession and the continuous pursuit of professional development is a primary factor in the advancement as exemplary teachers.

Tendency # 4: Participants reveal a marked preference for personal and social models of teaching.

A model of teaching is a description of a learning environment, which includes the roles and interaction between teacher and learner. A useful classification of teaching models that is based on their shared theoretical orientation toward human beings and how they learn was developed by Joyce et al. (2004). These researchers classify teaching models into four distinct families or groups: a) behavioral models– these models rely heavily on how learners respond to feedback for self correction, and use clearly defined instructional activities and sequences to change the learner's behavior or adjust their ability to perform tasks, b) information-processing models– these models emphasize enhancing the

learner's ability to acquire and organize data for problem solving tasks ;these models also cater to the learner's cognitive development and style, c) personal models– these models stress the learners' uniqueness and stress personal development by emphasizing personal responsibility and creativity, and d) social models– stress cooperative relationships to enhance learning by designing productive learning activities that integrate different perceptions to solve academic and social problems.

Personal models view each learner as unique and each personal model tries to help the individual learner take charge of his or her own growth. Social models of teaching are designed to take advantage of the synergy caused by the interaction of student diversity. These models foster cooperative relationships and emphasize collaborative learning activities (Joyce et al., 2004). Therefore, based on the derived characteristics, the participants in this study can be categorized as practicing personal and social models of teaching. However, in spite of the differences in theoretical orientations and the teaching approaches and models that they lead to, it is important to note that these descriptions are neither perfect nor mutually exclusive; the situational and social variables associated with teaching often blur differences and cause overlapping of concepts (Joyce et al., 2004; Schunk, 2004).

Tendency # 5: Participants rely heavily on personal and professional experience and practice an eclectic approach to ESL teaching.

It is important to note that teachers concern themselves with the practical pursuit of teaching and are not necessarily pundits of this or that philosophical or theoretical orientation. On the other hand, there are no exceptions to the fact that all educational propositions have theoretical underpinnings (Kelly, 2004; Ornstein and Hunkins, 1998; Richards, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Schunk, 2004). Accordingly, the second language teacher should be aware of the learner variables that influence and even determine second language acquisition (Brown, 1994; Brown, 2000). However, researchers also point out that although theory provides a necessary framework for making decisions, teaching involves knowing what to do in actual classroom situations (Brown, 1994; Brown, 2000; Schunk 2004). Thus, although knowing general principles and theories of learning and teaching apply, there are other elements related to the practice of teaching that also influence and determine learning. In second language teaching, for example, a teacher's personal view of learning the target language, the type of learning to be accomplished, preference for a particular instructional method, and procedural and classroom management strategy, as well as situational factors are issues that are equally important to learning and teaching (Brown, 1994; Brown, 2000; Eggen & Kauchak, 1999; Schunk, 2004).

The participants in this investigation rely heavily on personal and professional experience over specific or established theories or methods of second language teaching, and they follow an eclectic approach to second language teaching. This may be due to the fact that there seems to be a lack of consensus in the field of second language teaching to support one unique or standard approach or method that can be applied to all language teaching and learning environments (Brown, 1994; Brown, 2000; Nunan, 1999; Richards, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Another very plausible explanation for the participants' reliance on experience and the practice of an eclectic approach to second language teaching is their pragmatic-progressive theoretical orientation.

Several studies have assessed the effectiveness of specific ESL methodologies in Puerto Rico's language context. Moreno-Montalvo (1987) conducted an experiment to compare the achievement of two groups of ESL college students under two different methodological approaches. One group was exposed to an eclectic approach which stressed Audio-lingual and Cognitive teaching methods while another group was exposed to the same approach but modified by the incorporation of elements of Suggestopedia

which is intended to lower psychological barriers. Research results indicated a positive correlation between the use of the suggestopedic language teaching approach and the development of oral proficiency in the target language. This study is inconclusive in terms of a preferred teaching approach; however, it does suggest that an eclectic approach to ESL teaching is most appropriate.

In order to determine the instructional effects of a content approach to teaching called the Sheltered English Method (SEM) on the English academic proficiency of ESL college students, Medina (1996) conducted a quasi-experimental study. One group was subjected to SEM while the traditional Direct Approach was used on another group. Pre and post tests were administered to determine the effects of the teaching approaches on academic English proficiency. The research results indicated positive effects of SEM on ESL college students' academic proficiency.

In a similar study, Medina (1985) conducted an experiment to determine the effectiveness of using two different methods of teaching vocabulary to Puerto Rican ESL college students. The Grammar Translation method which emphasizes the application of dictionary definitions to specific written content was used on one group. The Experience Cognitive method which emphasizes the use of pictures to generate hypotheses and expectancies about the meaning of words using prior knowledge was used on another group. The study concluded that the results seem to suggest that the Experience Cognitive method's effectiveness was greater than that of the Grammar Translation method. Medina points out that the strategies used in the Experience Cognitive method are more effective in helping students understand, record, and retrieve new vocabulary than the strategies used in the Grammar Translation method.
In summary, it is fair to point out that theoretical and practical propositions are often dichotomously presented, yet theory and practice encompass an inseparable relation (Kelly, 2004; Ornstein and Hunkins, 1998; Schunk, 2004).

Therefore, in spite of the fact that the participants in this study perceive that they follow their personal-professional experience to arrive at a particular eclectic path to second language teaching, this does not mean that their approach and methods are not in tune with established learning and teaching theories. The present study was not designed to establish the appropriateness of ESL teaching approaches nor what method is most effective; nevertheless, the conclusion points out the essential role of personal and professional experience. Furthermore, the study also indicates that the practice of an eclectic approach is a successful path to exemplary ESL teaching.

Tendency # 6: Participants' teacher-role and teaching-style can be described as that of facilitator, collaborator, and coordinator of learning
The teacher-role and teaching style of the participants in this study can be described as facilitators, collaborators, and coordinators of learning. The way the teacher perceives, interacts, and responds to learners' needs and the learning environment constitutes his/her particular teaching style (Felder & Henríquez, 1995; Schunk, 2004). One general and widely accepted framework views teaching style in terms of the teacher's delivery of information: a) teacher as a formal authority– the teacher controls the content and flow of the information the learner is to receive and assimilate; this is an instructor-centered style in which the teacher delivers the information and demonstrates or models the skills to be acquired and then, the learner is expected to apply the skills and knowledge; b) teacher as facilitator or collaborator– the teacher-facilitator designs learning tasks that require student processing and application of the course content in creative and original ways. Their designed teaching activities necessitate active individual and collective student participation; and c) teacher as delegator or laissez-faire style– the teacher places the control and responsibility for learning on students; students are

expected to design and implement learning projects and the teacher assumes a consultative role (Schunk, 2004).

Because the teaching and learning process occurs over a sometimes unspecified period of time in a variety of social situations, some researchers emphasize the usefulness of adopting a balanced or eclectic teaching style for second language teaching— which is also in alignment with tendency # 5 of this investigation— (Brown, 1994; Brown, 2000; Díaz-Rico, 2004; Felder & Henríquez, 1995; Joyce et al., 2004). Furthermore, it has also been observed that even in a mono-cultural classroom, using only one specific method or teaching style is probably inadequate because of student diversity in a second language classroom (Díaz-Rico, 2004). Thus, the learners' uniqueness and the specific classroom setting require teachers to be receptive to the idea of variation or adjustment of teacher-role and teaching-style (Brown, 1994; Brown, 2000; Díaz-Rico, 2004; Felder & Henríquez, 1995; Joyce, et al., 2004; Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Moreover, it is appropriate to point out that regardless of the conceptual approach or method adopted into a school's curriculum; the manner in which any theoretical procedure is used in the classroom is the responsibility and choice of the teacher (Brown, 1994; Brown, 2000; Richards, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 1986). The teacher's function is to provide the opportunities and to increase the possibilities for learning to take place (Joyce et al., 2004). Viewed from this perspective, the conceptual approaches and methods, teacher-roles, and styles of teaching the target language represent alternatives that the teacher can use to provide the learner with opportunities that make it more likely that different language skills will be acquired. In summary, the choice of a teacher-role and teaching style - facilitator, collaborator, and coordinator - of the participants in the present research is widely supported by research.

Tendency # 7: Participants distinguish motivation as a primary goal and a key element of successful ESL teaching and learning.

Participants in this study distinguish motivation as a primary goal and a key aspect to successful ESL classroom teaching and learning. Participants in this research report that they rely on variety of resources and activities to address student learning preferences and the disparities in levels of second language dominance. In order to motivate student participation in learning activities, participants continuously express recognition of individual student achievement which emphasizes progress and the importance and satisfaction of completing a task or a finished product. Lowering students' anxiety level, motivation, and creating a supportive environment are affective factors that have been shown to influence and even determine second language acquisition (Brown, 2000).

One of the important areas of research related to the management of the ESL classroom is motivating students' participation in a classroom setting. López Román's (2006) exploration of Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and its correlation to ESL student's participation in oral activities revealed that the level of student's self-efficacy correlated to their oral participation in the classroom. According to the theory, self-efficacy is enhanced by four factors successful performances, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. López Román's research concluded that ESL educators need to work on the development of methodology, strategies, and activities that contribute to the enhancement of students' self-efficacy. López Román's (2006) general findings are in accordance with the conclusion that motivation is a key element to students' active and productive participation in teaching and learning activities.

Tendency # 8: Participants display convictions and practices that confirm the importance of affective variables in teaching ESL.

Participants in this study foster the development of a teacher-student relationship based on trust and respect. This relationship is conducive to a comfortable and nonthreatening classroom environment. Participants promote order and discipline by adherence to an expected classroom code of conduct rather than the strict observation of explicit rules. This code of discipline is characterized by respect for all parties, flexibility, discussion, and settling differences or disputes in the classroom without outside intervention.

Three studies that focused on the influence of affective variables on student ESL learning revealed corresponding results. The first study, Rodríguez-Galarza (1997) explored the attitudes, perceptions and opinions of high school students toward learning English, the ESL curriculum, and English instruction. The study compared the attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of low achievers of English with high achievers. The research results indicated that high achievers of English had better attitudes toward learning English, the ESL curriculum, and English instruction as well as a more positive perception of themselves and the second language than low achievers of English.

The second study of the influence of affective variables on student ESL learning produced similar conclusions. Hernández Nogueras (1996) examined the possible relationships among students' self-esteem, self-evaluations in the ESL classroom, and the oral communicative language proficiency of first-year college students. Quantitative research results indicated there were non-significant pairing relationships. However, Hernández Nogueras concluded that the qualitative results of the study revealed a tendency for students' self- esteem in the ESL classroom to be more related to ESL proficiency than their overall self-esteem. Students with a positive self-evaluation in the ESL classroom scores tended to develop a better proficiency in ESL.

A third study that focused on the affective variables that influence learning examined learners' perceptions about the circumstances and factors that contribute to oral English language anxiety in the classroom. The research concluded that the sources of anxiety can be classified into three factors, face, feelings, and affinity: a) face- includes making mistakes in front of others, not being sufficiently proficient, and being ridiculed, b) feelings- related to group acceptance or rejection, and c) affinity-relates to relations with other learners (Meléndez, 1997). In summary, the three studies mentioned in the previous paragraphs attest to the importance of affective variables in ESL teaching and learning.

Tendency # 9: Participants are self sufficient and have an independent spirit.

Araujo (2002) conducted a qualitative multiple-case study to determine how exemplary ESL teachers are able to overcome inadequate pre-service training, insufficient administrative support, and an ambivalent social environment regarding the teaching of English. Araujo concluded that moral sensibility, sense of calling to the teaching vocation, and life experiences influenced the exemplary teacher's ability to overcome the odds. Another qualitative study elicited the perception of ESL teachers and adult ESL learners regarding what they believe make good ESL teachers (Shono, 2004). Shono's conclusions also suggest the importance and influence of affective variables on ESL teachers' effectiveness. Furthermore, the findings on the importance of affective dispositions in exemplary teaching coincide with the research conclusions of Purdom, et al. (1997), Smith (1999), and Yen (2006).

Conclusion

It is important to assert that in spite of the major similarities between the participants, there are substantial differences which attest to their self reliance and independent spirit. Some of these differences

involve qualitative distinctions in the content that is emphasized and others relate to how learning is assessed. While some participants prefer to focus on teaching discreet skills, others emphasize the interrelated use of language skills for actual or realistic communicative purposes. Some participants express a preference for topics and situational activities that are specifically related to social-cultural contexts that are relevant to students and use alternative forms of assessment. Others give precedence to specific language skills that are tested using objective assessment strategies.

In relation to creating an appropriate environment for learning, some participants plan hands on activities that demand active physical and mental participation of students in meaningful tasks; they select topics that attract the students interest and motivate participation and incorporate humor and games in an effort to make the learning activities fun. Other participants make students aware of the learning objectives and involve them in the planning of learning activities. These participants involve their students directly in the selection of topics and teaching and learning activities by soliciting comments, opinions, questions, and their own examples concerning the lesson's concepts, topic, or situation.

As a general description, the participants can be described as divided into two main groups. One group prefers methods and strategies that expose students to as many opportunities as possible to experience and experiment with the second language. This group relies heavily on students' needs and interests to plan class activities and follows a hands-on approach to teaching and learning that emphasizes exposure and practice in the second language. In this group's view, this student-centered approach is more inclined to a constructivist orientation of learning and yields the expected results.

It is important to note that the other group of participants also recognizes students' needs and interests as primary concerns; however, they perceive that acquiring a second language also involves learning the formal skills of the language. In this second group's view, teaching the formal language skills requires the specific and explicit exposition of the formal conventions and uses of the language. Hence, this group follows a student-centered yet teacher directed approach that integrates the formal conventions and uses of the language and structures class activities around these essential elements without neglecting students' needs and preferences.

Nevertheless, all participants believe that classes should be student-centered, meaning that students' discover or construct knowledge when involved in meaningful tasks and when their needs and interests are at the center of classroom activity. However, several participants are inclined toward a teacher-centered approach. This teacher-centered approach involves a fair share of direct instruction predicated on the belief that language teaching demands explicit explanations of formal language conventions and skills.

Other differences between the participants involve those that plan lessons based on learning objectives in correlation to the PRDE's prescribed English curriculum and those that identify student needs and interests as well as the material resources available as the primary considerations in lesson planning. It is not that the prescribed curriculum is ignored but rather that they claim to know from experience what the goals and objectives are, so they proceed to focus on the practical execution of the lessons. On the other hand, those participants that strictly abide by the curriculum are aware of the importance of knowing students' needs and interests but, these elements seem to be considered secondary to the specific language conventions and skills that they feel should be the focus of teaching.

It is also relevant to point out that the general difference between the participants is due to their respective views regarding the emphasis and focus of ESL curriculum. A group of participants are oriented toward a holistic language approach to ESL teaching which concentrates on integrating the language skills around activities that demand relevant and actual communication tasks. However, another

group expresses their preference for a holistic approach but insists on integrating or combining it to a direct instructional approach that focuses on the discrete elements of the second language. Nevertheless, these differences apparent or otherwise demonstrate that in spite of their major similarities, the participants' teaching practice is based on independent and unprescribed views about teaching and learning the second language.

Finally, The PRDE has repeatedly instituted curricular reforms aimed at improving the teaching and learning of English. Yet, the teacher's competence of pedagogical and subject matter knowledge along with the skills involved in the management of classroom procedures is the primary contributory factor of student learning (Richards, 2001). Thus, it becomes increasingly necessary to continue research on the teaching practices of exemplary teachers. The present research along with the small but growing body of research on English teaching and learning in Puerto Rico can lead to the improvement of teaching, the betterment of teacher preparation programs, and contribute to professional enrichment activities.

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