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Dr. Harper

HON 498: Honors College Senior Research Project

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Honors College Senior Research Project Proposal

My HON 498 work will encompass elements from two major fields: Writing and Applied Linguistics. For this project, I will write two chapters of an original ESL textbook, integrate them into a teaching practicum, collect student feedback, and write a brief qualitative report that summarizes it.

A central objective for this project is to apply a novel pedagogical approach in the design of a textbook. Specifically, I will be putting the Communicative approach into practice with my task-based lesson design. In a nutshell, task-based instruction sets learning objectives in terms of performance tasks in the foreign language. Language lessons require straightforward tasks that can also have a non-linguistic meaningful use (i.e. make a class schedule, make a hotel reservation, order food in a restaurant, etc.). Linguists in favor of TBLT argue that the “real-world” usefulness of the tasks increases learner motivation level and engagement which in turn can lead to higher learner outcomes.

As a result, by conducting demonstration lessons from my textbook and receiving students’ feedback, I will be able to investigate the validity of claims regarding the effectiveness of task-based lessons in being perceived as “meaningful” by students and ultimately in facilitating the L₂ acquisition process (Ortega, 2009).

My textbook will be geared towards intermediate ESL learners with the primary focus being listening and speaking skills. The two chapters will be comprised of five lessons each that surround American culture and issues. One chapter will be built around the thematic unit of American leisure, and it will be entitled “On the Weekend.” The other chapter will be dealing with current events and problems facing the United States, and it will be entitled “Big Problems.” The working title of my textbook is *The Conversationalist*, since the primary focus of the lessons is to foster conversation among ESL learners to lead to an improvement in listening and speaking skills.

A preliminary source that will be informing this project is Klaus Brandl’s textbook *Communicative Language Teaching in Action: Putting Principles to Work*, specifically chapter 7 “Developing Listening Skills” and chapter 8 “Developing Oral Communication Skills.” My textbook will be following Brandl’s definition of task-based design. A lesson that follows a TBLT methodology often includes a pre-task phase, a main task phase, and a post-task reflection

phase (Calvert & Sheen, 2015). I will be incorporating these aspects into the organization of my textbook.

In order to practice using my textbook in a teaching situation and to assess the effectiveness of it, I will also be conducting a couple of demonstration lessons with an ESL “focus group,” most likely composed of a few of my ESL tutees in the Learning Student and Development Center. After each demonstration lesson, they will be asked to complete a brief qualitative survey asking their opinion of the task-based design. The framework that I will be following in evaluating the task is the “student-based” (Ellis, 1997, 2003 as discussed in Calvert & Sheen, 2015).

My faculty advisor for this project will be Dr. Shannon Halicki.

The suggested timeline for my project is as follows:

September

- Research existing literature on Communicative Approach and TBLT (annotated bibliography)
- Collect realia related to leisure
- Write chapter “On the Weekend”

October

- Collect realia related to social issues
- Write second chapter “Big Problems”
- Begin organizing ESL “focus group” for demo. lessons and design brief qualitative survey

November

- Teach demo. lessons with “focus group”
- Write brief qualitative report on students’ feedback
- Revise and review work

December

- Compile and submit Senior Honors College Research Project

I believe that my research project will be a contribution to the field because while there is much existing literature on the effectiveness of the Communicative approach, the amount of textbooks that actually put into practice TBLT are limited in scope (Calvert & Sheen, 2015). Additionally, the task-based textbooks that are on the market are not readily accessible because of their exorbitant prices. Not only will this be a tangible work that applies the theories of the

Communicative approach and TBLT, but it will also be a cost-free resource available for my future ESL students.

Preliminary Bibliography

Brandl, K. (2008). *Communicative language teaching in action: Putting principles to work*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Calvert, M., & Sheen, Y. (2015). Task-based language learning and teaching: An action-research study. *Language Teaching Research*, 19(2), 226-244. doi:10.1177/1362168814547037

Ortega, L. (2009). *Understanding second language acquisition*. London: Hodder Education.