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Program Outcomes Reflection

The journey I have taken to attain my Master's degree has been exhilarating, insightful, challenging, and inspiring. When first starting the program, I was faced with learning outcomes and objectives that would reflect a successful graduate. Over the past two years, I have been pushed beyond standard expectations, refined by critical thought, lifted to new heights, and given immeasurable support. It was never asked of me, or any other student, to simply meet the standard; we have all been encouraged to rise above it. Now reaching the end of a two-year endeavor, I am once again confronted by those same learning objectives. Have I reached my greatest potential? Am I ready to step into the field and make a career for myself? The answer I give to these thoughts is, yes. The learning outcomes of this program initially presented themselves to me as a checklist; a standard of achievement. Now, they are more than standards; they are a reflection of my teaching philosophy, my professionalism, my personal and academic growth, and a new self. Not only have I met these requirements, but I also embody them in the work I produce and the pedagogical styles and strategies of my teaching. As a graduate from Gonzaga's MA/TESL program, I am confident in my abilities and am more than confident in my competence as a professional, ready to step into the workplace.

Learning Outcome 1: Students will demonstrate understanding of the nature and structure of language, and the structure of English, on phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, discourse, and pragmatic levels.

I achieved my understanding in this area through real-life application. The *Be A Linguist* assignments done in Sociolinguistics (MTSL 504) helped analyze my own speech and the speech of others. These assignments forced me to pay attention to prescriptive and descriptive speech, and discover meaning in slang, various vernacular speech, formalized speech, or even piecing together broken words or phrases used by lower level students to convey meaning. Most of my understanding has come from interacting with students. I have worked at the front desk for a majority of my time in the program. It has been my time at the front desk and working with students in other various places that has given me opportunities to converse with them and use both formal and informal speech. Through my interactions, I have learned how to explain meanings of slang and formalized speech when holding conversations with students. Phonology (MTSL 517) and Pedagogical Grammar (MTSL 502) also gave me great insight about phonetics, grammar, and how to explain them properly and effectively to students. The Pronunciation Pal and Grammar Partner assignments were the most useful and influential in acquiring this knowledge, giving me more opportunities to use real-life practice.

Learning Outcome 2: Students will demonstrate understanding of the process of language acquisition and its effects on language learning.

Language acquisition, and its theories, is important to know for effective teaching. Knowing and understanding language acquisition helps teachers to understand the learning process students go through. From Second Language Acquisition (MTSL 508), Pedagogical Grammar, and Course Design, Testing, and Assessment (MTSL 510), I learned that there are different styles of teaching and learning, and the importance of including these different styles in each lesson; how to introduce students to topics with appropriately grading materials to reflect the needs of students' language proficiency, which is known as scaffolding; that being aware of students intake, or input, of information is crucial to the learning process in order for successful output to be had; how to give corrective feedback in ways that students will notice their errors and retain changes without compromising a low affective filter. These classes and the books we used, such as *How languages are learned* (Lightbown & Spada, 2013) and *Designing Language Courses* (Graves, 2000), gave insight into theories, such as Krashen's (1982) affective filter and input hypotheses, and Schmidt's (1990) noticing hypothesis, negotiation, and usage-based learning. Learning and working with these theories has shaped the way I teach and interact with students.

Learning Outcome 3: Students will demonstrate understanding of the socio-cultural contexts in which languages are acquired and their effects on communication and language learning.

Understanding socio-cultural contexts regarding language acquisition are not only helpful, but also necessary to teach a language properly. Studying sociolinguistics gave me insight into various socio-cultural backgrounds and situations, which I was then able to apply in the classroom and shape my philosophy of teaching. For example, understanding the differing roles of men and women from particular cultures will help me gage the appropriateness of pairing men and women from different cultures together for group work (Wardhaugh, 2010). By educating myself on typical classroom etiquette from different countries, I will also be able to gage how comfortable a Saudi or Brazilian student may feel speaking up in class as opposed to a Japanese or Chinese student doing so. Using the target language is also an important aspect of language acquisition. Submerging oneself into the culture and people of the target language will help students in the learning process. Lightbown and Spada (2013) highlight usage-based learning, which emphasizes students continually using the language while learning in order to solidify the input and produce effective output. However, enforcing an "English-only" rule in the classroom may not be the best solution. Although it is important for students to use the target language as much as possible, I do believe students should be allowed to use their L1 occasionally, especially for low proficiency students. In addition, the textbook from Literacy (MTSL 514) provided many activities and strategies for working with K-12 ELLs, most of which may be easily adapted for adult ELLs. Most importantly, it shed light on the fact that many ELL students are mistaken for needing special needs in public schools, solely because they cannot communicate properly. Some of the situations that these students come from do not allow them to grow in a proper language-learning environment. Due to various conditions or circumstances, these students rarely receive the help they need because their abilities and

needs are misunderstood, not to mention their cultural backgrounds. Lastly, the visit to World Relief gave me much insight into the plights, struggles, and challenges ELLs face. This was such an impactful experience for me and I strongly recommend it remain as a part of the course.

Learning Outcome 4: Students will demonstrate sensitivity to diverse cultures both within and outside the United States, and knowledge of the role English has played and plays in the world.

Again, I believe Sociolinguistics played an immense role in teaching and shaping this learning outcome for me. Understanding cultures and the various implications they have on language are essential for language teaching. Bringing students from multiple backgrounds together as a class comes with many challenges, which is why EFL teachers need to be aware of the countless variables that come into play when working with students. Observing the ESL classes of the ELC has shown me the difficulties teachers run into while teaching, but also how to repair and be prepared for those difficult situations. From my experiences talking with students, many students begin learning English due to career or educational aspirations. English is quickly becoming a worldwide language, representing not only a country and its people, but also serving as a lingua franca for most business matters. As a teacher, it is important that I know the context for which my students are learning English. The more I know about their goals and aspirations, the more I can effectively assist them in fulfilling their purpose. I found the class observations we had to do for each class incredibly helpful. The observations gave me the opportunity to see theory put into practice, while also giving me opportunities to be involved in the learning process with the students, in addition to viewing the classroom from a teacher's perspective.

Learning Outcome 5: Students will demonstrate knowledge of the principles of course design, curriculum design, and language assessment.

Course Design, Testing, and Assessment (MTSL 510) was an incredible course. What I love most about this program is the overt and accessible connections drawn between every course and opportunities for real-life practice. Everything I have done in this program has been connected. There are very few, if any, assignments or projects that do not tie in with whatever courses we may be currently, previously, or will be taking. Being able to connect research with course design was incredibly beneficial and direct. The data I collected from research directly correlated to my course design choice. I was able to apply my findings to the course design, and not only create a course based from recent research, but pilot materials as well. In addition to the course design process, I also learned the essentials for creating a test and various methods for collecting assessments from Graves (2000) and Brown & Abeywickrama (2010). These texts highlighted the importance of assessment, various options for collecting data, and guides for interpreting the assessments. After piloting some of my materials, I was able to go back through some of my work and apply the same process to revising them. I am proud to say I am once again given the opportunity to build a course and find myself going through the same steps as before. The texts and experiences I gained from MTSL 510 have given me confidence in my abilities

as a teacher, and given me a platform for using my creativity to create appropriate materials for my future students.

Learning Outcome 7: Students will demonstrate the ability to reflect and evaluate on their own teaching practice, to evaluate theories, methods, techniques, and materials.

I am very confident in my ability to reflect and evaluate my teaching practices, theories, methods, techniques, and materials. The reflections done in each course have given me opportunities to not only think about the texts I have read, or the observations I have seen, but also to apply them to myself. These reflections promote self-growth and an ability to evaluate effectiveness. Through reflection, I have cultivated my own teaching philosophy and gained an understanding of the role that research and observation play in the classroom. Reflecting and evaluating research and my own language teaching allows me to realize what aspects of my teaching are working, and what needs to be adjusted. Part of my philosophy of teaching is seeing myself as a guide, or tool, for students (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). As their guide, I need to be able to notice not only the successes and struggles of my students, but also my own. If I do not take time to reflect on myself and make appropriate changes as necessary, then I am only providing a disservice to my students. In addition to applying research in the classroom, staying updated with current research also helps me remain knowledgeable and capable of evaluating whatever theories, methods, or materials I may come in contact with. MTSL 508 (SLA) educated me on various theories and methods, and while learning about those methods, MTSL 510 (Course Design) taught me how to properly evaluate them. The main idea I have gleaned from all of this is that the importance of reflecting and evaluating is to ensure that the students' needs are being met.

Learning Outcome 8: Students will demonstrate the ability to express thoughts in writing and orally; to develop and support ideas, synthesize information, present information clearly in papers and oral presentations, and to follow conventions of the discipline for citations.

In addition to the reflective process helping me cultivate the ability to evaluate, it has also helped me form my own ideas about the theories and data I have read. In every piece of writing, it has been required of students to include support for the ideas we express. The need for support encouraged me to research and fully explore texts and theories for true and thorough understanding. Through this program, I have also been taught the fine art of concision. At a Master's level, it is important to be able to express ideas clearly and succinctly. In order to be succinct, clear direction is a must. The papers I have written for this program required and pushed me to narrow my focus and hone in on direct details. In order to support my ideas, I need to know about the ideas of others before, hence, the importance of a literature review. By including a literature review, I am able to establish myself as a credible source, giving credit where credit is due, but also showing my audience that I have taken the time to research and understand the topic I am presenting, in addition to supporting the direction of my research or ideas. The need for clear, brief, and direct expression is also needed when presenting. The presentations I have given have helped me learn the value of visual aids and the sometimes, uncomfortable assurance of few written cues on a PowerPoint slide. Although intimidating, the visual aids and cues are

only reminders of the information I firmly know. If I am properly prepared for a presentation, I will not need to rely on the PowerPoint for relaying my ideas to my audience, or for my confidence. Lastly, brevity has also helped me summarize main ideas from authors and only use quotes that have direct meaning pertaining to the topic of my paper or presentation.

Learning Outcome 9: Students will demonstrate professional and collaborative interpersonal skills

In my time with this program, there has been an abundance of opportunities to develop and cultivate professional and collaborative interpersonal skills. My first experience with this was in Sociolinguistics, Fall of 2013. Although the experiences I had with my group members were less than desirable, the disagreements and instances of miscommunication were opportunities for me to exercise professionalism while collaborating with others. There are many times in the workplace that we are forced to work or collaborate with others, and more than likely, we will not always agree. This experience truly tested my patience and put me in an uncomfortable situation where I had to develop strategies for working with a particular group member and managing my temper. Group work is a staple in this program, which also helps students demonstrate professionalism and develop collaborative skills. Other opportunities, like GECO, MTSL 510 (Course Design), and practicum, have also given me plenty of opportunities to work with my peers and other teachers. I believe this program has done a great job with providing opportunities for development, as well as opportunities to share experiences in a safe place, and provide helpful feedback. I have always felt comfortable sharing with any of my professors about a situation I have found myself in or an issue I have had. The feedback I have received has been helpful, nonjudgmental, and open. The professionalism I have been shown at the ELC is the same professionalism I try to emulate. With all of my culminating experiences, I am more than confident that I am capable of collaborating with any colleague, staff, or faculty member I may encounter in the future.

Works Cited

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