

How 'sign meaning develops': Strategic mediation in learning to teach

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Abstract

A fundamental goal of any L2 teacher education program is to move novice teachers toward greater levels of professional expertise, both in terms of what they know and what they can do with what they know. Yet, it is less clear how the activities embedded in teacher education programs actually assist novice teachers as they move toward greater levels of expertise. Informed by a sociocultural theoretical perspective on teacher learning (Johnson, 2009) this study examines the practices of a teacher educator as she works with a team of three novice teachers of English as a second language (ESL) who are exposed to and attempt to take up and use a set of pedagogical tools designed to assist them in garnering greater levels of student participation and engagement in their L2 instruction. Specifically, this study traces how the meaning and functional uses of this set of pedagogical tools develops and the critical role that strategic mediation must play in order to assist novice teachers in becoming fluent users of these pedagogical tools in their L2 instruction.

Keywords

novice teacher learning, sociocultural theory, teacher cognition, teacher education

I Introduction

It is well established in the research on L2 teacher cognition that novice teachers come to teacher education programs with idealized conceptions of what language teaching is all about and the kind of language teachers they aspire to be (Borg, 2006; Freeman,

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2002). Reeling from their long histories as students (Lortie, 1975) in traditional teacher-fronted second and/or foreign language classrooms, novice language teachers typically imagine their future classrooms as student-centered collaborative learning environments where the teacher plays a more facilitative role and active student participation and meaningful social engagement are the norm. For many novice teachers, it is not until their initial attempts at actually teaching, typically during an internship or practicum experience, that this gap between their imagined classroom and the realities of language teaching becomes apparent (Johnson, 1996). As novice teachers begin to engage in the activity of teaching, they quickly realize that they lack the pedagogical tools to create any semblance of the kinds of interaction they imagined for their classrooms. Informed by a sociocultural theoretical perspective on teacher learning (Johnson, 2009) this study examines the practices of a teacher educator as she works with a team of three novice teachers of English as a second language (ESL) who are exposed to and attempt to take up and use a set of pedagogical tools designed to assist them in garnering greater levels of student participation and engagement in their L2 instruction.¹

1 Vygotsky's maxim: 'Sign meaning develops'

From a sociocultural theoretical perspective, human cognition is understood as inherently social; that is, it emerges out of participation in external forms of social interaction that become internalized psychological tools for thinking (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). This transformation, from external (interpsychological) to internal (intrapyschological), is not direct, but mediated. Moreover, this process does not happen independently or automatically, but takes prolonged and sustained participation in social activities that have a clear purpose within specific social contexts, with strategic mediation (Wertsch, 2007) from expert others, and depends, in large part, on the agency of the person and the affordances and constraints embedded within the person's environment.

In establishing this theoretical stance, one of Vygotsky's (1978) major breaks with the field of psychology at the time was the basic maxim that the relationship between the word (sign form) and thought (sign meaning) does not remain constant, but instead is unstable and undergoes fundamental change. His developmental or genetic method was designed to understand how this change happens by focusing almost exclusively on how the inclusion of new tools or signs leads to qualitative transformation in mental activity rather than quantitative improvements in terms of speed or efficiency (Wertsch, 2007). And from this method, one can observe how the inclusion of particular sign forms, especially those of a symbolic nature (i.e. language) play a role in converting learning that emerges in social activity into psychological tools (sign meanings), or tools for thinking.

Much, if not all, of what teacher educators try to do is to explicitly mediate in novice teachers' processes of learning to teach. They intentionally insert new tools or signs into the activities that constitute teacher education with the goal of qualitative transformation in how novice teachers think as well as how they teach. Such explicit mediation, according to Wertsch (2007, p. 185–186):

involves the intentional introduction of signs into the ongoing flow of activity ... designed and introduced by an external agent, such as a tutor, who can help reorganize an activity in some way [and it is throughout this process that] sign meaning develops.

Wertsch goes on to claim that a sign form, or word:

first appears in social and individual activity without the users' full understanding of its meaning or functional role. What then follows is a process of coming to understand the meaning and functional significance of the sign form that one has been using all along. (p.186)

Cazden (1981) describes this developmental process as 'performance proceeding competence', claiming that we are able to use sign forms before we fully understand what we are doing or what they mean; however, it is precisely through their use that the meaning of that sign develops. Thus, the sign form, or word, functions as a sort of material sign vehicle that allows novices to function at a level that is out ahead of their current mastery. According to Wertsch (2007, pp. 186–187) 'the general goal of instruction is to assist students in becoming fluent users of a sign system'; thus:

when encountering a new cultural tool ... the first stages of acquaintance typically involve social interaction and negotiation between experts and novices or among novices. It is precisely by means of participating in this social interaction that interpretations are first proposed and worked out and, therefore, become available to be taken over by individuals.

If we consider the activities of second language teacher education (SLTE), teacher educators intentionally introduce new sign forms (i.e. information gap activities, tasks) and in some cases entire sign systems (i.e. communicative language teaching) in order to reorganize how novice teachers think about and engage in the activities of language teaching. These new signs and/or sign systems typically represent the latest theory and research on how language works, how languages are learned and used, as well as how languages can be taught in various instructional settings. The assumption, of course, is that the introduction of these new sign forms, through course readings, in-class discussions, and reflective activities will enable novice teachers to work out the sign meanings and functional significance and eventually lead to changes not only in how teachers think about teaching but also in what they actually do in the classroom. However this trajectory, from external to internal, does not happen automatically, nor does it occur in a straightforward manner. Instead it requires prolonged and sustained participation in concrete goal-directed activity (i.e. actual teaching), supported by strategic mediation offered by an expert (i.e. teacher educator, mentor teacher, and/or peer teacher) that leads the development of sign meaning (i.e. theoretical and pedagogical tools or signs) so that sign meanings become more like those of experts (i.e. intersubjectivity), with the ultimate goal of enabling novices to use sign meanings flexibly and fluently in the activities of L2 instruction.

In the current study, we trace how explicitly inserted new pedagogical tools function as material sign vehicles that allow novice teachers to function at levels that are ahead of their current mastery. Moreover, in the activity of using these new signs in actual teaching, combined with mediation from a teacher educator and peer teachers, we find evidence of the complex and variable nature of how sign meaning develops throughout a series of initial learning-to-teaching experiences.

2 *The reconceptualized microteaching simulation project*

This study draws on data collected from a reconceptualized microteaching simulation project that was carried out as part of a TESL methodology course (Johnson & Arshavskaya, 2011). Informed by a sociocultural theoretical perspective on teacher learning (Johnson, 2009), this 15-week project involves a sequence of activities whose intent is to provide novice teachers with opportunities to engage in different kinds of authentic teaching activities and to receive mediation from the course instructor (henceforth, teacher educator) and peer novice teachers (classmates).

A team of three novice teachers – Sally, Kim and Janet – were undergraduate World Languages Education majors seeking a K12 ESL endorsement.² Sally, a sophomore with no prior teaching experience, had just entered the World Languages Education program. Janet and Kim were juniors and had some classroom observational field experiences as part of their Education coursework. In addition, Janet had participated in a four-week West African missionary program and worked with small groups of EFL middle school children. Kim had completed a summer study-abroad program in Sweden but had no prior teaching experience. The team was assigned to teach one 75-minute session of an English as an ESL undergraduate composition course. The content of the lesson, taken directly from the course syllabus, focused on the use of counter-arguments in academic argumentative essays. The team was provided with curricular materials – the required textbook and other relevant instructional materials – on which the content of the lesson was based, but they were given freedom to plan the lesson as they saw fit.

As part of the project, the team engaged in several pre-teaching activities designed to prepare them to teach the eventual lesson. They observed two sessions of their assigned ESL class in order to develop a more acute understanding of the instructional setting, including required assignments and assessments, as well as the students' L2 proficiency, goals, and motivation. The observations also enabled the team to exchange ideas with the instructor of the ESL course and to interact with the ESL students informally. As a way to enrich the interpersonal relations between the novice teachers and the students enrolled in the ESL course, each team member participated in six 60-minute tutoring sessions with a volunteer ESL student (tutee) from the course. They assisted their tutees with classroom assignments and/or established other L2 priorities to work on. The tutor/tutee interactions provided team members with valuable information about the ESL course, which was useful in planning and teaching their assigned lesson, and it assured that they would have at least one familiar face in the ESL class they would eventually teach. Team members also wrote a 4–6-page reflection paper about their tutoring experience, in which they reflected upon what they had learned about L2 learners, L2 learning, and L2 tutoring.

During the lesson planning stage, the team had both face-to-face and virtual meetings with each other and the teacher educator as they constructed a lesson plan on counter-arguments in academic argumentative essays. They then participated in a 60-minute video recorded 'practice teach' in which they taught their lesson in the TESL methodology course. Throughout the 'practice teach' both the teacher educator and their fellow classmates regularly halted instruction in order to ask questions, provide feedback, and/or make suggestions. The feedback proved to be instrumental in assisting the team as they reconceptualize their lesson to better meet the instructional goals they had

envisioned and aligned their instructional activities with how their classmates had experienced their lesson.

Team members then reworked their lesson plan and parsed out various segments of the lesson. Sally was responsible for orienting the students to the topic of counter-arguments, Kim provided sentence-level examples of arguments and counter-arguments, noting discourse markers that signaled counter-arguments, and Janet walked the class through, paragraph by paragraph, an example argumentative essay to illustrate arguments, counter-arguments, and responding to counter-arguments. For the final 20 minutes of the lesson, team members planned to circulate among the students, helping them formulate counter-arguments for their own argumentative essays.

The team then taught their redesigned lesson to the ESL class. During the ‘actual teach’ the team made many in-flight decisions as they realized that in the activity of actual teaching they needed to alter or adjust their plans according to how the ESL students responded to and engaged in their instructional activities. The teacher educator attended and videotaped the 75-minute session but did not intervene.

Post-teaching components of the project included an audio recorded ‘stimulated recall session’ in which all three members of the team watched and discussed their videotaped lesson with the teacher educator. Team members were encouraged to stop the videotape whenever they wanted to comment on the lesson. The teacher educator also stopped the videotape to comment on the lesson, make suggestions, and/or ask questions.

Finally, after receiving digital copies of the ‘practice teach’, the ‘actual teach’, and the ‘stimulated recall session’ each team member wrote a 5–7-page reflection paper about the project, paying particular attention to what they had learned about themselves as teachers, about the activity of L2 teaching, and about this initial learning-to-teach experience.

3 *Pedagogical tools as mediational means*

Grounded in the seminal research on classroom discourse,³ which argues that how teachers and students talk and act in classrooms greatly influences what students learn, the teacher educator forged a set of pedagogical tools into a new sign system with the goal of enabling novice teachers to foster greater levels of student participation and engagement in their L2 instruction (see Appendix 1). Throughout the TESL methodology course, these pedagogical tools were operationally defined, modeled by the teacher educator, and analysed in the activity of teaching; it was expected that team members would consider them when they prepared and taught their lesson. Three of these pedagogical tools – instructional paraphrasing, orienting, and predictability – were found to be most prevalent in the data, both in terms of the focus of the mediation provided by the teacher educator and peer teachers and the extent to which they were referenced by the novice teachers themselves. Thus, they are operationally defined below and are the foci of the data analysis.

1 Instructional paraphrasing. Instructional paraphrasing is to foster active student engagement and participation, the novice teachers were encouraged to use instructional paraphrasing as a way to both acknowledge and build on what ESL students know, say,

and do. Thus, instead of responding to student contributions with an evaluative ‘right’, or ‘good’, novice teachers were encouraged to use instructional paraphrasing. This tool was operationally defined for the novice teachers as follows:

Instructional paraphrasing: Whatever students say, rephrase or paraphrase it out loud so that you:

- a) acknowledge the student’s contribution;
- b) make it comprehensible to everyone in the room;
- c) provide appropriate language input/model;
- d) relate it to what you are teaching (i.e. take students from where they are to where you want them to be);
- e) establish a pattern that any and all student contributions are welcome (i.e. lessen face-saving threats);
- f) give yourself an opportunity to ‘comprehend’ it. (TESL Course Handout #1)

While on the surface instructional paraphrasing may appear to be a variant of recasting, this pedagogical tool held much deeper meanings and broader functional uses than simply the provision of corrective feedback within this TESL methodology course. It was characterized as a way to acknowledge any and all student contributions, to make such contributions comprehensible for the entire class, while also providing an expert-speaker model. In addition, instructional paraphrasing was conceptualized as a way to relate student contributions to what was being taught and as a mechanism through which novice teachers could be sure they fully understood student contributions.

2 Orienting. The pedagogical tool of orienting originates from Gal’prin’s systemic theoretical instruction (Arievitch & Stetsenko, 2000), which argues that subject matter content must be presented to students as a meaningful interrelated system where the inherent logic or ‘inner links’ of the concept or phenomenon being taught are made evident. The goal of an orienting activity, according to Gal’prin (1989), is to enable students to systematically discriminate among different properties of the object or phenomenon under study in a meaningful and personally relevant way. The operational definition of orienting given below was presented to the novice teachers, modeled by the teacher educator, analysed in the activity of teaching, and discussed on multiple occasions throughout the TESL methodology course.

Orienting: Situate the concept, skill, or content you are teaching in such a way as to make all of its features salient and relevant to the students; help them, at the start of the lesson, relate to it in some concrete or personally relevant way. This will help them see the ‘big picture’ and relate what they already know to what you are going to teach them. (TESL Course Handout #1)

3 Predictability. Mehan (1979, p. 33) argues that ‘students need to know with whom, when, and where they can speak and act, they must have speech and behavior that are appropriate for classroom situations and they must be able to interpret implicit classroom rules.’ Thus, full participation in classroom activities requires competence in both the social and interactional aspects of classroom language. To achieve this, the novice teachers were

encouraged to make explicit the norms and expectations of how they expected their ESL students to talk and act in the classroom, with the intention of making their instruction as predictable as possible. The following operational definition of predictability was given to the novice teachers, modeled by the teacher educator, analysed in activity of teaching, and reinforced by the teacher educator throughout the TESL methodology course.

Predictability: Explicitly state, at the start of the lesson and throughout, what you expect students to say and do. Provide overt transitions between activities. If working in pairs or small groups, tell students what they will be expected to say and do with what they did in their group, and, if possible, give students opportunities to ‘practice’ before you expect them to ‘perform’ in front of others. (TESL Course Handout #1)

II Data analysis

A microgenetic analysis (Vygotsky, 1981) was employed to trace the development of a single psychological process as it unfolds over a short span of time. Wertsch (1985, p. 55) describes microgenesis as a ‘very short-term longitudinal study’ making explicit the moment-to-moment revolutionary shifts that lead to development of independent mental functioning. Data from the team’s reconceptualized micro-teaching simulation project were analysed to identify instances of the intentional insertion (explicit mediation) of the pedagogical tools (sign forms) to foster greater levels of student participation and engagement in their instruction. The data analysed included:

- a transcription of the video recorded ‘practice teach’;
- a transcription of the video recorded ‘actual teach’;
- a transcription of the audio recorded ‘stimulated recall session’; and
- the novice teachers’ final reflection papers.

In order to trace the extent to which the pedagogical tools presented, modeled, and analysed throughout the TESL methodology course moved from social to psychological, or from sign forms to sign meanings, and particular attention was paid to the quality and character of the mediation provided by the teacher educator and peer teachers. The analysis focused on the ways in which these novice teachers’ emerging understandings of these pedagogical tools were negotiated and worked out (i.e. how sign meaning develops) as well as the extent to which they attempted to use these tools (or not) to regulate their thinking and their L2 instruction.

III Findings: Tracing sign meaning development

I Instructional paraphrasing

Not surprisingly when tracing teacher learning from a sociocultural perspective, we found that the meaning and functional uses of instructional paraphrasing developed in very idiosyncratic but interesting ways. While the team received extensive mediation from the teacher educator and peer teachers about the appropriateness and instructional

value of this pedagogical tool, their developmental paths follow very different trajectories.

At the start of the ‘practice teach’ session, Sally introduced the lesson by asking for a definition of a counter-argument, to which her classmates remained silent. After an awkward pause and some coaxing from the teacher educator, they did provide her with a few examples of counter-arguments. However, since Sally was essentially reading a script that she prepared for her introductory portion of the lesson, the teacher educator, as we see in Excerpt 1, offered several suggestions to get Sally off her script, in essence implicitly modeling what instructional paraphrasing might ‘sound like’ if she were to draw the contributions of her classmates into her introductory comments.

Excerpt 1

TE: Well, one of the things, you know, you asked for, um, examples of counter-arguments and Tom gave you one, and Sean gave you another, so as you are going through these instead of just reading them maybe, or maybe just read them and say yeah ‘Sean said, ya know, that’s, that’s a good example of this particular definition right here’ or, someone gives you another uh, example yeah, ‘this third one here that Tom’s, Tom’s uh, contribution was a really good example of that’ and then repeat it and all that is doing is uh, moving you all off written text, drawing in what the students gave you so it becomes part of what you are all talking about together, and it will slow you down for sure, ‘cause, you’re not just reading, you’re having to recall what somebody said and bring that into.

Sally: Like what I wrote down earlier

TE: Yeah, OK?

Sally: OK

Janet: Is it paraphrasing or do you er ...

TE: Well, I was gonna ask that. You said their proficiency was pretty high, um, now let’s say Sean raises hand and gave his contribution and he was hard to understand, then you would wanna do that.

Janet: Yeah, sometimes pronunciation is an issue, for a few of the students.

TE: Right, right

Janet: more than others

TE: It’s a, it’s a perfectly legitimate, appropriate strategy in ESL classrooms to rephrase and repeat. I mean not just to confirm that the answer is right but so that everybody hears it, I mean sometimes students are really soft-spoken, and not everybody can hear what they have to say, so that repeating it again just makes it that everybody hears what it is, it becomes part of the conversation, somebody else can respond to it. (Practice Teach 11:35–13:01)

About mid-way through this interaction, it is interesting to note that while the mediation offered by the teacher educator is directed at Sally, it prompts Janet to seek assistance regarding what instructional paraphrasing is and whether or not it might be appropriate to use it in this specific situation. Her request for clarification suggests that Janet is conscious of this pedagogical tool and is perhaps planning to use it in her own instruction. Once Janet’s thinking is made public, her request creates a mediational space for the teacher educator to provide a hypothetical example of how and when instructional paraphrasing might be used and to reiterate its pedagogical value, further elaborating on its

sign meaning. Janet's request also indicates that while she may be aware of this pedagogical tool, she has not fully grasped its sign meaning, as she still needs to work out its meaning and functional uses within the activity of actual teaching. Such consciousness and planning, according to Vygotsky (1986), are important steps toward cognitive development, or the internalization of sign meanings.

However, we find no evidence in the 'actual teach' that Sally benefited from the mediation offered to the team. In Excerpt 2, she makes no attempt to use instructional paraphrasing when an ESL student mumbles as he attempts to answer her question.

Excerpt 2

- Sally: Today we're gonna talk about counter-arguments. Um, you guys know a little bit about this cuz you had to insert your paragraph into your essay which you already made. We'll talk a little bit about it, like how to do this, where to put them, kinda like the how to's of what this assignment is. So, um, does anybody know what a counter-argument is? Take a guess. (long pause)
- S1: How do you say again?
- Sally: Counter-argument
- Ss: (mumbling counter, counter)
- Sally: Counter ... is against, and argument is, how would you say
- S1: It's like (mumbles)
- Sally: Sorry
- S1: It's like the opposite of it, it's (mumbles)
- Sally: Yeah!
- S2: Very good
- Sally: definitely, yeah (Actual Teach 0:15–0:59)

Despite the mediation the team received during the 'practice teach' Sally made no attempt to use instructional paraphrasing, nor did she seem aware that this particular instance during the 'actual teach' was an appropriate juncture to do so. During the stimulated recall session, the teacher educator stopped the videotape at this very moment and asked Sally for her take on this opening interaction, to which Sally reported that she was expecting her ESL partner (tutee) to respond because she had explicitly taught him this. The teacher educator then explicitly inserts the pedagogical tool of instructional paraphrasing, emphasizing that this would have been an appropriate place to use it, reiterating its instructional value, thus once again emphasizing its sign meaning.

2 Stimulated recall (A)

- TE: Does that signal anything for you? Like when nobody responded or, did you ...
- Sally: I was waiting for my ESL partner to respond, cuz, um, I'd taught him this, it was before, so he could answer,
- TE: Did he say anything?
- Sally: He was the one that answered (laughter), so it was kinda like, 'um, hum, I taught you this.'
- TE: Right, so just as an instructional support mechanism, that, that would have been a great opportunity to, to um, do instructional paraphrasing, just repeat back what he said,

again, that's just like, I didn't really hear what he said, maybe the people around him did, but not, I'm sure not everyone in the classroom did, so all that does is just, um, makes it concrete, um, you get to say it again, you get to confirm it, everybody hears it, it's just a real common sort of ESL technique that would have been good there. (03:09–03:56)

It remains unclear if Sally would have been able to recognize the appropriateness or pedagogical value of instructional paraphrasing if she had been prompted to consider this pedagogical tool in a more implicit manner. Aljaafreh & Lantolf (1994) demonstrate the value of mediation that is gradual, shifting from implicit to explicit, and contingent on learner need. If the teacher educator had prompted Sally to 'talk through' her current and perhaps emerging understanding of this pedagogical tool rather than telling her when and how she could have used it, the teacher educator might have been given a window into Sally's current understanding of the meaning and functional use of this pedagogical tool, upon which she may have been able to calibrate her mediation accordingly.

In Sally's reflection paper we do find evidence that she has come to the realization that there are many interactional features of teaching that she has simply taken for granted. According to Vygotsky (1986) such awareness is a necessary and important first step in order for her to move toward self-regulation as a teacher in the future.

I realized exactly how much I take for granted what all is entailed in a lesson. For example, the schedule and pace a teacher sets in the lesson, how long each activity takes, and how to make a class predictable yet not boring, were all things that I kind of thought just happened (though I now know this is certainly not the case).

So, even though Sally was the target of the teacher educator's mediation, both before and after she taught the lesson, such mediation did not appear to have been responsive to the zone of proximal development (ZPD)⁴ in which Sally was functioning.

Kim demonstrated a very different developmental path throughout the project. In fact, we find evidence that Kim is clearly 'ripe' (Vygotsky, 1986) for the mediation provided and the sign meaning of instructional paraphrasing is not only developing, she is consciously using it to regulate her thinking. During Kim's portion of the 'practice teach' she read an example of both an argument and a counter-argument and then asked her classmates to provide a summary of the main points. When she responded to a classmate's contribution with an evaluative 'OK', as we see in Excerpt 3, the teacher educator halted instruction, reminded Kim of the pedagogical tool of instructional paraphrasing, and once again, reiterated its pedagogical value.

Excerpt 3

- Kim: OK, so can anyone, just summarize now what the two points are, for me ... anyone have an opinion? ... Anyone make an educated guess on what the argument is, and what the counter-argument is? ... Yes, Sean.
- Sean: Could the argument is that patients should be able to decide when they want to end their life and the counter-argument is that sometimes patients are sad and that will alter their opinion, and ()
- Kim: OK

- Sean: and they won't be good at making that decision
 Kim: OK, good ... now, if you
 TE: Perfect place to do a nice instructional paraphrasing cuz he just hit the central point you were trying to get him to make, so repeating that again for a whole class so everybody hears, I mean you don't have to do it now,
 Kim: OK
 TE: but when you are up and front because that, 'cause that when a student gives you the key thing, repeat it. (Practice Teach 37:54–38:50)

Not more than 5 minutes later, as we see in Excerpt 4, Kim tries out this pedagogical tool in response to a classmate's contribution. In this instance, the teacher educator names her activity as instructional phrasing and praises Kim for using it appropriately.

Excerpt 4

- Kim: Yes, Sean.
 S: Uh, I think these words, like serve as an introduction to (claps) whatever the, the change in topic is whether from the argument, counter-argument, or turn back, so it's sort of, these words indicate to the reader that this is a break from what we were just talking about, so like, using them at the beginning, as like a introduction or as a transition, is like a good recommended way to use them, even if it's not specifically at the beginning of the sentence but, it's a good place to use it.
 Kim: Exactly, so Sean's just explained perfectly that this, these words are used as signals, to the reader because, we as English speakers understand that these words, have certain connotations to them, so if you see the word however, you know that what follows it is going to be the opposite of what has just been stated, so you know that there's gonna be
 TE: Very good paraphrasing of Sean, very good
 Kim: Oh, thank you!
 TE: and got the key point out, very good
 Kim: Alright, so (Practice Teach 43:50–44:52)

Such explicit mediation on the part of the teacher educator – offered to the team but directed specifically at Kim while she was in the activity of teaching – created a mediational space where a sign form can 'ascend from the abstract to the concrete' (Bakhurst, 2007 p. 70), in that it lead Kim to re-examine her everyday understandings of her own classroom discourse through the sign meanings associated with instructional paraphrasing. During the 'actual teach', as we see in Excerpt 5, Kim uses instructional paraphrasing to both confirm and consolidate what an ESL student says, and she links her contribution to the subject matter content of the lesson.

Excerpt 5

- Kim: Ok, so does anyone want to try and summarize this point for me? Yes?
 S1: it mean that, cochlear implant is really important to him, and he really need it, and he wanna spend everything that he has to pay for that one
 K: ah uh,
 S1: he wants it

- Kim: Exactly, and um, what was your name again?
 S1: Chan
 Kim: So, Chan just said that um the cochlear, the author is saying that the cochlear implant is very important to him, and he, er, actually it's a she, um, but she has taken into account, the counter-argument, so she says that she agrees with the cultural point of view, but, from a different perspective or showing her own perspective; she is now asserting, bringing it back to the original argument, why her point is the best point, why hers is kind of more right or better to, better to believe. (Actual Teach 14:30–15:45)

For Janet, not only did she seek assistance about the pedagogical tool of instructional paraphrasing during the 'practice teach', but we find multiple instances in which she used it flexibly and fluently during the 'actual teach'. In Excerpt 6, Janet has the students read, paragraph by paragraph, an example argumentative essay on cochlear implants in the deaf community, stopping after each paragraph to identify and discuss the argument and/or counter-argument.

Excerpt 6

- Janet: So what do you guys think our, our author is arguing right now? (long pause)
 Janet: Yes?
 S1: Cochlear implant is good for, deaf people?
 Janet: OK, where did you get the idea that our author is saying that cochlear implants are good for deaf people? (pause) (S2's name)
 S2: in here the culture, toward the deaf culture?
 Janet: Sorry?
 S2: Say, it it, destroys the deaf culture, (mumbles)
 Janet: OK (scans the paper)
 S3: Last sentence
 S4: Yeah
 Janet: The last sentence is a big hit for you guys? (reads) *A cochlear implant, despite its drawbacks, gives deaf children every opportunity to succeed in the majority hearing world.* What do you feel like that sentence is saying?
 S3: um, says, that, um, (pause) this implant is good (laughs)
 Janet: Yeah! The implant is good, OK, so she's saying that it gives deaf children chance to succeed, do you guys see how she presents any arguments or counter-arguments
 S5: Yeah
 Janet: in this paper?
 S5: Yeah
 Janet: Yeah? where do you see it?
 S5: despite its drawbacks, drawbacks just means it destroys the deaf culture
 Janet: uhm
 S5: but then it gives you a chance to succeed.
 Janet: Yeah, perfect, so she says, (reads) *despite its drawbacks it gives deaf children every opportunity to succeed.* so she acknowledges the counter-argument but she brings in her argument here. (Actual Teach 25:26–26:54)

Here we see flexibility in how Janet employs instructional paraphrasing. With S1, she extends what the student says by repeating it within a question. With S2, who

mumbles a partial answer, Janet does not quite understand but simply says, ‘OK.’ Yet as she is scanning the essay, two other students, S3 and S4, identify the location, which Janet reads and then asks a follow-up question. When S3 struggles to produce a response to her query, Janet provides a confirmative ‘yeah’, and then repeats S3’s attempt, extends it by paraphrasing the text, and then expands it by returning to her original question about finding arguments and counter-arguments. With S5, Janet positively evaluates the student’s response, extends it by reading a key phrase from the text, and then links this key phrase to instances of arguments and the counter-arguments in the paragraph.

While data from the ‘actual teach’ indicate that both Kim and Janet used instructional paraphrasing in their teaching, it is during the stimulated recall session that we are able to discern how sign meaning is developing for each of them. When the teacher educator stopped the videotape to reiterate the pedagogical value of instructional paraphrasing, both Kim and Janet externalize their emerging understandings of the meanings and functional uses of this pedagogical tool.

3 Stimulated recall (B)

- TE: I can’t stress that strategy enough, for, for English language learners, I mean, some people just sort of do it, subconsciously, because you’re, you’re trying to create an engagement with whatever the person has said, but for a second language learner it is so helpful to have it repeated, it gets acknowledged, ‘Oh, she likes what I said’, it gets repeated so everybody can hear because ‘My pronunciation isn’t great’, you get to comment on it, you get to relate it to what you are talking about, it’s really a very, very helpful cognitive strategy with second language learners.
- Kim (to Janet): I don’t know, were you doing that kinds subconsciously, cuz I was like, actively, in my head, I was like, every time someone talked, OK restate it.
- Janet: I think, I think, it was a very conscious process, um, there, it was a convenient way to ask another question, but I definitely, I didn’t, really say like, ‘OK, yeah?’ and towards the end when they all were participating and we didn’t have a lot of time, and like, I did a couple of, ‘OK, what do you think?’
- TE: Yeah, it’s not appropriate all the time, when, when there’s lots of stuff coming at you, you don’t need to do it, but the, the nice thing was that you were able to take what the person said, and relate it to what you are talking about, make it, and also in the ESL classes it is sometimes hard to understand people, I can understand it, hear it, and, it really is a good strategy. It makes what you are talking about more, of a group effort, than you just up there. (28:36–30:14)

In this interaction, Kim’s admission that she was consciously making herself restate students’ contributions suggests that at this point in her development, this pedagogical tool is regulating her thinking. In other words, the pedagogical tool of instructional paraphrasing is functioning as a form of verbalization (Gal’prin, 1989) or the intentional use of scientific concepts as tools for understanding, and thus assisting in the process of internalization. And while Janet also admits that she too was ‘very conscious’ of using this tool, she extends it functional uses (i.e. a convenient way to ask another question) and recognizes when it may not be appropriate to use (i.e. when they were all

participating and we didn't have a lot of time, and like, I did a couple of, 'OK, what do you think?') in this particular context.

At the conclusion of the project, while neither Janet nor Sally mention instructional paraphrasing in their reflection papers, Kim repeatedly reiterates its pedagogical value. In addition, she recalls that as she used 'this tactic' she began to see (and feel) the positive effect it has on students, further convincing her of its pedagogical value in fostering student engagement.

By using the tactic of rephrasing, it reinforces the student and also validates their response and makes it understood to the rest of the class. I remember noticing during my teaching (which can't be seen on the video) that as I rephrased their answers, the students who had volunteered smiled and seemed to relax slightly. Every student feels slightly self-conscious before answering a question because no one wants to be wrong. The responses in the students' body language really reemphasized for me the positive impact of this simple rephrasing strategy.

As Kim appropriates this tool into the activity of teaching, she begins to see its positive impact on the ESL students' affect. Moreover, as she externalizes her emerging understanding of its meaning, she is also able to articulate its pedagogical value.

4 Orienting

Based on exchanges during the 'practice teach' and in their reflective papers, the team clearly struggled with deciding how to orient the ESL students to the concept of counter-arguments. In addition, since Sally was in charge of introducing the lesson, we have little data pertaining to sign meaning development for the pedagogical tool of orienting for Janet or Kim. However, Sally appeared, once again, to be less open to mediation regarding this pedagogical tool.

During the 'practice teach', when Sally's opening request for a definition of a counter-argument was met with silence, the teacher educator offered several concrete strategies for how she might orient the students.

Excerpt 7

Sally: I want you to say your own opinion, what you think a counter-argument is ... what you feel ... are for ah have you done this in a class, what is a counter-argument? (silence, nervous laughter) Counter and argument – you can look to the words and see what it means. What do you think? (long pause)

TE: Well, ok, so, ah, interjection here. Er, so you got nothing here, right? So you probably, that won't happen, you'll probably get something from the students cuz they've been talking about counter-arguments, but one thing you can do is put the word counter-argument up on the board and say that's one way to orient them. Another way would be to give them some kind of example and say eh does anybody else have an example of a counter-argument? Situating it a little bit as opposed to, 'What is a counter-argument?'

Janet: Ah wait do you mean you want us to start with an example of a counter-argument?

TE: Well I don't know you didn't get anything off 'can anybody tell me what a counter-argument is', so if that happens er yeah yeah that we do we can have sort of a back-up

- so counter-argument up on the board or an example that you can pull out of your pocket and say well 'I think this and someone thinks that. Can anybody else give me another example?' So that's just a strategy on the fly, a strategy that if you need it, you are ready.
- (Sally reads formal definition of a counter-argument)
- TE: Ok but can you give them an example?
- Sally: We're gonna do that later. We give the theory first and then-
- Janet: We're not sure. That's actually the number one thing that we debated about. Do we do examples? (Practice Teach 00:02:24–00:03:48)

In this exchange, it is Janet, once again, who seeks clarification regarding the teacher educator's suggestions about how to orient the students to the concept of counter-arguments. Furthermore, when Sally reads her prepared script (i.e. formal definition of a counter-argument) and appears to ignore the teacher educator's mediation, it is Janet who admits that the team struggled with how best to orient the students.

Recognizing their struggle, the teacher educator offers a hypothetical example, in Excerpt 8, 'I think we should fire [coach's name]' (the university's infamous football coach) as an example of how one might situate the concept of counter-argument. And once again, it is Janet who picks up on this example and actually models how it could be used as an orienting activity.

Excerpt 8

- TE: Again you, you may have to decide this when you actually get up there and see how they respond but if you don't get anything or there is-. () What a model does is right away it right away orients people and a concrete model that would be relevant to what they might all relate to like er, ... 'I think we should fire [coach's name], he's been here too long, he's too old' and somebody says, 'What would be a counter-argument to that?' I don't know, uh, 'He represents the school. They fired him.' You know, some kind of an example to situate it.
- Janet: We actually, it might be a dialogue about, like a classic argument, maybe have an example of, have people say like if my argument was that we should fire [coach's name] what would you guys say? Contrary to that.
- TE: There you go. There you go. Perfect. (Practice Teach 00:04:16–00:05:01)

At the beginning of the 'actual teach' Sally starts the lesson with an opening request for a definition of a counter-argument (see Excerpt 2), which is met with silence. When her direct request fails to generate student participation, she uses the teacher educator's hypothetical example (i.e. 'we should fire [coach's name] – that's your paper') only to discover that the ESL students do not know who [coach's name] is and thus are unable to come up with a counter-argument.

Excerpt 9

- Sally: So, argument – we should fire [coach's name], that's your paper. Now you're going to insert a counter-argument about why we shouldn't fire [coach's name], so let's think of why students would not want to fire [coach's name]. Just you guys as students, (Kim whispers something in Sally's ear). Does everyone know who [coach's name] is? I'm just wondering, I figured but,

- S1: No
 Janet: No (shakes head)
 Sally: No?
 S2: [coach's name], no
 (students mumble among themselves)
 Sally: You're kidding, I know you're kidding
 (students mumble among themselves)
 S3: [coach's name] library?
 Sally: Actually, well he does, um, he did fund the library, half the library, so, but he's the football coach at [university's name], he's been the football coach since 1950 as an assistant coach and 1966 as the head coach, so he's been here since my mom was here, my uncles was here, everyone in my entire family
 Janet: My grandparents (laughs)
 Sally: Yeah, grandparents (points to Janet), so he's kinda of a legend, so why do you think, any reasons why students wouldn't want him to be fired? (Actual Teach 00:01:32–00:02:27)

During the stimulated recall session, the teacher educator creates several opportunities for Sally to externalize her reasons for opening the lesson as she did. In one instance, she asks if Sally considered this opening elicitation as orienting, to which Sally indicates she felt there was no need to orient the students to the concept of counter-arguments because she believed they were fully aware of the concept and the team would provide examples of counter-arguments later in the lesson.

5 Stimulated recall (C)

- TE: So that was your orienting?
 Sally: I guess.
 TE: (laughs) Had you, what was, what was your, I mean, just tell me why, what was your hope for doing that? What was your intention for doing that?
 Sally: They had already written a paper, so they kinda knew what, that part, and they just knew they had to edit it, they already knew they had to put a paragraph in,
 TE: OK
 S: so, like, this will be kind of like what you'll be doing, but not really,
 TE: OK
 S: Cause we're gonna teach it later, kinda like, we'll do this later.
 TE: Alright, alright, so you're just trying to orient them. (01:56–02:27)

In one sense, we find evidence that Sally does, in fact, attempt to orient the ESL students to the concept of counter-arguments. However, being a novice teacher and an American undergraduate with a long family history at this institution, she clearly made certain assumptions about the ESL students without considering their sociocultural histories or lack of cultural knowledge surrounding football that is associated with the university. Sally's attempt (performance) to orient the students clearly preceded her understanding (competence) of this tool, as she failed to consider what the ESL students might need to know to make this example 'personally relevant' or to 'relate what they already know to what you are going to teach them' (TESOL Course Handout #1). Moreover, in her

exchange with the teacher educator, Sally's response to her explicit mediation (i.e. so that was your orienting?) appears to function more as an opportunity for Sally to construct a rationale for why she did what she did, rather than an opportunity to work out the sign meaning of orienting. This is not surprising given the potential face-threatening nature of the stimulated recall session (i.e. watching oneself teach, and being a novice) and the fact that her attempt to orient the students did not go as she had expected. Alternatively, if the teacher educator had provided mediation that was more responsive to the ZPD in which Sally was functioning; for example, asking Sally what other options she might have tried, or what other ways she might have oriented the students, since what she did was not working, might have created a meditational space in which Sally could have worked through her emerging understanding of the meaning and functional use of orienting.

Despite her failed attempt at orienting the ESL students, in her reflection paper, Sally does mention the need for and value of orienting students in the future.

I feel like I have a lot better of an idea about how to plan a lesson (orienting students and providing information in multiple forms especially) as well as how to learn from mistakes ... As previously stated, my explanations to the students could have been much better at times (I know that I can be unclear) and I could have tried harder to orient students in multiple ways. Nonetheless overall I feel that if nothing else this is something that I am highly aware of now and something that I can definitely work on in the future.

However, since her reflections remain very abstract, it is unclear if the sign meaning of this pedagogical tool is developing or if she is simply mimicking what the teacher educator has repeatedly emphasized as an important pedagogical tool. While Vygotsky (1978) argues for the value of imitation to the process of internalization, in other words, understanding the goal and the means through which an activity is carried out, Sally's vague reference to the 'multiple forms' and 'multiple ways she could have oriented the students' provides very little evidence of sign meaning development.

6 Predictability

Throughout the project, the team received multiple instances of explicit mediation regarding the pedagogical tool of predictability. And once again, we find variability in the extent to which sign meaning develops for each of the three teachers.

During the 'practice teach', as we see in Excerpt 10, the teacher educator is once again attempting to move Sally off her prepared script by suggesting that she consider how much engagement she wants at this point in the lesson. When a classmate (Tom) questions the interactional pattern Sally is establishing, of simply moving on if no one answers her direct questions, this opens up a mediational space for the teacher educator to emphasize how establishing a pattern for how students will be expected to talk and act can help them know how she expects them to participate.

Excerpt 10

TE: So, there's a couple of ways that you can do this ... it depends on how much interaction you wanna have during this part of the session, maybe you don't wanna have a lot of

interaction, maybe you just wanna kinda get through it, but there's a lot you've thrown at us. And talking real quick, and you know, your students might just start dozing ... and so you gotta make a judgment about how much engagement you wanna get them involved in the lesson at this point or not?

Tom: Now there's certainly some coaxing you could do, too, I guess, persistence, like it just sounds like, you might say, you ask us for an example, and you say anybody? Anybody? OK ... So we know there's a pattern and you're just gonna stop asking

TE: Right

Sally: That's true

TE: Or you keep asking (questions) and we know that when you get to the next bulleted point here I may have to say something. Once you establish a pattern, stick with that pattern and then they'll know how they're supposed to behave. If you keep switching back and forth, they won't know. (Practice Teach 29:35–30:45)

We find similar instances of explicit mediation regarding elements of the pedagogical tool of predictability throughout the project. In Excerpt 11, Janet has just asked her classmates a question about the text they have been working with ('Any last thoughts in the introduction?') when the teacher educator interjects and asks whether this is a rhetorical question or whether she is hoping to get a response from students.

Excerpt 11

TE: Or just as simple as 'do you agree, with her stance (the author's)?' And hopefully they'll say maybe they'll give you a counter-argument. Maybe, we'll see. (pause) I think when you're framing questions to your students you should have some idea in mind of what you're hoping to get and if you do, your question is gonna be more successful in getting students to participate; if you don't have a clue and you're just saying something then they're probably not gonna respond, because they're not gonna know either.

Janet: So it's targeted.

TE: Think about what, what if I'm saying that question, what am I hoping I'm gonna get from my students. (Practice Teach 55:05–55:45)

It is interesting to note the differences in how Sally and Janet respond to the teacher educator's mediation. In Excerpt 10, Sally's response, 'That's true', provides no indication that she understands the instructional value of making her instruction predictable. On the other hand, Janet's response, in Excerpt 11, 'So it's targeted', demonstrates an emerging understanding of what it means to ask questions (i.e. that they are targeted) that will help garner more student participation. Again, we see indications that the mediation provided by the teacher educator appears to be responsive to Janet's current understand of this pedagogical tool but may not be responsive to Sally's.

During the 'actual teach' both Kim and Janet are able to establish predictable patterns of how they wanted the ESL students to participate, and as a result they get increasing levels of student participation and engagement. During the stimulated recall session, the teacher educator names Kim's activity as 'establishing a pattern of how we're all gonna participate' and links this to elements of the pedagogical tool of predictability.

7 Stimulated recall (D)

- TE: what I noticed in doing each one of these, you got faster and faster participation, because now there was a pattern set, and now they knew, how they were gonna have to act, whereas the first one, you had to wait kinda long, the next one you had to wait kinda long, the next one was less, the next one was less, and then it was, 'Oh, OK', that's what I mean by making your instruction predictable, its just trying to establish a pattern so students don't say, 'Am I supposed to raise my hand now?' or 'Am I suppose to do this?' so once that pattern gets established then they are quicker and quicker, able to participate, ...
- K: It seemed like they were getting what I was saying, which obviously was the main concern. And then especially when they were picking out the phrases, I didn't even really have to wait for anything, I was just like, 'Does anyone see any of these phrases', and they were like, 'Oh, however, yeah, right there, right there', I thought that was going to be more difficult.
- TE: Well you kinda set them up for this, you had gone through the examples first, and they had seen them, and then it was like, 'OK can we find this? And oh yeah, I can see that here, I can see that there.' So you really set them up for success, so they would be able to do that. And again, I think as that pattern got established, then you got more and more, quicker, and quicker participation (21:30f-23:10)

In this exchange, the teacher educator not only explicitly inserts the pedagogical tool of predictability by naming what Kim was doing but she positively evaluates her portion of the lesson, praising her for using this tool and reiterating its value for fostering greater levels of student participation and engagement. Kim too seems to recognize the pedagogical value of making her instruction predictable, expressing surprise by the level of student participation that occurred during this portion of the lesson, something she had expected to be more difficult.

In their final reflection papers, all three teachers describe how their participation in the project heightened their awareness of how to make their teaching more interactive. Janet recalls that while the team wanted the lesson to be interactive, initially the various dimensions of making one's teaching interactive 'felt secondary' to the purpose of their lesson.

... if we agreed our lesson should be interactive, we then had to go through the process of figuring out what that meant for us as a team, and not just each of us as individuals. Also within this discussion were issues that felt secondary to the purpose of teaching counter-arguments, such as how to handle transitions, how to pose a question when we wanted discussion, how long is enough in terms of wait time, etc.

As we saw earlier, Sally admits her initial naiveté that interactive teaching 'were all things that I kind of thought just happened' although now she realizes 'this is certainly not the case'. And finally, Kim now recognizes that many of the interactive teaching strategies she saw herself using during the project are actually key to garnering greater student motivation and engagement.

I don't feel teachers need to have some elaborate scheme to motivate their students or some form of assessment to constantly check understanding. I think that if I continue to employ the strategies I found myself already using, I will be able to check for understanding and enhance student motivation with just a few words and my attitude as a teacher.

IV Conclusions

Overall this study traces how new sign forms were introduced by a teacher educator with the goal of reorganizing novice teachers' thinking and their teaching activity; in this case, to foster greater student participation and engagement. In tracing sign meaning development, the data indicate that the explicit insertion of new signs forms into the ongoing flow of activity created opportunities for the team to use these tools in the activity of teaching before they fully understood their meanings and functional uses. In fact, it was through using them, during both the 'practice teach', the 'actual teach', and the strategic mediation provided by the teacher educator and peer teachers, that appeared to create opportunities for sign meaning development.

However, the findings also highlight the importance of strategic mediation that is responsive to novice teachers' immediate need. We find repeated evidence of attempts by the teacher educator to reiterate the pedagogical value of these pedagogical tools. She not only names the novices' activity in terms of these tools, but she consistently reiterates their pedagogical value in fostering greater student participation and engagement. Yet, the findings suggest there is something cautionary about mediation that is targeted at a group in which individuals, with their own sociocultural histories and functioning within different ZPD, may be more or less 'ripe' for the mediation they receive. Poehner (2009) argues that students as a group can operate in a collective ZPD, in that they all benefit in varying ways from the mediation provided. Furthermore, he argues that as the group develops, so do the individuals in that group, although again in varying ways. In this study, while the responses of Janet and Kim to the mediation regarding these pedagogical tools and subsequent opportunities to use them in activity appear to foster the development of sign meanings, it is apparent that Sally did not benefit from the mediation that was provided. One important implication suggests that group mediation requires teacher educators to be highly sensitive to the ZPD that individual novice teachers are functioning in while also skilled at calibrating their mediation so it is maximally beneficial to both the individual and the group. On the other hand, if Sally had not been part of this team, or had not received the mediation directed at the group, she may never have attempted to use, for example, an orienting activity. And, despite its apparent failure to foster student participation, in her final reflection paper she describes orienting as something she is 'highly aware of now' and 'can definitely work on in the future'. Such findings emphasize the relevance of group mediation; that groups can and do learn from one another, but it is the quality and character of the mediation directed at the group that is critical. Within the institutional realities of SLTE programs, team teaching activities like the project described here may be a necessity if teacher educators wish to create opportunities for strategic mediation in novice teachers' initial learning-to-teach experiences. Team teaching activities may also prove beneficial for individual team members as well, since as the team develops, so do the individuals within that team, although again in varying ways.

The findings of this study also remind us of the idiosyncratic and variable nature of individual cognitive development. As evidenced in their interactions throughout the project, each of the three novice teachers began the project with different levels of awareness and/or understandings of these pedagogical tools and, not surprisingly, they were

found to follow very different developmental trajectories. While we are unable to index their individual points of departure, we can make certain assumptions about the ZPD they were functioning in based on their interactions with the teacher educator and peer teachers. Sally's apparent unresponsiveness to the teacher educator's mediation may be, in part, the result of not being 'ripe' for the mediation given, but it may also be linked to the face-threatening nature of an initial teaching experience and the expectation to perform well, even as a novice. Such resistance is common among novice teachers as they struggle to enact a conceptualization of teaching espoused in their teacher education program that is often substantively different from how they were socialized throughout their own educational histories (Zembylas, 2003). It may also have been the case that Sally lacked a conceptual understanding of the subject matter content she was attempting to teach, namely counter-arguments in academic argumentative essays. This may have been the reason for her overreliance on her prepared script (i.e. formal definition of counter-arguments) and her inability to anticipate that the ESL students might not be able to relate to the content of her attempt to orient them to the concept of counter-arguments. While the teacher educator's mediation may have failed to create opportunities that supported Sally's development, at the same time, no amount of mediation will be sufficient if novice teachers, such as Sally, do not have a deep conceptual understanding of the content of instruction.

While teacher education programs have a long history of presenting novice teachers with new sign forms (i.e. the theory/practice divide, see Clarke, 1996) questions remain as to what sort of experiences they provide for novice teachers to ensure that sign meanings develop. This study examines the naturally occurring interactions that took place during a series of activities designed to support novice teachers during an initial learning-to-teach experience. As such, it examines the concrete goal-directed activities of teacher education and highlights, for teacher educators, the importance of mediation that is not only responsive to individual need but also provided as novice teachers participate in the activity of actual teaching. It also points to the value of creating initial learning-to-teach experiences in which novice teachers can try out new sign forms in the activity of teaching before they fully understand their meanings and functional uses, receive mediation that supports sign meaning development, and have multiple opportunities to externalize their emerging understanding of new sign meanings in the context of actual teaching.

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Notes

1. This article is an expanded version of a paper given at the 2011 Seventh International Conference on Language Teacher Education, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
2. Janet, Kim, and Sally are pseudonyms. All three teachers volunteered to participate in this study.

3. See Baker, 1982; Barns, 1976; Cazden, 1988; Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1982; Gutierrez, 1995; Hall & Verplaetse, 2000; Johnson, 1995; Mehan, 1979; Wilkinson, 1982.
4. A metaphoric space where individual cognition originates in the social collective mind and emerges in and through engagement in social activity; an arena of potentiality, where one can see what an individual might be able to do with assistance as well as his/her emerging capabilities (see Lantolf, 2000).

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Appendix I

Pedagogical tools

Below is a list of pedagogical tools that can help teachers foster greater levels of student engagement and participation. They are not specific to any particular topic or language skill but relevant to all L2 instruction. Read each concept carefully and consider them as you prepare your lesson plans.

Orienting. Situate the concept, skill, or content you are teaching in such a way as to make all of its features salient and relevant to the students; help them, at the start of the lesson, relate to it in some concrete or personally relevant way. This will help them see the ‘big picture’ and relate what they already know to what you are going to teach them.

Predictability. Explicitly state, at the start of the lesson and throughout, what you expect students to say and do. Provide overt transitions between activities. If working in pairs or small groups, tell students what they will be expected to say and do with what they did in their group, and, if possible, give students opportunities to ‘practice’ before you expect them to ‘perform’ in front of others.

Instructional paraphrasing. Whatever students say, rephrase or paraphrase it out loud so that you:

- a) acknowledge the student’s contribution;
- b) make it comprehensible to everyone;
- c) provide appropriate language input/model;
- d) relate it to what you are teaching (i.e. take students from where they are to where you want them to be);
- e) establish a pattern that any and all student contributions are welcome (i.e. lessen face-saving threats);
- f) give yourself an opportunity to ‘comprehend’ it.

Engage participation. Don't assume students will know how you want them to participate. Arrange your activities so that students have opportunities to participate in different ways (individually, round-robin, pairs, small groups, large groups) and be explicit (meta-talk) about how you want them to participate.

Relevance. Tell students exactly why you are doing what you are doing, why you are asking them to do what they are doing, and what you expect them to know and be able to do by the end of the lesson.

Activity building. Sequence activities in such a way that they build on one another and lead to some sort of final outcome or 'product' that is a demonstration of what they have learned and are now able to do.

Teach off your students, not at them.