

Bridging the Gap Between Theoretical Socio-Cognitive Theory and Practical Second Language Instruction

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ABSTRACT

Post method pedagogies in second language acquisition (SLA) literature base have gained popularity, challenging the traditional conception of the field as a pure cognitive science. These new theories often highlight the social nature of language and its acquisition- begging for there to be more attention to students' learning environment and quality of interactions. One model that has emerged in the past two decades is socio-cognitive theory (SCT), which emphasizes the conversational alignment of language learners but also learners' alignment to their social environment. While there has been substantial literature upholding SCT and its rationalizations, there is an outstanding gap between its theoretical framework and practical enactment. Thus, this literature review aims to conceptualize certain inclusive English as a Second Language (ESL) practices under a socio-cognitive framework by synthesizing both SCT and ESL literature. It argues that the ESL practices of restorative practices (RP), social emotional learning (SEL), culturally responsive education, and situated learning all fit under a socio-cognitive model of SLA. Through this application of SCT to practical ESL instruction, we may arrive at a theoretical understanding of why certain practices triumph over others. The goal is that by bridging the gap between theory and practice, the practices covered may thus be accentuated as especially efficacious in ESL and be paid more attention in matters of instruction and policy.

Introduction

Cognition and one's social environment have been historically separated in the study of second language acquisition (SLA), which can reasonably be called "a branch of cognitive science" (Doughty & Long, 2003, p.4). The emphasis on cognition in SLA literature can be explained in part by its precursors of structuralism (linguistics) and behaviorism (psychology), which do not place importance on emotions in language learning or teaching (Swain, 2013, p. 197). Problems with behaviorism's overreliance on observable behavior eventually accumulated in the 1950s, leading to a "cognitive revolution" heavily influenced by American linguist Noam Chomsky's generative linguistics which highlighted internal computational processes (Marino & Gervain, 2019, pp. 371-372). In the field of second language-acquisition (SLA), Chomsky's unflinching prioritizations of internal mental processes over environment factors, knowledge over language in use, syntax over semantics (meaning), and innatism over learning through experience have led the way. Cognitive SLA theorists like Chomsky operate abstractly, assuming that knowledge is solitarily, and can be transferred across contexts (Boden, 2008). This worldview entails an alienation between mind and world: the learner is inputted language rules regardless of their surrounding environment. Conversely, socially oriented SLA theorists emphasize situatedness, and what insights can be derived from embodiment, mutuality, and contextuality. For example, social lenses account for the way humans alter their utterances mid-stream in response to their recipient's vocalizations and gestures, or lack thereof, while cognitive approaches overlook this fact (Goodwin, 1981, p. 66). This

is evidence that humans depend on interaction skills and social cues in order to conceptualize language and participate in natural human discussion.

In the turn of the 21st century, more researchers challenged the mainstream cognitivist approach towards SLA by diversifying their areas of inquiry, “starting with linguistics, psychology, sociology, and anthropology” (Matsuoka & Evans, 2004, p.3). Atkinson’s (2002) proposal of the term ‘socio-cognitive’ propounded the hybridity of the social and cognitive: the outside and inside worlds. His belief is that humans—like other ecological organisms—are always dynamically adapting to their environment. Cognition is therefore closely aligned with its environment in an integrative “mind-body-world” relationship, where the world denotes one’s learning environment and also other actors within it. Phenomena in daily life are evidence of the social aspects of language. An example Atkinson (2002, p. 527) gives is how the phrase *I hate you* derives its whole meaning from markers of how it should be interpreted, such as intonation and emphasis. Context can also be a standalone factor in gauging the intent of an utterance e.g. if *I hate you* is followed by a heartfelt embrace. Another core pillar of Atkinson’s SCT is that alignment—the ability for moment-by-moment coordinated interaction between speakers—is the basis of language. Therefore, one ought to learn language through flexible adaptation to one’s environment, often through contextualized interaction (Atkinson et al., 2007, p. 171). That is why Atkinson ultimately believes that ‘language is a social- a social practice, a social accomplishment, a social tool’ and there ought to be taught as such. Atkinson’s SCT draws heavily upon Russian psychologist Leon Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory, which claims that language is first a social act (interpsychological plane) and only afterwards is internalized as a cognitive practice (intrapsychological plane) through mediation (e.g. mediation through technology, dialogue with others) (Antón & Dicamilla, 1999, p. 233). What is most important to remember is that SCT places one’s social environment at the center of SLA, and even treats language as a social tool itself.

Gap in the Literature

The gap in SLA literature this paper seeks to address is highlighted in Barrot’s (2013, p. 535) exploratory-interpretative data analysis of pertinent literature in top journals in the field of applied linguistics and English as a Second Language (ESL) pedagogy from recent decades. Barrot states in his conclusion, “the findings revealed that the two macro issues in contemporary ESL pedagogy were the divergence between practitioners and theorizers and the lack of emphasis on pragmatic and sociocultural components of ESL pedagogy.” While there has been substantial theoretical investigation in SLA into post method pedagogies like SCT—away from the traditional cognitivist method—these frameworks are rarely synthesized with real world instruction and policy implementation.

Definition of Terms

This paper deals with the field of second language acquisition (SLA), which is a general term to describe the process of learning and acquiring a second language once one’s native language is established (although it is also used to refer to additional language acquisition in general, as ELs may learn English as a third, fourth, etc. language). The abbreviation this paper will use to describe SLA taught in kindergarten to 12th grade school is English as a Second Language (ESL), which refers to the teaching of English to people whose first language is not English and who live in a nation where English is the primary language spoken (Nordquist, 2019, para. 1). The phrase English Learners (EL) will be used to refer to students of ESL. As of 2019, 5.1 million students in the United States were ELs, comprising 10.4 percent of the nation’s public-school students (“English Learners,” 2022, para. 1). L1 refers to one’s first acquired language while L2 is someone’s second language.

It should be noted that ESL standards and curriculum vary across nations and states. In the United States, programs models include the pull-out model, where students learn in a mainstream classroom but are pulled out to receive individualized English instruction (“What are,” n.d., para. 1); the inclusion or “pull-in” model where ESL specialists assist ELs in mainstream classes to accommodate language needs (para. 2); and a dedicated ESL class

period where students learn English (“Program Models,” 1993, para. 5). Due to this sheer diversity of ESL curriculum and organization, this paper will not focus on any one model of instruction, but rather review general practices and policies for ESL. Lastly, an important distinction should be made between ESL and bilingual program models, where students’ first language plays a more substantial role in classroom instruction (para. 7).

Goal of Research

Barrot’s finding and the general lack of research applying the socio-cognitive approach to ESL pedagogy inaugurates the purpose of this research: to synthesize SCT with in-classroom teaching methods and education policy. Research into educational psychology and social justice in ESL has produced a variety of teaching practices that have gained traction in recent years, which show great regard for student background and healthy learning experiences. For example, restorative practices (RP) are a centerpiece of criminal justice advocacy and have been upheld as a solution to the grievous school-to-prison pipeline and zero-tolerance policies of suspension and expulsion that fuel it (Russell, 2013). This paper thus aims to apply SCT to practices like these to show their agreement and help explain why certain inclusive methods are so successful among students in ESL. While Barrot’s primary criticism is English Language Teaching (ELT) materials, SCT can also be applied on an even broader scale. Conflict-resolution, emotional support, and content-area instruction are all examples of practices that embody the socio-cognitive ideals of classroom and peer alignment. Thus, this paper aims to consolidate teaching methods and policies of RP, social emotional learning (SEL), situated learning, and culturally responsive education under one theoretical framework of SCT. Through the synthesis of technical/theoretical research and practical knowledge, we may arrive at a holistic explanation for why inclusive methods are successful and why they should be given more attention in discussions about ESL.

Method

In order to merge real world ESL teaching practices with SCT, a review of both ESL and socio-cognitive literature will be conducted in order to explain each other and show agreement.

Literature Review

Restorative Practices

A common thread in social-cognitive approaches to EL is contextualized learning and learning through interaction. Contrary to the traditional view of EL, the socio-cognitive approach treats language as less of an end to itself, but rather a means of exploring the world around oneself, and of producing new ideas and associations (Jacoby & Ochs, 1995, p. 172). One way of achieving this construction of reality through language while strengthening students’ relationship with their classroom ecosystem and bolstering their English language acquisition is RP. Ted Wachtel, founder of the International Institute for Restorative Practices defines RP as “a social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making” (2016, p. 1). Herrera and McNair (2020) explain that RP includes active dialogues, community-building circles, and interpersonal connections, which educate students on how to deal with human emotions and conflicts (p. 2).

RP foregrounds human’s most instinctive interactional capabilities and treats them as valuable assets in conflict resolution and conquering ESL classroom alienation. All animals conduct social interaction, but not nearly as frequently or as expertly as humans. Instead of resorting to punitive measures that label students as threats and breed seclusion, RP play on our cognitively predisposition to language, or what Levinson (2006) calls human’s ‘interaction engine,’ referring to abilities like *theory of mind*—the power to read intention and others’ understanding of your own—and *interactive skills*—responding to gaze and bodily orientation (p. 87). This relationship can also be flipped, as RP

programs in turn bolster these fundamental interactional and collaborative skills that are necessary to navigate language and engage in fluid English conversation. Contrary to the robot interaction view of language, SCT recognizes and highlights communication's cooperative character. Instead of talking *at* each other in a non-human-like form, interlocutors are expected to talk *with* each other. Atkinson (2013) compares this to two players rallying in a ping pong game, in which they align their activities attentively and continuously for both their gain (p. 2). RP fulfills this distinction by promoting collaborative forms of interaction such as dialogue, storytelling, and active listening (Sandel, Yusem, & Kong-Wick, 2013). Through these activities, students improve their English comprehension through repetition and rephrasing in response to both implicit and explicit signs of confusion, in which they negotiate meaning and align their intentions (Pica, 1994, pg. 61). Thus, as ELs engage in this dialogue, they learn to express and construe meaning from other people's utterances through English in a situated setting that promotes natural conversation. Negotiated meaning is displayed in an example given of restorative justice, a subset of RP: "restorative justice usually involves direct communication, often with a facilitator, of victims and offenders... to provide a setting for acknowledgment of fault by the offender, restitution of some sort to the victim, including both affective apologies and material exchanges or payments, and often new mutual understandings, forgiveness, and agreed-to new undertakings for improved behaviors" (Menkel-Meadow, 2007, p. 2). This collaborative environment prevalent in RP can be described as a 'community of practice' in the sociolinguistic lexicon. It is defined as (1) mutual engagement, (2) joint enterprise, and (3) group repertoire. RP achieves this by imbuing ELs with the vocabulary to express one's feelings and needs, the ability to listen to peers expressing their own situation, and skills to form new relationships. According to Hopkins (2011), students are taught to look beyond themselves and interact and empathize with others holding different opinions, beliefs, and personalities, so that they come out more able to converse productively and more capable of forming friendly relationships (p. 5). Throughout students' time together, they develop a pool of resources for negotiated meaning, while strengthening their comprehension and learning to use language in a social setting. Indeed, learning is an ongoing process of adoption, whereby one flexibly adapts to their environment by negotiating it. That is why Atkinson (2007) defines learning as "trajectories of ecological experience and repertoires of participation, gained in the process of adaptive dynamics" (p. 172). RP honors the nature of language, that is, dynamically adaptive and swift to effect social action, rather than teaching top-down techniques that favor decontextualized learning. Through ELs time in RP, they engage in real-time language use where grammar is leveraged on the fly for situation-specific use. Rather than learning sentences, students learn language in use as their behaviors adapt to increasingly complex social surroundings, and ultimately learn to establish healthy relationships with their peers.

Another way that RP aligns with SCT is by reinforcing support systems within ELs' educational spaces and creating a nourishing environment conducive to adaptation. For students to be meaningfully embedded into their learning environments, ESL instructors ought to pay special attention to students' positionality between them and their learning environment. Bateson (1972) explains that the mind is built into a large ecosystem (pp. 465–466). Instead of extracting input from their surroundings, SCT asserts that learners are the ones input into a rich contextual environment (Atkinson, 2018, p. 472). If ELs perceive themselves as in opposition to their peers, teachers, and program, they are less likely to welcome input from their ecosystem. RP aims to neutralize any antagonisms that ELs form with their school environment, so that students can welcome their enrichment. Building strong relationship between students and school is of utmost importance to ELs, many of whom are marginalized individuals and victims of racial and cultural discrimination (Kaplan et al, 2015, pp. 83). Morrison and Vaandering (2012) stress the importance of humanizing instruction for ELs that challenges traditional systems of oppression, which RP works towards by ensuring that everyone is treated with respect and has their rights and opportunities protected (p. 144). RP also avoids the issue of subtraction: instead of offering extra support, exclusionary disciplinary measures subtract resources—such as scaffolded instruction for correct learning strategies—from ELs. ELs suffer greatly from lost support: Burke (2015) found that suspension and expulsion rates remained uniform among ELs and non-ELs in elementary school, yet were radically transformed by middle school, where 11% of non-ELs were suspended, compared to 18% of ELs (p. 5). Thus, it is all the more important to implement RP in ESL programs in place of punitively taking students out of school. The effects of a supportive, caring classroom environment should not be underestimated. Corona's (2020) case study of a

South Californian school found that restorative practices even drove ELs who left the school to return, because the ELs found a greater sense of belonging there versus at schools that did not place weight on relationship-building (p. 81). In addition, a case study of an inner-city school in Houston, Texas shows that the students wish to be *cared for* prior to *caring about* school (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 21). SLA relies on student's immersion in classroom activities and their social and physical surroundings, whereas a lack of connectedness reduces students to the plane of objects, preventing them from mastering their social environment.

Language is an exceptional advantage that humans hold over other species and offers an edge in survival that ESL programs ought to apply to discipline as much as anywhere else. RP allows ELs to exercise language in practice, which is central to negotiating relationships with others, projecting one's identity into the world, and ultimately fostering a friendly environment that is conducive to learning. This is significant because SLA is fundamentally related to the personal relationships it involves, its role in identity construction, and how it is enacted (Jacoby & Ochs, 1995, pp. 172–173). Through RP, teachers allow ELs to practice language meaningfully and for the benefit of themselves and their peers. ELs are emboldened in matters of language and become confident in projecting their diverse identities into the world through English. Language is ultimately a social tool, so it only makes sense that ELs learn language from eminently rich, stimulating social activities and conditions.

Social Emotional Learning

The influence of emotion on cognition in the classroom is a relationship that has minimally been explored in SLA literature. Schutz and Pekrun (2007) state that, "In spite of the emotional nature of classrooms, inquiry on emotions in educational contexts, outside of a few notable exceptions ... has been slow to emerge" (p. 3). This information is especially revealing because ELs are at a higher risk for negative social-emotional conditions due to the unique circumstance many experiences, such as migration, family separation, poverty, fleeing war, and cultural disconnect. Stress from limited English proficiency (Kaplan et al, 2015, pp. 83-87) and the second-language acquisition process itself may contribute to social and emotional difficulties, such as loneliness, inattention, higher anxiety, and off-task behavior (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005, p. 82). Still, English Learners are disproportionately under-diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders, as they are approximately 78% less likely to be identified as EBD than native English-speaking students (Gage et al., 2013, p. 132).

A core belief in SCT is that cognitive development is embodied, meaning that humans think *with* their ambient environment and carry adaptive human intelligence. As ecological organisms, they depend on continuously and sensitively adapting to their environment to survive. It is therefore logical that the emotions one's social surroundings suffused within them are also influential in one's mental processes. In attempting to prove the interrelatedness of emotion and cognition in SLA, Swain (2011) studies a snippet of dialogue between two young learners in a French immersion program, Sophie and Rachel. As the students attempt to reconstruct the phrase *de nouveaux problemes* 'some new problems' they heard in a dictogloss. After initial frustration (which Swain describes as an ideal teaching moment), excitement, exhilaration, and finally, satisfaction, ensue. Swain uses this example to show how, "Emotions are socially constructed in dialogue, and those emotions mediate learning outcomes" (pp. 198-203). Emotional motivations and reactions to learning are evidence that emotion is a significant and all-encompassing factor in ESL classrooms that ultimately mediates learning outcomes. Social conditions and student emotional orientation to their surrounding classroom environment therefore ought to be a greater consideration in SLA research. According to Vygotsky (1978), the social is what is responsible for higher mental processes (p. 24). It is this belief that language ought to be learned by virtue of the social world that makes SCT such a close relative to neo-Vygotskian sociocultural theory. Instead of receiving decontextualized inputs like a computer, students rely on their environment to learn. Since emotions are interpersonal and social events, and affected by the social climate, they ought to be paid attention in order to facilitate holistic English learning within the classroom.

The implications of emotion on cognition and their inseparability are highly relevant to teachers of ESL. Vygotsky argues that SLA studies ought to take "into account the whole aggregate of social factors of the child's

intellectual development.” This is to say that ELs heavily rely on having robust classroom relations through social emotional instruction. According to Parkinson (1996), infants’ first sense of pride and shame depend on them being treated by others with pride or shame (p. 680). People only later apply these concepts to themselves—this shows humans learn emotions from their sociocultural world, and these emotions become psychological tools which mediate their behavior. Therefore, Swain suggests that “As teachers we need to reflect on what is mediating our own emotional responses to students, and what is mediating students’ responses to us, and to the activities we give them.” Ultimately, it is in teachers’ best interest to listen to students and listen to learners’ struggles to support them in achieving their goals. Negative emotions associated with one’s overall education reduces their self-efficacy, or their confidence in their ability to achieve a given level of success on a specific task. Pajares (1996) says that this concept of self-efficacy is important to understanding academic motivation and achievement, as it is correlated with greater persistence and more effective learning strategies (p. 544). Another way to understand this is through Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, a centerpiece of educational psychology, which asserts that for humans to attain self-actualization and excel above what one can gain from sitting in on a class, they must have self-worth (Benson & Dundis, 2003, 316-317). Self-efficacy is influential in SCT because of its ability to be affected by environmental factors. Positive and uplifting feedback, for example, allows ELs to cope with diverse situations and attempt tasks multiple times rather than immediately giving up after failure (Schunk & Usher, 2012, p. 21). What more is that will to communicate (WTC) dynamically changes as students come into contact with factors of the classroom environment (teacher, classmates, lessons, and activities) that control their psychological conditions (Cao, 2014, p. 792). Therefore, to encourage participation and EL alignment with their classroom environment, it’s important that teachers address students’ emotional state first. Through learning about EL’s affective reactions, instructors can mold their curriculum and expectation to be more accommodative. Karlin’s (2016) interviews of ELs regarding teacher power and student empowerment showed that overly strict ESL instruction such as enforcing unrealistic expectations and rigidity, on the contrary, creates doom about bad grades, failure, and being unintelligent (p. 5). If instructors treat emotion and cognition as separate entities, they lose the potential to understand what teaching strategies and activities students are most receptive to. By showing emotional intelligence and fostering high self-efficacy within students through encouragement, ESL instructors can help ELs overcome cognitive challenges in SLA.

Embracing Student Background

Another component of embracing student background is culturally responsive education. Language ought to be integrated with one’s socio-cognitive context, because its core purpose is to perform actions. ESL and language learning in general is therefore pervious to social and political circumstances and is “guided by larger and local contextual features with which the individual interacts, transacts, and internalizes” (Meskill & Rangelova, 2000, p. 1). Contrary to this design, many ELT materials fail to adequately cover the sociocultural and pragmatic aspects of EL (McDonough, Masuhara, & Shaw, 2013, pp. 50-62). When they do, Huang and Liou (2007) point out how they can be poorly localized to the culture of learners and may misrepresent the world in which EL learners live (p. 67). This focus on western life and lack of cultural responsiveness can be harmful to contextualized learning and SLA in general. Examples of culturally unresponsive education are abundant throughout Spitzman and Balconi’s (2019) document analysis of 50 lesson plans in English as a second language (ESL) teachers developed. In one lesson plan, a teacher gave an example of a fact sentence that wrongly assumed that temperatures were cold in the winter around the world. Here, the teacher missed an opportunity to ask students what the weather in winter is like in their native countries, as four of the 20 students were from Cape Verde.

Even though learning is consequential, ESL should still be mediated through familiar cultural concepts to ELs to give students support. Atkinson (2011) uses the extreme example of teaching toddlers to swim: although one could begin by tossing the child into water to assess the situation for themselves and find a way out (while being able to be scooped up quickly), it is likely that organized, scaffolded swimming lessons would be more effective (p. 151). Culturally unresponsive education makes use of an influential socio-cognitive tool that facilitates a supportive learning

environment: common ground. This means that communication proceeds smoothly if the hearer can recognize a speaker's intentions through pragmatic inferences (Kecskes & Zhang, 1996, p. 335). Moreover, to understand the structure of discourse and make explicit mental representations, one must consider factors such as information, beliefs, and sociocultural knowledge of participants (van Dijk, 2016, p. 5). Therefore, the more teacher and students' knowledge interfaces, the better they can interact socially. This means that ESL teachers ought to be cognizant of students' repertoire of knowledge and experience and that ELs ought to at least be acquainted with the concepts their instructors raise in class. This way, ELs can have an embodied "feel" for their instruction and engage in the real-time behavioral synchrony with other's actions and intentions, which is Atkinson's (2010) ideal learning situation (pp. 5-13). Meanwhile, instructors' egocentrism and expectation of native-speaker culture is rooted in interlocutors' habit of relying more on their own understanding than on mutual understanding. Keysar and Henley show through conversation analysis that speakers tend to overestimate the clarity and success of their utterances due to poor judgment of what others know (2002). It is therefore incumbent that ESL instructors recognize and correct such biases to ensure a more inclusive and relatable educational experience for ELs. Through providing culturally responsive education, educators collaboratively extract and construct meaning with students, ultimately supporting what Vygotsky dubbed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): the area between a student's unaccompanied performance and accompanied performance (potential developmental level) (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991, p. 30). Successful ZPD instruction means that teachers host dialogue with students and draw upon students' existing knowledge to reach students' potential level of English comprehension. A strategy that Renshaw (2004) suggests is mixing instruction with conversation. So, during a lesson, a teacher might ask the class test questions in combination with real conversational questions, asking about students' background relating to the discussed material. By doing this, a teacher scaffolds the conversation, meaning they provide structure or prompts to the learning environment that are gradually withdrawn (Khatib & Shakori, 2013, p. 1592). Renshaw's suggestion suggests the supportive potential that providing culturally responsive education has for ELs. By providing inclusive education, ESL instructors are able to take advantage of human socio-cognitive intuitions and a supportive environment that ultimately enhances ELs' language skills.

Another topic regarding student background in ESL is primary language instruction. Scholars on second language acquisition commonly consider if and how EL teachers should incorporate primary language instruction, and if it is beneficial to students. Chesterfield et al.'s qualitative study analyzing the interactional patterns of eleven Spanish-preferring preschool children concluded that Spanish-speaking ELs' language choices were positively correlated with teachers' dominant language of instruction (1984). Although these studies indicate a correlation between English instruction and student usage of English, they do not negate primary language instruction's utility in EL classrooms. Although it is established that learning is adaptive—it inevitably happens as humans come to survive in complex environments—Atkinson (2010) warns that immediately being thrown into unfamiliar environments is risky (p. 13). In ESL classrooms, the use of L1 provides students with scaffolded help in the ZPD by enabling them to assemble a shared perspective of an activity (Wood, Burner, & Ross, 1976, p. 98-99). This is also called intersubjectivity, when interlocutors are mutually aware of their situation definitions, whether that be objects, events, or goals (Wertsch, 1985, pp. 161-172). This concept was displayed in Antón & Dicamilla's (1999) study of audio recordings of five groups of students completing a L2 writing task, where students used their L1 to define elements of a task and to externalize their inner speech in order to regulate their own thoughts. Language is intrinsically bound to thought, mediating it semiotically within and between individuals. Therefore, to entirely prohibit L1 in the EL classroom and ignore its presence is to remove a powerful tool for learning.

Teachers of ESL ought to take advantage of mediatory tools and humans' innate predispositions for interaction in order to facilitate a smoother, more successful SLA environment for their students. By allowing ELs to create associations between their class materials and their past experiences and background, teachers allow students to align better with their language environment, increasing their potential to adapt and comprehend their surroundings.

Situated Learning

While there are many models of ESL in America, one that has been of particular research interest is the pull-out system. Haynes (2016), a writer under the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages International Association, defines pull-out programs as when, “the English language teacher pulls students out of the general education classroom to work in small group settings in another room” (para. 1). While pull-out programs may appear as an attractive model for raising EL language competency through targeted, focused instruction, they disrupt student’s natural learning process. The typical alternative to pull-out programs is the push-in method, which has English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers co-teach with content area teachers for combined language and content instruction. The time ELs spend in the push-in program model, also sometimes referred to as the inclusive model (Lee & Hawkins, 2015, p. 52), depends on their specific needs, English proficiency, and teacher schedule openings (Billak, 2015, para. 3). The pull-out model of learning is consistent with the ‘mind as machine’ conception. Rather than embedding students in a L2 environment, the pull-out method favors disembodied cognition that focuses exclusively and intensively on English language skills. Its premise can be described as cognitivist as it treats language as foremost a process of logical processing of abstract symbols (e.g. Noë, 2009). Proponents of the pull-out program laud it for its specialized attention to ELs. According to Honigsfeld (2009), ELs benefit from more focused attention and unique perspectives of the mainstream curriculum that ESL specialists offer (p. 169). Some members of the ESL community believe that the pull-out model has successfully aligned with these ideals and wrought positive change to ELs. All teacher participants in Thompson’s (2019) case interviews of an unspecified school district agreed with a perceived increase in EL performance through pull-out instruction led by a certified English language teacher (p. 94). This is supported by quantitative research indicating a positive correlation between schools using pull-out programs for ESL and higher EL-API scores (Williams et al., 2005, p. 20). While there is both qualitative and quantitative evidence that pull-out programs increase student literacy, a long-term national study indicates that inclusive methods result in higher EL academic achievement than pull-out programs, which are among the least effective EL services (Thomas & Collier, 2002). This shows that while the pull-out model is a method of improving one’s English, situated forms of learning are more efficacious.

A belief that underlies SCT is that learning and teaching are foremost conscious and deliberate activities. While learning occurs on all levels of cognizance and intentionality, it should be emphasized that learning is as inevitable to organisms as eating and sleeping. Clark (1997, as cited in Atkinson, 2013) uses an analogy to support the socio-cognitive approach: Humans are “good at frisbee, bad at logic.” Here, ‘logic,’ denotes the logical problem solving discussed by cognitivists, and ‘frisbee’ denotes complex pattern finding abilities which were of primordial necessity in tasks such as hunting. Language capability similarly improves during the day day-to-day and is fundamentally rooted in human sociality. In essence, all-language is language in use. The pull-out model, on the other hand, favors the conveyance of decontextualized knowledge between individuals over learning through external forces from one’s unique social and physical environment. Moreover, pull-out programs have been criticized for the erosion of classroom cohesion and fragmented education. Hopkins, Lowenhaupt, and Sweet (2015) found that ESL teachers and students in a midwestern district felt disjointed and confused by constant interruptions to the school day, necessitated by the pull-out program (pp. 420-422). This is supported by a case study on urban Green Tree Elementary school in the Midwest, which revealed that what ELs learned while being pulled out did not relate at all to the general classroom curriculum. Rather, these sessions focused on English comprehension and expanding students’ vocabulary (Yin, 2007). This inconsistency and stoppage in an EL’s school day is detrimental to achieving the socio-cognitive condition of alignment, meaning the dynamic integration of someone to their mind-body-world environment. Atkinson (2007) writes that this permanent process of adaptivity is necessary for an individual to survive and flourish (p. 171). Therefore, to promote a stratified form of education and extract ELs from their classroom ecosystem through the day is to hinder students’ natural learning process. By taking ELs out of their social classroom environment and away from their peers, pull-out models strip students of key socio-cognitives tools of social interaction and contextualized learning, while creating disjointedness.

Learning English alongside texts of interest to students and/or content-area instruction is the best way of exposing them to language in use. Research shows that ELs are embedded in meaningful contexts and have many opportunities for the repetition and use of English vocabulary words (Goldenberg, 2008, p. 17). This is opposed to learning words from single sentences and relying on dictionary definitions—methods isolated literacy instruction may promote. An example of this ideology of embeddedness in practice is New York and California’s state standards for 3rd grade science: while the content objective is to distinguish between and give examples of the three states of matter, the language objective is to orally describe the characteristics of each state to a partner (Himmel, 2012). By creating such contextualized SLA instruction for ELs and giving them opportunities for language in use, students’ reading comprehension and English will be enhanced. According to Lave (1993), “learning is ubiquitous in ongoing activity, though often unrecognized as such” (p. 5). This theoretical starting point for SCT is followed by a second argument: teaching is also a natural activity. Human-constructed structures are far too complex for people to adapt to solely through teaching and cultural transmission. Instead, humans have evolved a ‘pedagogical instinct’ and find teachers opportunistically around us in daily life (Atkinson, 2018, p. 489). In one example, Smotrova (2017) found that a university ESL teacher she studied did not only use intentional pedagogical gestures, but unplanned socio-cognitive tools for alignment, such as rhythmic body movement, interactional synchrony, and smiling. By forming moment-by-moment social relations during a conversation, interlocutors reach interactive alignment. This shared intentionality between speakers and adaptation. Contrary to cognitivist approaches which deem SLA a largely invisible process (Doughty, 2003, as cited in Atkinson, 2013), SCT posits that the tools and signs humans use to adjust and align their behavior during an interaction can be publicly identified. This ability for humans to synchronize their behavior and read each other’s intentions helps explain why situated learning is so successful—it draws upon humans’ most natural social instincts to teach language. An example of one of these socio-cognitive tools is gaze following—where listeners intuitively follow the speaker’s gaze when the latter is discussing an unknown topic to fill in their gaps in knowledge—as a tool to teach vocabulary in SLA (Yu, Ballard, & Aslin, 2005). As with many other socio-cognitive tools, gaze-following is tendency humans naturally adapt to and can be observed during infancy (Baldwin et al., 1996, pp. 3149-3152). Other actions like body positioning also offer ELs a better understanding of the current situation and can be used as an instantaneous mode of feedback. In a conversation analytic study conducted by Seo and Koshik (2010, p. 2219), certain head actions used by ESL tutors to show a momentary lack of comprehension and invite the speaker to repair their erroneous utterances, were also recognized and automatic in the tutees’ native interactions. According to Atkinson (2013), language is not the bedrock of human interaction but rather the contrary: it is human interaction’s crowning achievement (p. 4). We transformed our pre-existing, largely innate socializing capabilities into symbolic communication, and language still relies on those skills regularly. Through situated learning and contextualized instruction and conversation, ESL instructors are able to leverage human interactional instincts to bolster their language instruction.

When considering these factors, it becomes apparent that the definition of teaching ought to be extended dramatically. The straightforward teaching of grammar and vocabulary is only one human experience that is structured to facilitate learning. Meanwhile, contextualized language instruction is the most preferable way to prepare ELs for real experiences using the English language.

Conclusion

The common thread that brings together RP, SEL, culturally responsive education, and situated learning is that these practices transcend a purely internalist view of SLA, paying careful attention towards the social factors of an ELs education. They recognize that a classroom and one’s surroundings are part of the mind-body-world relationship that shapes cognition, and therefore students should not intake knowledge computationally. Adaptation-fostering techniques that favor contextualized, real-world language-in-use is therefore vital to nurturing competent social agents. RP, SEL, culturally responsive education, and contextualized learning fulfill this need by first and foremost, ensuring

that students feel a part of and embedded into their classrooms, leveraging and bolstering students' natural interactional skills that are the basis for language, and lastly, enhancing their motivation to learn overall. The ultimate goal of SLA and learning in general should be to build upon humans' natural interactional and adaptational capabilities, while also recognizing language as an inherently social act. Indeed, language-in-use cannot occur if interlocutors do not work together cooperatively. It is therefore advisable for ESL instructors and policymakers to recognize the socio-cognitive aspects of SLA and implement practices and policies like RP and cultural responsiveness accordingly.

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