**Making Second Languages Accessible: Creating an Inclusive High School Second Language Class with Playful Pedagogy**

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**Abstract:**

The purpose of this paper is to consider how teachers can approach the needs of students in an inclusive classroom, acknowledge how playful activities can be used as a helpful approach to dealing with academic diversity in a Spanish as a second language classroom and explore how professional learning communities and social media can be used to develop and create playful activities.  The intent of this research paper, is to depart from the notion that teachers should teach to the middle of the academic spectrum and instead include activities in their lessons that are conducive to all learner profiles in the class, no matter what the academic disparity looks like.  In this project I will be using a narrative inquiry, qualitative methodology to research the question: how can playful activities accommodate and motivate students who are learning Spanish as a second language in an inclusive classroom?  This paper will outline second language pedagogy, describe key ideas such as inclusive education and playful activities, and then through personal reflections and an analytical literature review, it will make connections between engagement, inclusion, and language needs in the high school second language classroom.  The reflections included will revolve around my personal experiences both learning languages and teaching Spanish as a second language.  This paper includes pivotal moments in my teaching career where I realized that I needed to change my teaching approach and moments when I realized that the Spanish as a second language classroom could be a place for any student, no matter their academic challenges, but whose interest in learning another language is evident.  These reflections are weaved together with and supported by academic literature that focuses on language teaching, language learning, playful pedagogy, and inclusion.  Also included in this paper are examples of playful activities and the exploration of how teachers can use professional development to expand their playful activity repertoire.

**Introduction:**

Looking back on my experiences teaching second languages, there have been many moments that have led me to reflect upon my teaching practices, or to ask myself why some activities work better than others with the whole class.  The analysis of my personal teaching experiences led me to the question that frames this paper: How can playful activities accommodate and motivate students who are learning Spanish as a second language in an inclusive classroom?  Because of these experiences, it has become my goal to create a classroom environment that is removed from the elitist or high academic environment that “has been attached to the formal study of second or foreign languages” (Arnett, 2013, p. X), and move towards a more inclusive environment that makes language learning accessible for any student in high school who has the desire to learn Spanish as a second language.  My goal is to present strategies that make it easier to teach every student on the academic spectrum, instead of teaching to the middle of the academic spectrum, a practice that is often done to survive classroom challenges, the curriculum, and sometimes the pressures of external variables.  In order to teach so that every student can feel successful in a second language class, I started to generate a repertoire of playful activities that works well with students of varying academic abilities.   Playful activities are fun, easy to accommodate, low risk, and can create an environment where students of all academic backgrounds can work together to achieve the common goal of learning Spanish as a second language. I believe that success does not have to look the same for each student and it doesn’t have to be defined by the curriculum constraints of Alberta Education, however to feel success, students must feel proud of what they have been able to accomplish in the second language class.

        In this research project, I plan to analyze prominent moments in my language learning experience and teaching career that have lead me to believe that there is a better and more inclusive way to teach.  Through this project I hope to make connections between my personal experiences and the research that has already been done through an analytical literature review.  In this research project I also present playful activities that I have used in my own Spanish as a second language classroom and I explore professional development opportunities such as professional learning communities and social media to help teachers expand their own repertoire of playful activities. My goal in presenting my reflections along with sections of literature review is not only to educate teachers about strategies that will help them create an inclusive environment in the second language classroom, but also to encourage educators to reflect on their own practices.

**Methods:**

This paper uses aspects of narrative inquiry, a qualitative methodology, to weave my personal experiences of both second language learning and teaching with an analytical literature review that focuses on language learning, playful activities, and inclusion in a second language classroom.  My goal with this methodology is to be able to create a more personal connection with the reader through reflections and the literature that I have integrated into the project.  The literature synthesizes themes of language learning, engagement, inclusion, language needs, and professional development in the second language classroom.  The objective of this approach is to encourage the reader to reflect on their own teaching pedagogy and language learning experiences.  By analyzing their own experiences while reading about those from another teacher, the reader may initiate changes in their own pedagogy, or research more in the field of inclusive education in the second language classroom, working toward creating a more inclusive environment for second language learners.  This method does not follow a prescriptive formula, but weaves the information together in a unique and creative way.  In a sense, it will give me the opportunity to be playful with the dissemination of the research project.  Because this approach focuses on reflections, there is no data collection, or research site for this project either.  There also aren’t any participants in the research study so the project does not require an ethics approval.  In my reflections, any students, co-workers, or situations that I do mention, will not be described by using any identifying information, and the details about them will remain vague so it would be impossible to identify people included in situations mentioned.  These details are integral to my approach, in order to maintain the integrity of the research paper.

**Reflections and Literature Review**

**Reflection:**

**How has my own language background influenced my teaching?**

Attending small town schools in Alberta, I never had the opportunity to learn a second language through public education. Until I was eighteen years old, I was completely monolingual.  After I graduated from high school, I participated in a yearlong Rotary Youth Exchange to Brazil.  I arrived in a Portuguese speaking country, not only having no knowledge of the local language, but more importantly, no knowledge of how to learn a language either.  After living in Brazil for a year, I still struggled to communicate with local people, and even though I did improve, my Portuguese language skills were poor after eleven months of immersion.  I found that I was able to memorize words and pick up on a few patterns in the language, however I had no understanding of Portuguese syntax.  One person told me “*Ela fala tudo, tudo errado”* or “she speaks everything, everything wrong.”  On saying this, this person would always laugh and give me a big hug because they appreciated the effort I was putting towards learning.  Even though I knew that my language skills needed to improve, I was not discouraged, but wanted to learn more.

I struggled to learn Portuguese on my own as I did not have any language learning skills prior to my trip.  To learn the language I tried my best to experiment with different language learning strategies such as flashcards, writing translations, reading in the target language, watching programs on television in the target language, and basic listen and repeat activities, however, none of these seemed to work very well.  Now, fifteen years later, the language learning moments that I remember as productive, exciting, and useful were none of the strategies that I employed on my own, but rather spontaneous playful activities that I did with my Brazilian friends.  One activity involved giant puzzle pieces that I hopped around on saying the prompted words.  Another activity that I will never forget was learning the words to various songs along with the dance movements that corresponded to the lyrics of the songs.

Not being able to speak the language well was a barrier for me, but as my language skills slowly improved, I found that I had a better understanding of the differences between the Brazilian and Canadian cultures.  I felt a sense of enlightenment and I looked at the world differently after this experience. When I returned to Canada, I registered in a Spanish class, as my year long struggle to learn Portuguese had motivated me to learn more about languages and cultures.  I was surprised to find that learning Spanish as a second language in the classroom was much easier than the immersion process as I was not only taught the language, but how to learn a language as well.   This experience, both my struggle and successes with language, inspired me to teach Spanish as a second language to high school students, so that I could share the gift of speaking another language with others.

         Every time I teach a new group of students, I tell them about my own language learning experiences including my successes, challenges, and struggles as a second language learner.  I explain that my experiences were different than learning in a classroom, as my first second language learning experience was complete immersion, which is very different than learning a second language in the classroom.  However a person learns a language, in a classroom, or through immersion, there are always going to be challenges.  The beauty of learning a language is that anyone can do it because language skills do not have to be perfect in order to function.  Learning another language is learning another way to communicate. People do not have to speak or write perfectly in the target language in order to communicate.  Even though I did not speak Portuguese well, I was still able to communicate with people using the words and phrases that I did know.  I always tell my classes that some students may learn more quickly than others and some may have different strengths or weaknesses as their language experiences may be different.  Languages and communication can be learned and embraced in many different ways and for many different reasons.  Some of my former students have been excellent writers, communicating clearly on paper with grammatical ease and correctness, however were too shy to speak.  Other students found their strength in spoken communication, however their speech was riddled with grammatical mistakes.  There are also students who use the spoken language, and also incorporate a mixture of gestures and expressions into their language in order to communicate.  Ultimately, no matter the approach, communication is successful as long as the native speaker can understand what the language learner is trying to say in the target language.  In my classes, students learn the skills that they will need to take their language further when they find themselves in an immersion environment or speaking with a native speaker in the target language.

**Literature Review:**

**Understanding language acquisition:**

In order to understand my own language learning experience that has influenced my language teaching experience, it is important to look at the fundamentals of how a person learns a second language.  In the textbook *Principles of Language Teaching and Learning,* H. Douglas Brown (2007) focuses on theories explaining how humans learn and he examines the cognitive process involved in internalizing a second language.  This process includes “perceiving, attending, storing, and recalling” (Brown, 2007, p. 86).  He first discusses psychologists such as Pavlov, Skinner, Ausubel, and Rogers and their theories that formed the foundations of different types of learning. Of these theorists, the most supportive of the integration of playful activities that I strive to implement in my current inclusive classroom are those of constructivist theorist Carl Rogers whose theories focus on the “social and interactive nature of learning” (Brown, p. 97).  Rogers’ theories are conducive to “learner centered classrooms where the teacher and learners negotiate learning outcomes, engage in discovery learning, and relate the course content to students’ reality outside the classroom” (Brown, 2007, p. 99).  In applying these principles, teachers take the students’ affective factors into consideration and work to provide an environment where the students not only feel comfortable about themselves, but an environment where they can use their own creativity to learn.  Playful activities not only encourage students to be creative with the target language, but they are also learner centered.   They encourage students to learn about learning, and work with people around them in a supportive environment to reach their goals and feel success with the target language.  Teaching pedagogy that incorporates these theories in an academically diverse classroom would help to support and possibly empower students in all parts of the academic spectrum.

Another theory that should be examined when analyzing the foundations of second language acquisition is positive psychology.  Positive psychology  “has been designed to address three topic areas: the workings of positive internal experiences such as emotions, positive individual characteristics such as traits associated with living well, and institutions that enable people to flourish” (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014, p. 154).  The positive psychology approach to second language acquisition that MacIntyre and Mercer describe has a humanistic feel and includes integration of affective factors in the learning environment.   Positive psychology “aims to contribute another perspective to psychology by studying what we can do to increase strengths and attributes such as resiliency, happiness, optimism and the like in the general population” (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014, p.155).  The idea of positive psychology has led me to consider how playful activities that I integrate into my classroom make my students feel.  Macintyre and Mercer (2014) state that “second language acquisition (SLA) rarely deals with these topics at present; however, their relevance in the field is immediately apparent when one considers the practical, human, and social dimension of language learning” (p.156).   Play and positive psychology drive each other forward towards the path of successful second language learning.  MacIntyre and Mercer (2014) explain that “positive emotion creates tendencies toward play and exploration, yielding a broadened field of attention and building resources for future action” (p.162).  Creating a learning environment for second language students that takes their affective factors into consideration and encourages a positive learning space is key to this theory.  Playful activities can create a low-risk and positive learning environment that the positive psychology theory aims to achieve.

**Connecting playful activities to learning styles and strategies**

In his book *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition,* Zoltán Dörnyei (2005) states that with regards to learning styles, “the concept represents a profile of the individual’s approach to learning, a blueprint of the habitual or preferred way the individual perceives, interacts with, and responds to the learning environment” (p. 121) and that “ this approach is not infinite but is characterized by systematic patterns” (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 122).   Learning styles are an appealing concept because they “are not yet another metaphor for distinguishing the gifted from the untalented but rather they refer to personal preferences” (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 122).  It is also important to point out that Dörnyei (2005) acknowledges that learning styles and cognitive styles “have too often been used in the literature in an interchangeable manner” (p.124) however they are different.   Learning styles are important for a teacher to take into consideration as they can utilize certain activities in the second language class that can be custom to the needs of the specific students and the class as a whole.  Because the learning styles of each class may be different, teachers need to assess each class in order to engage the second language learners with activities that correspond with the learner’s needs.

 Along with learning styles, teachers also need to take learning strategies into consideration as well.  With regards to styles and strategies, Dörnyei (2005), suggests that “the two concepts are thematically related since they both denote specific ways learners go about carrying out learning tasks” (p.122).  Once students understand and embrace their learning style they can then use strategies to best approach the language learning. Ehrman et al. (2003), examining differences in second language learning, conclude that “learning styles and learning strategies are often seen as interrelated” (p. 315). In their paper they express that “to increase L2 proficiency, some researchers and teachers have provided instruction that helped students learning how to use more relevant and powerful learning strategies” (Ehrman et al., 2003, 318). Playful activities can address a range of learning styles and strategies and can be used by teachers to help students take charge of their own learning.  Different types of playful activities can offer the student more freedom to experiment and explore the language in a low-risk environment.  Playful activities can also be manipulated in order to suit the learning style of the specific learner, or the needs of a classroom.  If the teacher implements a variety of playful activities in their class, it will help “learners to become aware of their own process of learning” (Brown, 2007, p. 131).   Ehrman et al. (2003) suggest that “the most effective strategy instruction appears to include demonstrating when a given strategy might be useful, as well as how to use and evaluate it, and how to transfer it to other related tasks and situations” (p. 318). In my own experience, I have found that students request certain playful activities, not only because they are fun, but also because they are conducive to different learning styles.  In order to complete the activities, students need to employ different language learning strategies.  I guide students through some language learning strategies, and some they come up with on their own.  This evidence supports the idea that teachers are not only teaching the second language, but providing students with the skills to identify the best way that they can learn a second language.  Also, all students, no matter where they are on the academic spectrum, can benefit from knowing which learning strategies work best for them. These strategies can also be transferred to and from learning in other subject areas.

 Along with the dissemination of the language, teachers are also constantly juggling learner needs.  By giving each student the tools to “become aware of their predispositions, their styles, and their strengths and weaknesses, they can take appropriate action in the form of a plethora of strategies that are available to them” (Brown, 2007, p.131).  When students are aware of their own best practices, teachers will have an easier time meeting the language learning needs in a classroom where students can use personalized learning strategies.

The main goal of the teaching pedagogy that I implement in my classroom is to teach so that all students have the opportunity to be successful in a second language class.   Brown (2007) suggests that the research studies show that “certain learners seemed to be successful regardless of methods or techniques of teaching” (p.132). This means that no matter what activities I do with my classes, there are going to be some students who are successful no matter what teaching pedagogy I employ, however more importantly, there will be a group of students who need different techniques and flexibility in activities in order to be successful in a second language class.  Playful activities are a teaching tool that I use, as they allow me to manipulate the lesson depending on the needs of the students.

After looking at the benefits of playful activities that cater to the needs of the students and give the students more freedom with their language learning experience, it is also necessary to look at the risk involved in this type of teaching.   Janet Hargreaves (2008) studied the risk of a student centered pedagogy and how teachers can find balance.   For teachers, “introducing creative activities arguably increases risk and requires more skill and courage than didactic teaching methods” (Hargreaves, 2008, p. 230).  Although there are many benefits to providing a creative and fun or playful environment, the teacher still needs to make sure that they are able to deliver the required curriculum.  So, when a teacher decides to use a playful activity, “creativity needs to be risk assessed and sufficiently managed to facilitate student success and safety” (Hargreaves, 2008, p. 231).  In order to meet the requirements of the curriculum and also meet the learning needs of the students, Hargreaves (2008) suggests that “balancing the consequences of an action to maximise the ‘goodness’ of the outcome is a useful and practical mechanism for judging the moral acceptability of innovative strategies” (p. 233).  Balancing these risks may be different in every classroom.  Teachers need to be able to assess their students and use pedagogy that meets learning requirements and also student needs.

**Reflection:**

**The evolution of inclusiveness in my classroom**

When I first started teaching, I was already teaching in inclusive classrooms, however at that time I was too busy struggling with lesson planning to be aware of the learner dynamics that I was facing in my classes.  In the beginning of my career I was only aware that there was a group of students in my classroom who did very well, a group who did satisfactory work, and a group that was failing.  My first approach to this classroom dynamic was simply survival.  I taught to what I thought was the middle of the academic spectrum because I did not know how to approach the inclusive classroom.

In the schools where have worked, each semester, a teacher who facilitates students who need academic support, distributes information about specific students in a teacher’s classroom, who have been coded with a learning disability or a disorder.  Along with the students’ information, the support teachers send a list of accommodation requirements for the teacher to implement in their classroom.  I remember going over my class lists, checking off the students who required accommodations, and making notes of the accommodations that each of the students needed.  I had meetings with these students, so I could ask them about the best way for me to help them in the second language class.  Most students were not interested in having me implement any of the accommodations available to them, as they did not want to be treated any differently than their classmates.  Accepting an accommodation in many cases caused students a lot of stress as they were afraid that their peers would find out that they were different.

I found myself in the situation where I had students who were rejecting the accommodations that they required and would help them.  These were the students who were failing my second language classes, and I knew that if I changed my teaching pedagogy, they may have the chance to feel success.  I decided that in order to support these students who were afraid to be singled out with their accommodations, I would have to change my teaching approach so that they had the opportunity to succeed.  This is when I started changing my teaching approach and adding playful activities to my lessons.  Gradually, as my pedagogy started changing, I began to see more students, even students who were coded and struggled with academics, succeeding in my second language classes.

**Literature Review**

**Defining an inclusive classroom:**

         What does it mean to have an inclusive classroom?  Katy Arnett (2008) suggests that “the term *inclusive* (and its derivatives) has multiple interpretations and modifications” (p. 64).  So as I examine how inclusive education can be taught in the second language classroom, it is important to have a clear understanding of what inclusive education looks like in my classroom.  Patrick Schwartz (2006) in his book *From Disability to Possibility* portrays that “true inclusion is the attitude that all students belong everywhere, with everyone else, in the school community” (p. 34).   He supports this model, and expresses that “within that student population is an increasing percentage of kids with diverse needs, with identified learning issues, whom you must educate along with everyone else” (Schwartz, 2006, P.xxii).  Every student, no matter what their challenge might be, deserves the opportunity to learn with their peers.

So, how does one know if they are teaching in an inclusive classroom?  In Alberta, teachers are often given information regarding students in their classroom, who may be coded with cognitive, behavioural, or physical disabilities.  Teachers must then implement strategies and accommodations for these students that are communicated in the students Individual Program Plan (IPP).  In the book *Languages for all,* Arnett (2013) discusses the differences between learning disabilities and special education needs.  This is important because “all disabilities can affect the learning experience” (p. 2) but specific learning disabilities can “affect the learning process” (p. 2).  In pinpointing the learning process, a teacher can then focus on developing and creating classroom activities that aid in students’ learning process, specifically in a second language classroom.

The Spanish as a second language classroom is the perfect place to test out these ideas of integration, especially because even though it is sometimes considered an academic option, all students who start in Spanish 10, begin the class knowing very little or nothing like their peers.  Spanish 10 also gives students, wherever they may fall on the academic spectrum, the opportunity to begin with simple and basic aspects of language learning.  In a lot of situations, students who have special needs in the classroom tend to be pulled out, instead of integrated.  Schwartz (2006) believes that “we need to honor the learning opportunities that students with diverse educational needs bring forward, not just label, berate, and isolate them” (p.xx). Not only does Schwartz explain the reasons for encouraging inclusion in schools, but he also sheds light on how “education must become more multifaceted and dynamic if it is to work for everyone” (Schwartz, 2006, p.18).

The advantages of an inclusive classroom far outweigh the separated system especially because a “quality inclusive education for students in schools leads to a greater chance of quality inclusive community participation for adults” (Schwartz, 2006, p.86).  Considering one purpose of education is to prepare students for their adult life, why wouldn’t a teacher want to give all students the chance to succeed in both an educational and social setting?

**Reflection**

**What does teaching in an inclusive classroom look like?**

When I started my teaching career, I assumed that second language classrooms would be dominated by academic students, however this assumption was quickly proved wrong as I was teaching in classrooms with a broad academic range.  In my career, I have taught second language classes of all sizes with varying degrees of academic diversity.  I have taught classes where there are no students who are coded with cognitive or a behavioural issues, and I have taught other classes that are dominated by students with cognitive or behavioural issues.   Most often though, my classes have been a mix of students that range the academic spectrum.  Through the evolution of my teaching experiences, my goal has become to create an inclusive space in my second language classroom where every student, no matter what their academic ability, can learn Spanish as a second language with their peers.

         The beauty of creating an integrated second language classroom at the high school level, is that all students start learning the three year Spanish as a second language program with no prior knowledge of Spanish.  This means that everyone starts the class on an even playing field.  This can greatly boost the confidence of students who may have been streamed into lower academic classes in their past.

         In some cases, students may have a familiarity with learning another language, which they can apply to learning Spanish as a second language.  This prior knowledge of language learning gives those students a slight advantage, however I find these students often support their peers with their language learning strategies.  In a few cases, I have taught French Immersion students who have been coded with cognitive delays, and although they may have struggled in some of their core classes, they were then turned into leaders in the Spanish as a second language class, and instead of relying on others for help, they became the helpers.  For these students, taking Spanish not only boosted their confidence in the second language class, but in their other classes as well.

The three year Spanish as a second language program starts with basic outcomes such as the alphabet.  The Spanish alphabet differs from the English one, however students can easily make connections with and feel success with this simple outcome.  Not only is this a tool for the Spanish as a second language class, but a tool for literacy in general.  For students who struggle with language, relearning the basics of a language is beneficial to their first language learning skills. As basic an activity as learning the alphabet is, even for students who are at a high academic level, it is an important language learning skill that they need in order to master Spanish pronunciation.  The simple language outcomes that the Alberta Spanish as a second language curriculum offers, pared with playful, low risk activities, can help create a classroom that can offer learning opportunities for all types of students. An inclusive Spanish as a second language class can bring together a diverse group of learners that may not have the opportunity to work together in other academically streamed classes.  This can be empowering for students who, by high school, have been streamed by their academic abilities.  Even though the streaming system may be best for those students in their core classes, it still causes a noticeable division of students and I have often heard students say that they are in the “stupid classes.”  I like to remind students at the end of the semester that they achieved success in an academic option.  I remind them that at the beginning of the semester they didn’t speak Spanish, and at the end of the semester they have the skills to communicate with Spanish speakers at a basic level.

As the Spanish as a second language classes in the Alberta three year program advance, I find that there is always student attrition between courses.  Often times, I find that students don’t continue on with the course as they aren’t interested in learning more after their Spanish 10 introduction, or Spanish doesn’t fit into their course load.  Even though Spanish 20 and Spanish 30 classes do not usually have the same academic diversity as Spanish 10 classes, they can still be considered inclusive, as every type of learner is welcome to join.  I have had students of every academic ability complete Spanish 20 and 30 classes even though these classes are more challenging due to the inclusion of more complicated outcomes.  Even with the more complicated outcomes, my playful teaching methodology stays the same and tries to cater to all students on the academic spectrum.  At this point, students usually don’t worry as much about their marks or how they compare to the other students in the class as these are the students who are really motivated and enjoy learning Spanish as a second language.

**Literature Review**

**Teaching second languages in an inclusive environment**

In the book *Languages for All,* Katy Arnett (2013) addresses the lack of inclusive resources for second language teachers, which is “partly due to the thinking that such resources are not needed” (p. ix).  Arnett (2013) discusses that many people stereotype second language learners to be “academically capable, well-behaved learners, who are destined for success” (p. ix).

 In his book *From Disability to Possibility* Schwartz (2006) acknowledges that creating an inclusive classroom is not easy, but he communicates that “the strategy behind inclusion is to design supports - innovative approaches to learning, differentiated instruction, curricular adaptations - for every student in the classroom, to include the entire spectrum of learners” (Schwartz, 2006, p.35).  This is a lot of work for teachers, especially because on top of all of the extra adaptations “all classrooms need to be exciting, inspiring, thought-provoking, enlightening environments for every student” (Schwartz, 2006, p.38).  However, the hard work that teachers put into their lessons to create an inclusive environment is worthwhile when students grow and learn along with their peers.  In order to successfully teach students in an inclusive classroom, Arnett (2008) suggests the use of universal design which “refers to instruction that proactively considers and accounts for the spectrum of students needs in the classroom” (p. 64).  She proposes that “instead of implementing reactive adaptation strategies to include students with special learning needs, teachers draw on pedagogical practices” (Arnett, 2008, p. 64). In an inclusive classroom a teacher needs to “find ways to engage in a dialogue that is open enough to allow participants to bring their unique voice and meaning-making into the process while being structured enough to support their cognitive and communication style, and that is based in the ‘here and now’ without compromising reflexivity” (Greenstein, 2014, p. 71).  Playful activities are able to engage students in an inclusive classroom as they are adaptable and appealing for students in any place on the academic spectrum.

To decide what learning process a teacher should use in their lessons, it is very important to know students’ needs including “understanding and successfully addressing individual special education needs as an integral part of second language classroom activities” (Arnett, 2013, p. 24). Arnett (2013) addresses the different learning challenges teachers may encounter in the second language classroom and what roadblocks these challenges may create.  She (2013) discusses challenges such as auditory processing, visual processing, attention disorders, communication disorders, and expressive language disorders.  In this range of disabilities, students may also face a range of learning challenges in the second language classroom.  Each of these disabilities may have a different learning process that might be conducive to assignments that the general population in the classroom can easily navigate.  Arnett (2013) stresses that it is incredibly important to use “discrete strategies” (p. 60) to help students with “diverse learning needs” (p. 60) and to “have a positive classroom experience” (p. 60).  She  provides strategies for students who need help “understanding spoken language” (Arnett, 2013, p. 62), “processing visual and text-based information” (Arnett, 2013, p. 65), “answering questions in class” (Arnett, 2013, p. 67), “producing spoken language” (Arnett, 2013, p. 70), “producing written language” (Arnett, 2013, p. 71), “finding ‘hidden’ messages” (Arnett, 2013, p. 73), “staying focused on a task” (Arnett, 2013, p. 74), “to sit still” (Arnett,2013, p. 76), and also for students who need “additional challenge” (Arnett, 2013, p. 77).  She also reinforces the fact that it is important for the teacher to consider that “just because some students have the same challenge does not mean that they will respond to the same supports in the same way” (Arnett, 2013, p. 79).  This means that it is important to incorporate activities that are flexible and can be easily changed in order to accommodate the students’ needs.

         In order to help the range of student needs that a teacher may encounter in an inclusive second language classroom, Arnett (2013) suggests that teachers use a chameleon activity where “all students complete the same learning task, but the inherent flexibility of the activity makes it possible to easily and unobtrusively incorporate certain learning adaptations to support a particular learning style” (p. 81).  These are different from differentiated activities where students work on “a distinct learning task that is closely aligned from the start of the task to a particular conception of that individual’s readiness to learn” (Arnett, 2013 p. 81).  Chameleon activities offer the student a more discrete adaptation, making it a low-risk activity for students who require accommodations.  It is more likely that the student will complete or even attempt an activity in a low-risk environment. Arnett (2013) provides a list of her own chameleon and differentiated activities that teachers can use in inclusive second language classrooms.  These are activities that any teacher can use, adapt, and include in their lessons.  Although Arnett (2013) provides a lot of thoughts and guidance on inclusive education in the second language classroom, she advises that the best approach is a “personal call, informed by our own beliefs as teachers, the grade levels we teach, the program we’re teaching in, and the language goals we have for our students” (p. 161).  As I have often found in my own classes, what works with one, may not work with another.  Each class may need a different approach to second language learning depending on the range of learning needs in the classroom, and other social and emotional factors that may play a role in the students’ learning.

**Empowering students in an inclusive classroom**

Teachers need to make sure that students are being given tasks that students feel they are capable of completing successfully.  Arnett (2008) portrays that “effective teachers model desired behavior, demonstrate new concepts and materials, vary their teaching styles and practices, and monitor student progress in such a way as to appeal to a large number of students” (p. 65).  This is important because in an inclusive classroom, the range of abilities can often be so diverse that some students may be bored by a task that is too easy, and other students may not even want to attempt the same activity as it is too hard for them. Greenstein (2014) conveys that a “playful methodology is positioned simultaneously within a certain social reality while posing an alternative to it, and opens spaces where binaries and hierarchies can be examined, challenged and blurred” (p. 79). The ability to be creative and play with the language, gives students the opportunity to experience the language in a low-risk situation, while learning and improving their language skills at the same time.

In Bell’s (2012) study on play in second language classrooms she found that “the findings demonstrate a positive and statistically significant trend toward stronger recall of those items that have been the focus of playful attention, with the strongest effects demonstrated for recall of word meanings” (p. 259). This means that it is important to use playful activities in the second language classroom where students have the opportunity to use and manipulate the language. In playing with the language they have the ability to use different words in context and are able to better understand their meaning.

When teachers can scaffold the students’ risk-taking abilities in a positive and playful environment, they can also facilitate students’ confidence in an inclusive classroom and their ability to take more risks with their own language learning.

**Reflection:**

**What was the turning point in my career that encouraged me to create a more inclusive classroom?**

A few years into my career, a student asked to audit my Spanish 10 class as she was interested in learning Spanish, however was enrolled in alternate programming for students who have severe academic struggles.  She was not on route to get a high school diploma, but rather a certificate.   When she started the class, I told her that I wanted her to try her best to do the classwork and assignments like everyone else.  I told her that the assignments might be challenging, but if she tried to do as much as possible I could give her feedback, showing her where she was personally successful, and what she could do to improve.  I wanted her to enjoy learning the language to the best of her ability, and not worry about how she compared to the other students in the class who were being assessed by the outcomes of the Spanish as a Second Language Alberta Program of Studies.  From the beginning of the semester, this student was motivated to learn and excited to be in class with her peers but without the pressure of failure which had already been a common part of her school experience.  The beauty of Spanish 10 is that most students start knowing nothing, so this student who was used to failure and being at the bottom of the academic spectrum in the class, was starting out in a class where she knew the same amount of Spanish as her peers.  Being left behind academically through most of her schooling, this girl seemed to love participating in a regular classroom and at the same level as her peers once again.  The assignments she handed in were not perfect, and her written language delay was obvious, however she was able to communicate to me the content and she could comprehend a lot of written and oral class work too.  Not every activity she completed was easy for her, however this was during the time that I was experimenting with a more humanistic teaching pedagogy, straying from the drill-based activities and integrating more playful learning experiences into my lessons.  I remember watching her do a fun dictation activity where the focus was on communication, not grammar or spelling.  In this activity every student in the class was making mistakes and laughing at themselves.  I remember the moment I realized that this girl, who had struggled in school her whole life, was now laughing and enjoying an academic option with her peers.  Not only did this student feel success, but I recommended that she earn credit for the class as she was able to achieve the outcomes of the grade 10 level Spanish as a Second Language curriculum included in the Alberta Program of Studies.

         Another moment that encouraged me to research inclusiveness in the Spanish as a second language classroom was when I was faced with an introductory Spanish class that had a large group of high energy boys, many of whom were coded for cognitive delays and behaviour issues.  This class was incredibly challenging to teach, not only keeping their behaviour under control, but also figuring out what would motivate them to enjoy learning a second language.  After weeks of struggling with their behaviour, my solution presented itself during a playful vocabulary activity.  I had the students work in small groups and play a game called Fast Hands.  They were competing with their partners to find the word that I would call out (in the opposite language) as fast as they could.  This group, who normally couldn’t pay attention for more than a few minutes, was focused on competing with their peer group, laughing and learning all at the same time.  Every day after this, they asked to play this game, and were always motivated and on task when I provided these types of playful activities.  Interestingly, a large number of both academic and non-academic students from this class, continued to take Spanish in high school.

**Literature Review:**

**What does it mean to be intelligent?**

         The thought of testing intelligence in a school setting likely brings to mind students sitting in rows of desks with an exam that tests the students’ IQ (intelligence quotient) sitting on the desk in front of them.  These types of tests may work well with students who have strong reading and writing abilities, however there are a large group of students who struggle with this type of assessment.  Howard Gardner (2006) recognized that intelligence is much more than students sitting in rows of desks writing exams. He believes that intelligence “is a pluralistic view of mind, recognizing many different and discrete facets of cognition, acknowledging that people have different cognitive strengths, and contrasting cognitive styles” (p. 48). Gardner (2006) narrowed these intelligences down to “linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist” (p. 11).  Gardner (2006) believes that “in our society, however, we put linguistic and logical mathematical intelligence, figuratively speaking, on a pedestal” (p. 49).  In the setting of a traditional second language classroom, this tends to be the case.  Second language classes are often taught to a specific type of learner, narrowing the spectrum for learner success.  In Gardner’s (2006) research, he focuses on “other special populations as well: prodigies, idiot savants, autistic children, children with learning disabilities, all of whom exhibit very jagged cognitive profiles - profiles that are extremely difficult to explain in terms of a unitary view of intelligence” (p. 49).  Gardner (2006) sees potential in a population of people who do not find their successes in rows of desks, or activities that focus on linguistic, or logical-mathematical strengths.  He believes that “the purpose of school should be to develop intelligences and to help people reach vocational and avocational goals that are appropriate to their particular spectrum of intelligences” (Gardner, 2006, p. 50).  By broadening the view of intelligence Gardner (2006) believes that students will “feel more engaged and competent and therefore more inclined to serve society in a constructive way” (p .50).  Creating a school environment where more students feel successful, no matter what their background or where they fall on the academic spectrum, will motivate people to be better.  Gardner’s view of intelligence looks beyond the black and white results of an IQ test and focuses on the strengths of an individual.  Each person is seen as having a unique mind with its own sets of strengths and weaknesses.  These intelligences flourish in different environments and don’t always fit the traditional second language classroom.

         In order to more successfully approach a classroom, Gardner emphasizes the importance of identifying which types of intelligences are represented in a classroom, and how teachers must first observe or get to know their students.  In Gardner’s (2006) research study, he identifies participants’ intelligences “through their play activities, what their particular combinations of interests and strengths are” (p. 51). Gardner’s research targets people who struggle to fit in to the typical educational institution.  He states, “I am not worried about those rare youngsters who are good in everything; they’re going to do just fine. I’m concerned about those who don’t shine in the standardized tests, and who, therefore, tend to be written off as not having gifts of any kind” (Gardner, 2006, p. 52).  Gardner focuses on creating an educational system where all students, no matter their academic ability, can achieve success. Gardner (2006) suggests that “if we can mobilize the spectrum of human abilities, not only will people feel better about themselves and feel more competent; it is even possible that they will also feel more engaged and more readily able to join with the rest of the world community in working for the broader good” (p. 53).  Making second languages more accessible to a larger population of students who want to learn a language is not only going to create a more skilled population of people, but also a population who are more tolerant, understanding, and accepting of the diverse language population around them.

**Reflection:**

**Roadblocks, Challenges, and Limitations**

In my career I have worked hard to create playful activities that I can manipulate and adapt to fit the needs of my classes to make learning fun and exciting for everyone.  Even as my teaching pedagogy improved, I was finding there were still students with, and sometimes without academic challenges, who were not responding to the activities that I was presenting in my classes.  In these situations, I had to remember that Spanish as a second language is an optional class.  Even though Spanish as an option implies that students are taking the course willingly or out of interest, some students ended up in Spanish class as it was the best class offered in that time slot or the class that the student actually wanted to be in was full.  There have been cases in my career where the students were surprised and ended up liking learning a second language, but there were also other times where students seemed unmotivated and refused to learn.

I remember studying a roster of students in an entry level Spanish course that included a large number of students with cognitive and behavioural struggles.  I was excited that there were so many students with struggles who were interested in learning Spanish as a second language, and I was excited by the challenge I faced to created playful ways to teach them.  I started off the semester with  many ideas, activities, and a lot of personal motivation however everything I tried with this class seemed to fail with a large group of disengaged students, who would have rather been anywhere other than Spanish class.  The most painful part for me was that there were other students in the class who genuinely wanted to be there to learn and who loved the playful activities that I included in my teaching methodology.  Frustrated with my failure, I asked the class what kind of activities they wanted to do in Spanish class hoping to pique their interest.  Some students loved the playful activities that we were doing, however the students who were not interested in learning Spanish responded that they wanted to do more worksheets.  Honouring their request, I provided the class with a few worksheets.  I quickly understood that worksheets gave the students the opportunity to copy answers off of the few students who were interested in learning and they also gave students the chance to chat with other students in the class, cause trouble, leave for a bathroom break, or other endless excuses to not learn Spanish.

Although initially discouraged by this class, I have decided that in order for playful activities to work in an inclusive second language classroom, the students must be intrinsically motivated.  If a student has the drive and determination to learn another language, it doesn’t matter what academic challenges they face or where they fall on the academic spectrum, they have the ability to find personal success in a second language class.

**Literature Review:**

**Intelligence and motivation:**

Motivation is not an easy topic to address as there is still much to consider about the subject.  Dörnyei (2005) proposes that “motivation is not seen as a static attribute but rather as a dynamic factor that displays continuous fluctuation” (p. 83).   In a classroom, depending on the environment, the subject, the activity, and the group of students, student motivation may vary.  Dörnyei (2005) explains that “people are influenced by a set of factors while they are still contemplating an action that is different from the motives that influence them once they have embarked on the activity” (p. 86).  Some of the factors that influence student motivations teachers have some control over, however other factors are out of the teacher’s control.  The environment of a high school classroom can change each day or even during the duration of a class.  This supports Dörnyei’s (2005) idea that  “academic goals will be accompanied by different social goals and practicing teachers know all too well how such social agendas can modify or disrupt the academic action sequence” (p.87). In my classes, it seems that on a daily basis, I deal with the extra social drama that hinders the dissemination of the course content. With high school aged students, social life often comes before academics and impedes motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic.

When considering motivation in the second language classroom, it is important to return to Howard Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences.  In his book *The Development and Educational of the Mind,* Gardner (2006) addresses the myth that “intelligence is the same as a “learning style,” a “cognitive style,” or a “working style” (p. 56).  So, no matter what approach a teacher takes with a class, if the students’ intelligences are not compatible with the language classroom, then maybe the student should be placed in a class that better fits their personal intelligences.  Gardner (2006) discusses that “educators are in the best position to determine the uses to which MI theory can and should be put” (p. 59). This means that the teacher must really know their students in order to be cognisant of their intelligences

When a teacher is planning what type of pedagogy to use with a class, especially one lacking intrinsic motivation, Dörnyei (2005) suggests that “a few well-chosen strategies that suit both the teacher and the learners might take one beyond the motivational threshold, creating an overall positive motivational climate in the classroom” (p.111). A positive climate may create or encourage intrinsic motivation.  Ehrman et al. (2003) acknowledges that research suggests that “intrinsic motivation correlates more closely with language learning success than extrinsic motivation, but a student’s total motivation is most frequently a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation” (p. 320).

Teaching pedagogy that uses playful activities may be a good strategy in order to increase intrinsic motivation.  Ehrman et al. (2003) implies that “by providing students with learning experiences that meet their needs for competence, relatedness, self-esteem, and enjoyment, teachers can increase their students’ intrinsic motivation; and by giving students choices, teachers can often enhance both students persistence and sense of autonomy” (p. 320).  These playful experiences give students choices and can encourage students to take risks in the safe environment of the classroom.   These positive experiences are important as they help students “to develop and maintain their motivation, perseverance, and resiliency, as well as positive emotions necessary for the long-term undertaking of learning a foreign language” (MacIntyre, Mercer, 2014, p.156).   In contrast, “language learners who are overly anxious about their performance are often less motivated to perform in ways that bring active attention to themselves in the classroom or in natural language-use settings” (Ehrman et al., 2003, 323).  In order to encourage motivation, teachers need to provide students with pedagogy that is engaging, in a low-risk environment, and where student can experiment with the language without fear. Implementing playful activities can fulfill these requirements.

**Reflection:**

**So let’s play!  Resources or playful activities for teachers to use in an inclusive second language classroom:**

My teaching repertoire is always growing and changing. With each activity, I always assess at the needs of the students in my classroom and adapt my activities as best as I can to suit their needs.  The ability to adapt a fun activity so that it works better for students with physical or academic challenges increases students’ personal success and also motivates them to continue learning.

         Many of the playful activities in my teaching repetoire give the students the opportunity to work in a small group of peers that they are comfortable with, or the option of working alone.  These playful activities use reading, writing, and oral language skills as well as repetition, chunking, information gaps, and kinesthetic movement to reinforce and support the language skills.  Often times these activities allow students to complete classroom work in a flexible and non-traditional environment that may be more conducive to their language learning needs.  Often times the activities are so flexible that students who need accommodations do not even notice that other students may be completing the activity in a range of different ways, helping to keep their disability discreet.

 The following is a list of playful activities that I have used or plan to use in my second language classroom.  I have narrowed this list down to the best activities as supported by my literature review.  Each of the following teaching tools will include a description of the activity followed by an explanation of how it is supported by the literature.

**Crossword puzzle with a partner**

**Description:**

A great playful vocabulary activity that I use with my students is a Crossword puzzle with a partner.  Each partner has either the answers to all of the down words or all of the across words in the target language.  Then, each pair of students sits back to back and they give each other clues in the target language.  The Crossword puzzle with a partner is also a formative activity that gives the teacher the opportunity to listen to the conversations in the classroom, and give the class as a whole feedback on pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and any other language feedback that they might observe.  One of my former co-workers introduced me to a variation of this activity.  I liked it so much, I modified it to fit the needs of my own second language classroom.   I found that the students who need a greater challenge, can have the option to work without the help of a vocabulary sheet and can create sentences to communicate the hidden words.  The students who need a little more support, can use a vocabulary sheet, but maybe still form sentences to communicate the word.  The simplest form of this activity is just finding the translation on their vocabulary sheet and saying the translation of the word as their clue.  The Crossword with a partner activity also gives students the option for movement if they need it.  In my experience, some students stay at their desks and sit back to back, other students stand, and some students like to find a different place in the classroom to work such as the floor.

**Literature Support:**

This activity fosters authentic language use as students do not have a script to read from and need to depend on the grammar and vocabulary that they know in the target language in order to give their partner clues. Their explanations can vary from one word answers to short descriptive sentences depending on the students’ ability level. This is a flexible activity that gives students on the whole academic spectrum the ability to do the same project, however each pair of students picks the variation that they are comfortable with.  This activity creates an environment that is low risk, as the students are communicating in small groups of two, often with people that they are comfortable working with. In the article *Place and Identity for Children in Classrooms and Schools* Julia Ellis (2005) studies how the environment that students are exposed to in the classroom affects their identities as a learner.  Ellis (2005) reveals that “activities that work well for these multiple purposes are semi-structure, include space for self-expression or creativity, and provide social support” (p. 66).  The crossword puzzle with a partner possess the characteristics that help students feel comfortable, included and aware.  These positive experiences help to create a more confident learner that is willing to slowly take more risks with the target language.

**Listening Puzzle**

**Description**

As a student, the listening puzzle was an activity that one of my university teachers implemented in class, and even though I only did it a few times, I always remembered it as it was fun, challenging, and low risk.  A listening puzzle is an activity where the students are given the lyrics to a song or a dictated piece of work in the target language, but the lyrics, or words have been cut apart into short fragments.  As they listen to the music or dictation, they have to put the pieces back in order.  When I do this with my classes, I have my students work in small groups of three or four.  First I have the students look at the lyrics in the target language and see if they recognize any of the words.  If they do, they can highlight them or underline them.  Next, I play a fragment of the song or dictation.  The students need to listen for words that they know or recognize and try to start putting the pieces of paper in order.   It is always fun as a teacher to hear the students talk about their strategies.  Often times they realize that they should listen for specific words that they know or even if they don’t know what the word means, they may pick a random word to listen for.

For the lyrics puzzle activity, working in a small group creates a low risk environment for the students.  There are always groups who have some students more actively involved than others, but I have found that this is an activity where all students like to get involved.  Sometimes, I have students who don’t like to work in groups.  With this activity, they also could have the option to work alone if I have enough puzzles.  This activity is also great for the kinesthetic and the musical learner in the class.  Most of the time students stand or are huddled around a desk, but they are also moving the puzzle pieces around as well.  Sometimes the students start sorting and moving the pieces around before the song has even started.  Songs tend to be faster and more challenging, however after playing the songs a few times for the students to hear, I always hear students humming or singing along even if they don’t know all of the words. Depending on the group of students, sometimes I even have a prize for the group who can complete the puzzle the fastest.

         Once I have played the song or dictation a few times and a few groups are close or have finished their puzzle, we go through line by line as a class to help other groups complete their puzzles.  During this time, we talk about the words in the lyrics that we know, and strategies to figure out the words that we don’t know.

**Literature Support**

This activity allows language learners with academic struggles to participate as much or as little as they are comfortable.  It is an activity that can be challenging for everyone in the class, however everyone, no matter their academic ability, has the ability to listen for the keywords that they highlight as a group.  Schwartz (2006) expresses that “meeting the learning needs of students on either end of the learning spectrum (students with gifts and students with challenges) improves the quality of education in the entire classroom” (p. 15).  The lyrics puzzle offers students of different abilities to push their personal goals rather than comparing themselves to the rest of the class.  In Silvy-Biloon’s (2017) article that focuses on games and second language acquisition, she expresses that “games allow them to not only learn vocabulary, but also give them a space to use it in a meaningful context, which will help make connections of how to use these words in the future” (p. 86).  Games or playful activities give students the opportunity to learn different aspects of language, no matter how simple or complicated their language learning conclusions are.  Silvy-Biloon (2017) suggests that “this active participation creates an environment where students can give unknowing attention to the specific grammar points, which they are learning or previously learned in class in a natural way” (p. 86).  Because each student is learning in their own unique style, some students will pay more attention to grammar and vocabulary than others, but most importantly all participating students are learning the language.

**Dictation with a partner**

**Description**

A few years into my career, a colleague shared the dictation with a partner idea with me.  First, the teacher must tape a few dictations in the target language to the walls in the hallway.  Then, the students work in groups of two or three to bring the dictation back into the classroom.  One of the students will walk into the hallway and read the first sentence on the dictation.  When they return to the classroom, they will say the first sentence in the target, or as much as they can remember, to their partner who will write it down in the target language.  Sometimes after the first paragraph, the partners will switch roles, and the student who was the reader will become the writer.  When the students have completed the dictation, they are given the opportunity to go over it and compare it to the original to see where they made mistakes.  With this activity I always give students comprehension questions to work on together after they have completed the dictation.

This activity gives students the opportunity to speak, read, write, and often times they are translating the words in the target language without even thinking about it.  It also gives the teacher the opportunity to offer formative feedback either to specific students or to the whole class.

**Literature Support:**

The beauty of integrating playful activities into the second language classroom is that students don’t feel like they are doing school work.  Norris (2012) conveys that even though it is more common to differentiate work and play as separate activities, he encourages “the conceptual collapsing of this binary opposite” (p. 306).  If students are doing playful activities in a second language classroom and they don’t feel like they are working to learn the language, they may be more encouraged to learn more and take more risks with their language learning experience.

**Create a Character**

**Description:**

I developed the create a character project for my Spanish 10 class in my first few years of teaching and it has changed and evolved over time depending on the needs of the class that I am teaching.  For this project I have students create a character.  However they decide to create their character is up to them. Some students use cut outs from magazines, some students draw, and some students use different technological applications to help them create their character.  Once their character is created, students need to give their character some background information such a name, birthdate, nationality, physical descriptions, character descriptions and whatever else is relevant to the lessons.  From this point, the teacher can use the students’ character to assess with either formative, summative, or both assessments, the students’ knowledge of the topic.  There have been some classes where I would have the students post their character in the classroom, and I would give the students sheets with clues about each character in the target language.  The students would have to use their clues to figure out which character was being described.  This activity was low risk as the students could work on their own or in a pair to figure out the answer.

With a different class, I had the students play the role of their character, and introduce themselves to their classmates as their character.  Depending on the ability and confidence of the class, they could introduce themselves to the few people around them.  Along with these introductions, students can also ask each other questions about the character that they are playing.  This activity is a little more challenging and there is a little more risk involved for students so it may be a good idea to scaffold the language skills and build up to this activity.

**Literature Support:**

In order to accommodate the academic spectrum in a language class, a teacher should first model the conversation in the first language and the target language and then write hints or a possible dialogue on the whiteboard for students who may struggle.  Norris (2012) suggests that “play is a disposition towards a task that fosters thresholds of possibilities, from which fresh ideas can emerge” (p. 300).  Students can then take the information that they have used in the playful activity and use their new knowledge to be creative with the target language.

**Kahoot**

**Description:**

Kahoot is an online interactive game that can be played with a class of students.  The teacher needs a projector or a screen to display the questions, and the students need a device to answer the questions.  In my experience, most students have a phone to use, and those who don’t have some sort of tablet or a computer.  In my school, if there is a student without a device, they can use a school owned Chromebook.

Once signed in to the website: kahoot.com, the teacher can search a game specific to what the students are studying, or the teacher can use a game that they have created themselves.  Once the teacher picks the game, there will be a game code that they will display on their screen.  Students then need to go to the website: kahoot.it, where they can enter their game code and create a nickname or pseudonym for themselves.  Once all of the players have signed in, the teacher starts the game.  Kahoot displays a question that the students must answer either in a multiple choice format, or place the answers in the best order.  The teacher is then able to formatively assess the class.  Because the students are participating with a pseudonym, their anonymity keeps the activity low risk and safe.

With Kahoot, the teacher has the ability to pick a game that is appropriate for the academic challenges and diversity of the class.  Some students may need short, easily digestible questions.  Kahoot also offers questions and tests that are more conducive to the visual learner as some questions have visual prompts.  Another way that a teacher can use Kahoot, is having the students create questions for a teacher made Kahoot game.  This is a great way to engage students’ creativity with the language and it also gives the teacher the ability to formatively assess the students’ abilities as they create their questions.

Kahoot is a flexible and playful activity that can be used at any point in the class.  It can be used to review information, to learn new information, to practice, or as a formative assessment tool for the teacher.  Often times, I know if my class has mastered a subject and is ready to move on or if they need more practice by a group formative assessment using Kahoot.

**Literature Support:**

Including playful activities that are technology based is an asset to student learning.  In a study done by Mady and Muhling (2017) on inclusive education in the French as a second language classroom, they found “students in the technology enhanced FSL classes demonstrated a higher level of engagement and interest in learning to read and speak French” (p. 17). Not only do students enjoy the use of technology in second language acquisition but “technology use proved to be an effective means of increasing inclusive instruction” (Mady, Muhling, 2017, 17).  Kahoot gives students the ability to test their own skills and compete against themselves in a playful activity.  Kahoot also gives students a clear and quick idea of what they know, and what they need to learn or practice.  It is an informal assessment that students can use to gauge their own abilities.  They do not need to worry about sharing this with others as it is completely anonymous.

**The Fly Swatter Game**

**Description:**

         One of my colleagues introduced me to the fly swatter game when we began working together and it has been a fun and physical way to teach, practice and formatively assess vocabulary in the second language classroom.  In order to play, the teacher randomly writes the vocabulary words in the target language on the classroom whiteboards.  Then, the class is divided into groups or teams, usually two to four teams depending on the size of the class.  Each student on the team takes a turn with the flyswatter, trying to swat the word in the target language that the teacher yells out in English.  The teams are allowed to help or guide their fly swatter, but they have to be careful that they do not give clues to the other team.   The first flyswatter to slap the correct word wins the point for their team.

         As a teacher, it is interesting to listen to the groups discuss their language learning strategies for different words.  Sometimes there are strategies or clues that can be shared with the class when the game is over.

         This game focuses on finding or working with one word answers. It is a simple activity that is conducive to a range of learners.  If the teacher feels they need to increase the challenge for a group that may be ready for a bigger challenge or a group that includes gifted learners, the teacher can make the game trickier by including more complex syntax.  Instead of yelling a word in the English, they could be more specific requesting, for example, the singular, feminine, definite article where the student would have to find *la* in Spanish.  A teacher could also include verb conjugations and request a conjugated verb, for example, we speak, where the students would have to find *hablamos* in Spanish.

In my experiences using this game I have seen students engaged and thrive in activities that support physical playfulness.  Often times, before an activity such as the flyswatter game, I need to remind students that full body contact is not allowed and students who are too physical may be disqualified from the game.  Of course, the students do not really want to harm each other, but enjoy being physical with their friends.

**Literature Support:**

Ellis (2005) suggests that “group activities that invite conceptual playfulness are valuable for warming relationships and enlivening everyday life in the class” (p. 66).  If students feel comfortable with the people around them, they will be more willing to take risks.  This is also incredibly important for students who may have been streamed out of academic classes as learning together can evoke a feeling of inclusion with their peers who have been streamed into the more academic classes. Even though student participation is required in this activity as each team member needs to act as a fly swatter, it remains low risk as students have the support of their team to help guide them to the correct word.

Part of the challenge of this game is knowing what the translation of the vocabulary word is, and the other part of the challenge is actually finding the word on the whiteboard.  This activity is also conducive to the kinesthetic learner as all students are required to stand and move around the classroom.   Katy Arnett (2013) suggests teachers should “incorporate kinesthetic elements into activities” (p. 76) as a strategy to help students who struggle to sit still during lessons.

**Lyrics Training**

**Description**

         Whenever I tell my students that we are going to do a song activity, they always groan, assuming that I am going to make them sing in a foreign language.  Although Lyrics Training sounds like an activity where I might encourage my students to sing, it is really just a listening activity that they can do as a group or on their own.

         Lyrics Training is a website that offers users the ability to practice and learn a second language by listening to songs in the target language and completing an activity.  Sometimes I have students just listen to a song in the target language and follow along with the lyrics as they are displayed.  In this type of a situation, I always give the students a challenge, for example they need to write a list of words that they recognize.  This can be done as a group or individually.  If the students need to move, I sometimes have them write the words that they hear or see on the whiteboard along with the English translation.

         Lyrics Training also offers song fill in the blank games for different ability levels. In this case, as the students are listening to the song and watching the lyrics appear, there may be a blank in the lyrics with four different options they can use to fill in the blank.  If the teacher has a touch screen students can move the correct words to the lyrics. Sometimes the song will slow down or stop in order for the students to complete the fill in the blank activity.

         Lyrics training also exposes students to different genres of music, different accents, and expressions in the target language.  In this activity, students have the opportunity to help pick the song that is played.  Teachers, however should censor the songs or have a list of options before hand as some of the music videos may be inappropriate for a high school classroom.  If teachers compile a list of songs for the students to choose from, they can also take into consideration the students’ language abilities and knowledge of vocabulary.

**Literature Support:**

This is a low risk activity that can be done in a group setting or on an individual basis if each student has access to a computer.  Even though some students might not like learning with music, Cook (2007) explains that “in the case of rhythm and rhyme, it is true that parallelisms at other linguistic levels have a clear potential to aid language acquisition, and that their existence can be explained in this way” ( p.30).  Music also gives teachers the option to get students moving, talking, and discussing the language without forcing the students to sing.  “Linguistic play is often the primary focus of certain types of language use such as certain poetry, rap, and puns” (Warner, 2004, p. 70) and in Spanish as a second language, students embrace the familiar and foreign tunes.  In my experience, students catch on quickly to the lyrics while we are doing the activity and I hear them singing under their breath.  The more confident students will sing out loud.  This activity gets the students listening to the target language, reading the target language, and sometimes speaking the target language.  It is an activity that caters to a variety of different learning styles.

**Speed Dating**

**Description:**

Speed dating evolved out of a simple questionnaire that I would have my students complete.  I wanted to find a way for students to practice, and recognize simple and common questions along with their responses in the target language.  These are questions that are difficult to have students practice in an authentic setting.

To start with I had a short list of simple questions in the target language that I would go over with my students.  We would review what each question meant and how to answer it.  I would talk about pronunciation and how to say each word.  Then, I would have the students circle the class and ask a classmate their questions and answer the questions that their classmates were asking them.  I found that even though this activity was well scaffolded, giving the students the freedom to make their own conversation failed as students did not have the confidence to speak to random people in the class, or they would sit with their friends and be off task.  This is when I decided that I needed to be more involved in the conversation process, however it needed to be fun for student buy in.

Speed dating is more structured than my previous questionnaire activity.  I line the students up in rows facing each other and I give them two or three minutes to ask and answer their questions.  Then they move on to the next person.  The students end up repeating the same questions over and over again, and in a way are rehearsing for the next person.  The more they interview the easier the activity gets.  Students are then willing to take more chances working with the language without the use of their notes.  Once students are comfortable with the language they can be more creative with the dialogue.  As the students are asking and answering questions, the teacher can formatively assess the conversations and when it is time for the partners to switch, the teacher can give the class feedback on their oral speech and listen for improvements in the next round.

**Literature Support:**

The speed dating activity offers students the ability to play with the language in a structured and low risk environment.  Their use of the language is scaffolded by the initial approach to the interview questions and then practice interviews. Warner (2004) expresses that “according to Lantolf, play as a rehearsal may allow learners to compare their existing interlanguage with newly acquired linguistic information in a low-pressure situation” (p. 70).  In Broner and Tarone’s (2001) article examining play in the second language classroom, they observes that “rehearsal is focused on imperfectly mastered language forms and aims at mastery of language norms, not their willful violation” (p. 366).  These types of activities give students the chance not only to make mistakes, but to acknowledge them and improve in the next round.

Ellis (2005) reinforces that playful activities lend themselves to being open ended and offer “space for the expression of students’ out-of-school identities- interests, values, common sense ideas, roles, motivations, ways of seeing and acting” (p. 69).  If students are exposed to activities that create positive spaces, they will be motivated to learn more.  So, even if there is a specific focus on something like vocabulary or simple grammar and syntax, it is only boosting the language learner’s confidence and creating a student with a confident language identity.  This creates a group of learners who are engaged and willing to take small risks in order to learn the language.

**Fast Hands or *La mano rapido***

**Description**

When I first started teaching, I printed the vocabulary list for each chapter on flashcards for all of my students.  At the beginning of each class, I would give my students a few minutes to flip through their flashcards so they would have time to practice their vocabulary words.  There were some students who loved the flashcards and used them diligently every day.  There were also students who hated practicing the flashcards daily, and would often lose their packs of flashcards or would just refuse to go over them.  It didn’t matter where the student was on the academic spectrum, some students liked to used them and others did not.  I saw the value of including the flashcards in my teaching methodology but I needed a way to make them more versatile.  One way I was able to integrate the flashcards into a fun activity was with the game fast hands.  This game was one of the very first games that I pinned on my Pinterest account.  It was a game called slap words, posted on a blog by Linda Mooney, a Kindergarten teacher that used this game for vocabulary building in her Kindergarten class.  I knew that this game could be easily modified to fit my second language classroom.

         To play fast hands, I have the students lay their cards down with the Spanish words facing upwards.  They can play with a partner, or a small group.  I have had situations with students who did not work well in group activities, and I gave them the option to play this game by themselves.  It worked better than I expected as it took a low risk activity to a no risk activity.

 When the class has their cards laid out, I say one of their vocabulary words in English and the students race their partner to find that word in Spanish.  If the students can’t find the word or don’t know the word, often they will start flipping the cards over to check the English translation provided on the other side and to find the correct word. The student who has the most words at the end is the winner.  In my experience, this activity has been fun for students wherever they are on the academic spectrum.  Fast hands is a great kinesthetic activity for the students who require more movement and flexibility in the classroom.  Although it is normally set up around a desk, and most students sit, this activity can be played on the floor or at a standing desk as well.  I often find some students get up on their knees on their chair or other students stand around the desk.

In order to make this activity more complex, I give the students clues as to what the word is before I actually say the word that they are looking for.  Sometimes, depending on the class, I give the students the clues in the target language.  Clues give the students the opportunity to narrow down or group the words that they are looking for.  For example, if the word the students are looking for is *azul* (blue), I might say: the next word that you are looking for is a colour, it is a primary colour, it is not red or yellow, it is the colour of the sky.  These clues tend to give students more time to figure out what word they are looking for.  Also, these clues are simple enough that they could be said in the target language in an inclusive second language classroom, and all students would be able to figure them out.

Fast hands is a game that my students have been requesting since I started implementing it.  It is fun, active, and low risk way to teach, review, practice, and formatively assess vocabulary in an inclusive second language classroom.

**Literature Support**

What play offers to students is the opportunity to “form hypotheses, immediately test them and then make adjustments” (Norris, 2012, p. 302).  It is a way for students to learn from their mistakes in a fun and sometimes carefree environment.  Playful activities don’t produce the same anxieties as a more traditional worksheet because students can see that other students are having fun and making mistakes too.  Warner (2004) suggests that “the word “play” is often employed to describe any sort of creative tinkering with normal set-ups (plays on words, play with ideas, identity play, play with genre expectations, etc.) for nearly any reason (fun, rehearsal, social relations)” (p.72).  In this case, students are actually playing with words, however as they listen to the translations or the hints that are given, they are able to make assumptions, and take risks.  This type of playful activity also gives students the opportunity to see that other students are in the same situation, learning from their mistakes.

***Arreado los gatos* or (Herding Cats)**

**Description**

         Herding Cats is a game that I recently created for the second language classroom, inspired by Teachallday’s math game, Corralling Chicks, which she posted on Instagram.  I have not yet tried this game in my second language classroom, however I have shared it with a colleague and am excited to hear the results.

         For this game, a teacher would need to blow up balloons, or have balls that they could write on.  Each balloon or ball would have either a pronoun or a conjugated verb written on it.  The teacher would create a large circle in the classroom with all of the balloons or balls in the center.  Then, the students would be separated into teams of students.  Each team would send in one student at a time who would have to find a pronoun and conjugated verb pair.  When the game is done, the group with the most pairs of balloons or cats would be the winner.  This would be a fast paced game, and would be great for the bodily-kinesthetic learners in the classroom.  It would allow students the ability to move around while learning.

         As we have learned, however, not every playful activity is conducive to each class.  If the classroom dynamics and learners do not respond to large group games, the same type of game could be played with ping pong balls in a box.  This would allow students the freedom to move, however it would be a lower-risk activity for students who many have anxiety of being put on the spot in front of a large group.

         This activity also offers the flexibility to teach or practice different aspects of the second language.  A teacher may have students match masculine and feminine, singular and plural pronouns or possessives with masculine and feminine, singular and plural nouns.  This may be considered a more simple activity that teachers could use to scaffold complexity into the class.  The balls or balloons could also have a variety of words on them and students could be challenged to create sentences.  This type of activity may be more complex, however would offer students the ability to create and play with the language.

**Literature Support:**

Ellis (2005) explains that playful group activities provide “opportunities for students to be humorous, validate each other’s contributions, and get to know and like each other” (p. 69).  Students will be more likely to work as a team, ask for help, and learn the language together rather than struggling with the language by themselves.  MacIntyre& Mercer (2014) suggest that “the social milieu in which the learning takes place is a key source of both positive and negative attitudes, as learners internalize elements of the context in which they live” (p. 159). Herding cats is a fun activity that brings students together in a positive and low risk environment.  It gives students the opportunity to work together without taking themselves too seriously. Herding cats allows students the opportunity to play with different aspects of the language and have fun while learning it too.

**Reflection:**

I have reflected on my learning and teaching journey and evaluated playful activities that I have used in my Spanish as a second language classroom.  These activities I have supported with literature that has analyzed second language acquisition, inclusive classrooms, and playful activities.  But there are other beneficial playful activities yet to be discovered.  In the beginning of my career my professional development was limited what I shared with my colleagues and local conferences that I was able to attend.  As time passed, I relied more and more on the internet, and social media sites to help me discover and keep track of resources and playful ideas that I could add to my teaching pedagogy.  In my career I have used Pinterest as my main form of online networking, but have also used email, Facebook, and various blogs to learn more about teaching Spanish as a second language.  These learning tools have helped me to craft my own personal teaching pedagogy and continue to grow and learn in my profession.

**Literature Review:**

**Professional Learning**

A professional learning network “is a system of interpersonal connections and resources that support informal learning” (Trust, 2014, p. 133). The paper *“Follow” Me: Networked Professional Learning for Teachers* investigates Twitter as a means of teacher professional development and a platform for connection.  Twitter is an online social media site that allows people to post ideas, links, or text and categorize the ideas of their posts by using hashtags. It gives people the ability to follow one another or to view hashtags concerning topics of interest.  Holmes, Preston, Shaw, and Buchanan (2013) express that “online tools are now enabling collaborations between teachers in diverse locations and time zones, facilitating connections based on common interests rather than proximity” (p. 55).  Before the internet and social media “professional development usually took the form of face to face workshops, often with limited time available for effective follow up or consolidation” (Holmes et al., 2013, p. 56).  Although teachers had the ability to access professional development, their choice was limited, their resources were limited, and there was usually a time limit associated with their development sessions.  I also found personally, that after a development session, I might have been very excited about an idea that I learned about, however, if I had questions about it later, or if the idea did not work the first time, I was likely to forget about it.  Time may have been an issue in the past, but now with online professional learning networks, there is “instant access to information and connections to thousands of individuals with an array of expertise” (Trust, 2014, p. 133).  Instead of teachers relying on professional development that is offered once or twice a year, or with colleagues within a school or district, “the paradigm of the isolated teacher who shows minimal professional growth into a lifelong learner who grows and shares expertise with others in his or her network” (Trust, 2014, p. 134).

The benefits of teachers using social media are vast as teachers have unlimited professional development and teacher to teacher networking at their fingertips. Online professional learning networks offer tools that “allow teachers to have conversations with others worldwide to receive feedback on new ideas, discuss lesson plans, ask for support, solve problems, and collaborate”(Trust, 2014, p. 134).  These types of networks bring educators closer together in a sense of professional development.  The Holmes et al. article acknowledges that “any teacher signing up to Twitter and following the leading educators is potentially exposed to a rich, interconnected network of other like-minded educators and is directed to a wide variety of up-to-date and relevant educational material” (Holmes et al., 2013, p. 63).  This means that easily accessed teaching material and ideas are quickly changing the face and process of classrooms.  One of the reasons that teachers should be interested in using Twitter or other social media as a form of professional development is that “Twitter has the advantage that it can be tapped into on any day at any time, leaving open the possibility that it may lead to learning over a sustained period of time, which can be accessed at the most optimal time for each user” (Holmes et al., 2013, p. 63).

Starting my teaching career in Northern Alberta, I found that professional development opportunities specifically focusing on issues in the second language classroom were not often available.  Professional development using social media “allows for each participant to focus on the particular issues that concern them at the time” (Holmes et al., 2013, p. 63).   So instead of waiting for the right topic to come along, teachers can be proactive and find the answers to their teaching questions in a matter of minutes.

Social media brings people from all over the world together and “the collaborative and public nature of the Twitter medium allows for networks of participants to form naturally in response to common interests” (Holmes et al., 2013, p. 63).  This collaboration is important as “teachers who are continuous learners that work to improve their practice, skills, and instructional strategies can successfully help others to learn” (Trust, 2014, p. 134).  Social media and other networking tools offer teachers resources, ideas, and support often times for free, with just the click of a few buttons.

**Conclusion:**

Through the reflection process and analysis of literature in this narrative inquiry, qualitative methodology project, I reinforced my belief that playful activities can help teachers to create a positive environment in an inclusive Spanish as a second language class that is conducive to all learners on the academic spectrum.  Prominent moments in my own second language learning and teaching career have encouraged me to learn more about successfully integrating all students into my lesson, and to learn more about the impact of the playful activities that I have been implementing in my second language classes.  An important part of the reflecting and researching process through the narrative inquiry approach was learning what Brown (2007) refers to as “balancing your perspective” (p. 310) by looking at all variables and then having the opportunity to apply them to my personal teaching pedagogy.  Bringing together research with regards to second language learning and teaching, inclusive classrooms, and playful activities has helped me to form a more complete picture of my teaching pedagogy.  This approach is also supported by Howard Gardner (2006) who believes that “practice is enriched by theory, even as theory is transformed in the light of the fruits and frustrations of practice” (p. 62). In compiling some of my most successful playful activities, I have also been inspired to create more playful activities that I can share with other colleagues who teach second languages.

The second language classroom can be a diverse and changing environment. One where teachers need the tools to approach these types of classrooms with the confidence that all learners can achieve personal success with the language.  Every classroom has different needs and teachers need to be able to identify these needs and take action, creating an environment where all learners have the opportunity to learn the language.  Success might not look the same for all students, however if students are able to achieve personal success in learning Spanish as a second language, I would feel that I have achieved my pedagogical goal.

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