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Effective Strategies for Integrating Pronunciation Instruction with a Focus on Intelligibility and Comprehensibility for Adult ESL Students

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**Effective strategies for Integrating Pronunciation Instruction With a Focus
on Intelligibility and Comprehensibility for Adult ESL Students**

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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DEDICATION

To all my ESL students throughout the years for inspiring me with their stories of bravery, triumph and success as they overcome significant challenges. I have learned far more from you than I have ever taught you. To my boys, Judah and Lucas who inspire me to be brave, kind, wise and constantly curious everyday. To my parents, who without your support, I wouldn't have come close to finishing this project. Thanks for always being there for me.

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

“Do you know what a foreign accent is? It is a sign of bravery.” This is a quote by best-selling author Amy Chua (2014, p 86), who is the daughter of immigrants. She shares this quote with her young daughters as she explains the difficulties that non-native speakers of English face when they adjust to the language and culture of the United States. As an adult ESL instructor for over a decade and meeting hundreds of ESL students from around the world, the concept behind this quote has led me to create a project surrounding pronunciation instruction. The question that will encompass the complexity of this capstone project will be: *What are some effective strategies for integrating pronunciation instruction in an adult ESL course with the focus being on intelligibility and comprehensibility?*

As an adult ESL instructor, I have watched in awe as students in their 60s and 70s jump headfirst into learning English for the first time, risking their pride and overcoming their fears, in hopes of achieving new goals when most people are retiring. I have watched hardworking students, with multiple jobs and a family to care for, attend night classes because they want to make a better future for their children. I have watched refugee students who come from the most devastating of circumstances, forced to leave their lives behind and start all over again, push through their challenges as they must build new lives from scratch. This often begins with language learning as being their first and most crucial step of the process.. All of these stories are important, all of them so very brave.

When considering this project, it is important to recognize my own positionality. I recognize that English is my native language and I am a natural born American citizen.

Although I have been a language learner and traveled around to many different parts of the world, I have never lived as an immigrant in a foreign country for an extended period. My understanding of all that my ESL students face is limited.. I have been teaching in many different contexts, yet before this program I had never studied TESOL as an undergraduate. When creating this project, I accept that my positionality is limited and must rely on the experiences of others and the research found on this topic. .

As we think of the challenges these adult ESL students face in their language learning, there are many. They have so much to overcome and so much to study. Reading, writing, speaking and listening are often the four main categories of focus for adult ESL students. All of these are essential for students to practice and learn in order to reach their desired fluency. Yet this is just the tip of the iceberg of all the language skills that students need to acquire. Grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and pragmatic functions of English are all skills that a student must be able to use and sometimes they must be used simultaneously. Think about an English language learner going into a job interview. They must be able to access all of these language skills in order to achieve a successful outcome. It would be a disaster if students only utilized one language skill at a time. Although this is true, adult education programs will often divide language skills into their own specific classes, compartmentalizing the instruction. In my current program, academic English classes are divided into reading, writing, oral communication, and math. This system has its advantages, however it doesn't always allow for these language skills to overlap each other which is what naturally happens when we take our language skills outside of a classroom.

Unfortunately not everyone outside of an ESL classroom will view a foreign accent as brave, leaving English language learners at risk for possible discrimination and less likely to have the same opportunities as a native speaker. I have noticed that out of all the language skills, pronunciation is often the most overlooked in these types of academic English classes leaving students struggling with communicating in the real world and teachers struggling to know where and how to incorporate pronunciation instruction into a class. What do teachers do when students worry about their foreign accent and how they are perceived? Is this an important skill for us to address or can it be left to learn naturally? What are the most important pronunciation features that contribute to an English language learner's ability to be understood and communicate well? All of these questions will be addressed throughout this capstone.

In Chapter One, I will first share my personal background and experiences as a long time adult ESL instructor and how I came to be invested in this topic. Secondly, I will provide the context and rationale for creating this project and its professional significance for both instructors and adult English language students. Next, I will preview my second chapter that will consist of an extensive literature review over the subjects of adult ESL pronunciation and the approaches that influence instruction. Chapter One will conclude with a summary and an outline of the rest of the capstone.

Background and Interest

In my 13 years of teaching adult ESL students in the United States, I have found a common theme around what students often worry about the most when it comes to their language skills. Whether the students are in a refugee resettlement agency, a private

institute, or community college program, the refrain is often the same, “Teacher, I need help with my pronunciation.” Students recognize their need to improve their speaking and listening skills as they interact with native speakers in their daily lives as they continue to struggle with being understood outside of the classroom. Even the most advanced students who are writing essays and reading novels in English can become frustrated when a native speaker still cannot understand some of the most basic words that they are saying. I recently had students discuss important qualities of love. One student was excited to participate and we spent a solid 10 minutes discussing her idea of love being *patient*. It wasn’t until later that she explained to me that she was confused about the whole discussion because she had been trying to say *passion* each time, yet everyone misunderstood her making her contributions to the discussion feel worthless. This student was very advanced, yet a simple word like *passion* was causing frustration and changed the entire direction of a small group conversation and assignment. I recently met with a friend from Colombia who had studied in the United States for over 6 years in both high school and college settings. She told me she was never taught pronunciation in her classes and wished that her ESL teachers had spent time on this area. Another friend from Brazil, who holds a doctorate degree in the US and works as a professor at a state university, often shares with me her struggles with pronunciation and being misunderstood by students and colleagues at times. This continuous pattern of English language learners, no matter their background or level of education, still being frustrated with their pronunciation has led me to this area of research.

I, like many other of my colleagues, did not study TESOL as a degree in my undergraduate studies. I have found that many of my colleagues have degrees in other

disciplines, such as K-12 education, communication, foreign language or business. The field of adult education includes a variety of educational backgrounds, which brings unique perspectives, however it can be a hindrance to the teaching of English pronunciation. For example, I was never given the opportunity to learn the ins and outs of the phonological features of English. Because of this, I have always felt ill equipped to offer activities and resources for students who want to work on pronunciation acquisition. In fact, many times I would feel overwhelmed when students would ask questions related to pronunciation such as why words are pronounced a certain way, or how they could work on learning specific sounds that didn't exist in their language such as the "th" /θ/ sound. I would scour Youtube trying to find help, but still struggling to feel confident in this area and in turn feeling like I was failing as a teacher. Even though I considered myself a good teacher, this feeling of inadequacy in this one area persisted from my time teaching in villages in Mexico, to refugee resettlement agencies in Texas and to my current position in a community college in Illinois.

In my first linguistics course at Hamline University, I felt like I was drinking water from a firehose as we studied a plethora of information that was helpful in teaching pronunciation. For the first time, I learned the differences between suprasegmentals and segmentals of speech. I was able to explore the phonology of several languages and compare and contrast them with English. I learned the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and how to view and write words phonetically. The discussion on stress-timed and syllable-timed languages opened my eyes up to understanding my students' challenges with pronunciation so much more. I could list multiple other linguistic features that I gained knowledge of that semester. Because of this class and all that I was able to learn

about pronunciation acquisition, I was able to integrate some pronunciation skills directly into my teaching context. I quickly saw the benefits and received fantastic feedback from my students. Ever since this class, I have had great interest in educating myself and other teachers more about strategies to teach pronunciation to our adult students.

While taking this linguistics class, I taught a Brazilian student with high level English proficiency in reading, writing and communication. However, as she was reading aloud one day, I noticed that she consistently added the extra syllable to every past tense verb regardless of the final consonant. When I finally corrected her and showed her the pronunciation rules, she was shocked.. In her 10 years of taking English classes in Brazil and the United States, she had never received feedback or instruction on pronunciation of past tense verbs. She told me that this small pronunciation activity was life changing. She now works as a paralegal in an immigration law office, and is still using the knowledge she received that day in the reading course in her professional career. There are countless other students who share stories of excelling in their ESL classes, but still struggle to be understood when speaking in the real world causing frustration and lack of confidence in their language skills. I have seen the benefits of integrating pronunciation instruction into lesson plans and course curriculum.

Professional Significance

There is always a focus on the skills of reading, writing, grammar, and speaking fluency in adult academic ESL education programs; however, pronunciation can often feel like an afterthought. In my current teaching context, I teach an oral communication course and an academic reading course. These classes are taught separately and on

different days of the week. In my oral communication class, pronunciation is a key objective that is meant to be covered. Yet, the textbooks that we use have little emphasis on pronunciation. For example, the first unit in our oral communication book has 28 pages, with only one page dedicated to any type of pronunciation activity or instruction. The other pages are dedicated to listening, vocabulary and grammar skills, which in turn creates the illusion that those are more important skills to learn and master. Likewise in our reading textbook, there is nothing that addresses reading aloud or giving pronunciation feedback. After doing some research I quickly realized that this was not uncommon for ESL textbooks and that there has been a history of ESL curriculum leaving out pronunciation as a main language skill to be taught (Derwing et al., 2012).

As a teacher, not only have I often felt like I am left on my own to figure out *how* to integrate pronunciation instruction in the curriculum, but also *when*. I have often wondered if giving oral corrective feedback on pronunciation should only be done in a pronunciation specific focused task or can it be effectively integrated while instructing other subject materials? This has most significantly become a question for me in the case of my adult ESL academic reading class. This class has the primary objective of improving students' reading skills. There is currently no space given to address pronunciation in the curriculum of my academic reading course. Yet as in the case of my student Maria, I learned that it was through reading aloud activities that I was able to pinpoint pronunciation errors more carefully and in turn give feedback to students more effectively. I believe that pronunciation instruction can happen during any or all subjects and doesn't have to only be addressed in a communication or speaking course.

Over the years, I have talked to many other instructors in my field who also do not have the confidence or adequate training to emphasize the importance of pronunciation and when to give corrective feedback in their classrooms. According to recent research studies, we are not alone. Multiple studies have shown that ESL instructors often do not feel adequately trained to teach proper pronunciation and give corrective feedback efficiently in their adult classrooms. (Alzarhani, 2021; Darcy et al., 2020). With a lack of training and a lack of resources, teachers are faced with a major dilemma of what to do when students ask for specific help in improving their pronunciation skills.

Purpose of this project

This project explores effective ways to integrate pronunciation instruction in an adult ESL course, whether it is a general skills or a specialized course. My goal is to develop a professional development workshop that centers around pronunciation strategies and equips teachers with the background knowledge they need to know to effectively help their students. On top of that, I have created a professional learning community (PLC) that models and demonstrates effective strategies of pronunciation instruction while allowing for active learning and collaboration among instructors over an extended amount of time. The PLC will be developed as a way to equip instructors and give them the resources they need to successfully and intentionally give attention to pronunciation issues with their students with the focus being on intelligibility and comprehensibility. Adult ESL instructors will be able to use the materials created in this project and implement them directly into their classrooms resulting in students becoming

more confident in their speaking and listening skills in the real world, and opening more opportunities for them.

Conclusion

Through my background and experiences of teaching adult ESL students, I have had great concern over the lack of pronunciation emphasis in curriculum and the lack of professional development opportunities for adult ESL instructors to understand how best to teach pronunciation. I also have seen the need and benefits of integrating pronunciation instruction in all areas of ESL study. My project will address both of these concerns and become a resource for colleagues that teach adult ESL students. Throughout the capstone I will continue to answer the question: *What are some effective strategies for integrating pronunciation instruction with a focus on intelligibility and comprehensibility for adult ESL students?*

Chapter Two of this capstone will provide a detailed literature review on the stigmatization of foreign accents and the paradigm shift of ESL pedagogy going from accent reduction to intelligibility, giving clear definition for both. The review will explore the current landscape and perceptions of both adult ESL students and instructors in regards to pronunciation instruction in their classroom with a brief section on certain pronunciation features and their impact on intelligibility.

Chapter Three will introduce and lay out my project which is a professional learning community for adult ESL instructors that equips, trains, and encourages collaboration in the area of pronunciation instruction with a focus on intelligibility over

accent reduction. The chapter will give a detailed description, the intended audience, a timeline and a rationale for why I chose this capstone project.

Chapter Four will be a final reflection over all that I have learned throughout the capstone process. I will revisit the literature review and explain the connections between my project and the research previously studied. The chapter will provide an explanation of the benefits of this project to my field and how this project will be used and implemented going forward.

CHAPTER TWO : Literature Review

Introduction

In order to fully understand the scope of this project, I will now present a review of the literature regarding a variety of topics that encompass my research question. My project will be answering the question: *What are some effective strategies for integrating pronunciation instruction with a focus on intelligibility and comprehensibility for adult ESL students?* In order to answer this question accurately, it is necessary to examine first the stigma that is associated with accented speech for L2 English learners. Next, we briefly discuss some of the features of English pronunciation such as word stress, intonation and segmentals in order to understand what type of language skills impact a student's pronunciation production most. Following this discussion, there will be a section that investigates the complexities of second language teacher cognition, which includes the beliefs, attitudes, experiences of ESL teachers around pronunciation instruction. A major focus of the paper will examine the two main approaches of pronunciation instruction which are 1) nativeness principles and 2) intelligibility and comprehensibility principles. In this part of the review, the beliefs and approaches that researchers have found to be most effective with adult ESL learners will be presented. Lastly, we will review the literature surrounding the implications of the pedagogical approaches and the effective strategies of implementation of pronunciation with regards to intelligibility and comprehensibility.

Stigma of Accent

When talking about ESL pronunciation, it is important to take a closer look at the reality that oftentimes English language learners experience stigma and even discrimination because of their accented speech. Preston (2004) points out that often we can easily identify the accent of others as outsiders who do not belong to our group, and even goes on to say that accents are the “salient triggers in our judgments of people” (p.480). A study done by Rubin (1992) examined how American undergraduate students perceived their non-native English speaking teacher assistants (NNSTA) in regards to their accent. It was found that if students perceived their NNSTA to have a foreign accent it undermined their evaluations, concluding that they were incompetent and a poor teacher. It was reported that some of these students even requested to be removed from the class that had a NNSTA because of their foreign accent. This study shows that even the most educated non-native speakers will still face discrimination based on the perceptions and racial biases of those native speakers around them.

The majority of research on accents has been placed on people’s perceptions, yet Gluszek and Dividio (2010) suggested moving the research forward into how the stigma of accent affects communicative activities in certain contexts and how the views of the non-native speaker influence their interactions with native speakers. When given a questionnaire about their goals for English pronunciation acquisition, research has shown that ESL students often prioritize the goal of having native like speech over intelligibility (Scales et al., 2006). Kim et al. (2019) attempted to look into the reasoning and logic behind these motivations by investigating the feelings and experiences of non-native speakers of English who work alongside native speakers in the workplace. The research

concluded that non-native speakers experienced great stress and anxiety in communicative activities because they were aware of the biases and stigmas that were related to their accented speech. These speakers believed that because of their accent, they were perceived as less competent, less intelligent and more disrespected in their workplaces. This rings true to multiple other studies that have concluded that similar stigmas related to accented speech exist in the United States (Isaacs, 2018; Lindemann, 2002). The stigmas and racial biases that exist with accented speech must be considered by ESL teachers in order to find ways to combat these stigmas, not reinforce them, in the classroom.

Pronunciation Features of English

Segmentals

The English language has several different kinds of features that encompass pronunciation. It is necessary to distinguish between them to be able to identify which features affect intelligibility or comprehensibility the most. First, we can examine segmental features. Segmental features of a language are defined as “the individual vowels and consonants in the phonological system of a language” (Derwing & Munro, 2015, p. 5). Segmental features consist of specific orthography and can be represented by the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Although there are only 26 letters in the English alphabet, when teaching pronunciation you must consider each and every sound instead of just the representative characters. According to the IPA chart, there are 58 basic consonants, 10 non-pulmonic consonants, 10 symbols for consonants and their voiceless counterparts and 28 vowels (Deterding, 2019). See Figure 1 below for the list of

basic consonants and both the places and manners of articulation. Vowel pronunciation is based on the position of the tongue in the mouth and if the lips are rounded or unrounded. Figure 2 shows how each vowel can be pronounced with these variables in mind.

Figure 1

The International Phonetic Alphabet- Consonants

THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET (revised to 2005)

CONSONANTS (PULMONIC) © 2005 IPA

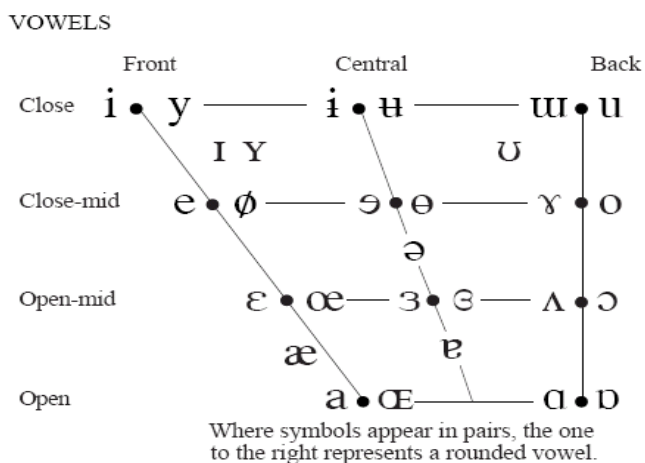
	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b			t d		ʈ ɖ	c ɟ	k ɡ	q ɢ		ʔ
Nasal	m	ɱ		n		ɳ	ɲ	ŋ	ɴ		
Trill				r					ʀ		
Tap or Flap		ⱱ		ɾ		ɽ					
Fricative	ɸ β	f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ	ʂ ʐ	ç ʝ	x ɣ	χ ʁ	ħ ʕ	h ɦ
Lateral fricative				ɬ ɮ							
Approximant		ʋ		ɹ		ɻ	j	ɰ			
Lateral approximant				l		ɭ	ʎ	ʟ			

Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a voiced consonant. Shaded areas denote articulations judged impossible.

Note. The consonants are arranged vertically from the manner of articulation and horizontally from the place of articulation.

Retrieved from International Phonetic Association.

(<https://www.internationalphoneticassociation.org/content/ipa-pulmonic-consonants>)

Figure 2*IPA Vowel Chart*

Note. Vowels are arranged from the height of the mouth, from closed to open, and the location of the tongue's articulation from front to back. Retrieved from the International Phonetic Association website.

(<https://www.internationalphoneticassociation.org/content/ipa-vowels>)

These two figures are helpful tools for teachers to use as a resource when focusing on the segmental features of pronunciation to their students. Often teachers who haven't studied phonology in depth are unaware of positions of sounds in the mouth and how to explain them effectively. These two figures give students a visual representation of where and how sounds are produced allowing for better understanding in their pronunciation production. According to the research done by Venkatagiri and Levis (2007), an awareness of the English phonological system has a positive correlation with a non-native speakers' language performance. They conclude that explicit instruction of

phonology that increases students' metaphonological awareness will in turn help increase their comprehensibility.

Suprasegmentals

Suprasegmentals, often synonymously referred to as prosody, refers to the parts of language that go above segmentals, such as intonation, rhythm, lexical stress, and thought groups/pausing (Dawson & Phelan, 2016). English pronunciation research, in regards to second language acquisition, reports that suprasegmental features are essential to learn in an L2 (Kang et al., 2010; Wang 2022). Even more importantly to note is that suprasegmentals are shown to be equally important at every stage of L2 learning, whether beginning or advanced levels (Saito & Saito, 2017).

The first suprasegmental feature to examine is thought groups. Thought groups, also known as pausing, tend to be seen as the backbone or foundation of learning most of the suprasegmental features of English. Murphy (2020) describes pausing with thought groups as the momentary interruption in the flow of speech that is directly tied to communicative intent and the organizational needs of both the speaker and listener. Because there are no direct rules to indicate when to pause in speaking, in the way written English provides punctuation for a reader to use, speakers tend to use thought groups to communicate and naturally put words together. Thought groups serve as guides for the listener and are usually no more than 10 words tied together.

Lexical stress is related to the syllable timing and vowel reductions of a language. In English, words with more than one syllable will have varying stress across syllable positions as compared to some languages that are fixed stress or syllable timed where

syllables are assigned and there is no variation (Cutler, 2019). A stressed syllable is longer, louder and higher in pitch. An example of this is the word *education*. *Education* has four syllables, yet the third syllable should be stressed, resulting in the speaker saying ed-u-CA-tion. Other stress timed languages include Thai, German, and Russian. Students who come from languages that are not stressed timed, but are syllable timed, may have more difficulty adapting to this pronunciation feature and become unsure of where to put the stress in each word resulting in difficulty in communication.

Intonation is an important pronunciation feature that plays a role in a non-native speaker's second language production. Intonation is usually defined as the linguistically meaningful use of vocal pitch level and pitch movement in phrases (Kang et al., 2010). The pitch movement of a speaker varies greatly depending on the context and type of sentence being uttered. The pitch takes on pragmatic meanings. For example, a falling intonation suggests that a speaker is telling information or also can indicate low energy. However, a rising intonation may suggest that the speaker is asking for clarification because of uncertainty and also an indicator of high energy.

Pronunciation acquisition has often been categorized into two features: segmental and suprasegmental. However, research shows us that there are plenty of other features in the English language that affect intelligibility and comprehensibility that need to be addressed by instructors in order to meet the needs of their students' communication goals. Some of those other factors include fluency, lexis, grammar, and discourse (Crowther et al., 2015; Hahn, 2004; Isaacs, 2018).

Second Language Teacher Cognition

Adult ESL teachers face a variety of challenges as they strive to effectively teach English pronunciation. Scholars have identified second language teacher cognition (SLTC) as being important in understanding ESL pedagogy and essential to study in the area of pronunciation instruction. SLTC includes the spectrum of teachers' beliefs, experiences, knowledge, and perceptions in regard to their actual teaching practices and the research behind it studies how they all came to be (Baker, 2014). ESL instructors with varying experiences and backgrounds participated in a study done by Baker (2014) that examined teachers' cognition surrounding pronunciation instruction during oral communication courses. Methods used to collect data were semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and stimulated recall interviews. The findings showed that the teachers who had taken a specific graduate level course dedicated to teaching pronunciation had significantly more knowledge and pedagogical strategies than teachers who hadn't. The conclusion was that explicit pronunciation training has a positive impact on teachers' knowledge base and success in their classrooms. This correlates well with the data that has shown how many adult ESL teachers admit that even though they understand the significance of pronunciation, they do not feel confident or equipped to teach it because of a lack of adequate training (Alzahrani, 2021; Baker, 2014; Darcy 2020, Foote et al., 2011). In one particular study, 75% of teachers stated that they wished that they had more training in pronunciation instruction no matter what their academic background was (Foote et al., 2016).

Oftentimes mainstream teachers become ESL instructors, and although they are capable and competent to teach other language skills, they often do not see the necessity

of pronunciation instruction until they have been taught and trained themselves (Burri et al., 2017). To add to this, Burri et al. concluded in their study of student teachers enrolled in a post-graduate pronunciation course that teacher learning is impacted by many contextual factors such as curricula, governmental policies, colleagues, and supervisors. They argue that although explicit post-graduate level courses are helpful, the learning of pronunciation instruction should go beyond one course and continue on and develop through actual teaching contexts.

Beliefs about Instruction

The teachers in the study conducted by Baker (2014) held several sets of beliefs concerning pronunciation instruction. The first belief that was shared among them was that listening perception was fundamental for producing comprehensible speech. The beliefs were reflected in their teaching practices which included listening discrimination activities. Another belief that emerged in this study was the necessity for kinesthetic practices in phonological awareness and improvement. These could be demonstrated through the use of clapping, standing up and down, and using gestures. The last belief that was shared among the participants was the idea that pronunciation instruction can often become boring and mindless. The author of the study pointed out the reasons these teachers felt that way could most likely be associated with the over-routinisation of textbook practices or lack of training in pronunciation pedagogy. Training in pronunciation pedagogy gives teachers the motivation and confidence to teach pronunciation in practical ways.

Curriculum and Materials

It is essential to examine the materials that are available for teachers, how effective they are, and where there might be a gap or need. Derwing et al. (2012) conducted a research study that closely examined 12 ESL textbook series that was guided by the following research questions: 1. How much of the overall coverage in general skills ESL texts is devoted to pronunciation? 2. How consistent is the pronunciation coverage across various textbook series? 3. How do pronunciation foci and task types vary across textbook series? and 4. To what extent do teachers' manuals provide support and background information about pronunciation activities? (p 5). Their findings suggested a wide range of pronunciation coverage across different curriculum series with varying priorities of instruction. In the conclusion and recommendations, the authors stated that because of the lack of explicit pronunciation training, curriculum is a significant resource for teachers and currently the textbook series that are offered are inadequate and limited. They suggested there should be more opportunities for professional development in this area.

Approaches to Pronunciation Instruction

Pronunciation is an essential part of foreign language acquisition and instruction. As defined by Derwing and Munro (2015), pronunciation includes all aspects of the oral production of language, including segmentals, prosody, voice quality and rate. When teaching pronunciation in an adult ESL classroom, many questions arise concerning best practices that help students in their everyday lives. The ways that instructors should approach this language skill have been debated and discussed. The two main principles

that influence the approaches for pronunciation instruction are the nativeness and intelligibility principles (Levis, 2005). The nativeness principle believes that native-like speech is both attainable and desirable for the language learner, while the intelligibility principle focuses on whether the speaker is understood by the listener. Both of these principles have influenced pronunciation pedagogy in a variety of ways.

Nativeness Principle

If we take a look at the nativeness principle more closely, we notice that it is mostly about accent reduction or modification. What determines accentedness can be up for debate depending on where one is located or who the instructor is. The judgment about whether someone has an accent is based on how closely speech sounds like the local variety of English that is spoken and how it impacts both the listener and the speaker (Derwing & Munro, 2008). The goal in this approach of instruction is for the L2 learner's accent to closely resemble the native dialect of English in the local area..

This nativeness approach has fueled an entire industry of accent reduction (AR) or accent modification (AM) courses. These courses primarily enforce the idea that one accent is superior over another, making the assumption that a non-native accent interferes with professional credibility, social adequacy and thereby a liability that should be eliminated. (Ennser-Kananen et al, 2021; Thompson, 2014). These AR courses are marketed around the world to non-native English speakers with this concept in mind and have thrived financially as a result. According to Ennser-Kananen et al. (2021), the implication that can be found here is that accent has often become a basis for racism and discrimination and that it is made more evident in some of the marketing of accent

reduction courses. The researchers of this study investigated and examined 26 different AR and AM courses that were marketed by universities in the United States towards international students and the sociopolitical implications that surround these courses. The analysis showed multiple themes that were promoted through these courses such as the pathologization of accents, hierarchization of international students, homogenization of native and non-native speakers, and implicit otherness of non-native speakers of English. These AR/AM courses are business models for making profit off English pronunciation based on the nativeness principle of instruction.

Thompson (2014) gives several warnings against these AR/AM courses stating that they often use fear mongering in their marketing, claiming that a foreign accent is a liability to one's success. Another warning that he identifies is that these courses often try to sell a "magic method" stating that eliminating an accent and creating a permanent change to one's speech is attainable at record speeds. It is noteworthy to state that the goals of the nativeness principle have been proven to be difficult and mostly unrealistic for most adult ESL speakers. (Saito, 2021).

Intelligibility and Comprehensibility Approach

The other approach to pronunciation instruction is based on both intelligibility and comprehensibility. Although those terms are often grouped together, they are not exactly synonymous. Derwing and Munro (2008) define intelligibility as "the degree of match between the speaker's intended message and the listener's comprehension" (p. 5) while comprehensibility refers to "the ease or difficulty to which a listener understands an utterance" (p. 5). Both of these concepts are used hand-in-hand as a way to view

pronunciation production. For this paper, we will use the intelligibility approach as an inclusive term for comprehensibility as well. The intelligibility approach is what most research would suggest to be a more practical, realistic and ethical approach in pronunciation instruction (Ballard & Winke, 2017; Derwing & Munro, 2008, 2015; Enns-Kananen et.al, 2021; Isaacs, 2018; Levis, 2005; Murphy, 2014).

It has been shown that accent does not always affect intelligibility. An English language learner can have an accent, yet still be completely understood by native speakers. Research suggests that there is no clear correlation between accent and understanding, noting that one can have an accent while being highly proficient in a language and without any communication difficulties (Derwing & Munro, 2008, Levis, 2005). We know this to be true when we consider English-speaking countries outside of the United States, such as the UK, Australia, or Nigeria. Speakers from these countries do not need to reduce their English accents to become more standardized to North American English in order to be understood. Isaacs (2018) argues against the nativeness principle that is used in AR/AM courses and in some ESL classes, stating that treating an L2 accent as a pathology that needs to be eliminated is incompatible with the intelligibility principle and should not be a desired outcome for instruction. The intelligibility principle uses this as its baseline and foundation for pronunciation instruction.

Trofimovich and Isaacs (2012) attempted to disentangle accent from comprehensibility by seeking to investigate which features of pronunciation are most related to each. Their research was led with the notion that some features affect comprehensibility more than others. In order to do this, they had 60 novice raters and three experienced teachers rate native French speakers speaking English. The results

showed that phonological and prosodic errors were more related to accent, while lexical and grammatical features were more related to comprehensibility and intelligibility.

Listener Responsibility

Another essential component of the intelligibility principle is its sensitivity to the context of the communication process. In this type of approach, the responsibility of communication doesn't fully rest on the speaker, as it does under the nativeness principle, but also considers the role and responsibility of the listener (Levis, 2005). Research on pronunciation and intelligibility has often taken more interest in the speaker leaving the listener as the "silent partner" without a role to play or study. However, Zeilinski (2008) attempted to investigate the role of native listeners speech processing strategies when interacting with non-native speakers and the specific features that impact the intelligibility. In this study, three native English speakers were given the task of listening to speakers of Mandarin, Vietnamese, and Korean without any prior experience or exposure to the languages. The listeners then transcribed both standard and non-standard pronounced words. After analysis of the data, it was found that the two biggest features to impact intelligibility of speech were the syllable stress patterns and the segments in strong syllables. Zielinski concludes that listener education would be valuable specifically if there were explicit instructions of the features of different accents and how they might impact their listening strategies.

Listener attitudes toward foreign accents may play a role in the comprehensibility of the speaker if the listener is not willing to be open to doing their part. Often racial biases emerge from listeners' perceptions of non-native speakers' accented speech. As

noted earlier, Rubin (1992) found that the perception of mainstream American students regarding foreign accents was the biggest factor in how they evaluated their NNSTA's.

Unfortunately as ESL instructors, we cannot control the listeners' attitudes or beliefs outside the classroom. However, an encouraging note is that more often workplaces are raising awareness in cross-cultural communication and providing training for their employees about listener responsibilities in these areas (Derwing & Munro, 2008). Listeners who are willing to take responsibility in their role of communication are beneficiaries in their participation with non-native speakers. In the study by Rubin (1992), the students who chose to stay in classes with NNSTA's emerged more capable with superior listening skills.

Variables of L2 Pronunciation

The development of L2 intelligibility and comprehensibility has many factors that must be considered. Alzahrani (2021) investigated a variety of factors that scholars suggest play a role in pronunciation acquisition such as phonetic ability, age, native language, exposure, motivation, cultural identity, and attitude. Each of these factors may impact language learners' pronunciation abilities in different ways. .

Age is an important factor to consider, especially in the context of adult education. Adult students have different barriers than K-12 students do. As adult educators, it is important to consider these factors that make adult learners unique. It is suggested to keep in mind the assumptions that adult learners are self-directed, draw from life experiences, are internally motivated to learn, and also need to know the rationale behind what they are learning (Finn, 2011). An adult learner's experience and familiarity

with the features of a pronunciation, which often stems from their age, may impact their intelligibility.

Some research would suggest that teachers must consider the native language (L1) of their student as it plays a major role into specific pronunciation difficulties that a student would have. Crowther et al. (2015) investigated how an L1 affected listener judgements on adult students whose first language was Chinese, Farsi, or Hindi. Their findings showed that the L1 affected the comprehensibility in different ways. For example, segmental features of the Chinese speakers most impacted their intelligibility while Hindi speakers' intelligibility was most impacted by lexico-grammatical features. Farsi speakers' intelligibility had no direct correlation to one pronunciation variable over the other. This study shows the importance of acknowledging a student's L1 when integrating pronunciation instruction. Alzhrani also discussed this in terms of phonetic ability, stating that it may become more difficult for a student to even understand or hear the sounds that English speakers produce because of the differences that exist in their own native language. There are sounds in English that do not exist in other languages; an example of this would be the /θ/ phoneme that represents the "th" blend. When thinking about the guiding question in this research project, it will be vital to keep in mind the different variables that affect students' pronunciation goals and intelligibility.

Pedagogical Implications

Focalization

Based on the literature review, adult ESL instructors should take an intelligibility approach into consideration when planning lessons in explicit pronunciation instruction

for their classrooms. Some scholars have been pessimistic about pronunciation instruction as an explicit focus in an ESL setting, considering it to be unrealistic or allowing communicative language teaching to naturally address it instead. Despite this view, most scholars in this area would agree that explicit pronunciation instruction is beneficial to an English language learner (Ballard & Winke, 2017; Derwing & Munro, 2008; Isaacs, 2018; Levis, 2005). The bigger debate that exists is to disentangle which features of pronunciation most significantly impact a student's intelligibility and comprehensibility and should be directly focused on in a classroom context.

In earlier research, nearly all instruction put the focus primarily on segmental features of English. When considering which segmentals to focus on, we need to recognize that there are certain segmental errors that are more detrimental to intelligibility than others. Isaacs (2018) provides examples of this with the words *sheep* and *ship*. The minimal pair in this case would be crucial for the speaker in order for their intelligibility and comprehensibility to be achieved successfully.

Some scholars would argue that suprasegmentals should take priority over all else in pronunciation instruction because some of these features have a direct impact on intelligibility. Saito and Saito (2017) discussed that the effective use of suprasegmentals can actually camouflage many segmental errors of an L1. Thus, if teachers are struggling with time crunches and forced to make decisions about which pronunciation feature to prioritize, suprasegmentals may be the better option. Kang et al. (2010) reported that speech rate and length of utterance are some of the best predictors of how a native speaker might rate a non-native speaker in terms of fluency. Fraser (2001) argued that native speakers notice patterns of stress and intonation more than phonology, thus

concluding that the order of instruction be based on how pronunciation affects listener comprehension most significantly. All of these scholars would agree that suprasegmentals are essential in their effect on the intelligibility and comprehensibility of a non-native speaker.

Derwing and Munro (2008) argue that explicit instruction is important but more importantly focusing on “ general speaking habits, volume, stress, rhythm, syllable structure and segmentals with a high functional load” (p. 8). The functional load mentioned is the principle that provides predictions about communicative effects of mispronunciation of English sounds and has been at the forefront of pronunciation research for quite some time (Isaacs, 2018).

Saito (2021) conducted a meta-analysis study of published intervention studies in order to answer the question of how different instruction impacts both comprehensibility and accentedness. The results pointed out that the effectiveness of teaching both segmental and suprasegmental (prosody) training for L2 speakers was significant. Levis (2005) argued that the advocacy for the importance of suprasegmentals needs to be nuanced as it is still uncertain which are most necessary and learnable. In more recent research, it has been suggested that an instructor stray away from the typical dichotomy of segmental versus suprasegmental features, but instead choose to see them as companions that help a student learn pronunciation while emphasizing the importance of both features. (Wang, 2022)

Accent Familiarity with Listening

Instructors should think of ways to move away from accent reduction principles in their pedagogic tasks. It can be difficult for teachers to create materials with this approach at the center. Murphy (2014) conducted a study using a select group of ESL/EFL professionals trained in pronunciation instruction as participants in which they listened to a 20 minute interview with Spanish actor Javier Bardem and evaluated his accentedness, intelligibility and comprehensibility through a questionnaire. The implications of this study showed there is value in pronunciation instructors using recordings of non-native speakers of English and allowing students to identify the intelligibility of the speaker and the strengths of their language skills instead of the deficit of their non-native like pronunciation (Murphy, 2014). This type of pronunciation pedagogy goes against the typical native speaker examples that most curricula would use in a classroom setting.

In more current research, we can find that there is a role of accent familiarity to consider when instructing pronunciation to ESL students. Ballard and Winke (2016) found in their study of non-native English instructors that there was a strong correlation between their students' evaluations of accent and the students' familiarity with it. For example, the students in the study rated the comprehensibility of southern American and Albanian accents low, but also had little to no exposure to these specific accents. Their conclusion affirmed other research that also stated that time and exposure to a variety of accents increased comprehensibility of the language overall (Ballard & Winke, 2016; Saito, 2021). A website, such as ello.org, which offers audio clips and videos with a

variety of accents from around the world is one example of a way to purposefully integrate pronunciation and listening instruction with the goal of intelligibility.

In a study done by Baker (2014) which interviewed and observed adult ESL teachers, there was a variety of activities that the teachers integrated into their classrooms, most significantly were controlled techniques, explanations, examples, and checking activities. The researcher noted that it is crucial for instructors to use techniques that include and focus on both input and output of the interpretation of auditory stimuli, not only output, because it is more challenging and representative of daily life activities and communication tasks.

Curriculum and Materials

When choosing a curriculum for a general skills ESL class, teachers and administration need to examine if and how pronunciation is integrated into the textbooks and where there might be a gap for their students. Derwing et al. (2012) analyzed general skills ESL textbooks and found that despite the varying coverage, the common theme was that suprasegmentals were emphasized more often than segmentals. However when it came to suprasegmentals, the area of thought groups was poorly represented despite the research that shows that they are beneficial. The study also showed that vowels were the most significant segmental area represented. Research has suggested that teachers should have an equitable balance between both segmental and suprasegmental features, yet that is not being represented in the curriculum studied. The study examined how pronunciation is integrated into textbooks, finding that it is most often used to reinforce a previously taught grammar point and very rarely discussed again in following chapters. It

was found that in one series, 80% of the tasks were based on intonation and rhythm, yet even the authors suggested that the patterns are limited and there was a need for more explicit examples. The most common task type across all series was the “listen and repeat” activities, yet this has been proven unhelpful and problematic without proper feedback and correction. Derwing et al. suggested that there needs to be improvements made across all ESL pronunciation curriculum series. We could imply by their lack of finding a perfect source, that it is best to pick and choose a balance of pronunciation features and tasks across several different curricula.

When creating a pronunciation lesson for an adult classroom, teachers must consider and prioritize what is best for their students based on a variety of factors, some of which have been discussed already such as age, exposure, and native language. Since studies show that there is room for improvement in most ESL curricula concerning pronunciation instruction, this leaves room for teachers to use a variety of materials and resources.

Assessment and Feedback

Several challenges will arise in a pronunciation course that focuses solely on intelligibility. One of the biggest concerns that scholars have is the ability to assess intelligibility with an effective and clear standard. Popular standardized English language proficiency tests such as the IELTS or TOEFL have drawbacks in the rubric that is used to assess speaking skills of non-native speakers. These tests currently rate speakers on terms such as pronunciation, pacing and intonation without any published guidance on

how to interpret them and a lack of elaboration on their intended meanings (Isaacs et al., 2018).

To solve this issue, Isaacs and Trofimich (2012) noted that since the listener has such an essential role, the target construct for assessment should be based on comprehensibility most of all. In response to this idea, a comprehensibility chart was created for the purpose of identifying sources of students' strengths and weaknesses with respect to comprehensibility, to guide teachers in targeting features for instruction and feedback while monitoring progress, and lastly to enhance ESL teachers' pronunciation literacy. Table 1 below shows the guidelines created as a tool for teachers and raters of comprehensibility. This chart was used in their study of 40 native French learners of English to identify the certain features of English that most affect comprehensibility.

Table 1

Suggested guidelines for L2 comprehensibility scale development

Comprehensibility	The L2 speaker
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produces fluent stretches of speech; generally only pauses or hesitates at the end of the clause • Provides sufficient vocabulary to set the scene and propel the story plot forward; lexical errors, if present, are not distracting • Assigns word stress correctly in most instances • Produces grammatical errors infrequently; errors do not detract from the overall message
Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produces some fluent stretches of speech; occasionally pauses or hesitates in the middle of the clause • Experiences occasional lapses in vocabulary, although may roughly convey the setting or main plot of the story; lexical errors are prevalent • Is inconsistent in word stress placement • Produces some grammatical errors that may detract from the overall message
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produces dysfluent stretches of speech; frequently pauses or hesitates between lexical items • Experiences frequent lapses in vocabulary that make the storyline unelaborated or indecipherable; high proportion of lexical errors, including L1 lexical influences • Frequently misplaces word stress • Produces frequent grammatical errors that are likely to detract from the overall message

Note: This chart was created by Isaacs and Trofimich (2012) and retrieved from the article Deconstructing comprehensibility: Identifying the linguistic influences on listeners' L2 comprehensibility ratings.

The chart covers four categories for assessment: pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and grammar. Isaacs et al. made some changes in 2018 to the chart as they concluded that the effect of the pronunciation error should be prioritized over the frequency of it, noting that even if the error is frequent it is acceptable if it doesn't affect comprehensibility of the intended message. This resource can help teachers feel more confident and capable in assessing students' pronunciation while lessening the risk of using racial biases or judgment upon accents.

Providing proper and efficient feedback to help students improve their pronunciation is also another challenge for ESL instructors. Stephens (2016) conducted a study to explore the effectiveness of written feedback concerning suprasegmentals and reached the conclusion that timely and constant written feedback will not significantly improve a student's intelligibility of suprasegmental production. The author suggested that a combination of feedback including written, visual and auditory might be more impactful on a student's improvement in pronunciation skills.

Baker (2014) argues that as essential as it is for teachers to be trained to have a confident understanding of how to provide pronunciation feedback and instruction, it is even more important that they value their students while recognizing the challenges they face in their goal of attaining comprehensible speech. The empathy and connection goes beyond the academic instruction and must be an integral part of a teacher student

relationship resulting in effective strategies to help students with improving intelligibility overall.

Conclusion and Recommendations

After reviewing the literature, research suggests adult ESL instructors should take an intelligibility and comprehensibility approach in pronunciation instruction with their students. The focus of instruction should not be on accent reduction as research suggests the nativeness principle is not realistic or helpful for adult ESL students, let alone that it can often be used as a coverup for racial biases and discrimination. Effective strategies that can be done using intelligibility and comprehensibility approaches are familiarizing students with a diversity of accents, focusing on both segmental and suprasegmental features of English and using a comprehensibility chart to assess students' pronunciation skills. Teachers must acknowledge that there are a variety of factors that influence the intelligibility of a student and their acquisition of English pronunciation. What works effectively for one student may not work for others in the same classroom. The curriculum that is used in a general ESL skills classroom needs to have a balanced approach in their coverage and provide specific and explicit examples throughout. Teachers should be ready to give corrective feedback when necessary.

Through this review of literature, we can see that there is room for improvement and more opportunities for professional development in pronunciation instruction for adult ESL instructors. Through these instructional strategies and with more professional development opportunities, adult ESL instructors can become more confident in their capability of teaching pronunciation with the focus being on intelligibility and

comprehensibility for their students. This brings students into a context that allows them to release the unattainable expectations of native-like speech and become successful communicators in English.

Chapter Two has reviewed the literature in order to help find the research to support the research question: *What are some effective strategies for integrating pronunciation instruction in an adult ESL course with the focus being on intelligibility and comprehensibility?* Chapter Three will take what has been learned from the literature review and lay out a description of a professional development workshop and a PLC for teachers on pronunciation instruction with a specific focus on intelligibility and comprehensibility. It will give a projected timeline for the project along with the rationale, setting, goals and intended audience.

CHAPTER THREE : Project Description

Introduction

The primary research question that guided this capstone project was: *What are some effective strategies for integrating pronunciation instruction in an adult ESL course with the focus being on intelligibility and comprehensibility?* Chapter Three explains the purpose of this project: a professional development workshop and a professional learning community (PLC) for adult ESL instructors specifically focused on pronunciation instruction strategies. It begins by providing the rationale behind why I have chosen a PD workshop alongside a PLC for my project and an overview of how it connects to the literature. Following that, the context and target audience for this project will be identified. Lastly, it will conclude with a detailed description of the project, the proposed timeline for implementation, and the framework for how the project will be evaluated in its effectiveness.

Rationale

I found that my personal career experience as an adult ESL instructor of feeling ill-equipped and untrained to teach pronunciation to my students was in line with what the research states to be the common experience for many instructors in the field of TESOL. As I continued the research, I found that instruction is most effective when it is focused away from accent reduction or modification and more on intelligibility and comprehensibility. With the growing number of adult ESL programs, and adult ESL

teachers struggling to feel equipped or skilled to teach pronunciation, I have chosen to create a professional development opportunity for these teachers in the form of a PLC, with an initial workshop. The workshop familiarizes instructors with certain features of pronunciation and offers practical pronunciation activities for teachers to integrate into a classroom, while the PLC allows for the continuation of implementation of these resources while discussing it with colleagues.

When creating a PLC, I used the research-based dimensions of effective PD from both Hord (2009) and Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) as guidelines and resources. Hord describes a successful PLC as one that has shared vision and purpose, shared leadership, supportive structural conditions, supportive relational conditions, collective learning to improve teaching and learning and individual and organizational improvement (pp 41-42). According to Darling-Hammond et al., there are seven essential elements that are used to define effective PD models. These elements require that the PD is content focused, incorporates active learning, suggests collaboration, uses models of effective practice, provides coaching and expert support, offers feedback and reflection and is of sustained duration (p. 4). These elements are the guiding force behind the creation of this PLC as this is a more holistic approach to effective professional development and teacher learning.

Intended Outcomes

Abbott et al. (2018) report that a PLC has the potential benefits of teachers being able to incorporate new knowledge, teaching approaches and strategies in a less structured informal and interactive forum. This is in direct contrast to a one time

workshop or lecture in which teachers have less opportunity to exchange information and apply it consistently. These stand alone workshops are not sufficient for real implementation and change to occur following. Hord (2009) emphasizes the significance of the word *community* in professional learning community stating that a worthwhile PLC goes beyond the definition of simple proximity, and into a place in which there is a “focus on a shared purpose, mutual regard and caring, and an insistence on integrity and truthfulness” (p. 41). In other words, a PLC helps bridge the gap between a one time PD workshop and true continuous learning among colleagues.

If all of these elements are done successfully in their PLC, teachers ought to better understand research on the intelligibility and comprehensibility approach, feel more connected to their colleagues, become more confident in their teaching abilities, have a greater inventory of resources, and be able to support their students in their speaking and listening skills more effectively.

Setting and Context

The setting for this project is a community college in central Illinois. According to the United States Census Bureau (2021), Normal, Illinois is a relatively rural town with a population around 53,000 with 77% of the population being white non-hispanic. The community college has an adult education department and within the department there are two types of ESL programs that are offered. The functional English as a second language (FESL) program offers five levels of instruction and focuses on basic language skills for surviving and living in the community. The FESL program currently has 132 students enrolled. The academic English language program (AELP) is a more rigorous

language course that offers four levels that prepare students to enter university level courses. Currently there are 90 students participating in this program. AELP offers a level-up program in the fourth level which is a career pathway program for English language learners that allows students to study English alongside courses that give students course credit in areas such as digital media, business technology, healthcare, and information technology.

In each of these English programs, enrollment is offered at different times. FESL students may join or advance every six weeks and attend three-hour classes on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. AELP students may only enroll at the beginning of each semester and must commit to 16 weeks of instruction attending classes four days a week for four hours a day.. Attendance is enforced as students are only allowed to miss two days a semester without being dropped from the program. For all of these programs, students are given the option to attend classes on campus in the morning or online in the evening. It should also be noted that these students do not have to pay any tuition fees as it is a state funded program.

In terms of professional development requirements, instructors are mandated to submit a minimum of 12 professional development hours for one fiscal year. Instructors are allowed to choose any type of professional development they would like. There is not a specific program or class assigned to them, but there must be proof of completion submitted to the Associate Director of Adult Education. Hours can be submitted in increments throughout the year or all at once. There is usually at least one paid PD workshop included in orientation/training at the beginning of a new school year, the rest must be completed on teachers' personal time.

Intended Audience and Purpose.

The intended audience for this professional development workshop is the current instructors of both the FESL and AELP classes in the adult education department at a community college. Currently there are 18 total instructors employed in these two programs. The majority of the teachers are white women who are native speakers of English, excluding three non-native speakers from Nicaragua, Colombia, and South Korea. These teachers have a variety of different career backgrounds. Some are K-12 retired teachers while others have TESOL degrees. All are required to have a bachelor degree in a related field. The amount of experience varies greatly, with some who are in their first year of teaching and others who have been teaching for decades. All of these teachers are considered part-time adjunct faculty.

Currently, there is not any type of organized professional development set up for these teachers. In 2018, teachers were given a PLC to participate in for a six-week period. This PLC was a way for teachers to share resources and collaborate on new ideas and strategies. Each team was given a veteran teacher to help lead and facilitate the groups. Although the content was not focused on one particular teaching skill, I found my participation in this PLC to be incredibly valuable. I gained many new resources to integrate into my classroom. Last year, we were given a virtual learning community (VLC) on the topic of retention. This was a successful professional development opportunity as it created collaboration among teachers who are often isolated from one another and offered teachers effective strategies on how to improve retention rates in our classes. In my nearly six years of teaching at this institution, those are the only two professional development opportunities that qualified as a PLC.

Description of Project

The Capstone project is a professional development workshop and a semester-long PLC with a specific focus on pronunciation instruction for Adult ESL instructors. The PLC begins with an initial intensive two and half hour workshop dedicated to teaching the significance of pronunciation instruction that is based on an intelligibility and comprehensibility approach. In this workshop, there is an overview of this approach with a direct connection to how it can be integrated into the classroom. The beginning of the workshop begins by teachers taking a survey discussing their beliefs, understanding and knowledge of pronunciation instruction and student production. Teachers will have the opportunity to share in small groups their personal and professional experiences with English pronunciation. Through a powerpoint slideshow, teachers are led through some of the research discussing the importance of intelligibility and comprehensibility approach as opposed to nativeness principles. There is a basic overview of metaphonological awareness. Modeling is provided with demonstration lessons on pronunciation features of intonation, word stress and vowel and consonant variation. These short lesson ideas provide practical hands-on activities for teachers to participate in and use in their classroom. This workshop is interactive in nature. This two and a half hour workshop is offered live on campus, with the ability to use Zoom to watch online if necessary. At the end of the workshop, teachers are teamed together into a PLC according to the levels and times that they teach. See the table below for the group assignments.

Table 2

PLC Group Assignments

Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4
FESL 1&2 AM/PM Online and In person (3 teachers)	FESL 3, 4 & 5 AM/PM (4 teachers)	AELP 1 & 2 AM/PM (5 teachers)	AELP 3 & 4 AM/PM (6 teachers)

Teachers work with their groups throughout the entire semester. It is similar to the VLC on retention that all instructors participated in during the Fall of 2022. This PLC has the goal of meeting once a month, for a total of four meetings, either in person or online which is decided by the groups themselves. During this meeting, teachers are given a topic or concept that was addressed in the workshop to discuss. Discussion should include ways they attempted to include the concept into their classrooms that month, how it was received and if there were any challenges that arose from the instruction. Meetings should last approximately one hour, with a facilitator keeping track of time and scribe recording the takeaways of the group. Extra resources that teachers have found for teaching pronunciation such as videos or lesson plans can also be shared and put into a shared Google folder.

Topics for each month's meetings are 1) segmentals (metaphonological awareness) 2) suprasegmentals (intonation, stress, and rhythm) 3) listening (familiarizing with accents) and 4) assessments.

Timeline

The research and literature review for this project was done in the fall of 2022. The project materials based on the research studied were created during the spring of 2023. During this time, practical resources including lesson plans, videos, and websites that are included in the workshop and further PLC meetings were gathered. The workshop is planned to be conducted during the teacher orientation for the fall 2023 semester which takes place at the beginning of August. The PLC groups will meet regularly from August to December on a once a month basis.

Evaluating Success

The goal of this project is to fully equip adult ESL instructors in the area of pronunciation instruction. By completing this PLC, teachers should feel confident and prepared to effectively help their students become more intelligible in their English language skills. Teachers will have knowledge over both segmental and suprasegmental features of English. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of this PLC, surveys will be conducted at the beginning of the PLC using a Likert scale. The surveys investigate a teacher's confidence and knowledge of phonology as well as teaching strategies for pronunciation instruction. At the end of the semester, teachers are given the same survey to see if there has been any improvement or gains in their confidence or ability to teach pronunciation. Students will also be given a survey at the beginning and end of the semester that investigates their beliefs and attitudes about pronunciation production and the importance of learning it in their ESL classroom.

Summary and Conclusion

In conclusion, Chapter Three has given a detailed description of this capstone project, the rationale, the intended audience and outcomes, the setting, and a projected timeline. Through this project, adult ESL teachers in this community are given the opportunity to become more skilled, knowledgeable and confident in their pronunciation instruction through the collaborative work of a PLC. This PLC is filled with practical active learning strategies for instruction.

Chapter Four provides the materials for the initial workshop and the PLC meetings. It includes specific resources for instructors in the PLC to integrate into their classrooms.

CHAPTER FOUR: Reflection

Introduction

Before starting this project I had been teaching ESL to adults for close to 13 years. I have a passion for this profession and have been constantly learning over these years on how to better provide learning opportunities to my students. I had taken many professional development workshops over my career, but had never been taught or trained on how to more effectively teach pronunciation to adult learners. When I looked for help in the textbooks I had been given, I always came up short and without much guidance. On top of this, I was constantly being asked by students on ways to sound more like a native speaker. I began to wonder about the reasons that so many students worry about this and the lack of resources teachers seem to have on this topic. It was during a linguistics class when I taught some basic metaphonological awareness and given hands on exercises to use in the classroom to help students, that I thought maybe I could create a project that gives teachers resources and education on effective strategies for pronunciation instruction. The primary research question that guided this capstone project was: *What are some effective strategies for integrating pronunciation instruction in an adult ESL course with the focus being on intelligibility and comprehensibility?*

In this chapter I will reflect on my learning through the process of exploring this topic, researching it, and creating the project itself. In this reflection, I will revisit the literature and share the new connections that I made between the research and my personal experiences as a teacher.

Key Learnings

As I began the process of writing my Capstone, the most difficult part was choosing which research question was best for me to pursue. I knew that I wanted to learn a lot in the process and not choose an area I already felt comfortable and familiar in. I had decided that pronunciation instruction was an area I felt the significance of increasing my instructional abilities, yet I wasn't quite sure how to start the research process. My original research question focused on the ways that teachers can give pronunciation correction and feedback during reading aloud activities. However as I started to do more research, I kept struggling to find much research that helped me come to any conclusions. I found that the literature in this area was sparse and possibly unimportant to researchers in the field of pronunciation. I could barely find the connections between reading and pronunciation and because of this I had a hard time seeing the long term impact on a topic this narrow. After writing the first chapter and doing a lengthy literature review, I came to the conclusion my topic would have more professional significance if it was broader in scope, yet stayed in the area of pronunciation instruction for adult ESL students.

Once I opened up my research to pronunciation instruction in general, I found myself in a deluge of information struggling to come up for air. There were so many scholarly articles and studies to devour. I learned how to sort through these articles and find the ones that are most related to adult ESL learners.

Even though I knew I wanted to do a professional development project, I wasn't sure how to go about it. In a meeting with my professor, it was recommended to me to consider a professional learning community as an extension of my professional

development idea. I had just finished a virtual learning community and had gained good insights and perspectives from this, so I instantly saw the value in this idea. The concept of teacher collaboration was very attractive to me, especially coming off a long season of isolation in the workplace as a result of virtual learning during the Covid 19 pandemic. A PLC is an impactful way to continue learning and growing together with other colleagues and educators that goes beyond a stand alone workshop.

Revisiting the Literature

The literature that I found on pronunciation instruction was abundant. Sorting through the many articles to find substantial information that would be practical for the classroom became the biggest challenge. I was most impacted by the literature that discussed the ethical implications of the nativeness approach to pronunciation instruction, most significantly on how accent reduction has been used as a way to cover up racism and discrimination (Ennser-Kananen, 2021; Saito, 2021; Thompson, 2014). As I prepared my professional development workshop, I knew that I wanted to highlight this idea to teachers and gauge how they felt about it. From learning about the intelligibility approach in a previous class, I had been planning to showcase the debate between pronunciation scholars of which approach is best, and it quickly became clear that there isn't much of a debate anymore. Most of the research lands in the camp that teaching pronunciation with a nativeness approach is not only unethical, but also unrealistic (Ennser-Kananen, 2021; Saito, 2021; Thompson, 2014). Doing research on the intelligibility approach affirmed what I already knew from experience, it just gave me the

language and data support to be able to convey this to students and teachers and incorporate immediately into my own instruction.

I was able to make new connections in the literature to my experience in the classroom about the role of listening and its important impact on pronunciation abilities. The literature I found often highlighted the role of the listener having an equal responsibility in a conversation between native and non-native speakers. As I worked on my project I wanted this connection to be made and was able to make that more so from the work that Ballard & Winke (2017) did in their research. Their research showed that time and exposure to listening to a variety of accents is beneficial to one's overall English language learning. Research helped show that most textbooks only offer one type of standard English accent. This impacted my project as I searched for materials for adult ESL learners that used a variety of accents. This led me to the website elllo.org to use in my presentation for teachers to use in their classrooms. This website gives a plethora of audio clips highlighting different English accents from around the world. My project tries to give multiple examples of how listening can positively impact a student's pronunciation.

Limitations and Implications

The area of pronunciation instruction is vast and I recognize that I have barely touched the tip of the iceberg with the information I have presented in this project. The goal of this project was to better equip teachers with knowledge and activities, but because of time constraints I was unable to include detailed descriptions of certain linguistic features or go in depth on how to teach the international phonetic alphabet.

Currently, the workshop time is only two and half hours, which is not sufficient time to cover everything that is needed for teachers to feel fully confident in their abilities to teach their students pronunciation. Another limitation of this project is that it was not able to address the current textbooks and curriculum that teachers in this program are using. It doesn't give the opportunity for teachers to take what is included in their textbooks and ask questions or build upon it.

I am currently in discussion with my associate dean of the adult education department to learn how this PD project could be implemented into our program. The biggest concern she has right now is regarding the professional development policies that the college has in place. From an administrative point of view there must be a digital component to be able to record PD hours and show progress in learning. Further adjustments might be needed to transfer the PLC into a virtual learning community with assessments to show the administration and give PD credit to instructors.

Next Steps for Future Projects

After completing this project, I considered how I might take what I learned and apply it to future projects in this field. Research done by Derwing et al. (2012) revealed that currently the textbooks series that are offered to adult ESL classrooms are inadequate and limited in regards to pronunciation practices. I think that there could be a great opportunity to take the literature that has been done about pronunciation curriculum and textbooks and move forward into evaluating our own adult education program's current curriculum and how effective it has been for our teachers and students. Taking the

literature that we have, it would be impactful to create more detailed and structured lesson plans that could easily be incorporated into our ESL curriculum.

This project wasn't able to touch on all variables of pronunciation production and was limited to only certain segmental and suprasegmental features. A follow up workshop in this area could include other factors that affect intelligibility and comprehensibility in speech such as fluency, lexis, grammar, and discourse (Crowther et al., 2015; Hahn, 2004; Isaacs, 2018).

Professional Significance

Currently, studies are showing that adult ESL instructors are left feeling ill-equipped because of lack of adequate training in explicit pronunciation instruction, yet most understand the importance of these skills for students' success (Alzahrani, 2021; Baker, 2014; Darcy 2020, Foote et al., 2011). My ultimate goal is to better equip adult ESL instructors in their understanding of pronunciation instruction in order to boost confidence and capabilities to help their students in the classroom. I started this project out of selfish ambition to improve my teaching skills and have found much of the literature and resources included in my project to make a significant contribution and impact to my students. I want to share this information with my colleagues and believe that this project can be used outside of just my local campus but in TESOL conferences in the future. The research done here focusing on intelligibility over accent reduction could dramatically shift the attitudes and beliefs of both teachers and students, ultimately giving freedom to speak without fear of stigma or discrimination.

Conclusion

Chapter Four was an overall reflection of the process of creating this Capstone Project. It provided a reflection of my key learnings throughout the process of researching and creating. Next, it revisited the literature drawing on which research studies were the most impactful to my learning and the new connections that were made. It also provided the limitations and implications that were discovered while evaluating what possible next steps could be done in this area of study. Finally, the professional significance was addressed stating the benefits that this project can have on fellow colleagues in the field of adult ESL instruction.

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