

Reflection 1: Reflection on ESL Instruction from Chapters 1 and 2

Megan Bishop

Excelsior College

## ESL Instruction from Chapters 1 and 2



As a student, I have often struggled with memorization of facts, such as all the states and their capitals. This struggle has caused me to consider how I would help my students with similar tasks when I was required to teach college students about rhetorical techniques and grammatical rules. Many students learn grammar rules in elementary school but fail to remember them by the time they get to college. Therefore, students are not transferring this knowledge from their working memory into their long term memory. Although memorizing grammar rules does not demonstrate a high level of Bloom's Taxonomy, becoming familiar with grammar rules and rhetorical techniques are important to effective writing, a particularly important skill in every occupation. *Essentials of Educational Psychology*, by J. Omrod (2012), has already proven to be an effective resource in discovering effective pedagogical techniques. In chapters one and two, I have learned about three particularly helpful notions: action research, reflective teaching, and techniques for transferring short term knowledge into long term knowledge. In my own action research project, I have used these pedagogical tools as I studied the effects that visual representations have on ESL students who are learning verb tenses.

**My Experiences with Action Research**

Action research is a useful tool that I plan to use in future pedagogical situations. As a Writing Center tutor, I have had many opportunities that would benefit from action research. Omrod (2012) notes the everyday need for action research as he notes, "In their day-to-day work with students, teachers sometimes encounter problems that researchers haven't previously addressed" (p. 11). For example, I tutor many ESL students who have troubles with verb agreement. When I tutor, I have them practice with verb tenses through speech and writing, and I model examples through speech and timeline diagrams to indicate which verb tense to use. This

technique, using timelines to teach verb tenses, is a new method I have been using to demonstrate a tangible way to understand the abstract concept of verbs. In other words, this method uses visual imagery to aid students in transferring knowledge from their working memory to their long term memory by making visual connections. This new pedagogical approach is an example of action research. I had previously noticed that students did not understand why and how to use different verb tenses. After researching techniques for instructing ESL students, I read that talking about everyday activities often helped students understand why they would use present progressive instead of present perfect tenses. I then decided to attempt using a timeline to help my students visually see when they are doing an activity that they are discussing. Although action research is an amazing factor for instructors to use in teaching effectively, this process is not as effective without reflection.

Reflective teaching is the step that accompanies action research and should be used by every instructor who wishes to teach effectively. Omrod (2012) explains this pedagogical method as a process in which the instructor continually reflecting on, examining, and critiquing "...their assumptions, inferences, and instructional practices, and they regularly adjust their beliefs and strategies in light of new evidence" (p. 11). As with the example of instructing on verb tenses to ESL students, I would need to reflect on whether my new instructional practice is working for my students. I assess my students with formative tests given throughout the lesson. During discussions and practice assignments, I ask my students to use different verb tenses and observe to see if they are switching tenses appropriately.

### **Shifting My Teaching: Using Strategies Learned with a Student**

Last week, one of my Russian students, Maria, was struggling during an exercise of recognizing the difference between present perfect and present perfect progressive. I noticed she

shifted as I asked her questions and would take longer to respond. This reflection allowed me to change how I explained the difference between these verb tenses, and she seemed to understand better. Over the past weeks, I have noticed that Maria is taking less time to switch tenses. At the end of the semester, I will interview her to find out what analogies helped her to understand verb tenses most. This qualitative data will help me understand what techniques are best to use when explaining verb tenses.

My ESL instructional techniques have been improved through the first two chapters of *Essentials of Educational Psychology*. Omrod (2012) provides information discussing how instructors can aid students in transferring new knowledge to long-term memory. Using this information, I decided to attempt action research, another concept introduced by Omrod. I planned to use the concept of timelines and timeline diagrams to connect the abstract ideas of verb tenses to a visual image. During my instruction, I reflected on my new pedagogical technique and critiqued my instruction. Through the journey these preliminary chapters have provided, I have already been able to put some of this new information to practice in my instruction of ESL students.



### **Analyzing the Effects: The Results of Using Timelines in ESL Instruction**

In my attempts with action research, I have attempted to utilize timelines to provide ESL students with a tangible way of thinking about verb tenses. The effects of this new pedagogical strategy have proven beneficial for my ESL student. Since implementation, Maria has demonstrated better understanding of the difference between present progressive and simple present. I gave Maria an assignment; she was required to write a daily routine and to write a few sentences throughout her day saying what she was doing. During the following lesson, we took out her work, and I had her plot the activities and sentences on a timeline. She began to nod as she began to see why she needed to use present progressive for her sentences indicating her

actions throughout the day and use simple present for her daily routine. She repeatedly said, “Oh,



I get it.” One example from her work included: “I go to the grocery store at 1pm on Mondays,”

and “I am going to the grocery store.” With this example, Maria was able to correctly use simple

present and present progressive in her writing.

Reference

Omrod, J. (2012). *Essentials of Educational Psychology*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.