



Humanizing Online Language Teaching Through Instructional and Affective Moves: Reflections from an ELD Teacher

The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply impacted the field of education, shifting instruction from in-person classrooms to virtual learning environments on a global scale. To understand how language teachers engaged in online pedagogy during the pandemic, the current study examines how one expert English Language Development (ELD) teacher, Ms. Anya Mendoza, adapted her instruction to deliver lessons that met the content and linguistic needs of her students. Findings demonstrate how, using a two-stage research design with a semi-structured interview and critical reflection journal entry, Anya performed both instructional and affective moves to support students in their content and language learning. Prioritizing student engagement, she also created space to humanize and empower her language learners in her virtual classroom. As we venture into a post-COVID-19 “new normal” that considers in-person, online, and hybrid instruction, findings from this study demonstrate the importance of anchoring instructional decisions on the needs of students to meaningfully support content and language teaching.

Keywords: pandemic pedagogy, affective moves, instructional moves, humanizing pedagogy, language instruction

COVID-19 has deeply impacted the field of education, affecting in-person and virtual classrooms on a global scale. In response, schools transitioned to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), the temporary shift of instruction to an alternate platform for delivery in crisis circumstances (Hodges et al., 2020). As the pandemic endured the 2020–2021 academic year, schools, again, shifted from ERT methods to new, relatively stabilized norms of online teaching (Barbour et al., 2020). The constant shift in instructional delivery, coupled with the uncertain development of the pandemic, forced teachers to reconsider teaching and learner engagement through remote digital technologies (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Moorhouse & Beaumont, 2020). The challenge of engaging students in online environments compounded for teachers of language learners in elementary and secondary school contexts (Cheung, 2021). Suddenly, once dynamic classroom spaces were limited and opportunities for second language (L2) speaking, listening, reading, and writing instruction were confined to a two-dimensional screen.

Although the idea of ERT has become popular in current scholarship and discourse, remote and online learning are not new concepts in educational research and practice (Peachey, 2017; Stanley, 2017). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, scholars examined the feasibility of video- and web-conferencing applications in school settings through synchronous online instruction (Boettcher & Conrad, 2021;

Stanley, 2017). Moreover, in language pedagogy, a field heavily shaped by a Communicative Language Teaching paradigm promoting communicative competence (Thornbury, 2016), a few studies examine the teaching of English to speakers of other languages within online spaces (Cheung, 2021; Stanley, 2017). Beyond instructional approaches to online teaching, however, studies have yet to explore how relationships are built and sustained with language learners in remote environments—an important perspective considering research that affirms the value of lowering the affective filter in language instruction (Heras & Lasagabaster, 2015; Horwitz, 1995).

In consideration of the pandemic's impact on language pedagogy, the current study aims to understand what strategies have been most successful in helping students manage the difficulties imposed by online language learning as we transition into a post-COVID era. More specifically, the study examines how one expert teacher adapted her instruction to meaningfully engage students and support their language and holistic needs.

Literature Review

Pandemic Pedagogy in K–12 Language Teaching

To engage in remote or online instruction, language educators need to consider a host of factors to orchestrate an effective learning experience. First and foremost, educators must understand the unique aspects of digital teaching methods that do not “transfer” perfectly from in-person to virtual instruction (Peachey, 2017; Rehn et al., 2018). Understanding how learners engage with synchronous and asynchronous instructional platforms, how to adapt components of instructional design (e.g., learning objectives, lesson delivery, assessments), how to monitor progress and mechanisms for feedback, and how to develop a rapport with students and parents while also engaging in digital classroom management are crucial for creating spaces conducive to learning (Rehn et al., 2018; Taghizadeh & Hasani Yourdshahi, 2020; Wang, 2021; Xie et al., 2019). Due to the interrelated skills and knowledge demanded of teachers when they engage students in remote learning, many feel uprooted and out of control when they shift from in-person to online teaching (Comas-Quinn, 2011), which has been evident during the COVID-19 pandemic in particular (Wong & Moorhouse, 2021).

Indeed, relationships between teachers and students are renegotiated in virtual settings (Sharma & Westbrook, 2016) as language educators find themselves unable to read physical cues beyond the lens of a webcam, build a community of learners to take risks in language learning, and provide immediate, moment-by-moment feedback like they are able to in an in-person classroom (Cheung, 2021; Orafi & Borg, 2009). With relationships existing through digital screens, teaching itself may feel like a dehumanizing endeavor, as students have the ability to leave their cameras off, mute their microphones, and even disappear with the click of a button. In contrast, humanizing pedagogies create learning environments where students are fully present as social, thinking, communicating, and creative participants in class (Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2011; del Carmen Salazar, 2013; Freire, 1970). To engage students in their humanity, humanizing pedagogy “builds on the sociocultural realities of students’ lives, examines the sociohistorical and political dimensions of education, and casts students as critically engaged, active participants in the co-construction of knowledge” (Bartolomé, 1994, p. 128). Humanizing pedagogy may be particularly challenging for language teachers who seek to digitally engage and humanize students in a foreign or L2.

Teaching a language effectively requires educators to promote the four language skills (i.e., reading, writing, speaking, listening) in the target language or L2 (Cheung, 2021; Stanley, 2017). Compton (2009) theorized that for teachers to engage in online language teaching, they may consider viewing these four language skills through lenses of technology, pedagogy, and evaluation. In this framework,

technology refers to educators' knowledge and ability to use both digital hardware and software; pedagogy refers to educators' knowledge and ability to engage students in teaching and learning activities; and evaluation refers to educators' knowledge and ability to assess learning while catering to learner and language proficiency differences. In a recent case study, Cheung (2021) investigated how one secondary ESL teacher in Hong Kong conducted synchronous Zoom lessons on a video-conferencing platform during COVID-19. Examining factors that influenced this teacher's technology, pedagogy, and evaluation (Compton, 2009), Cheung (2021) found that the teacher's pedagogical beliefs, professional development opportunities, and preference for product-oriented approaches that favored the end result (as opposed to process-oriented pedagogies) influenced how she taught language in a remote setting. Together, a number of factors influence the uptake and implementation of digital pedagogies to support language teaching in remote and online settings.

Promising Supports in Online Synchronous Language Classrooms

Previous studies have demonstrated the positive effect of employing metacognitive strategies in instruction, in particular with students learning English as a first language (L1) or L2 (Teng, 2020). When students are aware of the mental processes they are employing when listening or reading, their comprehension and confidence increases (Stricklin, 2011). With the heavy cognitive demand of language learning while simultaneously engaging in content learning, the following review provides three promising practices that offer structure for students' mental processing.

The first practice reviewed is the Frayer Model, developed by Dorothy Frayer (1969) as a structure to support concept attainment. The foundation of this model lies in activating levels of concept mastery that progress from concrete, to identity, to classificatory, and finally to formal, which indicates the highest level of concept mastery (Frayer et al., 1969). As a learner advances through these stages of concept development, they strengthen the connections and understanding they have of the concept. The purpose of the Frayer Model is to identify and define unfamiliar concepts and vocabulary, and it has been shown to enhance word learning (Dazzeo & Rao, 2020). It is configured as a graphic organizer that allows for processing of four key aspects of a concept, word, or term: its definition, its characteristics, examples of the word, and nonexamples of the word. Some variations may include a visualization of the word. Because language learning is dependent on the acquisition and comprehension of new vocabulary, the Frayer Model has been encouraged for use in English Language Development (ELD) instruction (Zwiers & Soto, 2017). Dazzeo and Rao (2020) further suggested that the Frayer Model can be presented via technological tools such as PowerPoint and Google Slides as it "has the potential to contribute to increased engagement and learning for students" (p. 38).

Another high-leverage practice is Think-Pair-Share (TPS), which has been found to serve several purposes: increasing the potential for students to participate verbally; providing a low-anxiety opportunity for learners to use language; and activating prior knowledge as a support to promote learning (Li et al., 2017; Mundelsee & Jurkowski, 2021). TPS is a collaboration strategy that requires students to individually consider a question or solve a problem, discuss their responses with a peer, and then synthesize and communicate their learnings with the entire class. Its scaffolded structure serves as an "advance organizer," which Li et al. (2017) define as a "teaching activity that helps build or activate L2 learners' prior knowledge for a listening task" (p. 114). TPS has been found to support language learners in both their listening and speaking competencies, simultaneously supporting their affective (i.e., emotional, holistic) and content (i.e., academic, educational) needs by priming students for what is to come in the instruction, while also increasing their confidence as they respond accurately with preparedness (Li et al., 2017; Mundelsee & Jurkowski, 2021). In other words, TPS is able to engage both

the socioemotional (e.g., confidence) and academic aspects (e.g., accuracy in responses) of the learning context.

Key among these practices is the final, Reciprocal Reading, also known as Reciprocal Teaching, developed by Palinscar and Brown (1984) as a means of helping students become aware of their thought process while reading and engaging with text. Students are assigned active roles to digest a shared reading selection, which include a predictor, clarifier, questioner, and summarizer, with some variations also including a visualizer and/or connector. This strategy is found to “meaningfully enhance learners’ reading comprehension abilities” in Iranian learners of English (Izadi & Nowrouzi, 2016, p. 142), which is critical, given that reading proficiency and comprehension are vital components of language learning. Studies reinforce the knowledge that strategic Reciprocal Reading supports reading comprehension for all students (Spörer et al., 2009), but Klingner and Vaughn (1996) further found that students with “relatively low decoding skills and students who have not yet achieved full English proficiency,” (p. 289) who are presumed most challenged by reading gains, markedly benefited.

Collectively, the instructional strategies provide the metacognitive scaffolds to support English learners’ (ELs’) language development via listening, speaking, and reading (Teng, 2020). Shifting from the brick-and-mortar classroom to an entirely virtual setting did not remove this necessity, but it presented new challenges. While studies indicate that technology has the potential to increase interest and engagement for students, few studies include the implications of using these strategies in an exclusively digital context. Dazzeo and Rao (2020) stated that “technology expands the ways that materials can be presented to students with supports and multiple representations built in,” (p. 38) wherein the technology may be used to provide an alternative display of the strategy. However, this context was reliant on student presence in-person. Absent from the current research is a consideration for how such strategies can be applied to digital environments that necessitate the remote or distance learning experienced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Aim and Research Questions

To address this gap in research, the current study sought to investigate how one veteran EL teacher transitioned from in-person to digital teaching environments to deliver content and language instruction to her ELs. It also examines her developing understandings of EL needs in virtual environments and the responsive pedagogical practices that address these needs. The specific research questions guiding the study are as follows:

1. What were the needs and challenges of ELs in virtual learning, particularly as they relate to content and language instruction?
2. What research-based approaches were successful in addressing the challenges in the ELD classroom? What evidence suggests they met student needs?

Methods

Background and Context

Ms. Anya Mendoza

Anya Mendoza is a sixteen-year veteran teacher at the General Unified School District (GUSD) in Southern California, specializing in language instruction. Her full educational experience spans more than two decades, and her teaching assignments reflect the ever-changing landscape of language instruction practices. After graduating from the University of California, Santa Cruz, she began her teaching career in a nearby school district, in a bilingual classroom setting. Over time, however, she adapted to teaching in

solely English-based classrooms, as they became more prevalent in California school districts in the early millennium with the passage of Proposition 227 in 1998, requiring educators in public schools to conduct all instruction in English (Legislative Analyst's Office, 1998). By the time she arrived in the GUSD, models she was expected to employ included one-way ELD and English Language Arts (ELA) with instructional scaffolds. With her expertise and adaptability, Anya was eventually tapped to serve as the Language Development Resource Teacher for the GUSD's largest high school. In this role she mentored fellow ELD teachers and was responsible for the assessment and progress monitoring of emergent bilinguals classified by the state as "English language learners" or ELLs.

However, with the adoption of an aligned framework for ELD and ELA in 2014, distinctions in designated and integrated ELD were brought into focus and began to reignite Anya's original passion for bilingual education. This led to Anya's decision in 2016 to leave her Language Development Resource Teacher position to help launch GUSD's inaugural Spanish Dual Language Immersion (DLI) program for middle and high school students. In doing so, she was returning to a classroom that would encourage bilingualism, albeit with instruction entirely in Spanish, serving English language fluent students seeking to acquire Spanish language fluency. In that same time period, the California Multilingual Act of 2016 was passed (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2016), and Anya again shifted with the changing landscape, this time to recapture emergent bilinguals who needed the most attention and language reinforcement: newcomers to the country. As the child of Mexican immigrants herself, Anya's childhood of translating and interpreting for her family honed her deep appreciation for bilingualism and a personal understanding for the student learning experience. In recent years, she has connected transferable strategies for language instruction into both ELD and DLI classroom settings and hopes to bridge stronger relationships between the learners in each.

Ms. Anya Mendoza's Classes

The students in Anya's ELD classes are typically *expanding* language learners, as described by the California ELD Standards, and aligned to level 3 of the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC), exhibiting moderately developed proficiency in oral and written English skills (California Department of Education, 2014). Anya's students would be described as able to "use English to learn and communicate in meaningful ways in a range of topics and content area [and needing] light-to-minimal linguistic support to engage in familiar social and academic contexts . . . [and] moderate support to communicate on less familiar tasks and topics" (California Department of Education, 2020).

During the 2020–21 school year, Anya taught 33 students across two sections of the school day. Nearly all of the students qualified for the state's subsidized meal programs and contributed to the GUSD's receipt of federal Title I and Title III funds, indicators of socioeconomic and academic need. Her students' first languages are diverse: 27 are native speakers of Spanish, two of Mandarin, one of Cantonese, one of Japanese, one of Hindi, and one of Russian. The 16 girls and 17 boys range in ages from 12 through 17, and in grade levels from 6th through 12th grade.

Yet, despite such varying differences, the students exhibited a community and camaraderie informed by their shared journey in bilingualism and transition to the United States. Approximately a quarter of the students had taken ELD classes with Anya in 2019–20, prior to the COVID-19 school closures, and were somewhat familiar with her practices. For many of Anya's students, 2020–21 was their second or third year in the Global Center hosted by her school, having progressed from *emerging* language skills in their first year of the program into their current level of *expanding* English language acquisition. In the initial year(s) of participation in the Global Center, the students would have taken multiple ELD courses within the program itself, receiving instruction from teachers specializing in language development across

all subject areas. However, as their proficiency increased, their transition to “mainstream” courses outside of the Global Center would become the norm. Therefore, by the time they had progressed to level 3 and entered Anya’s class, hers would likely be the only ELD course on the majority of the students’ daily schedule. This course was a specific ELD setting called Academic Language Development, meant to provide direct support to their bilingual development and foster success in other academic courses that would be primarily conducted in English.

Ms. Anya Mendoza as an Expert Teacher

It was in the 2019–20 school year that the GUSD began to use Anya’s class as a demonstration classroom to train teachers in practices and strategies that would support emergent bilingual students. For four years prior, the GUSD had been shifting its approach to literacy instruction away from whole-group lessons to become more student-centered and inclusive for individual learning needs through a workshop model of instruction (Beschoner & Hall, 2021).

During this shift, Anya had been working closely with the GUSD’s secondary literacy specialist, Evan Lopez, who recognized that her skillful development of students in both ELD and DLI classes would be helpful for other teachers and school leaders to observe. Evan had recently joined the GUSD team partnering with the California Education Partners, a nonprofit reform organization supporting districts in building internal capacity by identifying, testing, and replicating effective practices to drive district wide improvement (CAED Partners, n.d.). Through this work, the GUSD team recognized that emergent bilinguals would benefit from the consistency of scaffolds within a workshop setting, and three ELD strategies were selected to be employed: the Frayer Model, Think-Pair-Share, and Reciprocal Reading. Evan designed a training series for teachers that would include a visit to Anya’s class to observe and try out these strategies, and, in February 2020, the initial training day took place with 14 teachers and instructional coaches from multiple schools across the GUSD.

Being one month ahead of the school closures that would come from COVID-19, the group of educators gathered in person in a training room, unaware this mode of instruction and learning would shift rapidly in the coming weeks. They spent the morning reviewing aspects of the workshop structure and then transitioned to focusing on strategy groups within the workshop, wherein the three ELD strategies of the Frayer Model, Think-Pair-Share, and Reciprocal Reading could be implemented. The morning session ended with reading and discussion of the three ELD strategies and their beneficial use for generating oral discourse and language acquisition (Buehl, 2001; Frayer et al., 1969; Zwiers & Soto, 2017). The group then transitioned into Anya’s classroom to observe how she had put these strategies into practice with her students, armed with an observation tracker to take notes on the teacher’s actions and the students’ actions.

In the classroom, the students were at tables in groups of three to four, each with chart paper in the middle, upon which a graphic organizer of the Frayer Model was drawn. Each group had been provided with a different vocabulary term and completed sections about their term’s characteristics, examples, and nonexamples, as well as a visualization of the term. Within the next half hour, the students each shared aloud their term and descriptions, orally teaching it to their classmates. As each group presented, Anya engaged the remaining students in TPS as they processed each new term, resulting in 100% of the students in the class listening to usage of the term and speaking aloud themselves using the term. In the last half of the hour, students transitioned to a reading selection from which the terms were drawn. Anya assigned each student in the group a Reciprocal Reading role: predictor, connector, questioner, or clarifier/facilitator. The students read and discussed independently while Anya moved about the room, stopping in to check on groups and prod as needed. The class time closed with Anya asking all the students

to return to their seats and synthesize what they had learned in that hour in a brief written statement that she collected as an “exit ticket” on their ways out and onto their next class.

At this point, the training transitioned into a lab setting. The teacher observers would be expected to return to Anya’s class in the afternoon to practice a strategy themselves with a group of students. Thus, they spent time debriefing what they had observed, including what they appreciated about her lesson design, what they still wondered about, and what instructional implications they were considering.

The Effects of COVID-19

While the training series had just gotten underway, plans were suddenly brought to a halt when schools were closed in March 2020 to slow the spread of COVID-19. Like many across the nation, the GUSD’s teachers and students finished the 2019–20 school year unsure of what would lay ahead for many aspects of teaching and learning. However, in a true reflection of reality, shortly following the start of the 2020–21 school year, Anya and Evan decided on an ambitious plan to continue the training in their new mode of learning: virtual. Anya had spent much of her time reaching out to and connecting her students to online learning, both technically and affectively. While honing practices that would engage them, she discovered that structures they were familiar with were reaping the most responses. Therefore, she found herself utilizing the Frayer Model, Think-Pair-Share, and Reciprocal Reading in modified digital ways. By November 2020, she was ready to invite the teachers back into her classroom, but this time to try the strategies with her students virtually.

The morning of the virtual training day was spent reviewing the three strategies and focusing on their use for language development. Particular attention was paid to the critical nature of oral and written language development in a remote setting, given the growing concern about this unfamiliar environment for both students and teachers alike. This time around, the teachers did not observe Anya employ the strategies, but rather engaged in a single strategy directly with the students themselves, drawing from their in-person practice from the past training and transferring it into the virtual setting. Amidst some technical glitches and time taken to ensure all students were able to participate in the breakout rooms, the teachers engaged with a small group of students on an academic language lesson using either a virtual Reciprocal Reading, TPS, or Frayer Model. While the teachers’ learning outcomes and strategy use were synonymous to the in-person training in February, the virtual training in November yielded discussion on the distinction of using the practices remotely. The implications for language development were at the forefront of the conversation, as teachers noted the students’ new reluctance to speak but also new ideas to connect with students more intentionally and relationally in order to encourage more language use.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection centered on Anya Mendoza’s experience and occurred over two time points with two different methods. First, a semi-structured interview was designed with 10 interview questions related to constructs in the research questions: needs and challenges of virtual language teaching and instructional approaches used in virtual settings. The interview lasted 70 minutes and was recorded with video-conferencing software to minimize physical contact due to the ongoing pandemic. Anya was informed of her rights and provided informed consent.

After an initial round of data analysis about key themes and impressions from the interview, Anya was invited to engage in a critical reflection on her experience teaching during a pandemic with optional prompts to elaborate upon initial findings from the interview. Anya’s reflection was approximately five pages long and was analyzed in combination with the interview for emergent themes. A thematic analysis with Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-stage process was used to identify, enumerate, analyze, and report on

the rich descriptions of data from the two artifacts. Researchers met multiple times to process and discuss interpretations. Together, these complementary methods provided researchers with new knowledge and opportunities to delve deeper into the perceptions and experiences of the participant (Cohen et al., 2017).

Finally, to enhance the trustworthiness of findings, the researchers engaged Anya in member checking to explore the credibility of results through participant validation. After Anya checked the accuracy of key themes against her experience, the following two categories of findings emerged: instructional moves and affective moves used in pandemic language teaching.

Findings

Instructional Moves Used in Pandemic Teaching

Increasing Opportunity to Use Language

Anya acknowledged that the pandemic very notably affected her instruction, given her responsibilities as a language teacher. Once the school closures occurred, she grappled for some time with reconnecting with her students online. Initially, her concerns were technical, ensuring that students each had internet access, that they were capable of using the video-conferencing and learning platforms, and that they had stable remote environments for learning. Later on, her concerns would become social-emotional, as she found herself unable to discern comprehension, motivation, or even engagement given the lack of students turning on their video or unmuting their microphones. “[T]he full year in-person we’re able to connect and really[,] you know[,] have that strong bond, but about halfway through the year online I really felt like, ‘Oh, my goodness, I haven’t really touched them.’” She admitted that she did not reconnect with all of her students, as conditions for learning were not consistent for all.

This posed an incredible challenge, as language acquisition is difficult to assess without direct interaction and even more difficult to teach via independent work. Anya shared that she posted assignments and resources in her learning management system, but this one-way interface did not provide the opportunity to use and engage in language in the ways she would have pre-pandemic. “*When we were in class pre-COVID, we just did so much. We were constantly on field trips, . . . and the kids really thrive[d] on that.*” To address this need, Anya directly contended with her earlier concerns of technical and social-emotional barriers to language use. She understood that increasing productive language in her virtual classroom would need to be achieved in equal parts technically with structure (e.g., using breakout rooms to create less intimidating spaces) and equal parts social-emotionally with motivation (e.g., finding assignments that would compel students to participate).

Anya mentioned her constant vigilance for opportunities to speak and interact with one another. “*I’m always asking myself how do I get them to speak, how do I get them to use the language, . . . and that’s where the speeches came from.*” She ultimately landed upon a long-term project that would involve self-selection of a topic, research and writing of a persuasive speech, and then delivery of the speech in a public presentation. She co-created this project with her students when they became surprisingly vocal about current events surrounding immigration and social justice issues. This intentional instructional move demonstrated Anya’s willingness to listen to her students and her insight when taking advantage of the opportunity to use language in both an oral and written manner.

Use of Familiar Strategies

With the transition to fully remote learning, Anya found herself needing to reconnect with students in a different setting or build new relationships with students she had not previously met in person. Anya described periods of constant readjustment for both herself and her students, as the pandemic

environment was rife with new and unfamiliar circumstances. In seeking to address this challenge, she noted that structures and practices that were familiar to the students would transfer into the online classroom more effectively. *“Okay, so what worked in the classroom? This worked in the classroom so let’s do it, and if it works online, we’ll keep doing it.”* Anya had a subset of students in her virtual classes that had been with her pre-pandemic. She noticed that they were helpful in participating and modeling structures because of their own prior knowledge of the structures. The students themselves were a conduit of familiarity that would support the other students. *“We went through the kids that I had before; they already knew the Frayer Model so”* she decided to incorporate strategies that the students had previously used, namely the Frayer Model, Think-Pair-Share and Reciprocal Reading.

She further positioned the familiar strategies to support the new virtual setting. For example, with relationships and community building more important than ever, Anya shared of her students, *“I told them that we would start with a focus on Pair-Share, which to me is not just speaking to one another, but listening with our ears and[,] most importantly, with our hearts.”* Anya was explicit in her use of familiar strategies to not only structure language processing but also to build interpersonal connections in a digital environment. Collectively, this provided more frequent opportunities for instructional interaction and student discourse, which are foundational to language learning (Gupta, 2019).

Allowing for Flexibility and Innovation

Anya expressed how she and her students experienced continuous change during this time period, as they shifted from emergency remote learning in the Spring 2020, to distance learning in the Fall and Winter 2020, to hybrid learning when schools reopened in April 2021. She repeatedly referred to flexibility as a necessity and considered each setting a *“a whole new way of teaching, so again, I find myself doing my best to adapt.”* For a teacher who was accustomed to designing lessons and planning ahead, Anya described a new approach to instruction in the pandemic: *“It was like action research. I’m learning as I’m going along, and so I kept the strategies that worked[,] and I just had to let go of things that just didn’t work.”* Her own ability to adapt to the constant changes and unknown future enabled her to persist through the demands of pandemic teaching.

Additionally, Anya noted how flexibility and innovative instructional ideas also enabled her students to persist through pandemic learning. She described a slump in the winter months when distance learning fatigue was setting in as well as how she overcame it by providing flexible choices to students, described as a best practice during the pandemic to motivate interest and position multilingual learners to use their strengths (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2020). When considering the next unit of study with her students, Anya stated, *“I asked the students what they wanted to learn about[,] and they mentioned so much I was overwhelmed . . . I wasn’t going to be able to cover all those topics, so that is [sic] when I got the idea of having each student select an issue that was close to their heart. I told them to think about what mattered to them the most.”* She explained that such flexibility and innovation enabled her students to meet instructional goals around research, writing and presenting, while simultaneously experiencing higher engagement. *“In the end, there was a sense of completion, a sense of accomplishment from all of us.”*

Affective Moves Used in Pandemic Teaching

Cultivating a Community of Learners

Anya recognized the pandemic weighed heavily on her students and wanted to create space for a community of learners to support and be there for one another. She centered her pedagogy on the assumption that her students were intelligent, capable, and important. Repeatedly, Anya would tell her

students, “*You are important. No matter who you are. No matter whether you have documents or no documents, you are an important human being.*” Anya shared that because many kids did not believe these words, she communicated this message in her in-person and virtual pedagogy to help them comprehend their value as human beings and as students in her class.

To communicate this belief and message, Anya would always tell students to not listen with only their ears, but “*with your hearts.*” Through class discussions about what it meant to listen with their hearts, students shared that it means “*to listen without judging, without assumptions, to try to understand where that person is coming from, . . . in their words, to listen without hating.*” This humanizing principle of active listening was particularly timely in the 2020–2021 academic year, which was fraught with polarizing politics in a presidential election year, coupled with the uncertain and distressing developments of the COVID-19 virus.

Anya reinforced these humanizing, community-building beliefs in her pedagogy as well. To engage students in speaking and listening skills, Anya often sang songs in class with her middle school students. Cultivating a community of learners with mutual respect and a low-risk environment, Anya shared that even though students had their cameras and microphones off, she could say with absolute confidence that “*they were singing with me.*” By addressing the emotional needs of her students and prioritizing affective variables in her instruction (Horwitz, 1995), Anya was able to help her language learners fully engage in activities needed to support language development.

Humanizing Instruction Through Authenticity and Empathy

To enact humanizing pedagogy, teachers engage in *mutual humanization* with their students, where teachers and students dialogue as co-investigators (Freire, 1970). Through discussion, teachers and students engage in conversations that promote critical consciousness or *conscientização* (p. 26) about power and privilege in specific spaces.

While classroom spaces often position teachers as knowledge bearers and students as receivers of knowledge, Anya was very transparent and upfront with her students about her experience as a teacher. When Anya first shifted to online teaching, she asked herself, “*How will I get students to listen to me? How can I continue to help them develop English reading, writing, speaking, and listening?*” Presenting her humanness to her students, Anya shared that she was always honest with her students. She said, “*I told them how hard it was for me and that I needed their help as I delivered lessons. Sure enough, every lesson I taught, I would ask what they thought and if they felt they [had] learned.*”

This level of dialogue provided a platform for students to develop their critical consciousness about teachers as learners who are not the source of all knowledge. On the contrary, students have as much to contribute to the learning space with their lived experiences and funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992).

Throughout her interview and in her follow up critical reflection, Anya consistently positioned herself as a learner. She described her own experience as an EL in the US schooling system and shared her resolve to take the perspective of her students in her teaching regardless of the platform. Specifically, remember how embarrassing it could be to learn and express herself in a second language, Anya would break down her instructional steps to demonstrate—authentically—how everyone was learning:

I have [students] observe how I begin my prewriting, which is messy with all kinds of mistakes; however, I just focus on the ideas I want to write. They then do what I have done, knowing that mistakes are fine and that later they will have time to revise.

In the end, they see me, a teacher, struggle through the writing process, adding, taking ideas out, correcting errors. By the end, I have a beautiful piece of writing about myself. Students are getting to know me as a writer and as a real person.

In this excerpt, Anya puts her humanity on display, demonstrating how writers and people engage in the messy, nonlinear process of writing. Leading with empathy, Anya centers the perspectives and experiences of her students as she leads online instruction.

Creating Opportunities for Meaning-Making

With online instruction, Anya was interested in motivating her students to engage in lessons through intrinsic curiosity. She designed learning units that allowed students to acquire knowledge and skills in ways that were meaningful to students (Kearney, 2012; Lambert et al., 2017). As co-investigators in the learning space, Anya sought students' feedback and input on topics to cover in the school term, asking them to *"select an issue that was close to their hearts . . . to think about what mattered to them the most."*

With this freedom, students chose topics that were engaging and relevant to their lives, topics where they were excited to become the experts. Students chose topics that discussed the role of immigrants in society, the "discovery" of the Americas, electric cars, plastic pollution, the COVID-19 vaccine, gender roles, discrimination, and animal rights. Responding to the students' overwhelming interest in understanding these topics, Anya spent two months supporting students as they explored their respective issues and delivered powerful speeches in English that advocated for their topics of choice.

Given such an empowering and humanizing experience that fostered students' critical consciousness about issues in modern day society, Anya shared that there was a sense of accomplishment from everybody in the virtual classroom, and that when students listened to each other's presentations, she knew that they were listening with their hearts.

Conclusion

The current study sought to examine how one expert ELD teacher shifted lesson delivery from in-person to digital environments during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it considered challenges and solutions in delivering content and language instruction remotely to students. Findings demonstrate how Anya Mendoza engaged in both instructional and affective moves to support the linguistic and socioemotional needs of her students. Humanizing the learning experience in an otherwise isolating virtual learning space, Anya kept students at the center of her decision-making when creating opportunities to increase language use, adopting familiar teaching strategies that supported student learning, and making space for flexibility and innovation in her instruction.

Moreover, Anya created a mutually humanizing learning space by bringing her teaching concerns and fears to students. As co-investigators in a virtual learning environment, Anya and her students engaged as a community of learners and co-created learning opportunities to engage in deep meaning-making and language development. As schools begin to consider what instruction might look like in a post-COVID-19 world, the current study advocates for instructional decisions that center student experiences, interests, abilities, and humanities when teaching language, regardless of in-person, online, or hybrid platforms.

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