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Basic Linguistics for English Language Teachers: A Community for Professional Development Online

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Abstract

Online professional development has become a popular way of staying up-to-date with what is going on in the world of teaching. Teachers are notoriously busy as institutions require more administrative work of them. Time and distance limitations, busy schedules and family commitments coupled with an increasing demand from institutions that their staff engage in continuous development have all put heightened pressure on teachers. One way of fulfilling professional development hours is by taking free online courses. The internet is now bustling with countless online courses as can be seen on the diverse websites that offer them, or at [Class Central](#), a trendy search engine which lists its courses in categories, such as “trending”, “self-paced”, “just announced”, and “starts now”.

Basic Linguistics for English Language Teachers (BLELT) was created under the umbrella of Electronic Village Online (EVO), which was created in 1999 as a Special Project by the Computer-Assisted Language Learning Interest Section (CALL-IS) of TESOL (Bauer-Ramazani, 2018). In this report, the BLELT content creators will review the process that took place to design the BLELT session, develop it, and transform it into a collaborative professional learning community.

Introduction

Basic Linguistics for English Language Teachers (BLELT) is a five-week online professional development session developed by its three co-moderators Carmen Medina, Lana Hiasat, and Roslyn Billy, who have also co-authored this paper. As professionals in the field of education, they

had often taken advantage of opportunities for professional development (PD) online. When first introduced to the idea of sharing their expertise with a group of like-minded teachers, the moderators were enthused. The only problem was that, given their years of experience and the number of courses they had created, it was difficult to choose the content of their course and the target audience.

After some discussion over different possibilities, the moderators decided to create a linguistics course thinking that it would be useful for novice and experienced teachers alike who needed to refresh their ideas, share their classroom practice, build resources, or simply communicate with other teachers. This was the spirit behind the creation of the Basic Linguistics for English Language Teachers online session. Once the proposal was sent in and after an initial tentative acceptance was provided, the moderators attended the online moderator development session which allowed them to capture the essence of the Electronic Village Online (EVO) through the experiences of other teachers who had participated in former sessions. During that formative process, the moderators decided on a logo (see Figure 1), the Google Classroom on which to create the content, and other tools to be used in order to keep the participants engaged. They also set the number of synchronous sessions and identified a number of tentative guest speakers.

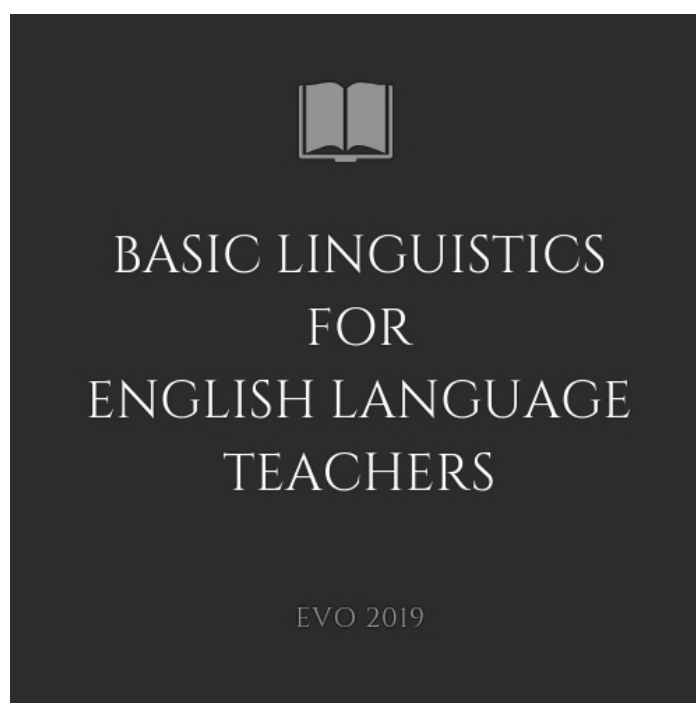


Figure 1. Logo for the BLELT session, created on Canva.

During the last week of the training course, the moderators shared their materials with other moderators in order to receive feedback and make improvements before the final admission into EVO 2019, and opening the session to participants.

In this report, the authors will share a brief literature review discussing how online courses are built and other aspects of the adult learning environment. This is followed by a discussion of how the online professional learning community was developed and maintained. Additionally, a detailed description of setting up the session and its surveys ensues. The surveys were used to gain demographic details as well as to offer opportunities for questions. Challenges are also discussed, followed by a number of recommendations. The report concludes with a brief discussion of certain elements of this online experience that made it an innovative practice.

Literature Review

Building an Online Community

Developing an online course is a process that can lead to the creation of a virtual professional learning community. Online blended learning is likely to become a substantial component of the US education system, at least at the secondary level (as cited in Matzat, 2013). With that being the case, the shift in instructional paradigm is changing from complete face-to-face instruction to blended and online instruction.

An initial storyboard becomes the road map to developing an effective online course or series of modules. Understanding by Design, a framework developed by Wiggins and McTighe (2005), provides a three-stage backward planning system for curriculum and course building which aids in the development of building an online or blended course. This design practice allows instructors to set clear and attainable outcomes and work backwards in planning the content in order to achieve those learning outcomes.

Adult learning in an Online Environment

Malcolm Knowles' theory of andragogy emphasizes that adults are self-directed to take responsibility for decisions (Knowles, 1990); meaning that when developing an online or blended course, an adult learner would be invested in the outcome of said course. In order to maintain the engagement of adult learners in a virtual learning environment, the instructor must provide various instructional activities that cater to various learning styles and provide the opportunity for course participants to build a learning network. Networked learning offers a unique opportunity for exploring learning pathways as the virtual learning environment provides an archived transcript of a community's life history. Networked learning is based upon two theoretical ideas: (1) learning through cooperative groups, and (2) collaborative group activities and learning communities or communities of practice (Allan & Lewis, 2006). Hence, creating a Virtual Learning Community (VLC) became an essential part of the online EVO session described in this report.

Developing a Professional Learning Community in an Online Environment

Developing a professional learning community in an online environment requires certain criteria for it to succeed. According to King (2011) there are three important key elements when building a Virtual Learning Community (VLC). The community must be: (1) ethical, (2) self-directed, and (3) contextual. Ethical conduct tenets are core guidelines for professional practice in formal academic studies. Self-directed learning is a productive means to keep pace with lifelong professional development. Lastly, the course context must hold relevance to the adult learner, which will allow the course participant to engage in the online learning environment. Implementing these three tenets would contribute to the success of a VLC.

Maintaining a successful VLC (Virtual Learning Community) in an Online Learning Environment

Maintaining a successful VLC in an online learning environment includes the need of new constructivist virtual learning strategies. To continue maintaining a successful VLC there should be a clear virtual curriculum, a virtual professional development community, and an innovative virtual pedagogy. A virtual curriculum includes multimedia content such as videos, audio files, and interactive texts (Strungă, 2015). Creating a virtual professional development community would include a virtual network that provides course participants with a community of practice in which

participants contribute to the constructivist learning environment. Finally, providing an innovative virtual pedagogy becomes imperative to engaging and maintaining a VLC for an adult learning environment.

Setting up the Online Session

The main objective the moderators had in mind when setting up the session was to encourage English language teachers to reflect upon their knowledge of linguistics, and how this affects their classrooms. Over five weeks, the moderators intended to present a review of the concept of linguistics and its relationship with language, pronunciation, word formation, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, and succinctly mention the relationship between language and culture. Another objective was to interact with the participants while helping them generate practice through discussions and reflection in order to adapt resources such as the minimal pairs activity or the morphology and syntax activity provided as a model, to their teaching contexts.

As mentioned earlier, we used Wiggins & McTighe's (2005) backward design to build our materials. This was done by setting the desired goals: (1) first, by clearly agreeing on what we wanted our participants to know, understand, and be able to do; (2) secondly, by establishing how we would know if our participants had achieved the desired results; (3) and finally, by planning the instructional activities we wanted the participants to carry out. We scheduled one weekly live session via Zoom and four interviews with English teaching professionals from a variety of countries. At the end of the five weeks, the participants who had attended all the live meetings and had carried out all the tasks would receive a badge for completion of the tasks.

Once we had our design laid out, we used a storyboard to fill in the content and sequence the five weeks, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Storyboard Based on Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) Understanding by Design.

	Pathways to intended learning	How to demonstrate that the intended learning was accomplished
Week 1	Participants will examine, discuss and understand the branches of linguistics.	Carry out the previous knowledge questionnaire to assess background knowledge. Identify linguistic concepts and create a working definition.
Week 2	Participants will reflect, analyze and comprehend the sound system of the English language.	Participate in the discussion on English sounds and reflection on most difficult sounds to particular language speakers. Produce a minimal pair activity based on a model.

Week 3	<p>Participants will consider, discuss, and comprehend the arrangement and relationships of the smallest meaningful units in a language (morphemes)</p> <p>Participants will analyze and understand the major syntactic structures that pose difficulty for ELLs.</p> <p>Participants will review Parts of Speech and identify ELLs' major trouble areas.</p> <p>Participants will examine, compare views on, and comprehend building sentences and how to teach this.</p>	<p>Participate in the discussion on how morphology and syntax can be presented at different stages of learning.</p> <p>Produce a morphological or syntactic activity based on a model.</p> <p>Participate in the discussion on what aspects of language are more difficult for students.</p>
Week 4	<p>Participants will analyse and understand the relationships between words and how we construct meaning.</p> <p>Participants will raise their awareness of the meaning and interpretation of words, signs, and sentence structure and how this impacts ELLs.</p> <p>Participants will explore, talk about, and discover pragmatics. They will also distinguish the conversational implicatures which the speaker implies, and a listener infers.</p> <p>Participants will review and discuss the relationship between culture and language.</p>	<p>Participate in the discussion on how semantics and pragmatics affect ELLs.</p> <p>Participate in an activity on cultural gaffes.</p> <p>Participate in an activity on culture by interviewing people from other cultures.</p>
Week 5	<p>Participants will analyze and master how to create a plan of action based on the information obtained throughout the course.</p>	<p>Create a plan of action on one or more aspects that have been dealt with throughout the five weeks which can be integrated into your classroom practice.</p>

In Table 2, we have included the elements that made up the first week. As can be seen in the table, we started by providing the participants with an inventory of what was going to be learned during the week, followed by the activities that would be expected of the participants in order to cover the target. In the third column, we included the suggested content in order to cover the target and complete the assessment successfully. Under the heading “Supplemental Resources”, we provided content for high achievers who finished the content quickly as well as remedial suggestions for

participants who required extra information. Similar outlines of Weeks 2 to 5 can be found in the [Appendix](#).

Table 2

Sample of what a week's module looks like using backward design.

Learning Outcomes	Assessment Activities	Content	Supplemental Resources
Assess your previous knowledge.	<p>Go to Google + (G+) and introduce yourself.</p> <p>Carry out previous knowledge survey.</p> <p>Attend the live Zoom session. If you cannot attend it, watch the recorded version and leave your comment in the G+ community.</p>	a) Go to the G+ community and explore the comments posted by peers.	<p>Linguistics and the classroom from Newcastle University (2014) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rnXwHVjHR9E</p> <p>Intro to Linguistics-Basic Concepts of Linguistics (Hana, 2011) https://ufal.mff.cuni.cz/~hana/teaching/2015wi-ling/01-Intro.pdf</p> <p>Linguistics and Philosophy Courses MIT (2019). https://ocw.mit.edu/courses/linguistics-and-philosophy/#Courses24.900-24.903</p>
Form your own definition of linguistics in your context.	<p>Go through the PowerPoint by C. Medina. Pay special attention to the questions and be ready to answer them in the G+ community.</p> <p>State your opinion on what linguistics is in the G+ community.</p> <p>Read K. Robertson's (2016) post and share your views in the G+ community.</p>	<p>b) PowerPoint created by Carmen Medina introducing linguistics and establishing points of reflection and discussion.</p> <p>c) Watch the video on what linguistics is from The Virtual Linguistics Campus. (2014): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bzz1pFWAtMo</p>	
Understand the complexities of language as it relates		d) Watch the Ling Space (2014) video on how different languages can influence the English language learner.	

to instructing
mono/multic
ultural
students.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UB18y2ZYBiY>

e) Read Kristina Robertson's (2016) post on connecting students background knowledge to content in the ELL classroom. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/connect-students-background-knowledge-content-ell-classroom>

After designing the weekly materials, we had to decide on a platform. We visited different options and finally agreed on Google classroom as the platform where we would develop the content and on Google+ as the platform for the community discussion. These two choices were made mainly because all three moderators had varying degrees of experience using these tools. For the synchronous sessions, we unanimously agreed on Zoom and also created a hashtag for use on Twitter: #BLELT.

The Moderators

Following the suggested norms for EVO session development, we had three moderators. All three contributed to: (1) designing the structure, (2) creating content, (3) managing the content and discussions, (4) grading, and (5) interacting with the participants who signed up for BLELT. Based on their beliefs grounded in social constructivism, the moderators modeled how the content was constructed on professional interactions and discussions amongst each other which resulted in continuous ongoing improvement to the content and delivery throughout the training and even during the actual period the sessions were open.

Choosing the Content

The topics were selected following a Linguistics for Educators course that the main moderator had created as part of the Project Empower grant for Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa in 2017. The section on culture was developed based on theories of culture. These were mainly Hofstede's (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010) dimensions of culture, Worldview theory (Nuagle, 2005), and Knowledge Workx's 12 dimensions (2012).

Geert Hofstede and a team of collaborators (Hofstede, et al., 2010) created a theoretical framework of cultural dimensions based on cross-cultural communication. The dimensions describe the relationships between values and behaviors while providing a rating on a comparison scale. The six dimensions are: (1) Power Distance Index which describes the degree of inequality between people with and without power, (2) Individualism versus Collectivism which is meant to indicate the strength of the ties amongst people in a community, (3) Masculinity versus Femininity which refers to the distribution of roles between men and women (4) Uncertainty Avoidance which indicates how well people cope with anxiety, (5) Long-term versus Short-term orientation which stipulates the time tolerance people in different communities display, and (6) Indulgence versus Restraint, which was discovered and described together with Michael Minkov in 2010. It is the most recent and therefore less defined of the dimensions, and is meant to define a culture's tendencies regarding the fulfilment of desires.

The most basic definition of Worldview theory is that it's the way we view the world. Naugle (2005) identifies four key components which he uses to understand worldview. These are that: (1) worldview refers to a person's *interpretation of reality*, or basic view of life; (2) it is *an inescapable function* of the human heart; (3) there is *no impartial ground* from which to reason or interpret reality; and (4) worldview is best understood as *a system of signs* (symbols), which helps us to understand the world.

In 2002, a Knowledge Workx (2012) team of international expatriates who were working in Dubai developed a cultural mapping inventory which was used to understand people from a cultural perspective without using any characteristics that could lead to stereotyping or discrimination. Since the moderator for the section of BLELT on culture and languages was a certified trainer in intercultural intelligence based on the Knowledge Workx model, several activities were selected based on it. The main objective was to introduce how culture links to language. Even though this topic has many theoretical perspectives and analyses that could be applied to language, the goal was to introduce the topic and provide a practical assignment that participants could apply. Participants discussed conflict approaches to culture and how changing perspectives can help teachers change their teaching approaches.

The practical assignment was an interview with foreigners in the participants' own country to learn about cultural mistakes. Some teachers found it difficult to interview foreigners and later reported that they would rather read about the topic than carry out a practical assignment. Such comments further show how cultural differences can create communication and learning boundaries. Several teachers expressed their personal cultural shocks and reflected on how such emotional experiences could impact learning.

The choice of content included diverse authors and experts in the field of linguistics. Weeks 1 and 3, were based on *Linguistics for Educators* (West, 2018) which is a comprehensive course in linguistics for teaching in the classroom. Not only is it simple and accessible for all levels but it also presents interesting theories; for instance, the dance of the English verb (West, 2018, pp.: 70-78). For Week 2, which was on phonics and word formation, we used *Words their Way* (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2016) because it includes an original way of working with vocabulary and phonics that can be adapted to any level and context.

Week 4 was divided into two parts: Part one was on semantics adapted from West (2018, pp. 79-94), and pragmatics also adapted from West (2018, pp. 95-98). During this week, we included a brief overview of the *Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (COE, 2001), and the newly published *Companion Volume with New Descriptors* (COE, 2018) which introduces "mediation" as a "new skill". The main preoccupation for participants regarding the new companion volume to the CEFR was how they were going to create meaningful activities for the "new skill" of mediation. An animated discussion ensued when discussing mediation as we reviewed what mediation was (summarizing, paraphrasing, translating, soft skills, problem solving, and conflict resolution) and what type of activities we would be creating to practice and test it. We learned that Greece was testing mediation by means of translation, and that Spain was currently working on developing activities for mediation and would be testing as of the 2019 – 2020 academic year. To end this first part, we also included references to Europe's plurilingual model of Content and Language Integrated Learning (Hanesová, 2015).

Part two focused on culture and language reviewing and commenting on Hofstede's (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010) theory, Worldview theory (Naugle, 2005), and Knowledge Workx's (2012) 12 dimensions. Week 5 ended the session with a Plan of Action adapted from DuFour, Eaker,

and Many (2010), *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work*.

The moderators made it a point to introduce the discussion on what linguistics currently, in 2019, involves based on their experience, later exchanging their views with those of the individual participants' taken from their particular context and classroom practices. Several interesting points arose such as a discussion on the refutation of Chomsky's Universal Grammar theory (Cook & Newson, 1996) or his famous phrase: "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously" which made for lively discussion and exchange of opinions.

The Surveys

Two surveys were carried out for this series of sessions. The first one was given at the beginning in order to determine the profile of the participants. The second was an evaluation which took place at the end of the five weeks to receive feedback from the participants regarding the contents and their quality in order to improve the delivery for subsequent future sessions.

In the Previous Knowledge Survey, we asked 16 questions regarding the origin of participants, their years of experience in the teaching profession, the country they were teaching in, what their expectations regarding the course were, what questions they had regarding linguistics, and then some linguistics-specific questions on each of the aspects we would be dealing with throughout the five weeks. This survey had 153 respondents originating from four different continents.

The Profile and Previous Knowledge Survey

Survey results indicated that the majority of the participants were either in primary or secondary education with only 16.3% from higher education, while the remaining 11.2% were from diverse teaching sectors or in a combination primary and secondary (see Figure 2).

What level do you teach?

153 responses

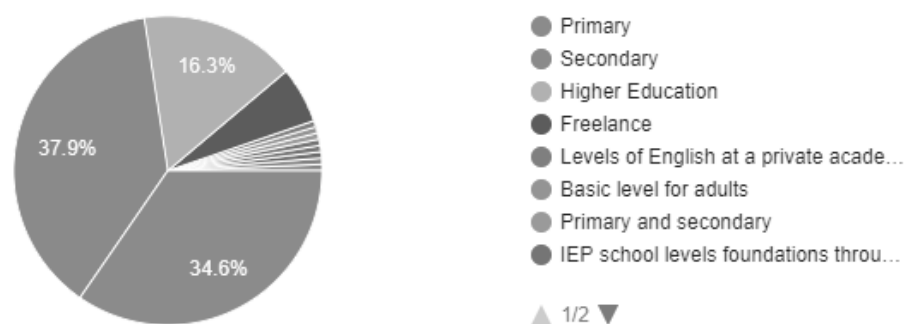


Figure 2. Survey results which reveal the diverse teaching backgrounds of the participants on the course.

When asked about their teaching experience, 49% said they had been teaching for more than 10 years which highlighted the range in the teaching experience of the participants, as shown in Figure 3.

How long have you been teaching?

153 responses

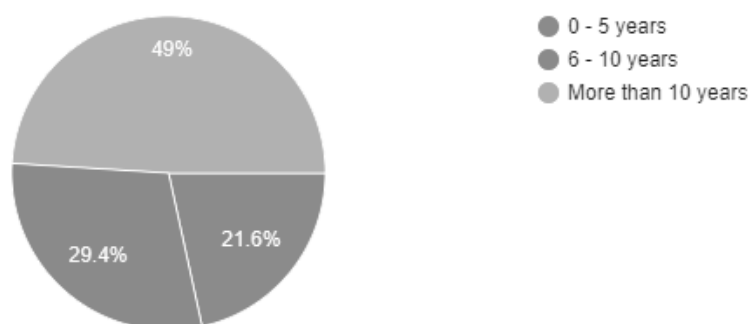


Figure 3. Teaching experience of the respondents who took part in the Profile and Previous Knowledge Survey.

The reasons the participants expressed for taking the sessions were as diverse as their origins. Some of the reasons were purely methodological in the sense that the participants simply wanted to update, review or learn more about linguistics. Other reasons were pedagogical, because they wanted to learn how to improve their teaching in order to help their students acquire the language.

When queried about what they wanted to know about linguistics, the answers were again diverse, ranging from having very basic questions answered to broaching very broad ones as can be deduced from these examples:

- (1) What is word formation?
- (2) What is the difference between language and linguistics?
- (3) Which skill is the most important one?
- (4) Why is it important to learn about the evolution of language in history and how does it impact the classroom?
- (5) How can I deal with people from other countries?

Finally, most of the participants responded correctly to the purely linguistic questions such as: Is schwa a long or a short vowel? Are language and linguistics the same thing? Are there only five vowels in English? Is it ungrammatical to say, “Me and Daniel went to school together?” Responses to the latter item are shown in Figure 4, which showed that there was a need for revision and updating of the linguistic topics that were to be reviewed during the five weeks of BLELT.

It is ungrammatical to say, “Me and Daniel went to school together.”

151 responses

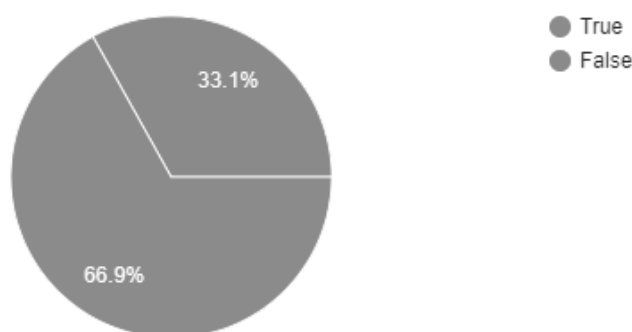


Figure 4. Sample grammar question result which reveals participants' command of the English language.

The Feedback Survey

Only thirty-seven participants carried out the feedback survey. It may well be that the response rate was low because the survey was closed on the very day that the sessions ended. We asked the participants 10 questions, four of which were relevant to further improvement in subsequent sessions:

- (1) Which weekly session did you like best?
- (2) Which weekly session did you like least?
- (3) Would you recommend our session?
- (4) Would you be interested in a follow up session?

As can be seen in Figure 5, the most popular topics were Week 2 on Pronunciation, and Week 4 on Culture and Language. The participants found Week 2 useful not only because it gave them motivating materials for their future lessons, but also because it made them aware of problems that could arise in their classes as well as suggestions pertaining to how to solve them. A few respondents said they liked the topics in Week 4 most because they offered the opportunity of understanding the importance of culture in language teaching, and relationships between culture and language which they had never thought about before. They continued to say that this also made them aware that they should learn more about other cultures in order to be able to teach their students more effectively.

Which weekly session did you like best?

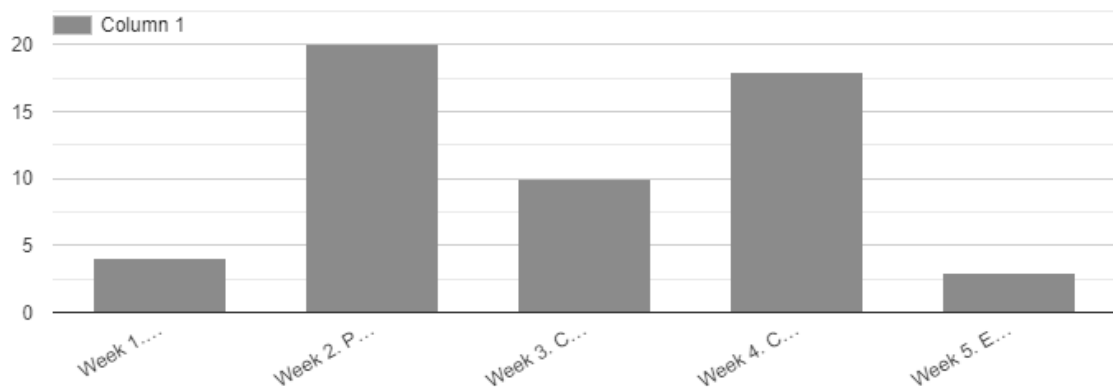


Figure 5. Sessions which the participants favored; feedback survey results.

According to Figure 6, the responses to the most unpopular sessions included Week 1 which they found superfluous and could have been dedicated to more relevant content. Others felt confused because they did not understand the importance of learning linguistics and how it reflected on their teaching. Some of the teachers working in rural settings did not find the content in Week 1 relevant for their teaching context. Week 5 did not seem appealing to some participants because it was the last topic and they had already used action plans to develop professional goals.

Which session did you like least?

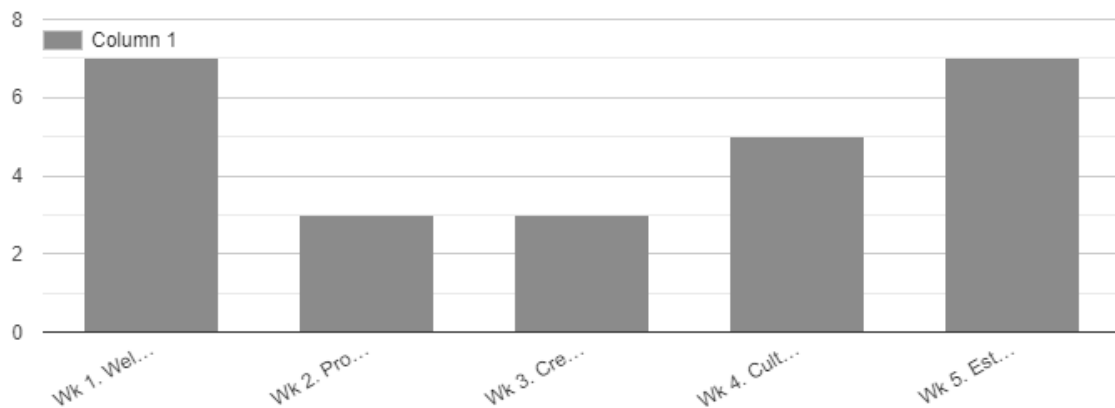


Figure 6. Sessions which the participants least favored; feedback survey results.

We can see in Figure 7 that the thirty-four respondents unanimously agreed that they would recommend the sessions to other preservice and novice teachers. Likewise, with regards to whether they would be interested in a follow up session, 88.2% of the respondents affirmed that they would be.

Would you recommend our sessions?

33 responses

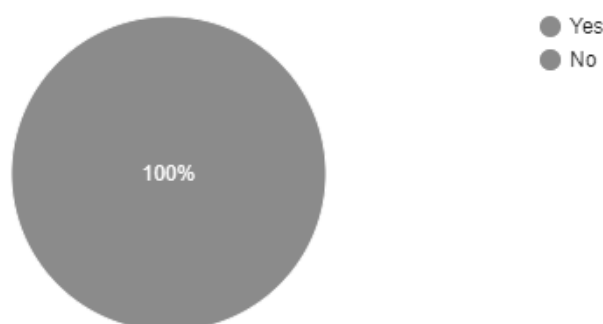


Figure 7. Respondents' recommendation for future sessions.

Some of the participants' comments included:

- (1) It gave me a lot of interesting material for my future lessons.
- (2) It has helped me to know what problems we can come across as English language teachers and how to improve them.
- (3) I feel in contact with the rest of the world and the reality of some of my students. Now, that I am aware, I can show I care about them.
- (4) You presented boring topics (such as pronunciation) in a very engaging way.
- (5) The sessions helped me have growth mindset for teaching.
- (6) Very informative and inspiring, and I feel no learning can take place unless a teacher has some understanding of the cultural background of his/her learner. An ethnocentric person can never be a good teacher.

Level of Difficulty

Participants expressed their diverse needs for choosing this session either as an update for their knowledge of linguistics or to learn more about the topic. However, the moderators planned this session with the intention of carrying it out with inservice teachers, novice teachers, and those who needed a quick review of key concepts of linguistics. We found that the content was not as basic as we intended it to be. We assumed that all teachers participating in the session had some background knowledge in linguistics, and cultural theories. What we found as we progressed with the weekly topics was that many of the basic concepts were not so familiar to some of the participants. Therefore, the Google+ community discussions were an important venue for further clarification. One of the teachers created a Quizlet with the key concepts which many participants appreciated and found useful. A true sense of community began to build as participants started to help each other with the content that some found challenging.

Managing High Numbers: Challenges and Moderator Intervention

The moderators encountered a number of challenges during this professional development session. The main challenges were:

Challenge # 1. Live Zoom Session. Some participants were not used to participating in live Zoom sessions and had little idea about netiquette when it comes to respecting an online live session as they did not mute their microphones despite repeated requests or were even on their cell phones while the session was going on. For subsequent Zoom sessions, the leading moderator muted the microphone upon starting the session and then allowed participants to intervene only when they asked a question in the chat.

Challenge # 2. Grading. A second noticeable challenge was grading the assignments and how demanding the participants were despite the fact that this was a free, open source PD opportunity. Many participants were extremely demanding when it came to feedback as they wanted an immediate response. This led the moderators to plan and distribute a calendar that included when each assignment should be handed in and when it would be graded and returned. Also, there was no predetermined rubric. We soon found that it would have been beneficial if a rubric had been included, so that participants would have known what was expected of them and how to go about producing the tasks.

Challenge # 3. Participation in Discussions. The moderators found that they were under a lot of pressure to participate in the discussions. In subsequent sessions, it will be made clear that the discussion should take place between the participants and that the moderators will only participate in order to clarify or highlight specific topics, comments, best practices, etc.

According to the Community of Inquiry theoretical framework (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000), creating a deep and meaningful (collaborative-constructivist) learning experience requires the development of three interdependent elements – social, cognitive and teaching presence.

- Social Presence is the participants' skill to connect with other members within an online learning environment to create a teaching and learning community (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001). Our participants very quickly established a social presence in the first week when they introduced themselves and greeted new incoming members.
- Cognitive Presence is how participants are able to socially construct meaning from reflection and interaction with each other, the materials, and the moderators. Our participants maintained a sustained reflection and interactive discourse throughout the five weeks. They appeared grateful for the online presence of the moderators who repeatedly answered questions and actively participated in most of the discussions and comments. Queries were answered methodically every 24 hours. Some participants found it easier to create and share resources, comments, and technological tools, whilst others found it tremendously challenging due to their limited English language level, their restricted knowledge of technology, and their overall teaching experience.
- Teaching Presence is the design and creation of the online learning space to include the cognitive and social presence of the participants to build a community (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001). Participants in our course not only shared their teaching context, but also created and shared resources.

Challenge #4. Copy and Paste Submission. The moderators discovered that there was a small number of participants that simply copied and pasted the interventions of other participants or from other sources without indicating any source of attribution. The moderators deleted all suspicious content. They also refused access to any suspicious members.

Challenge #5. Continuous Improvements to the Weekly Topics. The moderators found that they, too were going through a learning process because it was their first time participating in EVO. Some ways of improving the content as it was delivered were:

- adding weekly reviews
- creating weekly summaries
- adding a specialized section in the G+ community, upon request, for teachers who need to improve their English language skills
- organizing a live Twitter session on a specific area of interest
- in one instance, adding a video to answer a previous-knowledge survey questions.

With regards to improvements and moderator intervention, one initiative that we have already started is creating a BLELT group in Facebook as an extension to the discussions that have taken place during the series.

Guest Speakers

We would like to acknowledge our gratitude to the four guest speakers who participated in our series. Including guest speakers (experts in the field) was recommended as a means of engagement during the EVO moderator development session. Our guest speakers were chosen based on their expertise in the weekly topics.

Dr. Stephen West is the author of *Linguistics for Educators* (West, 2018). As mentioned above, the main moderator became familiar with Dr. West's work when she was creating the Linguistics for Educators course at Grand View University. Dr. West intends that his students "will learn the relevant concepts, skills and strategies which are at the core of language science but which are understandable and useful for people who are not specialists in linguistics." (West, 2018, p. 12). His work was chosen as a model of clarity and simplicity. The interview with Dr. West could not be carried out synchronously due to the different time zones. However, this difficulty was overcome by using email to send him the questions and receive his response using the same medium. His chapter on the English verb, and more specifically, the relative importance of the verb in different languages, was discussed in a live Twitter session. This session provided a particularly enriching debate because the participants were from different countries and thus spoke different languages. They had to reflect upon their languages (Arabic, English, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Vietnamese) to think about how important the verb was in organizing a sentence.

Dr. Christine Coombe was chosen not just because of her expertise, but also because she is the colleague of two of the moderators on the course. The interview with Dr. Coombe was carried out using a cell phone in our workplace. We mention this because it was an easy way of recording and editing videos for the online course.

Dr. Hussam Alzieni was chosen because he has gone through the process of learning a foreign language, and because of his expertise in training Arabic speakers to learn English. He gave us a number of tips and tricks from his experience as a learner and a teacher as well as a number of references he had found useful in his teaching and learning practice. This interview was also carried out using a phone in our workplace.

Ms. Elena Miranda Verdú was chosen because of her expertise in English and Spanish, and because she has taught both languages in different contexts (the United States, Scotland and Spain). The interview with Ms. Miranda was carried out using Zoom. She answered questions on whether grammar should be taught in isolation or in context and her struggles in implementing the use of project-based learning with adults in a government-owned language school in Spain.

Why is this Platform Considered Innovative Practice?

The moderators believe this platform for professional development could be considered innovative practice because it was live learning and teaching which reached areas where this online training is not a common practice. It was also asynchronous learning and teaching (due to the time constraints encountered by having participants from practically all over the world). It was multicultural, multi-level, and multi-context, as well, due to the variety of teaching levels, contexts, and cultures.

Lastly, it can be considered innovative practice because of the variety of technological tools that were used:

- (1) Google classroom for content development
- (2) G+ for written discussion, sharing of teaching tools and best practices
- (3) Twitter hashtag for live discussion
- (4) Zoom for face to face synchronous discussions
- (5) Padlet and Nearpod for the culture tasks and discussions
- (6) And finally, the BLELT Facebook group for continuing discussion and sharing of tools, best practices, and interesting articles on teaching and learning

Conclusion

This five-week series was a great inspiration for the moderators because it reinforced their belief in online professional development that caters for teachers' specific needs and areas of interest through collaborative spaces that will create professional learning communities. They recommend that further online professional development sessions are designed and carried out to target areas of need such as basic pronunciation, effective technology use in the classroom, lesson planning, and basic teaching skills to help novice teachers advance in their teaching careers. There are many online spaces where such efforts can be realized. Electronic Village Online (EVO) is recommended as one fruitful means for the delivery of such sessions.

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Appendix

Weeks 2 to 5 of the BLELT Session

Week	Learning Outcomes	Assessment Activities	Content	Supplemental Resources
2	<p>– Reflect upon the English sounds that are different/difficult for your students.</p> <p>– Reflect upon the English stress and intonation patterns that are difficult/different for your students.</p> <p>-Review phonics as fun way to focus on spelling and pronunciation.</p>	<p>G+ discussion</p> <p>Live Zoom session</p> <p>Create and share a minimal pair activity which is relevant to your context</p>	<p>a) PowerPoint on the pronunciation of English</p> <p>b) Phonetics and Phonology: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qj6f_wxz4YI</p> <p>c) History of IPA: https://www.voices.com/blog/history-international-phonetic-alphabet/</p> <p>d) Varieties of English, minimal pairs, pronunciation guide: http://fonetiks.org/</p> <p>e) Young learners: http://www.foniks.org/ohandah/contents.html</p>	<p>Phonetics Manual by Dr. Rodney Ball: http://humbox.ac.uk/62/1/PhoneticsFull.pdf</p> <p>Phonemic chart: http://www.phonemichart.com/</p> <p>Interview with Dr. Hussam Alzieni on tips and tricks for pronunciation in the classroom</p>
3	<p>– Understand aspects of morphology</p>	<p>G+ discussion</p>	<p>a) PowerPoint on Morphology and Syntax</p>	<p>Simple introduction to Morphology: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qj6f_wxz4YI</p>

needed in the ELL classroom.

– Understand basic morphological patterns needed in the ELL classroom.

– Understand aspects of syntax needed in the ELL classroom.

– Understand basic syntactic patterns needed in the ELL classroom.

Live Twitter session

Create word study activity or a syntactic activity

b) Reflection 1: What aspects of morphology do you struggle with when explaining them to your students?

c) Watch the introductory video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=syjbhT45J14&t=4s>

d) Morphology, phonograms and spelling: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmnzJv0kQ7I&t=7s>

e) Reflection 2: What aspects of syntax do your students struggle with? What aspects of syntax do you struggle with when explaining them to your students?

[e.com/watch?v=Rrk_cR_9pxjA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rrk_cR_9pxjA)

Simple introduction to Syntax: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J8Lj2G4FfS0>

On word order 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tG0d0j_vv4A

On word order 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TeiuG81mbII>

Interview with Dr. Stephen West on his book *Linguistics for Educators* and his views on the English verb (West, 2018).

Interview with Elena Miranda Verdu and her views on grammar and how she is implementing grammar through project and task based learning.

4

– Review semantic concepts.

– Identify the importance of semantics in EL classrooms.

G+ discussion

Live zoom session

Participate in Nearpod

Part One: Meaning, Context and Culture.

a) Review the three PowerPoints: Semantics, Pragmatics and Culture. Prepare the questions included

Watch the interview with Dr. Christine Coombe and Dr. Lana Hiasat for her opinion on language and culture.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Share engaging materials that help students identify meaning and multiple meanings attached to some words. – Review pragmatic concepts. – Identify the importance of pragmatics in ELL classrooms. – Share engaging materials that help students identify meaning and multiple meanings attached to some words. – Review aspects of culture in the English language classroom. 	Participate in Padlet	<p>in them for discussion.</p> <p>Part Two:</p> <p>Cultural Backgrounds</p> <p>a) Go over the PowerPoints on New cultural approaches and Ethnocentrism and Culture.</p> <p>b) Watch the video of Chimimanda Adichie: https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story</p> <p>c) Complete the small scale research on cultural ga.</p> <p>d) Post your findings on Padlet: https://padlet.com/lhiasat/nw1yzi-brbhio</p>
5	– Reflect upon the previous four weeks in order to develop a plan of implementation of newly	G+ discussion Live Zoom session	a) Template of a plan of action with instructions.

learned
content into
your field of
practice.

– Catch up
with
assignments
that were left
behind.

– Take the
feedback
survey.

– Receive your
badge.

– Prepare for
continuous
collaboration.

Create plan
of action

Participate
in feedback
survey

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