EFL TEACHING AND TEACHER TRAINING IN NICARAGUA: A MASTER’S INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

By

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ABSTRACT

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English as a foreign language (EFL) is a mandatory part of public education in Nicaragua, Central America. Many Nicaraguan EFL teachers, however, lack the English and teaching skills to be able to do their job effectively. Furthermore, teacher training and professional development opportunities for EFL teachers in Nicaragua are often inaccessible and/or of low quality. As a Master’s International Program student, I studied Teaching English as a Second Language/Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TESL/TEFL) and served in the Peace Corps in Nicaragua, where I sought to improve EFL education. This M.A. Project tells the story of my Master’s International Program.

In Chapter 1, Introduction, I outline the project. In Chapter 2, Master’s International Training and the Nicaraguan TEFL Context, I describe the TESL/TEFL training I received at Humboldt State University and in the Peace Corps, and the relevancy of that training to my later TEFL development work in Nicaragua. Chapter 3, Co-Teaching, discusses the two years I spent as a Peace Corps volunteer training Nicaraguan EFL teachers through co-planning and co-teaching high school English classes. Chapter 4, Secondary Projects, details the other TEFL development work I did in Nicaragua, including teaching English at the community and university levels and giving
workshops to Nicaraguan EFL teachers. Lastly, in Chapter 5, Conclusion, I summarize my thoughts and feelings regarding my Master’s International Program.

Throughout this project, I discuss the methodological approach, techniques, and activities that I used to improve the English and TEFL skills of the Nicaraguan students and teachers with whom I worked. In addition, I note unresolved professional challenges that I encountered, as well as what I might have done differently. Overall, my Master’s International Program was a successful and enjoyable experience. I hope that this M.A. Project will provide guidance, as well as generate productive questions, for others working to improve EFL education in Nicaragua and similar contexts.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In August 2013 I enrolled at Humboldt State University (HSU) to pursue a Master of Arts degree in Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language (TESL/TEFL). While most Master’s degrees take one or two years to earn, I embarked on a four-year journey through the Master’s International program (MIP), a collaboration between U.S. universities and the United States’ Peace Corps (PC). The Peace Corps had tantalized me for a decade before I applied to the Master’s International program; I strongly believe in the organization’s mission:

To promote world peace and friendship by fulfilling three goals: 1) To help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women; 2) To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served; and 3) To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans (“About”).

I could have joined the Peace Corps immediately after earning my B.A. in Cultural Anthropology. Instead, I earned a California State teaching credential and taught high school English for two years in Los Angeles. The experience proved to be career-defining because I discovered that the students I most enjoyed working with were those identified as English-language learners (ELLs). These were mostly first-generation Hispanic-Americans and immigrant children brought to the U.S. by their Mexican and Central-American parents. They spoke Spanish in their homes, and though many of them sounded fluent when they spoke English with their friends, their academic English was
weak, especially in writing. These students were as intelligent as any other population, but they struggled in classes designed for native English speakers, and as I got to know my ELLs, my heart reached out to them. Faced with poverty, bullying, after-school jobs, and housing instability, many of these students made the most of anything that helped them survive and thrive, and they realized that the English skills I taught were crucial for academic and professional success. I did my best to help my ELLs, often tutoring and counseling them during recess and after school. As is sadly common amongst English teachers, however, I was poorly trained in the theory, methodology, and practice of TESL/TEFL, and so felt ill-equipped to teach ELLs. When I left education to pursue other interests then, it was with the intention of returning to the profession after learning how to be a more effective ESL/EFL teacher.

Five years later, I returned to school to earn a Master’s degree in TESL/TEFL. Humboldt State was the first university I looked at because of its beautiful location, and with my dream of Peace Corps service in the back of my mind, I was happily surprised to discover that the university had a Master’s program combining TESL/TEFL with Peace Corps service. It was the only program to which I applied.

The course of study for a Master’s International varies by university. In general, though, participants take a year of classes, complete 27 months in the Peace Corps, then return to school for up to a year to do some sort of culminating project. HSU follows this model, beginning with a year of TESL/TEFL coursework, during which time I was accepted into the Peace Corps and invited to serve in Nicaragua, Central America. I moved to Nicaragua in August 2014, where I completed the standard three months of
Peace Corps training in Spanish, TEFL, and general topics related to foreign development work. After PC training, I served 24 months as a volunteer teaching English as a Foreign Language and training Nicaraguan EFL teachers.

Throughout my service I was in contact with my MIP adviser at HSU, Dr. Suzanne Scott, by way of monthly emails in which I discussed my teaching and learning experiences and sought her advice as necessary. Additionally, during my service I completed the work necessary to earn an International TEFL Certificate, endorsed by the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington D.C. The Certificate program was a Peace Corps pilot project when I participated, but it has since expanded to many more countries in which the PC operates a TEFL sector. After finishing my service in 2016, I completed a final year of studies at HSU, which included the writing of this culminating project for my Master’s degree.

In this project I will describe, analyze, and reflect on my Master’s International experience. I hope to give readers insight into the state of EFL education in Nicaragua, and offer suggestions for continued improvement of EFL education there and in similar contexts. As it is beyond the scope of this project to provide a comprehensive account of four years of professional development, I will focus on what I believe to be the five most important things I learned concerning TEFL in Nicaragua. While these lessons are discussed at length in later chapters, in brief they are that:

- Due to cultural mores, establishing and maintaining positive personal relationships with host-country nationals (HCNs) is the most important factor determining one’s efficacy as a visiting EFL teacher in Nicaragua.
• Professional development of Nicaraguan EFL teachers is key for both the short and long-term improvement of English education in Nicaragua.

• Professional development of Nicaraguan EFL teachers should concentrate on improving their English speaking and listening skills.

• Professional development of Nicaraguan EFL teachers should include an emphasis on the topic of classroom management.

• Professional development of Nicaraguan EFL teachers should help them teach communicatively in order to support student motivation to learn English and improve students’ English speaking and listening abilities.

Discussion of the experiences that led me to these conclusions will be organized as follows: Chapter 2: Master’s International Training and the Nicaraguan TEFL Context; Chapter 3: Co-Teaching, where I describe the professional development work that I did with my three Nicaraguan counterpart teachers; Chapter 4: Secondary Projects, which details my other TEFL activities in Nicaragua, including classes at the community and university levels and professional development workshops; and Chapter 5: a Conclusion, where I summarize what I learned during my Master’s International experience.
CHAPTER 2: MASTER’S INTERNATIONAL TRAINING AND THE NICARAGUAN TEFL CONTEXT

This chapter details the training I received in my Master’s International Program and how that training was relevant in my Peace Corps teaching context. It is divided into two sections: what I learned at HSU, and what I learned in the Peace Corps.

Humboldt State University Training

I took eight classes at HSU the year before I joined the Peace Corps. These were English 600: Graduate Studies Introduction, English 605: Cultural Studies Introduction, English 611: Reading and Writing Pedagogy, English 635: Issues in ESL/EFL, English 328: Structure of American English, English 417: Second Language Acquisition, English 614: Teaching ESL Writing, and English 684: Internship Teaching ESL. Together, these classes gave me a strong foundation of TEFL knowledge and experience that prepared me for my Peace Corps service.

Establishing and maintaining positive personal relationships

English 605: Cultural Studies Introduction provided me with the framework to develop a personal philosophy for my career in TEFL that would later prove invaluable for relationship building in Nicaragua. The class began by introducing poststructuralist philosophy and the idea that truth is a subjective “discursive construction” that is not fixed, but is “unstable . . . always deferred and in process” (Barker 21). While contemplating the possibility of no objective truth, even about myself, as “identity
[is a] . . . regulated way that we speak about . . . ourselves” (18), I experienced a mild existential crisis concerning my chosen profession. I wondered, “Who am I to move to another country to teach people? Is English even valuable, or will I be pushing my language and culture on people who are better off without it?”

A literature review that I wrote in English 600: Graduate Studies Introduction on teacher identity formation helped me clarify and come to terms with my role as an EFL teacher in a way that coincided with the moral perspective of TESL/TEFL specialist H. Douglas Brown, whose work I read in English 635: Issues in ESL/EFL. According to Brown, because teaching EFL unavoidably involves both the teaching of culture and the formation of new identities in students, the key is for teachers to be compassionate, reflective, and aware of their cultural biases. They should “screen [their] techniques for material that may be offensive” and note cultural differences and similarities while “emphasizing that no culture is ‘better’ than another” (Brown 74). Teachers should also “help students . . . claim their own power and resources and . . . bridge the gaps that separate countries, political structures, religions, and values through a unifying language, [while doing] all they can to celebrate [students’ native] languages and cultures” (518). Brown’s words prompted reflection on my own learning of a powerful, unifying foreign language, Spanish. My high school Spanish teachers helped me fall in love with the language, its associated cultures, and my identity as a Spanish speaker, and my foreign-language skills have greatly enriched my life. I decided that I would try to do the same for my future EFL students.
Working through the uncomfortable questions raised by my introduction to cultural studies increased my confidence as an EFL teacher. It also cultivated in me greater humility, open-mindedness, compassion, and flexibility, qualities that would later serve me well in forming positive personal relationships with Nicaraguans. During Peace Corps service I would also discover that, on the rare occasions when I could not ignore a personal belief that put me at odds with a Nicaraguan, the pragmatism of cultural theorists like Stuart Hall and Richard Rorty gave me confidence to negotiate meaning in the hopes of establishing a new common truth leading to mutually beneficial change, i.e., confidence that “at some point the flux of meaning stops, and people and groups of people come together to fight for their ideas” (Barker 472).

Teaching communicatively

English 635: Issues in ESL/EFL covered the topics of listening, speaking, grammar, vocabulary, integrating skills, lesson planning, classroom interaction, and the sociopolitics and social responsibility of ESL/ESF teaching, all of which would prove relevant to my Peace Corps service and will be discussed throughout this project. The class also provided an in-depth look at various TESL/TEFL methods. This knowledge would later be critical to my success in the Peace Corps, as the organization officially charged me with changing Nicaraguan EFL teachers’ practice from primarily the Grammar Translation Method to primarily the Communicative Language Teaching Method.

According to H. Douglas Brown in Teaching by Principles, which was a primary text used in English 635, the dated Grammar Translation Method is problematic (18-19).
While it “is sometimes successful in leading a student toward a reading knowledge of a second language,” it does little to develop communicative ability (19). Lacking a theoretical rationale, Grammar Translation can be defined by its major characteristics (19). These include: classes taught in the students’ native language; vocabulary “taught in the form of lists of isolated words;” “long, elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar;” target-language texts “treated as exercises in grammatical analysis;” student exercises involving mostly translation from the target language to the native language; and “little or no attention . . . given to pronunciation” (19). The method requires “few specialized skills on the part of teachers,” as “[t]ests of grammar rules and of translations are easy to construct and can be objectively scored,” which may explain why “to this day it is practiced in too many educational contexts” (19).

Instead of continuing with Grammar Translation, says Brown, historical trends in language-teaching methodology have led to a “post-method era” where teachers should use an “enlightened, eclectic approach” determined by one’s specific teaching context (44). He does, however, take a strong position in favor of communicative approaches to language teaching, which are commonly grouped together under the term Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). States Brown, “Communicative Language Teaching is an accepted paradigm [in TEFL] with many interpretations and manifestations” (45). Key characteristics of CLT include focusing on the functionality of language and using it in authentic ways for meaningful communication; attending to both fluency and accuracy as students learn; teaching language-learning strategies; and practicing student-centered teaching where the teacher often assumes a facilitative role during collaborative learning
activities designed with students’ backgrounds, interests, and learning styles in mind (Brown 46).

In another class I took at HSU, English 611: Reading and Writing Pedagogy, I read several books of education theory, all of which lent credibility to CLT. One of these was L.S. Vygotsky’s *Mind in Society*. Vygotsky believed that people learn best through social interaction, including play, especially when the interaction is focused on accomplishing a task. This idea supports CLT’s promotion of collaborative and task-based learning, and, I would discover, is easily applied in Nicaragua, where group effort and practicality are valued.

The ideas of John Dewey, another influential education theorist whose work I read in English 611, were harder to implement in Nicaragua. As a fellow American, I almost can’t help but agree with Dewey that “people learn only by thinking for themselves” – a perspective which requires teachers to “set up conditions that provoke thinking” and echoes CLT’s emphasis on learner autonomy and meaningful communication (Finkel 151-2). Dewey’s perspective also takes for granted the value of creativity, individualism, critical thinking, personal responsibility, and empowered action – ideas that I have been taught to revere but that, I would discover, are less important in Nicaraguan culture.

According to researcher and professor of applied linguistics Alistair Pennycook, EFL teachers should be aware of the cultural biases inherent in ESL/EFL methods. He writes, “[a]ssumptions about [best EFL teaching practices], despite the claims by some researchers that they are empirically preferable, are cultural preferences. And this means
that the classroom becomes a site of cultural struggle over preferred modes of learning and teaching” (98). I experienced that struggle in Nicaragua, and I wish that I had paid better attention to Pennycook’s words when I read them at HSU so that I might have been more prepared for the difficult work of changing my Nicaraguan colleagues’ teaching. Details on the challenges and successes I experienced using CLT in Nicaragua and training my colleagues to apply the approach are provided in chapters three and four, where I describe my Peace Corps teaching and teacher-training activities.

**Improving English speaking and listening skills**

Research has shown that all four language skills – reading, writing, speaking, and listening – support each other to aid language acquisition. Speaking and listening are, however, central components of CLT. Says Brown, “[l]anguage is for communicating with people . . ., and the more [students] engage in face-to-face communication, the more their overall communicative competence will improve” (228). Regarding listening, there are several characteristics that make it a particularly challenging skill for ELLs. These include colloquial language like slang and reduced forms (sounds or words that are unstressed and often pronounced differently than their spelling suggests, such as “want to” being commonly pronounced “wanna”). Other performance variables like false starts (e.g., “I – I - I know”), rate of speech delivery, stress, rhythm, and intonation can also make listening difficult (Brown 304-06). In addition, listeners are usually expected to process spoken language quickly enough to respond.

Learning to speak English can also be challenging. Students may struggle with pronunciation, prosody (stress, rhythm, and intonation), and the negative “interference”
of their native language’s grammar on English grammar (when students mistakenly apply the grammar rules of one language to another) (Lightbown and Spada 44). While student errors in speech production are inevitable and necessary for development, a problem may occur if those errors damage a student’s nascent “language ego,” or “mode of thinking, feeling, and acting” in their new language (Brown 72). Students with damaged language egos can become fragile, defensive, and inhibited in their new language, and may ultimately develop an “[un]willingness to communicate” that can negatively affect overall language acquisition (72-3).

In English 635, I learned that second and foreign-language teachers should attempt to bolster students’ language egos and willingness to communicate by 1) discussing the value of errors, and 2) being very strategic and compassionate in the feedback and error correction they give on students’ speech (Brown 324). In addition, through conversations about the point of learning a foreign language, ESL/EFL teachers and their students may choose to settle on comprehensible communication as a worthy goal, not native-like perfection (136). This means focusing on developing students’ oral fluency over accuracy. If a students’ speech is comprehensible, a teacher may choose not to correct small errors in order to help the student develop positive feelings toward English and confidence in their communicative ability. I would later be reminded of this approach to error correction by one of my Nicaraguan colleagues, who liked to say, “Our job is to make students fall in love with English.”

A focus on speaking fluency should not, however, prevent an ESL/EFL teacher from incorporating vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar mini-lessons into their
teaching to help students “see the pieces . . . of language that make up the whole” (Brown 327). Teachers should simply work to quickly move students from controlled to automatic, meaningful uses of English (64). This approach to balancing accuracy and fluency is in line with TESL/TEFL research professor Diane Larsen-Freeman’s assertion that instruction which calls students’ attention to a language’s form may be inductive or deductive, but should always include an authentic communicative context and much meaningful student practice (“Teaching Grammar”).

Supporting student motivation and improving classroom management

In addition to challenges with speaking and listening, during my Peace Corps service I would discover that many Nicaraguan ELLs are unmotivated to learn English or improve their existing skills. Most of the contextual factors affecting student motivation in Nicaragua, such as few teaching resources, erratic school schedules, administrative pressure to socially promote students, no standardized testing, physical hardships like hunger and lack of electricity, and a culture in which family needs often come before education, are beyond teacher control. Therefore, throughout my service I would focus on what I could control: my own teaching actions and the training I gave to other EFL teachers in motivating techniques and practices. States Brown, “all humans are driven to act . . . by the anticipation of some sort of reward,” and the most powerful reward is intrinsically-motivated behavior, meaning that when a student wants to do something for his or her own satisfaction, then gets to do it, the action itself is the reward and no external reward is necessary (67). He advises limited use of immediate and short-term
external rewards because they can “forestall the development of [students’] own internally administered, intrinsic system of rewards” (67).

The topic of student motivation was also addressed in English 417: Second Language Acquisition. One of the class’ assigned texts was Lightbown and Spada’s *How Languages are Learned*, in which the authors assert that although “[t]eachers have no influence over learners’ intrinsic motivation for learning a second language,” they should still support learner motivation by “making the classroom a supportive environment in which students are stimulated, engaged in activities that are appropriate to their age, interests, and backgrounds, and, most importantly, where students can experience success” (204).

One way for teachers to “mak[e] the classroom a supportive environment” is to be empathetic when students make errors during in the challenging, non-linear process of language learning (Lightbown and Spada 207). In English 417, Dr. Scott recommended two ways to cultivate empathy as a language teacher that would later help me in Nicaragua. First, a teacher can reflect on their own imperfect process of additional-language learning. For example, I was well into my second year of Peace Corps service before I could usually understand Nicaraguans when they spoke to me at a normal pace. Second, a teacher can practice the Japanese principle of Kai Zen, the idea that small steps can lead to big changes. Language learning happens in stages, and even backsliding, when a student’s skills revert to an earlier stage, can be a sign of progress as the student undergoes cognitive shifts in learning new items, such as a new verb tense, which unsettle their earlier, seemingly settled knowledge. Instead of feeling bad about
errors or frustrated at having to review a previously taught topic, a teacher can instead take comfort in knowing that each small step in their students’ language learning leads further down the path toward English proficiency (Scott, “Researching SLA”). Interestingly, I would later discover that Kai Zen is similar to the Nicaraguan concept of “avanzando,” which places value on taking small steps toward the completion of a larger goal.

While making the classroom a supportive learning environment is important for student motivation, Lightbown and Spada state that students must also be “stimulated [and] engaged in activities that are appropriate to their age, interests, and backgrounds” (204). This advice corresponds with Communicative Language Teaching’s emphasis on “genuine linguistic interaction” and student-centered lessons (Brown 47). At HSU, I had the good fortune to observe an ESL teacher who applied these ideas when I took a class called English 684: Internship Teaching ESL. The teacher’s lessons and activities focused on meaningful communication surrounding current events and topics of personal, cultural, and international significance. I noticed how students displayed interest in the authentic reading materials that the teacher presented. I noticed too that students were comfortable interacting with the teacher and one another, and were keen to participate in the communicative games and activities simulating real-life situations that the teacher facilitated. Often the activities incorporated movement and the arts. One day, however, a game that the teacher tried to do with students didn’t work well. Students were confused about the rules, and the class became chaotic. This showed me that communicative
activities like games, though valuable as part of a teacher’s repertoire, must be well planned and clearly explained.

Lastly during my internship, I was impressed by how the teacher who used CLT seemed to motivate students and increase participation through her cultivation of caring personal relationships with students. For example, on a day that the class was studying health, the teacher brought everyone spinach-infused blueberry muffins that she had baked in the hopes of getting her young child to eat more vegetables. Students from several different countries found this amusing, and the class spent a few minutes laughing and discussing the strangeness of adding vegetables to sweets, as well as the success of the experiment, measured in terms of the muffins’ taste.

The final element of a motivating teaching practice, according to Lightbown and Spada, is creating conditions that allow students to experience success. Success is crucial because even in a classroom where students feel emotionally supported and mentally engaged, they will likely lose motivation if they don’t sense that they are making progress (204). This is where recognizing students’ accomplishments with specific positive feedback and tangible progress markers may be useful. Other techniques to help students feel successful include 1) giving students a lot of exposure to target language because as many as 16 exposures may be needed for a word to become “firmly established in memory” (62); 2) using sufficient “wait time” after asking a question so that students have a chance to recall what they know and figure out a way to express it (147); and 3) being explicit with students regarding both the negative and positive influence of their first language on their additional-language learning. “The transfer of
patterns from the native language is one of the major sources of errors in learner language,” but when there are significant similarities between languages, as between English and Spanish, “there is much that learners already ‘know’ – including the alphabet, cognate words, [and] some basic principles of syntax” (205).

During my Peace Corps service, I would observe how low student motivation to study English had broader negative effects on EFL teaching and learning. Unmotivated individuals frequently engaged in disruptive behavior that created a stressful classroom environment and reduced the quality of education for all. Thankfully, before I joined the Peace Corps, Dr. Scott gave me some personalized advice for improving my “teacher presence,” which can have a big impact on student behavior. She recommended that I do the following: 1) Imagine that my teaching or presentation space is an environment that calms me; 2) Apply the ideas of non-verbal communication expert Michael Grinder by modifying my natural “approachability” to include voice and body movements that convey greater “credibility,” such as ending sentences on a down note and using a “power stance”; and 3) Give clear activity instructions that tell students what to do, how to do it, and why they are doing it. These suggestions would later help me in Nicaragua when I taught unruly classes, and would also help my Nicaraguan colleagues who struggled with classroom management.

One required course in my Master’s International curriculum was not offered the first year I was at HSU. Therefore, I took the class, called English 436: Integrating Language and Content, only after I completed my Peace Corps service. The class was about content-based instruction (CBI), a method within the CLT framework whereby
“language becomes the medium to convey informational content of interest and relevance to the learner” (Brown 55). CBI is most useful in intermediate-to-advanced level classes and “[has] the potential of increasing intrinsic motivation and empowerment, since students are focused on subject matter that is important to their lives” (56). I would have liked to try CBI with my more advanced students in Nicaragua, but I am grateful for my education in the method upon my return to the U.S. because I will use the perspective and skills that I acquired in English 436 to help motivate my future ESL/EFL students.

Peace Corps Training

I will provide an overview of the structure and content of my Peace Corps training before discussing the most important lessons learned from that training. My PC training consisted of two distinct components, the normal Pre-Service and In-Service Training that TEFL volunteers worldwide receive, and the special training that TEFL volunteers serving from 2014-2016 in Nicaragua received as part of the Peace Corps’ TEFL Certificate pilot program. My Pre-Service Training (PST) occurred during my first three months in Nicaragua. I and the eighteen other people in my Peace Corps training group lived with Nicaraguan host families in adjacent towns outside the nation’s capital, Managua. Weekday mornings were spent studying Spanish in small groups of trainees who were at similar levels of Spanish language acquisition.

Spanish classes were not a stressful part PST for me because I had a solid base of Spanish before joining the Peace Corps. According to the PC, at the start of PST, I was at an low-intermediate level of Spanish. After three months of full-immersion CLT-style
Spanish language lessons, I left PST at the mid-intermediate level. This was the lowest level that trainees had to reach in order to serve as volunteers. Two years later, at the end of my service, the Peace Corps assessed me at the mid-advanced level of Spanish, a substantial jump that I credit to both the patience of my Nicaraguan friends and host-family members, and my shameless language ego and enthusiasm to communicate with all Nicaraguans.

Besides three-and-a-half hours of language training five days a week, trainees spent afternoons receiving workshops on topics related to cross-cultural issues, foreign development work, health, and TEFL. During the second half of PST, our normal training schedule was often modified so that trainees could practice co-teaching with Nicaraguan EFL teachers (called counterparts). Co-teaching would be our primary assignment during our service. As volunteers, we would also be required to conduct secondary TEFL activities such as camps, workshops, special events, and community classes. Therefore, in training we practiced organizing and running a secondary TEFL activity – in our case, an English-focused youth group. Both trainees’ co-teaching and our leading of a youth group were observed by Peace Corps Nicaragua TEFL supervisors, who gave us written and oral feedback on our performance. Trainees were also required to observe each other co-teach and give one another feedback.

After PST, trainees became volunteers and moved to our assigned sites around Nicaragua, where we lived and worked for two years. I was assigned to a small rural town located in the lush central mountains that produce coffee, cacao, dairy, and beef. During my two years of service, normal Peace Corps training for TEFL volunteers
continued with In-Service Training (IST) workshops every few months on the same topics covered during PST. Observations of volunteers’ co-teaching by Peace Corps supervisors and fellow volunteers also continued during this time on a biannual basis.

In addition to PST and IST, I and the other volunteers in my group began doing work to earn a TEFL Certificate two months before we left for Nicaragua, which we then finished shortly before completing Peace Corps service. Certificate assignments consisted of participation in over 20 TEFL training workshops, completion of a portfolio of written work, bimonthly participation in an online discussion forum with other volunteers, and annual formal classroom observations. Volunteers’ participation, written work, and teaching skills were assessed by Peace Corps supervisors and had to meet passing standards in order to count toward the Certificate.

Establishing and maintaining positive personal relationships in Nicaragua

A recurring theme throughout my Peace Corps training was the need to form and maintain good personal relationships with Nicaraguans. The PC only operates in countries where it is invited by the host-country government; therefore, having good relationships with host-country nationals is essential to the PC’s very existence. Human relationships are also at the core of the organization’s approach to development, which aims for the sustainability of volunteers’ work by “empowering local people to be their own decision-makers and to develop the skills to carry out those decisions and improve their lives” even after volunteers leave (Peace Corps, PACA).

Happily, the importance that the PC places on personal relationships is well suited to Nicaraguan culture, where friendly, respectful, caring relationships are the
motivation and foundation for most activity. If a Nicaraguan likes and trusts you, they will go out of their way to help you, but such goodwill takes time and effort to develop, especially between Nicaraguans and foreigners. The country is somewhat isolated by its unique government and culture. Many Nicaraguans haven’t had sustained personal contact with foreigners, so they want to get to know them and develop a fond trust, or “confianza,” before working with them in a serious way.

The Peace Corps staff in Nicaragua does an excellent job of cultivating and maintaining friendly, personalized professional relationships with Nicaraguan stakeholders and collaborators. While volunteers may initially benefit from the Peace Corps’ good name, each volunteer is in the position to make a deep impact on how average Nicaraguans view the United States and respond to American development efforts in their country. Fortunately, the Peace Corps provided volunteers with training to help us make the most of this opportunity. The organization urges volunteers to act with emotional maturity and social sensitivity. This includes being patient and flexible, giving and receiving feedback appropriately, and showing respect for host-country norms and values (Peace Corps Nicaragua, “Trainee Cross Cultural Self-Assessment Form”).

Getting to know norms and values is aided by adopting the role of “learner” (Peace Corps, “Roles”). As a volunteer who was finishing his service as I arrived advised, “Seek to understand before being understood.”

Learning about Nicaraguan norms and values related to the English language, specifically, is helpful for people working to improve EFL education there. The PC encourages such learning through “community assessment of English use, English needs,
and [attitudes and] aspirations related to English” (Peace Corps, “Community Assessment”). I completed an English-focused community assessment report upon my arrival in site, and doing so gave me insight and understanding that kept my professional ambition grounded in the reality of my context.

The PC’s recommendation that volunteers assume the role of “learner” in order to help cultivate positive personal relationships extended to our relationships with students. As in the U.S., some teenagers in Nicaragua enjoy testing the boundaries of allowable behavior and are more concerned with social lives than school work. Unlike in the U.S., however, school-wide systems of discipline are rare in Nicaraguan public schools. Because teachers get little support from administrators regarding student behavior, they depend on the power of caring, respectful relationships with students in order to get them to behave and do schoolwork. As one of my counterparts explained to me, in Nicaragua, teachers are also students’ friends, parents, and psychologists.

Although school administrators and local officials with the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education were little involved in the day-to-day work that I and my Nicaraguan counterparts did to improve EFL teaching and learning, the PC taught volunteers to keep administrators and officials “in the loop” about our activities and to solicit their approval for extra-curricular TEFL activities. Because approval was more likely to be given if respectful face-to-face interaction had taken place, volunteers were required to meet with higher-ups several times throughout our service for friendly chats about our work. I found that following the PC’s guidelines in these matters fostered positive relationships with my non-PC bosses, and those relationships contributed to the success of my service.
Of all the relationships I developed in Nicaragua related to teaching English, the most important were those with my counterpart teachers (CPs). Trainees were taught to engage CPs in communication intended to help us get to know each other personally and professionally. For example, the first time I met one of my CPs, the Peace Corps required us to ask each other “Conversation Starter” questions such as “What is something you’re very proud of [in your life]?” and “Which routines do you use in your classroom?” Later, after a training workshop called “Co-planning, Co-teaching, and Co-adjusting,” my CP and I were required to complete a worksheet about our co-teaching expectations and willingness to adjust our behavior in order to meet each other’s expectations. Still later, after I had moved to my permanent service site and begun work with all three of my CPs, we each completed a “Getting to Know You Survey” (see Appendix A) to discover our multiple intelligences and preferred learning styles. This tool helped us get to know one another personally, as well as teach each other more effectively throughout my service.

In all interaction with my CPs, I was trained to be respectful, accommodating, and focused on the positives of co-teaching and on the successes that my CPs and I experienced. Finally, as with all Nicaraguans, I was taught to value process over product – to slow down, listen, and appreciate the slow formation of strong personal relationships that can open the door to sustainable development. More information on the importance and practice of relationship building in Nicaragua is given in chapters three and four, where I discuss my Peace Corps teaching and teacher-training activities.
Focusing on professional development in Nicaragua

Once good relationships have been established between a volunteer and the HCNs with whom they will work to improve English education in Nicaragua, what should be done with that goodwill? According to TEFL academic Edipcia Chávez in her 2006 study of Nicaraguan EFL teachers, the fact that they try to do their best in the face of difficult challenges and have a considerable degree of autonomy in how they teach means that “the need to improve the EFL instructional process through teachers’ own improvement is . . . a pertinent and imperative endeavor” (37). From experience, I agree with this assertion, which also corresponds with PC Nicaragua’s TEFL Goal 1: Build Capacity of English Teachers (Peace Corps Nicaragua, “Project Framework: TEFL Nicaragua”). The question then becomes, “What elements are needed in order to help [Nicaraguan] teachers so that they become competent, well equipped agents that promote improvement and change within their particular teaching situations?” (Chávez 37).

Working with teachers who want to improve EFL education in Nicaragua is the first step. The Peace Corps attempts to screen out less motivated teachers by requiring potential CPs to complete a lengthy application process that includes meetings with Peace Corps staff, Nicaraguan education officials, and school administrators. At these meetings, the Peace Corps’ “Expectations for Counterpart Teachers” are reviewed by all. See Appendix B for the English-language version of this list. The rigorous application process usually results in the partnering of volunteers with CPs who are highly motivated to improve their teaching, as were my three counterparts.
Once counterparts have been selected and a TEFL volunteer placed at a development site, volunteers begin step two for successful capacity building of Nicaraguan EFL teachers: assessment and goal setting. An initial period spent gathering data through observation, English-language testing, questionnaires, and interviews is meant to help a volunteer assess their teaching context, as well as their counterparts’ strengths, weaknesses, and professional goals.

The length of time available for assessment varies for each group of volunteers. When my group arrived at site, we had three months to conduct assessments because the school year was ending and vacation was about to begin. For the last two weeks of the school year I observed each of my CPs teach class twice a week and met with them afterwards to debrief. Once vacation started, I spent less time with my CPs and more time getting to know my Nicaraguan host family, my surroundings, and the EFL resources and needs in my community. Then, towards the end of vacation, I again started meeting with my CPs one or twice a week, this time in their homes. Per PC training, while we prepared materials for the upcoming school year and got to know each other better, I told my CPs the impressions I had gained through assessment. This was done in a respectful way that honored their strengths, described specific opportunities for improvement, solicited my CPs’ perspective, and conveyed optimism about working together to improve EFL teaching and learning (Peace Corps, “Guidelines”).

Another initial assessment occurred a few weeks into the new school year when a Peace Corps supervisor observed each of my CPs and I teach one class, then held a debriefing session. A week later, I received my supervisor’s written assessment of each
of my CPs’ teaching strengths and needs. Following this, my counterparts and I wrote individualized action plans for the school year that took into account the Peace Corps’ expectations for counterparts, my and my supervisor’s assessments, and my CPs’ professional goals.

Then came the day-to-day work that is the defining element of the Peace Corps’ TEFL development program in Nicaragua. Volunteers were required to co-teach at least 16 hours per week for two years. Those hours were divided between at least two CPs in accordance with their wants and needs, and every co-taught lesson had to be co-planned. The Peace Corps expected volunteers to conduct co-planning in as much English as possible, and to use that time to teach CPs the TEFL knowledge that volunteers themselves learned in training. Additionally during co-planning, volunteers were expected to facilitate reflection on what was and wasn’t working well in the classroom, and share suggestions for improvement.

A final important element for effective capacity building of Nicaraguan EFL teachers, according to the Peace Corps, is getting them to participate in a number of professional development activities and assume leadership roles in those activities. Accessing professional development can be difficult in Nicaragua, especially for rural teachers and those on tight budgets, so the PC trained volunteers to build communities of practice in our sites. A community of practice is a “group of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Peace Corps, “Communities”). More information on what I did to build the professional capacity of Nicaraguan EFL teachers is provided in chapters three and four.
Improving English speaking and listening skills in Nicaragua

Improving speaking and listening skills was a frequent topic of professional development in Nicaragua because EFL teachers must feel comfortable with spoken English in order to teach communicatively. Listening comprehension is particularly important because it is a “threshold skill for overall English participation” (Peace Corps, “Listening Introduction”). If an ELL cannot understand spoken English, they are unlikely to attempt communication with English speakers or listen to other sources of input, such as radio or television, and this lack of engagement hurts overall English language acquisition. In my experience, many Nicaraguan English teachers are aware that the reading-and-writing focused TEFL method traditionally used in Nicaragua is dated and ineffective for producing fully bilingual students. The teachers want to change, but they don’t know how, and they have limited access to quality professional development opportunities. Most modern EFL teacher training that I saw in Nicaragua came from foreign organizations and the few Nicaraguan English teachers who had studied abroad.

According to the Peace Corps, one of the best things that volunteers can do to help all ELLs, including EFL teachers, understand spoken English is to speak it ourselves. Using English as a tool for authentic communication is effective for teaching listening because “learners comprehend best when they focus on whole utterances rather than individual words [and accomplish] tasks in relation to the language they hear” (Peace Corps, “Listening Introduction”). Volunteers were trained to interact with teachers in 100% English whenever possible, using scaffolding techniques like slow speech, simplified language, pausing between language chunks, visual aids, and gestures. Though
I was often tempted to speak Spanish with Nicaraguan English teachers in order to help build good relationships, plan lessons quicker, and explain ideas more clearly. I knew from my own experience learning Spanish that having a sympathetic interlocutor as a source of foreign-language input is helpful for improving listening skills, so I made an effort to be a source of comprehensible input for my Nicaraguan colleagues.

The PC also trained volunteers to introduce ELLs, including Nicaraguan EFL teachers, to other sources of spoken input. I found such recordings as Voice of America’s “Learner English” newscasts, which I had been introduced to at HSU, valuable for advanced learners like my three CPs, who slowly became used to my speech and needed something more challenging. On the other hand, with beginning-level ELLs and in mixed groups, such as at training workshops, the Peace Corps taught volunteers some interactive techniques and activities to improve listening comprehension. These included calling on all students during individual questioning, not just the most eager, and facilitating information-gap and applied listening activities where students do something in response to listening (Peace Corps, “Session”).

With few opportunities or compelling reasons to listen to English in their daily lives, it made sense that most Nicaraguans I met also struggled with speaking, as one must hear English in order to know how to pronounce it. My main goal with improving teachers’ listening skills was to increase their confidence with spoken English to the point where they would teach English class in English. The Peace Corps also taught volunteers more focused ways to teach speaking. In workshops that include teachers with poor speaking skills, volunteers were encouraged to use brainstorming to get participants
speaking at least single words, as well as choral repetition to give reluctant speakers low-pressure pronunciation practice. Allowing workshop participants to write out, or script, English before they speak it can also improve speech confidence and performance.

I found scripting useful during lesson co-planning, too. My counterparts and I sometimes scripted plans to help them teach in English, especially if a lesson contained language they found intimidating. If they were still reluctant to deliver a lesson in English, I would use our scripted plan to model-teach one period of a class, then observe my CP teach the next period using the same plan while I noted mispronunciations and places where my CP switched to Spanish. Then we would discuss those items later.

According to the Peace Corps, most Nicaraguan EFL teachers don’t need to learn to speak English at an advanced level because they don’t teach at an advanced level. They just need to be comfortable speaking “teacher English,” a sort of English for specific purposes. Even teachers who are not yet comfortable using teacher English can incorporate spoken English into their classrooms for students’ benefit. One way is to use recorded English audio, like dialogs and songs that correspond with the national EFL curriculum. At the very least, the PC recommends that teachers with weak speaking skills use, and require students to use, procedural language. These phrases, such as “May I use the bathroom?”, “Excuse me,” “Please repeat,” and “Form groups of ____” are used many times each class period and may be written on posters for ongoing reference.

Finally, volunteers were trained to teach pronunciation and correct pronunciation errors whenever possible so that speakers become aware of them. Ignoring errors lets speakers assume that their pronunciation is fine, and when those speakers are English
teachers, mispronunciation spreads (Peace Corps, “Pronunciation”). Many times in Nicaragua I corrected an ELL’s pronunciation only to be told, “But that’s the way my teacher says it.” Correcting anyone’s pronunciation, but especially teachers’, can be embarrassing, so the Peace Corps taught volunteers several techniques for doing it gently. These include recasting (where an interlocuter models correct English by repeating a learner’s error back to them in a corrected form), repeating a learner’s error as a question (e.g., “You’ve been studying English since five years?”), requesting clarification of a statement that contained an error (e.g., “Could you repeat that, please?”), and delayed correction in private (Peace Corps, “How”). During my Peace Corps service, I discovered that Nicaraguan teachers, unless they give explicit permission to do so, should not be corrected in public (especially in front of students) because Nicaraguan culture places great importance on teachers being correct at all times.

Supporting student motivation and improving classroom management in Nicaragua

According to the Peace Corps, effective classroom management includes three components: motivating students, following routines, and managing behavior. To motivate, volunteers were taught to pay special attention to the first phase of the Peace Corps’ 4MAT lesson plan template, called “motivation.” See Appendix C. This phase aims to engage students by activating their background knowledge and providing a rationale for the day’s topic. The entire lesson plan template is based on Bernice McCarthy’s 4MAT method, which is designed to motivate students with different learning styles by explaining the “why,” “what,” “how,” and “what if” of a lesson topic. I was introduced to McCarthy’s method at Humboldt State University. During my Peace
Corps training, however, no history or theory behind the organization’s 4MAT lesson plan template was discussed.

Many effective teaching practices, while potentially motivating, can be difficult to implement at first. Eventually, however, if repeated consistently, new practices become routines that can help students focus on language learning instead of rules and instructions. Routines are an important part of classroom management. They save time, increase order and efficiency, limit “down time” when students can goof off, and promote students’ sense of safety and competence because they know what’s expected of them.

As secondary-school students in Nicaragua are often out of their seats and talking when a teacher enters the room to begin class, a helpful routine is a silent “early bird” activity, such as a couple of practice exercises or a writing prompt written on the board that students can focus on while the teacher assembles his/her things and takes attendance (Peace Corps Nicaragua, “Twenty-One Strategies”). Another effective routine is to create and consistently use a seating chart so that the teacher, not students, controls where students sit. In Nicaragua, it is helpful to discuss and create a seating chart with all the other teachers of a class, or section, of students. This allows students to stay in the same teacher-chosen seats for the entire day instead of having to change seats just for English class.

With all routines, it is important to ensure that they are implemented whether or not a volunteer is in the classroom. I found that no matter what a Nicaraguan teacher said they wanted to do or planned to do, they would often revert to ritual teaching behavior if I failed to remind them to perform a “new” routine, even if we had already been doing the
routine for months. It was usually obvious to me when one of my CPs was not using a routine in my absence because students would be confused or slow to act when I applied the routine upon my return.

Following routines and facilitating motivating activities can be impossible if student behavior is out of control. Therefore, either beforehand or along with the introduction of such practices, a teacher must consistently apply a system of discipline that supports positive student behavior and discourages negative behavior. According to the Peace Corps, the first couple class periods of the school year should be used to talk about rules and explain why they are necessary. Teachers should work with students to create class rules, then post and refer to them regularly. It is best not to overwhelm students with rules; teachers are advised to follow the “six by six” rule: six rules of six words each (Peace Corps, “Managing”).

In addition, volunteers were taught that effective classroom management includes refusing to talk or shout over students (Peace Corps Nicaragua, “21 Strategies”). Because Nicaraguan classrooms are normally louder than American classrooms during individual, pair, and small-group work, it is helpful to use a routine attention grabber to get students’ attention when necessary, and to have a clear and consistently enforced system of consequences for students who aren’t quiet (Peace Corps, “Managing”). My favorite attention grabber in Nicaragua was a call and response. I would say, “One two three, eyes on me,” and the class would respond back, “One, two, eyes on you” and fall silent.

In many Nicaraguan classes, there are individual students whose behavior is particularly challenging. These students usually fall into four categories:
non-participators, over-participators, needy students, and confrontational students. With a non-participator, a teacher may attempt to improve the misbehavior by giving the student choices, e.g., “You can continue working, or turn in your work now and get a lower grade” or “You can present the project with your group or present to me after class” (Peace Corps, “Students”). On the flip side of non-participation are students who over-participate, thereby thwarting opportunities for other students. A good way to handle such behavior is to speak with an over-participator outside of class time. Express appreciation for their knowledge and enthusiasm, and explain that you need other students to participate more so that they can learn more. To empower the over-participator, decide on a secret signal that you will make to let them know when you need their participation. In addition, a teacher may ask an over-participator if they’d be willing to sit next to and help a struggling classmate (Peace Corps, “Students”).

Most needy students can be managed through tactful ignoring and a rule that all students must ask at least one classmate before asking the teacher. Finally, there will always be those students who behave disrespectfully and engage in power struggles. With these students, according to the PC, teachers should 1) Focus on desired behavior, not misbehavior, by asking an off-task student, “What are you doing? . . . And what should you be doing?” instead of “Why are you doing that?”; 2) Give a misbehaving student some “take-up time” – a minute or two without the teacher’s attention focused on them to improve their behavior after being asked to do so; 3) Watch their body language and tone of voice – a teacher must remain respectful in order to be respected; 4) Take the problem outside, if necessary, or discuss it after class; 5) Not hold a grudge: Rewarding “bad”
students when they do good things shows that the teacher cares about them, and supports long-term improvement in behavior; and 6) Consider giving high-energy misbehavers class chores that allow them to move, or simply allow them to stand or sit at the back of the classroom as they desire (Peace Corps, “Students”).

Teaching communicatively in Nicaragua

As noted before, the end-goal of Peace Corps Nicaragua’s TEFL development work is to get teachers to change from a teacher-centered, Grammar Translation instructional style to a student-centered, communicative style. However, knowing and practicing CLT myself, and even training others in it, was easy compared with getting Nicaraguan EFL teachers to actually change their teaching. Chávez noted that Nicaraguan EFL teachers have a “tendency to stick to ritual behavior . . . in the classroom,” including application of the Grammar Translation Method by which the teachers themselves were taught English (35). I found this to be true. Fortunately, the Peace Corps trained volunteers in how to help people change their behavior.

According to the Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change by psychology professor James O. Prochaska, there are six stages that a person goes through on their way to lasting change. The first is the Precontemplation stage, during which “an individual has little understanding of the way in which a behavior is damaging to him/herself and has no intention of changing his/her behavior” (Peace Corps, “Stages”). Next comes the Contemplation, or the “clued-in” stage, “when an individual has acknowledged that a behavior is a problem, and has suggested the possibility of changing the behavior within the next six months.” Following that is the Preparation stage, “when
an individual is willing to explore ways to change, or to incorporate a new behavior into his or her life in the immediate future (within the next month).” Then comes the Action stage, when a person makes obvious change(s) in their regular behavior, followed by the Maintenance stage, during which he/she consistently practices the new behavior(s) for at least six months, ending with the Termination stage, “when an individual is sure he/she will not go back to old behaviors” (Peace Corps, “Stages”).

Preparing Nicaraguan teachers to change requires getting them clued in to ineffective teaching behaviors without making them feel defensive. To this end, empathy must be exhibited by teacher trainers and cultivated within workshop environments and communities of practice, where Nicaraguan teachers may feel critically judged by one another. One way to cultivate empathy is to share views and experiences regarding TEFL, including personal learning styles, teaching philosophies, teaching contexts, and teaching practices (Peace Corps, “Building Community”).

According to the Peace Corps, once a person becomes aware of the need to change their behavior, there exist many determinants of whether or not change will actually occur. See Appendix D for the list of determinants that the PC gave volunteers. When I arrived at my service site, I discovered that my three motivated counterparts were already prepared to change. Other Nicaraguan teachers I worked with, however, had to overcome powerful obstacles before they could align what they said they wanted to do – teach in a more student-centered, communicative way – with their actions. These obstacles included perceived “self-[in]efficacy,” “social norms,” “susceptibility [to
negative consequences of change],” and “barriers” related to policy and culture (Peace Corps, “Summary”). Discussion and training helped these colleagues overcome obstacles.

When Nicaraguan EFL teachers felt ready to change their behavior, volunteers were trained to become “perceived enabler[s]” through supportive co-teaching, as well as by providing access to information and resources (Peace Corps, “Summary”). Two strategies for successful implementation of new pedagogies aided volunteers in our work as enablers. First, according to the PC, volunteers could introduce new educational approaches, techniques, and activities as “supplemental,” meaning in addition to a teacher’s traditional lesson plan. This avoids devaluing what the teacher normally does. Second, volunteers could introduce new practices as alternative options by saying, for example, “Well, if it were me, I might try _____ instead of ______.” This can be less threatening than saying, “We should do this.” It also allows space for a teacher to “try an activity and [easily discard it if they don’t like it] because it was presented simply as ‘one possible way.’” No matter how a volunteer introduced something new, the Peace Corps urged us to “be sure [it] fits both the lesson and its audience” (Peace Corps, “Strategies”).

Finally, once a teacher has entered the action and maintenance stages of behavior modification, the role of reinforcer should be added to a volunteer’s work in order to hold teachers accountable for making lasting improvements in their teaching. Reinforcement may be provided through “cues for action/reminders” (Peace Corps, “Stages . . .”). These can be as simple as a volunteer’s verbal reminder before class to use a target routine that often gets forgotten, or a volunteer raising their hand during class and asking the teacher, “Could you show us what you mean?” to cue the teacher to model an assignment’s
instructions. More comprehensive reminders could take the form of performance reports that are linked with a teacher’s professional development objectives, like the Peace Corps’ semesterly “Counterpart Expectations Report” (see Appendix E). Completing such reports together allows a volunteer and CP to take stock of their progress, while also reminding them of the goals that they still need to work on.

The year of coursework that I took at HSU both situated and was reinforced by my later TEFL training in the Peace Corps. Aside from the normal debate amongst experts in the field of TESL/TEFL, I noticed few discrepancies between what I was taught in the United States and what I was taught in Nicaragua regarding TEFL theory, methodology and practice. This consistency helped me feel confident and competent in my Peace Corps work. With “principled eclecticism,” I was able to choose the approaches, techniques, and activities best suited to my Nicaraguan teaching contexts and explain to others the rationale behind my choices (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson 229).
CHAPTER 3: CO-TEACHING

Much of my time and energy in Nicaragua was spent co-teaching. I was dedicated
to meeting Peace Corps Nicaragua’s TEFL Project Framework Goal 1, to build the
capacity of English teachers so that they can deliver effective English lessons. This goal
contains four objectives which state that, through their work with the Peace Corps,
Nicaraguan English teachers will:

1) implement more student-centered English teaching and effective classroom
management techniques; 2) conduct a higher percentage of class in English;
3) develop additional material resources, or introduce new or better ways to
preserve and utilize resources; and 4) increase their technical knowledge of TEFL
through workshops and trainings (Peace Corps Nicaragua, “Project Framework”).

These objectives closely aligned with the wants and needs of my Nicaraguan counterpart
teachers, Ana, Oscar, and Sara (pseudonyms). All three were smart, kind, hardworking,
knowledgeable in their craft, and dedicated to professional development. In addition,
unlike some Peace Corps CPs, Ana, Oscar, and Sara were at intermediate levels of
English language acquisition when I met them, so basic communication between us was
not a struggle.

Despite these advantages, getting my CPs to do voluntary professional
development work was not easy. Some days I faced resistance that required me to
practice extreme compassion, flexibility, and perseverance. Adding to the challenge was
the fact that I too struggled to change the way I taught while in Nicaragua. Certain
practices that I was accustomed to in the U.S., like hand raising and silence while I lectured, did not work well in my new teaching context. As recommended by the PC, I learned how to adapt from my counterparts, other Nicaraguan teachers, and fellow volunteers. A more difficult challenge, however, was switching my identity and mindset from that of novice teacher to teacher-trainer. This required a profound shift in ego and ambition, and I had to regularly remind myself of my job in Nicaragua by taping a note to my mirror that said, “I want my CPs to be the most excellent EFL teachers, not me.” Fortunately, I was able to use my personal struggles with professional development to cultivate empathy between me and my CPs, which strengthened our relationships.

Ana

One of my CPs, Ana, ended up being one of my best friends. When we met, Ana had only been teaching for two years, but she already did a lot of good things in her classes. During initial observations, I noticed how she created a friendly rapport with her students through humor and kindness. She also made an effort to show students many examples of the English-language content she was teaching, and she gave students ample opportunity to practice new content through written exercises. Nevertheless, as a novice teacher with a low-intermediate level of English language acquisition, Ana had room for improvement. Based on my and my PC supervisors’ assessments of Ana’s teaching, as well as her own professional development desires, we decided on the following goals for our work together. First, I would help her finish her Bachelor’s degree in TEFL. Second, we would improve her English language skills, especially speaking and listening. Third,
she would teach English class in English and facilitate more communicative learning activities simulating real-life situations. Finally, I would help Ana improve her classroom management skills; this was imperative because her school administrators felt that student behavior, even a student’s violent outburst that I witnessed in Ana’s classroom, was entirely a teacher’s responsibility.

Helping Ana earn a Bachelor’s degree in TEFL required us to work on her university assignments outside of our normal lesson-planning hours. The assignments mostly involved written translation between English and Spanish, but her final assignment was to pass a comprehensive exam, and Ana was worried about the speaking and listening portions of the test. To improve Ana’s listening skills, we reviewed the listening questions that she had gotten wrong on the *Top Notch* English-language placement test that I had given her at the start of my service. We also worked through the listening exercises of a TOEFL study guide.

Most importantly, Ana and I spoke English together the entire time that we planned lessons, co-taught, and worked on her university assignments, which ended up being around sixteen hours per week. This authentic communicative practice greatly improved her overall oral fluency. To develop her speech *accuracy*, we agreed that I would correct or call her attention to every speech error that I heard her make. I corrected her both immediately (when we were alone), and after class (to discuss language mistakes that she had made during teaching). In addition, I sometimes recorded Ana’s responses to speaking prompts so that she could hear herself, which was effective in getting her to self-correct. I cannot say enough about Ana’s dedication, hard work, and sacrifice during
the months when she was simultaneously caring for an infant, teaching full time, fulfilling the PC’s professional development expectations for counterparts, and attending university on the weekends (with a three-hour commute each way). Her work paid off, though, when she passed the exam to earn her Bachelor’s degree, moved up two placement levels on the Top Notch English-language placement test, and noticeably improved her fluency, accuracy, and confidence with English, especially in conversation.

As Ana’s speaking and listening skills developed, it became easier for her to teach in English, but when she felt unsure of the language needed for a particular topic or activity, we would review that language during co-planning; she would note the language in her lesson plan, and sometimes script portions of the lesson. If Ana wanted me to teach a lesson or part of a lesson the first time that we delivered it so that she could hear its language in action, I would do so while she observed me. More often, however, Ana was brave enough to teach language that was unfamiliar to her, and, unlike many Nicaraguan teachers, she would ask me for help in front of her students. Over the two years that we worked together, Ana went from teaching in about 20% English to about 80% English. Appendix F shows my notes from the final time that I observed Ana teach, and indicates her success in meeting most of the Peace Corps’ expectations for counterpart teachers.

Through co-planning and co-teaching, Ana also accomplished our goal of incorporating into her teaching a greater number of authentic communicative learning activities. Most of the activities that Ana and I used came from Peace Corps Nicaragua’s TEFL Manual, a book of lesson ideas that corresponds with Nicaragua’s national EFL curriculum. In addition to an overview of Communicative Language Teaching’s core
principles and techniques, the *Manual* includes bilingual descriptions of more than 50 communicative learning activities. All volunteers and CPs in Nicaragua receive a copy of the *Manual*, along with its supplementary audio CD and student worksheet packet.

One communicative activity that Ana and I regularly facilitated required students to work in groups to play a game called Secretary. Students chose roles – one secretary, one artist, and two runners. The runners had to leave their group and “run” to read a paragraph (related to the lesson) that was posted in a corner of the classroom or on an outside wall. Then the runners returned to their group to repeat to the secretary what they had read. The secretary wrote this down while the artist drew what the secretary wrote. Completing the activity took coordination between a team’s two runners, short-term memory, and multiple trips, not to mention application of the entire team’s speaking, listening, writing, and reading skills.

Another communicative activity that Ana and I facilitated required students in their last year of secondary school to create and present timelines of their plans after graduation. Based on the high rate of participation, carefully illustrated timelines that students presented, and good speaking skills demonstrated, this project was motivating. To add to the communicative aspect of the project, Ana and I had students in the audience think of follow-up questions to ask their presenting classmates.

The professional development goal that Ana struggled to meet was improved classroom management. Though her students’ behavior did naturally improve a bit as Ana’s teaching became more communicative and student-centered, she and I also developed a discipline system, including an attention grabber that we explained and
practiced with students. For over a year, I modeled using the discipline system when I taught in Ana’s classes. I also reminded Ana to use the system, and I even helped her implement it by, for example, writing the names of misbehaving students on the board while she lectured. But Ana herself rarely used the system. Each time that we reflected on our classroom management efforts, as well as each time that Ana received negative feedback from observers who noted students’ poor behavior, she promised to try harder to consistently implement the discipline system.

In the end, I’m not sure why Ana resisted a more assertive style of classroom management. When I asked her about it, she would say that she felt uncomfortable being “strict” with students. She felt that it wasn’t her personality, and though she wanted students to behave better, she wasn’t terribly bothered by misbehavior that I and my supervisors considered unacceptable. I believe that teachers must, regardless of their natural personality, take control inside the classroom to create the best environment for learning. If I could work with Ana again, I would spend more time discussing our culturally-influenced beliefs and preferences regarding classroom management, and I would be more interested in hearing Ana’s suggestions for controlling student behavior.

Oscar

Another of my counterparts, Oscar, had been teaching for almost four years, but he still faced some of the same challenges as Ana, including classroom management and teaching in English. Based on observation feedback and self-assessment, Oscar and I decided that his professional development goals would be to improve his classroom
management, increase his use of English in the classroom, modify his lecture-heavy teaching style in order to give students more opportunities to speak English, and focus on getting all students to participate.

To improve his classroom management, Oscar spent the first class period of the school year creating class rules with students, and he had one student create a poster of the rules to hang on the wall (see Appendix G). Oscar also decided to stop spending the first five minutes of class calling roll. Instead, he helped students quiet down and gain focus by writing an “early bird” activity on the board as soon as he entered the classroom. The activity also served as a warm-up for the day’s topic. In addition to this change, Oscar and I developed a behavior management system. Names of misbehavers were written on the board, and if a student’s bad behavior continued, they could receive two check marks before their name was noted in the teacher’s “black book.” Then, a clearly explained series of consequences kicked in. On the rewards side of the spectrum, each group of students had the opportunity to earn end-of-class free time if they were completely silent after an attention-grabber.

Oscar often used an “early bird” activity and the behavior management system that we created, but not always. The behavior of his students improved somewhat, but not to the point where it should have been, according to me and my Peace Corps supervisors. When I left Nicaragua, Oscar was working on consistency in his application of classroom management strategies. In addition, he was considering adding the use of a seating chart so that misbehavers didn’t sit together, and he was trying to get his classes even quieter by lowering his tolerance for extra-curricular chatter and being stricter about taking away
free-time minutes. As with all my CPs, it was important not to overwhelm Oscar with proposed changes to his classroom management. Instead, we attempted to consistently implement just one or two new practices at a time for a set period of time before modifying those practices or introducing new ones.

When I began working with Oscar, his English-language skills were already good enough to teach in English. He enjoyed self-study and took advantage of the English-language resources I gave him, including books and magazines. When I needed a CP with whom to co-present a professional development workshop called Feedback and Error Correction at the Nicaraguan TESOL conference, Oscar volunteered and excelled at the challenge. Strangely, the pleasure and confidence that Oscar exhibited while speaking English with adults did not carry over into his secondary school classes. When I asked him about this, he said that his 7th- and 8th-graders were true beginners, so he had to use Spanish to communicate with them. While I admitted that it was easier to teach in Spanish, I tried to help Oscar understand and experience the benefits of teaching in English. Personally, I think that insecurities played a large role in Oscar’s reluctance to teach in English. He was scared to make language mistakes or seem less than entirely competent to his students. He was also sensitive to student complaints of feeling lost, and he had a hard time refocusing students when they stopped trying to understand and started misbehaving.

To help Oscar feel more secure about teaching in English, we took advantage of his desire to provide students with visual scaffolds like flashcards, posters of high frequency and target language, graphic organizers, pictures, drawings, and realia that we
made and collected. These resources helped students understand his spoken input. In addition, Oscar and I sometimes scripted the portions of our lesson plans that we predicted would be confusing to students, and whenever we spoke in the classroom, we used simple language and cognates, pausing, gestures, intonation, and modeling to help students understand. Finally, as with Ana, I often model-taught while Oscar observed me, and then we switched roles the next time that we taught the same lesson (to a different group of students). This informal peer observation and the feedback we gave each other concerning our efforts to teach in English pushed us both to improve, since full-immersion with beginning-level students can be very challenging. Once, a PC supervisor videotaped Oscar and I teach so that we could see for ourselves the places where we could and should have taught in English instead of Spanish. This was illuminating.

Despite these efforts, when I left Nicaragua, Oscar only used English about 50% of the time that he taught (up from about 20%). Unfortunately, he had gotten into the habit of translating his English into Spanish at the first sign of student incomprehension. If I could have continued working with Oscar, I would have secured video equipment to film him regularly so that he could see how his discomfort with teaching in English was continually costing his students the opportunity for highly contextualized authentic communication in their foreign language.

In Oscar’s two other professional development goals – adopting a more student-centered approach and getting all students to participate – he was more successful. As he gained control of student behavior and grew accustomed to interacting
with students instead of lecturing at them, his innate sensitivity to multiple intelligences and diverse learning styles supported the incorporation of communicative activities that allowed him to talk less and encouraged all students to say and do more. These included whole-group activities and games like brainstorming, question-and-answer chains, Telephone, Simon Says, and Change Seats If, as well as language assignments involving art, small-group research projects, songs, and interviews and dialogues that students practiced and presented in pairs. Appendix H is a photo of a functional-dialogue template that Oscar and I created and taped to the board during a unit on currency. Students worked in pairs to personalize the dialogue by filling in the blanks with their choice of realia displayed at the front of the room. Students then practiced and performed their dialogues, with one student as a salesperson and the other as a customer.

The student-centered momentum in Oscar’s classes slowly built on itself. As most students did more and Oscar did less, student behavior improved, which encouraged him to give students ever more responsibility. Oscar began using techniques like having students read (instead of reading to them), asking students to recall information (instead of repeating it himself), eliciting student self-correction, calling on naturally quiet students, implementing no-opt-out questioning, silently pointing to written words/sentences after choral repetition so that students had to read and pronounce the language on their own, and assigning exit tickets so that all students had to demonstrate that they understood key concepts before class ended.

Through our efforts, the oral communication skills of Oscar’s students improved dramatically. Towards the end of my service, however, we encountered an unforeseen
negative consequence of focusing so intently on speaking and listening: students’ English
spelling was not good. This wouldn’t have mattered much, except that our administrators
required written exams during triannual schoolwide testing weeks. To get around this
problem, Oscar and I decided to 1) devote a little more time to teaching writing,
2) formally assess students on speaking and listening the week before chaotic
testing-week schedules (with scores from both the listening/speaking and reading/writing
exams weighted equally in final grades), and 3) grade just a half-point off for minor
spelling errors on written exams.

Sara

In contrast to both Oscar and Ana’s fewer than four years of teaching experience,
my third counterpart, Sara, had over fifteen years’ experience when I met her. She was a
born teacher, very loving and mentoring towards her students, with a presence that
fostered respect without being forceful. In part because Sara only taught older, more
mature students, discipline was not a problem for her, and students in her classroom
seemed to feel safe to be themselves and work together. This dynamic, combined with
Sara’s disinclination to lecture, made her teaching style naturally student-centered.

A few months before I completed my Peace Corps service, Sara surprised me by
moving into a classroom that was exclusively hers – a rarity for any Nicaraguan public-
school teacher. With hardly a word to me, she had worked for over a year to convince her
administrators of the need for a dedicated English classroom that could be decorated and
used to store English-teaching resources. Appendix I shows some of the environmental print that Sara hung in her new EFL classroom.

I learned as much from working with Sara as she learned from me. Her teaching didn’t need major changes, just minor additions and adjustments. Based on my and my PC supervisors’ assessments, as well as Sara’s desires, we settled on the following four professional development goals: 1) Incorporate new communicative techniques and activities to make learning fun and give students more speaking and listening practice; 2) Implement classroom management routines to make class time more productive; 3) Get a higher percentage of students to participate in class, especially quiet and lackadaisical students; and 4) Teach English class in English.

Concerning our first goal, Sara’s many years of teaching experience gave her the confidence to try almost any communicative activity in order to gauge its feasibility and level of student engagement. This attitude, combined with the low incidence of student misbehavior in her classes, meant that Sara was able to successfully implement activities which my other CPs could not. Through my usual process of enabling – co-planning followed by model teaching, class observations, and behavior reinforcement – I helped Sara incorporate into her teaching communicative activities that required critical thinking, creativity, and a high degree of student autonomy. Charades became popular in Sara’s classes, as did information-gap activities in which “one person in an exchange knows something the other person does not” (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson 122). A favorite information-gap activity was Blind Partner Drawings, where students sit back to back and “one student is given a picture and describes [it] for another student to draw”
In general, Sara’s students enjoyed the challenge of information-gap activities, whereas the generally less well-behaved students in my other CPs’ classes found ways to “cheat” by completing such activities without speaking or listening to English.

In addition to adding new communicative activities to her teaching, Sara followed my suggestion to add speaking and listening components to reading and writing assignments in order to make them more communicative. This also lowered teacher work-load by allowing one material, such as a handout or poster, to be used to practice all four language skills. For example, a worksheet containing a paragraph about the Nicaraguan department (or state) of Masaya began with a listening comprehension activity: students listened to Sara read the paragraph a few times while they filled in the blanks on their worksheets (see Appendix J). Then, after students had read the paragraph on their own and written their responses to the reading comprehension questions, Sara checked students’ answers orally by asking, for example, “Jeni, what’s your answer to number three?” to give students speaking practice.

Sara’s second goal was to implement new routines to maximize student learning in the 2 ¼ hours-per-week that each group of students received EFL class. Over the course of two years, I suggested and taught Sara seven routines, which she gradually integrated into her teaching practice and consistently used to good effect. For example, she began writing the date, lesson topic, and agenda on the board at the start of each lesson so that students immediately had something to focus on and copy into their notebooks. In addition, Sara began setting time limits during individual, pair, and small-group activities, with remaining time periodically announced and written on the
board to help keep students on-task. Sara also stopped allowing students to gather around her desk to have their completed work checked – a common sight in Nicaraguan classrooms and an inefficient use of class time. Instead, she circulated while students worked in order to help them as needed, and she taught early finishers to quietly do other work or help a classmate while they waited for Sara to collect their work, which she graded after class. Finally, Sara began conducting frequent low-stakes assessments with a focus on speaking and listening. Doing so gave students motivating formative feedback on their progress, and did not cause the nervousness that less-frequent, higher-stakes assessments can.

My and Sara’s third goal was to get a higher percentage of her students to actively participate in class. We began by designing activities that catered to students’ varied intelligences and learning styles. For interpersonal learners, we incorporated more pair and small-group work, with roles or expectations assigned to each student so that everyone had a job to do. For visual and kinesthetic learners, we assigned projects that included those elements, such as a project to make safety-warning signs to post around the school. For aural learners, we designed instructional units and lessons about music, and we incorporated music-based assignments into other instructional units, such as a listening-activity worksheet based on a song that discussed the unit topic of Love and Family Ties. Sara’s students enjoyed listening to the song, and they were fascinated to hear the similarities and differences between American country music and Mexican ranchera music, which is popular in rural Nicaragua.
Another strategy that Sara and I used to encourage greater student participation was to design lessons and activities on topics of personal and cultural interest to our students. One example of an activity that generated high participation was a worksheet, adapted from Peace Corps Nicaragua’s *TEFL Manual*, where students had to rank fifteen characteristics of a potential romantic partner in order of importance. After finishing the worksheet, students discussed their ranking in pairs, and then Sara and I facilitated a rich whole-group discussion about partnership that touched on the subjects of race, religion, safety, gender-roles, and happiness. One more activity that generated both a high-level of student participation and high-quality student output was a research assignment on tourist places in Nicaragua. Student enjoyed researching their own country, creating posters, and proudly presenting them to teachers and students.

Finally, to encourage participation by all students, Sara and I began facilitating more whole-group activities like circle games and line games. We also began using techniques to randomize individual participation. In the United States, teachers commonly write students’ names on popsicle sticks, then draw popsicle sticks from a cup to randomize participation. It was difficult to find popsicle sticks in Nicaragua, however, so Sara and I wrote students’ names on pieces of paper and drew those from a bag.

Sara’s fourth professional development goal during our time together was to improve her percentage of classroom English use. Sara’s oral skills were good, but she was a shy perfectionist when it came to speaking. I tried to help her overcome these obstacles by discussing them with her and by giving her a lot of positive feedback on her speech. Beyond addressing Sara’s affective issues, I tried to get her to use more English
in the classroom by following the same enabling procedure as with my other CPs: scripting lesson plans, model teaching, and conducting observations of Sara’s teaching with feedback on her use of English and Spanish. Despite our efforts, Sara only used more English when there was a push to do so, like during formal observations or when I reminded her before class to focus on speaking English (and then gave her cues for action throughout the lesson). Before I left Nicaragua, I noted that Sara had moved from about 30% English use to about 60% English use, but, like Oscar, she was quick to translate her English to Spanish at the first sign of student distress.

I believe that two main factors kept Sara from teaching English class in English. First, she highly valued connecting with her students as a friend and mentor. She delighted in chats with students on current events related to school, the community, and personal situations, and students loved her for it. In my experience, such relationships are harder to maintain when a language teacher uses full immersion. I remember viewing my beginning-level Spanish teachers who used full immersion as teachers only. I was grateful to them for the skills they helped me acquire, but I never communicated that sentiment to them because we did not have any sort of personal relationship. Sara, on the other hand, personified the warmth of Nicaraguan culture, and I feel that neither she nor her students wanted to lose their connection by putting a language barrier between them.

Sara’s close relationship with her students may have made her extra sensitive to the second factor that I believe kept her from using more English in class: many of her students pushed back against being taught in their foreign language. When Sara or I tried to express ourselves, give instructions, or explain concepts in English, students would
often say, “Spanish please,” then complain in Spanish about how we couldn’t possibly expect them to understand us, despite our best efforts at scaffolding. Resistance to learning English, specifically, may have played a role in students’ behavior. Sara taught the older grades, and by that age, Nicaraguans are basically treated as adults and often begin to display adult-like bias against the language of the “imperialist Yankees,” as Nicaragua’s president commonly referred to Americans during my time there (Celebración). Resistance may have also stemmed from older students’ acculturation to the Nicaraguan education system, which places students as passive fact-recorders and rarely requires tolerance of the unknown or rigorous mental effort.

If I could work with Sara again, I would have a serious discussion with her about the challenges to English immersion that we faced, and I would solicit her solutions to those challenges. I would also recommend beginning the school year with a lesson or short unit, conducted in Spanish, on the topic of EFL in order to gain an understanding of students’ thoughts and feelings on the subject. Then, throughout the school year, I would remind students of the reasons for learning to understand spoken English.

Co-teaching in Nicaragua was a period of intense, and intensely rewarding, personal and professional growth for myself and my three counterpart teachers. A year later, we are still in regular communication, and I feel proud and happy about their continuing accomplishments, which they update me on through voice and text messages, as well as photos from their classrooms and professional development activities. These interactions reassure me of the sustained impact of my Peace Corps work. My co-teaching experience also highlighted two common challenges for Nicaraguan EFL
teachers: effective classroom management and conducting English class in English. Competence in these areas is necessary for teaching communicatively. Therefore, I believe that efforts to improve EFL education in Nicaragua should begin with professional development to improve teachers’ classroom management and English-language skills.
CHAPTER 4: SECONDARY PROJECTS

In Peace Corps parlance, co-teaching was my primary project; my secondary projects were all the other development work I did in Nicaragua. My major secondary projects were 1) teaching beginning- and advanced-level community English classes; 2) teaching beginning- and intermediate-level English at the small university in my town; and 3) giving professional development workshops to Nicaraguan EFL teachers. With these projects, my goals were to improve the communicative ability and motivation of those I taught by applying Communicative Language Teaching methodology. Key characteristics of CLT include focusing on the functionality of language and using it in authentic ways for meaningful communication; attending to both fluency and accuracy as students learn; teaching language-learning strategies; and practicing student-centered teaching where the teacher often assumes a facilitative role during collaborative learning activities that are designed with students’ backgrounds, interests, and learning styles in mind (Brown 46). In professional development workshops, specifically, I also aimed to improve the teaching knowledge and skills of attendees. This chapter details the approaches, techniques, and activities I employed to achieve my secondary-project goals, while noting some unresolved challenges. In addition, it compares and contrasts my secondary-project experiences with those of my primary project, co-teaching.
Community English Classes

When I arrived in site, the Small-Business Peace Corps volunteer who lived there and was about to finish his service asked me if I wanted to teach a beginning-level EFL class in a rural community outside of town. I said I would, and this opportunity resulted in a nearly two-year commitment. Every Wednesday morning, I made a four-hour round-trip journey on a dirt road in an old school bus or in the back of a pickup truck to teach a group of about ten students for two hours. Some of these students were in high school, some were small-scale ranchers and coffee farmers, and one was an elementary school teacher who wanted to become an English teacher. Unlike the mandatory high school English classes that I co-taught, students in my community class didn’t have a reason to attend except their internal motivation, and many traveled as far as I did to be there. Therefore, I knew I had to support students’ motivation by developing good personal relationships with them, designing engaging lessons with their wants, needs, and interests in mind, and creating a safe and friendly learning environment.

I immediately set out to get to know my students, but I was determined to use full-immersion Communicative Language Teaching, more out of curiosity than that it was my preferred method; I had been trained in CLT, but I hadn’t ever had solo control of an EFL classroom with the freedom to teach as I pleased. With my methodological goal in mind, my community class’ first lesson was on introductions because that is what people who are getting to know one another do in real life. In English, I introduced myself and taught students the language necessary to introduce themselves, including
their names, ages, occupations, and where they lived. From this activity, I gathered that all my students were beginning-level ELLs, except the elementary school teacher, who was at a low-intermediate level of English proficiency.

I rarely used Spanish or elicited students’ use of Spanish in my beginning-level community class. When I did, it was usually to talk about teaching and learning, as opposed to using Spanish as the language of instruction. For example, during our first class meeting, I used Spanish to explain to students why I would be teaching in 90% English and expecting them to speak English whenever possible. I also used Spanish to ask students what they hoped to learn in our class. Most told me they wanted to learn to communicate in English both orally and in writing so that they could talk with English-speaking tourists and develop and maintain online relationships with English speakers. The high schoolers wanted to reinforce what they were learning in school, plus learn more in order to later do well in university EFL classes, become bilingual, and improve their career opportunities. The elementary school teacher was eager to have the opportunity to practice and improve her skills with a native English speaker.

Language immersion seemed to work well in my beginning-level community class. I credit much of my success with this model of instruction to effective management of student behavior. Admittedly, the small class size helped, but if my community-class students didn’t like English immersion, the learning environment I created did not permit them to fight against it or ignore my words, as did some of the high school students I co-taught. With student affect in mind, however, and in accordance with some second language acquisition experts’ suggestion to make judicious use of students’ first
language, I did not use a hard version of language immersion in my community class; I remembered the ill-will that some of my classmates in the U.S. had felt toward our Spanish teacher, who would not allow use of our native English. Instead, in Nicaragua, I accepted my community-class students’ Spanish if I had not taught them how to say what they wanted to say in English, and I only pushed them to use English when I knew that a particular individual should have been able to communicate a particular idea in English. Pushing students often included reminding them to look in their notebooks if they couldn’t recall the English they needed. I repeatedly told students that a large part of learning a foreign language is memorization. Sometimes I demonstrated the drills I used to memorize Spanish, and I taught my students English drills and study techniques. Based on later written and oral assessments, English immersion effectively aided students’ acquisition of all four language skills.

I would like to say that my soft approach to language immersion not only helped students learn English, but also helped us form trusting, warm relationships. The truth, however, is that, based on Spanish-language conversations I had with students outside of class time, they felt that the biggest flaw with our class was that they didn’t feel close to me because I always spoke English, and they were not comfortable or confident in their listening ability. When I reiterated that the reason I spoke English was to help them learn, they said that they understood, but still wished we could create more confianza (fond trust/abiding respect/mutual reciprocity – the word is hard to define) through use of a shared language. Because I don’t need, or even particularly want, to feel confianza with all my students, I wasn’t sure how to honor both my and their cultural preferences, and I
didn’t want to slow students’ English learning by speaking Spanish. It may, however, be necessary in Nicaragua where, I believe, some students’ lack of confianza with me eventually negatively affected their motivation and attendance. I have since considered speaking Spanish when talking about myself, followed by an immediate translation to English so that students could get to know me but at least also hear the English. I have also considered being explicit with students about speaking Spanish during just the first and last five minutes of class in order to begin and end class in their comfort zone.

Personally, I felt that my beginning-level community class students and I were getting to know each other well enough through normal classroom interaction. Almost all lessons contained cultural and personal exchange on topics like family, community, animals and pets, jobs, plans and dreams, hobbies, music, and food. In general, topics and assignments seemed to please and motivate students; participation was high, and student output was impressive. For example, students drew beautiful, detailed maps of their rural communities and proudly presented them using target grammar and vocabulary.

One of the nicest things about making my own community-class curriculum was flexibility. Unlike in the high schools where I co-taught, I was free to continue teaching topics that generated high interest for longer than I had planned to, and I could create and deliver instructional units and lessons on topics that students unexpectedly expressed interest in. For example, during a unit on music, I used a map of the United States to show students where different styles of American music are most popular. When students began asking me off-topic questions related to U.S. geography, I decided to develop and deliver an instructional unit on that topic next. I believe that teaching to students’
interests, as opposed to a mandated national curriculum, played an important role in keeping students attending and succeeding academically for as long as they did in this voluntary English class, despite long commutes and the challenge of CLT for students accustomed to passive learning.

Having a fellow teacher as a student in my beginning-level community English class was wonderful, especially because she knew a bit more English than the other students. She strategically assisted her struggling classmates to scaffold their learning, and I helped her improve her English and TEFL skills by occasionally handing over teaching responsibilities to her. Sometimes these hand-offs were planned, as when she asked if she could give a lesson on domestic violence because her church was exploring the topic. I enthusiastically said yes and helped her plan, offering some CLT suggestions and helping her script portions of the lesson so that she could teach using mostly English. Other times, teaching hand-offs happened spontaneously when the class was struggling to understand something and my intermediate-level student/teacher felt she could help by offering an alternate explanation. I was always grateful for her insight and assistance.

In addition to this beginning-level community English class, I taught a 2-hour per week advanced-level community class in my town. My five advanced students were highly motivated. They loved learning English and excelled at teaching themselves through books, movies, music, and online content. For this reason, I decided to make the curriculum for this class almost entirely student-driven. At our first meeting, I asked students to write down three things they wanted to study, and then we discussed them. From this discussion, the curriculum took shape. Students wanted to do the following:
learn more slang and idiomatic expressions; improve their reading comprehension of mainstream English-language newspapers and magazines; improve their pronunciation; get help applying to jobs, scholarships, and study abroad programs that required advanced English proficiency; improve their academic English skills; learn how to more effectively teach English, as most of them already did so in one form or another; and improve their translating skills, as most of them already did so with varying frequency.

As with students at all levels of English-language acquisition, I helped my advanced-level ELLs meet their learning goals by teaching form-focused mini lessons (e.g., on real and unreal conditionals), and facilitating a lot of practice activities simulating real-world situations. Unlike with beginners, however, much of my advanced-class work involved gathering and presenting materials that students didn’t know existed or didn’t know how to acquire, such as information on the English-language resources and programs offered by the U.S. embassy in Managua; word lists; corpus linguistic tools; specialized English dictionaries; pronunciation charts; online audio like Voice of America newscasts and This American Life stories; and reading material that I had shipped from the U.S., had American friends and family bring to me when they visited, or brought back to Nicaragua myself from trips abroad. According to Brown, “Successful mastery of a foreign language will depend to a great extent on learners’ autonomous ability both to take initiative in the classroom and to continue their journey to success beyond the classroom and the teacher” (70). To my delight and my advanced-level students’ credit, they used the materials that I presented to them to further their own learning and teach others, both in and out of class.
My advanced-level community class was conducted almost exclusively in English, so students got a lot of incidental listening practice; but I still gave students deliberate listening exercises. According to Brown, listening is so challenging that teachers should take time to intentionally focus on developing students’ listening abilities instead of just letting them “experience” language (310). And some theorists suggest that listening exercises be designed at or below students’ current level of English proficiency, an idea which runs counter to the common practice in the other skills (speaking, reading, and writing) of providing language input that is just beyond students’ current level of proficiency (Scott, “Listening”). In Nicaragua, I found the EFL textbook series Top Notch to be a useful source of listening exercises because it produces entertaining graded audiovisual clips with corresponding listening-comprehension worksheets.

The only time that English was not used in my advanced-level class was when I occasionally allowed the focus to shift to my own second-language development. I learned a lot of Spanish from my language-aware students, and they took obvious satisfaction in helping me. When we did grammar mini-lessons and the translation of example sentences from English to Spanish inevitably arose, I became as much of a student as anyone else in the room because I often didn’t know the advanced-level Spanish grammar constructions. Outside of class time, at students’ suggestion, we went to dinner about once a month and spent the first hour speaking English, the second hour speaking Spanish, and so on, alternating until the night dissolved into Spanglish.

The friendship, bilingualism, and lack of external pressure to meet certain expectations, such as my counterparts and I faced, also meant that my advanced-level
community class students and I felt free to spend time discussing current events, personal issues, and questions about language and culture that popped up outside of class. At least one student per week brought a hot topic to class, and the lively, thoughtful discussion that often ensued was a valuable learning opportunity for us all. In both my beginning- and advanced-level community English classes, the freedom I had to adjust curriculum to follow student interests seemed to motivate students to learn English faster than in the high school classes I co-taught. The question remains in my mind, however: Were my community classes more successful in terms of student achievement because of the motivating practices I could employ, or because motivated students self-selected to attend?

One of the greatest successes of my advanced-level community English class was when students and I spent a week translating for a group of American university students who came to our town to do research, cultural exchange, and charity work. Prior to the Americans’ arrival, my students and I worked to shore up our oral translating skills and brush up on medical terms. When the time came, we all performed well, and the American visitors would have certainly been less successful in their mission without the translating and cultural knowledge provided by my students. In addition, my students earned a large sum of money by Nicaraguan standards, forged personal relationships with some of the university students that continue online to this day, and acquired ongoing work coordinating and translating for future trips planned by the American university.

Upon reflection, my biggest regret with my community classes, both beginning and advanced-level, is that I didn’t show students enough markers of their
language-learning progress, as recommended by the second-language acquisition experts Brown, Lightbown, and Spada, whose work I read at Humboldt State University. I didn’t give regular exams or class grades, didn’t set attendance or performance requirements, and didn’t create end dates for classes, at which time students would have received certificates or some other symbol of achievement. If I ever teach community classes again, I will do all of these things, as I believe that my failure to do so eventually negatively affected student motivation and attendance. After about a year of success, both of my classes slowly fizzled out until I finally cancelled them due to low attendance.

University Classes

A cousin of my Nicaraguan host mother was president of the small private university in my town. About six months after I moved there, she stopped me in the street to ask if I had a Bachelor’s degree, and, if so, would I teach a beginning-level EFL class to prospective English teachers. I agreed to, which resulted in a 15-month commitment to teach for three hours every other Sunday morning. On average, there were ten students in my class, and turnover was low; I taught nearly the same group of students for the duration of my employment at the university.

Most of my students were between the ages of 20 and 40 years old. They were elementary school teachers, ranchers, carpenters, stay-at-home moms, and service-industry workers who were interested enough in TEFL to enroll at university and spend a significant amount of money to earn a bachelor’s degree in the field. The higher-education setting and financial sacrifice that these students were making
contributed, more than in any of my other Nicaraguan teaching contexts, to a situation where I did not feel that developing strong personal relationships with students was a prerequisite for their success. My university students showed up to class and worked hard, or they were highly susceptible to failing my class and wasting their time, money, and whatever effort they had put forth. For me, this situation felt freeing: I could experiment with teaching approaches, methods, techniques, and activities, and most of these students would accept a challenge and take responsibility for their learning.

As in my beginning-level community English class, on the first day of university, I used Spanish to explain my communicative approach to language teaching and the rationale behind it. From that point on, I spoke 95% English, which students seemed to value. Unlike in most other Nicaraguan educational environments I taught or observed, my university students engaged in almost no extra-curricular chatter. They were either writing notes or watching me and, based on their reactions and responses, actively trying to understand and learn from my English input. My university students’ eager and willing attitude toward language immersion was also apparent in the difference I noted between them and other beginners regarding English use outside of class. I gave my phone number to all my secondary-project students so that they could ask me questions or just chat by text message. I always responded to students’ texts in English, which seemed to motivate my university students to ever more communication. In contrast, my beginning-level community class students rarely contacted me, and when they did, they often told me they couldn’t understand my English, though I knew that I had taught them the simple language I used. My university students’ acceptance and appreciation of the
language-immersion approach filled me with hope, as most of them were aspiring English teachers, and Nicaraguan EFL teachers have been found to teach the way they were taught (Chávez 29).

Even with the language barrier between us, these university students and I formed trusting, friendly relationships through a student-centered communicative TEFL approach. Most of the lessons I presented involved a sharing of personal and/or cultural information. For example, during an early unit called My Life, students practiced using daily-activities verbs, such as “to cook,” and “to drive,” with the verb “can” in order to complete an information-gap worksheet that helped us get to know one another (see Appendix K). I always participated in interactive activities like this one because doing so allowed me to both model my expectations for students and demonstrate my enthusiasm to communicate with them and learn about their lives.

The motivation and good relationships in my university class served students and me well when I began “flipping” the classroom so that students had to learn and memorize English on their own, then come to class prepared to use that language to communicate with their classmates. According to Rudolfo Chaviano in his presentation at the 2015 Nicaraguan TESOL conference, flipping an EFL classroom means assigning input as homework through readings, videos, websites, etc. Students then come to class prepared to practice using that language, with the teacher available to answer questions, facilitate communicative activities, and provide formative feedback. Subsequent application and reflection on learning is done by students outside of class time, and then a
final, summative assessment is done in class ("Flipped: A Disruptive Classroom Approach").

Flipping contrasts with the teacher-centered style of traditional Nicaraguan EFL classrooms, where class time is spent delivering input through lecture and readings, followed by a bit of student practice through written exercises, and more practice assigned as homework. I found flipping’s reorganization of learning time to be an advantageous alternative in my university class. It allowed students and me to focus our six hours-per-month of class time on the part of language learning that is nearly impossible to do alone: authentic communication. This effectively developed students’ communicative abilities, especially in speaking and listening.

During class time, I used varied formative assessments to motivate students of all learning styles to practice using English and show what they knew. Formative assessments in my university class included observation during pair, small-group, and whole-group communicative activities; whole-group questioning where students responded with a movement or gesture, such as a thumbs-up; worksheets and writing prompts; oral presentations; individual questioning at various levels of Bloom’s taxonomy, dependent on student ability; quizzes; brainstorming; exit-card activities; and peer and self-assessment (Peace Corps, “Formative Assessment Strategies”).

Some of the formative assessments and practice activities that I facilitated in my university class came from the Peace Corps Nicaragua TEFL Manual’s index of multipurpose communicative activities. Another useful resource was Top Notch’s Copy and Go, a book of interactive practice activities. Appendix L shows a Copy and Go
board game that students played in groups of three. As students moved their game pieces down the board from start to finish, they had to ask each other “wh-” questions based on the pictures in the squares. For example, if a student landed on square 7, they could ask their classmate, “Where is she?” and the student responding would have to say something along the lines of “She is at the bank.” The point of the game was to provide students with “opportunities to interact with other speakers, working together to reach mutual comprehension through negotiation for meaning” (Lightbown and Spada 114). If a student could not sensibly ask or answer a question, they lost their opportunity to move their game piece forward. The first student to reach the end of the board won.

Of course, I was only able to have students play the board game in class because they had done their homework of memorizing how to ask and answer “wh-” word questions. My university students took their English studies seriously, and this enabled my use of the flipping technique. In all my other Nicaraguan teaching contexts, however, I could not rely on students doing their homework. Based on observation, I believe that this phenomenon is a widely-accepted reality in Nicaraguan education, countered only by the conscious effort of teachers and administrators at a particular school to create a culture of academic rigor and personal accountability.

In addition to flipping the classroom, another successful technique that I used in my university class was allowing students, all of whom were also taking pedagogy classes at the university, to assume some teaching duties. When I and an individual student felt that they were ready, I would sit and observe while they facilitated, in English, a routine communicative activity or the sharing of individuals’ written work
with the whole class. This was challenging for students, but gratifying when they realized that they could teach English class in English.

I did not critique students when they student-taught in English. For all, it was the first time, and I felt that they were too emotionally vulnerable for critique to have a positive effect. My role while students led the class was to give support and encouragement. Afterwards, in private, I gave students positive feedback. I also emphasized my belief in their ability to improve their skills and accomplish their goals through hard work, as recent research has shown that this sort of support can have a strong positive impact on student motivation and perseverance (Toch and Headden).

Thanks to the university, which required teachers to give an exam at each class meeting, I did not make the same mistake with my university students as with my community-class students. Exams were cumulative; they included material from the entire trimester, so the formal, graded feedback that they provided each class meeting kept students aware of their progress and helped support motivation. Exams normally required students to demonstrate their vocabulary and grammar knowledge, as well as their communicative ability in reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Based on the low drop-out rate in my classes, the high level of academic rigor that students and I sustained, final class grades, and the language-learning progress that I continue to observe in students with whom I am still in contact, I believe that most of my university students gained a solid foundation of English and the motivation to continue their studies. Most of them moved from a beginning level of English-language acquisition to an intermediate level in just over a year.
Professional Development Workshops

On seven occasions during my Peace Corps service, I gave professional development workshops to Nicaraguan EFL teachers. These workshops were on three different topics: feedback and error correction, CLT basics, and classroom management. Four times I presented outside of my service site to teachers I didn’t know, and three times I presented in my local community of practice (CoP).

I approached the development and delivery of workshops in a way that was informed by my Peace Corps training and my observations of EFL teaching and learning in Nicaragua. First, I modeled the Communicative Language Teaching approach that I hoped audience members would use to teach English, and I explicitly addressed my preferred method and its rationale at the start of workshops. I told participants that the goal of CLT is to develop all four language skills through authentic communication in English, and that I would therefore be speaking English to give them listening practice. I said also that I would use scaffolding techniques to help everyone understand me, but that participants should help each other and raise hands to ask questions. Then, I introduced three procedural-language posters that I hung up at all workshops. One read, “Could you repeat that?”; another, “I don’t understand,” and a third, “What does ____ mean?” I told audience members that they would be expected to use these phrases and all the other English they knew, and would also be asked to practice speaking English that was unfamiliar to them. I usually ended this introduction with a favorite mantra of mine in
Nicaragua, which I repeated in Spanish to guarantee comprehension and build confianza: “If you do not speak English, you will not speak English.”

Second, I assumed that there would be beginning-level English speakers in my workshop audience. Many Nicaraguan EFL teachers are at an overall beginning level of English language acquisition because of poor quality teacher training and hiring practices that take personal relationships and political affiliation into greater account than professional merit. Other EFL teachers struggle only with spoken English because of the reading-and-writing focused method by with they learned the language. This reality meant that I had to deliver workshops using the same scaffolding that I used with any group of beginners: slow, simple language; pausing; relating content to things that students were familiar with; visual support; a lot of examples and modeling; pair and group work so that students could help each other; and frequent comprehension checks.

Third, to help students learn and apply the content of workshops, I followed the Peace Corps’ 4MAT lesson plan structure of motivation, input, practice, and application. In addition, I always gave handouts of key points and/or techniques and activities that participants could immediately try in their own classrooms; see Appendix M for an example. I also planned a reflective wrap-up at the end of each workshop to help teachers retain what they had learned. Finally, in workshops with my local community of practice, I assigned follow-up activities. I could do so because I met with those teachers regularly. Follow-up activities were extremely valuable because they applied a bit of pressure and held teachers at least minimally accountable for making changes in their teaching based on what they learned. Lack of follow-up was my biggest concern with workshops that I
gave outside of my town to teachers I didn’t know and never saw again. After experiencing the sustained, intensive effort it took to see changes in my counterparts’ teaching, I doubt that much of what I taught to teachers who I didn’t know made a difference in their classrooms.

The feedback and error correction workshop that I gave was originally assigned to me by my Peace Corps supervisors when, in an effort to support peer-to-peer teaching, they asked me and other experienced volunteers to help deliver the Peace Corps’ TEFL training curriculum. The information for the workshop was provided by Peace Corps headquarters in a rough lesson plan that I revised extensively. I presented the workshop three times to three different groups of Peace Corps TEFL volunteers before adapting it for a Nicaraguan audience.

The first time I gave the feedback and error correction workshop to Nicaraguan EFL teachers was at the 2015 national TESOL conference in Managua. Oscar, as mentioned in Chapter 3, planned and presented with me. Working with Oscar was beneficial because I got his perspective and help adapting the workshop’s content and language for a population he knew well. For example, Oscar suggested that we start with an explanation of the word “feedback” because it was not familiar to him, and a literal translation of the word to Spanish, “retroalimentación,” is a pedagogical term in Nicaragua that means something else entirely. Working together was also an excellent professional development opportunity for Oscar. He learned the presentation’s content and practiced his English (the word “focus” stands out in my mind, as Oscar had to unlearn the error commonly made by native Spanish speakers of mispronouncing the
word in a way that sounds profane to those in the know). Oscar also discovered a taste for teaching adults. Not only did the mature workshop participants free him of the burden of student discipline, they actually expressed gratitude and respect for a job well done. Several approached him after the workshop to thank him for skillfully covering a complex topic that is rarely addressed in Nicaraguan teacher education.

It was a good thing that Oscar took his TESOL convention duties seriously and learned the entire feedback and error correction workshop in-depth, because when we gave it in our CoP months later, I was unexpectedly called away by the school principal, and Oscar had to present alone. Our principal was aware of our workshop; we had expressly sought and received his permission to hold it on campus. Nevertheless, five minutes after Oscar and I had begun, the principal asked me to help him set up an overhead projector for his own presentation in another classroom. I was disappointed by the situation, as it was the first time that a workshop was happening in my local TEFL CoP, and getting organized to that point had been a laborious process. However, this sad incident here serves to illustrate three important points about working in Nicaragua. First, one should never depend on technology. After fiddling with two different overhead projectors for close to an hour, neither would work, and the principal couldn’t give his presentation. Second, the compassion and flexibility to follow host country norms is necessary. My principal needed help, and I could not have refused him without damaging our relationship and possibly losing his support on future projects. His request and my accommodation exemplify “confianza” – a relationship in which people make sacrifices to help each other. Third, one should focus on the professional development and
leadership of Nicaraguans, as I did with Oscar, so that development work can be carried out by more than one person.

Feedback and error correction ended up being a worthwhile topic to address with certain Nicaraguan EFL teachers. It was not, however, a workshop topic that I would have chosen on my own in a country with more basic TEFL needs, and when a Ministry of Education official in a neighboring town asked me to give a workshop to her English teachers, I felt that it would be more appropriate to present on Communicative Language Teaching basics. I expanded a 30-minute workshop on communicative learning activities that I had developed during Pre-Service Training into a two-hour workshop on how the communicative approach can stimulate interest and engagement through 1) teaching in English; 2) delivering student-centered lessons; 3) initiating a lot of student-teacher and student-student interaction; and 4) facilitating communicative learning activities.

The CLT basics workshop went as well as could be expected considering that the teachers and I didn’t know each other. Two of the six teachers could barely communicate in English, so I was glad that I had planned for that scenario. The other four teachers ranged from high-beginning to low-advanced levels of English language acquisition. Getting everyone to participate took patience and persuasion. Some attendees were shy and seemed overwhelmed by what was probably their first time having prolonged interaction with a native English speaker or being introduced to CLT.

Because this workshop was a one-shot deal, I wanted to leave participants with artifacts that would increase the odds of them applying in their own classrooms the things I had taught. For example, I had them complete a worksheet to evaluate and reflect on
four communicative learning activities that I explained and demonstrated. I don’t know how participants later used what I presented, but giving the workshop had one definite positive effect: it allowed me to strike up relationships with the town’s education official and its most motivated EFL teachers. The following year, we all worked with my Peace Corps supervisors to get the town its own TEFL volunteer.

After presenting the CLT basics workshop outside of my town, I decided to deliver it in my local community of practice. As with our first workshop, on feedback and error correction, I had to push the seven teachers in my CoP to meet for this voluntary professional development. By that point in my service, though, their resistance didn’t surprise or upset me. I had come to the conclusion that Nicaraguans are generally happy with their traditional values and slower-paced lifestyle, so they approach with skepticism any new activity that affects their work-life balance. In Nicaragua, family time, hobbies, and simply relaxing are considered as important as work.

After the second rescheduling of the CLT basics workshop, however, I decided to entice my colleagues to attend. I told them that not only would I be handing out copies of the *TEFL Manual*, but that lunch would be provided. Both treats were funded by a grant that I had secured from Fundación Uno, a non-profit committed to the well-being of Central America. The promise of free teaching resources *and* food did the trick. All but one colleague showed up, and the CLT basics workshop finally took place in my CoP.

The workshop went well. It was my first time presenting in my CoP, and though I was acquainted with the four teachers who were not my counterparts, the workshop greatly improved our personal and professional relationships. It also opened my eyes to
the very limited English-language proficiency of three members of my CoP. At first, these teachers struggled to understand me and were embarrassed to speak in front of their more advanced colleagues; however, as the workshop progressed and my counterparts and I showed ourselves to be learners who made mistakes without judgement and helped each other improve our skills and knowledge, the beginning-level ELLs became visibly and audibly more comfortable. By the end of the workshop, they were using their best English and only switching to Spanish about 30% of the time. This rate was alright with me because I wanted the teachers to feel safe and successful at our first workshop together. However, at our next workshop two months later, I would push my colleagues to express themselves without speaking Spanish.

The best part of the CLT basics workshop, in my opinion, was that I could do follow-up with the participants to see if my presentation had any impact on their teaching. At the end of the workshop, my colleagues and I agreed to each try one new communicative activity in our classrooms, then share how it went at our next workshop, including challenges encountered, how we overcame them, modifications made for our context, and the likelihood of continuing to use the activity. The four teachers who were not my counterparts ended up trying the activities that I had demonstrated in the workshop (which speaks to the power of modeling, even with adults). Happily, all reported positive results and ongoing application of the activities in their own classrooms. My three adventurous counterparts chose to try other activities from the *TEFL Manual*, with mixed results. One of the unexpected challenges reported was that, in large classes, an activity called Two-Circle Conversations, in which all students talk with a partner at
the same time, did not work well because the room became so loud that people couldn’t hear each other. No one in our CoP could think of a feasible solution to the problem, so we deemed the activity unsuitable for large classes.

The third and final professional development workshop that I gave in my CoP was on classroom management. I co-planned the workshop with a member of my CoP named Etan (pseudonym), who was not one of my counterparts. Etan worked in a tiny rural community an hour from my town, so co-planning required coordination and travel, but it was worth it. He was a young, enthusiastic teacher who spoke English at an advanced level and was always looking for ways to improve himself. As with Oscar, co-planning a workshop with Etan was educational for me. I learned from his TEFL expertise, cultural insight, and skill at teaching Spanish as well. Because both Etan and I delight in pleasantly surprising students and learning along with them, we decided that he would deliver his half of the workshop in English, and I would deliver my half in Spanish. Our intentions were three-fold: 1) to have a fun; 2) to build confianza between me and the beginning-level ELLs in our CoP; and 3) to help me improve my Spanish before the end of my Peace Corps service.

As with every professional development workshop in my CoP, giving the classroom management workshop required flexibility and understanding. It was postponed once due to an unforeseen scheduling conflict with another school event. Then, on the day that the workshop happened, Etan couldn’t attend because he had been called away to campaign for the national government’s reelection campaign, so I gave the workshop alone. It went well. This time, I successfully used a subtle version of
no-opt-out questioning to gently push the beginning-level ELLs to understand my words and speak in English. When I knew that a question would likely be just beyond their ability, I would ask the question of one or two of the more advanced speakers first. This gave the beginning-level ELLs a chance to hear both the prompt and their colleagues’ answers a couple of times before being asked to respond.

At this last workshop in my CoP, I noticed more voluntary participation and spontaneous communication in English than ever before by all members of the group. For example, Oscar volunteered to demonstrate his favorite attention-grabber when I discussed their use, and a beginning-level ELL offered to share his technique for getting to know students’ names. This participation was indicative of one of the best outcomes of developing a functioning CoP in my town: a spirit of friendship and professional support amongst English teachers who had previously been competitive, judgmental, and defensive concerning their language and teaching skills. Another good outcome was that the CoP helped me establish close relationships with local English teachers other than my counterparts, and one of those teachers ended up becoming a new counterpart who worked with the TEFL volunteer who replaced me. Finally, the CoP met the Peace Corps’ goal of sustainability. My counterpart Sara took over organizational leadership of the group upon my departure, and to this day keeps everyone, including me, connected through the smartphone application WhatsApp. About twice a month I group chat with the five members of my CoP who are most active online.

My three main secondary projects – giving professional development workshops and teaching community and university English classes – taught me a lot about EFL
education in Nicaragua. Regarding the development of confianza in teacher-student relationships, in all cases, it smooths the way for effective teaching and learning, but in situations where student participation is voluntary, confianza is critical. Good relationships are not, however, enough to keep students voluntarily attending a class with few markers of progress and no end-date. Concerning Communicative Language Teaching, it is feasible and effective for motivating Nicaraguan ELLs and improving their speaking and listening skills, but it requires a teacher with good classroom management who is comfortable conversing in English and knows why and how to apply the method. In many cases, getting Nicaraguan EFL teachers to that point requires focused, intensive, and sustained professional development activity, not one-off workshops, and organizing any sort of professional development in Nicaragua requires patience, flexibility, and persistence. Finally, flipping the classroom can be a very helpful practice for improving the oral communication skills of university-level EFL students.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Shortly before finishing my service, I learned that the Peace Corps was discontinuing the Master’s International Program. My reaction then, as now, is sorrow. I feel bad that more Americans will not have the opportunity I had. For me, the MIP was the perfect combination of travel, service, cultural exchange, language learning, and higher education. I am stronger, wiser and better for it, both personally and professionally. From the excellent TEFL training I received at HSU and in the Peace Corps, to the Nicaraguans who embraced me and my purpose in their country, to this final opportunity to reflect on my journey over the past four years, the MIP was an invaluable experience for which I feel the deepest gratitude.

This sentiment should not be taken as a sugar-coating of my Peace Corps service. Part of what made the experience valuable is that it was incredibly difficult. In addition to the challenges of acculturation and TEFL development work, there was physical hardship. I routinely pushed my way onto buses so overcrowded that passengers banged on the roof for want of air. I lived without running water for weeks and hand-washed my clothes for years. I lost twenty pounds and contracted Dengue Fever.

Incredibly, the rewards more than compensated for the challenges. By example, Nicaraguans taught me how to be happy in the face of limitation. They work hard, but appreciate the benefits of rest and recreation. They take pride in the simple, high quality things they have, from reliable old Toyota trucks to homegrown food and clothes made to order from the local tailor. Furthermore, the government and people of Nicaragua opened
my eyes to alternative ways of thinking and acting that have made me critical of American values, particularly surrounding capitalism. I consider my new perspective a good thing, but sometimes it makes me miss the camaraderie that I felt in my host country. Fortunately, I formed close and lasting relationships in Nicaragua, so it will always be a second home.

Regarding my Peace Corps work, I am satisfied with my contribution to the slow and steady improvement of EFL education in Nicaragua. Much remains to be done, but as one of my Peace Corps supervisors liked to say, development work is adding one’s raindrop to a river – each drop counts as the river makes its way to the sea. Highlights of my TEFL-development raindrop include helping my three counterparts notably improve their teaching through the adoption of communicative techniques and activities, and helping my university and community-class students improve their English.

I hope that my counterparts continue implementing the changes we made. I also hope that everyone I worked with in Nicaragua will teach others the things I taught them and continue their own education in English and TEFL. Finally, I hope that this project provides guidance for those teaching English in Nicaragua and similar contexts. Curiosity, compassion, resourcefulness, patience, flexibility, and optimistic tenacity are imperative for anyone working abroad. For those working in Nicaraguan TEFL development specifically, I return to the five major lessons from my Master’s International experience to recommend that educators:

- establish and maintain positive personal relationships with HCNs
- focus on the professional development of Nicaraguan EFL teachers
• concentrate on improving those teachers’ English speaking and listening skills
• concentrate on improving those teachers’ classroom management skills, and
• help those teachers adopt student-centered, communicative teaching practices to support student motivation and improve students’ English speaking and listening skills

The ability to communicate through a common language, be it English or Spanish, goes a long way toward building good relationships between Nicaraguans and Americans, but it is only a first step. Therefore, I consider the 27 months of cultural exchange in which I participated in Nicaragua to be just as valuable as my TEFL development work there. Fewer than 40 years ago, many Nicaraguans were at war with U.S.-backed troops. Suspicion, tension, and great differences of opinion remain. When discussing politics and world affairs with Nicaraguan friends, we agree that Nicaragua and the U.S. would likely take opposing sides in a future conflict. Even now, Nicaraguans are acutely aware of the racially-tinged nationalism in the U.S., and it has negatively affected their opinion of my country. Personally, like many Americans, I knew very little about Nicaragua before living there, so I was susceptible to believing whatever I was told about the country and its people. Thankfully, Peace Corps service had a huge impact on me and those closest to me, both Americans and Nicaraguans, by replacing stereotypes and misconceptions with understanding and compassion. I thus encourage people to join the Peace Corps and visit or live in places like Nicaragua.
APPENDIX A:

Getting To Know You Survey

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<th>Name</th>
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**Getting To Know You Survey**

**Directions:**
Fold the paper on the dark vertical line so that the eight columns on the right are folded back. Then read each statement below. Rate each statement from 0 to 5 according to how well the description fits you (0 = Not at All to 5 = Very True). Next unfold the paper and transfer each number over to the outlined box on the same row. Finally, add the numbers in each column to find the total score for each multiple intelligence area. The highest possible score in one area is 15. How many ways are you smart?

**Which of the following are true about you? 0-5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Naturalist</th>
<th>Mathematical-Linguistic</th>
<th>Verbal-Linguistic</th>
<th>Musical-Rhythmic</th>
<th>Visual-Spatial</th>
<th>Bodily-Kinesthetic</th>
<th>Interpersonal</th>
<th>Intrapersonal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy singing and I sing well.</td>
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<td>I love crossword puzzles and other word games.</td>
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<td>I like spending time by myself.</td>
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<td>Charts, maps, and graphic organizers help me learn.</td>
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<td>I learn best when I can talk over a new idea.</td>
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<td>I enjoy art, photography, or doing craft projects.</td>
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<td>I often listen to music in my free time.</td>
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<td>I get along well with different types of people.</td>
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<td>I often think about my goals and dreams for the future.</td>
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<td>I enjoy studying about the earth and nature.</td>
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<td>I enjoy caring for pets and other animals.</td>
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<td>I love projects that involve acting or moving.</td>
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<td>Written assignments are usually easy for me.</td>
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<td>I can learn new math ideas easily.</td>
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<td>I play a musical instrument (or would like to).</td>
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<td>I am good at physical activities like sports or dancing.</td>
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<td>I like to play games involving numbers and logic.</td>
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<td>My best way to learn is by doing hands-on activities.</td>
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<td>I love painting, drawing, or designing on the computer.</td>
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<td>I often help others without being asked.</td>
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<td>I enjoy being outside in all types of weather.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love the challenge of solving a difficult math problem.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having quiet time to think over ideas is important to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I read for pleasure every day.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Totals**

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APPENDIX B:

The Peace Corps’ Expectations for Counterpart Teachers

1. Co-planning
   a. Occurs on a consistent weekly schedule
   b. Consistent attendance and open communication
   c. Utilize structured lesson plan format (ex. 4MAT)
   d. Strive towards co-planning conducted in 100% in English (see #3)
   e. Use student-centered teaching methodology (see #4)

2. Co-teaching (total: minimum 16 hours)
   a. BEFORE co-teaching begins at start of service, Volunteer conducts peer observation (2x minimum)
   b. Regular co-teaching occurs only after co-planning
   c. Volunteer not left alone in classroom with no disruptions
   d. Occurs on a consistent weekly schedule
   e. Clear roles, responsibilities, and participation during lessons (example: 50-50, progresses to Volunteer feedback/observations)
   f. Strive towards classroom teaching conducted in 100% in English (see #3)
   g. Use student-centered teaching methodology (see #4)

3. Improved and increased use of English
   a. Strive towards co-planning and co-teaching conducted in 100% in English
      i. 1st semester: no less than 30% in English
      ii. 2nd semester: no less than 65% in English
      iii. End of 3rd semester: 100% in English
   b. improved fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary
      i. Use Top Notch assessment – 3x during service
         - Baseline: November – December, start of Volunteer’s service
         - Mid: October – November, one year of Volunteer’s service
         - Final: administers July – September, towards end of Volunteer’s service
      ii. Based on assessment results, plan for improvement

4. Use of student-centered teaching methodology (all required)
   a. Communicative activities (games, information gap activities, dialogues, skits, pair/group work, student-student interaction)
   b. Resource development: Creation and use of materials (flashcards, posters, game boards, pictures, music, graphic organizers, mini-books)
   c. Use of different assessment methods (questioning, think-pair-share, short answer quizzes, exit cards, self-assessment, interviews, role plays, rubrics)
   d. Inclusion: Gender equity practices, special needs support, learning styles (pair/group work, equal student participation, diverse activities and techniques)
   e. Classroom management (rules, routines, early bird activities, exit tickets, daily outlines, class log/correction sheet)
   f. Appropriate input (clear procedural language, simplified language when necessary)
The Peace Corps’ Expectations for Counterpart Teachers (Continued)

5. Positive attitude and open communication
   a. Has clear, targeted goals and plan to reach them
   b. Regular communication (ex. Text or phone call about missed classes or planning sessions, interest in coursework, absence due to illness or personal issue)
   c. Self-reflection on teaching (after every lesson, weekly, monthly)
   d. Cultural exchange
      i. Counterparts help Volunteer with community and school integration
      ii. Counterpart looks out for Volunteer’s safety and security
      iii. Counterpart: Learns about USA and Volunteer; Volunteer: learns about Nicaragua and CP

6. Continued professional development for English
   a. Community of Practice (CoP) – required
   b. Present or co-present workshop session/s (minimum 1 listed option)
      i. NicaTESOL (mandatory for Volunteer after 1 year of service + 1 counterpart)
      ii. Regional conferences
      iii. In site (at TEPCE or other)
   c. Attend a workshop or continuing education class/es (minimum 2 listed options)
      i. Peace Corps In-Service Trainings
      ii. University course
      iii. In site workshop/pedagogic circle
      iv. Use of Duolingo, US Department of State classes, MOOCs
      v. Apply to/attendance of continuing education program (ex. SIT, TEA, STEP)
      vi. Attend conversation class (formal/informal)
   d. Participate in peer observation and feedback sessions
      i. Peer observation (minimum 2x): November – December, start of Volunteer’s service
         • Volunteer conducts peer observation: only observing to get familiar with counterparts’ teaching style, strengths, and areas of need
         • Counterpart conducts peer observation: only observing to get familiar with Volunteer’s teaching style, strengths, and areas of need
      ii. Feedback: July – September, towards end of Volunteer’s service
         • Volunteer conducts observation, then gives feedback (3x minimum)
         • Counterpart conducts observation, then gives feedback (1x minimum)
### 4MAT Lesson Plan Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson Title (topic or theme):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date/Lesson #:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Required:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Developers:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Learning Objective(s): |
| Skills: (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Critical Thinking): |
| ✔ |
| ✔ |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase/Time/Materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOTIVATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFORMATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRACTICE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPLICATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D:

Key Determinants of Behavior Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Determinants of Behavior Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The 3 Most Powerful Determinants</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Self-efficacy/Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An individual's belief that he or she can do a particular behavior given their current knowledge and skills; the set of knowledge, skills or abilities necessary to perform a particular behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Social Norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception that people important to an individual think that s/he should do the behavior; norms have two parts: who matters most to the person on a particular issue, and what s/he perceives those people think s/he should do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Positive or Negative Consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What a person thinks will happen, either positive or negative, as a result of performing a behavior. This includes advantages (benefits)/disadvantages of the behavior, attitudes about the behavior, perceived action efficacy (whether or not the person thinks the action will be effective in overcoming a problem or accomplishing something that the person wants), and perceived positive and negative attributes of the action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Determinants</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The degree of availability (to a particular audience) of the needed products (e.g., fertilizer, ITNs, condoms) or services (e.g., veterinary services, immunization posts) required to adopt a given behavior. This also includes an audience's comfort in accessing desired types of products or using a service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What makes it more difficult to perform a given behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Enablers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What makes it easier to perform a given behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gues for Action / Reminders:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The presence of reminders which help a person to remember to do a particular behavior or remember the steps involved in doing the behavior. This also includes key powerful events that triggered a behavior change in a person (e.g., &quot;my brother-in-law got AIDS&quot;; &quot;the tsunami hit&quot;).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Susceptibility (together with Perceived Severity, this is sometimes referred to as Perceived Risk)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A person's perception of how vulnerable they feel. For example, do they feel that it's possible that their crops could have cassava wilt? Is it possible for them to become HIV+?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Severity:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that the problem (which the behavior can prevent) is serious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of Divine Will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A person's belief that it is God's will (or the gods' will) for her/him to have the problem; and /or to overcome it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laws and regulations that affect behaviors and access to products and services. For example, the presence of good land title laws (and clear title) may make it more likely for a person to take steps to improve their farm land.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The set of history, customs, lifestyles, values and practices within a self-defined group. May be associated with ethnicity or with lifestyle, such as &quot;gay&quot; or &quot;youth&quot; culture. Culture often influences perceived social norms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**APPENDIX E:**

Counterpart Expectations Report Template

**Counterpart Expectations Report: February - June 2016**

Counterpart: Name  
Peace Corps Volunteer: Name

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Below Expectations</th>
<th>Approaching Expectations</th>
<th>Meets Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Co-planning</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Occurs on a consistent weekly schedule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Consistent attendance and open communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Utilize structured lesson plan format</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Strive towards co-planning conducted 100% in English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Co-teaching</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Occurs only after co-planning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. PCV not left alone in classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Occurs on a consistent weekly schedule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Clear roles, responsibilities, and participation during lessons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Improved and increased use of English</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. <em>Strive towards co-teaching in 100% English:</em> 1st Semester: 30% or more, 2nd Semester: 65% or more, End of 3rd Semester: 100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Improved fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Use Top Notch assessment: 3x during service (Baseline, Mid, and Final)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Use of student-centered teaching methodology</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. <em>Communicative activities:</em> 1. games, 2. information gap activities, 3. dialogues, 4. skits, 5. pair/group work, 6. student-student interaction, 7. other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Inclusion of gender equity practices and special needs, learning styles support:</td>
<td>1. pair/group work, 2. all students participate, 3. diverse activities and techniques, 4. other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Classroom management:</td>
<td>1. rules, 2. routines, 3. early bird activities, 4. exit tickets, 5. class agendas and objectives, 6. discipline system, 7. other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Positive attitude and open communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Have clear, targeted goals and a plan to reach them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Regular communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Self-reflection on teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Cultural exchange</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Continued professional development in TESL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Community of Practice - required</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Present or co-present workshop session(s), Minimum of 1:</td>
<td>1. at NicaTESOL, 2. at regional conferences, 3. in site, 4. other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Attend a workshop or continuing education class(es), Minimum of 2:</td>
<td>1. Peace Corps in-service training, 2. university course, 3. in-site workshop, 4. use of Duolingo, 5. U.S. Department of State class, 6. MOOCs, 7. attend a continuing education program (ex. SIT, TEA, STEP), 8. attend conversation class, 9. other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Participate in peer observation and feedback sessions: Baseline: no feedback, PCV conducts min. 2 at beginning of service, 2. Formal with feedback: min. 3 over 2 years, 3. other (ex: of Nicaraguan teachers)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Complete Written English Assignments, Minimum of 4:</td>
<td>1. blog entry, 2. professional development action plan, 3. yearly delegado report, 4. university assignment, 5. other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F:
Completed Class Observation Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level: 9th</th>
<th>3rd</th>
<th>6th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exp.</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Improved and Increased Use of English:
   - 100% in English: +
   - Semester: 30%

2. Communication Agenda and Expectations:
   - Communicate agenda and expectations: +

3. Use of Student-Centered Teaching:
   - Use of different assessment methods: +
   - Use of group work: +
   - Use of game boards: +

4. Other Notes:
   - Students were still loud:
   - Students were still testing:
   - Pretty good
APPENDIX G:

Student-Made Class Rules Poster

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Rules</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Respetar a todos.</td>
<td>1. Respect everyone.</td>
<td>1. Respect everyone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. No Copiar.</td>
<td>2. Don't cheat.</td>
<td>2. Don't cheat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. No Usar teléfono.</td>
<td>3. Don't use your Phone.</td>
<td>3. Don't use your Phone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Mantener limpio.</td>
<td>4. Keep the class clean.</td>
<td>4. Keep the class clean.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX H:

Functional-Dialogue Template

Shopping Dialogue

Customer: Excuse me, how much is this?  
Salesperson: That is ____ dollars and ____ cents.  
Customer: OK, and how much are these?  
Salesperson: Those are ____ dollars and ____ cents.  
Customer: OK, thank you.  
Salesperson: You’re welcome.
APPENDIX I:

Environmental Print in a Dedicated EFL Classroom
APPENDIX J:

Worksheet Designed to Integrate the Four Language Skills

Nicaraguan Diversity Activity

The Department of Masaya

Masaya is known as the capital of folklore. It is located between Managua and Granada. The typical __________ from Masaya are Mondogo Soup and Bahi. Masaya — a very famous handicrafts — where tourists — to visit to buy presents for their friends and family. Masaya also attracts tourists because of Coyotepe Fortress, Masaya Lagoon, and the Masaya —. Masaya also has a Patron Saint festival for San Jeronimo. During this festival there are processions and folkloric — where people wear traditional costumes — dance to marimba or chickeros —. Masaya has an indigenous neighborhood called Monimbo — preserves its traditions.

Questions

1. What is the typical food of Masaya?
2. Who is the patron saint?
3. Where is Masaya located?
4. What can you do in Masaya on vacation?
APPENDIX K:

Information Gap Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ability</th>
<th>Classmate</th>
<th>Yes or No</th>
<th>Complete Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>drive a car</td>
<td>Ex. Victor</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Victor can drive a car.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ride a horse</td>
<td>Ex. Osman</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Osman cannot ride a horse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cook tamales</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>milk a cow</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swim</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>play a musical instrument</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ride a bicycle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sew</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>build a house</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sing or dance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>draw or paint</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do something unique</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX L:

Board Game from Top Notch’s *Copy and Go* Book of Interactive Learning Activities
APPENDIX M:
Professional Development Workshop Handout

Handout 3: Six Error Correction Techniques

1. **Explicit Correction:**
   *Teacher says, “It’s ‘I’ve studied English for five years,’ not ‘since five years.’”*

   This technique calls explicit attention to the error, but it can make the student feel bad. This technique is most effective when introducing a new language feature because explicit correction helps clarify rules.

2. **Repeating Error as a Question:**
   *Teacher says, “Since five years?”*

   This technique calls less attention to the error. The student has the opportunity to self-correct.

3. **Requesting Clarification:**
   *Teacher says, “What was that?” or “Could you repeat please?”*

   This technique calls little attention to the student’s error, and it gives the student an opportunity to self-correct. However, it can be too subtle, suggesting that the student did not make an error, but that the teacher simply did not hear well.

4. **Correcting by Stating (or asking a question about) the Rule Involved:**
   *Teacher says, “‘Since’ points to the beginning, and ‘for’ is about duration.”*

   This technique gives the student a tool to avoid the error in the future.

5. **Questioning to Elicit Self or Peer Correction:**
   *Teacher asks, “Is it correct to say ‘since five years’?”*

   This technique can wake up the class and invite all students to think about how to correct one student’s error. This technique can also encourage solidarity and peer-to-peer learning; however, in a competitive classroom, it can aggravate tense relationships.

6. **Recasting, or Modeling the Correct Answer:**
   *Student says, “I’ve studied English since five years,” and the teacher responds, “You’ve studied English for five years.”*

   This technique does not call direct attention to the student error. However, a student, especially a young student, may not notice the correction and may instead think that the teacher is simply repeating what the student said.
WORKS CITED


