

April 2018

Positive Language Teaching: Culturally Responsive, Strengths-Based and Empathetic

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Recommended Citation

Anderson, Lauren; Hanken, Alyssa; and Horn, Tessa Noes, "Positive Language Teaching: Culturally Responsive, Strengths-Based and Empathetic" (2018). *Research in the Capitol*. 1.

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Positive Language Teaching: Culturally Responsive, Strengths-Based and Empathetic



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Positive Psychology: The scientific study of what goes right in life

Method in Classroom: Strengths-Based

Research Question:

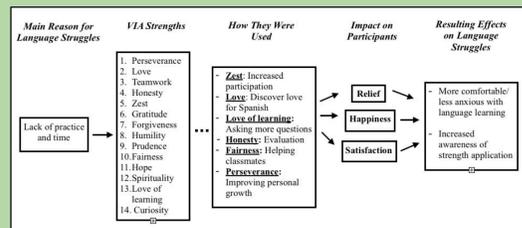
Will language learners who focus their attention on personal strengths have more control over their foreign language anxiety?

Methodology:

This was an IRB certified narrative study of how ESL and beginning Spanish language learners utilized their character strengths in the language classroom to manage foreign language anxiety. Students from four CIEP advanced writing courses as well as two Elementary Spanish 1 courses at the University of Northern Iowa were invited to participate.

- Participants were asked to complete the online VIA Inventory of Strengths, which generated their top twenty-four signature strengths from strongest to weakest.
- Participants completed three narrative frames
 - First, participants filled out a pre-assessment narrative frame, which documented their current strengths and weaknesses in the language classroom.
 - Second, participants were asked to focus on their top three character strengths and apply them to language learning each day for one week.
 - Lastly, participants were asked to reflect on this experience and document how they felt applying their strengths to learning the language.

Results:



Conclusion:

- Creatively using strengths led to students feeling relief, satisfaction, and overall comfort and confidence in the language classroom.
- Out of thirty-six students who agreed to participate, only seven filled out all three narratives.
 - A significant amount of students indicated that they were unaware of how to use their character strengths, therefore they did not complete the exercise.
- Therefore, this study suggests that educators should help students develop strategies to utilize their strengths as it has proved to help students feel more comfortable and confident in the language classroom.

Method in Classroom: Culturally Responsive Teaching

Research Question:

Identify the use and effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching specifically for adult Chinese students in the United States both in language learning (ESL) and in mainstream college classroom settings.

Methodology:

This was an IRB certified qualitative study that interviewed three professors and two Chinese students. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed for recurring themes. Participants for this research consisted of two Chinese students and three professors. One student participant had taken only mainstream academic classes at the University of Northern Iowa, while the other was in the mainstream college setting and had also previously been in ESL classes at UNI. Of the three professors, two were ESL educators and one was a mainstream educator in the College of Business.

Results:

- Lack of understanding of Chinese culture by mainstream educators
- Identified CRT teaching strategies specific to Chinese culture
 - Working on direct communication skills
 - Developing participation skills
 - Scaffolding group work by providing clear roles
 - Build confidence by knowing student strength in memorization and test taking
 - Accommodate for use of translation technology
- Identified general CRT strategies to which Chinese students responded positively
 - Incorporating materials or examples relating to home country
 - Accommodating language by allocating more time to take examinations
- Identified general CRT strategies Chinese students responded to negatively
 - Calling directly on students (in an effort to gain their perspective)
 - Discussion based classes

Conclusions:

The findings in this study have shown a critical need for more communication and collaboration between mainstream professors and those with Chinese cultural knowledge in order to best serve the needs of incoming Chinese students integrating into the U.S. classroom. Furthermore, the lack of culture specific literature calls for more CRT research to be done with specific cultural populations. Culture specific research could benefit the multitude of educators working with diverse populations in their classrooms by providing them with cultural knowledge and clear strategies for helping students from various cultures succeed in education.

Figure 1. Culturally Responsive Teaching (Shallenberger, 2017)



Shallenberger, M. 2017. Culturally Responsive Teaching. Retrieved from <https://theexchange.kleinisd.net/cultural-responsive-teaching-7b8451d022c3>
VIA Institute on Character. 2018. Character Strengths. Retrieved from <http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Portals/0/Character%20Strength%20Word%20Infographic.jpg>

Figure 2. Character Strengths (VIA Institute on Character, 2018)



Method in Classroom: Empathetic

Research Question:

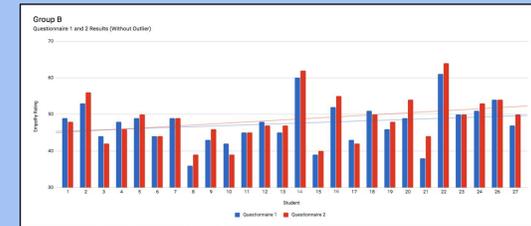
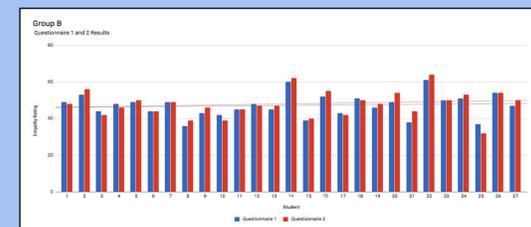
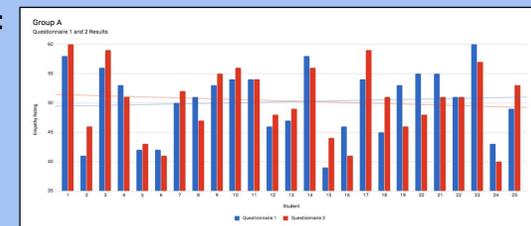
Does the inclusion of a photo or statistics of a refugee English Language Learner influence the empathic response of teachers?

Methodology:

This was an IRB certified quantitative survey study of the empathy levels of pre-service teachers in a higher education class at the University of Northern Iowa. This study utilized a control group, an experimental group, and two different data collections.

- Both groups completed the Toronto Empathy questionnaire as a baseline for their empathy ratings.
- Around 1.5 weeks later, both groups completed the Toronto Empathy questionnaire a second time.
 - Group A received information about a refugee and Group B received the same information along with a picture of the refugee prior to completing the questionnaire.
- All of the questionnaires were scored and the results from the first and second data collection were compared.

Results:



Conclusion:

- The results were inconclusive; more research needs to be done in order to definitively state that including pictures increases empathy ratings.
 - Group A: results concurred with previous research in that empathy ratings did not increase when only information was presented about a refugee
 - Group B's results: only a slight positive difference in empathy ratings between the first and second data collection
 - Group B's results without the outlier: demonstrated a very significant difference between the results of the first and second data collection
- It would be beneficial to include a larger group of participants and/or a focus on individual results rather than group results in the future.

This preliminary research demonstrates the value of stronger communication between mainstream and ESL teachers, strength interventions to manage foreign language anxiety, and increased empathy in teachers in hopes of creating a successful environment for language learners. As indicated through this research, this goal could be achieved through teachers seeking to gain a deeper understanding of a student's culture, encouraging students to utilize personal strengths, and presenting an image along with a written description of students to teachers.