Introduction

This portfolio is structured around a particular Northwestern course, LING 380 (Focus area: conversation). While my teaching philosophy is a general philosophy of ESL teaching and learning, the sample syllabus, lesson plan, and activity plan provided represent how I would implement this particular course.

I chose to develop these materials in the way that I did in order to reflect four themes that appear in my teaching philosophy, which in turn are based on the work we've done throughout the quarter. The themes are these:

- A great deal of input is provided, and that input is meaningful and realistic. Successful communication is the end goal of learning, and it is the most important part of the classroom experience. Because the function of language is communication, acquisition of linguistic knowledge occurs best when communication is made contingent upon it.
- Linguistic instruction focuses on increasing the student's level of attention to regularities in the input they receive, facilitating the acquisition process. It doesn't provide the student with usable linguistic knowledge directly.
- Student communication takes up most of the class time.
- There are regular, built-in opportunities for evaluation.

These follow from a particular attitude towards language acquisition:

- Language can be acquired without any formal instruction from diverse, disorganized, and in some ways deficient input. However, this body of input is also large and meaningful. Our first languages are acquired in this way, and second languages may be as well.
- The "rules" of a given language are difficult to articulate even when they are well-understood, yet fluent speakers tend to converge on most grammaticality judgments. That is, there is some body of knowledge possessed by some speakers that could be called "knowledge of English", but its contents are not consciously known by speakers in the form of rules.
- Second language acquisition uses roughly the same mechanism as first language acquisition, with the greater difficulty coming from the facts that fine phonetic and semantic distinctions are more difficult to make with age, that older second language learners are often not completely immersed in a second language environment, and that first-language knowledge can cause interference.

These ideas are based on the readings we've done throughout the quarter, and reaffirmed on the basis of current theories of ESL teaching and empirical evidence regarding successful teaching methods. While there may be practical reasons to use other teaching methods sometimes, I think that the foundation of my ESL classroom should be as described above, and that this is broad enough to allow variation in day-to-day classroom activities and accommodate students with diverse abilities and motivations.