Weaving webs of connection: Empathy, perspective taking, and students' motivation

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Abstract

L2 motivation is a relational phenomenon, shaped by teacher responsiveness (Lamb, 2017; Ushioda, 2009). Little, however, is known about the practices in which responsiveness is manifested. Drawing on research from the culturally responsive teaching paradigm (Petrone, 2013), and highlighting the role of empathy and perspective taking (Warren, 2018), the aim of this ethnographic case study of two lessons with a focus on poetry is to develop a relational understanding of the evolution of motivation. Analyses reveal how perspective taking has instructional and interactional dimensions, and how connections between lesson content and funds of knowledge with origins in students' interactions with popular culture bring additional layers of meaning to learning. It is suggested that while connections that arise through perspective taking practices shape students' in-the-moment motivational responses, they also accumulate in ways that lead to enduring motivational dispositions.

Keywords: L2 motivation; teacher-student relationships; culturally responsive teaching; funds of knowledge; empathy; perspective taking; connected learning

1. Introduction

Learning to make meaning with language is an inherently social process that involves interaction with others (Byrnes, 2013). However, despite the fundamentally relational nature of learning/using a language, and the recognition that success "depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom" (Stevick, 1980, p. 4), the "relationality" of teacher–student relationships has not been systematically researched (Mercer, 2016, p. 107). As applied linguistics moves into a social era (Benson, 2017), focus on relationships between teachers and students has become of greater importance (Mercer, 2015, 2016). Not only are psychological constructs such as motivation, willingness to communicate and language anxiety being reframed as *relational* phenomena (see e.g., De Costa, 2015; Gkonou & Miller, 2017; MacIntyre, Barker, & Sparling, 2017), but motivational influences stemming from the teacher–student relationship are also beginning to be explored (Henry & Thorsen, 2018a, 2018b).

In social interactions in language classrooms, connections between teachers and students are central in shaping learning behaviors (Arnold & Murphey, 2013). Connecting with students involves the capacity for empathy (Mercer, 2016). Empathy is foundational in the development of learner-centered and facilitative classroom environments. Skilled language teachers are empathetic. They are able to recognize and understand "the needs and emotional states of their students" (Oxford, 2016, p. 18). In a state-of-the-art review of the motivational dimension of language teaching, Lamb (2017) identifies empathy as *the* defining characteristic of teachers successful in creating engaging learning activities and motivational environments. It is a capacity for "responsiveness" founded on "the personal quality of empathy" and developed over years of practice, which Lamb argues "defines the successful motivator" (p. 312).

If motivation in L2 classrooms is a relational phenomenon shaped by teachers' responsiveness, there is value in studying how empathy is manifested in teacher–student interactions. While surveys of teachers' social and emotional intelligence and their beliefs about empathic relationships are now providing empirically-based insights into the importance of empathy in the social environment of language classrooms (Gkonou & Mercer, 2018; Mercer & Gkonou, 2017), ethnographic approaches can shed light on the ways in which empathy plays out in interactions between teachers and students and, as a relational practice, how it can influence students' engagement and motivation.

While it is at the "very localized level of students' learning experience that the real potential for engaging (or disengaging) their motivation may lie" (Ushioda, 2013, p. 236), research examining motivational phenomena in the classroom

contexts in which they emerge is thin on the ground. Taking up Ushioda's (2016) call for a "richer and sharper focus" (p. 574) on local and particular phenomena, and with the aim of generating situated understandings of language teachers' responsiveness (Lamb, 2017), the aim of this ethnographic case study is to explore language teacher empathy in teacher–student interactions. Specifically, we want to consider a particular type of empathy that involves *attunement* to the perspectives and experiences students gain in social interaction outside the classroom, and, in the design and delivery of learning opportunities, *orientations* to these cultural frames of reference. Before outlining the purpose of the study and the methodology, we first review research on culturally responsive pedagogies.

2. Literature review

2.1. Culturally responsive pedagogies

In literacy education a growing body of work is investigating the intersections between young people's interactions with popular culture and the development of academic skills. In this work, *funds of knowledge* (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) is a central concept. Developed in pedagogies designed to support the teaching of minority children, *funds of knowledge* (hereafter FoK) refer to the cultural frames and linguistic resources that young people bring to classrooms. In pedagogies aimed at improving the life situations and opportunities of disadvantaged youth, a primary aim is to forge strategic connections between academic knowledge and community- and culturally-based ways of knowing (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll et al., 1992). Attracting the attention of mainstream education research, the content domain of FoK has been extended to additionally encompass experiences gained in social interactions outside of home and community environments (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). In these emerging understandings, popular culture practices and networked communities are identified as sites of identity development with particular importance for FoK (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Subero, Vujasinović, & Esteban-Guitart, 2017).

Popular culture is central in young people's lives, and contemporary pedagogies need to engage with students' out-of-school experiences. With a focus on connections between academic knowledge and young people's "popular culture funds of knowledge" (Petrone, 2013, p. 250), research has investigated how intersections between institutional and informal ways of knowing can foster engagement and enhance academic achievement (Hall, Burns, & Edwards, 2011; Moje & Hinchman, 2004; Petrone, 2013). As this research shows, when teachers are responsive to students' lives beyond the classroom, and when popular culture FoK are activated as a part of learning, cultural experiences that are otherwise

marginalized in school become a resource for knowledge-development. When instruction is designed and carried out with the aim of integrating ways of knowing common in popular cultural practices with those that are academically framed and educationally determined, points of contact are created (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Vasudevan, 2008). Such intersections are important, and can function "as a way of helping students to connect more effectively to new ideas [and] as a way of engaging and motivating students" (Moje & Hinchman, 2004, p. 326).

Examples of ways in which intersections between students' popular culture FoK and academic content have a positive influence on motivation is to be found in work by Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002, 2004). Here, in an urban high-school setting in the US, the FoK of hip-hop lyrics functioned as a resource for interpreting canonical poetry. As students took part in the critical comparison of genres, positive effects on engagement were observed. These included increased participation in discussions, and greater effort expended on assignments. These authors also describe observing examples of deep engagement with analytical work. Students were "excited about the juxtaposition of rap and canonical texts," and classrooms were abuzz with energy (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2004, p. 265).

FoK are generated in social activities in on- and off-line settings (Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Subero et al., 2017). Thus, in addition to cultural knowledge gained in local practices, the FoK of contemporary youth also encompass digital literacy skills, and knowledge generated through digitally-mediated communication (Schwartz, 2015). For many twenty-first century youth, FoK comprise semiotic resources that are distributed across time, space, activities and artefacts, and evolve through the social use of digital media. As Subero and colleagues (2017) explain, when activated in contemporary educational contexts, these semiotic resources "can be materialized into transferable elements that can help to connect school practice to the learning contexts and practices that take place at home, with peers and with those practices mediated by digital devices" (p. 260). In the context of activities that involve examining, circulating, valuing and appropriating students' FoK, possibilities for meaningful self-expression can be further enhanced when text-creation becomes a multidiscursive, multimodal social practice (Schwartz, 2015).

While culturally responsive pedagogies involve the creation of "explicit curricular bridges" between academic imperatives and students' FoK (Petrone, 2013, p. 252; Schwartz, 2015), another approach designed to facilitate interactions is the creation of what Dyson (2003) calls a *permeable curriculum*. Unlike elements of instructional design aimed at creating clearly delineated spaces within which connections between cultural knowledge and academic understanding can take place, in a permeable curriculum connections are allowed to occur organically. In a pedagogy characterized by permeability, teachers are receptive to students'

experiences, and work in ways that facilitate the dynamic interplay of knowledge developed in the classroom, and knowledge originating outside school. At its core, permeability involves openness. As Dyson (1993) explains,

> Openness . . . is not easy if curricular mainroads have rigid boundaries within which children must respond. In such a curriculum, the "sense" of each task may be to please the teacher, a kind of sense that is differentially meaningful to children. In contrast, a permeable curriculum assumes and, indeed, exploits children's susceptibility to the appeal of meaningful activity and their sensitivity to situational context. Further, it acknowledges the complexity of children's social worlds and cultural materials. And it attempts not only to create bridges between worlds, but to support children's own naming and manipulating of the dynamic relationships among worlds. (p. 217)

For teachers whose professional practice has the characteristics of permeability, there is a heightened sensitivity to opportunities to support students' agency. They are accommodating of the experiences students bring to learning, and receptive to knowledge genres, cultural practices and modes of participation that are highly familiar to students, yet rarely made meaningful in classroom learning. In classrooms characterized by permeability, where teaching is centered on "meaningful activity" (cf. Stevick's [1998] notion of *meaningful action*), and where teachers promote students' agency and meaning-making capacities, conditions conducive for motivation and engagement are generated (Dyson, 1993).

2.2. Teacher empathy: Empathic concern and perspective taking

The openness that is central to culturally responsive teaching is founded on the teacher's capacity for empathy (McAllister & Irvine, 2002). Empathy has an emotional dimension (empathic concern) and a cognitive dimension (perspective taking) (Davis, 1994). While *empathic concern* involves the capacity to experience feelings of sympathy, compassion and understanding, *perspective taking* is the tendency to "adopt the psychological point of view of others in everyday life" (Davis, 1994, p. 57). Teacher empathy can be understood as a refined element of the moral responsibility of caring for students (empathic concern) and "the teacher's ability to understand the classroom from her students' perspectives" (perspective taking) (Rychly & Graves, 2012, p. 45). Teaching that is culturally responsive builds on empathic concern and perspective taking (Warren, 2018). Because perspective taking is needed in order to develop empathic concern, it can be understood as the "anchoring dimension" of the exercise of empathy in social interactions (Davis, 1994; Warren, 2018). At root, perspective taking involves the ability to solicit information and to make inferences. It is the driver of decision-making, and the tool by which teachers gain insights into the

lives and concerns of students as unique individuals. Most importantly, it is the means by which teachers are able to create opportunities for students to engage with new forms of knowledge on *their* terms.

As Warren (2018) explains, "simply playing a popular song during a lesson is not evidence of a teacher's cultural responsiveness" (p. 172). Rather, culturally responsive teaching involves perspective taking that manifests itself in engaging personally with students' experiences, and teaching and interacting through students' cultural filters. Because perspective taking leads to a "pedagogy of listening" (cf. Low & Sonntag, 2013), it enables teachers to become aware of and gain access to students' FoK (Warren, 2018). It functions as a means of knowing who students are and "translates pragmatically into any number of routine *instructional* or *interactional* [emphasis added] habits that allow teachers to enter the life worlds of their students" (p. 7). Most essentially, perspective taking means "responding flexibly" to students "moment-by-moment" (Warren, 2018, p. 175).

3. Study and purpose

In language teaching, responsiveness is the defining professional characteristic of successful motivators (Lamb, 2017). Empathy is the foundation upon which responsiveness is developed, and it lies at the heart of responsive teaching (Rychly & Graves, 2012; Warren, 2018). In line with the view that perspective taking is the "anchoring dimension" in the exercise of empathy (Davis, 1994; Warren, 2018), and with the aim of contributing to the development of a theoretically-informed account of the motivational influences of language teacher responsiveness (Lamb, 2017), the purpose of this exploratory case study is to examine perspective taking in teacher–student interactions.

4. Method

In applied linguistics, case study research involves the close-up examination of an individual entity in a manner and context interesting both theoretically and descriptively (Duff, 2008). Case studies are carried out against "the backdrop of existing theory and research," and aim to generate insights into the phenomenon in focus (Duff, 2014, p. 237). To develop an understanding of the responsiveness theorized to be characteristic of successful motivators (Lamb, 2017), classrooms where relationships are positive, where students are motivated, and where teachers are aware of and interested in students' lives and experiences outside school provide suitable sites for research. Here we draw on data collected in a 9th grade class as part of the Motivational Teaching in Swedish Secondary English (MoTiSSE) project (Henry, 2018; Henry, Korp, Sundqvist, & Thorsen, 2018;

Henry & Thorsen, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Henry, Sundqvist, & Thorsen, 2019). Ethnographic research was conducted in the classrooms of 16 teachers identified from a randomly-drawn sample (N = 252) as being knowledgeable about and interested in students' out-of-school activities involving English, possessing a professional practice informed by these insights, and having students who were generally motivated. A detailed account of the recruitment procedures is provided in Henry and Thorsen (2018a, 2018b).

4.1. Data

In the MoTiSSE project, ethnographic observations of 258 individual lessons were carried out. Examples of responsive teaching involving orientations to students' "popular culture funds of knowledge" (Petrone, 2013, p. 250) were numerous. These orientations were evident in activity design, and in teacher–student interactions. In the current study, we focus on two lessons observed by the first author. With the aim of developing students' understandings of literary genres, in these lessons exploration of poetic form took place through the FoK of online media practices. The data consists of fieldnotes and semi-structured interviews with the teacher and the students. The teacher interview and the student interviews were conducted in English.

4.2. Analytical procedures

Analyses were carried out using a multi-stage, holistic approach. In a first stage, repeated close readings were made of the fieldnotes and interview transcripts. Next, these were re-read and coded. Here, the aim was to identify specific examples of practice that could be understood as involving a form of responsiveness. In a third stage, theoretical perspectives gained from readings of the literature on culturally responsive pedagogy (described in the review of the literature) were brought in. From this point onwards, the analyses proceeded in an iterative manner. From the descriptions of situated interactions, broader and increasingly abstract understandings of responsiveness were developed. To enhance interpretive validity, these analyses were discussed between the authors over a period of months, and drafts of the paper were sent to the teacher for comments and feedback.

4.3. Ethics

The teacher and the students were informed in writing about the study, its procedures, and the ethical guidelines. Written informed consent to participate was obtained.

5. Results

To provide a broader relational context within which classroom interactions can be understood, the analyses are framed by extracts from interviews with the teacher (Noomi, a self-chosen pseudonym) and her students.

5.1. The teacher: Responsiveness as an aspect of identity

While all of the teachers in the MoTiSSE project expressed awareness of the need to create connections between target content and students' cultural experiences, and designed learning opportunities in which students could explore popular culture domains and use skills and knowledge gained in popular cultural practices, the degree to which practice was systematically informed by these insights differed.

As Golombek (2017) writes, "what teachers do in the classroom is intricately tied to how they perceive themselves as teachers" (p. 19). For Noomi, her interest in the students as young adults, and her desire to connect subject content with experiences from life beyond school were the lodestars of her teaching. Perceiving awareness and responsiveness to be the personal and professional qualities defining of who she was as a teacher, Noomi emphasized the importance of not monopolizing knowledge, and of creating opportunities for students to express knowledge that is particularly theirs:

> And when it comes to the subject, I need to update myself. I think it's important for you as a teacher to update your content. I think you need to study and always be a step ahead. But also to allow yourself to not to know everything, and to let the students inform you, and teach you, and help you. And I will always try to teach and bring up subjects or examples out of their life and their reality, and then connect that to other subjects and so on and so forth.

The perception that learning is bi-directional, that she also learns from her students, is a recurring theme in the interview. For example, she talks about how knowledge gained in interaction with one student can be subsequently used in interactions with others:

> For example, like there is these TV-series like Gossip Girl and Vampire Diaries and all these things that they are watching. If I would ask the question, for example if I sit and talk to them, and I ask them, "So what do you do?" And they say "I watch this series." "And what is it called?" "Vampire Diaries," then the conversation doesn't end there just because I don't know anything about it. For it's more like, "Oh tell me, what is it about?" Because I'm thinking that if there is something that I don't know, and they are spending all this time understanding it, then maybe they can teach me something. And if I learn something, even if I just remember a little bit of it, that would be probably useful for me when I'm building a relationship with another student that is watching that.

Noomi's concern with students' cultural experiences, and the need to acknowledge everyday knowledge, is particularly apparent with regard to technology:

> *I think you have to use this kind of things as tools, you know, and you have to use chatgroups as something in school. You have to use the stuff that they use every day. You have to use it. You cannot continue and try to …*[1] *I mean, sure, I want them to read like physical books as well. But then I need to introduce it so that they will accept it and they will think it's exciting and they will make a big deal out of it, you know? It's like with poetry. None of the kids like poetry, so I have to try to introduce it and make it exciting so that they will love poetry. I want, my goal is that in the end of this course, I want them to continue writing on the blog, so even when they're finished, I want the kids to continue writing.*

As she indicates, the activation of students' FoK – here practices of online communication – can add an additional dimension to working with subject content and has the potential to generate engagement of a more enduring nature.

5.2. The students: Having a teacher who is responsive to needs and concerns

For the students, Noomi is a teacher who is involved and non-judgmental: "Well, there is real sense of togetherness in our group, I think, and she has enabled us to feel safe with all the others in the class. So we can talk absolutely anything without being afraid of being wrong" (Boy). In addition to the security and openness in English classes, students talk of Noomi's ability to connect with them as individuals and as a group:

> *She has the class with her. She is like a friend, but also an adult. So she's not … not in the sense that she just wants to be a part of the group, and will just play around, but rather that she is very … a person who you can look up to.* (Girl 1)

For another student, Noomi is a teacher with the capacity to adapt, and someone who acts at the intersection between the concerns of education and the concerns of youth: "She is very young at heart. But at the same time very adult. I mean, I can't explain it, she is somewhere in between, and she … yes, she adapts to the students" (Girl 2). A third student describes how, in being present and open, Noomi is able to take their perspective:

> *She is not a teacher who you just … She is here in the present. So we can bring up things in conversation that I couldn't bring up with for example* [name], *but you can with Noomi. … She makes it so that we are comfortable with her, and she takes up everything, all of our questions. Which most of the other teachers wouldn't do, because they think such things are uncomfortable or don't belong here.* (Girl 3)

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[1] Unspaced ellipses like this one indicate pauses.

Throughout the interviews, students talk about how they are motivated during lessons, and how English is a class they enjoy and look forward to:

For me, Noomi's lessons are a little special compared to the others. The others are like more of a burden, if you can call it that. Noomi's are more a good thing, something you want to go to. (Girl 2)

For me, I am very motivated. And I think it has a lot to do with what I said before, that we really have fun, it is really enjoyable. Togetherness, a feeling of togetherness. (Boy)

In Noomi's classes students consistently demonstrated engagement and participated enthusiastically in class discussions (see also Henry & Thorsen, 2018b).

5.3. Practice categories

Perspective taking is theorized as a disposition that is manifested in both *instructional* and *interactional* practices (Warren, 2018). These practice categories provide the framing for our analyses. First, in the lesson where the poetry project was introduced, perspective taking is examined as an *instructional practice*. Then, in the immediately subsequent lesson, it is explored as an *interactional practice*. In the sections that follow, the fieldnotes are presented in their original form, all of the interaction taking place in English.

5.3.1. Perspective taking as an instructional practice

Excerpt 1

"OK guys, so what's poetry?" Noomi asks.
Immediately the students respond, putting up hands and being invited to speak, and, as they come up with ideas, Noomi writes these up on the board.
"It is art in text form"
"It has a rhythm"
"Expressing thoughts and feelings"
"It is usually short"
"OK," says Noomi "So what are your feelings towards poetry?"
It is quiet. Then come some responses:
"I feel like it is something I have to process for a long time"
"A poem can give new impressions and perspectives"
Noomi then goes around and asks specific students for their feelings are about poetry. The students' feelings are mixed.

Although the students do not appear as negative as Noomi seems to believe ("None of the kids like poetry"), their responses are nevertheless cautious ("I feel like it is something I have to process for a long time"). The students' ambivalence

confirms Noomi's assumption of needing to proceed in a way that will "make it exciting." She continues by explaining that they will look at the stylistic conventions of poetry and that students can draw on this knowledge in creating their own poetic work:

> Excerpt 2
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> "What I want us to do is to create a blog where you can publish your piece of art, where you can share and where we can all see all of your ideas, your feelings, and your thoughts, and then I also want us to have a Facebook group where we can discuss the poems and give more critical feedback on your thinking. So the blog will start off closed, while we are working on the poems, and then will become open, so that anyone anywhere can read them. But closed first while we are working on them. And then open. And Facebook is where we can be critical. Where we analyse the poems that you write. So the blog is for publishing and the Facebook group is for discussion." She continues, "And you know we will be connecting to things we have been doing before, the analysis of literature, critique, and there are of course links to genre." … "Could you Luke, create a Facebook group. And then invite us. And you can create a name. And you can create the layout. It can be as you like."
>
> Luke and two students next to him get out their phones and immediately start creating the group. "But nobody uses Facebook any more" says Luke. (I ask Luke about the social media that he and others use. Well, we used to use Facebook, but now it is like Instagram and Periscope, he says. But Facebook is OK. We know it and it is cool that we are using it in class.)

As recounted in the interviews, the students experience a sense of "togetherness" in Noomi's classroom. Drawing on the social cohesion in the class, Noomi proposes that the work with poetry should take place in a networked form. Here, social media platforms (a blog and a Facebook page) provide representational spaces within which the students' work can circulate. In the context of a genre that students can experience as intimidating, the integration of social media into the instructional design can be understood as a form of perspective taking. By drawing on FoK comprising digital literacy skills (Schwartz, 2015), engagement with an unfamiliar genre takes place in an everyday discourse context. Specifically, because the production and analysis of texts is carried out in a networked environment, and because these digital spaces are student-generated ("And you can create a name. And you can create the layout. It can be as you like")[2], the design involves a bridging between the discourse domains of classroom learning and the cultural practices of social media interaction (Schwartz, 2015; Subero, Vujasinović, & Esteban-Guitart, 2017).

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[2] Given the focus of the unit and the teacher's approach to the topic, it is perhaps no coincidence that the students elected to call the blog Dead Poets Society.

Having transferred responsibility for the creation of the blog and the Facebook group to the students, Noomi shifts focus and begins to explore poetic conventions:

Excerpt 3

"Rhythm" says Noomi. "What is rhythm?" She then produces a pair of bongos.
"Bongos. Does anybody play these?"
She then says "Rhyming"
She goes around the class eliciting single syllable words that rhyme.
Each pair of words she then sounds out on the drum. (One word on each bongo drum, and with emphasis on the stress.)
"Um Um" ... everyone laughs
When someone can't immediately come up with a word pair, Noomi bangs the drums faster and faster, creating a sense of tension ... everyone laughs
As they go round and round the class the drumming gets louder and faster, as do the responses.
"Now let's do two syllable words."
And Noomi bangs out two syllables on the drums 'da, da; da, da.' For each pair, Noomi sounds out the sounds on the drums:
snowing, blowing
raining, shaming
"Now sentences" she says. "Roses are red, violets are blue, I am ugly and so are you."
"So now you have to find something that rhymes with blue!"
"Now everyone stand up." The students stand up and Noomi goes around with the 'Roses are red, violets are blue, I am ugly and so are you' line and elicits responses, lines that follow on and rhyme. There is laughter at some of the crazy things that the students come up with:
"give me something and I will come home with you"
"you are a monkey and belong in a zoo"
"I am in love and you don't have a clue"
"no, no, no, no, two two two two"
"you are so ugly but I still love you"
There is lots and lots of laughter, as students say strange things. Embarrassment, smiles, laughter. Noomi keeps going on and on, and finally finishes, the students sitting down again with relief. Noomi then asks everyone to check that they have received email invites to the blog and the Facebook group. The students have the phones out and are checking. It seems that everyone got the invites and are into the group and the blog.
"So everyone is in? Good!"
Noomi now gets the students to go to her webpage. Now, Noomi says, the students should post a "Roses are red violets are blue" poem. The students are writing, as Nomi goes around checking to see that everyone is in and that the blog is working. When they are finished they start looking at and commenting on other students' poems, laughing, talking across the class, reading out loud, laughing, sniggering.
"OK, now you can comment on these 'Roses are Red' poems!"

"There are some awesome ones here!" says Luke. "Jenny, I like the one you wrote" Everyone is smiling, sharing posts, laughing, reading all the poems that have now appeared on the site. And commenting on them too. While this is happening Noomi is checking on her tablet, checking to see that everyone is in and is active.

Within a short time after the start of the lesson, and the students' caution and initial ambivalence, the atmosphere changes to one of joy and amusement. Exploring the nature of rhyme, Noomi goes round the class inviting each student to participate, first in sounding out intonation patterns, and then in creating rhyming word-pairs. Increasing the complexity, they move to the sentence level. This Noomi does by using the "Roses are red . . ." couplet, and inviting students to complete the second line. Like the use of social media, this too is an aspect of instructional design informed by perspective taking.

For the students, the "Roses are red . . ." couplet is immediately recognizable. Not (of course) as a derivation from Spencer's *The Faeire Queene* ("She bath'd with roses red, and violets blew"), but rather as a high-circulation Internet meme. Internet memes are forms of cultural information spread between people – often very rapidly – and which scale into a shared social phenomenon. That is, while memes are spread at a micro level, they can have a macro-level impact in shaping the thinking and consciousness of social groups (Shifman, 2013). In this case, the (at the time) widespread popularity of the "Roses are red . . ." meme derives from anti-humor in the parodying of the poem's original romantic sentiments (gi97ol, 2012).

Since the students are immersed daily in flows of networked media, the "Roses are red . . ." couplet immediately triggers associations with online discourse practices. By drawing on FoK that comprise understandings of online humor, the in-the-moment creation of the next line is facilitated. Students are quickly able to come up with rhyming lines. This maintains momentum and sustains continued engagement with the activity. In the next stage of the instructional design, knowledge of social media use and online humor are combined when students are invited to create "Roses are red . . ." poems on the blog, and to comment on them on Facebook. As the activity unfolds, the students' initial hesitation about engaging with poetry appears to subside.

5.3.2. Perspective taking as an interactional practice

In the following lesson, the exploration of poetry continues:

Excerpt 4

Noomi arrives. "Sorry I was late I got called into the principal's office."
"Ohhhh" chorus the pupils, "What did you do?" Noomi smiles, jokes and then says to the class generally, "Did you have a good day? Are you still grumpy today? Is it hormones? What

would you do if you went home? Sleep?" Then she says "I saw what you wrote online, but let's look at it together. Let's look at the blog and the Facebook group together, OK?"

Noomi begins the lesson in playful mood, her description of a meeting with the school's principal framed in a manner that enacts a leveling-off of the teacher-student relationship. Continuing, she jokes with the students, hinting that sleep might be an alternative (and possibly more attractive) option compared to the next ninety minutes of class. While lighthearted and seemingly superficial, these interactions also involve perspective taking. Framing the meeting with the principal as a summons, and presenting sleep as a legitimate (?) alternative to work, the institutional constraints of school are represented from the students' perspective. This is not inconsequential; rather, these momentary renegotiations of the teacher-student relationship are instrumental in creating the climate of "togetherness" within which the work with poetry takes place.

Once the students have accessed the websites, Noomi begins by reading the poems. Giving positive comments, she then asks students to read out their verses. As they read, she starts snapping her fingers to the rhythm. The students follow her lead, and this continues for a while. Then, she introduces another poetic form, the nursery rhyme. She begins by reciting the rhyme, "Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle:"

> Excerpt 5
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> "So what does it mean?" Noomi then elicits responses about different words, getting students to rephrase the lines to make sense of them. The word fiddle is difficult. Noomi asks. A girl comes up with a suggestion. "Great, she looked it up! Great" Noomi says (giving positive acknowledgment to the fact that this girl had used her phone to find out the meaning of the word). After the final line ("the dish ran away with the spoon") Noomi says: "OK, so give me a Shakespeare play where people ran away!" Romeo and Juliet, some students say. "OK, Give me another play!" Now they do the "Hey diddle diddle" rhyme together, clicking their fingers and identifying the stress markers. Everyone is getting into this, doing it again and again, themselves. Some decide to do this to different types of rhyme (rapping) and accents (I hear both US and RP). (Interestingly, Noomi has not asked for these raps, and the students have just started doing them). Now, Noomi asks half of the pupils to do the fingers, and half to mark the stress with a pen "I am taking Carlo's idea here" (When they were practicing, Carlo had been clicking his pen on the table to the rhythm, instead of clicking his fingers). "Now I want first fingers and then half way through pens!" "And now I want the rhyme too." There is a mass of sound as the whole class are involved in making the rhyme come to life. "It's creating music" says Noomi.

As an interactional practice, perspective taking involves in-the-moment flexibility in responding to unfolding events, and to the ideas, concerns, interpretations and expressions of personhood to which students give voice. At the beginning of

the extract, and in the context of the invitation to decode and make sense of the rhyme by deconstructing it line-by-line, Noomi applauds the initiative of a girl who circumvents this process by using her phone. Rather than framing this as an act of spoiling, she casts the use of the phone as a legitimate and valuable strategy.

Later, when the students subvert the traditional rhyming pattern of the "Hey diddle, diddle" rhyme and transform it into a rap, Noomi gives no indication that this is not what was intended. On the contrary, it appears neither noteworthy nor remarkable. By letting the situation pass uncommented, her response not only flags the possibilities that arise when genres are mixed but also legitimates the use of students' popular culture FoK in the development of a broader understanding and appreciation of poetic form.

A third example of perspective taking occurs at the end of the extract when Noomi introduces a new tool for marking rhythm. Asking half of the class to continue snapping their fingers, she invites the other half to mark the stress by clicking their pens on the table. This, she says, is an idea gained from seeing a boy doing this instead of snapping his fingers. Like the use of the phone and the rap, the boy's decision to click his pen is a deviation, albeit slight, from Noomi's original design. Sensitive to the boy's chosen way of participating, by incorporating his method of marking poetic meter into her design, Noomi's actions are supportive of his agency. Like with the girl who uses the phone, and those who rap, she recognizes and legitimizes students' self-initiated attempts to bridge between different domains of experience. When students' agency and meaning-making capacities are supported through in-the-moment reflexivity, and when perspective taking as an interactional practice is systematic, teaching bears the characteristics of a permeable curriculum and positively influences students' motivational dispositions (Dyson, 2003; Warren, 2018).

6. Discussion

As observed at the beginning of the first lesson, the students were not immediately enthusiastic about the unit. As Noomi herself comments, "none of the kids like poetry." However, by the second lesson, the students had become fully absorbed in the exploration of poetic form. In fact, the motivational energy generated was such that when the ninety-minute lesson ended, only two students left the room, the others continuing with their work. Twenty minutes after the lesson's end, several were still engaged writing verse. Eventually, Noomi had to ask them to pack up, telling them jokingly to "go and get a life."

L2 motivation emerges in and through social relations; complex interactions of situational parameters influence the motivational responses of individuals and groups (Dörnyei, Henry, & Muir, 2016; Ushioda, 2009). Here, in attempting to

understand the evolution of motivation during these two lessons, it is clear that teacher-student relationships (Henry & Thorsen, 2018a) and group dynamics (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003) play important roles in shaping engagement. However, in working with the deconstruction and creation of poetry, something more appears to be taking place. In an attempt to understand observed behaviors, and with the aim of generating theoretically-anchored conceptualizations of motivation that arises when students engage with forms of expression characteristic of online genres, we draw on recent developments in the culturally responsive teaching paradigm emphasizing the importance of FoK that originate in the social worlds of online interaction (Petrone, 2013; Schwartz, 2015; Subero et al., 2017). Through the analysis of two focal lessons, and based on Warren's (2018) assertions that: (a) empathy is operationalized through perspective taking, (b) perspective taking constitutes the central cognitive anchor in culturally responsive teaching, and (c) perspective taking translates into particular *instructional* and *interactional* practices, we have attempted to explain how language teacher responsiveness (Lamb, 2017) can be understood as a motivational influence.

In the design of the lesson, the use of everyday social media constitutes an *instructional practice* that provides students with a familiar medium within which poetic form can be explored. Through the activation of FoK comprising digital literacy skills (Subero et al., 2017), representational spaces in rich discursive contexts are created (Schwartz, 2015). As Ito et al. (2013) have argued, in overcoming the gap between in-school and out-of-school experiences of learning in a digital age, contemporary education has a need for "connected learning." This involves the connection of *activities*, *identities* and *digitally mediated knowledge* (Henry, 2018). As a form of perspective taking, the strategy of connecting something decidedly unfamiliar (poetry) with something highly relevant to everyday life (discourse practices in social media) creates positive motivational preconditions for the students' work (Henry et al., 2019). Within this discursive framework, the use of a high-circulation Internet meme functions as a platform from which explorations of poetic conventions can proceed, thus constituting an additional layer of perspective taking. Not only is the "Roses are red . . ." meme instantly recognizable, but it is also encountered in ironic forms and associated with subversive and irreverent genres of humor. As a consequence, the task of constructing innovative continuations generates a positive response as students create verse that is amusing, quirky and deliberately warped. Further, because engagement becomes possible from a position of knowledge (of online humor), this contributes in generating an enduring motivational influence.

As well as an instructional practice, where bridging between the familiar and the unfamiliar is accomplished through the activation of FoK originating in students' social worlds, perspective taking is also a hallmark of this teacher's

interactional practice. In the open and inclusive environment in which interaction takes place, opportunities for negotiation, adaptation, play and resistance can increase experiences of autonomy; just as it is permissible to play with language and to recast the rhyme as a rap, so too is the choice of an alternative method of participation (clicking a pen) and the use of an unsanctioned resource (a phone). Not only do the teacher's responses to these renegotiations of the activity reveal a space for individual agency (see also Henry & Thorsen, 2018c), but as the pen-clicking example reveals, perspective taking also enables students' initiatives to be seamlessly incorporated into an intentionally permeable design.

Reflecting on these two forms of responsiveness, it is perhaps easier to understand how, as an *instructional practice*, perspective taking can influence students' motivation. Indeed, the motivational affordances of pedagogies that draw on FoK comprising digital literacy skills, and which "attend to the virtual spaces that young people may be exploring via the Internet" (Moje & Hinchman, 2004, p. 66), have been previously recognized (Henry, 2013). However, while the motivational influences of perspective taking as an *interactional practice* might not be as apparent, they should not to be underestimated. As Ushioda (2011) explains, "it is through social participation in opportunities, negotiations and activities" that motivation emerges, and it is in classroom practices where there is space for adaptation and compromise that "motivational dispositions and identities evolve and are given expression" (p. 21). In line with these ideas, the empirically-grounded insights gained in the present study suggest that in classrooms where teachers are responsive to FoK originating in students' social and cultural practices, perspective taking functions to legitimize alternative ways of knowing and to encourage alternative forms of expression. This extended scope for agency enables students to participate in the learning process as knowledgeable partners. To reference one of Stevick's (1998) many telling observations on effective learning in L2 classrooms, in both its instructional and interactional forms, perspective taking can be understood as providing students with the experience of being "an object of primary value in a world of meaningful action" (p. 20).

In instructed settings, motivation is highly dependent on the relational climate. In classrooms where teacher-student relationships are positive, where teachers are open about who they are, and where empathic capacity translates into forms of perspective taking, influences on students' motivation are likely to operate both within and outside of conscious awareness. In classrooms where a teacher's empathic concern is manifested in the *design* of learning activities (instructional perspective taking), and in moment-to-moment *communication* (interactional perspective taking), students can develop a "relational stance" that mediates a perception of being psychologically connected with the teacher (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006, p. 274). In such situations, the mere presence of

the teacher, or the simple act of crossing the classroom threshold, can generate positive emotions. Over time, these accumulate to form positive motivational dispositions (Henry & Thorsen, 2018a, 2018b). It is the effects of these accumulated perceptions of connectedness, we contend, that are reflected in the wealth of L2 motivation research highlighting the centrality of teacher responsiveness for students' motivation (Lamb, 2017).

7. Conclusion

Given recent developments in L2 motivation research demonstrating the importance of the classroom social climate (Joe, Hiver, & Al-Hoorie, 2017; Park & Hiver, 2017) and emerging insights into the role of well-being and enjoyment in the L2 learning process (MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2016), it is somewhat paradoxical that like other aspects of the L2 learning experience, the influence of the teacher remains a relatively neglected area of inquiry (Csizér & Kálmán, this issue; Dörnyei, this issue). While the papers in this special issue evidence a range of objectives and methodologies currently being used to explore motivation at the learning interface, our aim has been to employ a narrow focus and to investigate motivation "in relation to particular classroom events [and in] situated interactions among teachers and learners" (Ushioda, 2016, p. 564). Here, as in other case studies carried out in the MoTiSSE project, we find that small and sometimes almost imperceptible interactions between teachers and students can be of significance for motivation and engagement. Although the interests of our research have been diverse, the investigation of the practice of successful motivators has led to the insight that while engagement can ebb and flow during a lesson or activity, and while motivation is influenced by any number of learner-internal and learner-external contingencies, students' motivational dispositions are best conceptualized as the cumulative outcomes of innumerable micro-level interactions. In the complex worlds of language classrooms, it is the "small, positive ripples" that teachers make in the lives of students (Gregersen, MacIntyre, & Mercer, 2016, p. 9) that, over time, accumulate and result in more enduring motivational dispositions. Not only off the radar of research seeking to understand the effects on L2 motivation of the classroom social climate in a more general sense, but often passing unnoticed by teachers and students themselves, these ripple-like moments of connectivity can be decisive in shaping responses that develop into established patterns of behavior. If motivational teaching is indeed about the weaving of complex webs of connections (Arnold & Murphey, 2013), then connection-making needs to be understood and investigated as a situated practice. Focusing on the "relationality" of teacher-student interactions (Mercer 2016, p. 107), and examining perspective taking as an instructional and

an interactional practice (Warren, 2018), this study constitutes a step towards understanding how these webs are woven.

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