

## **Introduction**

When learning a foreign language students are often accustomed to learning the language in a classroom with other students. In the recent years, however, labs have become an additional resource for students to learn and refine their language learning skills. In addition, labs give students an opportunity to receive more individualized attention in relation to their challenges in the process of acquiring a foreign language. The way a lab is structured is unique to the university and unique to the needs of the students attending the university. Some universities set up self access labs where students are able to go into the lab and use resources available via the computer. Other universities offer the opportunity for students to work directly with a counselor so that the student can get the opportunity to focus on the major challenges which are being faced in learning the language. I work in a language lab specifically dedicated to speaking skills such as pronunciation, conversation and presentation skills. In this lab, students are either assigned to come into the lab or the students come in by choice. The purpose of this observation report is to examine the characteristics of this lab and how the lab environment contributes to student motivation. The opportunity to attend the lab gives students the opportunities to make choices and decisions about ways to improve their acquisition of English.

Out of these observations emerges an interesting question: What impact does the language lab at the Pacific School of Art and Design have in the lives of students and in particular, student motivation and autonomy? The following literature provides potential answers to these questions and creates an introduction for the research which has been completed at the Pacific School of Art and Design.

## **Literature Review**

Language labs play an important role in the process of acquiring a second or third language. Classroom instruction is always a useful method of practicing a second language. However, labs which allow students to

take the initiative to seek a more guided instruction, in particular self-access labs, “talk about the need for a bridge between public domain learning such as in a classroom and private domain learning.” (Gardner & Miller 1999). As a result of the various kinds of learning which are made possible in a language lab, labs are starting to gain more recognition in the field of ESL. Students are not only able to get more personalized attention, but they are also able to validate their motivation and autonomy being used to acquire the foreign language. In addition, a particular focus on skills such as pronunciation can be achieved because of the smaller group sizes or one on one work achieved.

When looking at labs in ESL/EFL teaching, much of the general focus and research is on self access learning. “Self access talks about the need for a bridge between public domain learning such as in a classroom and private domain learning “, (Reinders, 2006). The reason why learning a foreign language in a lab plays a significant role in language learning is because it allows language learners to interact in a unique way with controlled and uncontrolled learning environments (Gardner, Miller, 1999). One of the main achievements of self access learning is it fosters autonomous learning in EFL/ESL. (Gardner, Miller, 2010). Labs assist in helping students find a way to develop skills which best fit the individual’s learning needs. In addition, labs help to avoid categorizing learners in “cut and dry” categories (Gremmo, Riley, 1995). Gremmo and Riley highlight how practical experience has shown that a self-directed learning scheme providing varying methodological and linguistic resources can help learners find their way through foreign languages (Gremmo, Riley 1995). The different resources set up different types of learning and as a result learners are able to come to terms with their strengths and weaknesses and learn a language “efficiently in ways which are compatible with their personalities.” Because of the structure of the lab, teachers are also able to take on a different role than that of a normal classroom teacher. In addition to providing methodological information such as materials, work techniques and planning programs of work, they are also able to provide conceptual information and

psychological support such as helping learners come to terms with their successes and failures while acquiring the foreign language (Gremmo, Riley, 1995).

In addition to these factors, metacognitive strategies are important for ESL/EFL learning as some studies have indicated that poor learners often develop limited or negative beliefs about their capacity to perform certain tasks. These thoughts can encourage poor cognitive performance and a negative attitude towards autonomy. As a result, teaching metacognitive strategies in language labs encourage motivation and autonomy in ESL/EFL learning because they shape student attitudes towards and about language learning so that they can learn about their own learning styles, preferences, beliefs and expectations about language learning. As students become more capable of assessing what strategies are most effective for learning the foreign language, they becoming more increasingly motivated and independent (Victori, Lockhart, 1995). Cotterall (1995) further examines how learner beliefs impact autonomy because beliefs have a profound influence on learning behavior. Autonomous learners “monitor their language learning” and learner confidence is linked to “self-esteem” and the learner’s perception of their language learning (Cotterall, 1995). As labs provide one on one support for students to become autonomous by addressing student language learning needs, the motivation to learn and learning effectiveness can be increased in learners who take responsibility for their own learning (Dickinson, 1995).

In addition to these factors, it is not clear what constitutes learning gain. Morrison writes, “In order to evaluate learning gain. . . . there is a need to re-conceptualize what is perceived as learning gain and look to identify evidence of such (Morrison, 2005).” Despite the positive aspects of how the highly flexible approaches and learner centered environment can contribute to developing motivation and autonomy in ESL/EFL learning, there is limited assessment on how effective labs can be for students. This has a lot to do with the fact that many students who come to labs are not regular visitors. As a result it is challenging to see what the long term benefits are (Renders, 2006). However, other authors mention the importance of enhancing

students' metacognition and encouraging motivation and autonomy in self-directed learning (Victori, Lockhart, 1995). As a result, even though it is challenging to measure learning gain, there is a noticeable increase in student motivation and autonomy when ESL/EFL students are given the opportunity to develop their language skills in a lab.

Language labs encourage motivation and autonomy also because of the opportunity for students to create a focus by initiating time with an instructor who can assist on the skills they are challenged by in their language learning experience. For example, since it is difficult for learners to self-assess their pronunciation, students are able to elicit specific feedback from the instruction on pronunciation errors (Dlaska, Krekeler, 2008). It is also noted that "stand-alone pronunciation teachers employed more pronunciation resources than did regular ESL teachers because of the focused attention the students are able to obtain (Foote, Holtby, Derwing, 2011). As students continue to make progress and learning gain because of the individualized instruction in language labs, student autonomy and motivation continues to increase. The lab also contributes to reshaping learner beliefs. As Dornyei indicates, "there is no doubt that learner beliefs greatly affect behavior, when someone believes in a particular method of learning and resists another". Dornyei points out (2001), "creating realistic learner beliefs is an important motivational strategy." As a result of the change in beliefs, the idea of learning outside of a classroom context becomes more hopeful and beneficial for students who are not easily able to develop their language skills in a regular ESL/EFL classroom environment. An additional benefit is that the student's willingness to communicate increases.

In his book, "The Psychology of the Language Learner", Dornyei indicates "It is not uncommon to find people who tend to avoid entering L2 communication situations even if they possess a high level of communicative competence." The way the speaking lab works and is set up helps work out the mediating factors between having the competence to communicate and putting this competence into practice (Dornyei, 2005).

**The Context**

The Pacific School of Art and Design is a private university in California which has a high percentage of international students. The university doesn't demand that foreign students take the TOEFL and instead it offers it's own placement process to both undergraduate and graduate students. In addition, The additional ESL courses taught along with the regular curriculum allow for international students to enroll immediately in art and design classes while learning English.

**These classes teach international students how to:**

- participate actively in college classes
- express themselves clearly in art critiques
- understand lectures and American idiomatic speech
- improve reading skills
- increase art and design vocabulary
- write papers for class assignments

In addition to this support, students are able to access the ESL lab which provides support for writing and the speaking lab which provides support for speaking in presentations, conversational skills, and pronunciation. The speaking lab is open daily and appointments are booked in advance. The appointments for assistance with presentations are individual and one on one. The appointments for conversation groups are not required and there is not a group capacity. The appointments for pronunciation are recommended as there is a maximum of three individuals per group allowed.

**The focus of this paper is on the speaking lab . (EDIT THIS ? )** The speaking lab is open to all university students, not just non native English speakers. In the lab, there is an opportunity to practice speaking, pronunciation, and presentation. However, the majority of the students which attend and request assistance at the lab are non native English speakers. The number of students which attend the lab each semester are approximately 1300. Many of the students seek assistance on a one time basis. Some students come back for further assistance and the opportunity to further develop their skills. This is often the case with students who attend the pronunciation lab as students feel they require more than one visit to improve their pronunciation.

Many surveys have been done to determine the impact of the lab. In a most recent survey of 58 students the following feedback was received, 28% indicated, *“I am interested in improving my presentation skills.”* 34% indicated, *“I am interested in improving my presentation skills.”* 17% indicated *“I want to pronounce English sounds better.”* 6% indicated, *“I want to learn how to critique better.”* 2% indicated, *“I heard about the Speaking Lab and I just wanted to try it out for the first time!”*

## **THE STUDY: METHODS AND DATA**

### **Data Collection**

A number of data sources were used to validate findings and to give a complete picture of the learning experience at the speaking lab. Among the sources of information

used were demographic questionnaires and semistructured interviews with the director of the lab, instructors, coordinators, and students. A brief review was also done of the materials being used.

### **Materials**

In addition to conducting the discussions with students and instructors, the materials were reviewed as well. The textbooks and workbooks were considered in terms of how frequently they are incorporated into the actual teaching curriculum. In specific, the materials used in the lab include a textbook called “Well Said” which is also part of the ESL program. The textbook is often referenced in the classroom as well as in the lab. As a result, students are able to make connections with the textbook when reporting to the lab. There are other materials such as instruction worksheets available to students in the lab so they can really understand their presentation skills. In addition there are small pocket mirrors in the pronunciation lab which allow for students to see how they are doing when they are pronouncing.

### **Student Interviews**

Interviews were the primary source of data collection. Preliminary interviews were conducted with nine students. The students were selected because of their recent experience in the language lab. The interviews which took place were face to face. The answers to the questions presented were transcribed immediately as the interviewees were speaking. The interviews were semistructured and consist of a group of core questions that were open-ended and focused on the participants’ perceptions of why the students chose to access the lab and how the lab impacts student learning. After the interviews were conducted, one student was selected to do a more in depth interview.

### **Instructor Interviews**

Another important component of data collection was interviews with instructors.

These interviews served two purposes. The first was to obtain the instructors' views in regards to the purpose of the speaking lab—their personal opinions of the goals of the lab, the approach they had in working with students during the 50 minute session, as well as what they believe are the top priorities in growing/developing the lab. This discussion supplemented conversations with student participants on how they perceived the roles of teacher and learner in individualized versus classroom language learning.

#### **Interviews with Administrators**

Interviews were also conducted with the lab manager and other managers, including the director at the university, who are involved in curriculum assessment. They provided general feedback on their perception of the lab, how they refer students to it, what challenges they see within the lab and hopes they have for it in the future.

## **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### ***STUDENT FEEDBACK***

Motivation impacts student learning through the following themes which include, “One on One Sessions and Group Sessions”, “Developing Skills”, “Tools”, and their connection with the teacher.

#### **One on One Sessions and Group sessions**



In the lab, students are given the opportunity to practice their presentation skills “one on one” for a period of 50 minutes with their instructor. In addition, though the pronunciation groups often expand to 3 students a session, often times only one student shows up. As a result, students are given the opportunity to practice “one on one” in their pronunciation skills with their instructor as well. The students responded positively when providing feedback regarding the benefits of one on one instruction, as opposed to classroom learning. One student indicates, “One on one helps you get more information.” Another student indicates, “I feel like one on one is very useful and it helps me pay attention to what I am studying.” while another student further validates this observation in his words, “I think that one on one versus groups is very good because I can talk to the instructor face to face and learn how to improve my pronunciation.” Another student points out the benefit of one on one sessions is very much connected to receiving solid feedback from the instructor in her words “Because I have one audience (one person), who will help me and not laugh at me.” In addition to feeling more relaxed in the low anxiety environment, the student is really able to focus on her errors. As she says, “I think one on one is useful because only me and you know how to fix my mistakes.”

In addition, the one on one lab sessions gives students an opportunity to select an area which he/she would like to improve. One student indicates the benefits of having the choice and opportunity to express his needs in this kind of setting as opposed to a classroom setting, “ In the classroom, if I have a problem, I will take the problem to lab and tell my teacher. In the lab, I can say which problem I have (in the classroom) and the lab teacher will tell me how to work with the problem. When I go back to the class, I then know why I have the problem and how to solve the problem.”

As students obtain individualized attention, they become more conscious of how to improve their comprehension and acquisition of English because they are able to make choices and take initiative about how they can better improve their English skills. They become negotiators in the language learning process. As a result, their motivation to acquire the language increases. While there are many benefits of one on one learning,

group learning helps students identify with other individuals who are also challenged by the process of learning English. As one student says, “Group work in the lab is also good so I can see if I have the same problems as other students in the labs. If a classmate has the same problem, I realize it is something I need to work on.”

### **Developing Skills**

In a classroom setting, particularly in the ESL courses students take, they are introduced to all components of learning English simultaneously (speaking, listening, reading, and writing). The opportunity for students to attend the lab allows for students to choose which skill they would like to focus on. If they choose to focus on the skill of pronunciation, they become more aware in the process of the session of how to further strengthen an area of pronunciation which they may not have been conscious of prior to the lab session. One student verifies this in her observation, “The lab can let me know how to pronounce clearly, step by step.” In addition, the students are inspired to improve other skills such as presentation skills and general speaking skills in conversation. As one student explains her perception of the lab she says, “The lab will help me study English in writing, reading, speaking, grammar, etc. The lab is just like a tutor.” Another student, after completing a pronunciation course, explains how the lab helps him with the skills of better understanding American English. He says, “Since English is not my first language, I only know it simply. The lab helps me a lot because I can listen to American speakers.” Finally one student, in her review of her syllabus with an instructor to understand a grading rubric, indicated the lab helped her improve her study skills.

### **Tools**

While working on their skills, students are also given an opportunity to learn about tools which can enhance their skills. One student reports, “The lab offers me materials I can study with.” Students are given the opportunity to record a presentation practice so they can go home and listen to the stress and pronunciation

needed while practicing for their upcoming speech. As one student comments, “I have feedback on the recording to go home and practice with.” One student also given resources to access the San Francisco Public Library and check out a book which may assist him with pronunciation. He reported the value of finding this book, “The book teaches basic children’s language and how to pronounce each word in a long sentence. I think this book is very useful because it helps me pronounce some simple words.” In addition, students use the text book “Well Said” in their regular classroom. The instructor also uses “Well Said” in the pronunciation course so that students are able to see the many valuable uses of the class. In the presentation class, students are introduced to the important use of notecards as a tool for public speaking. All of these tools which students learn about give them an opportunity to better their skills outside of the lab experience. As one student confirms, “It is helpful to have some things prepared so I can review at home.” In addition, it gives them the opportunity to discover there are many useful resources outside of the classroom to help them improve their English skills.

#### **Connection with the teacher**

The general feeling of confidence which students feel after a session at the speaking lab is positive across the board. One of the most satisfying results which the speaking lab offers to students who attend is the way students feel after completing a session with the lab. Overall, students provided feedback which reveals the positive outcome established as a result of their connection with the teacher. One student writes, “The teacher taught me some ways to relax before giving a presentation.” Another student indicates, “I improved my confidence, writing, everything.” Another student writes, “I feel more successful after leaving.” One student goes to the extent of indicating, “My mind is clearer.” One student admits such by saying, “I do feel more successful. I feel more prepared.” Overall this feeling of confidence helps students feel more successful functioning in the outside world in general. As one student points out, “It improves my confidence when I speak in a public space

(because I was listening to a native English speaker.) I can hear or I will understand how a native speaker uses English in their life.”

### **CURRICULUM ADMINISTRATORS**

Three curriculum administrators were also interviewed for the purpose of this study. All three individuals have dual functions in their job at the university. They all teach English and are also involved in coordinating curriculum of the University. One person interviewed is also involved in managing the speaking lab. Out of their feedback came a variety of themes which include the following : **(I DIDN'T INCLUDE BOB HERE AND I NEED TO EXPAND ON THESE ROLES OF THESE INDIVIDUALS AND MAKE THEM CONFIDENTIAL) DO A QUICK INTRO TO THE THREE THEMES ADDRESSED WITH THESE INSTRUCTORS AND MENTION HOW THESE PERSPECTIVES VARY**

There roles

EAP Instructor and Graduate Level Coordinator,

EAP Instructor and Undergrad Curriculum Supervisor

EAP Instructor and speaking lab coordinator

#### **How the lab is changing**

Regarding this theme, the administrator doesn't think that the lab has changed much in the past years. She thinks it “has always been a place for students to go to and get more assistance if their needs aren't getting met (in the classroom.)” She thinks the new lab manager is “changing the communication between the EAP teachers and the lab.” As a result, this is one change she has witnessed. The second administrator believes the lab “used to be more of a “bandaid”. Now it has transitioned into serving a purpose and really “promote an opportunity for outside learning.” He says “The speaking lab adds credibility to the university. If there is one teacher who is not pulling weight, the student can be encouraged to go to the speaking lab to improve his/her

skills.” He sees the teachers in the lab as giving students pep talks and individualized attention, what they may not get in a large classroom. The third administrator has witnessed a change in the lab in terms of objectives. Before last semester, there were no stated goals or objectives for the lab or focus to help ESL students. A large part of last semester was spent working on these with a couple of the tutors. She says, “we now have clearly stated goals and objectives and a workflow for each of the tutors.”

Since the lab is also available to native English speakers, its focus was not for non native English speakers. Now that the new manager has implemented goals, the main one which states “The Speaking Lab assists in the progress of English language learners in their spoken English needed for both informal and formal classroom activities.” Because it has taken more of a forefront in catering to the EAP program, the teachers are taking note of the lab as a place to refer their EAP students to for further support.

### **The Purpose of the Lab**

The administrators vary on their understanding of the purpose of the lab. In one stakeholder’s perspective, “It is a two fold purpose: A place where students can refer students who are low level and struggling and it is a place for students who are autonomous.” She sees the lab as there to help support teachers and students. It is a way for students who need to work on their skills to get additional help. In addition, it is a way for students who are self motivated to get more independent support. Another administrator sees the speaking lab as a place “I can refer students who are struggling in their regular ESL courses” He likes students to go there because it is an opportunity for students to make a connection with a teacher and for students to realize they have an opportunity to improve their grade if they receive a “D or F” on a presentation. The third administrator believes, “The lab runs parallel and is aligned to the EAP curriculum taught at the Academy of Art.” She sees it as “an extra outcome of support to maintain objectives of the ESL program.” In addition, she considers it a service for students outside of this focus who really want to practice English. The budget which is

allocated to the lab is also resource intensive. It allows the lab to support the ESL program. The director expressed he is glad to support this lab under budget constraints and as a result it reflects successful management.

### **How instructors and coordinators refer students to the Lab**

The administrators vary in their motivations and reasons for referring students to the lab. One administrator is very careful about who she refers to the lab. She chooses to refer the “20% or 30% of students to go to the lab.” They are the percentage of students who are struggling and need more support. She is cautious about who she refers because she’s aware there is a limited amount of lab spots in the lab and it could easily fill up if everyone is referred.

Another administrator tries to encourage all of his students to attend the lab. He “sells the speaking lab to students for the first two weeks of class.” Then, he encourages students to go, particularly those who get a D or F in the class. Also he refers students who are getting C’s or D’s because they are not participating. In order to encourage other students to attend the lab, he asks those students who have gone to the lab to show their green slip to the classroom and explain their experience.

A third administrator highlights how the new process of a referral slip is being implemented. She indicates, “We just started this semester with having instructors fill out a referral form for their students to take with them to the lab.” She says, “Regarding how I refer students to the lab - if I assess that a particular student needs help in an area of speaking (most often these would be my students), I refer them to make an appointment with the lab.” However, the process of referring is still not clear to the administrator. She says that going to the lab is still based on student initiative in her words, “I’m not sure yet how this is working. I know there have been referrals, but it is up to the student to make the appointment and bring the referral with them.” In conclusion, it is really up to the instructor to determine the process in which he/she will try to get their student to go to the lab. The observations conclude much depends on the student’s initiative.

**Varied perspectives on training instructors for the Lab**

Training is not offered to instructors. Some teachers are given the opportunity to work with a specialist in pronunciation on their own time and schedule. As a result, the perspectives on training vary. In reference to training suggested for the lab instructors, one administrator has been involved in managing another language lab in the university and as a result sees a benefit to training the instructors. She is familiar with many instructors indicating they are capable of teaching in the lab because they are familiar with the topic. However, she indicates, because there was a training in place, she was able to respond “No there is an approach. The approach and priorities were set.” She thinks any lab could benefit from a more consistent approach or training.

Another administrator credits Grace Wood, a specialist in pronunciation, for training the instructors. He indicates, “I think Grace Wood, who trains teachers who pronunciation has done an amazing job training teachers to work in the speaking lab.” He believes the teachers currently working in the speaking lab are different than the teachers in the past and really want to be there and are committed. This may be relevant to training.

A final administrator hasn’t really thought about training. One of the limitations is “there is no paid time allotted to training or even meeting.” So this limits the “the types of interactions which the tutors can have (outside of informal times in passing). In addition, in her position as coordinator of the lab, she is only allotted 3 hours to focus on the lab which “spills to 5 or 7 hours in reality.” It doesn’t give her much time to consider a training program. She points out that some teachers have signed up for Grace Woods training (which is not paid), that is training that is not done through the speaking lab.

Comment [M1]:

**Instructors’ perceptions of how students view lab**

One administrator indicates, she “ doesn’t think students value the lab for what it has to offer.” She bases this on her discussions she has had with students about going to the lab. One student said that she didn’t really need to go to the lab because she was getting the grade she needed to pass the class.” She also provides her observations that students see signing up to participate in the lab as an “obstacle.” The tutor trac, the program which is used, is hard to work with and results in many students becoming challenged with signing up. As a result, the majority of them don’t sign up. She says for those students who do attend the lab, they come back saying, “ the lab was really good with a look of shock and surprise.” The student hadn’t expected to have such a good experience after going through the complications of the sign up, which causes the lab to lose its credibility.

Another administrator believes the lab has many benefits and sees many students “attending the lab to improve his/her grade.” In addition, he also sees students attending the lab because it is an opportunity for the student to make a connection with a teacher outside of the classroom. He also worked really hard to obtain copies of “ Well Said” books so that teachers who are teaching in the pronunciation component of the lab have a copy and will use it as it is the textbook used in the classroom. He wants students to see that what goes on in the lab is connected to what they are learning. However, despite his efforts, he isn’t “sure if students know how to use the lab strategically yet.”

### **Envisioned Futures for the Lab**

The administrators have varying opinions on their perspective for the future lab. One administrator thinks the lab can be modified to charge a nominal fee so that the lab has more credibility. It can be connected to how students are referred to the lab. She illustrates her opinion in her perspective, “I heard a student say “I know there are labs and I know I need to sign up but I would rather just be given a time and told to go there.” She thinks some students need to be simply told to go to the lab and pay a nominal fee rather than make it an option as it will change the students’ opinion of the lab. She believes “putting a price creates a status and



value.” In addition, this instructor thinks that revising the ESL curriculum may contribute to making a clearer use of the lab for students who really need it. She indicates, “right now students get 6 hours a week of combined reading, writing, listening and speaking.” She believes this is a lot for the instructor and “it would be more effective if students got a dedicated 3 hour instruction to listening and speaking.”

Another administrator believes the lab is no longer a “bandaid” to other issues and it “can be built to be really dynamic.” He thinks the new lab manager, has done an excellent job in contributing to its success. He hopes the new leadership in the lab will “frame the new face of the speaking lab”. He also hopes the lab will encourage what considers, “the most successful part of learning which can take place outside of the classroom.” A final administrator who is involved in the administration of the lab indicates, “I hope to continue to make services meet the outcomes of our EAP curriculum and our students' needs. I also hope to create workshops, more resources, and tutor training.”

BOB’s FEEDBACK ALSO NEEDS TO GO IN HERE !

## **LAB INSTRUCTORS**

The lab instructors interviewed have been working in the actual speaking lab for over three years. They work part time in the speaking lab and spend their other time instructing in the ESL classes. All these instructors hold a Master’s degree and are experienced in the field of ESL.

EXPAND A BIT ON THIS INTRO

### **Learner Motivation and Teacher Motivation**

The instructors report the benefits of the students’ experiences at the speaking lab really enhance their motivation to improve their English. As one instructor says, “Students can become more aware of their speaking challenges and pick up a few tips to try and improve their pronunciation or presentations through their study at

home.” Another instructor reports how the lab deepens their awareness about their errors. As a result, this increases their motivation, “when they come of their own accord as opposed to being forced to attend and as a result it builds student confidence in their own abilities.”

Another teacher indicates that students who come to the lab are genuinely more motivated to begin with in contrast to other students who don’t select the lab. She indicates, “I found that the majority of students who use this service come in with a genuine motivation to learn for one reason or another.” The teacher says that much of this has to do with the classroom setting, “There is a more tangible sense of being useful to the students who come in because of the small group/one on one format and the way that facilitates assisting students with their individual needs.”

Teachers are equally as interested as teaching in the lab setting as students are in attending. As a result, the teacher’s motivation to teach impacts the students desire to learn. One teacher reports, “I enjoy having the opportunity to assess and then to work with students one to one on their pronunciation issues.” Another teacher indicates his motivation to work in the lab is because he “enjoys the advantages of tutoring over classroom teaching.” In his opinion, these advantages include, “the more individual/personal nature of interactions with students, greater independence, and the challenges that goes along with working with individuals and small groups.” The opportunity to teach one on one and the witnessing of learner motivation, particularly, “when it seems like the student has gotten useful insight and a course of action they can carry out on their own, ” leaves the teachers feeling very satisfied. As one teacher indicates there are other additional factors as well which encourage her to work in the lab. “I really enjoy the connection with students, and being able to combine several different kinds of attention and analysis at once, sensory attention-hearing small nuances in their pronunciation, analytic work; figuring out what the root of any intelligibility problem might be and how to remedy it; research-reading about teaching methods for pronunciation.”

Finally, an additional benefit which further motivates instructors to want to teach in the lab is the opportunity to develop a skill such as pronunciation will help them in their future work. As one instructor indicates, “ My skill at the tutoring pronunciation has increased tremendously from working at the lab. “ Another instructor indicates the lab, is giving me skills that I could use as a freelancer later, so hypothetically it could be an investment that makes more money in the future.”

### ***Observations of How the Speaking Lab has Changed***

Like the administrators, instructors have also noted how the speaking lab has changed in the past few years. One instructor reports, “The new central location is in a hub of sorts and seems to be more accessible to students”. She also indicates, “There is a greater feeling of both oversight and support that has gone along with administrative changes. The lab has grown as more students seem to be aware of this service. Another instructor reports how the lab environments have changed over the years. She says, “When I moved to the A building (the location prior to the current) it became much more cheerful. Before that we were in a tiny basement and I never saw my ESL colleagues. Now, we are near the ESL student lounge and near a lot of ESL classrooms, so it seems like the attendance should go up. But I think the lab doesn’t have its own identity..(no sign above the door, no waiting area, no receptionist, so from a student’s point of view it might not be as welcoming as the previous lab was.” However, some of the new additions are positive, such as “the new whiteboard, bookshelf are really helpful.” Another instructor observes, “Students have mentioned they are more comfortable in a room with walls and a door.” Finally, one instructor, as indicated earlier by an administrator, mentions how tutor trac has been a challenge over the years and remains one, “I wouldn’t be surprised if attendance dropped off after we moved, but again that should be recorded on Tutor trac (CHANGE IDENTITY OF TUTOR TRAC AND CHECK SPELLING). Tutor trac stores a lot of information, but it also

could be misleading because it is so hard to use that I think over the years attendance hasn't been recorded accurately."

### **Teaching styles and how they vary**

Each teacher in the lab has his/her own approach when it comes to instruction. Particular individualized approach is noted when instruction takes place in the pronunciation lab. One teacher indicates, "Initially we would review the sounds on the English language vowel chart. I'd assess the student's ability to recognize the sounds and say them." Another teacher uses different techniques and indicates, "I have a few different techniques; call and response, games or dialogues, drawings of mouth positions." Another instructor indicates, "I often use language generated by the student as the content of tutoring session and focus on helping them pronounce individual sounds, stress, and linking." In reference to the textbooks, not all instructors use the textbooks during the pronunciation sessions. One instructor reports he uses them only occasionally by saying, "When needed, I use worksheets, charts from pronunciation textbooks to supplement." Another instructor reports she uses, the "American Accent training book" and will now begin to use "Well Said now that it is a standard EAP (check word for anonymity) text).

### **Teacher training**

Because instructors do not receive a formal training to teach at the lab, many were asked what they thought about the opportunity to do so. The responses varied however the majority indicated the importance of an individual approach. In reference to pronunciation guidance, one instructor wrote, "Grace Wood was my pronunciation mentor and I greatly benefitted from her workshops." Another instructor wrote, "I think I would've been quite hesitant to sign up for the Pronunciation Lab if I hadn't received pronunciation training

with Grace Wood. I also appreciate the pronunciation resources (books, handouts) that have been provided at the speaking lab.

However, in response to a formalized training for all aspects of the lab outside of pronunciation, another instructor said “Teachers should be allowed the freedom to pursue their individual approaches, but having professional development would be fine too.” Another instructor indicates a similar sentiment in her words, “I think allowing an individual approach is crucial for keeping the tutors happy with their jobs, and it is working out well with me. But I would also like to get some training from someone who knows more than I do about how to teach pronunciation in a clinic setting like ours.” The instructor goes on to say that “the training **Grace Wood (CHANGE NAME OF GRACE WOOD)** gives (for pronunciation) is really useful but not all tutors can afford to go to it. It’s unpaid time that conflicts with their work schedules.” The issue regarding costs for training was also addressed by one instructor. She says, “If training were required, the tutors should be paid for the time they spend in training.”

The possibility of streamlining instruction was also raised. One instructor indicates, “I would like it if all the pronunciation tutors had some training. If we all had some of the same training as each other, and if the approach was streamlined so that we were all following a basic template or possibly using some kind of pronunciation teaching software (in reference to streamlining for the pronunciation component.)” Another instructor responds to the idea stating, “some streamlining might make things easier for a new tutor coming into the job for the first time.”

On the other hand, the benefits of not streamlining are what shape the face of the lab. One instructor says perhaps there can be a more moderate approach, “I do like the the freedom to be able to teach using my own approach, but it would be nice to exchange ideas with other tutors and the coordinator so that we could learn from each other.” As one instructor indicates, “I think the loose system we have now is working pretty

well, and it would be a mistake to jump into a more structured, prescriptive way of teaching in a slap-dash way. If that happened, our teaching quality and tutor satisfaction would probably go down.”

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

Based on these interviews, it is fairly evident that the speaking lab serves a purpose for the university. It is an outlet for ESL students to receive more attention and instruction strategy outside of the classroom. In addition, it is an opportunity for instructors and administrators to direct students so they can receive more support. The most surprising and useful piece of data revealed in this study is despite the “low profile” of the lab as many, it has reveals many amazing benefits, such as promoting student autonomy. Instructors attempt to encourage student autonomy by using the speaking lab as a vehicle to motivate the students despite the challenges of student sign up in **tutor trac** (change to code) and the students may at first seem resistant to going to the lab but always return with a sense of success. This sense of success promotes student motivation and a willingness to communicate. The learning which takes place outside of the large classroom impacts learner identity and assists students in getting the necessary attention they need. Lab instructors also witness a real increase in the motivation of their students after attending the lab. They also note the lab attracts students who are genuinely motivated and as a result the lab is a location to foster their interests in improving their English skills. Teachers at the lab also really enjoy working there particularly since they can use their own teaching style and modify the lesson to accommodate the student's motivation.

In addition to the students who feel motivated by the lab, some students aren't yet aware of how to use the lab strategically. The strategy could involve creating a curriculum which has more dedicated courses (3 hours) to listening and speaking and really encouraging the idea that there are other successful ways learning can take place outside of the classroom. This is based on the idea of one instructor who was interviewed.

## **Recommendations**

The challenges which the lab faces is there is limited coordination amongst the instructors and administrators to determine an effective way of referring students to the lab and also to determine what kind of training may be necessary for teachers at the lab. These challenges are primarily due to time constraints and limited budgets. The majority of employees are on a part time salary. As a result of part time availability, this limits the opportunity to spend more time working together and examining if the goals of the lab are being met. It would be useful to create a time once or twice a semester to share ideas and reflect upon how the lab is being utilized.

Nonetheless, the students aren't aware of these challenges when attending the lab and the lab is able to function effectively despite the limitations. In particular, it is evident they are given the opportunity to mark their own learning which then impacts learning gain and increases autonomy and motivation. Even though it is difficult to quantify it in the lab, it is occurring and very effective for the students.