

FOSTERING CONCEPTUAL ROLES FOR CHANGE: IDENTITY AND AGENCY IN ESEA TEACHER PREPARATION

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Abstract

English Changing, the theme and title of the 2009 ESEA conference held in Manila, raises specific challenges for language teacher education: To what extent do we prepare teachers to be passive recipients of the social, cultural, and economic changes that align with the global spread of English? Alternatively, how might we encourage teachers to become active participants—“agents of change”—through their mediation and implementation of language curricula and pedagogy? The author addresses such questions by first reflecting on his own personal and professional development in EFL and EAP teaching contexts. These experiences are then related to the growing research literature in language teacher identity and several theoretical issues related to this area of interest. The following sections of the article look at the complexities of transferring theory to practice in the specific context of a pre-service, language teacher education course, one of whose primary goals is to foster awareness of language as a social practice linked to unequal relations of power, and one in which language teachers are encouraged to imagine and act otherwise through their teaching and interpersonal relationships with students and colleagues. In the final sections, these course aspirations are explored through a group assignment called a “social issues project,” in which students conceptualize and design a blueprint for transformative action in various forms such as an advocacy letter, workshop, curricular materials, etc. Reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of several selected projects, and how they relate with ESEA issues, conclude the article.

Keywords

English language teaching, teacher identity

About the author

Brian Morgan is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at Glendon College/York University in Toronto, Canada. From the beginning of his ELT teaching career, and throughout his graduate studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Brian has been keenly interested in critical theories and their relevance and implementation in a broad range of ELT contexts (e.g., community-based ESL, content-based EAP, language teacher education, language policy and planning). A primary interest of Brian's critical work has been research and pedagogy on language and identity. Another major research interest involves critical multiliteracies and their local and international applications. Brian has published in journals such as *TESOL Quarterly*; *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*; *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*; *Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*; *Language Policy*; and the *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*. He is the co-editor with Vaidehi Ramanathan of the 2007 special issue on *Language Policies and TESOL: Perspectives from Practice* in *TESOL Quarterly*. His first book, *The ESL Classroom* (1998), is published by University of Toronto Press.

INTRODUCTION

The teaching issues I raise in this paper come from a somewhat unique vantage point. Over the past ten years at York University and now at Glendon College in Toronto,

I have had the opportunity to work in three related, but distinctive areas of academic practice: 1) a content-based, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program in which undergraduate students gain academic credit for both their research and second language (L2) development; 2) an undergraduate TESOL certificate program for government-funded adult ESL programs recognized by a provincial ESL organization (i.e., TESL Ontario); 3) a graduate program (Masters and PhD levels) in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, in which I teach courses primarily related to language, culture, and identity. Initially, as a newly minted PhD from the research-intensive Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), I was disappointed by what I perceived as a teaching load that failed to utilize my scholarly potential as it was weighted heavily on the teaching and grading of first and second year EAP texts. Soon, however, I came to value this professional diversity and recognized the wisdom of its design. I often found myself noticing and reflecting on the substance and relevance of advanced theories through incidents in my EAP or TESOL classes. Equally, I would draw on these classroom experiences to both clarify and critique the challenging concepts that many students struggled with in our graduate program. As an additional outcome, I also found myself, over time, growing more comfortable and confident in this multi-layered professional life and I began to think about the extent to which the development of such emotions and experiences are a valuable component of any language teacher education program. The theoretical exploration in this paper, and its programmatic realization, are a product of such thinking.

Foremost, the title and purpose of this paper is informed by my belief that learning is a complex process involving much more than just the acquisition and retention of predetermined content or skills. Rather, it involves a process of *identification*—that is, of acquiring an identity, of becoming someone or something. For language teachers, this process of becoming is crucially relevant to how we understand ourselves and our professional roles and responsibilities. An example would be how we understand ourselves in relation to the idea of *English Changing*, the title and theme of the recent English in South East Asia (ESEA) conference held at Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines, in November 2009. In relation to the conference theme, for instance, we might see ourselves as bystanders or passive recipients of the changes English brings to our lives. Alternately, we might come to see ourselves as active participants in how these changes take place. Or, it may be a bit of both, depending on the personal and professional constraints in our lives.

As the title of this paper would suggest, I lean towards the optimistic, and I believe that in a world of English Changing we can become Agents of Change—active participants and transformative practitioners. This transformative identity or conceptual role does not

necessarily require a 24 hour/7 day a week condition. Most certainly, it would be less of an option for teachers who have little decision-making power over their working conditions or are overwhelmed by the demands of high-stakes testing. Still, I would invite readers to think about those small spaces, places, and moments in which we do have “wobble room” — that is, opportunities to ignore or re-interpret language policies, curricula, and classroom materials in ways that better reflect the local needs and realities of our students. Indeed, this active, participatory attitude towards change was exactly what Vaidehi Ramanathan and I wished to encourage when we co-edited the 2007 special issue of the *TESOL Quarterly* on language policies — or more specifically, on policy enactments and the central role of teachers in this process (see also Farrell and Tan; Stritikus & Varghese).

This localized, teacher-centred perspective on policy and curricula underpins the theory and pedagogy I discuss in the sections below. In a world of English Changing, there is a place — indeed a need — to foster an identity that encourages and supports the transformative potential of teachers. In one of the following sections, I will detail my efforts to foster such an identity or conceptual role through a pre-service language teacher preparation course I have taught at York University called *Socio-Political Issues in Second Language Teaching* (LING 3600). Below, I will describe the syllabus design of this course and a particular group-project assignment — the issues analysis project (IAP). Though this pre-service course is designed to satisfy the certification criteria for government-funded, adult ESL in Canada (e.g., TESL Ontario’s website: <<http://www.teslontario.org/accreditation/>>), many of the graduates from this certificate program seek out teaching positions in international EFL and EAP settings, which many course readings address. It is my hope that the description of this course and the project assignment might suggest ideas for similar projects related to ESEA settings and issues.

Of equal importance, I hope that the ideas and practices in this paper contribute to further dialogue and critical investigation of the transcultural and transnational relevance of identity work in ESEA settings (e.g. Gao; Lin; Phan). Along with Vandrick in *Interrogating Privilege*, I feel that it is crucial for those of us who are ideologically and professionally privileged as so-called native speakers of Western Englishes to explore and reflect upon an underlying “colonial legacy” in our English Language Teaching (ELT) practices and beliefs (see Ch. 2). Perhaps *identity* itself is a concept shaped by such a legacy and hence worthy of critical investigation. As Lin astutely observes, “the notion of identity is double-edged and is a weapon with risks and dangers (and often with far greater risks and dangers for subordinated groups)... It is, in short, not necessarily a universal form of life prior to the colonial or oppressive encounter” (2). Though identity may indeed be “inauthentic” — a

Eurocentric, (neo)colonial invention—it is still a concept difficult to dispense with in a globalized world marked by what Nancy Fraser describes as the *post-socialist condition*, one in which identity politics (i.e., claims for ethno-linguistic rights) have become moral and political imperatives, often superseding rights and justice claims based on traditional socio-economic conditions (e.g., collective bargaining by unions, progressive taxation, universal health care, and education). In sum, the notion of identity offers both obstacles and opportunities for language teacher preparation in a world in which the changes ascribed to English are varied and complex in form and origin.

ENGLISH CHANGING: CHALLENGES FOR LTE

Long term experience in an academic field can provide a depth of perspective and balance sometimes lost in the fashions and superlatives of the present. Such experience can be particularly useful for investigating the notion of English Changing and the particular challenges and demands it poses for the ELT profession. The following quote comes from Anne Burns, and it is the first paragraph in a chapter aptly titled “Interrogating New Worlds of English Language Teaching”:

When I first became a teacher back in the 1970’s, the world of English language teaching (ELT) was more comfortable and cozy place of people who followed neat and predictable methods—secure, especially for native-English-speaking teacher, in the assumption that English meant learning to speak like me. (1)

Burns’s quote alludes to two very important professional changes she has observed, both of which have great importance in ESEA settings. The latter point refers to what critical and post-colonial linguists describe as a “native speaker fallacy” (Canagarajah), through which the intercultural skills and insights of Non-Native Speaker (NNS) teachers have been professionally marginalized (Braine; Kramsch; Lin et al.). Amongst ELT professionals, to speak of native-speakerness as a “fallacy” these days does not invite the level of disbelief and dismissiveness of earlier times—a significant change. Indeed, I still remember a plenary I gave at the 2002 TESOL France colloquium on identity and L2 pronunciation pedagogies, after which I mentioned that the head administrator and many supervisors of the ESL program where I had done my research were so-called NNS teachers/administrators. As the tone of subsequent questions and comments indicated, this situation

seemed irresponsible for many in attendance. “How could ‘accented’ NNS professionals properly supervise other ESL teachers?” was the common refrain. The rhetorical question became an unplanned opportunity to debate preferred goals such as *intelligibility* based on the description of “core” phonological items for English as an International Language syllabus design (Jenkins), and to talk about the kinds of language learning experiences and advantages that NNS teachers would have over their monolingual, NS colleagues in prioritizing and presenting such a syllabus.

The other point Burns raises regarding the comfort of “neat and predictable methods” is one that hits quite close to home, idiomatically speaking, in that it reflects my own TESOL training in the mid-1980s and the received wisdom of a “one-size-fits-all” method or approach, always developed by “expert” researchers from the inner circle or centre of ELT and often applied in ways that clashed with local conditions and expectations, a point persuasively made by Hu in respect to communicative language teaching (CLT) for ELT in the Peoples Republic of China (PRC). I experienced many of these tensions first hand as a newly minted EFL instructor at the Sichuan Foreign Language Institute in Chongqing, People’s Republic of China (1987-88), where many of the initial, CLT-informed lessons I introduced were too unstructured and practically unmanageable for the relatively larger classes I taught. I describe the process of dialogue and method negotiation I subsequently underwent as “learning/unlearning ESL” (*The ESL Classroom* 1-6) in an earlier publication. Looking back, much of the “unlearning” that I describe would be more formalized and integrated in current language teacher preparation. Such preparation would eschew neatness and security based on universal “best methods” and invite teachers, instead, to draw upon a larger repertoire of approaches/methods based on local conditions and prior language learning experiences (Kumaravadivelu *Beyond Methods*). Of equal importance, such an approach in LTE would frame language as a *social* practice and invite teachers to explore the ideological dimensions and consequences of their work beyond the classroom, a profound change neatly summarized by Bill Johnston:

The introduction of the political dimension into our discussions about language teaching has also meant the introduction of a language of values to the field: Where before there was only really the question of what, psycholinguistically speaking, was the most efficient way of acquiring a language, now there are matters of ideology, that is, beliefs about what is good and bad, right and wrong, in relation to politics and power relations. (51)

These quotes from Burns and Johnston suggest an expanded list of issues and choices that teachers must consider and that pre-service syllabus design should try and accommodate. Many of these choices are indeed political and ideological and would have been unimaginable when Anne Burns was doing her own pre-service language teacher education. Increasingly, for example, we ask language teachers to think about micro-macro connections—that is, how classrooms and communities are interconnected with larger changes in the world. A related TESOL topic here would be the notion of global flows and the geopolitics of English (Kumaravadivelu *Cultural Globalization*; Pennycook; Ramanathan; Sharifian). Does the spread of English reduce or increase local inequalities? Does it carry or align with external values that threaten local traditions? Or can it be appropriated and decolonized to serve local needs as suggested by Ahmar Mahboob in his article “English as an Islamic Language”?

Similarly, does globalization promote linguistic diversity or homogeneity—or both? One the one hand, through increased migration, a rich variety of languages, dialects and Englishes are now spoken in the streets and classrooms of Toronto, Sydney, New York, and London. Yet, on the other, global divisions of labour, such as in the call centre industry, compel teachers to teach so-called accent neutrality courses and the discourse norms and pragmatics of North American business transactions (Cowie; Morgan & Ramanathan). And in the Philippines, successive governments have placed a strong priority on the provision of human capital for global export through directed language policies and skills that promote the standardized English norms of dominant, labour-importing nations (Tupas). Such developments are reflected in the notion of “language as commodity,” by which discrete elements of language become factors of production and exchange, and subsequently managed and monitored for (in) efficiencies and value-adding opportunities (Tan & Rubdy).

These new inter-connections of the local and global, the linguistic and the extra-linguistic, are only a part of the curricular changes involved in LTE. For example, we can reflect on the broadened, interdisciplinary range of theories that we now relate to language learning and that we now ask our students to consider as part of the world of ESEA. A short list would include feminist pedagogies, queer pedagogies, anti-racist pedagogies, and post-methods informed by post-colonial theory, most notably Kumaravadivelu’s work. In addition, there are notions such as situated learning, community of practice, socio-cultural and activity theories, poststructuralism, language ecology, multimodality. The key point here is that these issues and theories might seem a bit conceptually dense and abstract, but I would argue that they have real, practical implications for identity work.

I can elaborate on this last point by relating a conversation I had in the summer of 2009 while attending the 2nd International Discourses and Cultural Practices Conference in Sydney, Australia. While there, I had an opportunity to meet with a number of graduate students to talk about their work, particularly when it related to my own. One PhD student I talked to was from Japan and was interested in studying language teacher identity in the Japanese setting. The question she posed was insightful and thought-provoking. By way of comparison, she wanted to know if in the field of mathematics, teacher identity mattered and with the same degree of research intensity now prevalent in ELT circles (Clarke; Morgan “Teacher Identity”; Phan; Varghese et al.). In our discussion, we explored how such identity parameters might correlate to field-internal assumptions around disciplinary content. We would need to think about, for instance, what a community of practice based on the study of math recognized as truth-like and as legitimate knowledge within its field of expertise: simply put, what it would mean to know math, and more broadly, what these beliefs implied for this community’s understanding of the possibilities for knowledge in general (i.e., questions related to the philosophical realm of *epistemology*). This would involve how the community defined and delimited knowledge of math, the kinds of methods it used to verify such knowledge, and the forms of pedagogy recognized as essential for imparting and sustaining its field (i.e., the community’s *paradigmatic assumptions*; Lynch). When correlating mathematics and identity, for example, if the correct answer or final outcome of a math activity had already been pre-determined by outside experts and based on de-contextualized, experimental research methods (on positivistic research design, see Lynch; Reagan), then a teacher’s identity would be relevant primarily in terms of the efficiencies described by Bill Johnston in the quote above.

How this relates to language teaching is worth considering. If we treat the knowledge base of language learning in “math-like” ways that objectify and de-historicize knowledge and exclusively privilege scientific and positivistic modes of reasoning, then identity becomes mostly a side-show, with teachers positioned as *technicians*—the delivery boys and girls of others’ “truths.” If, on the other hand, we see teachers’ actions as fundamental to meanings, outcomes, and answers—that is, to the knowledge that is gained—then identity becomes an essential component of curricula. Teachers are encouraged to see themselves as *agents of change*, creators of disciplinary knowledge and active meaning-makers. Such assumptions reflect what can be called a *social turn* in the language teaching profession, a turn indicative of constructivist, participatory, and emergent metaphors, and in poststructural, sociocultural, and activity theories, to name a few.

Along with Graham Crookes, I feel that it is essential for teachers to recognize that “ideas are the creation of women and men” (125)—always historical, socially constructed and contested, and always serving particular group interests and relations of power. As Crookes persuasively argues,

This is really important for us teachers. It puts us much less at the mercy of the expert or the researcher; it emphasizes the importance of our own locally situated, locally developed knowledge, and it also suggests the possibility that knowledge tends to be “interested” ... this is why it is important for a teacher developing a philosophy of teaching to be aware of the existence of a range of ‘theories of truth’; the dominant theories have not always been to our advantage and the mere understanding that there can be more than one such theory is itself emancipating. (123)

The pluralization and questioning of “truths,” as suggested by Crookes, clearly enhances and expands the decision-making authority of teachers. At the same time, following Johnston, it places questions of ideology at the center of language teacher preparation. The “inner world” of the teacher—his or her values, beliefs, and experiences become crucial concerns—something to monitor and manage. In this way, we come to attach prominence to teacher identity itself as a *form of practice* or as a *work in progress*, and as an *activity* with practical and professional consequences. Thus we see it as something to be nurtured and modeled in more formal ways in pre-service syllabus design—for example, through storytelling, self-study, auto-ethnography, and in course assignments such as journal entries and on-line discussion fora. Identity thus becomes an object for reflection, investigation, even confession, in order to bring about intended change. Of course, the larger question is towards what end or who’s vision? Some will view identity work as mostly pragmatic in nature, helping teachers cope with the “sink-or-swim” realities of the classroom. Others view identity work as more ideological, focused on showing how language, power and discourse shape our social and professional horizons.

AGENT OF CHANGE: THE EXAMPLE OF CRITICAL EAP

Ideally, the best identity work in LTE is both pragmatic *and* ideological. Such an approach emphasizes that becoming an agent of change is not a zero-sum dilemma in which a teacher must choose between the practical or the socially transformative,

sacrificing one for the other with each pedagogical step taken. As an important example, I have my pre-service, TESOL students read about Sarah Benesch's approach to Critical EAP, and in particular her conceptualization and correlation of Needs *and* Rights analyses in EAP settings. Needs analyses address conventional, language-specific obstacles with essay writing, test-taking, academic tasks and genres. Rights analyses address institutional obstacles (e.g., the lack of program support for additional language speakers). At the same time, Rights analyses in ESP/EAP also relate to the broader issue of teacher identity in that they address the relationship of the teacher to disciplinary content, a source of insecurity for EAP teachers who might feel that they know considerably less about the specialized content, writing tasks and genres that they are required to teach to their graduate students or professional students such as engineers, accountants, or health care workers. In most universities, as Benesch has noted, EAP teachers have been relegated to subordinate roles in relation to their content-area colleagues. The EAP specialist becomes, in effect, a junior service provider of insights on the language requirements (i.e., genres, registers, vocabulary, and knowledge-display tasks) of more prestigious academic disciplines. This role assigned to the EAP teacher—the subordinate role of technician (Kumaravadivelu *Beyond Methods* Ch. 2)—need not be the only identity option or default role for EAP professionals, as Benesch demonstrates in her discussion of a feminist EAP curriculum and her treatment of the topic of anorexia in a linked EAP-psychology. Through selected readings and classroom tasks, the students in Benesch's linked course not only improved their academic language skills (i.e., through needs analyses), they were also encouraged to explore the topic of anorexia through critical, feminist perspectives (i.e., through rights analyses) that framed the eating disorder as not just an individualized pathology, but also as a social and cultural issue tied to impossible images of beauty in the media. What also comes across in her anorexia chapter is the unique intercultural opportunities for language-based consciousness-raising that arise in the global "contact zones" of EAP classrooms. Restricting the parameters of EAP instruction to pragmatic, lexico-grammatical concerns fails to address the social and linguistic potential that such diverse settings uniquely offer.

Not everyone would be comfortable with Benesch's approach to EAP and its foundations in critical and feminist pedagogical research. Still, I would argue that even by a pragmatic and politically neutral measuring stick, the ability to see disciplinary content from multiple and innovative perspectives advances students' learning and in most cases justifies higher grades. I would also argue that meta-linguistic awareness of how textual choices construct disciplinary knowledge in an additional language is also invaluable in terms of helping students create their own persuasive and authoritative texts. Such texts

can be used strictly for self-interest (i.e. getting better grades and a job), or they can be used for collective and socially transformative purposes. It is the student—and not the teacher—who must ultimately decide how and to what ends this new textual awareness should be applied. It is the teacher’s responsibility to make this awareness of language and power available, even in cases where teacher and student might not agree with the social analyses and outcomes pursued (Morgan “Fostering” 89-90; see also Morgan “Pedagogical Dilemmas” on the ethics of teacher-student dialogue).

FOSTERING AGENCY: IMPLICATIONS FOR SYLLABUS DESIGN

When I have my pre-service teachers read Benesch’s chapter on anorexia, I want them to see how a feminist, critical EAP syllabus is actually realized within a specific institutional setting with all its contingencies and regulations. I want them to have concrete examples of how academic Needs and Rights can be integrated and how conventional, academic skills and tasks can be interwoven with socially aware, critical consciousness-raising. Moreover, I want them to have ethnographic and narrative detail—of how a teacher observes the syllabus in process, making decisions, and reflecting on their social and linguistic consequences/effects. To reiterate a key concern of this paper, I want them to learn about not only the *product* of teaching but also the person/identity *behind* the agency demonstrated—his or her ideological beliefs, values, the processes of identification that are inseparable from the pedagogy displayed and the types of inter-personal relationships formed with students. This is a particularly intriguing challenge for language teacher preparation and syllabus design as it speaks to the possibilities and limitations of what we can accomplish in formal school settings.

Let me explore this point further by referring to the speech at the ESEA conference given by the former Vice-President of Ateneo de Manila University, Dr. Assunta Cuyegkeng. In her opening address, Dr. Cuyegkeng marked the 150th anniversary of the university by reminding the assembly of some of its most prestigious alumni—national heroes such as Jose Rizal, Claro Recto, Edgar Jopson, and Evelio Javier, all of whom had made extraordinary contributions and sacrifices for the Philippine nation. Clearly, these were exceptional agents of change, and by citing them as Ateneo de Manila alumni, Dr. Cuyegkeng was implying that their social character and world views were not entirely pre-formed, but instead, and in some way, influenced and informed by the experiences and training they received at Ateneo de Manila. For educators, this raises a number of challenging questions as to what we do, or *if* and *how* we contribute to these types of

developments in our students. That is, what is the source of transformative agency? Is it innate, a product of emotion or affect? Does it come about by chance? Or, is it a unique product of prior family and community experiences? In other words, is it something that can be fostered or enhanced in a pre-service language teacher education? Though I believe it can, I also recognize that we need to consider the extent to which acquiring a new role or identity may involve different forms and pathways of learning. The instructed learning of new strategies to teach academic vocabulary, for example, may be of a different kind and type as the recursive processes of critical reflection and emergent understandings that facilitate social agency and a transformative potential in EFL/EAP teachers. In other words, we can't develop a transformative or liberatory agency in the same way we might promote grammatical or methodological competency in LTE. This point is nicely summarized by Mark Clarke:

“Empower” and “liberate” are not transitive verbs. Grammatically, of course, this is not true; both verbs require objects and therefore are transitive ... Pragmatically, however, the matter is not so straightforward. Empowerment and liberation are not serums that can be administered to others. They are not states of grace that we confer on our students. We do not empower others by declaring them to be liberated, nor can we harass them into being empowered ... In other words, liberation education is not a direct-instruction phenomenon. *The best we can do is work to create the conditions under which students will begin to take the initiative.* (175 emphasis mine)

To achieve the kinds of awareness and agency suggested by Burns, Johnston, Benesch, and Crookes in the sections above, the role of the language teacher educator, following Clarke, is focussed on creating conditions and possibilities rather than certainties through syllabus design. This raises practical concerns as to how we move from theory to practice and how we conceptualize and implement the elements of non-direct instruction for identity work in pre-service LTE. The following list of key elements represents my ongoing efforts towards this development:

CREATING CONDITIONS THAT FOSTER AGENCY FOR CHANGE

- A. Attention to situated constraints, institutional power relations (cf. Needs and Rights, Benesch)

- B. Attention to textual patterns and cycles (sequencing/combination) of texts, including talk about and around texts (cf. Bhattacharya et. al)
- C. Attention to multimodal, semiotic resources (digital, visual, print, gestural, spatial) and their “affordances” (cf. Kress; van Lier)
- D. Students as active meaning makers and not passive recipients
- E. Teacher/Student identities as texts (Morgan)
- F. Critical awareness and agency are *emergent* phenomena, *potentially* arising from the interaction of all the points above

To reiterate Clarke’s point above, critical awareness and agency are not serums or instruments to be directly administered by an all-knowing teacher-educator. Nor do they happen the same way across place and time as Benesch’s contextualized treatment of anorexia demonstrates (Point A). They are instead *emergent* phenomena (e.g. van Lier Ch. 4; Point F), arising through the local articulation of multiple factors (e.g., all the points above) and through continuous reflection and collaboration around content.

Perhaps the most important point of consideration is that for each student in a class, critical awareness may not necessarily come about the same way—if at all. Often, and long after a lesson or reading, a student might have an “Ah-ha” moment, an epiphany of sorts, whereby something (i.e., a shared sign or meaning) in the immediate present clarifies and animates what had seemed vague or less relevant in the past. This is where the notion of *affordance* is significant (Point C). As van Lier states, “The notion of affordance is related to *meaning potential* [cf. Halliday], so long as we do not define meaning as sitting inside words and sentences (or in objects). More accurately, it is *action potential*, and it emerges as we interact with the physical and social world” (92). For the purposes of fostering critical awareness, then, a LTE course reading or related activity may contain such *potential*, but its full extent does not lie bounded and intact within the text itself or method of instruction alone. Rather, it is a co-constructed or shared opportunity informed as well by a student’s specific needs, memories, and abilities—at a given moment—to perceive and utilize this meaning potential in order to realize particular self-directed goals, transformative or otherwise. As van Lier explains, “affordances are detected, picked up, and acted upon as part of a person’s resonating with, or being in tune with, her or his environment This means that when we perceive something, we perceive it as it relates to us. So, the object [e.g. an EFL/LTE text, activity, or lesson] ... is not ‘as it is,’ but ‘as it is to me’” (91). A notion of affordance, as defined by van Lier, clarifies and complements Clarke’s explanation of empowerment as a non-linear, non-directive condition of a pre-service LTE course syllabus.

Critical possibilities in syllabus design are also enhanced through multiple readings of texts via the inter-textual talk of teachers (e.g., Wallace), small group interactions, and the careful development of question prompts that encourage experiential, critical-analytic, and oppositional meaning-making (Points B, D). Another key element is how we inter-relate lessons over time—how we initiate opportunities for students to construct their own patterns and insights across texts and across lessons—to conceptualize larger *meta-lessons* that give relevance and coherence to the transformative roles they might wish to adopt. This idea of higher-order patterning and of *meta-lessons*—constructed by participants interacting and contributing to the systems in which they are situated—exemplifies the notion of *emergence* (van Lier), but more broadly refers to a growing research interest in ecological understanding as it relates to SLA (e.g., van Lier; Kramersch) and more specifically, the visionary insights of anthropologist Gregory Bateson (cf. “the pattern which connects”; e.g., Harries-Jones) a key theoretical influence on Mark Clarke’s work in LTE quoted above.

Non-linear, holistic, and ecological metaphors for learning all draw attention to the communicative/semiotic tools we use to make sense of, or to mediate, the patterns and meta-lessons that we perceive across time and place. In this respect, a transformative potential is also encouraged through the strategic sequencing and utilization of multimodal resources (i.e., digital, visual, spatial, etc.), each modality engaging identities and meaning-making in ways not duplicated through alternative modalities (Point C). Not least of all the elements above, it is important to consider the extent to which a teacher’s identity is itself a textual and pedagogical resource (Point E), co-constructed with students and potentially deployed in transformative ways that invigorate course content and meaning-making (cf. Simon’s notion of “image-text,” Morgan “Teacher Identity”).

The following sections describe my ongoing efforts to transpose theory into practice and in ways that encourage language teachers to reflect on the social world and on their capacity and legitimacy as agents of change. The institutional context is a pre-service course I have taught called *Socio-Political Issues in Second Language Teaching* (LING 3600) with specific focus on the final course assignment, the Issues Analysis Project.

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: LING 360 AND THE ISSUES ANALYSIS PROJECT

LING 3600 is a three-credit, required course as part of the 30-credit York University TESOL Certificate Programme (<http://www.yorku.ca/laps/dlll/tesol/>). The program attracts both domestic and international students from a wide variety of ethno-linguistic, academic

and professional backgrounds. Some students are relatively young, and complete the certificate concurrent with their undergraduate studies. Many post-graduates with years of work experience—and some nearing retirement age—enroll with thoughts of a career change or travel-work opportunities. These varied experiences and interests enrich the kinds of conversations that take place in class. The following course description for LING 3600 explains its intentions:

All second language teaching and learning takes place within a complex socio-political, cultural and economic context. The TESOL professional is able to analyze this context, and understand its influence on the classroom. This course examines the context of TESOL and considers how various issues influence and inform such elements as classroom methodology, leadership, administration, programme design, the role and responsibility of the teacher, the teacher as leader and change agent. Students will be encouraged to select and analyze issues that are relevant to the particular context within which they are, or expect to be, teaching.

The course meets once a week over a twelve-week semester and has four graded components: Term Essay - 40%; Issue Analysis Project (IAP) - 30%; Response Paper - 10%; Participation - 20%. In another publication (Morgan “Fostering”), I detail the weekly readings and thematic units that comprise the course. Beginning around week 7, after the research essays have been submitted, preparation for the IAP begins. By this point of time, and through the sequencing of selected readings, the frames of reference for socio-political issues in SLE has integrated both macro and micro dimensions of the profession and field, examining global and local issues, policies and pedagogies as well as issues of culture and identity, especially from a Canadian perspective. I begin by going over the format, description and objectives for the assignment. The following assignment description and instructions are handed out to the student-teachers:

LING 3600: Issues Analysis Project (30%)

Length: 1500-2000 words + appendices and bibliography of relevant sources

Format: This is a group project (2-4 people)

The premise of this assignment is that the effective teacher is aware of the socio-political context within which she or he works. It also assumes that the instructor has a

professional responsibility to attempt to deal with the issues that impact negatively on the teaching-learning process and the situation of second language learners and teachers.

The objective of this assignment is to select an issue, and structure a response that will at least some way work towards resolving the issue. In other words, you will produce a blueprint for action that is responsive to the issue identified and could, at least in theory, be carried out as proposed. Your response might be in the form of a new policy, advocacy initiative, curriculum innovation, specialized materials, or an in-service/pre-service workshop for teachers and/or program administrators.

To help students conceptualize a possible “blueprint for action” or “intervention,” I bring in a variety of student examples from previous years. I also describe a number of exemplary projects and publications external to the course. Class time is set aside each week to brainstorm possible topics in small and large groups. Based on these discussions, I bring in supplementary materials and email the class links to Internet sites that might be useful.

Part of this preparation is focussed on the strengths and limitations of specific formats of intervention, a key component of the grade for the IAP. For example, we discuss options for effective, participatory workshops and realistic goals within a 2-3 hour time frame. Similarly, we discuss the rhetorical elements and appropriate length of a persuasive advocacy letter to an elected official. In support, I sometimes bring in examples of advocacy resources from the TESOL organization’s website, including a few position statements and formal letters to policy makers. In terms of transformative lesson plans and/or curricular units, we look at ways in which they should follow the task-based guidelines developed in the Language Instruction for New Canadians (LINC) curricula based on the Canadian Language Benchmarks (Pawlikowska-Smith), which is the model most familiar to the student-teachers in our program.

Another important element that supports the IAP is the selection and sequencing of readings around this stage of the course. Weeks 7 and 8, in particular, tend to inform IAP’s designed as workshops for teachers and administrators (e.g., Burnaby; Haque & Cray; Pinet). For groups interested in developing their own critical pedagogies as an IAP (e.g., lesson plans, units, materials), week 9 offers many detailed examples for EAP and ESL curricula (e.g., Benesch; O’Mochain; Quinlisk; Morgan “Teaching the Gulf War”). In reference to the above list of curricular elements, the Quinlisk article takes up media literacy and multimodality strategies in ELT (Point C). In an ESEA setting that might first appear unreceptive to discussions of homosexuality (Point A)—a Christian women’s college in Japan—Ó’Mochain describes how he integrated the narratives of Japanese gays

and lesbians into a content-based EFL course on cultural studies in ways non-threatening yet supportive of academic language learning. Ó'Móchain's students showed a newfound empathy based on awareness of the painful familial and social ostracism faced by lesbian and gay youth in Japan. My own article describes a somewhat unexpected ESL unit on lessons related to the first Gulf War and reflects on the ways that identity, critical language awareness, and local community concerns can be sequenced and integrated over several weeks (Points B, D, & E). The final readings in week 12 (Elson; Forhan and Scheraga) reiterate the larger socio-political contexts for the IAP, and the need for practitioners to advocate on behalf of their students and their profession.

In total, the readings and diversity of units across the semester are intended to create a broader horizon (i.e., a meta-lesson) of possibilities for new language teachers. Becoming an agent of change can be related to all aspects and domains of the ELT profession (e.g., policy, administration, materials development, classroom practices, as well as inter-personal relations within and beyond the school). The following examples of IAPs and their blueprints for action are a general indication of the variety of socio-political concerns identified by students in LING 3600 as well as the diversity of interventions they designed.

SELECTED ISSUES ANALYSIS PROJECTS

1. *Age Discrimination for Overseas Teaching* (2 students)

Blueprint for Action: An advocacy letter to the president of TESOL with recommendation for official policy related to age discrimination for overseas teaching.

Comment: Both group members are mature students seeking TEFL employment overseas after their retirement. They researched and developed this IAP after finding several websites—many in ESEA settings—that would not hire older teachers and some requesting photographs of applicants, which might also facilitate discrimination based on age, race and/or gender. The two students found several United Nations' documents and policy statements against age discrimination, which they used to support their advocacy letter.

2. *Teaching Hidden Identities* (4 students)

Blueprint for Action: 2 hour lesson based on Vandrick's 1997 *TESOL Quarterly* article on hidden identities as part of a curriculum unit on Human Rights based on the Canadian Language Benchmarks (Level 5-6) for adult ESL students. **Comment:** In this lesson, students were required to match images on a PowerPoint presentation with narrative captions/statements depicting issues raised by Vandrick in her article (e.g.,

sexuality, economic disparities, attention disorders, health problems). The intent of the activity was to begin a discussion on stereotypical associations and prejudices, followed by a discussion of how “hidden identities” might influence language teaching and learning.

3. *A Report on the Cost-Benefits of Computer Assisted Language Learning* (2 students)

Blueprint for Action: A consultant’s report submitted to a local board of education deliberating over the efficacy of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) for adult ESL programs in Toronto. **Comment:** This project examines the relative benefits of applying limited budget resources for CALL in relation to investment in more teachers and smaller teacher-student ratios. A key conclusion from this group IAP was that the issue of resource allocation is not one of computers replacing teachers, but that inevitably, teachers who can use computers will replace those who cannot.

4. *Ornamental English in Asia* (4 students)

Blueprint for Action: 2 hr. workshop for prospective EFL teachers on “ornamental English” (cf. Seargeant; see also <www.English.com>). **Comment:** The purpose of this workshop is to make EFL teachers aware of global uses of English that are not conventionally considered or taught; that is, the use of English words and orthography for decorative purposes that can be commercial (i.e., enhancing the value of consumer products) or identity-motivated (i.e., claiming a cosmopolitan identity or aligning oneself with particular globalized, transcultural communities of practice; e.g., Pennycook). Though such decorative texts may contain grammatical or pragmatic errors as defined by so-called native-speakers, it is worth considering that such creative borrowings of English might not be intended for inner-circle users. Accordingly, native-speaker, inner circle judgments that negatively assess the accuracy and appropriacy of ornamental English would be biased and locally irrelevant. Thus, one of the key goals proposed in this IAP workshop is the development of intercultural competence: on the one hand, enhanced teacher awareness of the complexities of English in the world; on the other, EFL student awareness of how “non-standard” uses of the language (i.e., as ornamentation and/or identity-negotiation) might be perceived and evaluated by inner-circle speakers.

CONCLUSIONS

In Morgan (“Fostering”), I provide a detailed discussion of Projects 2 and 3 and the ways that they realize the transformative potential set out in this article. In the same

article, I discuss some of the challenges of doing the IAP's, particularly the difficulty of pre-service teachers analyzing and addressing social and pedagogical contexts in which their familiarity might be limited and based solely on their practical observations. Another challenge I discuss is the reluctance of some students—particularly in the competitive context of university grading and funding criteria—to work collaboratively in groups and share a common grade for the project. As I mention in the same article, I have had to reduce the grade weight of the IAP over the years (from 40% to 30%) and on occasion, I have allowed individual projects to be submitted based on time availability or topic concerns. At the same time, I try and emphasize that any type of meaningful change (i.e., policy or curricula) in any language program requires the building of consensus, negotiation, and compromise amongst colleagues and peers. In other words, the skills refined in developing and completing the IAP are transferable and indeed essential for teachers in their future professional lives.

As researchers such Guo and Wang have observed, project-based EFL learning is difficult to implement in countries such as China where teacher-centred, transmission-based pedagogies have been more prominent. Yet, both authors recognize the advantages for language acquisition gained through students' interaction and problem-solving around meaningful tasks related to locally relevant subject matter. This has also been my experience in the LING 3600 course, where socio-political and ideological concerns—such as those raised by Burns, Johnston, and Benesch—are explicit elements of course content.

I have been mostly encouraged by what my students have generated in their IAP's. I see this kind of experiential, project-based, form of learning as especially relevant and effective given what constructivist, ecological and poststructural theories of knowledge and language learning suggest. Student identities are engaged and re-negotiated when they find and address a problem in their intended profession. Working collaboratively towards solutions to real-world problems helps students develop the kinds of team-building skills that are necessary for improving working conditions and curricula in language programs. Such practices foster the potential for agency in relation to the ESEA conference theme of English Changing. We become active participants in these changes through our interpretations and contextualized "modifications" of school-based language policies; or in how we critically engage with the notion of English as an international language in relation to Asian Englishes; or in the creation of new English programs serving those who have been historical and socially marginalized (Ramanathan)—and through our participation and collaboration in organizations such as ESEA. To reiterate, some of us will have less power and fewer opportunities to do so, but I strongly encourage all of us to look for the small spaces and places where change is both needed and possible.

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