

## **Postcolonial Theories and TESOL: Exploring Implications for Teaching in U.S. Contexts**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

One of my first experiences with teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) was during my years as an undergraduate, working with the Somali-Bantu Community Organization (SBCO) in Syracuse, NY. My fellow undergraduate tutors and I worked specifically with 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade students, developing lesson plans and implementing project-based learning activities each semester. The program met weekly on Saturday mornings through collaboration with the Syracuse City School District and several student organizations and academic departments from Syracuse University. I continued my work with the tutoring program after graduation as a member of AmeriCorps, working as a liaison between the SBCO and the departments and programs at the university.

In the five semesters I worked with this program, I planned monthly meetings with community leaders, assisted with lesson planning and activities, and organized tutors and transportation to the site. I sought advice across campus and in a variety of scholarly sources for our teaching and project-based activities, which included a holiday book, a poetry quilt, a CSI movie, decorated T-shirts, and an alphabet line.

I progressively became aware of the politics of power related to my work. In my meetings with community leaders, I was aware that my identity as a White, middle-class, female student from a locally prestigious university afforded me a position of power and privilege: I collaborated with colleagues and advisors from the university to plan and implement the projects, not allowing much choice by our students or their families. While well received by other White, American-educated faculty and friends, our students' parents did not always appreciate the projects with as much confidence. The youths' self-revelatory writings aired individual perspectives in ways with which parents were uncomfortable even as their children seemed engaged and motivated. Though the community leaders tried to protect us program co-coordinators from hearing what parents thought, the students were forthright about sharing their parents' beliefs that the program was contributing to their assimilation to U.S. culture, questioning if it was at the expense of Somali-Bantu culture, language, and tradition.

Awareness of my location within these situations of power and privilege caused me to take pause when considering a future degree and career in Teaching English as a Second or Other Language (TESOL). The little that I knew and understood about the spread of English, with its politically charged ties to colonialism, made me want to learn more about why and how

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others undertook the profession, while it simultaneously pushed me away so as not to continue traditions of power and privilege related to teaching English to nonnative English speakers.

Since that time, I have observed and student taught in several different contexts in New York City. In both K-6 and 7-12 classroom experiences, I have witnessed well-meaning teachers, myself included, who continue to enact this imbalance of power, fostering English acquisition and academic success with little sense of the students' or their families' goals, aspirations for their American school experience, or ways of being. In addition, large waves of immigrant populations can alter school communities within a school each year and from year to year, further complicating educators' abilities to understand students' communities.

I am now beginning my second semester at a 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade school, part of the Internationals Network for Public Schools. The school, located in Brooklyn, serves foreign-born English language learners exclusively. The New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) does not publish records on languages spoken at a given school, however, in my brief time at this high school, I have met students who speak an incredibly diverse range of minority languages: Spanish, French, Creole, Chinese, Fujianese, Ukrainian, Russian, Arabic, Bengali—and these were spoken by just the 25 students I worked with as part of the Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) program last year. My cooperating teacher has discussed the repeated change in language majority populations since her time there. When she first began teaching at this school, she observed that Spanish-speakers were the majority, however now Chinese is the most common first language (C. Zaverucha, personal communication, January 18, 2013). She has noted seeing a change in the ways in which the students interact with one another as the language majority fluctuates; in this case, language majority refers to the students at this high school whose L1 is spoken by the most number of students, such as Spanish and Chinese.

According to the most recent demographics from the NYCDOE (2001-2007), the four-year cohort from 2007 (i.e., graduation in 2011) at this high school consisted of eight Asian students, 27 Black students, 24 Hispanic students, and 3 White students. The four-year 2005 cohort, in comparison, consisted of 13 Asian students, 12 Black students, 19 Hispanic students, and 13 White students. Of course, these statistics reflect demographics of ethnicity rather than language, but they suggest that it is likely that the language majority can change quite dramatically, even in a two-year time period.

As a White, female, middle-class educator, my coordinating teacher seems to have positive rapport with parents. She has completed four books with her student writers using the personal narrative genre. Identifying Ukrainian, a minority language, as her first language, she often relates with her students by using her own status as a minority language speaker as a tool in helping to shape her students' identities, encouraging them to maintain their first languages while also gaining access to English.

In contrast, I identify English as my first language, and I am not a competently bilingual Spanish speaker. I am aware of how my position as an ESL educator who is White, female, middle-class, and born and educated in the United States, situates me relative to immigrant populations in our culture, especially in the English-centric culture of schools. Trying to become conscientious about my exercise of this power and privilege, as well as desiring more understanding of the underlying non-neutral nature of the TESOL profession, caused me to want to look further into the nature of these politics and how they have been enacted and addressed.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### English and Global Colonialism: Establishing a Context

Postcolonial critics view the contemporary spread of English as a way that racism and cultural stereotypes have been perpetuated despite the end of colonialism, creating a static Other (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Said, 1978). Other postcolonial researchers view the spread of English from the perspective that it is part of the complex global reality of today (Lok, 2012). Taken together, the words “teaching” and “English” are central to some of today’s most critical educational, cultural, and political concerns (Pennycook, 1999).

Kachru (1996) noted that the contemporary spread of English is unprecedented in linguistic history, describing the Three Concentric Circles of English. The Inner Circle includes countries with traditional bases of English, such as the United States. The Outer Circle includes former English colonies where English still plays an important role in multilingual settings, such as Ghana and India. Finally, the Expanding Circle refers to countries in which English is increasingly becoming an international language, including Korea and Zimbabwe. World Englishes, the many varieties of English spoken around the world, develop through a combination of Englishization, in which English affects the local language and culture, and nativization, in which the local language influences English. Contrary to intuition, the spread of English in these Outer and Expanding World contexts is often for intranational communication, not necessarily to communicate with people from Inner Circle countries.

Kachru pointed out that some in the TESOL field believe learning English and the cultural associations related to learning and using the language can cause identity confusion or can lead to Othering linked to racialization. However, he also acknowledged others in the profession who view the spread of World Englishes (WEs) as a means to communicate intranationally that provides individuals with the opportunity to choose to learn and use English because of its prestige and linguistic currency. Kachru also addressed the complexities of multilingualism. The TESOL profession, Kachru contended, oversimplifies the spread of English because it is still enacted in the same vein as past colonial contexts, but the contemporary globalization of English is much more layered and complicated than ever before. Kachru explained two sides of the World Englishes debate, and even though he avoided explicitly choosing a side, his explanations seemed to favor the opportunities available through English. His analysis considered misconceptions related to the spread of English, but he could have delved more deeply into the opportunities presented by World Englishes to further his point.

In contrast, Phillipson (2001) asked how English plays a role in the process of globalization with a more critical lens. His analysis focused on the globalization phenomenon and the rhetoric related to the spread of language, as well as the ways in which postcolonial and post-communist worlds view the spread of English. His analysis took the position that English is primarily spread for economic and militaristic reasons. English serves the interests of some, like military links (NATO, UN) and cultural profits (CNN, MTV), at the expense of others, thus enabling disparate conditions in Expanding Circle countries. He argued that this process could be considered via two paradigms. The Diffusion of English paradigm involves the promotion of one language (English) and culture (U.S.) through linguistic imperialism based on the ideals of exploitation and expansion. The Ecology of Languages paradigm, in contrast, values and places equity on speakers of all languages and promotes linguistic and cultural diversity.

Phillipson considered the teaching of English in several global contexts (i.e., India, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Japan). His analysis demonstrated how the native speaker is glorified in these contexts, and how the spread of English causes the diffusion of sociolinguistic features of the local culture and language. The practical implications he offered suggest that future language policy and planning be more sensitive toward the value of all languages. English should be used for equitable purposes and native English speakers should be more accountable for spreading English to Expanding Circles. He also argued the need to acknowledge the validity of all the varieties of English, rather than view standard English as the model. It should be noted that Phillipson's abstract was written in English, German, French, Spanish, and Russian, with Asian and Arabic languages noticeably absent. Though Phillipson was ultimately in favor of the spread of English as long as it is under equitable conditions, he seemed to oversimplify the role language plays in the complicated context of globalization.

These postcolonial analyses help to explain what may be described as present-day linguistic imperialism in the K-12 U.S. context, particularly since the global language pressures these scholars describe are analogous to the idea that English language learners (ELLs) in U.S. schools are often sacrificing their native language(s) and culture(s) while learning English and constantly being exposed to American popular culture.

### **English and Power in the United States**

The postcolonial culture of power is also reflected in English-dominant U.S. primary and secondary schools, with language acknowledged as being where power is formed, performed, and tied to identity via race, gender, and social-class (Bourdieu, 1991; Delpit, 1988). *Identity* will be defined in this review as the way a person is recognized as a certain *type* of person in a *particular situation*, as identities are complex, varied, and tied to one's varied affinity groups (Gee, 2000). *Gender*, *race*, and *class* will be defined as socially constructed variables via which identity is constructed by an individual or viewed by others, not necessarily how one is born or materially defined. Research has explored parents', students', and teachers' perspectives toward questions of English language learner identity in U.S. schools and communities.

#### ***Parent perspectives***

Villenas (2001) described a two-year ethnographic study interviewing Latina mothers in a small town in North Carolina. Derived from a race-based feminist perspective, Villenas noticed a great deal of both malicious and benevolent racism toward Latinos; the small town was home to the Ku Klux Klan and markedly blatant discrimination toward Latinos for jobs and housing. There was also a noticeable amount of "helping," which came in the form of a local health clinic that thought it necessary to educate Latina mothers on proper ways to care for their children. The Latina participants in Villenas' study demonstrated resilience to the dominant benevolent racism with counternarratives. When it became clear that cultural differences existed toward parenting between them and the White mothers' expectations about parenting, the Latina mothers constructed themselves as educated, positioning traditional family and community education they received in their native countries as superior to the education in the United States. They proudly positioned themselves in their roles as homemakers and framed "education" and "intelligence" in the context of having etiquette, loyalty to family, respect, a hard work ethic, and common sense through observation.

The implications of this study highlight the resilience and intelligence possessed by immigrant families and communities. It exemplifies how social change could be brought about through sharing counternarratives, and how resistance can be reconstructed in the discreet defiance of home life. This study also noted that benevolent racism is still racism: viewing the Other as having a deficit and therefore wanting to help because it is perceived necessary is a form of oppression. Villenas' description of her methodology could have been more explicit, including stating what questions she asked participants, in what language interviews were conducted, and how often she met with participants. This lack of information may cause critics to question her biases.

Olmedo (2003) studied Latina mothers living in low socioeconomic Chicago neighborhoods and the ways in which they simultaneously used assimilation and resistance as strategies to raise children in a different cultural environment from their native countries. The data reflected two entwined ethnographic projects: interviews conducted with Mexican mothers and interviews conducted with Puerto Rican grandmothers, with findings grounded in theories about the relationship between Mexican and Puerto Rican migration and education in the U.S., deficit-oriented explanation of underachievement in immigrant communities, intragroup diversity among Latino/as, and static concepts of culture. Olmedo noted that the Latino families understood that the familial role is to teach children about respect and good behavior, whereas schools seemed to expect parents to demonstrate their value toward education by being present at school functions. The mothers and grandmothers in this study constructed the term education to include more than academics and adjusted to their new lives and the lives of their children in the United States by figuring out ways of maintaining Spanish, negotiating careers in order to be at home and at school as often as possible with their children, and disciplining at home. They assimilated some of the American cultural norm (i.e., volunteering at school), while also resisting by tapping into their cultural capital (i.e., opening a Mexican food catering business for income that would allow as much time as possible to be home and at school with their children).

The implications of this study revolved around educating teachers about parents' cultural values and expertise to improve the relationship between home and school for student success. The study suggested that schools should view parents' cultural beliefs and practices as complementary to the school's mission, rather than resistant. This study could have been extended to note paternal viewpoints on education as well as additional Latino/a cultures.

### — *Student perspectives*

— Harklau's (2000) year-long ethnographic study followed three language minority students from their last semester in a U.S. high school through their first semester in college, exploring how they negotiated the variation in academic and linguistic demands during the transition from secondary to postsecondary education. She also explored how students' identities were constructed in two different educational institutions with the label "ESOL student," and how this mediated students' transition from secondary to postsecondary schools. Harklau's findings were grounded in hidden curriculum theory, poststructuralist perspectives, representation concepts, and identity in movement theory. She found that in high school, immigrant students were identified, or Othered, as the students with determination, as exemplified by English class assignments geared toward students' writing personal narratives and allowing opportunities for teacher sympathy and support, which, in turn, created a complex power dynamic between student and teacher. Similarly, teachers often viewed immigrant

students in juxtaposition with their U.S.-born peers. Teachers identified immigrant students as comparatively perseverant, hard working, but lacking in innate ability due to the language barrier.

These same three students were considered long-term ELLs in community college ESOL classes, in comparison with peers who came to college having spent most of their identity-forming years in their native country. The long-term ELLs found a mismatch between their experiences and their assignments, causing them to feel that they were being identified as deficient. The ESOL classes gave explicit, constricting instructions that assumed students were recent immigrants, had come to adulthood in a foreign country, had entered the U.S. with economic and social privilege, and would likely return to their native country in the near future. The classes also assumed that students struggled reading in English and English grammar. The long-term students found assignments conflicting with their new hybrid identities forged in high school through merging American cultural norms with those of their native cultures.

This study demonstrated the ways in which teachers placed identity labels on students; in this case, the homogenizing label of ESOL student, affecting the ways students identified themselves. Harklau called for reexamination of such program configurations in order to unearth what is taken for granted in curriculum and assignments. She suggested that TESOL professionals should be explicit with ESOL students about placement and program, and that curriculums need to reflect and acknowledge long-term U.S. residents' experiences and expertise.

In the high school, language minority ESOL students were a smaller percentage of the population. Compared to American-born students, most teachers often stopped with lumping students together as ESOL without considering more universal issues of gender, race, and class. ESOL teachers assumed a model of sympathy and support toward the language minority students, regardless of whether they were currently receiving ESOL services. To extend the study, Harklau could have interviewed newcomer ELLs at the postsecondary level to see how their formation of identity aligned with what the long-term ELLs felt in high school. There also could have been more discussed or observed related to race and gender in student identities.

Ibrahim (1999) conducted a five-month ethnographic study, asking: What critical pedagogy is required in order not to repeat the colonial history embedded in the classroom relationship between White teachers and students of color? He used a methodology he called ethnography of performance, grounded in social imaginary and Black stylized English theories. At the time of the study, all of the teachers at this small Franco-Ontarian high school were White and the majority of students were African. Ibrahim identified 10 boys and six girls for extensive observation in and outside the classroom and for interviews. All of the participants were African and at least trilingual: French, English, and a mother tongue. Most chose to interview in French.

Ibrahim found that participants felt rushed to learn English in Ontario in order to communicate outside of school and speak with peers, and feeling that teachers often spoke to them in a condescending manner if it appeared they did not know English. All the participants claimed to learn English from television, which Ibrahim acknowledged as their introduction to Black popular culture, and which, in turn, became an alternative site for students' identity formation and language learning. Rap and hip-hop were also considered to be a learning site for language, though seemingly more so for boys than girls. Ibrahim argued that the students dressed, behaved, and spoke according to the processes of becoming Black in order to fit into a culture with people who looked like them. Furthermore, the participants identified with linguistic and cultural behavioral patterns that were constructed as Black (i.e., basketball and rap music).

The study implications included an argument for TESOL teachers to identify the different sites students might invest their identities and develop materials to engage students' raced,

classed, gendered, sexualized, and abled identities. He also argued that rap and hip-hop need to be opened in the curriculum in order to legitimize students' identities as aligned with a norm. Ibrahim also contended that teachers should be familiar with popular culture in order to engage students, and if they are not, they can engage students as the teachers, explaining what rap and hip-hop mean to them. Finally, he noted that TESOL professionals need to close the gap between minority students' identities and the school curriculum, similar to Harklau's implications, and between those identities and classroom practices and materials. Ibrahim could have interviewed more female students to point out the gendered critiques he begins to touch on related to language learning and particularly the sexism identified in rap and hip-hop. Also, interviewing in French may have lost some meaning when translated to English. Finally, Ibrahim could have more deeply explored class, sexualized, and abled identities.

Quach, Jo, and Urrieta (2009) used Critical Race Theory and Asian Critical Theory to ask how identity and language development in Asian students is shaped by race, racial relations, and experienced racism in school. The researchers interviewed nine 1.5 generation Asian students from various backgrounds, including Korea, China, and Vietnam. All of the students grew up in North Carolina and attended a state university there. The interviews were obtained over the course of one academic year and used open-ended questions. The researchers found that the participants grew up in areas with no other Asian students or people who looked like them. They negotiated their identities, constructing hybridized identities and making intentional power moves by choosing White friends, learning standard English, and even altering physical appearance, such as remaining out of the sun to stay light-skinned. All the participants also admitted to regretting not maintaining their heritage language. The researchers took note of how participants' gender and class status were entangled with their racial and language experiences, informing the construction of their overall identities. Participants' identity development was confusing and conflicted: for some, it became more important to claim their Asianness.

The researchers explained that the results suggest that schools and educators need to actively help immigrant students of color to claim bilingual and bicultural identities. They also recommended that educators expose harmful stereotypes and re-consider multicultural curriculums. This study could have been enhanced with quantitative findings or collecting ethnographic data from one specific ethnic group, as the range of ethnicities, in some ways, seemed to further assume the stereotype the interviewers were trying to contend: that all Asians are the same with similar experiences.

### *Teacher perspectives*

Motha (2006) took a different perspective on Othering in the United States. Her article represented a critical feminist ethnographic study of four female native English speaking ESOL teachers in their first year teaching in K-12 schools in the northeast U.S. Data sources included classroom observations, interviews, and "afternoon teas," gatherings in Motha's home every 2-3 weeks during the school year. Informal interviews of students, other teachers, administrators, school documents, e-mails, and phone conversations were also included. Motha's research asked: (1) how do identities acquire racial meanings within school walls? (2) how do teachers negotiate dominating images surrounding ESOL and race? (3) what are the implications of teachers' privileged linguistic identities for their pedagogical practice?

Motha's report highlighted several findings. First, challenging and complex issues of race were often entwined in various small moments throughout any typical school day. Participants also strived to counter their Whiteness and privilege. One participant did this by advocating for a

multicultural literature course to be taught by a person of color. Another challenged the concept of Americanness by promoting the study of Native American folk tales in her class. The third finding of the study was the ways in which the participants' students' first language, labeled "World English," along with their identities as having interrupted formal education, positioned them as having a deficit. The teachers were often uncertain of how to address the racialized implications of standard English that were promoted by their schools, especially when many of the native English speakers at the school spoke African American Vernacular English. Their students were essentially learning three different varieties of English at the same time, causing one of the teachers to look for ways to explicitly teach each variety.

The researcher suggested that TESOL professionals need to be aware that identities shaped within ESOL are inherently racialized. She noted that to aim to be colorblind and "treat everyone the same" is to ignore the power and privilege embedded in such differences among students. She also recommended that teachers work collaboratively to deconstruct White identity and avoid the traditional missionary-like positioning of the profession. She also noted the need for support for preservice and new teachers to explore race issues in the classroom and that remaining silent about the varieties of English at a school perpetuates racial inequities. Finally, Motha advocated that teachers work collaboratively outside school-sanctioned environment to help discover divergent solutions to problems posed by the school context.

Motha explained that her results suggested a need for TESOL professionals to be aware of their own identities. In a historical context, these identities may award them privilege and power. Even when teachers try to contest this by pushing students to be vocal in their views of racism or study multicultural perspectives, they must also be aware that terms like "multiculturalism" and actions to counter racism are coming from their positions as White, middle-class, female teachers in positions of power. She noted that it is also important not to become so incapacitated by this racialized and sensitive history to avoid fighting the system as it exists. Interviewing male teachers could further this study, as there is even more history related to power, privilege, and gender in this context. The study also could have been more explicit about the grades participants taught so the reader could have a better understanding of the developmental maturity of the students. Also, the participants in this study were former students of the researcher, which may have caused an imbalance in the interview hierarchy and influenced participants' answers.

Katz and DaSilva Iddings (2009) used role and positioning theory to ask how teachers function as mediators of their students' socio-constructions of identity. Their methods included two programs: the Family Literacy Study and the Storytelling Study. The Family Literacy Study focused on academic interactions between native Spanish speakers and native English speakers over one academic year at an elementary school. The data reflected weekly family literacy meetings and classroom observations twice a week, and included interviews with parents, students, and teachers in both English and Spanish. Though the study anecdotally discussed two students in some detail, overall the study found that English held high status in the classroom, which silenced the ELLs in school and their parents' efforts to help their children learn English. The Storytelling Study, in comparison, took place in preschool and kindergarten classrooms over four years in a low socioeconomic urban community. Classes included almost all African American children and one White child. Data collected included student journals, audio/video tapes and fieldnotes of children's oral and written narratives, as well as interviews with teachers. Overall, the study found that students wrote or told stories that positioned themselves with



people who were important in their lives and doing activities in which they were performing important roles, such as helping Momma count money.

The researchers recommended activities that were both text- and oral-based, allowing students to express themselves in a familiar format, using familiar words as well as places and people who are important to them. They suggested that teachers need to provide students with choice and ownership, and make the curriculum meaningful and interesting to them. They also noted that meaningful inclusion of all children within classroom practices was needed to validate student discourses by integrating home and school identities. They explained that teachers intentionally need to create opportunities for family and community lives to intersect with school practices and organize the class to ensure students have equitable access to instructional content. They concluded with the importance of promoting teachers' awareness of students' language, race, and identity, as they relate closely to academic performance. These researchers could have gone further to offer practical ways to raise teacher awareness. Furthermore, their use of comparing these two studies caused a shallow written analysis of both as well as shallow implications related to minority and majority languages in classrooms.

Lin et al. (2004) used theories of marginalization, discrimination, social justice, and togetherness-in-difference in order to practice political intervention, as well as feminist theory to shape their analysis related to how TESOL professionals can revision and reshape TESOL as a discipline, keeping in mind issues of gender, race, and social class, and their connected histories of conquest, slavery, and colonialism. The researchers/authors wrote narratives and circulated them via email in order to respond to one another's emerging themes. Data is displayed in narrative excerpts, summarizing patterns and issues and analyzing underlying ideological and institutional conditions. The researchers represent diverse racial backgrounds and ethnicities, including African American, Sri Lankan Australian, and Chinese.

Lin et al. found labor segregation to be prevalent in the TESOL profession, with women and faculty of color most often assigned labor-intensive administrative and teaching duties. Similarly, the theory-practice divide was found to be present in the TESOL profession, with senior faculty, typically privileged men, having less of a work load in order to spend their time researching and theorizing, while TESOL teachers are excessively part-time, adjunct, or temporary and females. Finally, when communicating with White faculty and students, women faculty of color were often perceived as the stereotypically unsmiling, angry women of color when expressing unjust treatment or anger.

This analysis presses for a need for people to actively seek to work with different groups and that dialogue must continue even if it means making some people uncomfortable. Lin et al. also included seven policy-based strategies, including equal pay for female faculty and protecting minority women from serving on too many committees. Finally, the implications push for the TESOL profession to remodel to fit the increasingly globalized world by finding dialogic ways of teaching and learning English and to promote social justice with the spreading language. Critics may question the researchers' use of personal experience in this analysis and how that may have influenced their biases related to women faculty of color in TESOL. For future study, interviewing third-party participants on their experiences may be appropriate.

Rymes (2002) uses a course with preservice ESL teachers, asking the question, how does one instruct methods of teaching English while honoring community norms and interests that may not include the learning of English? Her research collected data from her own preservice teachers' email journals and final portfolios while focusing on Rymes' own teaching practice and the impact of the course on the participants. Not much emphasis was placed on the participants'

adult ESL students, as there was no tool in place to assess what they took away from the experience. Getting the adult students' feedback would have been a way to enhance the study.

The findings of this study were grounded in research on English and its global spread, critical pedagogy, socialization studies based on a process of give-and-take, and the belief that language is always learned in context. Preservice teachers went to the Spanish-only Valley View community and taught adults in their homes. In their portfolios, Rymes reported finding that the teachers born in the U.S. or who had not had extended experiences abroad referenced a personal transformation from the experience at Valley View. However, international students and students who had previously been abroad did not write about a transformation in their portfolio, seemingly because they had previously felt like linguistic outsiders. The preservice teachers' ideas about what it means to teach language also changed from the service experience: they realized that teaching is not about grammar or ABCs, but rather, about the development of authentic tools that students can actually use. Participants also chose to (re)learn Spanish in order to work with their students, as the community spoke Spanish exclusively. The preservice teachers quickly learned that their attempts at speaking Spanish helped the Valley View students feel more at ease and comfortable trying English. Finally, though there was no tool in place to measure the outcomes of the Valley View students, many of the preservice teachers and the Valley View students continued the project after the semester ended.

Based on the findings, Rymes concluded that a sense of development might be achieved by reducing vulnerability to influences that are outside of one's control. However, a sense of control can be gained once one makes moves to learn more outside of what is comfortable. Furthermore, globalization and the spread of English can have negative effects, particularly when it emphasizes the loss of home culture in exchange for the monetary culture of the English-dominant economy. Rymes also argues that educators should note that the impact of teaching English within a community could be a bidirectional process.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS**

The research related to power dynamics in the classroom is clearly complex. Even the basic teacher task of creating assignments claims authority that can be tied to colonialism, as shown in Harklau (2000). The issues uncovered in the mostly qualitative analyses above represent subjects that can continue to be debated, depending on perspectives toward several issues, including whether or not one thinks the spread of English is a positive development. These studies did make it clear that the teaching of English could be an incredibly powerful tool—under equitable, give and take conditions. Yet the very nature of American classrooms places teachers in an authoritative role. So how might one negotiate more equitable terms?

It would seem that most researchers in these studies described implications that could reasonably be incorporated in the U.S. K-12 classroom context. As an example I will consider how their recommendations apply to the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> grade classroom at the International High School, which is a diverse student population linguistically, ethnically, and socioeconomically. The 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> grade students with whom I am currently working are adolescents who are forming identities at a formative time in their lives, including the fact that they recently immigrated to the U.S.

First, it would seem appropriate to discuss how to teach English from the basic standpoint that makes explicit assumptions and tensions associated with the spread of English. Creating an Ecology of Language (Phillipson, 2001) seems plausible by encouraging students to embrace where they come from while also being open to a hybridized identity. It seems that, in some

ways, it could be too easy of a solution for an incredibly complicated question to just encourage students to retain their cultural and linguistic heritage. There needs to be a balance in place in which students recognize that it is acceptable to embrace their new lives and new culture in the U.S. while also trying to maintain aspects of their native country (Ibrahim, 1999; Quach, Jo, & Urrieta, 2009). This is a sensitive and challenging journey to bring up in school, but it is also important to recognize that it is likely a journey the students are already making privately. In taking up their new lives in the U.S., they are no longer Chinese, Ukrainian, Mexican, or otherwise. They are at least partially American now, too, and the tensions they live can be a focus of classroom discussion.

One example from Villenas's (2001) study can easily be imagined in the context of an ESL K-12 parent-teacher conference, in which a White, US-born, middle-class teacher tells a foreign-born, low socioeconomic status parent(s) how to be a parent, particularly by helping their child at home with school work. This can certainly affect a learner's identity as a parent tries to negotiate his/her parenting expectations from what is familiar to what is being suggested by someone who may be perceived to have more power. Olmedo (2003) asserted that families in marginalized communities often have a great deal of knowledge and many skills. However, oftentimes people in authoritative positions at institutions do not understand this or place little value on this understanding. More teachers need to realize that parents have valuable experiences and expertise and want what is best for their children. They, like their children, are negotiating American cultural norms with the cultural norms and understandings of their native country. It would also be important and relevant to recognize that many Latino families, specifically, assume that parents are responsible for teaching children respect and honor, while teachers and schools are responsible for teaching academics; such differences in assumptions are quite likely true of other heritages as well.

As a teacher, I would like to say that I value parents' input in order to collaborate to identify strategies for their children to be successful in school and beyond. However, there are often restrictions associated with this, such as finding a common time or any time at all, given the number of students, families, and cultural groups that may be involved. If such a time can be found, it might be wisest to address parents with notes on what I, as the teacher, see in the classroom, and ask if those observations match with what they observe at home, together working out instructional responses to these ideas.

Revisiting my experiences with the Somali-Bantu Community Organization and the Saturday tutoring program, we should have had more parent interactions in order to avoid the conflicts that eventually became prevalent, resulting in some students not returning to the program. Though at the time, it seemed like we were trying to incorporate parents in the classroom by having one parent-volunteer present for additional supervision, we certainly could have done more to incorporate them more meaningfully in the classroom. In the future, it would be wise to invite multiple parents in at a time (Olmedo, 2003) and work with them to access the students' discourse backgrounds (Katz & DaSilva Iddings, 2009). It seems the case, however, that parents will not feel welcome unless the invitation is made explicitly and continuously. My mistake in the past may have been my implicit and sporadic offers. However, as I have seen at the International High School, many parents feel involved and welcome at the school because there is constant communication between teachers and parents, including phone calls to simply point out good progress.

Ibrahim (1999) suggested opening up the curriculum to students' experiences and expertise and Katz and DaSilva Iddings (2009) argued for teachers to be open to students coming

to the classroom with different discourse experiences and understandings. It seems that many in the TESOL profession try to do this, particularly with authentic literacies related to adult learners' needs and experiences (Rymes, 2002). However, in a high school or community college context, it was shown that relating material to students' experiences and expertise, at least as they relate to immigrant and non-native experiences, can be stereotypical and not completely relevant, especially when those are the only assignments students receive (Harklau, 2000). For instance, assigning students to write a memoir based on a time when they had to overcome an obstacle, while seemingly generic and preparatory for a college admissions essay, lends itself to further this culture of power in which the teacher (or reader) becomes sympathetic toward the student. Because of subjective grading, this can also lead to a less critical grade, furthering the power imbalance already in place.

Realistically, however, it is important to note the ethnocentric nature of the U.S. academic culture. College admissions committees very much reward essays that aim for sympathy, if not pity. This practice exemplifies the privilege and power of those in authority at the expense of the exploitation of the oppression of those trying to gain access to the system—a monumental issue that challenges the system itself to a policy level of reform.

A re-examination of a classroom's curriculum can also be viewed from a grassroots perspective. In my current 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> grade classroom experience, we are beginning a unit about teenagers, entitled *The Struggle to be Strong*. The model texts for the unit are written by teenagers, both American- and foreign-born. This may seem like it does not necessarily lend itself to the students continuously writing about their experiences as an immigrant, but based on the literature, I want to give the students choices about what they can write about. For some essays, perhaps even giving students the clear opportunity to write about experiences in the U.S. lends itself to making their recent hybridized identity formation explicit. At the very least, the assignment might be more applicable to figuring out who they are right now, even while it begs the question of how well it will prepare the students for future required academic writing.

Though it can easily be overlooked, being explicit with students about placement in an ESL program also seems an important and relevant step (Harklau, 2000). Receiving ESL services, particularly at a school in which English is the majority language, is often stigmatized. Clearly talking with students about their placement is a way of framing the additional services as an opportunity rather than a deficit.

Continuing to collaborate with peers and mentors on how to go about teaching and being aware of sensitive issues, while also addressing these issues, seems like one of the most realistic and powerful ways to apply the reviewed studies to my own practice (Motha, 2006; Lin et al., 2004). Collaboration with my host teacher, who has more experience teaching and is more familiar with the students and the school, will be my immediate next step. However, continuing to find colleagues to work with in the future to challenge my own ethnocentric enactments can only expand my understandings and experiences.

As comes with such a complicated topic, there could certainly be more research in this area. Much of the research is qualitatively based, as the issues relayed are multifaceted and delve into individual experiences. With that said, however, there is room for quantitative research in this field, such as constructing numerically based surveys in conjunction with open-ended questions. Many of the studies here just begin to skim the surface of the complexities related to present-day authoritative dynamics in the TESOL field. More specifically, it might be interesting to further research immigrant populations in suburban or rural areas. As these populations continue to increase, the effects of resistance and assimilation to find one's hybridized identity in

areas in which fewer people look similar to oneself would certainly be an area to progress. Similarly, continuing to follow long-term ELLs as they become increasingly more Americanized while possibly being perceived as a recent immigrant is also an area for additional study. Finally, further exploring postcolonial theories by observing and interviewing nonnative standard English speakers in the TESOL profession and addressing how their experiences of power and privilege compares to those of White, native standard speakers might be an interesting area in which to delve deeper.

Ultimately, my battle to recognize the power and privilege with which I approach my career as a TESOL professional will continue for years and may never be resolved. This may be inherent in a profession so warped with a history of colonialism (TESOL) and considered by many to be a helping profession (educator). With that said, I lean most heavily on the implications suggested by Motha (2006). Her study concluded by stating that it is important to recognize the inherent power and privilege associated with the field, but not allowing it to debilitate one's attempts at questioning and fighting the current standards.

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