Gina Abol Fontejon-Bonior

Trajectories and Reifications: An Attempt at Signifying My Philosophy as an ESL Teacher

In this paper, the author contemplates her professional life not just to reflect and comment on her philosophy as a teacher of English as a second language (ESL), but to critically examine her enactment of this philosophy in her every day encounters in the classroom and how this has influenced the quality of her teaching. In this mood of self-reflexive engagement, the author retrospects on three occasions that inspired her to evolve this philosophy of teaching. Using the Bakhtinian perspectives for this metanarrative critique, she concludes that a) the written word could not concretely reify her beliefs mediated as they are by language, b) the formulation of her beliefs was filtered through personal and political motives, and c) the reader co-constructs meaning bringing into the text variable interpretations of the written word. With these caveats in place, she traces her professional growth through the shifts in language teaching principles and beliefs that shape her actions.

INTRODUCTION

> Developing and articulating a teaching philosophy is [a] valuable outcome... that cannot be transferred in any simple way from teacher educators' minds to their student teachers' minds. A teaching philosophy is something that must be individually cast and recast as it is constructed from and translated into the experiences as practice.
>
> **Loughran & Russell**, 1997, p. 176

I find articulating my philosophy the most challenging paper I have had to write. I remember staring at an empty piece of paper, when my student teaching supervisor at the College of Education required us to write one at the conclusion of our one-year teaching practicum. When words finally started to surface, I found them too hackneyed and superficial. They were exactly what my professor at the Graduate School described thirteen years later: When teachers are asked to articulate their philosophy of teaching, what they do is enumerate

some theories and methods they use in teaching. Although these may significantly influence one's philosophy of teaching, they do not constitute one's philosophy.

My professor Graham Crookes (2001) reiterated that "a philosophy of ES/FL teaching worthy of its name should go much further, or deeper, than simply stating a pedagogical approach or a set of procedures the teacher espouses." He stressed that, "if one is trying to engage in a systematic process of personal development, a more complete, coherent, and extensive construction would be desirable" (ESL 690 lecture notes, Fall 2001). Crookes argued that a philosophy of teaching may also be generated based on a rather narrow perspective, i.e., that the primary task and content of philosophy of education can be solely the analysis and clarification of educational concepts, such as teaching. This is illustrated in Passmore's (1980) position:

> The philosophy of teaching is that part of the philosophy of education which concerns itself not with the formal structure of educational theory, not with those problems in social, political, and moral philosophy which arise out of the character of the school as an institution and its relation to society, but primarily, at least, with teaching and learning – with problems which arise in *any* attempt to teach systematically in *any* social system which places *any* value whatsoever on the transmission, by way of formal teaching, of knowledge, capacities, and attitudes (cited in ESL 690 lecture notes, Fall 2001).

After the class discussions on the subject and several exchange of reflective journals via e-mail, my professor challenged us to articulate our philosophy of teaching. I felt inadequate. I knew that the written output, despite the number of revisions made, will never be able to completely and coherently articulate my thoughts and experiences. So, the introduction of my paper read:

> *This paper on my philosophy of teaching is presented in two parts. The first part, Trajectories, situates me as voice trying to "reify" my beliefs. The second part, Reifications, attempts to signify my philosophy as an English as Second Language (ESL) teacher.*
>
> *I borrowed the above terms from Wenger's "Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity." Wenger defines a trajectory "as not a path that can be foreseen or charted but a continuous motion – one that has a momentum of its own in addition to a field of experiences" (1998, p.154) [Emphasis mine]. I entitled the first part of this essay Trajectories because it suggests the many paths I have taken that frame and shape my philosophy in teaching.*
>
> *According to Wenger, to reify is "to convey the idea that what is turned into a concrete, material object is not properly a concrete material object" but simply abstractions of that object*

(1998, p. 58). Wenger further pointed out that reifications of concepts are not sufficient to generate meaning (p. 65). Hence, because the articulation of my philosophy is mediated by language (in fact, a language that I can never call my own), and because the experiences that shape my philosophy of teaching English as a Second Language are most likely not shared by the reader of this text, I labeled them as reifications: attempts at generating meaning from the abstractions in my mind. Thus, the second part is entitled Reifications because although the section attempts to argue for a philosophy of teaching particularly ELT, it cannot fully convey my beliefs about my own teaching and learning experiences primarily because language cannot accurately articulate my thoughts. This is aptly put by Schuster (1997) in his interpretation of Bakhtin (1981):

Language is essentially a rich stew of implications, saturated with accents, tones, idioms, voices influences, intentions. Words carry with them their own histories, their own previous and potential significations.... Language—whether spoken or written—is a perpetual hybrid which expresses the various contexts within which it exist (p. 460).

THEORETICAL MUSING

When I was informed that this article was accepted for publication in SILLIMAN JOURNAL, I requested that it be placed in the Notes Section, to which the editor-in-chief, Dr. Ceres Pioquinto replied: "But why? This is a performative critique that is worth publishing, and this has been reviewed by two readers who are in their own right experts in autoethnographic research."

I was apprehensive. I knew that reflexive ethnography, particularly those written as personal narratives are critiqued by those with quantitative orientation as being too subjective. Some even insist that autoethnography is not legitimate research. In retrospect, I only now realized why Dr. Pioquinto insisted on my writing the output of my autoethnographic research. She was drawing me to Bourdieu and reminding me about the hierarchical structuring of culture and the struggle for legitimacy between competing genres, in particular "the struggle for monopoly of power" (Bourdieu, 1983). This brought me to confront the nagging question: Who is legitimately entitled to designate one research mode as superior to the other? It took me another six months to re-visit this article, but at least I have found the answer. During this time, I repeatedly read Ellis and Bochner's *Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject* (in Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. Eds., 2000). In this article, the authors addressed the issue on the ethnographer's subjectivity. Citing Ronai in "Investigating Subjectivity," Ellis and Bochner (2000) points out that,

the disadvantage is that being so involved in the scene emotionally means that it's difficult to get outside of it to analyze from a cultural perspective. Yet both of these

processes, moving in and out, are necessary to produce an effective autoethnography. That's why it's good to write about an event when your feelings are still intense, and then go back to it when you're emotionally distant (p. 752).

Autoethnography, as an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural, is a generic term that includes different types of studies. Among these are personal narratives, self-ethnography, native ethnography, and reflexive ethnography.

In exploring the implications of reflexive ethnographies for scholarship, Ellis & Bochner (2000) argue that the researcher's personal experience is only as important as its capacity to illuminate the culture under study. According to them,

Although reflexive ethnographies primarily focus on a culture or subculture, authors use their experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on the self and look more deeply at self-other interactions. In native autoethnographies, researchers who are natives of cultures that have been marginalized or exoticized by others write about and interpret their own cultures for others. In personal narratives, social scientists take on the dual identities of academic and personal selves to tell autobiographical stories about some aspect of their experience in daily life (p. 740).

As an ESL teacher writing up my philosophy of teaching, I needed a thorough understanding of Personal Narratives and to look there for guides in articulating my beliefs using the genre. I also needed to know how my positionality as the subject of this research may be signified in the narrative. In his immensely instructive lecture on "Why Personal Narratives Matter," Arthur Bochner underscores the value of personal narratives as "a project of telling a life." It is, according to him, "a response to the human problem of authorship, the desire to make sense and preserve coherence over the course of our lives.... The narrative challenge that we face as narrators is the desire for continuity, to make sense of our lives as a whole." (in Ellis & Bochner, 2000p. 746). Echoing Crites (1971), Bochner asserts that "the present of things past and the present of things future are the tension of every moment of experience, both united in that present and qualitatively differentiated by it." In another writing, "It's About Time: Narrative and the Divided Self," Bochner stresses the function of personal narratives as a form of "storytelling that works to build a continuous life of experience, linking the past to the future from the standpoint of the present; to problematize the process of assigning meanings to memories via language; and to blur the line between theory and story."

Ellis & Bochner (2000, p. 97) as well as David Carr (1986) posit

that narrative matters because "coherence seems to be a need imposed upon us whether we seek it or not." Bochner further added that "at stake in our narrative attempts to achieve a coherent sense of ourselves are the very integrity and intelligibility of our selfhood... In the final analysis, the self is indistinguishable from the life story it constructs for itself out of what is inherited, what is experienced, and what is desired" (Freeman, 1993, 1998; Kerby, 1991).

Today, seven years after I wrote the first few drafts of this study to meet the requirements of a course in Graduate School, I am revisiting my practices to see recurrent patterns that define my practice. Perhaps, the enactment of my philosophy could inform this attempt at achieving a coherent sense of my identity as an ESL teacher.

TRAJECTORIES: MOMENTS AND MOMENTUM IN MY LIFE AS AN ESL TEACHER

Four circumstances provided the impetus for articulating my philosophy as an ESL teacher. The first was an interview with the Fulbright panel commissioned to determine if I was qualified to pursue a graduate program in the United States. The second was an interview with American ESL program administrators to determine if I could effectively and efficiently teach ESL to college students in an American University. The third was a requirement I had to submit in my ESL Teaching Practicum class at the University of Hawaii at Manoa Second Language Studies Department. And the fourth was an interview with a graduate student researcher who was investigating my identity as a "non-native" English speaker teaching ESL in the United States.

During the Fulbright grant interview, the first question I was asked was about my philosophy of teaching. I remember saying without hesitation: "to me 'a teacher is not a sage on the stage; s/he is a guide by the side.'" Looking back, I realized that I truly believed even then that the place of the teacher is not the center stage. That it was a cliché was unimportant. A few years since that fateful interview—and now from the vantage point of newly gained experience—I relive those moments and wonder whether I really believed in what I said then. Or still do. Did I simply mouth such philosophy to beguile the interviewers into believing that I deserved the grant? Were the thoughts that came to my mind motivated by my experiences as a teacher or simply by my desire to take a respite from teaching and gain entry into a reputable group of scholars? Because these thoughts plunged me into a state of disquiet, I decided to

reexamine my professional life and reflect on my experience first as an English teacher at a secondary school and later in a university in the Philippines. In particular, I wanted to trace how my experiences with my students have shaped my philosophy as a teacher. Somehow, I felt I had to reaffirm my beliefs and the way they define me not only as a teacher, but also as an individual.

In this moment of reflection, one episode stands out vividly in my memory: my second year of teaching English in a prestigious secondary school in my province where I was assigned to teach a group of students from affluent families. At that time, I was twenty-two and idealistic about the future, albeit already tired and fast becoming disenchanted about what was. The essay we were to discuss that day was about life behind bars written by a former prisoner who just left the "rehabilitation program." It provided an insider's view of life in prison and described not only the author's experiences of pain in jail, but also his life as an "ex-convict." The author of this essay questioned not only the system that was supposed to rehabilitate deviants considered risks to the community, but also the society that legitimated discrimination against ex-convicts like him.

The class discussion that followed the reading of this essay revealed to me a sad truth—that my students saw no connection between the author, the text, and their own sheltered lives. On the other hand, they registered only indifference, detachment, apathy. Seeing this troubling reaction from them, I decided it was time for them to go beyond a vicarious experience of the author's life. Thinking that if students were allowed the opportunity to confront the realities of "others" face to face rather than simply discussing these as a topic out of an abstract text, I proposed a class activity that would take the students on a small trip to a local rehabilitation center so they could see for themselves the conditions in prison cells and the life of those behind bars. I believed this personal immersion might enable them to appreciate that even lives less privileged than their own can also be valuable. Because of the apparent risks involved in this activity, organizing it was painstakingly slow. For a start, I invited a number of experts to prepare the students to face the complex and encompassing ethical and social issues that might arise in this activity. Among themselves, the students organized activities that would facilitate the discussion with the prisoners about life in jail and the prospect of rehabilitation. Understandably, because the students were minors, getting the permission from parents and the school administrator was difficult.

"You are taking 15-year old kids to jail. Do you know what you're doing?" asked the school administrator. "Yes," I answered calmly though resolutely, despite my misgivings. I was determined—with thorough planning and careful implementation of the planned activities, and God's presence—to make this rare learning opportunity proceed smoothly. Yet, I could not sleep thinking about what might happen. Nevertheless, because I was convinced this was an activity worth all the risks, I went ahead with the plans, and after clearing the last hurdle, our class finally got the permission from the school to proceed. To make this story short, that project proved I was right. The poem I wrote in my journal the night after my class visited the rehabilitation center captures what my students and I went through during this rare event and leaves an eloquent record of how this close encounter with the inmates had impacted our lives.

Of Jails and Journals

I gulped it all
the pain
of such dichotomy
my students
preparing food
for the prisoners;
the prisoners
feeding meaning
to my students' lives,
breathing life
into an essay we read in class
about hardened prisoners
and wretched realities.

I absorbed them all
the essays they wrote
some full of life
some empty; some emptied
some explosive; some silenced
some oblivious; some obnoxious
some cowed; some wowed
some cursing; some caring.

They wrote them all.

I remember them all
a flood of humanity
gushing like shallow waters
at the portals
of a jail.

They were fifteen and sixteen
mostly strangers
to life
behind bars.

I took them all,
the risk
of unearthing
corpses
buried deep
from my students' eyes.

They were fifteen and sixteen
born to affluent families
untouched
by the life
behind bars.

Reflecting on the experience years after it happened, I continue to wonder at the idealism and courage that led me to embark on such a reckless but nevertheless excitingly instructive adventure. It must have been the effect of too much Paolo Freire at the University of the Philippines where I had my Masters degree in Teaching English as Second Language (TESL). As a teacher, I believed there is so much more to the banking system I saw in many classes. I did not want to simply pour into my students the little that I know because I know from experience how stupefying and unexciting that was. Yet I also realized that if I were the principal, I would have also been shaken by the risks a young teacher like me was prepared to take in the name of constructivism and critical thinking. I would have made sure all safety precaution were taken to buffer every possible risk. A month after our trip to the provincial rehabilitation, a news report shocked me. A number of prisoners attempting to break out of a rehabilitation center in Manila held hostage a group of nuns who were leading a Bible Study, using them as shield against the prison guards. While watching

the news on television, I felt my stomach lurch violently. Older now and wiser, I know I will never take the same risk again, particularly not with high school students.

The second time I was compelled to discuss my philosophy of teaching was during the interview for a teaching position in a US institution. In the course of this interview, I shared the paradigm shift that I was going through at that time with the two administrators who asked me about my philosophy of teaching, particularly language teaching. I had just completed a course that has impacted my beliefs about the compelling issues in teaching writing in a multi-cultural setting, and I was eager to discuss the Bakhtinian reaction to "the structuralist view of the signifier (e.g., the word) as having idealized meanings, and linguistic communities as being relatively homogeneous and consensual" (Bakhtin, 1981). Bakhtin and other poststructuralists, such as Bourdieu and Kress, argue that the signifier has no idealized meanings because "the signifying practices of societies are sites of struggle, and that linguistic communities are heterogeneous arenas characterized by conflicting claims to truth and power" (Norton & Toohey, in press).

The paradigm shift in my thinking led me to share enthusiastically with my interviewers my belief in the importance of hearing students' voices rather than simply regurgitating the principles of writing a five-paragraph essay. I defined my position on the issue of having a "non-native speaker" ESL teacher in a context where English is the dominant language. I described how I would organize my lessons, and what I considered important in curriculum development and materials design. I elaborated on the centrality of students in a class as well as emphasized the importance of their voices as legitimate funds of knowledge. At the same time, I highlighted the role of the teacher in providing opportunities for those voices to be heard. I cannot now remember my interviewers' reactions to what I said that day, but all I know is that I spoke my mind, my heart, and my soul. In retrospect, I wish I had remembered to bring along to this interview the poem I wrote about my own experience as a student in an ESL Writing class. Perhaps, I would not have needed so many words to signify what I believe in.

From the beyond

With clammy palms
I tiptoed into this world

of thesis,
complete sentences
commas and dashes.

Voices
inside me
screamed,
waiting
to erupt
in print
seeking fissures
searching cracks
so splinters
of my life
could break free
on paper

But your world
spins around
dangling modifiers
and comma splices,
or S-V agreement,
not I, a disagreement

Today,
my pen
perfunctorily surveys
the page
to sketch
your five-paragraph essay.

As a student in the ESL Writing class, I knew there was something more to the three-paragraph essay. I questioned how I, as a Filipina, should articulate myself. Should I write the way I am and run the risk of writing endless drafts until I "get" the conventions of Western expository writing right? Or should I simply give in to what my teacher wanted and ace the project? It appears to me that my teachers could not understand who I am, while I did understand what she had to do. She had to prepare us for the written requirements in the content areas, which, in the Philippines, are taught in English. I had to get the genre, and subscribe to the prescribed moves. Then, I

can be myself. So, in class I wrote *who I had to be*. Then, I rushed home to my journal to write *who I was*.

Later, when I became an ESL writing teacher myself, I realized that I seemed to have sold who I was to what I believed my students needed to be. In the Philippines, learning the American academic writing conventions is a passport to success in college. My desire to provide the needed scaffolding so my students could have access to the language of power compelled me to become who my ESL writing teacher was. I found myself recycling the same dangling modifier and S-V agreement exercises in my writing classes. I, too, had become engrossed in coherence and agreements when what my students first needed to do was make sense of the incoherence and disagreements in their lives. I had exemplified what Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) observed:

> And so we went to into schools not understanding that there were other subjectivities among our students, being uncritical of our own subjectivities, and being perpetrators of nothing but the cultural capital... legitimated by our own schooling (cited in Osborne, 1996, p. 292).

I left the interview room that day dissatisfied and confused. I wanted to say more, but how could I? My mind was with my professors and their colleagues who were at the picket line that day professing their philosophy of teaching. And there I was in campus, technically crossing the picket line, talking about mine.

The third time I had to elaborate on my philosophy of teaching was during the interview with a graduate student who was researching on "non-native" speakers of English teaching ESL in an American institution. That interview made me reflect on my philosophy as a Filipina teaching English in a context where English, the *lingua franca*, is not my first language. I remember explaining to the researcher that I do not believe in the hegemonic labeling of speakers as native and non–native because the distinction is potentially oppressive. To deny people a job—in spite of their qualifications—on the basis of their "native-ness or nonnative-ness" is absurd, even oppressive.

In the interview, I was also asked to describe my view of an effective teacher. In my response, I emphasized that an effective EFL/ESL teacher is one who can cause among students the itch to learn and the hunger to discover for themselves and in negotiation with others the what, why, and how of learning the foreign language, and use such knowledge to serve their purposes. I stressed the point that this doesn't take a 'native speaker' to do that. Alluding to my own

experience, I argued that competent, proficient teachers who do not speak English as a first language are at a distinct advantage because of the language learning experiences they could share with their students. Firstly, they could serve as "imitable models" for successful language learning. Secondly, they can explicitly teach learners language learning strategies that they found to be effective. And thirdly, their own learning experiences put them in a better position to "anticipate more easily the difficulties language learners might encounter" (Medgyes, 1992, in Tajino, & Tajino, 2000). Moreover, in my view such teachers have a more heightened awareness of issues in power and politics in learning a foreign language. For instance, they are often keenly aware of the struggles learners experience in the co-construction of identity that inherently accompanies language learning experiences.

Reflecting on what I had said then, I wished I had articulated more clearly what I really should have said—that an effective teacher is one who can provide opportunities for students to reflect on why they need to learn the foreign language, and how they can use their agency to adopt the new identity that usually results in embracing a dominant secondary Discourse, without being colonized by it. I wished I had already read James Gee (1996, 1998) then.

Finally, the fourth time I was compelled to articulate my philosophy of teaching was when my professor in the ESL Practicum class at the University of Hawaii at Manoa required one after a discussion on the subject. This was, by far, the most difficult writing exercise I had to undertake. I sat before the computer monitor until beads of sweat formed on my nose and forehead. I stared at the computer screen for hours, but it only glared back at me, empty. The many discussions and readings I had on pedagogical, linguistic, anthropological, postmodern theories in the many classes and conferences I attended confounded me. I exchanged journal reflections with my professor, who wrote back: "Just get it going. Write what you have in mind."

So, I got going. What disturbed me most at that time were the readings for a course on Bilingual Education. I was particularly interested in theories in language and identity, in ethnographic studies on schooling and cultural compatibility, and critical pedagogy in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

My professors at the University of Hawaii also kept mentioning the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) ethnographic research and how its findings informed educational policy makers

and educators on the approach to teaching multicultural classes. So, I read about it in Ovando and Collier's (1998) *Bilingual education and ESL classrooms: Teaching in multicultural contexts*. According to the authors, KEEP researchers conducted "a series of studies on home-school mismatch... in search of explanation on why children of native Hawaiian ancestry tended to have the lowest achievement levels" of any group in the United States. Among the topics included in the database gathered by the KEEP researchers included home socialization, social motivation, language production, phonemics, sociolinguistics, cognitive strategies, and standard English acquisition. One area of cultural mismatch was on personal autonomy. This means that

> in the home, the children were socialized to value being contributors to the family's well-being rather than to value independent living (Tharp, 1994). In the classroom, however, personal accomplishment was valued for its own sake rather than as contribution to the needs of others.

Through in-service trainings and collaboration between teachers and consultants, an innovative instructional program that considered culturally sensitive approaches to teaching was implemented. Both the teachers and the researchers observed that "by getting a glimpse of native Hawaiian students' natural cultural environment, teachers saw the children demonstrating talents seldom revealed in the classroom" (Tharp et al., 1991; Tharp, 1984; Voght, Jordan, & Tharp, 1983, cited in Ovando & Collier, 1998, p. 167). The teachers and researchers concluded that indeed a culturally responsive curriculum is "the keystone for effective schooling." The challenge was to identify "what is and is not essential in the match between the home and the school...." The findings of this study also revealed that some important home cultural patterns were positively applicable to the classroom. For instance, the researchers cited the open, relaxed "talk-story" discourse pattern that regularly occurs in Hawaiian homes as being more effective than the conventional "teacher-asks-a question/ one student-answers/teacher-evaluates" format" (p. 167). Similar studies were conducted by Heath (1983) among African-American children; Mohatt & Erickson (1981) among Indian and non-Indian teachers; and Morine-Dershimer (1983) among students in multi-ethnic classrooms. Among the most influential is Heath's work. Heath (1983) observed that

> the questioning patterns used in the home were different from those used by teachers

in school. Consequently, when teachers changed their questioning styles at school to one more similar to the home style, there was a significant change in the students from a passive to an active role in classroom discussions (cited in Ovando & Collier, 1998, p. 168).

In the same semester, I also took Introduction to Second Language Studies. My professor, Richard Day, gave us a packet of introductory readings for us to see "the lay of the land." Two articles came to mind as I wrote my philosophy paper. The first was "Critical Pedagogy in ELT: Images of Brazilian Teachers of English" by Maria Ines Pagliarini Cox & Ana Antonia de Asis-Peterson (1999), and the second "The World for Sick Proper" by John Rogers (1982).

Pagliarini Cox & de Asis-Peterson (1999) conducted an ethnographic study to investigate Brazilian English teachers' knowledge and perceptions on critical pedagogy in ELT. They found that English teachers in Brazil, where Paolo Freire came from, "were unaware of it." Moreover, Pagliarini Cox & de Asis-Peterson found that teachers were attached to the strong appeal of integrative discourse and saw themselves as agents of good whose main responsibility was to prepare their students to be successful in the world (p. 433). Their article questioned "the absence of a critical view toward ELT and the role of English internationally", arguing that "this may be a result of English teachers' submission to applied linguistics, which emphasized principally formal and methodological issues" (p. 433).

This is ironic since Freire, as an educator, "relentlessly reaffirmed that education is a political act that, if not viewed as such, begins to surreptitiously legitimize and reproduce the politics of the dominant classes, perpetuating social inequalities" (p. 435). The authors, however, argued that Freire would agree with Pennycook (1995) that "if English today is a language through which the forces of neocolonialism operate, then counterdiscourses need to be articulated in English" (in Pagliarini Cox & de Asis-Peterson,1999, p. 438).

Although Pennycook's (1994) work published approximately two decades after Freire's work shook the Western world, his thoughts on education echoes Freire (1970, 1974). Within the context of ELT, Pennycook reiterates:

the spread of English is considered to be natural, neutral, and beneficial: Natural because it is the inevitable result of global forces; neutral because it assumes that English has been stripped of its original cultural contexts and has been transformed into a transparent, universal medium of communication; and beneficial because it is a

condition for cooperation and equality" (p. 9).

Like Freire, Pennycook does not see students and teachers as helpless pawns in the arena of ELT. In fact, he posits that "people are not passive consumers of hegemonic cultural forms" (Pagliarini Cox, & de Asis-Peterson, 1999, p. 438). Among Pennycook's (1994) memorable assertions which have left an indelible influence on contemporary English teaching include his call that those who teach English must (1) doubt and be critical of the dominant discourse that represents the internationalization of English as good and as a passport to the first world; (2) consider the relationship of their work to the spread of the language, critically evaluating the implications of their practice in the production and reproduction of social inequalities; and (3) question whether they are contributing to the perpetuation of domination (p. 439)

As I reviewed Pennycook for this article, I thought of KEEP and Heath and the many others who conducted ethnographic studies to investigate the mismatch between the discourse patterns and practices at home and those used in schools and taught predominantly by teachers who are socialized into believing that American discourse patterns are the only legitimate ways of thinking. I was saddened for the many students in the Philippines who are labeled academically inferior and are perpetually, albeit unwittingly, oppressed by teachers who recognize only one way of teaching: the "teacher-asks-a-question/one student-answers/teacher-evaluates" format (Ovando & Collier, 1998, p. 167) I felt sad because I, too, am a product of such system. But the greater cause of my disquiet was the feeling of guilt that as a teacher who has been socialized and apprenticed into such limited and limiting discourse, I had somehow participated in the oppression of my students.

When I reviewed John Rogers (1982)'s "The World for Sick Proper," I read what I had long observed and pondered. Why should Filipino children be defined by their ability or the lack of ability to read, write, listen, and speak in English? Clearly, the reason is both political and economic. In the Philippines, some legislators recently promulgated policies to boost ELT in the Philippines, e.g., the Gullas Bill, and the present government supports them. The reason for this strong support, however, is because the country earns so much from Overseas Contract Workers (OCW) remittances. In fact, in 2006 alone, the remittances totaled Php 101,964 million (http://www.census.gov.ph/data/pressrelease/2007/of06tx.html). However, although the

government continually brags about the proficiency in English of overseas Filipino workers' as their clear advantage over laborers from neighboring countries, the painful truth, however, points to the contrary: many Filipino contract workers (OCWs) are not proficient in English at all. In fact, according to the survey conducted by the Income and Employment Statistics Division, Household Statistics Department of the National Statistics Office, one out of every three of the 1.52 million OCWs within the period April to September 2006 is a laborer or unskilled worker who has had little formal education and could barely speak beyond a few words of English.

This reminds me of a story Dr. Cicero Calderon, former president of Silliman University, shared with us about his experience at the ASEAN regional summit some years ago when the keynote speaker said: "Do you want your children to be like the children of the Philippines? Would you want them to leave their parents and children to take care of other people's parents and children?" Of the number of speeches that were delivered at this meeting, Dr. Calderon remembered only this speech because it was the one that caused him the greatest pain.

As I was trying to revise this paper, it has been three years since Dr. Calderon died. But alone at three in the morning and staring at the computer monitor, I was haunted by Dr. Calderon's story. The memory of pain I saw in his eyes when he told us this story moved me to tears.

REIFICATIONS: THE PRESENT OF THINGS PAST AND THE PRESENT OF THINGS FUTURE

As I revised "the philosophy paper" in my Teaching Practicum class for this publication, I could still hear my professor: "Just get going. Write what you have in mind." I knew it was not possible to write everything I had in mind. Translating what is in the mind into something intelligible in print is a formidable task. It was difficult to make sense of the multitude of voices in my head as pained and painful voices clamored to be heard. Even worse, it was doubly difficult to find my own. Moreover, I knew that what I write were simply abstractions or refractions of what I wanted to articulate. I realized that this text is mediated, according to Bakhtin (1981), by words, and "the word in language becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive

intention" (p. 293). On the other hand, this text has a voice, and that voice cannot fully reify my thoughts. The words I use to express my philosophy are pregnant with my own personal histories, but how the reader chooses to co-construct meaning from this text is beyond my reach.

But I had to get going. There was no stopping to what I had to do. I was beginning to feel what my undergraduate professor used to call "divine discontent." And so I labored to formulate a set of statements in an attempt to sketch "the present of things past and the present of things future," the tension, as Crites said, "of every moment of experience, both united in that present and qualitatively differentiated by it" (Crites, 1971, p. 302, cited in Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 746).

I believe that language learning can only take place when learners have opportunities to use it in meaningful contexts (Spolsky, 1989, in Pierce, 1995, p. 573). Within the perspective of critical pedagogy, this reads: learning can only be meaningful if it is critical and liberating. This assumption should influence syllabus design, materials preparation, and methodology in the language classroom. Students must be provided opportunities to use the language to achieve real-life purposes in contexts that are meaningful and advantageous to them.

The above belief closely relates to James Gee's (1996) position that *learning requires "legitimate peripheral participation" in a community of practice that transforms one's identity.* Such transformation enables the person "to visualize imagined communities of meaningful engagement in pursuit of an enterprise." This means that learning is made meaningful if students are empowered by the experience such that they can use the language of power to question existing power differentials rather than be "groomed" to maintain their marginalized role in the society (Wink, 2000, pp. 64-65). This entails what Gee calls "mastery of secondary Discourses." Discourses, according to Gee are "socially accepted...ways of using language, other symbolic expression, and 'artifacts' of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network'" (p. 131). For Gee, Discourses are "a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize" (p. 127).

In this context, students may be considered failures not because they cannot learn but because they have not been apprenticed into

secondary Discourses necessary to succeed in school. Students whose home Discourses are different from the secondary Discourse such as discourses at school are inherently disadvantaged compared to what Gee (1987) calls "mainstream" students whose primary Discourse are parallel to the Discourses in school (cited in Zamel & Spack, 1998, p. 57). For example, while some children in the Philippines are brought up in the middle class culture where reading is integral in the family life, many are exposed to literacy materials for the first time only when they go to school. Yet, they are expected to have the same familiarity with the secondary Discourses in school as the middle or upper class children and are judged as failures by the system that is ignorant or negligent of such realities.

In relation to Gee's Discourse theory, ***I believe that pragmatic features relevant to particular tasks must be incorporated into the lessons***. For instance, Ohlstain and Cohen (1990), in their study of ESL learners in Canada, found that even those who have higher proficiency in the language fail in several communicative situations because of their inability to use the language appropriately. The researchers concluded that "the fine points of speech act behavior, such as 1) types of intensification and downgrading, 2) subtle differences between strategy realizations, and 3) consideration of situational features, can and should be taught in the second and foreign language classrooms" (p. 57). Kasper (1999), in her review of classroom research in interlanguage pragmatics, also supports this argument. This is also consistent with Hymes's concept of communicative competence, which includes not only linguistic competence but also sociolinguistic, pragmatic, strategic, and discourse competence (Saville-Troike, 1996, p. 363).

An even richer implication of Gee's theory in the context of ELT in multicultural context is the challenge for ELT practitioners to conduct action research similar to those done by Heath (1984) and the KEEP researchers to examine the socio-cultural factors that could affect the teaching-learning process, e.g., mismatch between the discourse patterns valued in the home and those in school or the mismatch between what Gee (1987) calls the Primary Discourses and the Secondary Discourses that students need to be apprenticed into.

Corollary to the aforementioned statements, I believe that meaning is mutually negotiated between and among interlocutors. Therefore, no one has the monopoly of truth. Students must therefore be provided opportunities to negotiate meaning with other students. I share Willet's view that teacher talk must be minimized, and activities

should facilitate student-student interaction since such interaction often provides more opportunities for students to negotiate meaning without the inhibition that is often associated with teacher authority (Willet, 1995, pp. 488-492).

I believe that the language program must be designed to meet students' communicative needs; however, any needs and situational analyses should be conducted critically. A thorough needs assessment must be conducted so that students do not waste time learning language features and communicative functions that they may never use in their real life tasks. An appropriate methodology such as TBLT (task-based language teaching) as espoused by Long and Crookes (1992) and Long (2000) can be facilitated to meet students' particular communicative needs in particular settings for particular purposes. However, such needs analysis must be done within a critical perspective. The researcher must look into whose needs are identified and whose voice is represented in the needs assessment because if the identified needs simply perpetuate existing oppressive power structures, then teaching ceases to become a caring profession (Auerbach, 1995).

I believe that teaching must be a reflective practice. Teaching is a political act, and teachers who do not reflect on their practices could unwittingly become arms of oppressive powers. In the article, *The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children,* Lisa D. Delpit describes five aspects of power that teachers must be aware of (Delpit, 1988). First, "issues of power are enacted in classrooms," e.g., the power of teacher over students, the power of textbook publishers and curriculum developers in determining the world view to be presented in classes. If schooling prepares people for jobs and jobs subsequently determines a person's economic status, then schools have the power over people's socio- economic mobility.

Second, "there are codes or rules for participating in power, i.e., there is a culture of power." One's familiarity with "communication strategies, linguistic forms, and presentation of the self in talking, writing, dressing, and ways of interacting or what Gee refers to as familiarity with the Discourses of the dominant group positions some students in advantageous stance and marginalizes others.

Third, "the rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of those who have power." This means that students come to class with varying degrees of access to the culture of power. Those from the upper and middle class have the inherent advantage in terms of familiarity with the culture of power and the dominant Discourses

in the community.

Fourth, "if you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier." In the context of teaching ESL/EFL especially in the Philippines, where many of the students come to class uninitiated into the dominant Discourses of schooling in English, this implies "explicit presentation" of the Discourses that students need to acquire.

Fifth, "those with power are often least aware of—or at least willing to acknowledge—its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence." On my part, this means revisiting some classroom practices I have done in the past as well as those at present that may/might have disadvantaged some groups of students and advantaged others. For instance, I need to mobilize my students to look into community and home practices that might conflict with the academic culture of my class and investigate ways of bringing into the classes funds of knowledge available in students' localities (Watson-Gegeo, K., & Welchman-Gegeo, D., 1995). This is going to be a big leap for me, but I am willing to dive in and learn from this new experience. I still do not know where to go from here, but I commit to explicitly articulating my beliefs on language and power in my classes.

I believe that research is therefore an integral part of teaching and learning. Teachers must continually engage in action research in order to maintain a critical as well as analytical perspective of their existing classroom practices. They must study how students might benefit from the existing resources in the school and the community so that the latter can avail of the wealth of "symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital" and subsequently vest in them the power to re-examine their identities (Norton & Toohey, in press).

This can also be done through what Skrtic and Ware (1992) calls adhocracy, "a problem solving organization configured to invent new programs" (p. 215 in Crookes, Fall 2001, p. 204). Teachers can work in groups and re-examine the curriculum and the materials and activities used in class in light of the socio-political context of students' learning. Students, teachers, school administrators as well as parents can work together and look beyond the what, when, why, and how of ESL/EFL teaching and examine who makes the choice, who frames relationships and for what purposes, and who are advantaged and disadvantaged as regards program development, curriculum planning,

and class activities (Auerbach, 1995).

I believe in what Paulo Freire professes: "Education is radically about love" (cited in Wink, 2000, p. 2). If teaching only serves to perpetuate hegemonic practices that serve the interest of the dominant group at the expense of the marginalized majority, then teaching ceases to be a liberating enterprise, and school is nothing but a factory of goods for the demigods, and the students a commodity that can be sold, bought, or dispensed with. If this is the enterprise to which I have devoted much of my time and energies, I will have considered myself a failure.

CONCLUSION

The research project on which this paper is based took me seven years to complete, and it is far from finished. I started to seriously contemplate my philosophy as an ESL teacher as a graduate student at the University of Hawaii in Manoa in the Fall of 2001. Admittedly, this project started out of a necessity. Yet the four instances that compelled me to articulate my philosophy provided the avenue for me to revisit my experiences as an ESL teacher and to re-think the language teaching and learning as well as the linguistic, anthropological and postmodern theories I have absorbed so that I may, in the words of Bochner (2000), "achieve a coherent sense" of my life as an ESL teacher.

I needed to reflect on the thoughts and experiences that I have described during the occasions that compelled me to reify my beliefs as a teacher, so I can see, albeit in a limited way, my location in this community of practice. I needed to retrace the border crossings that I made, and reconsider my attempts at embracing a "nexus of multi-membership." Perhaps it is only then that I can be provided "enough legitimacy" to be included in this community of practice called ELT (Wenger, 1998, pp. 158-59). I realized that despite my limitations, I am privileged to have examined and re-examined my philosophy, and that it may be worthwhile to communicate this with others who may share my experience. As John Ashberry said: "Very often people don't listen to you when you speak to them. It's only when you talk to yourself that they prick up their ears" (cited in Elbow, 1987, p. 259). I felt I needed to talk to myself.

Autoethnography is self-examination, and like any examination, it is nerve wracking. It took me six months to muster enough courage to revisit this philosophy paper after it was peer

reviewed. I realized my philosophy was constantly shifting because every experience brings about a change in my perspective. I realized that my philosophy was dynamic, and there was no way I could capture it in print. So, I decided to abort the project. I convinced myself that although Socrates made sense when he said that an unexamined life is not worth living, the cliché "ignorance is bliss" is just as profound. Yet, the voices of my professor and my editor kept stoking the embers of divine discontent in me. So, I got going.

I agree with Wiseman (1984, cited in Crookes, Lecture notes, Fall 2001) that "the development of a personal philosophy requires self-examination and honest comparison and consideration of what we are about as teachers. It is a continual process that involves seeking answers to hard questions over a long period of time" (p. 110). This entire enterprise of self-reflexive problematizing of the act of ESL teaching and its enactment in my life as an ESL learner and teacher has been a painful metaphysical journey for me. In the end, I am left with more questions than answers. I wonder how much of what I have articulated in this article is me. I wonder to what extent the writing up of this autoethnographic study created me rather than characterized me as an ESL teacher and as an individual. I wonder to what extent this personal narrative allowed me to find myself rather than define myself.

This process of reflecting on and writing up a personal narrative on my philosophy as an ESL teacher jolted me to a realization that if I have to live the rest of my life in this profession, I have to find meaning in what I do. As Sullivan (1995) so eloquently expressed:

> To discover meaning is to find a point to living by recognizing oneself as a participant in a worthwhile enterprise whose accomplishment calls out one's energies and whose purposes define and vindicate one's having lived. To live with meaning is to have discovered the secret of happiness" (p. 154).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to two fine peer reviewers who provided insightful comments and suggestions "to tighten up" this paper. My deepest gratitude to Dr. Ceres Pioquinto, mentor, colleague, confidante for believing in a novice ethnographic researcher like me, and for pushing me several notches higher than where I thought I could be; and to my professors at the Second Language Studies Department who inspired me to "just get going."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gina A. Fontejon-Bonior is Associate Professor at the College of Education and the Department of English and Literature at Silliman University. She completed her MEd in Teaching English as Second Language at the University of the Philippines at Diliman, Quezon City and her MA in English as Second Language at the University of Hawaii at Manoa on a Fulbright grant. She also holds a Certificate in Teacher Education from the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane as a fellow of the Philippines-Australia Project in Basic Education (PROBE).

REFERENCES

Auerbach, E. (1995). The politics of the ESL classroom: Issues of power in pedagogical choices. In J. Tollefson (Ed.) *Power and Inequality in Language Education.* (pp. 9-33). Cambridge: CUP.

Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination.* Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas.

Bizzel, P. (1994). "Contact zones" and English studies. In National Council of Teachers of English. *College English* 56 (2), 153-69.

Bochner, Arthur, "It's About Time: Narrative and the Divided Self," http://www.clarku.edu/~mbamberg/Material_files/Narrative_and_the_Divided_Self.pdf

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society and culture.* Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc.

Bourdieu, P.(1983). The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed. In *Poetics* 12:311-356.

Crites, S. (1971). The narrative quality of experience. *Journal of American Academy of Religion,* 39, 291-311.

Crookes, G. Notes for ESL 690. (Unpublished readings, Fall 2001, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu, Hawaii).

Delpit, L. D. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. In V. Villanueva (Ed.), *Cross-talk in Composition Theory* (pp. 565-587). Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.). (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications, Inc.

Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed. (pp.733-768)). London: Sage Publications.

Elbow, P. (1987). Closing my eyes as I speak: An argument for ignoring audience. (pp. 258-276). In National Council of Teachers of English. (January 1987). College English 49, 50-69.

Freeman, D., Johnson, K. E. (1998). Reconceptualizing the knowledge-base of language teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32 (3), 397-416.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: Continuum.

Gee, J. (1998). What is literacy? In Zamel, V., & Spack, R., (Eds.), *Negotiating Academic Literacies*. NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Gee, J. (1996). *Social linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. (2nd ed.). UK: The Farmer Press.

Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge: CUP.

Income and Employment Statistics Division, Household Statistics Department of the National Statistics Office. Manila, Philippines. (http://www.census.gov.ph/data/pressrelease/ 2007/of06tx.html). Retrieved, April 3, 2008.

Kasper, G. (1999). Classroom research on interlanguage pragmatics. In Kasper, R. (Ed.), *Pragmatics in language teaching*. NY: CUP

Loughran, J., & Russell, T. (1997). Meeting student teachers on their own terms:experience precedes understanding. In V. Richardson (ed.), *Constructivist teacher education* (pp. 164-181). London: Falmer Press.

Long, M. (2000). Focus on form. In R.L. Lambert & E. Shohamy (Eds.), *Language Policy and Pedagogy*, 179-182.

Long, M., & Crookes, G. (1992). Three approaches to task-based syllabus design. *TESOL Quarterly*, 26 (1), 27-55.

Medgyes, P. (1992). 'Native or non-native: who's worth more?' *ELT Journal* 46 (4), 340-349.

Mohatt, G., & Erickson, F. (1981). Cultural differences in teaching styles in an Odawa school: A sociolinguistic approach. In H. T. Trueba, G. P. Guthrie, & K. H. Au (Eds.), *Culture and the bilingual classroom* (pp. 105-119). New York: Newbury.

Morine-Dershimer, G. (1983). Instructional strategy and the "creation" of classroom status. *American Educational Research Journal*, 20, 645-662.

Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (in press). Identity and language learning. In R. Kaplan (Ed.), *Oxford University Handbook of Applied Linguistics*.

Ohlstain, E., & Cohen, A. (1990). The learning of complex act behavior. *TESL Canada Journal*, 7, 45-59.

Osborne, A. B. (1996). Practice into theory into practice: Culturally relevant pedagogy for students we have marginalized and normalized. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 27 (3), 285-314.

Ovando, C. J., & Collier, V. P. (1998). *Bilingual and ESL classrooms: Teaching in multicultural contexts* (2nd ed.). Boston: McGraw Hill.

Pagliarini Cox, M. I., & de Asis-Peterson, A. A. (1999). Critical pedagogy in ELT: Images of Brazilian teachers of English, *TESOL Quarterly*, 33 (3), 438-452.

Pennycook, A. (1994). (1994). *The cultural politics of English as an international language*. London: Longman.

Pennycook, A. (1995). English in the world/The world in English. In J.W. Tollefson (Ed.), *Power and inequality in language education* (pp. 34-58). Cambridge: CUP.

Peirce, B. N. (1995). The theory of methodology in qualitative research. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29, 569-576.

Rogers, J. (1982) 'The world for sick proper.' *ELT Journal*, 36, 144-152.

Saville-Troike, M. (1996). The ethnography of communication. In McKay, S., & Hornberger, N. (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language teaching*.(pp. 352-382). NY: CUP.

Schuster, C. I. (1997). Mikhail Bakhtin as rhetorical theorist. In V. Villanueva (Ed.), *Cross-talk in Composition Theory* (pp. 457-474). Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.

Skrtic, T. M., & Ware, L. P. (1992). Reflective teaching and the problem of school organization. In E. W. Ross, J. W. Cornett, & G. McCutcheon (Eds.), *Teacher personal theorizing* (pp. 207-218). Albany, NY: SUNY Press

Spolsky, B. (1989). *Conditions for second language learning: Introduction to a general theory*. Oxford University Press.

Sullivan, W. M. (1995). Happiness as the pursuit of meaning: The promise of professionalism. In L. S. Ronner. In *In Pursuit of Happiness* (pp. 147-164). Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press.

Tajiro, A., & Tajiro, Y. (2000). Native and non-native: what can they offer: Lessons from team teaching in Japan. *ELT Journal* 54 (1), 3-11.

Tharp et al., 1991; Tharp, 1984; Watson-Gegeo, K., & Welchman-Gegeo, D. (1995). Understanding language and power in the Solomon islands: Methodological lessons for educational intervention. In J. Tollefson (Ed.) *Power and Inequality in Language Education*. Cambridge: CUP.

Voght, L.A., Jordan, C., & Tharp, R.G. (1983). Explaining school failure, producing school success: Two cases. In E. Jacob & C. Jordan (Eds.), *Minority Education: Anthropological Perspectives* (pp. 53-65). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: CUP.

Willet, J. (1995). Becoming a first grader in a second language: An ethnographic study of language socialization. *TESOL Quarterly.* 29 (3), 473-503.

Wink, J. (2000). *Critical pedagogy: Notes from the real world* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.

Zamel, V., & Spack, R. (Eds.) (1988). *Negotiating academic literacies: Teaching and learning across languages and cultures.* Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum.