

Constructing a Dialogic ESL Classroom: Questioning the Standard

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Abstract

In English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms across the United States, international students are studying Academic English and absorbing American culture. This paper questions how ESL teachers respond to international students cultural questions about linguistic facets of American culture. This paper also confronts the ESL industry's approach towards Standard English speakers and discusses benefits and pitfalls of measures taken in ESL teacher education to address teacher biases. The author also reflects on lessons learned from both early and later stages of her experiences as an ESL teacher.

Keywords: ESL teacher education, hidden curriculum, Standard English, world Englishes, Hip Hop pedagogy

Introduction

“To be involved in TESOL anywhere is to be involved in issues of liberation and domination everywhere.” Julian Edge, 1996, p. 17

At the start of teaching English as a Second Language, reservations about my contribution to the international spread of English abounded. I questioned my role the slow depletion of world languages and cultures, one English class at a time. On darker days, the questioning would take the form of worries about indoctrinating students of English with my personal opinions and beliefs as I answered queries on topics in ESL text books such as: the IRS, marriage and obesity.

Multilingual students have complex perceptions about the power their languages possess and definite ideas about the value of English compared to their first languages. Many see English “an important tool for social, economic, and political advancement” (Norton, 2010, p.6). Some international students may experience internalized oppression or the belief that they are inferior to a dominant group. The student discourse about the high value of English as a global language mentioned above indicates the potential for internalized oppression by students who categorize their languages as inferior or less valuable than English.

Scholars, such as Johnathan Hall believe that in the United States multilingualism will become the norm. Johnathan Hall (2009) says “the Next America is a place where living one’s whole life in one language seems as odd as eating the same thing for dinner every day” (p. 35). Hall’s future America is an imagined space where the monolingual English speakers make up the minority. Yet, a palpable tension exists between the internalized oppression experienced by international students of English, the preservation of the right to speak whatever language and, dialect, one chooses, and a growing population of multilingual individuals in the United States. For example, statistics of language shift among Navajo speakers in New Mexico indicate that many in the youngest generation chose to speak English instead of their heritage languages (Lee & McLaughlin, 2001, p. 30).

Teachers and students in the ESL classroom experience what Giroux (1983) terms “hidden curriculum”, or unstated and otherwise unrecognized norms, values, and beliefs embedded in texts, lessons and also transmitted to students through rules and structure of classrooms. Furthermore, Widdowson (1994) writes that language is “culturally loaded” (p. 386). If teachers and students are both ignorant of hidden curriculum, what effectively masks it? How can it be uncovered in culturally loaded language?

The body of my inquiry is organized into four categories. First, I investigate who teaches what content in ESL classrooms through a reflection on my career start in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Next, I consider the construction of Standard English in relation to World Englishes, African American Discourse and Navajo English in both classroom practice and teacher education. Subsequently, I address the relationship between World Englishes and learner identity in formal learning environments. In conclusion, I discuss implications of the body of this inquiry for future ESL classrooms and teacher education programs, focusing on solutions without rigid prescriptions. Throughout this paper I reference my ESL teaching experience in hopes to better understand the schooling practices and hidden

curriculum, including inequality and discrimination that I have witnessed and participated in as a teacher in ESL classrooms.

In 1988, Lisa Delpit wrote “Those with power are least aware of-or least willing to acknowledge its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence” (p. 283). In an effort to gain awareness, this inquiry marks my grappling with the most significant and perplexing issues I have encountered in TESOL. Why are white, native speakers more likely to teach English as a Second Language? Why are competent English speakers with certain accents or dialects hired or not hired? What is the relationship between inherent authority of a teacher versus earned authority? What did my initial teaching pedagogy look like and how was it connected to my experience as a student? How do I act as a cultural worker consciously and unconsciously? What hidden curriculum do ESL texts and classroom discussions promote? What is the connection between ESL student achievement or failure and cultural discontinuity and resistance?

Who teaches what in ESL classrooms?

“The problem lies in the tendency to equate the native speaker with white and the non-native speaker with non-white” Kubota & Lin, 2006, p. 481.

Today, I use the term “unearned privilege” to describe the ease that I experienced entering the international TESOL job market. Multiple factors contributed to my privileged candidacy for teaching ESL including my whiteness, “nativeness” and femaleness. As Kubota and Lin (2006) remind us “the problem lies in the tendency to equate the native speaker with white and the non-native speaker with non-white” (p. 481). In two years of teaching, employers never questioned my authenticity, my education or my teaching credentials. Colleagues of mine who are fluently bilingual non-native English speakers did not experience this privilege. In my graduating class of ESL educators, only the most experienced, an older Russian woman, was flunked. She openly remarked that she was discriminated against because she was a non-native speaker. Since then, I have witnessed several capable and talented bilingual non-native speaking teachers fired for what I considered unsubstantiated reasons.

The reality of discrimination between native speakers and non-native speakers corresponds to the power relationship between the colonizer and the colonized (Macedo, 2000, p. 21). Donaldo Macedo (2000) recounts a reaction to the hiring of a Puerto Rican teacher in Westfield, Massachusetts where “about 400 people there signed a petition asking state and local officials to ban the hiring of any elementary teacher who speaks English with an accent” (p. 21). In contrast, in my first two years of teaching I was hired over and over again, working for more than seven companies and subsequently recruited for nine more. Being a native speaker made me a commodity on the job market, increased my employability, and brought me status in the form of my choice of job contracts.

In her seminal work, *The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children*, Lisa Delpit (1988) identifies a culture of power in the classroom that varies across Black and white communities. She explains “many people of color expect authority to be earned...” (Delpit, 1988, p. 289). White, middle-class educators in Delpit’s essay and native English speaking ESL teachers both purportedly possess authority by virtue of their position not competence. Delpit, in comparing teaching practices, claims the white middle-class teacher

“...does not need to express any sense of personal power because her authority does not come from anything she herself does or says” (p. 290). In the case of native English speakers, authority comes from unearned privilege without necessitating awareness of the skills needed to acquire English.

Once in charge of ESL classrooms, I felt an entitlement that both weakened and emboldened me. As a new teacher, adult students questioned my cursory explanations like “it sounds right”. In my first few months of teaching, I relied heavily on the six weeks of intensive training where I had learned many previously unfamiliar components of English grammar. The initial TESOL certification also provided instruction in basic teaching methodology. As a native speaker, authenticity of birth language sanctioned my ad-hoc teaching methodology. Widdowson (1994) outlines the process wherein:

...If you give authenticity primacy as a pedagogical principle, you inevitably grant privileged status to native-speaker teachers, and you defer to them not only in respect to competence in the language, but also in respect to competence in language teaching. They become the custodians and arbiters not only of proper English but proper pedagogy as well. (p. 387)

My teaching practice consisted of underdeveloped and untested teaching methods. Native speakers understand the cultural context and idiomatic use of “naturally occurring language”, but they cannot recreate authentic cultural contexts by virtue of their understanding (Widdowson, 1994, p. 386). Without the methodological tools for teaching, this understanding cannot be transmitted. On the surface, I reflected my pedagogy from the recently completed TESOL certification course. However, my learned pedagogy echoed my history as a student of mostly white, female teachers in puritanical New England schools. I operated as a “cultural worker” who defined the appropriate language and classroom behavior for teacher and students from this deeper pedagogy.

Reevaluating my entrance into TESOL, the unearned authority of middle class white teachers in Delpit’s 1988 essay, resonated with my experience as a native speaker. Recollections of inequalities between English speakers who possessed the wrong accent, recall Macedo’s warning of the discrimination that teachers with certain accents face. Widdowson provides reassurance that culture and language are connected beyond an explanation rendered by any native speaker. Giroux would say that in hidden, but influential ways teachers are cultural workers promoting rules and norms they have consciously or unconsciously absorbed. In ESL classrooms specifically, the selection of a demographic of ESL teachers who are natives and much of the time, white, helps ensure the promotion of Standard English

Standard English and World Englishes Education

“You can, of course, persist in your nonstandard ways if you choose, but then do not be surprised to find yourself marginalized, perpetually kept out on the periphery” Widdowson, 1994, p. 381.

Across various ESL classrooms, my students have questioned English language variation whether pointing to international accents or national dialects. Inevitably, the controversial question of who speaks “real” English arises. Instead of addressing this question, World

Englishes (WE) as a concept, promotes intercultural communication between speakers of different varieties of English or non-native speakers (NNS) (Kubota & Ward, 2000, p. 80). Proponents of WE endorse the teaching of English as an International Language (EIL) over English as a Second language (Matsuda, p. 719).

Braj Kachru (1992) developed the term, World Englishes and described three circles of English: the inner circle (the U.S., U.K., Canada, Australia and New Zealand), the outer circle (regions that have passed through colonization), and the expanding circle (p. 356). Despite critiques of Kachru's diagram, scholars such as Kubota and Ward (2000) have built Kachru's idea stating:

It is also estimated that the worldwide ratio of nonnative speakers of English to native speakers is somewhere between two and four to one. These figures indicate that English no longer belongs only to "native speakers" of the Inner Circle-it is used by other people in bilingual/multilingual situations with various forms of pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax, and discourse. (p. 82)

When the ownership of English by native speakers is challenged, by extension the myth of the purity of Standard English comes under question. At the same time that various forms of English are being spoken, scholars such as Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1994), claim that languages, cultures and "linguistic human rights" are endangered by the rapid spread of global English (p. 83). Linguistic human rights constitute "the right to use a regional or minority language in private and in public life..." (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1994, p. 83). Ironically, local forms of English, internationally known as World Englishes and national varieties of English should also be sheltered under the umbrella term linguistic human rights.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, local varieties of English represent more than linguistic systems; WE are interlaced with local history, ways of speaking, thinking and norms of behavior-all aspects of WE speaker identity. While Phillipson argues that English as a global language infringes on the linguistic human rights of speakers across international communities, the rebuttal stands that a language itself cannot act as a hegemonic power (Widdowson, 1998, p. 138). For WE speakers, the imposition of Standard English would represent a hegemonic force enacted through Standard English speakers, impeding on the local appropriation of English. Varieties of English, such as Navajo English, showcase adaptation and specific cultural expression (Benally & Viri, 2005, p. 103). In the Navajo arts, Navajo English has been celebrated in many literary works (Benally & Viri, 2005, p. 104).

In his writing, *"Please Read Loose": Intimate Grammars and Unexpected Languages in Contemporary Navajo Literature*, Anthony Webster describes Navajos' appropriations and uses of English. Navajos who authored work in Navajo English have been dismissed by Standard English speaking critics as "confused", but exert influence within Navajo communities (Webster, 2011, p. 79). Navajo English is "...based on the distinctive historical trajectory...a local way of speaking and writing that does not completely overlap with the historical trajectory of mainstream English" (Webster, 2011, p. 65). Dismissing Navajo English as invalid masquerades as an acceptable form of literary discrimination, which perpetuates linguistic inequalities. Webster (2011) concludes by saying "The recognition of American Indian Englishes as languages worth taking seriously, as 'beautiful Englishes' and intimate grammars, would be one useful starting point in destabilizing such inequalities" (p. 80). Instead of acknowledging Navajo English as a distinct and valid linguistic system, educators on and off the reservation postulated "they still do not have it right" (Benally & Viri, 2005, p. 103).

Deconstructing the idea of Standard English provides a platform to assess the validity of

World English education as an antidote to linguistic discrimination. The lexis of English defines the Standard; vocabulary delimits insiders and outsiders across disciplines like law, medicine, and the academy (Widdowson, 1993, p. 380). The difference between British English and American English rests in lexis and both are considered Standard. Instead, "...the communal rather than the communicative features of standard English that are most jealously protected: its grammar and spelling" (Widdowson, 1993, p. 381). According to this argument, the primary unchanging element of Standard English resides in graphological distinctions and not phonological distinctions.

How then, could World English education serve to enhance teacher education or ESL classrooms? In my teacher education experience, WE has not been considered as a core topic for teacher preparation. Still, Kubota and Ward (2000) have argued that if WE were to be included in teacher education, ESL teachers could be sensitized to what might otherwise be an uncontested, unquestioned promotion of Standard English. WE education might expose ESL teachers to political implications of privileging one form of English over another, such as linguistic roots of colonial legacies.

A study conducted by Brown and Peterson (1997) offered training in World Englishes for graduate students in a TESOL program (Cliett, 2003, p. 72). Two groups of ESL teachers in training were given four and thirty-four hours respectively of instruction on WE. The study showed that the former group classified English speakers into two categories: native and non-native speakers and the latter group "described English speakers in terms of sociolinguistic norms and language policies" (Cliett, 2003, p. 72). A case is made for incorporating World English curriculum into requisite ESL teacher education. But while teachers demonstrated a more complex understanding of multilingual learners' background, the study failed to prove how WE curriculum would diminish notions of the centrality and correctness of Standard English.

Instead, incorporating World English curriculum into teacher education and ESL classrooms may engender the inverse response towards Standard English. McLaughlin (2001) terms English a "power language" in his discussion of language shift among Navajo communities. In bilingual schools where Navajo is taught, English remains the primary curriculum. As a result, teachers supplement the primary English curriculum with Navajo language instruction. Introducing Navajo like this creates the antithesis to reversing language shift "... thus reinforcing English as the 'real' language of the school" (McLaughlin, 2001, p. 35). Kubota and Ward's (2000) advocate for the introduction of WE curriculum to teacher education programs; they suggest providing audio taped samples of English to be listened to for: "various accents, intonation, vocabulary and grammar" (p. 83). The focus rests on sharing "communicative responsibilities in intercultural communication", but not on challenging the institutional stability upheld by written Standard English (Kubota & Ward, 2000, p. 85). While WE education might herald an increase in ESL teachers' tolerance of dialects and varieties of English, it is dubious that WE can effectively combat Standard English by functioning as the antidote to the perpetuation of linguistic discrimination. On the contrary, WE education may reinforce the centrality of Standard English.

If World English education provides no solution for combating Standard English, another struggle presents itself. How and when do ESL teachers explain linguistic discrimination in the United States? Kubota and Ward (2000) claim, "it's necessary for (ESL) students to become aware of biases and discrimination that these speakers of domestic varieties of English face" (p. 83). Is teaching about linguistic discrimination, the domain of ESL teachers? If so, what kind of classroom environment fosters or spurns student questions about linguistic discrimination and

what impact does this have on the acquisition of English as a Second Language?

The discussion of linguistic inequalities unquestionably benefits ESL students. In discourse communities within the United States, such as speakers of Navajo English (NE) and African American Discourse (AAD), the struggle against linguistic discrimination continues. Abroad, Cliett (2003) describes English teachers working in schools outside of the United States as “intermediaries between the hegemonic and global standard English and the local and marginal varieties of English” (p. 73). To expand her perspective, English teachers within the United States also act as brokers between Standard and marginalized varieties of English through discussion of discourses, curriculum choices and classroom conversations.

African American Discourse, the “n word” and the Dialogic Classroom

“One important shift is from recitation to something closer to ‘real discussion’ in order to treat topics that do not fit the lesson structure” Cazden, 1986, p. 54.

In my years of teaching, I cannot count the times that international student have asked about the role and usage of African American Discourse. ESL students want to know the difference between how Blacks and whites talk and specifically, who can use the n word. Questions seem to appear from nothing, as if they had been patiently waiting for a convenient crack to slip through, often times arriving in a manner that I would consider tangential to our topic. In one instance, showing a video with a Black man from New York City speaking in African American Discourse, a discussion ensued about differences in “accent” and vocabulary. When the discussion ended, a student asked “What does the n word mean?”

Having addressed this question many times before, I relied on my standard answer: “don’t use it”. I wrote the word “derogatory” on the board. Later that evening however, in a teaching journal kept for a practitioner action research class, I reflected on our discussion. After ensuing conversations with my mentor, I read Thompson’s (2004) *Through Ebony Eyes*, and recognized my position, “an eradicationist stance” (p. 159). My intent in the class was not to shut down conversation, but that is what I had done. I began to investigate options other than my usual-eradicating all n word discussions. I believe that eradication is a strategy used by ESL teachers to label questions, topics or words inappropriate. How does this strategy keep teachers safely within the curriculum, including the hidden curriculum, under the guise of acting as moral arbiters?

I turned to the book *Teaching for the Students: Habits of heart, mind and practice in the engaged classroom*. Bob Fecho (2011) describes his experience when a student reading Shakespeare in his high school English class called Juliet “a ho, like all women” (p. 24). He relates that at one point in his teaching career his reaction was “...to banish what I construed as blatant misogyny from the room” (p. 24). My eradicationist stance had also attempted to banish my perception of racism from the classroom. Fecho (2011) reflects on the dialogue in his English class:

But then I decided that all my banishment had done was to drive ideas underground where they wouldn’t be turned over, examined, and perhaps, reconsidered. Nor could I come to some understanding of the set of experiences that produced that opinion. Without that understanding, I was little prepared to suggest the construction of other realities. All I had done was to provide a space in which we could avoid the issue staring us in the face. (p. 24)

In my case, contrary to Fecho’s experience, students would not let their ideas be driven underground. International ESL students have had a variety of experiences with the n word from

popular culture and hip hop and rap songs, to discriminatory speech and conversations in the dorms. My students resisted my oversimplified, eradicationist dismissal of the n word and pressed on, seemingly yearning to know the rules for using it and what it means to African Americans.

As an Anglo ESL teacher, dismissing all usage of the n word as inappropriate may reproduce societal norms in my classroom. For one, Bonilla-Silva (2006) writes about the emotional nature of talk about race in America (p. 71). In his chapter "The Style of Color Blindness", Bonilla-Silva recounts that many whites that he interviewed have clever semantic moves to protect themselves from accusations of racism (p. 57). None of the respondents in his surveys used the n word in their interviews. Clearly, the absence of that word was not a guarantee of the absence of racist ideologies. He notes that by focusing on overt racial epithets, survey respondents used projection as a rhetorical tool, drawing attention away from more subtle forms of racism. Projection coupled with a defensive stance serve as linguistic maneuvers to convince others that "they", not I, "are the racist ones..." (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 63). In retrospect, I fancied myself a neutral teacher who focused on minimizing harm, by giving however short amounts of time to discussions of racial epithets. I can no longer deliver an eradicationist message without questioning my motives and the impact of this strategy on lessening racial discrimination.

After examining my approach to questions about racist speech, I am no longer inclined to tell students they are wrong, or banish topics without discussion. Fecho (2011) asks the question: "If students uttered racist, sexist, or homophobic statements in our discussion, was it my job to tell them they were wrong or to ask them to further examine and explain their stance?" (p. 23). I choose not to stop dialoging with students about the politics of the n word, because I want to understand students' perceptions and I agree that discussions of race are sensitive in America. Total dismissal of the n word warrants deterioration in the fight against obliterating racist ideologies while potentially reproducing sensitive societal norms in America around discussions of race.

In conjunction with questions about the n word, students asked me about variations in speech between Blacks and whites. As the teacher, the voice of expert authority, I was expected to give explanations of African American Discourse in relation to the English that I speak. My standard answer would vacillate between minimizing differences that I could not explain and validating the speakers' credibility. Understandably, my explanatory efforts left students confused. Emphasizing that AAD is a distinct linguistic system would confirm students' reported experience with difficulty communicating with AAD speakers. Yet, I was trying to dismiss the differences between discourses and convince students that they could in fact understand speakers of AAD.

In the future, I will work to create a dialogic classroom, where linguistic discrimination and complex use of African American Discourse can be discussed without bowing to pressure to be the expert. More than an explanation of phonological differences, students may be asking about discourse and elements of African American Discourse like I witnessed with questions about who can use the n word and when. Rahman (2011) writes:

The semiotic value of features eliciting feelings of familiarity and shared cultural experiences and knowledge works to build solidarity and makes the features amenable to use in constructing identity as an African American aligned with and participating in the African American community. (p. 4)

Explaining features of African American Discourse merely as a linguistic system cannot explain

the cultural experiences shared by speakers of AAD. Most importantly, ESL teachers should not avoid distinguishing between discourses or minimize the complex nature of their relationships. Students endeavor to make sense of the myriad of English discourses they hear in United States, while struggling to construct and choose their English speaking identity.

Cultural Incongruities in Schooling and Resistance

“Learning is as much about shifts in participation in social and cultural practices and activities as about shifts in ways of thinking” Nasir & Cooks, 2009, p. 41.

What happens to students who want to appropriate the English language, but not American cultural practices? How many failing ESL students are capable of language acquisition, but unwilling to lease the social practices or shifts in thinking that accompany the shift in discourse? Jenkins (2002) reports “some countries wish to learn the English language for instrumental purposes while maintaining local heritage and culture”(p. 460). Many international students from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) focus on learning English while distancing themselves from American culture. Do ESL students from KSA who engage in social practices uncommon to their culture enjoy greater success in their classrooms and acceptance from their teachers? Are students who distance themselves from American culture, but still seek to appropriate the language labeled as troublemakers or non-achievers?

While some students may explicitly resist enculturation, others may unconsciously resist subtexts of ESL classrooms, or hidden curriculum, resulting in refusal to comply with classroom or language norms. Fordham (1999) reminds us “the underachiever’s refusal to lease the discourse practices that they view as foreign and hostile to their own identity is influential in marking them for academic and social failure” (p. 282). International ESL students, like Native American students in the English speaking classrooms, make choices about which parts of their identity need to be protected, which classroom rhetoric or practice should be rejected and when noncompliance is paramount.

A look at Joseph Suina’s personal narrative, recounting his departure from Cochiti Pueblo illustrates the jarring changes as he transitions into his first English learning environment. From his young vantage point, Suina (1998) remarks of his English teacher that “I didn’t think she was so smart because she couldn’t understand my language” (p. 57). The discomfort and pain that Suina felt as he adopted new behaviors and a new language culminated in a transitional moment where he knew that he had to “give up part of my life” (p. 57). The disparity between home and school discontinuity speaks to ESL students transitioning between cultures.

Conclusion

“Which pedagogical practices are both appropriate and desirable in the teaching of literacy and which will help students develop the capacity for imagining a wider range of identities across time and space?” Norton, 2010, p.1.

What began as a line of inquiry questioning global implications for teaching English as a Second Language, transitioned into an investigation of hidden curriculum and power relations in ESL classrooms. Recently, as a teacher in a program that purportedly educates students on the English language and American culture many subsequent queries arose. How do I teach American culture in my ESL class? How do language use and discussions of language forms such as Standard English reflect or perpetuate the hierarchy of power relations between dialects and discourses?

As an ESL teacher, multilingual and multicultural students surround me daily. Have I felt defensive or shied away from discussions of the plurality of identities in American culture

because of my monoculturalism? How many other ESL teachers have felt this way and what impact does it have on the classroom? Tanaka's (2009) recounts implementing a research grant at a University striving to develop intercultural behavior or "learning and sharing across difference where no culture dominates" among a highly diverse student population (p. 83). The University where he worked benefited enormously over two years, but during a public forum, outcries came from one particular white student who lacked a 'repertoire of identities' (Tanaka, 2009, p. 84). What forums in ESL teacher education exist for unpacking intercultural behavior and self-reflection for ESL teachers?

The promotion of English Only in the ESL classroom contradicts requirements for an intercultural space. Disallowing other languages in the classroom thwarts students from negotiating and connecting the layers of multilingual identities. As Jenkins (2002) notes "constantly reprimanding a student for using his/her native language sends the message that L1, and by extension L1 culture, is not welcomed in the class" (p. 459). When students guard against using their L1, they may experience difficulty accessing memories, anecdotes and facets of their L1 cultural experience. Furthermore, English Only classroom policies directly oppose global cultural relations or "the local take up of cultural forms across the globe" (Pennycook, 2005, p. 33). In reality, banishing L1 from a classroom hardly ensures its total disappearance. "From a multicompetence perspective, all teaching activities are cross-lingual...the difference among activities is whether the L1 is visible or invisible, not whether it is present or altogether absent" (Cook, 1999, p. 202). Superficially, banning student's L1 from the classroom may foster resistance among students who seek to maintain their cultural heritage and view English Only policies as a threat. Teachers must allow first languages to be spoken for the foundation of building a dialogic ESL classroom. As a dialogic classroom develops, however, further actions must be taken to maintain an intercultural environment. When students ask about American culture in the classroom, valuable material ripe for discussion has been introduced. This material is relevant and rich, a window into student experiences that should not be ignored.

Prior to coming to the United States, or in some cases, prior to entering an ESL classroom, students have amassed knowledge and experience of American culture from everyday life and global pop culture. Norton (2010) writes that second language learners create *imagined communities* through deliberate planning processes which include envisioning what life with an unfamiliar community will be like (p. 3). As students invest time and energy in imagining their entrance into the community of English speakers, they envision their future identity as an English speaker (Norton, 2010, p. 3). ESL teachers validate this experience in part by including pop culture materials that students are familiar with, as real curriculum. Actualizing student experience means validating their perceptions even those formed during the imaginary stage. In all likelihood, not all ESL students will foresee themselves joining white, Standard English speaking language communities. Nor will all students imagine English speaker identities that precisely mirror those of their teachers. Decentralizing Standard English generates space for ESL students to cultivate the English speaker identity of their choice.

The use of pop culture texts occurs in some ESL curriculum, but student-generated and student lived pop culture constitutes an opulent and unwritten curriculum. To accept pop culture (and pop questions) as curriculum, teachers must pass through the discomfort of not knowing and move away from initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) sequenced classrooms. Fecho (2011) describes tension or the recognition of cross-cultural differences without needing to resolve or categorize them, as one component of a dialogic classroom (p. 38). Tension, he says is "...the trampoline most educators don't want to jump on" (Fecho,

2011, p. 38). When teachers use pop culture texts, they open the classroom to questions about varieties of discourse and topics not found in ESL curriculum.

Incorporating Hip Hop and Rap into curriculum answers a triad call for incorporating student lived pop culture curriculum, providing role models with a plurality of identities and incorporating an element of African American Discourse and linguistic markers into the ESL classrooms. Pennycook (2005) says “Rappers are interested in a plurality of identities” (p. 34). Many international students are aware of American Hip Hop artists, or global Hip Hop. Ibrahim (1999) argues that “to identify rap and Hip Hop as curriculum sites in this context is to legitimize otherwise illegitimate forms of knowledge (sic)” (p. 366). Building from the idea of Hip Hop as curriculum, Pennycook (2005) writes “to teach with the flow, then, suggests not so much an incorporation of Hip Hop texts into the curriculum but an opening up of possible identities” (p. 40). The foundation for opening the possibility of identities must, at a basic level, include welcoming the students' L1 and their curiosities about identities and perceived inequalities.

Undoubtedly, the question will be asked: What service is being provided to students who are not taught Standard English? In the ethnographic research of Shirley Brice Heath, students were trained as ethnographers who investigated the language used in their communities. Teachers and students crafted a meta-narrative about the relationship between contexts and linguistic choices (Brice-Heath, 1988, p. 317). This research trajectory suggests that ethnographic studies of communication in ESL classrooms are needed to interrogate teacher methodology and treatment of linguistic inequalities. With further research, the power relationship between native and non-native speaking teachers may change, opening the ESL job market to more non-native speakers. ESL students need more examples of non-native English speakers to provide new frames of reference for American culture and to inform their developing English speaking identities.

Ethnographies of communication in ESL classrooms should investigate practices developed by students with the aim of protecting their identities. Classroom practices could be developed that allow more flexibility for students to engage with the curriculum, texts and questions of their choice. Further research could aid students attaining specific goals for language acquisition, as in the case with Saudi students, while the absence of such studies perpetuates misunderstanding of such students.

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