An Understanding of Why ESL Teachers Teach

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Reference Data

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This paper presents a qualitative investigation into how sociocultural interactions with students bring meaning to ESL teachers' work. Aspects of the inquiry tool appreciative inquiry (AI) were used to interview 8 tertiary ESL teachers. AI allowed the participants to reflect on the positive aspects of their careers, from which several interesting patterns emerged. In particular, although the majority of participants did not intend to become career ESL teachers, the value they got from engaging with students encouraged them to become professional teachers. Further, a central aspect of their work-value stemmed from the pastoral care and life-changing sociocultural support they gave to their students. The results of this study, examined from a sociological perspective, suggest that the dynamics of ESL teacher-student relationships can be understood as a process of social history. Moreover, these interactions have positive, important, and lasting influences on both students' and teachers' lives.

本論文では、学生との社会文化的交流が、どのようにESL教師の仕事に深い意味を与えるかというテーマについて行った質的研究を紹介する。Appreciative Inquiry (AI)という問い合わせツールを利用して、8人の大学ESL講師にインタビューを行った。AIを使用することにより、参加者は、自分の職歴の前向きな側面を顧みることができ、そこから幾つかの興味深いパターンを観察することができた。特に、大半の参加者は、生涯EFL教師として務める意思はなかったが、生徒との交流から得た価値観が、彼らに、教師を本職とするモチベーションを与えた。また、彼らが生徒にパストラルケア（心理療法的なケア）や人生を変えるような社会文化的な支援を提供した経験が、彼らの職業観に大きな影響を与えた。社会学的な観点から見た本研究の結果から、ESL教師と生徒の関係の変遷は、社会史の過程と捉え、考えることができる。さらに、これらの交流は、教師と生徒の双方の人生に、前向きかつ重要で、永続的な影響を与える。

> *". . . with other people, it's more or less irrelevant to me that they are intelligent, as long as they are kind, sincere etc."* — Marcel Proust

Reflection on day-to-day teaching experience and practice is a valued part of professional development in ESL (Farrell, 2003). However, less emphasis is placed on reflecting on the practice of ESL itself. As with other educational sectors, ESL is a social field that is informed by theoretical orientations of one form or another. However, the socially constructed nature of ESL textbooks, training programmes, and so forth is usually taken for granted. Further, the majority of ESL literature does not engage with the societal level of teaching. Yet, teachers are also micropolitical agents who bring their own agendas and assumptions to their work. As such, their actions have wider impacts on the lives of their students (Crookes, 2003). Sociological accounts of the education

system, particularly the tertiary sector, suggest that education, along with economic and social capital, is one of the primary mechanisms by which social structures are reproduced (Jenkins, 2002). For ESL students, English language education may play a particularly important role in their other scholastic endeavours and consequently their success in life more generally. Second language acquisition may be of particular importance given the established symbolic power of language use in social interaction (Bernstein, 2003; Bourdieu, 1991). Therefore, there are moral aspects of ESL teaching that should be open to public scrutiny (Crookes, 2003) and reflected on as a part of ongoing practice. As Bourdieu (1992) suggested, "[a] scientific practice that fails to question itself does not, properly speaking, know what it does" (p. 236). By taking one's own profession as the object of study, one can make alternative perspectives and understandings of both day-to-day practices and institutionalized ideas about the field of ESL.

As a means to examine some of the logic of ESL teaching practice, the following study presents a sociological examination of a particular group of tertiary ESL teachers by examining the role of *rapport* in the ESL classroom. The aim of the study was to help understand what value *being an ESL teacher* gives to people so as to understand what gives this particular group of ESL teachers a sense of "aliveness and authentic relatedness to the [working] world" (Fromm, 2005, p. 21).

Although the field of education, including ESL, appears to be an independent academic discipline, there is a reciprocal relationship between the way the field is organized and the socioprofessional interests of teachers within it. This structure becomes embodied in routinized and standardized teaching practices because it helps teachers to reinforce and reproduce a system that bestows value on themselves and creates a monopolized subsystem of social and economic power (Bourdieu, 1984b; Jenkins, 2002).

Even though ESL is part of the tertiary sector, there may be some significant differences between ESL and the tertiary educational field more generally. Specifically, ESL study is often undertaken as a means to other ends, which influences access to other fields of study, the work force, and ultimately social and economic capital (see Bourdieu, 1984b). Furthermore, the wider demand for English education in the international market has meant an increase in opportunities for native speakers of English to teach (Senior, 2006). Unlike many other disciplines, ESL education spans all sectors of education from preschool to postgraduate. This means that there is a much wider range of positions within the field available to teachers, each conferring different degrees of socioeconomic power. People also undertake ESL teacher training with both short- and long-term objectives, meaning that the experiences and skills people bring to ESL are quite varied (Senior, 2006). As with other fields within the labour market, the particular skills and knowledge that teachers have acquired (specifically qualifications, teaching experience, and social connections) have a determinant effect on the position they occupy within the field, as well as their mobility and capacity to acquire economic capital. As an example, in the Japanese EFL context some people teach as an opportunistic means to some other end, such as undertaking a working holiday. These teachers tend to be employed in entry-level positions under nonstable, short-term, and relatively low-paying conditions. However, as people in the ESL field transition to careers as professional teachers by acquiring relevant teaching qualifications and engaging in ongoing professional development, the types of jobs they can get, as well as the security and benefits, tend to improve. At the far end of the spectrum, ESL teachers with postgraduate qualifications who are both professional teachers and academics become eligible for positions at universities on longer contracts and less frequently to tenured positions. The collective effect of people's orientation to ESL teaching practice constitute what sociologists call *the rules of the game* (Swartz, 1997). It is the social interactions and the kinds of social capital that ESL teachers bring into the field that determine the nature and values of ESL education more broadly.

A useful way to understand what value teachers get from ESL practice is to retrace the history that leads to particular kinds of

vocational ideology. This can help to uncover why it is that some people become ESL teachers and examine how this constructs the value they get from their work. Through an examination of these factors, an understanding of a particular part of the ESL field may be gained. To this end, some of the logic of the appreciative inquiry (AI) framework was adopted in this study. AI is primarily a management strategy for introducing organizational change by drawing and building on the positive aspects of people's work. Ideas from AI are useful in the current study as they can help to understand the *positive core* of ESL teachers' work. The aim of AI is to recognize and *appreciate* vocational value and *inquire* about working people's lived realities. As a constructionist approach, the medium for *appreciating* and *inquiring* is the language people use to describe their working contexts. This focuses on metaphor, narrative, and knowledge and how these reveal workplace value. This uncovers the qualitative characteristics that make particular kinds of careers collectively different and special (Cooperrider, Sorensen, Whitney, & Yaeger, 2000; Ludena, Whitney, Mohr, & Griffin, 2003; Whitney, Stavros, Cooperrider, & Fry, 2003; Whitney, Trosten-Bloom, & Cooperrider, 2010). In particular, the current study focused on the affirmative topic of *rapport* in the ESL classroom. To this end, the teaching experience of a group of professional ESL teachers is compared with Bourdieu's (1984b) examination of the tertiary education sector, *Homo Academicus*. In this seminal text, Bourdieu argued that the tertiary academic field, like other social fields, exists as a hierarchy of prestige and socioeconomic power. Agents within this field establish and reproduce their social position by exchanging and exploiting social and economic capital to compete for academic positions. Position and power within the academic field are typically determined by embodied and objectified forms of cultural capital such as distinguished qualifications (particularly the PhD), education within and appointments to prestigious schools (such as Ivy League and Oxbridge universities), publication in highly ranked journals, books, and engagements as keynote speakers. For Bourdieu, the ideology of working within the tertiary education field is most concisely summarized by the aphorism *publish or perish*.

Method

Eight 25-45 minute, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with eight professional, tenured, senior ESL teachers at a public technical institute in New Zealand. Although the teachers were working in a native-speaker context, they were teaching study-abroad students who intended to return to their home countries at the end of their ESL studies. The sample included six women and two men from a permanent staff of 40 people, with 10-20 years ESL experience, whose ages ranged from approximately 40 to 60 years. They all held professional ESL teaching qualifications (CELTA or DELTA) and most held a bachelor's degree; one had no formal university qualification and one a masters in applied linguistics. The participants were asked the following five questions, as well as follow-up questions:

1. When did you realize that you wanted to become an ESL teacher?
2. What are the most important qualities of a good ESL teacher?
3. How do you establish positive relationships with your students?
4. What are the positive aspects for you of working as an ESL teacher?
5. Can you tell me about any particularly memorable students you have had during your teaching career?

The interview was designed to identify the participants' core teacher-student relationship values, as well as identify strategies they used in establishing and maintaining such relationships. The participants' responses were categorized according to each question they were posed.

Findings

Many of the participants were in the latter stages of their career, which made the interviews noticeably emotional. They tended to

share quite personal experiences, which reflected the value that they placed on their work and the relationships they had established with students throughout their careers.

Question 1 revealed one of the most interesting findings, which was that most of the participants had not planned to become ESL teachers. Furthermore, none said that they had become ESL teachers out of a particular interest in the English language or linguistics. Rather, they had become ESL teachers for tangential reasons such as a lack of other teaching work, as a result of involvement in a local community, or as a working holiday abroad. Nonetheless, having found themselves in the role of ESL teacher, all said that they had continued to teach because of the positive nature of the work. Many were also inspired by the opportunities to learn about other cultures and the chance to make meaningful differences in their students' lives. Ethical and political matters play a role in all education, including ESL, and in these respects teachers feel a responsibility towards their students (Crookes, 2003; Eccleston & Hayes, 2009). All but one of the participants began their work as ESL teachers of migrant and refugee students. Their students lacked the basic English language skills to integrate themselves into their new cultural environment and they found great value in being able to empower their students. It was rewarding to help break down the boundaries of cultural isolation by helping people to communicate in day-to-day situations. This empowerment allowed their students to establish friendships, participate in local communities, gain employment, and restore their sense of self-respect and dignity. The participants did not see their teaching as just providing their students with a new skill, but also dramatically altering their lives.

When asked what qualities made a good ESL teacher, all of the participants felt that establishing good student rapport was central to the facilitation of learning. The values they felt most important in maintaining positive relationships were respect, honesty, empathy, equality of all members of the class (including the teacher), trust, and the recognition of people as individuals. They also thought that it was essential to accept the cultural and skill differences that everyone brought to the class. Furthermore, establishing good rapport required flexibility, sensitivity, and being approachable and compassionate. It also demanded good listening skills and the ability to minimise confrontation when challenges arose. Self-awareness seemed to be another crucial element to teaching success. Specifically, the teachers stressed the need to be aware of their own limitations and to be prepared to seek advice or help from others.

In reply to Question 3, all of the participants reported that they established positive rapport with their students by breaking down the traditional teacher-student power imbalance. They typically did this by personalising the context through sharing their own life stories. Other common strategies included moving around the classroom and bringing themselves physically down to the students' level. Many participants also suggested that sharing humour and encouraging the notion that everyone in the classroom has responsibility for creating the classroom environment was central to good rapport. These practices were encapsulated by one participant who said, "You need to give the students the time and space to realise you're not an old dragon—that you're on their side."

When asked about the positive aspects of ESL teaching, the participants all felt that the ESL classroom was a uniquely different learning environment because of the importance of language competence in access to education, the workforce, and social capital. Because of this primacy of language use in social life, the participants saw themselves as being more involved in their students' lives than were teachers of other disciplines (see Bernstein, 2003; Bourdieu, 1991). The student-teacher relationship appeared to be one of the most rewarding aspects of the job for all of the participants, which many regarded as humbling. The ideal teacher-student relationship was one where there was some major shift in their students' perspectives on their studies, culture, relationships with others, or the direction that their lives were taking beyond the classroom. The

participants' experiences with people from other cultures had been rewarding in and of themselves, as it gave them a greater awareness of their own culture and the limitations of their own perspectives on life. As one commented, "The ESL classroom is the ultimate multidirectional teaching-learning environment."

All of the participants were able to provide affirming stories about memorable relationships. The following story exemplified the kinds of meaningful experiences that the teachers had had. As one participant reflected,

> I remember working in a poorer part of China, with students whose ability to master [the English] language determined the fate of not only of themselves, but also their family and the wider community. The parents of the children had invested everything in their children's education, which in turn placed enormous pressure on the children to succeed. Inevitably, the measure of each student's success was his or her performance in an IELTS exam [International English Language Testing System]. There was one young woman who needed a particular score to be able to pursue her and her family's dream. She worked so hard, made the most of every opportunity and I gave her all of the extra support I could. When the results came out she had actually exceeded the requirements. I'll never forget the overwhelming, almost embarrassing outpour of gratitude. Her mother, who spoke no English at all, travelled all the way from the countryside to thank me, in tears. It was a deeply humbling experience.

The above interview extract was not unusual in terms of the dramatic social impact that many of the teachers reported they had had in their students' lives. Other participants even reported having successfully helped students deal with serious psychosocial issues, including violence and abuse.

At the end of the interviews, the participants were asked to reflect on their time as ESL teachers and look forward to the future. The most common theme was the hope to be able to maintain their enthusiasm and energy for teaching in the future. They also aspired to be able to continue to improve their own understanding of ESL teaching and to continue to learn from their students.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that at least part of the value the participants derived from their teaching work did not come from a pecuniary or strictly academic standpoint, but rather from being able to establish authentic rapport with their students and develop themselves as people (Senior, 2006). The participants' view of their occupations aligned with Fromm's (2005) existentialist *being mode* of working, in which there is a congruency between sociocultural development, teaching practice, and internalized perceptions of appropriateness (see Sartre, 1984). However, this kind of authenticity is socially derived through the kinds of values that people bring to their occupational field (Bourdieu, 1984b). To understand why it is that the participants in the study placed a particular importance on establishing a meaningful rapport with students that extended beyond the delivery of an English language service, it is important to contextualize how a particular set of social conditions facilitated the participants' entry into ESL teaching. In particular, the skills and social capital that these teachers brought with them had an important influence on what they value and their teaching practices.

Bourdieu (1984a, 1984b) suggested that the education sector is a structured and hierarchical social marketplace in which particular forms of social capital are exchanged. Those in the tertiary sector (specifically the university system) occupy an economically and socially dominant position in this field. The tertiary education system typically maintains and reproduces itself by placing a premium on social capital in the forms of economically demanding, difficult to acquire and, by extension, socially prestigious qualifications, teaching appointments, publications, and so forth. Those working in the primary and secondary education sectors generally

occupy a subordinate position in the education system that does not demand the particular forms of cultural capital required for participation in the university system. Entry to the tertiary ESL field is usually possible through the acquisition of a bachelor degree and ESL teaching certificates that are relatively economical and quickly acquired, meaning that the entry barriers to teaching tertiary ESL are also comparably less restrictive than those of other tertiary disciplines. However, dominated fractions—subclasses of people with differing volumes of social capital and power working within the education system—are still organized into hierarchical systems of social interaction. Rather than exchanges based on the kinds of scholastic capital described above, teachers in dominated fractions of the education system may be more inclined to pursue and exploit professionalized strategies for accruing cultural capital. In the case of some of the positive values expressed by the participants here, this was manifested in the expression of values driven by a moral imperative to improve the lives of their students more generally. Such values were reflected in the emphasis placed on the pastoral aspects of teachers' attitudes towards their students, a tendency that some authors have argued is more prominent in the primary and secondary sectors (Crookes, 2003; Eccleston & Hayes, 2009). Consequently, the participants in this study seem to have viewed their student-teacher relationship somewhat differently than what might be expected of other teachers within the tertiary sector. Typically, there is a perception that tertiary-level teachers have less of a moral responsibility than those in the primary and secondary sectors (Crookes, 2003). However, this does not appear to be the view of the teachers who participated in this study. Rather, these people gained significant value from providing pastoral care in the form of sociocultural support (counselling, career advice, and so forth) to their students.

Drawing on Bourdieu (1984a), it may be argued that part of the value the these ESL teachers derived from pastoral practices can be understood as an alternative means of accruing social capital (i.e., doing something socially valued by helping others), which is indirectly related to ESL delivery. This was aptly surmised by one of the participants who said, "There must be something about the job that that has kept me in it for more than 25 years—it can't be the money!"

If it is the case that pastoral care constitutes a significant aspect of ESL teaching, then ESL teachers need to be familiar with ways to address and deal with the moral and ethical issues that they will inevitably encounter in their work. They also need to take into consideration the boundaries and implications of their work before involving themselves in student-teacher interactions—such as pastoral care—that extend beyond the specifics of teaching ESL. If it is appropriate for teachers to be engaging with their students in this way, then ESL training should also include the skills and tools necessary to deal with pastoral issues. At present there is no code of ethics in the ESL industry. The development of such a code would be a useful guide in teacher-development in assessing teacher aims and outcomes. Such a code would also be an important aspect of teacher professional development (Crookes, 2003).

Conclusion

The outcomes of this study have highlighted some interesting facets of ESL teachers' motivation. They have suggested that some ESL teachers derive significant value in their work from aspects of the job that are indirectly related to teaching English. Particularly, the participants in this study valued the opportunity ESL teaching gave them to have a broader influence on their students' lives and for their own sociocultural development. This difference in value, as compared to other aspects of the tertiary field, may in part be explained by how the teachers entered the field of ESL teaching and the kinds of social capital they brought with them. This has implications for the professional development of ESL teachers. Further research could be directed towards adding greater explanatory power to the findings of the current study and assessing their generalizability to other teachers within the different fractions of the ESL industry.

Bio Data

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