Curriculum Discourses Within a TESOL Program for International Students: Affording Possibilities for Academic and Professional Identities

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Introduction

The research discussed here investigates the curriculum discourses circulating in a TESOL Masters Program for international students at a Canadian university. It focuses on issues around academic and professional identity constructions and language, viewed through dialogical (Bakhtinian) and ecological perspectives. The authors are two teacher educators in the program. We situate our work within the field of curriculum studies that engages in cross-border and cross-disciplinary conversations and see ourselves as implicated in larger structures, discourses, and ideologies, including the trend towards a market orientation of higher education, the conditions of globalization, and neo-colonial contexts of history, culture, and power. As we investigate the curriculum discourses in the program in this article, we interrogate our own practices as educators in it in an attempt to denaturalize and historicize the discourses available in the program and in current conditions of internationalization of higher education (Stier, 2004) in order to align TESOL programming with ethical practice.

Beset by shrinking budgets and reduced government support, educational institutions have become increasingly reliant on international programs and tuition fees. As Stier (2004) notes, a prominent ideology of internationalization in higher education is "instrumentalism," with the goals to enrich the labour force and consolidate the economic prowess of a country, as well as maximize revenue for educational institutions. Despite institutional dependence on their revenue, international students and the programs designed for them are often marginalized within North American universities (Beck, Ilieva, Scholefield and Waterstone, 2007; Beck, 2008; Liu, 1998). This marginalization seems particularly acute in a field like TESOL, which has historically been "a pedagogical site and institution for educating the racial and linguistic Other" (Luke, 2004, p. 25).

For Luke (2004) and others, the TESOL field is implicated in neo-colonial relations of power and the work of teacher educators in this field can be seen as securely in the service of mobilizing global capital. An important aspect of the neo-colonial relations of power in the TESOL field is the dominance of a discourse of native speaker authority/native-speakerism which places non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) in a position of deficit professional competence on the basis of assumed standards of language proficiency (see

Canagarajah, 1999; Holliday, 2005; and Faez, 2011, among many others). Holliday and Aboshiha (2009) equate this deficit discourse with an ideology of racism. Native speaker ideology (Holliday and Aboshiha, 2009; Pavlenko, 2003) not only dominates the TESOL profession, but also informs identities and literacies within higher education, marginalizing those who speak/write accented English and reinstating Western/Centre privilege. Thus, the desire for "native speaker English" seems to drive much of the internationalization of the student body in TESOL programs in Western countries (Beck et al., 2007). This increased desire for TESOL programs cannot be separated from the rise of English as a world language, a global lingua franca, alongside the privileging of native speaker dialects.

In this article we maintain that the curriculum of TESOL programs needs to engage head on with these powerful broader TESOL discourses which impact the construction of academic and professional identities of international students in these programs. Only then can such programs work to limit possibilities for perpetuating neocolonial relations of power between the West and the rest by questioning uncritical acceptance of native speaker ideology and English linguistic imperialism associated with it (Phillipson, 1992). Such questioning is in line with Stier's call for unpacking the internationalization of higher education as an "ideological endeavour" (Stier, 2004, p. 95) where higher education has its own version of ethnocentrism: "*academicentrism*" or the conviction "that 'our' methods of teaching, research and degrees are better than those of other countries" (ibid., p.93). Academicentrism is an aspect of the ideology of educationalism, which tends to "[individualize] solutions of structural and global problems" thinking that "educated and enlightened people [from wealthy nations] are considered the cure for poverty, inequality or exploitation" (ibid. p .93) at the expense of less developed countries. Alongside ideologies of internationalization that echo a "West is best" perspective, the conditions within today's globalized higher education are highly politicized: the academy can no longer "represent itself as a homogenous and unified entity, to which outsiders must seek access through learning its ways" (Jones, Turner & Street, 1999, p. xvii).

The critical views discussed briefly above motivate our investigation into the possibilities for agency for the international students we teach in a TESOL program as they accommodate, negotiate, and resist identities, practices and discourses in the program inflected by broader racialized, neo-colonial, and global/local tensions (Canagarajah, 2004). Higher education curriculum and pedagogy are complicit in a narrative of acculturation to the practices of Western educational institutions (Beck et al., 2007) or, as Bakhtin (1981) would say, seem to disallow possibilities for "ever new ways to mean" (p. 346). This is part of the liberal tradition Bhabha (1994) speaks of that accommodates 'others' only within its own norms and frames, and attempts to contain difference.

Theoretical Framework
Aware of the possibility that we could be considered as "technicians of empire" (Luke, 2004, p. 24) in the work we do in a TESOL program for international students, we expose in the two complementary longitudinal studies below the reiteration of normative discourses despite or alongside curriculum designed to raise critical awareness. In searching for ways to align internationalization and TESOL with ethical practice (Beck et al., 2007; Ilieva, 2010; Waterstone, 2008), our goal is to suggest directions for more ethical and equitable curriculum discourses that create new options for students and teachers, while also exploring broader

questions about the containment of difference and the tensions within higher education in these globalized times characterized by larger geopolitical, economic and institutional constraints.

Some of the questions around curriculum discourses in the TESOL program discussed here were taken up in a previous study conducted by one of the authors (Ilieva, 2010). In particular, the previous work aligned with studies critically exploring if or how TESOL programs could allow NNESTs to construct positive professional identities and become pro-active educators (Brut-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Golombek & Jordan, 2005; Pavlenko, 2003) and offered a Bakhtinian analysis of the negotiations of authoritative program discourses evident in the end-of-program portfolios of students in the 1st cohort in this TESOL program. Drawing on views of identity as crucially related to social, cultural and political contexts (Toohey, 2000), as constructed through language and discourse (Weedon, 1997), and as multiple (Norton, 2000), dialogical (Bakhtin, 1981), and agentive (Varghese et al. 2005), the study argued that TESOL programs are sites of professional identity construction and rife with authoritative discourses that demand unconditional allegiance, alongside possibilities for the development of creative and productive "internally persuasive discourses" among student teachers (Bakhtin, 1981). It concluded that possibilities for appropriating the TESOL program discourses are quite varied with some discourses presenting openings for the students to insert their own meanings and intentions while other discourses are seemingly experienced as impositions. It recommended that TESOL programs provide "curriculum and pedagogy across coursework that engage meaningfully with international students' prior discourses and … [be] specifically geared towards allowing students to actively negotiate their needs/interests/local contexts in their academic work" (Ilieva, 2010, p. 363).

A question the study raised in Ilieva, however, was how was it that some program discourses were experienced by students as inviting negotiation on one's own terms while other program discourses seemed to be precluding agentive appropriation. Such inquiry requires a more fine-grained examination of students' interactions with program discourses. This brings us to an inquiry into how the curriculum is lived and enacted in this program and this is the question that this article attempts to address. Here we draw on a subsequent study by Ilieva examining further students' constructions of professional identity in the program as evident in their portfolios and the study of Waterstone on the program discourses that allow for the construction of an academic identity among students within the program. The studies are complementary in offering different angles through which the TESOL program curriculum and its discourses could be investigated to gain some sense of how curriculum is negotiated and lived across coursework and pedagogical interventions. In order to be able to present a fuller picture of this curriculum enactment we find the need to supplement Bakhtin's dialogical lens in outlining processes of identity construction and discourse negotiation with an ecological lens.

"Ecology is the study of the relationships among elements in an environment …in particular the interactions between such elements" (van Lier, 2010, p. 4). An ecological perspective aims to deepen our understanding of *processes* as opposed to products of teaching and learning and attempts to shed light on the *dynamic* and *multifaceted* sets of relationships that educational settings entail in addressing the quality of educational experiences (van Lier, 2004). It allows us to see how if you "[p]ull one string, metaphorically speaking,… all the others will move in response" (van Lier, 2010, p. 4).In our analysis, we use an ecological

framework alongside Bakhtin's concept of dialogism to analyze more fully the ideologies, discourses and identities that circulate in one TESOL Masters program as these become evident in the interactions between elements in the environment (i.e., curriculum discourses and students).

Bakhtin's (1981) understanding of ideological becoming/identity construction points to the opening of possibilities within a heteroglossic dynamic between different types of discourses talking back to each other within one's own consciousness. There are authoritative discourses enforced from outside, in effect, the "word[s] of a father, of adults and of teachers, etc. [demanding] our unconditional allegiance" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 343) and internally persuasive discourses that we take up as 'our own': creative and productive, "tightly interwoven with one's own words" (p. 345). "Our ideological development is just such an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values" (p.346). We are interested in exploring this inter-animation of voices within one's consciousness through an ecological lens.

In discussing ecological perspectives in relation to language, Kramsch and Steffensen (2008) note that "a key word in ecology … is holism" (p. 18) and that a holistic starting point leads to the adoption of "a dialogical point of view on language" where dialogue is understood "in a Bakhtinian sense as a relational principle" (ibid., p. 19). This speaks to the compatibility of Bakhtinian and ecological perspectives which we endorse in this article. The ecological, like the dialogical, is characterized by "interconnectedness, interdependence, and interaction" (Kramsch & Steffensen, 2008, p.19).

Viewing one TESOL program through an ecological lens (Kramsch, 2002, 2008; van Lier, 2004) focuses attention on affordances or "relations of possibility" (van Lier, 2000, 2004, 2010) particular curriculum discourses open up for international students. By highlighting the notion of learners and their environment as parts of a living organism, it brings into focus the symbiotic relationship that develops between the authoritative discourses circulating in an educational setting and the internally persuasive discourses/identities that are available for uptake in this setting. Van Lier (2000) defines affordance as:

> a particular property of the environment that is relevant—for good or for ill—to an active, perceiving organism in that environment. An affordance affords further action (but does not cause or trigger it). … an affordance is a property of neither the actor nor of an object: it is a relationship between the two. (p. 252)

The centrality of "interaction" in the concept of affordance allows us to ruminate in the data sections below over the constraining and agentive relations of possibility afforded by the curriculum discourses as lived in this TESOL program. In addressing these we focus on the following research questions:

- How is curriculum lived and enacted in this program?
- "What is in this environment [TESOL program] that makes things happen the way they do?" (van Lier, 2004, p. 11).
- How might curriculum discourses and practices of TESOL programs afford possibilities for constructing positive academic and professional identities within globalized economic and institutional conditions?

Program Background and Data Collection

The Masters of Education TESOL program, housed within a Faculty of Education in a Canadian university, is a 17-month program which started in 2005, each year enrolling cohorts of 22 to 24 students who are all international students. It consists of 7 required courses and a comprehensive examination, and includes observations and practical teaching experience in Canadian school classrooms within a 'fieldwork' course. Throughout the program, assistants are hired for specific, on-going academic support alongside course work. A graduate of the program is hired as a part-time cultural assistant to support students' cultural adjustment, offer information and support for community involvement, plan cultural and social activities and assist the academic coordinator in supporting students. The academic coordinator liaises with all instructors in the program to ensure coherence across coursework and to monitor students' progress. Before the first full term starts, there is a 5-week intensive introductory Orientation to graduate study, which introduces reading and writing activities and oral discussions/ presentations similar to those that will be expected in the coursework. Both authors have been academic coordinators and instructors in the program. One teaches the academic literacy course, the other teaches a course focusing on issues around second language teaching.

Common themes across coursework are 1) critical, poststructural and sociocultural perspectives on language learning and teaching; 2) understanding the centrality of issues of equity and social justice in relation to schooling; 3) a focus on reflection and inquiry. The research interests of the academic coordinator and the faculty involved in this Program reflect these 3 themes. The Faculty of Education itself has in its mission statement reference to social justice and equity and a strong emphasis on reflective practice in teacher education, particularly in curriculum and instruction (the broader area where this TESOL program resides). These commitments shape the curriculum.

The first study discussed here investigates initial encounters with these curriculum discourses in the first term, when students meet the actual demands of graduate coursework. It is based on 4 years of data from an academic literacy course designed to support beginning international graduate students, and in particular to introduce them to educational discourses and practices in North American contexts. This course continues work begun in the Orientation, and runs alongside their first academic course in TESOL and their first visits to classrooms in the 'fieldwork' course.

The second study investigates the portfolios produced at the end of the degree program, where students reflect on their learning throughout their coursework, and their experiences during the program (e.g., volunteer work, community involvement) with a view to how this might inform their future teaching. These portfolios speak to how students negotiate program curriculum discourses in developing professional identities as teachers of English.

In the first study, data was collected from students in 4 cohorts of the program (2007 to 2011) with a total of 43 participants. The data used here is from students in cohorts 2, 5, 6 and 7. Documents analyzed included student writing, course outlines, assignment descriptions, email exchanges; for 3 of the cohorts, audio-taped one-on-one interviews and videotaped focus groups were conducted by a research assistant. Analysis of transcripts was done using a grounded theory approach, letting themes emerge from the data (Charmaz, 2000). Investigating the initial encounter with normative expectations of graduate study in the field of education, the first study takes a wider holistic view which includes larger economic and

institutional conditions that impact what kinds of spaces can be created within a particular classroom and looks for possibilities that open (or foreclose) more positive identity construction within that environment. Investigating the academic literacy course, the analysis focuses on beginning students' struggles to understand new linguistic, cultural and disciplinary discourses and to negotiate entry into scholarly and disciplinary conversations. Students are aware that their writing will be evaluated by criteria they are just beginning to understand, and they begin already in this initial course to grapple with academic gate-keeping regulatory practices and their own desires. This study exposes practices that work to domesticate or discipline divergent meanings and identities (Foucault, 1988). In one sense, such an academic literacy course is intended to acculturate these students into a "North American" way of writing, to help them succeed in graduate study here. This course, taught by Waterstone, uses an academic literacies approach, "which emphasizes the socially situated and ideological nature of student academic writing" (Lillis, 2003, p.194). As Benesch (2009) argues, a critical perspective on academic writing is needed even more within current global conditions. Students respond to this critical perspective in various ways, and it is possible to trace how this curriculum is enacted and lived through analyzing their reflections on their learning, in writing and in interviews and focus group discussions. Overall, the goal was to understand how curriculum discourses and practices (in this course in particular, the impact of new ideas of language learning and teaching in assigned readings) might open more agentive, creative possibilities, as well as foreclose those and reinforce constraints.

For the second study, portfolios, produced in hard copy (and electronically) by a total of 51 students graduating from the first 3 cohorts in the program (2006-2008) were analyzed. Course outlines and assignment instructions throughout courses in the program provided another set of data that complemented the students' portfolios in allowing for a more robust examination of the curriculum discourses the students engaged with in the program. Access to student portfolios was requested following students' completion of the program. Building on a study which discussed the main themes in the portfolios of the first cohort of students completing this program through a Bakhtinian lens (Ilieva, 2010), the study reported here attempts to engage in a more detailed manner with a question the earlier study identified: i.e., "how dialogical/internally persuasive [are] some of the authoritative discourses circulating in this program?" (p. 363). As mentioned earlier, the study concluded that dialogicality varied significantly. Making sense of this variation is the main focus of the work presented here through the inquiry into: what is it in this program that makes things happen the way they do (see van Lier, 2004). Such questioning allows us to broaden the analysis by complementing Bakhtinian perspectives (helpful in addressing identity construction though discourse appropriation) with ecological perspectives that attend holistically to the complex dynamic system that an educational endeavour represents. In order to respond to this question, Ilieva went back and read cohort 1 final portfolios and then read through the portfolios of cohorts 2 and 3 following a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2000), not imposing a particular framework on the collected data. Instead, Ilieva followed an inductive research process where the focus was on identifying themes salient in the data and theorizing ensued from the data. As salient themes (to be discussed below) transpired, the focus of analysis became an exploration of the relations of possibility that students' engagements with program curriculum discourses afforded; that is, viewing the data through an ecological lens. This entailed inquiring into the

constraints and agentive opportunities for professional identity constructions afforded by the program.

Both authors analyze the nature of the curriculum discourses these students interact with in the program and use pseudonyms in the analysis of students' quotes below. A major impetus for the studies has been to contribute to program and curriculum developments grounded in examining program impact on students. In our research reported below, we trace some processes of students' academic and professional ideological becoming/identity construction evident in our two longitudinal studies.

Data Analysis

In answering our research questions, we were interested to find out what affordances were present within the curricular discourses reiterated in the program and what agency was possible as students accommodated, resisted, or negotiated these discourses in their processes of academic and professional identity formation. As discussed above and briefly summarized here, according to van Lier (2010), "[a]ffordances are relationships of possibility, that is, they make action, interaction and joint projects possible" (p. 4). An important aspect within relations of possibility is agency presented as follows: "I define agency in the final analysis as movement, a change of state or direction, or even a lack of movement where movement is expected.… [i.e.] the organism moving in order to live and grow (p. 4).

Thus, affordances may open spaces for movement or constrain movement into particular directions.

Two major themes emerged from data analysis viewed through the lens of relations of possibility and agency within those lenses: the first characterized by constraint, the regulation of particular meanings, accepting authoritative discourses; the second demonstrated instances when participants negotiated these discourses on their own terms, with a more agentive uptake.

1. Relations of Possibility which constrain agentive appropriation
Study 1
Becoming Critical /Reflective:
One curriculum discourse circulating within this program is about being or becoming 'critical' and 'reflective' in developing an academic (writing) identity (as well as in developing a professional identity). Reflection and inquiry begins in the Orientation, with students asked to reflect on their own experience in relation to an excerpted reading from Freire's (1970/2000) work on critical pedagogy. Writing 'reading responses' that require linking their own experience to the theories presented continues through most coursework and is further developed by the reflecting on practice and classroom inquiry aspects of the fieldwork courses that involve classroom observation and some practice teaching. Coursework reinforces the Orientation encounter with critical pedagogy by continuing with critical perspectives in the TESOL field (e.g. Luke, 2004; Canagarajah, 2004; Pennycook, 1989), and emphasizing poststructural and sociocultural perspectives with critical, poststructural and sociocultural readings (e.g. Norton, 2000; Pavlenko, 2003; Morita, 2004). For many students in the program, this is a new view of second language education, and the requirement for successful study, involving critical reflection on their own experience, is also new. As will be shown below, the relations of possibility afforded by an expectation to be

critical and reflective as a writer seemed to constrain students' appropriation of these curriculum discourses.

Commonly, students reported difficulties with producing a 'reflection' at the beginning of study. For example, after a paragraph that summarized her classes and activities for the week, one student wrote in her reflection assignment:

> There were so many things I have experienced. But when I am writing my reflection, I can't recall the most impressive one that I want to write about. I felt a little lost. What I am doing? (Xue, Written Reflection, coh2).

Reflecting on experience is a valued activity in educational practice (Waterstone, 2003, p.139), but it is not self-evident which experiences constitute something worth reflecting on in writing for a class. Similarly, in an interview, another student expressed her frustration with making sense of assignment expectations, particularly the responses to readings, which required not only summary but also a critical reflection.

> For my own reflection part, for this was my first writing, "critical" was a brand-new word to me. Even though I remembered when I was in American university [as undergraduate exchange student], one criteria of writing paper was "critical thinking", I couldn't fully understand the essence meaning at that time. (Mary, Int, coh6)

This is not to suggest that students have not been or are not 'critical' but that they are meeting in this environment the imperative to 'be critical,' and there is a particular way to be critical that is valued. Commenting on what she felt was an unsatisfactory evaluation of her writing, one student said:

> [...] the worst part was my critique because it was not so related to the original article. [The instructor] mentioned my critique need to be more tied to the article. I think maybe I wrote too much about my personal experience about how to learn English. That is not so related to the article so I revised most part of my critique. (Amber, Int, coh5)

Within the academic discipline of education, reflective practice is valued; it has special meaning in a field that seeks to align theory and practice to effect positive change in teaching. Learning to link ideas to one's own experiences, but 'not too much' is a challenging process. Here we see how the curriculum's focus, both implicit and explicit, on demonstrating critique is enacted and lived within this environment.

All these quotes from students suggest tensions in the lived curriculum within the TESOL program in becoming academic writers. Taking a critical stance in relation to established knowledge on the basis of their experience assumes some implicit cultural baggage on the part of students: reflection is motivated by visions of an independent thinker, who will come up with "questions this raises for you"—and who will be comfortable expressing such questions in writing to the teacher. It imagines a student accustomed to offering a personal critique of an established, everyday way of doing things. These tacit expectations are made

visible as students struggle to negotiate how to be critical and reflective—as they encounter these salient curriculum discourses within this program. Pulling the "string" of critical reflection seems to entail the movement of all efforts by the students to be "successful" in the program in that particular direction. As will become evident in some data from study 2 below, critical reflection has become an internally persuasive discourse for the students by the time they write their end-of-program portfolios.

Alongside other curriculum discourses circulating in the program, particularly the emphasis on critical reflection, students also encounter a discourse of 'voice' primarily through assigned readings about multilingual writer identity (e.g., Canagarajah, 2004). Sometimes students respond to this idea of having one's own 'voice' as an imperative, like being 'critical.' In the following interview excerpt, a student is asked about a word choice she made in revising her paper, and she answers that that wording sounded stronger to her:

> […]in the original version because I want to put myself in a lower place, I didn't want to be too certain about my suggestion. Someone said: "You should speak out your voice in your writing." I hear that from a conference or orientation program for the whole Faculty of Education. I think about it and I think I should speak out my voice. (Tammy, Int., coh6)

The sense that she 'should' speak out her voice can be seen as constraining. However, according to Bakhtin (1981), sometimes discourses *can* be "*simultaneously* authoritative and internally persuasive" (p. 342) and when "someone else's ideological discourse is internally persuasive for us, ….entirely different possibilitiesopen up" (p. 345) allowing the appropriation of discourses on one's own terms. Further data on "voice" discussed in the next section shows that this discourse of 'voice' could be "simultaneously authoritative and internally persuasive" (p. 342). This interanimation of voices can be viewed through an ecological lens to reveal a symbiotic relationship that develops between curriculum discourses dynamically interacting with human agents in this environment. Students link thediscourse of 'voice' to their changing academic identities as graduate students in a new cultural and academic context.

Study 2
Data in the second study also speak to constraining relations of possibility, in this case in developing professional identity as teachers of English. Like in an earlier study drawing only on data from cohort 1 portfolios (Ilieva, 2010), there was pronounced variability in the ways program discourses were taken up (or not) and discussed by the students in cohorts 2 and 3 in the program with respect to professional identity. Of particular importance in this study, however, was the saliently different construction of future practices the graduates of cohort 2 and 3 imagined for themselves. In portfolio after portfolio, cohort 2 graduates argued for the importance of bringing Critical Pedagogy (CP) as a useful approach into their future teaching context and explained in much detail how they will engage with it in their professional practices. The first quote below illustrates the embracing attitude towards CP shared by all but one of the graduates in cohort 2:

> Critical pedagogywas introduced to me in [a] course … whose content and instructor were very fascinating and inspiring. (Michael, cohort 2)

Other words students used in their portfolios to represent their relation to CP are: "exciting", or "the right way to reform China's education." While students had been introduced to critical pedagogy earlier, it was in one particular course that it was expected that they engage with it on a practical level or the lived curriculum entailed grappling with it (in an assignment to be addressed further down).

In addition to expressing enthusiasm vis-à-vis CP, cohort 2 graduates expressed strong commitment to apply CP in their local contexts of teaching in the future as evident in this quotation:

> In China… I will try my best to overcome [the structural challenges] and use the critical [pedagogy] approach to design effective curriculum for students. (Sandra, cohort 2)

As the above quotes indicate, cohort 2 graduates seem to be in awe with critical pedagogy.

In contrast, graduates of cohort 3 felt strongly that it is very important to take Constructivist Teaching (CT) from the West and bring it back to their local teaching contexts and also discussed in detail ways to implement it in their future classrooms. Here are a couple of quotations that attest to this:

> [B]ringing constructivism theory back to China is very important. … we can raise people's awareness that every student from the school can be the resource to transfer knowledge. (David, cohort 3)

> With the idea of Democratic Classroom, I made some expectations about my own future teaching…. To be a constructivist teacher, first we should bear in mind that students are not passive vessels of knowledge. They come to class with their unique experiences, and each of them should be valued and respected. Teachers should nurture students to make meanings themselves. (Beatrice, cohort 3)

As is evident from these quotes, cohort 3 graduates are eager to become constructivist teachers and talk with facility what this might entail. The string/thread of CT in the way cohort 3 students seemed to have lived the curriculum of this program seems to pull these students' imagined future practices in the direction of CT.

Overall, it seems that both cohort 2 and cohort 3 graduates take for granted the usefulness and applicability of their chosen pedagogical model and refer to it rather uncritically. This seems at odds with the general critical approach espoused in rich detail in most end-of-program portfolios by students of all cohorts as evidenced in the illustrative quotes below:

> After taking … classes here, I get a better sense of the role of teacher. … I know what's important is not getting an answer from anyone else, but developing our own

thinking, critical thinking. …. Merely putting emphasis on subject matter will never be a good way. Only when students get engaged in problem-solving activities can they know what the subject really means to them and how it is related to real life. (Rhonda, cohort 1)

[Critical thinking] is needed everywhere.By critical thinking, we won't become the parrot of other people's thinking: we can understand things from new aspects and … see the world more soberly. (Leila, cohort 2)

We should encourage students to raise as many inquiries as possible, and also we ourselves should be able to question what we teach, not accepting them for granted. If we take everything happening in class without questioning, that means the class stops growing, eventually dying of its stiffness. (Jung, cohort 3)

These quotes point to the students' overall self-reflexivity and willingness to engage with their future teaching contexts critically. The facility with which they discuss critical thinking on their own terms in explaining its value in, for example, "see[ing] the world more soberly" or allowing the class not to die "of its stiffness" and indeed in being "related to real life" speaks to how these students found in the concept "critical" newer ways to mean. Thus, the contrast between the students' facility in being reflective and critical in many instances in their end-of-program portfolios and the uncritical embrace of CP (among cohort 2 graduates) and CT (among cohort 3 graduates) makes it all the more imperative to attempt to trace what is it that is happening in the program for these students.

The examination of course outlines and assignments allowed Ilieva to trace the contexts in which students engaged with particular discourses quite intensely, in this case CP and CT. What transpired in this examination was the very explicit framing of some assignments in specific courses that, viewed from an ecological perspective, could give us an idea of the kinds of affordances/relations of possibility particular program configurations/curriculum discourses may provide for students attending the program, pointing to what could be seen as representing a somewhat symbiotic relationship between particular elements in this environment. Thus, cohort 2 students engaged at a very practical level with critical pedagogy through an assignment in one of their courses where they had to design a critical lesson plan framed in very concrete terms: they had to "make a list of possible structural challenges" to CP design and choose activities that are "doable" and represent tenets of CPspecifically named (e.g., "equalizes power in the classroom", "focuses on issues of power and equity"). The reference to "structural challenges" in the assignment is echoed across the students' portfolios in their discussions of CP and was illustrated by a quote from Sandra's portfolio above. Cohort 3 had a similar intense engagement with CT during their fieldwork/practicum course. Their primary assignment during their observations in a Canadian classroom was to: "choose 2 out of 12 explicit statementsabout constructivist classrooms (e.g. "allow student responses to drive lessons", "seek elaboration of students' initial responses") and make "observations about how these are evidentin the [Canadian] classroom [they] visit…[or] NOT present and why."

These instances which trace curriculum enactment in some of the coursework students were part of suggest that naming and explicit framing of CP and CT may have created

somewhat constraining relations of possibility for these students speaking to forces in the environment that the students interacted with without much possibility to grow.

2. Relations of Possibility which allow for more agentive appropriation of program discourses

The data presented in this section represents students' negotiations of the native speaker ideology dominant in the TESOL field both in developing academic identities and in constructing professional identities through the program. The flow from one type of identity to the other in engaging with the curriculum discourse of critique on native-speakerism and celebration of linguistic multicompetence (Cook, 1999), makes it helpful to present data from both studies together.

As outlined in the introductory section, international students arrive to a TESOL program in the West with deficit discourses of lack and limitation in place and these are also reinforced within the larger academic/institutional context. Because in this particular TESOL program they are asked to be critical and are introduced to respected researchers and scholars who critique the strong native speaker ideology within the TESOL field and champion the strengths of multilingual second language speakers and writers, their sense of themselves as non-native speakers is disturbed. The internal struggle begins between "various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.346). As students reflect on their initial difficulties, they frame their understandings in us/them comparisons, with the privileged binary always the idealized native speaker (Pavlenko, 2003). Excerpts from group interviews in study 1 with some of the study participants discussing their first attempts to produce North American style academic writing attest to this.

> When I am writing, I am always influenced by my Chinese writing style as well as I cannot express myself precisely due to my vocabulary limitation. (Cindy, Int. coh 5).

While these international students arrive with rhetorical resources from their own academic background, these are not valued. They feel constrained to represent their understanding in a 'westernized way;' the readers (their 'Western' instructors) may allow for some degree of 'difference' but the academic and institutional norms remain the same. However, it is not only writing that is the issue:

> one possible reason why NNES graduate students have such English difficulties is that they are lack of "English Thinking." (Felicity, int. coh 5)

This internalized deficit discourse on NNES (non-native speakers of English) becomes the default explanation for their difficulties. This view is often supported by institutional and curricular interventions which focus on "improving writing skills" to solve the "problem" (e.g., Jones, Turner & Street, 1999; Harwood & Hadley, 2004). Even in current higher education, which is "like a petri dish of intercultural communication, Anglo/Western ways of using language remain unexamined values, rather than seen as "deeply embedded in cultural history," constrained by particular world views, and co-incident with a colonial binary that pathologizes the Other" (Turner, 2010, p.24).

Students frame their struggles as deeper than surface linguistic features of writing. They seem to understand that the challenge they face is about changing a way of understanding the world more generally, and, more specifically, what counts as valued knowledge or interpretations of ideas and the ways to represent their interpretations. They meet specific discourse expectations in a North American educational field, particularly in this critical TESOL program, for a style of writing they label "native-like" but which leaks beyond linguistic competence:

> With no doubt, most of the time native speakers' advices can make our articles [i.e., papers] more native-like because they totally think in English way. (Cindy, coh 5)

As evident in the quotes above, the critical perspective on a homogeneous North American academic literacy that populates the curriculum of their introductory course is initially overwhelmed by larger discourses shaping the MEd Program: native speaker ideologies alongside ideologies of literacy/language that privilege eurocentric epistemologies and methods of representing knowledge. Students are trying to succeed and the first task is to learn these often tacit expectations. The curriculum in this course attempts to present a critical pragmatic approach (Benesch, 2001) to academic writing, which involves making explicit how we frame texts and talk about texts in classrooms, how we authorize, invite and legitimate certain reading/writing practices and not others (Kramer-Dahl, 1996). This approach becomes one of the discourses circulating within the program, countering the myth of a native speaker and aligning with other critical perspectives.

With regards to professional identity construction, the discourse of multicompetence and the critique of native-speakerism seemed to be uncritically embraced by students in cohort 1 as pointed out in Ilieva (2010). The data in the portfolios of cohort 2 and 3 students speak to a more nuanced engagement with these discourses. These discourses, understandably (given the broader relations in which the TESOL field is embedded as discussed at length in the beginning of this article), dominate the students' portfolios and they, like students in cohort 1, continue to embrace them. However, there are many instances that document students' struggles in making sense of these discourses and this allows for the tracing of relations of possibility in this program that could perhaps be termed agentive. As van Lier (2010) states, "In the classroom, an agency-promoting curriculum can awaken learners' agency through the provision of choices" (p. 5).

Tracing the engagement with these discourses in the students' end-of-program portfolios presents vividly their initial desire for developing "native" English and the pressure of living with an unachievable dream as English teachers that they carried with them from their native countries to their graduate study.

> [I came to the program thinking that] with the quickening of Chinese reforming … it's our duty to get a good command of English (Monica, cohort 1)

> [In China] …I compare myself to native speaker and I always see myself as failed L1 speaker… Every time we learn to speak, we listen to how native speakers pronounce and talk, and if we can't follow exactly, we feel disappointed. … All I was required to do was to … imitate the accent to try to sound like American. (Zhang, cohort 3)

> Through this … MEd TESL **…** I could feel free from obsession that [as a teacher] I should become like a native speaker.(Chung, cohort 2)

These quotes are testament to the impact of the dominant native-speaker ideology they had been exposed to prior to coming to the program on any professional identity they imagined themselves they could develop. Tracing students' engagement with the discourse of native-speakerism in the program suggests that gaining familiarity with the discourse of multicompetence (Cook, 1999) and with critical views on native speaker accents (Lippi-Green, 1997) allows the students to develop critical perspectives on native-speaker ideology and professional identity.

> I used to worry [whether] I can speak like a native English speaker and I believed it would bring me more prestige … living in Canada. [Here], I formed a new attitude towards the accent as it is impossible for adult Chinese learners to speak "perfect" English. Now I am no longer shameful about my accent and I even do not want to sound like a native speaker because it may take away my identity …. I will share my view with my future students which would give them confidence in learning English. (Chloe, cohort 3)

While the way students discuss CP or CT in the previous data section do not suggest creative use of these discourses, the facility with which Chloe talks about her identity in relation to native English speaker accents and the well-thought-through rationale behind her intention to share these struggles with her students speak to the choices these pre-service teachers have seen in engaging with discourses critiquing native speakerism in the program. Another relevant thread that allows us to make sense of the changes in these students' views of themselves as professionals in relation to the dominant native speaker ideology comes from tracing the struggles some students went through in becoming critical of this discourse.

> In the past … I always naturally labeled myself…. I am an "international TESL student," a "non-native English speaker," a "Chinese, who came from the so-called 'third world'" …. I actually created a border between those labels and the opposite [side]… [A]fter coming to this International programin this diverse … country, I have learned that it is necessary for me to break these boundaries. Without these boundaries**,** I could not only learn from the opposite perspectives,different cultures and languages, but also use my "peripheral" perspectives and identities to help both others and me understand the world completely.(Diana, cohort 3)

Overcoming boundaries has been difficult for Diana, but also liberating/allowing for agentive uptake of the critique of native speakerism. Crossing boundaries and struggling with the disempowering native speaker ideology can be traced as well in the portfolios of other students in cohorts 2 and 3. Here are two examples:

> One anecdote … happened in an ESL lesson [during practicumwhich] aroused my awarenessof the possibility that non-native ESL teachers like me may have some

advantages over native [English] teachers in "English-only"classroom … Later on …
I got the theory to support my idea.(Megan, cohort 2)

Lippi-Green's (1997) comments on accents and "standard languages" further
challenged my previous view upon "non-native" accentsin English which had been
…negative. … [W]hen I read "What do ESL Students Say about their Accents" in
[the first course of the program],my thoughts about L2 accents [were] already …
changing. [Now]my opinion on "standard languages" was more powerfully shaken.
(Ben, cohort 3)

These quotes invoking timelines around unsettling native-speakerism speak to the
many opportunities students had across courses to engage with discourses of non-native
speakers of English as multicompetent second language (L2) users and legitimate teachers of
the language. Thus these ideas seem to have been reinforced across coursework and fieldwork.
Indeed, an examination of course outlines suggests that students had opportunities to engage
with discourses of multicompetence and critique of native-speakerism in more than half of
their courses. Clearly "[c]ertain elements in the environment have been made salient, relevant
to the personal experience of the learners, for whom they "afford", i.e. yield meaning"
(Kramsch, 2002, p. 11). What's more, in this case, the meaning that they seem to yield allows
for a more agentive uptake of discourses critiquing native-speakerism.
       The discourse of multicompetence first encountered in readings by multilingual writers
in the introductory course seems to offer affordances or spaces for movement (van Lier, 2010,
p. 4) towards more confidence in themselves, both as graduate students in TESOL and as
professionals in the field, as one student reports in an interview in Study 1.

[these readings] made me think a lot and also it gave me a lot of strengths as a non-
native speaker (Kathy, int, coh6).

Other students' reflections at the end of the first term index these new perspectives.

[…] Before … I agreed that non-native English language teachers are marginalized.
Yet my answer to this question now is this status is an asset because I have
experienced the learning difficulties so I have a better understanding … This critical
thinking helps me to build my identity confidence (Gayle, written reflection, coh7).

One student wrote about how she changed her views on L2 users and used that idea to
write one of the assignments in the course—when there was no expectation that specific
engagement with the curriculum discourse of multilingual competence will be made in any of
the assignments for the course:

L2 users, although may have various difficulties in academic writings, can also serve
as a stream of new blood who can bring new visions and different culture and values
in this field. And this actually became the theme of my short paper. (April, written
reflection, coh6).

An outspoken, mature student with prior teaching experience called for changes in academic discourse communities themselves. She speaks directly to Stier's (2004) critique of the ideology of academicentrism, which only recognizes a narrow way of 'doing things' in the academy.

> Western academic communities should investigate the value of Non-Western writing practices and shed new light on them. (Kathy, written reflection, Coh6).

These critical views show how some students, by the end of the academic literacy course, have gone beyond feeling that they must only bow to normative values, but rather have a more positive view of themselves as second language users and point to the need for change in academic communities and the TESOL field. This agentive movement is linked to the affordances made possible by the reiteration of critical perspectives towards native-speakerism throughout the program.

As mentioned briefly earlier, another discourse that seems to offer more possibilities for an agentive uptake is the discourse of "voice" in becoming an academic writer. The program seems to be a place where students can develop and produce a 'voice' that, while constrained by the conditions of reception (by who will hear it and how it will be heard), nevertheless provides a chance to negotiate their own understandings.In the following interview, another student shows her developing understanding of how to produce a 'voice' within the writing she does for her graduate study.

> Interviewer: Do you have a sense of your own voice as a writer?
> April: … I'm not quite sure yet. The only thing I'm sure is that when I write papers I will have my own stance on a certain topic … I want the readers to really know my stance, my understanding …
> Interviewer: Do you have any idea how to develop your voice? …
> April: To read more is a good way because from reading you can find others' voice and then you know how their voice is heard when you read their papers and then when you write your own papers, then you can think about how you can make your voice heard by others (April, int, coh5)

This student recognizes that one does have to think about the reader, about creating a voice that can be heard. She points to reading, as enacted in the course, as a guide to developing voice. In academic writing, this means being able to situate your work within a particular field, to join an ongoing scholarly conversation, and seeing their own writing as in a dialogical relationship with others writing about the same issues.

In the following focus group discussion from the same cohort/same year, held at the end of the first term of study, students talk about their emerging appropriation of the discourse of voice, which as expressed below may be potentially traced to specific readings they engaged with.

> Linda: I still remember that one article we read in past [course] is how to find I, I in the paper, your identities. I think maybe we can shift our intention from trying to impress the reader to just write down what you think about, just to express your

original ideas. I think that may be easier to write a long, to write an academic-like paper, because if you lost I, if you lost identity, you just to try to imitate others, it's not meaningful. I think it's not, it doesn't make sense to me, so I think if you try to understand, if you try to write down what you think about that may be easier.

      Amber: to create your own voice

      Linda: yeah

The idea of 'creating' your own voice suggests that students are seeing this as a chance to assert their own agency. While using others' words, they have a sense of inflecting them with their own meanings (Bakhtin, 1981).

I kept thinking about my voice … in some ways, I kind of borrow others' language but I think I can own English in my own way. So when I want to say something in English I just use English to represent my ideas. … I just want to make my own ideas and support my ideas using my experience while using my readings to show that how I understand it and what does it really mean to me. (Jennifer, Focus group, coh7)

The course readings that assert the strengths of multilingual writers and that encourage ownership of English as an international language continue to have an impact. One student writes at the end of the first term how she has understood both the discourses of being 'critical,' of 'voice,' and of her rights as an L2 writer:

I like reading Canagajarah's articles because I can hear his own voice through his papers. Maybe I think of him as a role model of L2 writer. In English writing, L2 writers dare not claim its ownership of English. We just try to satisfy the Standard form. As a L2 writer, I might start writing by imitating others. However, it's time to go beyond ventriloquism. I also am a legitimate user of English. A language belongs to people who use it whether native or non-native, whether standard or non-standard (whose standard?) It is true that I have to make my voice heard. At the same time I should be careful not to be dominated by 'standard' forms. L2 users can transform standard form if it's needed. As an educator, I think critically about the nature of language and encourage my students to have their voice with ownership. (Sharon, written reflection, coh 7).

Conclusion

International students come to North American universities seeking a foreign graduate degree from an English-speaking country in order to augment their cultural capital (Beck, Ilieva, Scholefield and Waterstone, 2007) and bring with them an internalized 'deficit discourse' about their own abilities. However, with increasing internationalization, what counts as cultural capital is becoming destabilized, and higher education is a site of clashing epistemologies and increasing diversity. Within this context, the question of how to engage with students in an ethical manner remains a challenge; we feel this can be illuminated if the way students and instructors inhabit program curricula is explored holistically, using an ecological lens. As van Lier (2010) insists, "all the elements within an ecosystem (such as a

classroom) are interrelate... research [should] look at the full complexity of the entire process, over time and space, in order to capture the dynamic forces that are at work" (p. 5).

Our study illuminates the symbiotic relationship that develops between the discourses circulating in an educational setting and the internally persuasive discourses/identities that are available for uptake in this setting.

Using both a Bakhtinian and an ecological lens, we have examined the program curriculum as lived and how it opens up a local space for 'taking up' available discourses in various ways. Clearly, certain ideologies and discourses in the environment limit the possibilities for students to see themselves as 'successful' graduate students in this new academic context, or, as they complete their degree, to imagine themselves successful within the profession. Other forces afford relations of possibility that yield positive academic and professional identity formation of these students.

This particular program seems to create spaces or affordances that constrain possibilities for students to be creative and also, to a certain degree, allows or opens up spaces where students are able to be more active, agentive. Creating opportunities for agency in a classroom setting is essential because, as van Lier (2010) points out,

> agency is … closely connected to identity, and this emphasizes the social and dialogical side of agency: it depends not only on the individual, but also on the environment. …. Learning is inseparably tied to agency. The employment of agency depends on a learning conducive environment that allows and instigates a diversity of manifestations of agency at different levels. ….." (p.5).

This examination of curriculum enactment helps to unravel the thread that runs through this particular program and that may contribute to a sense of accomplishment as an academic writer and future teacher of English.

We need to be critical towards the authoritative discourses we help international student teachers appropriate as particular program discourses seem to offer particular relations of possibilities. Since 2006, research on the initial academic literacy course in the program has influenced curriculum design each year. One impact is that we recognize the need to scaffold and practice developing the kinds of writing expected, not only in the beginning, but throughout the program. Being more aware of how these authoritative discourses may be taken up, and continuing to try to create "a learning environment for a variety of expressions of agency to flourish" (van Lier, 2010, p.5) seem crucial.

Students continue to be exposed to readings that question some of the prevailing ideologies in TESOL and in higher education, as well as to concepts in critical pedagogy and constructivism. Viewing the data presented above from an ecological perspective, we can see some of the impact of the reiteration of particular curriculum discourses throughout coursework in the program. According to Kramsch (2008), "[m]eaning is multiscalar and recursive" (p. 404). Students encounter the 'same' ideas, but at different stages of their learning. The extensive, but nondirective focus on multicompetence and critique of native-speakerism perhaps allows for "cycles of repetition, re-iteration on various levels of complexity" (p. 404) and the restructuring of old knowledge in light of the new where "new meaning emerges in the contact zone between [various] renditions of the same story" (p. 404).

This complex layering influences the ways students engage with the curriculum and their uptake of certain discourses may change as a result.

What seems interesting to note through the data presented above is that there do not seem to be written assignments through the courses in the program framed with an explicit expectation that students critique native speaker ideology in their work. Similarly, while initial writing assignments seem to expect that students develop their own critical and reflective voice, no expectations seem evident with respect to developing a particular kind of voice vis-à-vis discourses of native-speakerism or multicompetence. A question this analysis demands is as follows: Could such non-directive continuous engagement with particular themes allow various possibilities for ongoing negotiation/agentive appropriation of program/Centre discourses? Could this be one way to take into account van Lier's assertion that "the creation of [the agency-rich] environment is a major task of pedagogy" (2010, p. 5)?

Several questions continue to haunt us: Is a critique of native speaker ideology and embracing the discourse of multicompetence truly a route to disrupt existing power relations or could these be another iteration of Centre domination in TESOL programs? Are we advancing *academicentrism* (Stier, 2004), the view that 'our' way of doing higher education, our theories/practices are 'better'? Are we still caught, as teacher educators in a Canadian university, in the role of technicians of the empire (Luke, 2004) when promoting critical pedagogy and constructivist teaching?

In this study, we interrogate our own practices as teacher educators in this international program. It is dangerous and necessary work, as we are implicated in the structures and ideologies we are critiquing. As Luke (2011) reminds us: "The unmarked norm of Western rationality provides a 'naturalizing' device for its regulation of 'Others' of all sorts and kinds" and we need to continue pondering "Who is theorizing and positioning whom, on what grounds, with what historical precedents, with what educational and material consequences …?" (p. 18). Here, we study student experiences and their oral and written reflections, and interpret them through our own frames, "speaking for others" (Alcott 1991). However, this critical work must be done despite its limitations, because of the consequences of not critiquing 'business as usual' in an increasingly commodified higher education market, where internationalization is most often viewed through the lens of educationalism, as unproblematically improving cultural communication.

Notes

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