A Synergistic Curriculum for the Distressed:

Mediating the Accommodation of Diverse Students into Academia[1]

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There is a wonderful cartoon[2] in which a man introduced to another man at a cocktail party says with great relief: "Oh, you're a terrorist! Thank God. I understood Meg to say you were a *theorist."*

What makes theorists so potentially dangerous and threatening, yet why is theory indispensable to the creation of efficacious practice? Is it the confluence of theory and practice that yields praxis? Is that what ultimately I am—a "praxisioner," rather than a practitioner—in the sense that a practitioner merely implements the curricular ideas and concepts that have been created by others, theorists, while a praxisioner creates and practices, designs, plans, and implements simultaneously? And is it as a praxisioner that I partly "theory-rize"—and in turn am "realicized"—by my students and by my very praxis? Is this the distinction between a mechanistically reproductive, imitative pedagogy, and a synergistically vital, generative, and creative pedagogy? Are these distinctions absolute in systematic and systemic ways, or are we teachers destined to dichotomously toggle between the mud of practice and the ether of concepts to find the gyroscope of true praxis?

Over the past two decades I have developed a methodology (Alcalay, 1996) for teaching the acquisition of a non-native language that has emerged from my own idiosyncratic melding of theories of language, mind, and learning with my instructional classroom experiences. I have named this methodology KECCA: Kaleidoscopic, Eclectic, Communicative, Cognitive, Architectonic. It is Kaleidoscopic because language is not acquired predictively, but rather aleatorily, through the spontaneous play, interchange, and permutation of its fundamental elements; Eclectic, because anything and everything may be a source for language learning; Communicative, because it is primarily through human interactive expression and response that language develops; Cognitive, because the thinking abilities of second-language learners far exceed their current mastery of their new linguistic medium; and Architectonic, because any learning can become foundationally incorporated in a modular fashion into (both chronological and conceptual) subsequent learning.

This is the pedagogical methodology. But what is the pedagogical problem? Or, as one of my students, from a business family who had been sent to study in the U.S., to the envy of all his business-practicing relatives, while all he really wanted to do was to do business himself, put it: "Your method is perfect, but only for those who want to learn, and since the majority of your students don't, or aren't prepared, or aware of the value, of learning, well, your method…." (I leave the rest to your imagination). So, am I a great teacher, a legend (and in whose mind?!), or an utter fail-

1.©Copyright 2004, by Leor Alcalay. Presented to the 1st Annual Conference-Workshop of the Social Theory Forum, UMass Boston, April 7, 2004 (Panel: "Pedagogy and Praxis in the International Sphere"). **Contact information: leormishko@aol.com**

2.*Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, by Jonathan Culler (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 15; cartoon is by Anthony Haden-Guest.

ure, condemned to follow my students into the limits of their existing habits, adopting the mini-motions of rote behavioralism, rather than to discover with them new realms of conceptual generativity?

I struggle with the emotions grounded in such a pedagogical problematization on a daily basis, beginning from the disquieting anxiety borne of the recognition that a class must be taught at a certain time, followed by ecstatic rush of adrenaline that characterizes the classic stages of generative pedagogy: observation of classroom phenomena, recourse to the imagination and the stored memory of the teacher, the filtering of materials and mental peroration of their "praxical" implications, selection of the material and the hard work that goes into obtaining and preparing it for use, finally the long-awaited implementation in class and then, with a booming crescendo, the fall into the clay of the realization that the conceptual ether is ultimately an illusion, the deflation of the anticipated ecstasy into the collapse of the behavioral mini-motion, the shared moaning and groaning with colleagues, the long journey home, and the birth of a new hope for the next day. This is the circadian rhythm of the praxisioner, Freirean or no.

Such a recent example was the one in which I put together the materials for the film "Fiddler on the Roof." I had been using "Good Will Hunting" successfully for years in a class aimed at preparing students for programs in technology and the sciences. It had great appeal to the students and engaged them in many ways: the local scenery (subways, world-renowned universities, a community college, neighborhood bonhomie), the theme (the hardscrabble existence of the locals, the talented but troubled youth, the manipulation and attractiveness of the academic elites, the developing relationships with the love interest and with the mentor), and the language (the contrast between local slang and the academic university tone, the cultural references, allusions, and embedded knowledge of high culture). I would even end the semester with a field trip to the MIT or Harvard campus, where we would see some of the scenery portrayed in the film, while students would have the opportunity to benefit from the broader cultural offerings of our city, and learn about the higher educational system in the U.S. at first hand. The class also provided a great opportunity for students to learn to apply the language and techniques of literary analysis to film, and to begin the struggle to develop their academic voices. It was a great introduction to the U.S. cultural reality, with a local flavor.

The pedagogical purpose of using this lexically rich film is also to meld the modes of language learning: the challenging film script allows students to take an academic approach to comprehending the rapid and varied speech which escapes them when they merely view the film on screen, even with closed captioning. It helps wean students away from the inadequate translation based bilingual dictionaries—because culturally dislocated, instructionally unsupportive, and linguistically translated—they often "present" with in class, and toward the wonderful English based, culturally contextualized, linguistically immediate, and instructionally instructive learner dictionaries which enable, transitively, the "down-time" of dictionary lookup to become an integral, if not central, part of the new learning. But students resistant to this multiple accommodation of cultural exposure and pedagogical transformation can present obstacles to such a class project. And aren't Freirean educators enjoined to "hear" the cultural realities of their students? Perhaps sometimes a strategic retreat, a reciprocal accommodation by the teacher as well, can lead to new realms for discovery in the classroom. Whether it is an objection to densely varied lexical registers, or to the canned Hollywood film plots, an instructor needs to listen to the voices of students who are still grounded in their own cultural contexts, and use these opportunities to break new ground. This is how I try to evolve in my selection of materials for my classes, particularly in terms of films.

Prompted by a very culturally diverse class of students who expressed interest in my own culture, my notion that it might be useful to expand beyond the boundaries of both the local urban and the national mentality into a more international sphere, and a pedagogical impulse to move on from a lexically laden film and venture into the less challenging vocabulary of song because of the possibilities a musical would offer to the language-learning process, I decided to use "Fiddler on the Roof" the following semester. I also was seeking to manageably present the essence of my culture without getting lost in the details and controversies of its myriad manifestations. In addition to activating musical parts of the brain, as advocated by the instructional application of Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory, it would introduce general oppositional and other themes such as traditionalism versus modernity, fatalistic determinism versus activist individualism, Diaspora and migration, intercultural communication, and religious faith. It enabled the presentation of Jewish culture within a universal setting, that of the traditional family. And it allowed for the discussion of religion within a context of language, thinking, and interpretation.

One perceptive student wondered about the implied contradiction in Perchik's offer to teach Tevye's daughter lessons from the Bible, while advocating revolution and communism. This led to an explanation of the two parallel traditions, the written and the oral, with the deliberate avoidance of the vowels which would fix meaning, because the Jewish sages recognized that changing circumstances in the future would call for changing interpretations, much as the Founding Fathers of the American Republic recognized that the immutability of Constitutional dynamics would

have to endure the mutability of the upcoming times. The potential analogies to the pedagogy of the writing process, as well as to the philosophical explorations of speech and writing, are evident. Judaism, as the Constitution of the United States, was programmed to override the Achilles Heel of the Roman Empire, the "O Tempore, O Mores" that couldn't be accommodated. Marx's own cultural origins came as an epiphanous revelation to a student from China after his classmate had graphically portrayed the dilemma of human rights within the communist society when responding rhetorically to an African student's inquisitive response to her explanation that an unauthorized fetus in her former world would be "eliminated." The African couldn't grasp this in relation to her, transcontinental, reality, and assumed that the baby would be brought into the world, only to be killed later. No, explained the Chinese student, the child would be eliminated within the womb. But couldn't that be dangerous if the fetus were beyond a certain stage? "Yes, but who cares?" responded her Chinese classmate! "One point three billion people! Who cares if there's one less?!" (i.e., he was of course ironically mimicking his perception of thinking of the powers that be in his own country's cultural reality). This is an instance of the hyperplexic synaptic responses in the manifold learning spaces of my classroom.

Within the classroom, it is the instructor who must provide the opportunistic linkage to enable the students to inclusively transpose their cultural realities, born with them psychically and existentially, into a newly common linguistic and cultural framework. The Freirean third-world rural liberatory circle is transformed into a hyperplexic (a kind of "manifold" teaching where various interfaces crop up within the teaching and learning space, in a kaleidoscopic and architectonic fashion—the K and A in my KECCA methodology) communicative synaptic response system, in which individual realities project and interject, act and react, in a way that can be managed, facilitated, stimulated and provoked, goaded and guided, supported and reinforced, so that the multiple realities of the students in the class are transformed into a great learning mechanism that seeks to acquire academic English—and the referential cultural correlatives that accompany it—as the new reality. The classroom materials (dictionaries, literary readings, vocabulary, writing, and computer texts) become the vehicles, the news media become the filmic screen upon which the semiotics of the new culture, in all its graphic, linguistic, economic, and political intensity can be decoded, and the discourse becomes the gel within which the cells of linguistic acquisition proliferate. But a teacher's ethereal ideal of creating one's own class musical can (and did!) sink into the reality of a 10-minute repetition, led by a music student (the abilities of the student population must be utilized!), of the behavioral mini-motion of getting the right beat to the refrain: "the Papas… the Papas!" And the teacher needed to spend more time with his colleagues…

For 15 years, I have been striving to develop a pedagogical approach and curriculum to serve a variety of diverse students who come to my community college in Quincy, MA. My classroom is steps away from the birth and burial places of the 2nd and 6th presidents of the United States, the first of whom served as the intellectual mentor who fostered the succeeding two centuries of democratic polities which have flourished not only in the U.S., but through memetic—the notion that meaning gets transmitted among people in cultural "meaning units," or memes—inspiration have proliferated, with varying degrees of success, around the world. Adams represents the historical locus of the community, and is proudly featured by locals who show him off to the world of visitors. The second Adams represented legally the heroes of the Amistad rebellion. A student, of Mendi background himself, learns from his college instructor about the Amistad and his own cultural connection to Quincy via the figure of John Quincy Adams, who projected outward from the local, by his legal advocacy of the human dignity of the victimized Africans, a sense of universalism and cosmopolitanism. Over a century later, another local, Colonel Francis Parker, a Quincy educator who traveled to Europe and learned about progressive elementary and secondary education there came back home and revitalized the public school system.

Quincy College was established about 50 years ago by forward-thinking citizens who wanted to extend the public school system into the higher educational sphere. It provided opportunities for returning servicemen from both the Korean and Vietnam War eras, as well as for local students who were reluctant or unable to seek higher education beyond their local communities. Early in its existence, the College provided a welcoming and supportive environment for students who, for a variety of reasons, and from a variety of backgrounds, did not have the sufficient preparation to succeed immediately at the college level. The current academic support program was created to serve such students at the time of their entry and throughout their studies at the college.

Over time, there has been an influx of students from a diversity of backgrounds, with varying needs, abilities, and goals, in distinct categories: international students seeking a degree; immigrant students whose parents have brought them to the U.S. and who have lived in an English-speaking cultural and educational environment for varying lengths of time, but may have mostly experienced a non-English dominant home and communal cultural life; and U.S. native-

born English-speaking students whose educational background is either weak or distant in time, and who need further preparatory work in order to function reasonably well or more effectively in their major subject area courses. International students may arrive with technical college or university degrees or professional training and experience in their own countries, and may seek a transitional experience to perfect their English, acculturate within the U.S. higher educational environment, and acquire affordable credits transferable to future degree programs in other institutions, further professional training or equivalency certification programs or licensing.

One student with a doctorate in computer science improved her oral communication skills and left in mid-semester to take a high-paying job in her field. Immigrant students may also be relatively recent arrivals to the U.S., or they may have grown up within a primarily non-English language dominant household and may have been enrolled in bilingual education programs in elementary and secondary school, or may have not successfully mastered English well enough to achieve effectively in college. There are some students born and raised in the U.S., who have gone through K-12 education and graduated from U.S. high schools, whose academic English may need significant improvement to perform well in college-level courses. Native English-speaking students include those just graduated from local U.S. high schools but whose academic skills are not up to the level of mainstream courses, and those graduated from high school years (or decades!) ago who need to either get back into the swing of things, a "brushup" academic experience, or who were not great academic achievers in high school, and need to build their academic skills from the ground up. I recently had a student in his forties—his Gaelic speaking parents having immigrated to the U.S.—who had graduated from high school "24 years ago" (as he would continually point out to the class!), who was one of the most active members of the class, most helpful to especially the international and immigrant ESL students. He had good command of social English but needed to perfect his academic English and explicit analytical knowledge of grammar.

With such a variety of students also comes a variety of needs. There are students who are focused on further academic achievement in the U.S., and understand that they need to accommodate to the culture and language of higher education here; others seem to be here not so much of their own volition, but perhaps to experience the culture of the U.S., because they have been sent here by caretakers, or because they seek to immigrate to the U.S. Because students don't always declare their goals explicitly, it may be difficult for even an experienced instructor to accurately gauge their true motivations. Some students actually may have an academic motivation, but view the Academic Support courses from particular perspectives that are colored or determined by their personal language-learning or accommodation philosophy and strategy.

Some representative examples may be instructive. Students with a strong academic background in a Romance-language, whose cognate vocabularies usually affords them a rather high academic literacy comfort level, may view classes as opportunities for oral input and communicative practice. Such students, therefore, might forego their homework duties; they may even opt to take classes purely for the opportunity to listen to an instructor speaking normally paced academic English, without being active in terms of their performance in classes. Others may hail from native-language backgrounds linguistically distant from English, and have been exposed to English only in classes taught by native speakers of their own language who do not have communicative mastery of English, and therefore limit their teaching to purely textbook-based grammar-translation exercises. Furthermore, such students often come from educational traditions heavily influenced by Confucian attitudes of passive respect for hierarchical superiors, as well as the defining influence of logographic orthographies; both factors form students who view language learning as purely a receptive activity, in which obedient listening to the instructor is assumed to yields the desired result. However, such an approach is singularly inefficient for acquiring a new language. In fact, contemporary linguistics view the human language ability as a natural, biologically based faculty, and second-language acquisition as a process which occurs regularly and systematically within a communicative context of meaning-making and exchange, we well understand that learning to speak by being silent (beyond an initial naturally occurring "silent period") is a ridiculous oxymoron.

Well, this is a small snapshot, both systemic and anecdotal, of the diverse student population who comes to our doors. Now, how can we create and implement a curriculum, and with what type of pedagogical approach and philosophy should it be informed, that will adequately and even effectively meet the educational needs of all of our students, and transform them into successful students at the 2-year college level subject courses and programs, and beyond? And how can we achieve this within both our higher educational system, and within our broader culture, economy, and polity (or within those of their own countries, to whom many will return when they complete their academic programs and subsequent practical training experience in this country).?

Paulo Freire has articulated for us an inspirational view of pedagogy, a combination of messianic egalitarianism and revolutionary transformative praxis, emerging from a colonialist-driven syncretic society in which the dispos-

sessed indigenous and forced-immigrant groups were denuded of the opportunities for educational access and socio-economic improvement. By defining the association between the physical control of socioeconomic structures and the access to abstract cultural forms of representation (i.e., linguistic literacy), Freire graphically caught the attention of the world and especially of intellectuals within the industrially, technologically and economically developed world who were driven by similar egalitarian urges and often viewed critically the existing cultural mechanisms within their own societies. They flocked to the pedagogical approaches articulated by Freire, which had emerged from experiential contexts very different from those within the "advanced" countries. Freire himself cautioned against the dangers of extrapolating from pedagogies developed within the developing world to contexts, institutions, and populations now in the developed countries. Other theoreticians have elaborated in detail on the complexities of the direct access to knowledge by those who have been alienated from its production and therefore its acquisition as well.

However, what seems to have eluded some of the methodologists and theoreticians in the developed countries who have been so self-critical of their own societies is that the corruption of knowledge works in both ways. Just as Westerners have pined for an imagined East of spiritual purity which would relieve them of the burdens of alienation, so too have Southerners and Easterners, those on the periphery of "Western" civilization, pined for the relief of the technocracy and consumerocracy of the North. It is at this interface, this critical junction, that my theory comes face-to-face with the practice of teaching such newcomers.

My students have not been "corrupted" by the critical theory of these leading intellectuals because perhaps they aren't "fluent" in the academic language in which it is expressed, or they may, by virtue of their rapid progress in learning the new language and culture, have moved beyond any "liberation circles" which may be operative in local education centers in their new country, or they simply have followed a path of progress in acquiring English that has led them from the grammar-translation methodologies of their English as a Foreign Language classes in their home countries, through the communicative methods of their language schools in the U.S. or other English speaking countries (or even in independent language schools increasingly in their home countries). They may have completed programs and are well-versed in the academic literacy of their own native languages, and they probably do aspire to academic, vocational, and professional achievement in an English-speaking world, and thus do have an awareness of the demands of academic English. They may have been influenced by a culture of test preparation and achievement.

But when asked such potentially revealing questions as: What is more important for you in becoming good in English—learning good grammar, or learning more vocabulary?—many will respond: "Grammar," of which they are probably familiar with over 50% of the patterns in English, while their recognition, let alone active use, of English vocabulary probably may barely approach 1% (an educated speaker's probably approaches 10%). When asked what is most important to becoming a good writer, they would tend to respond: "Grammar." They expect to be corrected on their written work, primarily on the grammatical level. But an interesting question becomes: What linguistic categories exactly are subsumed in their definition of "grammar"? They may include what a linguist would define as lexicon, morphology, pragmatics, etc. So is this really an instance of categorical "mis-location," or an opportunity for learning exploration, discovery, and integration? Some of my initial probing into what students really mean by the cover term "grammar" (or "grammars," which is a common but revealing ESL student locution) suggests some combination of the two.

So, what I am trying to teach them, and what they need to learn, is that a grammar book is only about 1 inch thick, but a vocabulary book (i.e., a dictionary) in English is many inches (or feet!) thick; that words have their own grammar; that what is important about words are things such as their part of speech (especially if there are multiple parts) marked by bracketed grammatical code symbols, the domain of usage (marked by "signposts" in the dictionary), their style level (i.e., their linguistic register, marked by social usage labels), their non-primary definitions (i.e., secondary, tertiary, etc.), and the collocations within which they are idiomatically embedded in idiomatic English. Bringing students to understand that their appropriate comprehension of text and speech depends on their ability to function with Freirean "critical transitivity" with the tools of second language learning (such as learner dictionaries) rather than with passive "intransitivity" is the challenge to the teacher of such groups. It is this which will aid in developing the habits of mind (and of hand, because there is much page-turning of dictionaries on the path to academic literacy in a new language!) that will lead toward a true chance to acquire academic language in the long-term. And by the way, the native English speakers in my classes often pick up most quickly on the ability of these dictionaries to provide the information they need as well, a further corroboration that it is the linguistic and conceptual modalities of academia that is the real prize in this pedagogical enterprise.

So what is the role of the teacher, given these diversities, exigencies, goals, and challenges?

"Freire describes *dialogue* as an 'I-thou relationship between two subjects' in which both parties confront each other as knowledgeable equals in a situation of genuine two-way communication. Teachers possess knowledge of reading and writing; students possess knowledge of the concrete reality of their culture." *http://www.cal.org/ncle/digests/FreireQA.htm*

But in my case, students do NOT possess knowledge of the concrete reality of the culture in which they are currently learning (they of course do possess their mental recollections of their former cultural realities). In fact, that is a great part of the problem: not only do students need to learn the language of the academic forms of knowledge and of acquiring it which they will need to succeed institutionally in higher education in the U.S., but their very *lack* of familiarity, groundedness, and knowledge of the cultural forms and artifacts within which they move on a daily basis exacerbates their struggles with acquiring the language. The educator is thus faced with a double challenge, one that really places the traditional Freirean equation on its head. The teacher must function as a conduit, a facilitator of contact, a stimulator of involvement, a provoker of inquiry to the students who are alienated from their own realities. Thus the notion of "banking" education must also be transformed, because the teacher is in fact the repository of vital cultural knowledge of which the student is only vaguely, almost "anomie-ically" aware (in the sense of functioning in the new environment with a gnawing sense of disquiet, due to the inevitable semiotic dislocation from the cultural universe).

Freire used a concept of generative syllables that could be assembled in various combinations to produce words meaningful to the learners and help them acquire basic literacy skills. Freire made the point that educators should not apply his principles in a reified way, but should explore their own circumstances. I also use the concept of generative key words and recombinant syllables, but I seek to do it on a level which can synergize and accelerate the lexical acquisition of the students, and connect them to the new linguistic universe which links them to their current informational reality. Thus, students subscribe to *Newsweek*, which we read each week, but they also study a self-programmed text of key generative morphemes for academic English. My assignments lead the students from intransitivity, in an academic sense, to transitivity. For example, for the vocabulary text, they read the formative principles, study the morphemes, do standard fill-in-the-blank and matching exercises with the words presented in the text, and read a mock text containing the words taught in the unit. We could call this the academic learning correlative of "naïve transitivity" in the Freirean sense; however, in the next stage, I ask students to create new words of their own, formed generatively from the morphemes taught in the textbook, and applied in usage to concepts which they have thought of. The test of the validity of a created word is: (a) does it adhere to the word-forming principles of academic English; (b) is it formed from the morphemes presented and learned in the "naïve transitivity" stage; (c) is it logically applicable to an object or concept we can imagine; (d) has it already been created? If it has, then the word doesn't count as valid for the purpose of this exercise.

It is fascinating to observe students participating in the word-formation process of the English language, just as countless others have done in the past and are doing now. These newly created words, which arise out of social circumstances and are documented and even evaluated by the Linguistic Society of America each year (which selects and awards the winning words!) reflect the syntactic dynamism, lexical creativity, and mental agility of the English-speaking peoples. This is Freirean transformative critical transitivity transposed from its developing world setting to the developed world. The problem of the students I face is not the inculcation of basic literacy; rather, it is the transfer of literacy skills from one set of realities and educational approaches to another, or the development of advanced literacy skills by students who already possess basic ones.

A look at some key aspects of the material presented in my course reveals a variety of components, presented within a unidimensional chronological and learning framework. However, other components—the students as part of the formal curriculum, and the notion of outcomes— lend the course its unique character. Curricular outcomes are the result of a recent movement in education, stemming from the so-called accountability movement in the business world, to ensure that students emerging from courses would have the abilities to perform particular activities delineated in courses. I must admit that I was a reluctant and at times finicky implementer of administrative dictates to establish and implement these outcomes in my courses. I was puzzled by how these differed from the previously defined curricular goals. However, after having defined outcomes through a collegial process of discussion and definition throughout our institution, I must say that one clear advantage of this movement is the emphasis on helping students take the lead in understanding what the outcomes are, which helps them become more proactive and responsible in their approach. In fact, one instrument I use with my students is a 10-level, 4-mode (listening, speaking, reading, writing) list of concrete abilities in ESL performance. The very activity of understanding the range of abilities in language learning, and of hav-

ing students self-identify their strengths, weaknesses, and levels, proves very helpful to enlarging the vistas of the ESL learners. I have discovered that a key aspect to learning a second language is envisioning the future learning while recognizing the past learning. Students (as all of us) have the tendency of moving forward while looking backwards; changing this to moving forward while looking forward is a key aspect of making the transition from what Freire calls intransitivity to transitivity as learners.

I have a number of examples of how I strive to accomplish this in my classes. One example has already been described: the creation of lexical neologisms based on the principles and examples learned in the vocabulary textbook. Another is having students take the lead in teaching students a story from our fiction reader. I lead the students through the first two stories, providing them support in terms of lexical and stylistic explanation, the tools of literary analysis, the responses to the grammatical and lexical exercises, presentation of background contextual material on the author and the historical context in which the story is set, and guidance through the written exercises. These written exercises at the end of each reading provide an entry into another gate, the gate to the writing text. After each story, there is a series of 6 questions. I ask the students to select one and respond to it. The selection aspect also serves a learning goal, as it forces the students to contemplate the various purposes, challenges, and demands of writing. For example, one of the questions is posed in a way so as to produce writing in the critical analytical style, another in writing from within the story but from the perspective of a different character, another in continuing the story from the author's imaginative perspective, and yet another in evoking a real-life event that the student has experienced. Students thus begin to sense progressive connections leading from the writing tasks grounded in the fictional stories, to more academic writing tasks in the future.

Early on in the semester, I ask the students to define which is the hardest of the 4 modes of language communication in English. Although individuals may differ, on the whole students will tend to find that writing is the most difficult and complex mode, and the one that incorporates all the other modes. I pose the following question to the students: Which is the one mode you would choose to be skilled in, if you could only be good in a single mode. I usually will get at least one student who will respond: writing, because if you can write, you can do everything else. While this might not be technically accurate, and of course particular individuals will feel more comfortable with certain modes and less comfortable with others, this remark is in fact very revealing, because it reveals how difficult it is to get students writing well, as a group of individuals.

At any rate, this lead-in to writing brings their first written work. Another source of writing is emails: I have instituted a policy of awarding a small but significant percentage of the course grade on the basis of frequency and substance of emailing with myself as instructor and with classmates. The emails are not judged on grammatical accuracy. This ties in with another text we use, a comprehensive introduction to computer technology for ESL students.

In the last two weeks before the semester break, I ask the students to make oral presentations about their countries, focusing on any aspect they choose to. This turns over the control of the classroom, to a large extent, over to the students. I bring a video camera, which I give to various students in turn, and ask them to videotape the student presentations. After the presentations are over, I will use the videotapes in class to review some aspects of the oral presentations, and also to have students create test questions based on the presentations. The purpose of having students create test questions is to help enable them to perform better on future tests they will encounter in various subjects. Creating test questions enables the revelation of the logical, linguistic, and factual thinking of the students, not only to the instructor, but also primarily to themselves, with the opportunity of self-examination, critique, amelioration, and empowerment. Once again, this is an example of the transition from intransitivity, through naïve transitivity, to critical transitivity, in the Freirean sense. I use the slogan: "Become a better test-taker by becoming a better test-maker." It is indeed amazing to some instructors unfamiliar with the linguistic nature of second language learning what students have in their minds when they face their multiple-choice tests. Once learner thinking becomes explicit, the process of improvement can begin.

Our writing text is part of a series of textbooks created by one of the most pedagogically progressive publishing companies, in terms of the communicative approach to language teaching which has superceded the now discredited grammar-translation approach that still operates in much of the world's EFL sites. This textbook series operates under the extended metaphor of a series of interwoven threads which must be followed individually but interact with one another at different tangent points and in different ways in order to create a tapestry of language learning. Well, if we look at the scope and sequence of this textbook, we will see 10 chapters (rows) and 6 learning areas (columns): these include grammar, learning strategies, writing strategies, from reading to writing, etc. This is a very challenging text to implement in this course, although in many ways it provides a mirror for some of the learning paths we ourselves are

following. It is a kind of “fractal” representation of the course as a whole, and illustrates how nonlinear the reality of group language learning is, and how challenging it is to conduct a class with this aspect in mind.

One strategy I have found helpful is to enable the dissolution of a teacher-led and orchestrated curriculum into a more student-driven one. I am contemplating instituting a concept of individual learning plans, according to which individual students will chart out a projection of the paths their learning might follow, and be responsible for particular sections of textbooks. This is perhaps the single most challenging aspect of teaching a Freirean-inspired curriculum at the level of higher educational academic and cultural literacy. All the issues which appear and reappear in the learning circles of basic adult literacy education within the home cultures of students, or even within a culture into which they have been transplanted, are exacerbated a hundred-fold by the diversity of background, motivation, work habits, and acculturation patterns of the groups I teach.

One striking example is that students enter my class via various routes: a passing grade in the previous course, Intermediate ESL; an appropriate placement test score on the institutional placement test (a standardized computer-based ETS language placement test); an appropriate score on the TOEFL, presented mostly by students applying directly from overseas; a personal decision to take Advanced ESL even though a student has placed into the higher level English Composition 1; a decision to re-take Advanced ESL after having taken it previously, even if they have passed it. One can see a fairly striking difference in the awareness of students who have attempted “regular” subject courses such as English Composition 1, Chemistry, etc., and have had difficulty in such courses. These students tend to be quite active in my course, apparently understanding how crucial it is for them to improve their skills. Such awareness may be lacking in students who have never had this experiential “preview.”

It has also been interesting and useful to me to have the perspective of a graduate student doing her “Field Experience” for the UMB Applied Linguistics program for the past few semesters. This year in particular I have a student with an interesting background, a Chinese native speaker who did two degrees (BA, MA) in Japan in the field of Social Psychology. She has been very active in questioning what I’m doing in the class, and we have had an interesting conversation after classes, with follow-up via email.

I would like to append some artifacts from the class, to introduce a flavor of the texture of learning that I’m speaking about. My goal is to enable my learners to master (meaning to learn and to use) the fundamental elements of English, especially academic English. On a lexical level, this means mastering morphemes, which implies stages of recognizing the presence and significance of morphemes in existing words; the most efficient way to do this is to empower students to play with morphemes by constructing new words, so they recognize the meaning of each morpheme and seek to apply the meaning of the coined word to a real-world situation. Words such as “Emelish” (behaving in the way that Emel does) and “multiexpertity” demonstrate the validity of initiating the process of word recognition through its reciprocal mirror of word production. The most touching compliment I received was from a Vietnamese immigrant who coined the compound “weapon-provider” for having given her the various materials, ways of thinking, strategies, and ways of growing as a language learner that she would use to “infiltrate into next semester[,] also take further advance into my major’ [sic].

In this final part of my presentation, I will attempt to provide a self-critique of my teaching situation, and to try to situate it within the Freirean tradition. In referring to outcome-based education, Desmond (1996, p. 145) speaks of

> “the development of synergistic reform” and “the praxis of ethnical conduct in a political context”…seeks “a paradigm shift from scarcity to synergy, the praxis of the leader and the led,” which are described as “holistic, time-consuming approaches”… which require a liberation from “Newtonian and Weberian conceptual frameworks”, the former which understands human behavior as “a linear, sequential linkage of one unit of analysis to the next”, and the latter which assumes a pyramidal organizational concept which is in fact “limiting and unresponsive to…the complex, chaotic demands of the changing, interactive culture of [contemporary] America and to the multiplicity of needs of American students. The self-contained, self-supporting pyramid is too easily removed from the context and values of the surrounding culture, too isolated from the nature and from the interaction of the lives of human beings outside the pyramid.

These words were applied to the school environment, rather than to the classroom curriculum, but they can certainly apply to the situation I am speaking about, where the classroom extends into the world, and the world is represented within the classroom. Thus, communicative language teaching, in a true sense, invites the recollection of the threads of the lives of the students (represented curricularly in their narrative essay of how they arrived to the class),

as well as an expansion of their awareness into the world (through the curricular component of *Newsweek,* which stimulates and reinforces the students connections to their linguistic, cultural, and informational environment of television, radio, newspapers, and even day-to-day conversations on the *Newsweek* topic of the week.

The process of acquiring a new language is inevitably intermingled with the evolution and adaptive transformation of personal identity within the new culture, especially when it occurs at the higher levels of academic literacy. I see similar evidence of awareness of this growth of identify in the students who are best able to articulate their thoughts in English that is more expressive and academic. Such awareness may be present in those who language skills are weaker, but it cannot come through in English, or at all, unless they communicate it in a native language.

How can I critique my own methodology? One source is the inevitable self-doubt that inexorably seems to enter the soul of a genuine teacher during the process, in many of its stages, ranging from conceptualization, initiation, implementation, realization, and "posteriorization" (the inevitable, chronologically predetermined process of parting from the experiences of the completed academic semester, a process which, in my opinion, has not been sufficiently recognized in educational thinking). One source of comfort about the validity of the pedagogy, at least in the socialization process, has been the "life of groups" structure that is a foundational precept of the field of Applied Group Dynamics (a group will inevitably move through the sequential stages of forming, storming, norming, and performing). So, when I observe students going through their "growing pains" in terms of collaborating with one another in group assignments, class discussions, dyadic communication, etc., I remind myself that time will bring its own rewards. I would add that this process is most probably made more complex by the high degree of diversity of cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds among the students.

On the cognitive-academic level, the development of concretely demonstrable skill clusters, the picture is often daunting. Students often come to the classes with uneven abilities, development, awareness, confidence, strategies, proclivities, etc., in terms of the traditionally defined areas of writing, reading, speaking, and listening, as well as other, more "postmodernist" categories such as spontaneity of communicative reactiveness, comfort with direct thinking in the target language (using such strategies as intra-, as opposed to inter-, language translation; i.e., translating from academic to social linguistic registers, rather than from academic English to academic native language), ability to deal with multiple avenues of learning, especially in terms of materials (what I call moving from 10^0 to 10^1; most students are accustomed to using only a single—10^0—textbook per class, which breeds a learning attitude of passivity and implied limitation, whereas what students need is to be engaged in the generativity of the limited elements of language in unlimited permutations—represented symbolically by 10^1, which is approximately the amount of texts, learning tools, modalities, and elements in the classroom: alphabetical and thematic, paper and CD-based dictionaries; email; class film; news magazine; writing, computer, fiction, and vocabulary texts, student oral presentations, teacher lectures, library information research, etc.) and their manifestation in the real-world communicative system), and a sense of locus in the SLA process—that is, a learner's understanding of where he or she is realistically situated within the process of academic second language acquisition. So, if I hold fast to the traditional evaluative criteria, perhaps I might view my students (and thus myself) as failures (and this is all too enticing a tendency!), but if I remind myself that the evaluative criteria need to shift along with the problematization of the challenge and the corresponding methodological-theoretical response it has engendered, then I think I can come to see myself (sometimes kicking and screaming!) as a successful educator.

What I have come to suspect may be the missing element in this seemingly alchemic formulation is the validation from outside sources. The need for isolation, the development of a pedagogical cocoon in which the methodology engendered by theoretical rumination can gestate and be "field-tested" with students, has provided a great opportunity for creative expression, for unfettered pedagogical "play," for honing methods through successively finer approximations as one semester's experimentation becomes the next semester's established tradition. But the free imaginative and experimental expansiveness of any theoretical and methodological innovation implies an inevitable myopia vis-à-vis the established conventions of the collegial profession. As I have grown more confident within my own pedagogy over the years, I have come to realize the need for affirmative feedback, to recognize the need for a professional "echo" beyond the walls of my immediate classroom and those who populate it. Recent visits to my class by a variety of denizens of academia—a professional tutor, an accomplished second-language learner who is an artist and from another pedagogical tradition, colleagues from other disciplines such as English composition and literature, psychology, and mathematics, friends invited by students, such as an academically competent native-English speaking student who had been accepted to a selective 4-year college but was taking courses in our institution, have made me more cognizant of this. In fact, many of my own self-doubts seem due to this inevitable myopia of the closeness of pedagogical interaction, without the comforting validation of outside. My greatest validation has often come from my deans, my col-

leagues, my best students, and students farther along the academic process, from the explication of my practice to colleagues.

What I have concluded from this is that I am at the stage where I need to expand the sphere of my pedagogy beyond my classroom. Just as I have sought to bring contemporary communicative technologies into my classroom in order to stimulate the SLA process of my students, to engage them in real world semiotic systems through mechanisms such as email, web-based learning, learner dictionary CDs, and news magazines, so too can these technologies provide an avenue for the "ventilation" of my practice into a larger sphere of interest. My goal now is not to further hone the theoretical argumentation supporting my pedagogical approach, but rather to reach a wider audience, both of students and teachers, through the use of technology. So, I am hoping to create, through the use of video, computers, CDs or web-based storage mechanisms, appended and referenced learning materials and annotated commentaries, a larger pedagogical wheel in which my classroom would be the hub, the spokes would be the technological mechanisms, and the rim would be populations of non-local students and teachers. This might lead to another stage of field-testing the pedagogy, in the real-world, and an evaporation of the doubts through exposure to the ventilation of a broader population, separated geographically and temporally from the pedagogy, but not conceptually and thus experientially. The actual classroom experience will then be subject to validation (or not!) by the best arbiters of any pedagogy: those who make use of it, as both practitioners and as learners.

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