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Language, Culture, Power, and Identity: Intercultural Communication and Teaching English as a Second Language

With this special theme section, we are proud to bring to *The CATESOL Journal* a rich collection of invited articles exploring the theories, constructs, and tools of Intercultural Communication. The individual articles cover topics from cross-cultural values to issues of identity, power, dominance, and cultural hegemony—all as they apply to English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching and the dynamics of our classrooms. Each article deepens our understanding of intercultural communication in ESL classrooms and challenges our assumptions about teaching. Together, the articles call for a transformation in how we teach students from other cultures and how teaching English as a second language (TESL) programs prepare new teachers for this challenge.

We begin with an overview by Linda Callis Buckley, who sets the stage for the two articles to follow. Summarizing many of the current studies in the field of cross-cultural values, Callis Buckley provides “A Framework for Understanding Cross Cultural Issues in the ESL Classroom.” She argues cogently for ESL and English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers to develop cultural competence, that is “an awareness of the deeply held values and beliefs of students and [their] impact...on classroom interaction and language learning” (p. 53).

In the second article, “Individualism-Collectivism and Power Distance: Applications for the ESL Classroom,” Gayle Nelson focuses on two of these values. Like Callis Buckley, Nelson teaches intercultural communication in a Master of Arts program for teachers of English as a second or other language (MATESOL). She shares classroom anecdotes that illustrate how an understanding of students’ cultural values can assist teachers in understanding their students’ classroom behaviors. She concludes with practical suggestions for culture learning for ESL and EFL teachers and provides an extensive bibliography of culture-specific references. Nelson’s study of culture and intercultural communication courses in MATESOL programs nationwide (1998) and her advocacy for more systematic instruction in intercultural communication in MATESOL programs have been major catalysts for changes both in

California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (CATESOL) and Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

Drawing on both research and her own experience as a native Russian, Irina Moisseeva Smith (1999) has produced a very helpful analysis of Russian ESL students and the values and attitudes underlying their classroom behaviors. Smith's cultural explanations and practical, no-nonsense suggestions provide much-needed advice to ESL teachers working with this student population. We hope that other CATESOL members whose first cultures are not European American will follow her example by conducting classroom research on students from their cultures and sharing their findings with fellow professionals. Smith's examination of ESL pedagogy from the perspective of a non-native teacher leads us naturally to the next article.

Gust (Gustavo) Yep, professor of speech and communication studies and human sexuality studies at San Francisco State University and past chair of the Western States Communication Association Intercultural Communication Interest Group, is a self-described "asianlatinoamerican." He was raised in Peru by Cantonese parents before coming to the U.S. to attend college (Yep, 1998, p. 79). In "Encounters with the 'Other': Personal Notes for a Reconceptualization of Intercultural Communication Competence," Yep challenges the current Eurocentric "conceptions of intercultural communication competence" (p. 117). For readers new to the field of intercultural communication, Yep's article is a valuable, readable introduction to the schools within the field, providing clear direction for an examination of Eurocentric assumptions. Yep challenges researchers and teachers alike to question the assumed superiority of all things western, much as Stephanie Vandrick of the University of San Francisco has done in recent TESOL and CATESOL presentations (Vandrick, 1999, 2000).

Lynne Díaz-Rico, co-author with Kathryn Weed of a core text used in crosscultural language and academic development (CLAD) credential programs, *The Crosscultural, Language, and Academic Development Handbook* (1995), continues the critical examination of current views of culture and the teaching of culture. She scrutinizes the cultural component of the CLAD credential program, advocating "modifications to current CLAD teacher education programs based upon insights available from the emerging field of intercultural communication" (p. 145). Díaz-Rico begins with a summary of the current CLAD skills set for K-12 teachers, then systematically outlines missing components, arguing that understanding of teacher first-culture socialization, privilege, prejudice, and equity must be included in any program whose purpose is to develop "intercultural educators" (p. 146). Finally Díaz-Rico proposes that "teachers who draw upon behaviors and values already featured in students' [first] cultures are more apt to encourage success" (p. 157). By bringing to the fore the often unexamined assumption of superiority of specific (read western) teaching and learning styles, Díaz-Rico challenges ESL teachers and those who design teacher education programs to re-examine existing teaching models.

Finally, with this special issue of *The CATESOL Journal* we bring you an article by Jim Cummins, a leader in the field of English language development and bilingual education. In "Negotiating Identities in the Multicultural Classroom," Cummins examines the current and potential impact of California Proposition 227 (Unz & Tuchman, 1997), often called by its critics the anti-bilingual education act. "The challenge for educators in the wake of Proposition 227 is how to minimize the potentially disempowering impact that the rejection of students' languages and cultures entails" (p. 163). Exploring both the "teaching-learning" relationship and the "identity negotiation relationship" and drawing on research in reading theory, language acquisition, and bilingual education, Cummins provides a framework for reversing the negative effects of Proposition 227. Describing a study of The International High School in New York City, Cummins outlines the guiding principles of this program and ways in which these principles are implemented to validate and take advantage of students' first cultures at the same time that they are developing English proficiency.

We invite you to explore these articles, re-evaluating your own multiple identities and cultural groups, examining the role that power plays in your classroom, and imagining the potential you have to engage your students in even more vibrant, deeply meaningful learning.

Editors

Piper McNulty, coeditor of this theme section, is an instructor of Intercultural Communication at De Anza College, Cupertino and conducts corporate-training and teacher-training workshops in intercultural communication throughout California. She is a former trainer and curriculum developer for Clarke Consulting Group, a training and consulting group based in Redwood City and has lived and taught in Japan, Hong Kong, and Mexico. She is co-founder of the CATESOL Intercultural Communication Interest Group and is on the Steering Committee for the TESOL Intercultural Communication Interest Section. McNulty is co-author of The Culture Puzzle: Cross Cultural Communication for ESL and is currently earning a second master of arts degree in Intercultural Relations from the McGregor School of Antioch University.

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