
(TO ROAM) IN SEARCH OF EMPOWERING PEDAGOGICAL THEORIES FOR LANGUAGES LEARNING: LESSONS LEARNED.

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Abstract

William Blake, one of England's greatest poets, the B52s, one of America's top rock bands of the 80s and 90s, and perhaps even the Minangkabau people through their *merantau*, all acknowledge in their own ways, that to "roam" can be a way to new learning. Blake stated, "How sweet I roam'd from field to field", expressing the enjoyment of a journey. The B-52s, an American New Wave band, formed in the mid-1970s, sang about the joys of roaming "without wings, without wheels". The Minangkabau people of West Sumatra encourage/expect their young men and women to roam in search of new knowledge and experiences, *merantau*, before eventually bringing their learning back home. In fact even modern telecommunications terminology uses the term "roaming". A belief in the power of "roaming" to seek new truths has been a characteristic of the human journey for a very long time.

For more than three decades, I myself have been fortunate enough to have had opportunities to roam in my own search for answers to questions about empowering theories for education in general, and languages education in particular. It is my belief that through the teaching and learning of languages and cultures we can engage with multiculturalism, social justice and inclusion in schools which are in themselves contributing issues adding to the complexity and richness of our society.

What I have learned while I roamed about different education systems is that there is generally a deep desire to make schools a better place. Education does this by dividing up the curriculum into subject areas. One such subject area is foreign language education. Yet empowering theories for languages education are not always in evidence and making schools and universities better places may well just be serendipitous, rather than a result of good planning. This paper examines why we want (and need) to empower the individuals in our schools and universities, what it might look like to empower language teachers and students through an intercultural orientation, and how dialogue and reflexivity are crucial as we continue to roam.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines excellence in education, relates those notions to empowerment, and through the example of foreign language education, looks at one specific empowering theory for languages learning: an "intercultural" orientation.

An attempt to locate the best information about excellence in education in a *Google* online search produced 75 million-odd hits in 0.28 seconds. Many of the first listings were websites for educational systems, some were awards for excellence in university teaching, schooling showcases, conferences, and individuals claiming they had the answer to excellence in education.

All contemporary governments are, undoubtedly, still searching for excellence in education to build human/social capital. Excellence has many synonyms, for example, "the best", "the most outstanding, brilliant and exceptional". However, "whose" excellence is what is highly debatable: one person's judgement of "best" is not the other person's judgement of "best". There is a solution to decide on what is excellent, however, and it is in the terminology used. No longer do we aim for "best" teaching, rather the term we can use which allows us to be less subjective is "accomplished" teaching.

"Best" or "accomplished" aside, this paper examines why we might want (and need) to empower the individuals in our schools and universities in their journeys towards excellence in education, or accomplishment in teaching and learning. In the particular case of languages learning, one focus of this International Seminar, I will argue that it is important to empower language teachers and students through an intercultural orientation.

2. A CONTINUED (ROAMING) SEARCH FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

I am fortunate, in that my travels have taken me to Asia, in particular a number of countries in Southeast Asia, as well as to North America, and further afield to Europe, and most recently further north to Scandinavia. In each country I have met educators who variously share with me the focus of their teaching, learning and policy. My roaming around the world has allowed me to consider the guiding principles for teaching and learning in schools and universities. The way my colleagues describe the aspects of those educational plans and strategies ranges from totally committed to quite pessimistic, and every reaction in between. The search for excellence in education in these contexts certainly bring out a number of emotional responses in educators who “care”.

In the United States of America, I learned of the “No Child Left Behind” Act of 2001 (see k12.wa.us), which concerns all students meeting or exceeding state standards in reading and math by 2014. I learned recently in Finland that their education system is free of charges/fees, right through to the academic-track university courses, and that Finnish teachers are all prepared with Masters degrees. In Timor Leste I learned that in a country less than 10 years old, aspirational standards for literacy and numeracy are expected despite the complexity of language issues and development/health/political problems.

Barbara Jordan, a lawyer, later a US politician, and a teacher of political science at one time in her career which spanned the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s, is quoted as saying, “education remains the key to both economic and political empowerment”. In China and in South Korea I see “tiger mothers” hot-housing their children in after school tuition schools, as families compete for university places, good jobs, secure, well paid futures, and therefore higher standards of living. The link between education and empowerment is clear for so many. For this Minang context in Indonesia, I have learned that your culture emphasizes the importance of learning, and there are many successful Minang people in a number of powerful and influential positions as a result of their solid educational backgrounds. UNESCO is even pursuing an “Education for All” movement – “a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults”, launched in 1990, and affirmed to be aspirationally achieved worldwide by 2015 (see unesco.org). As education systems place their efforts into making schools and universities better places, the stakeholders need to be empowered to achieve their goals.

3. A FOCUS ON EMPOWERMENT

Any number of motivational speakers have taken their messages about empowerment to a wider public audience, emphasising the relationship between empowerment, self-belief, and self-assurance. A number of well-known scholars have published on the theme of empowerment through education. Paulo Freire worked with illiterate people in Brazil in the 1950s, and from there his “empowerment education model” grew (Freire, 2002). Ira Shor (1992) has written comprehensively on empowering through education, and emphasizes society’s “critical consciousness” about knowledge and education’s role in transforming people’s lives.

4. LINKS TO CRITICAL LITERACY, SOCIAL JUSTICE, MULTICULTURALISM AND INCLUSION

Education’s close links to critical literacy, to social justice, to multiculturalism and inclusion is continually under investigation. In her book *Empowerment through multicultural education*, Sleeter (1991, p. 3) discusses empowerment in contexts where many cultures are present as a “belief in ones’ ability/capability to act with effect”. She problematises multicultural educational contexts where there are no “inclusion” strategies, and where students’ voices are not heard because their heritage languages are not included in the curriculum (Sleeter, 1991, p. 223). The links at yet another level to social justice are also clear: educational contexts can be places where individuals can learn to be effective advocates for social justice (Sleeter, 1991, p. 154), or even contexts that ignite political activity with the challenges of ensuring equal opportunity.

Language “is the vehicle or avenue through which ideas are constructed during reading and writing” (Kucer, 2005, p. 17). In order to empower individuals, scholars have learned to focus on what readers and writers must know about language that allows them to “crack the code as they transact with written discourse” (Kucer, 2005, p. 17). Literacy, or the “set of decoding skills that are necessary for ‘taking meaning’ from a text” (Kostogriz & Tsolidis, 2008, p. 127), allows individuals to focus on “language or textual dimensions of reading and writing... the mental

processes that are used to generate meaning through and from print... acts of literacy as expressions of group identity that signal power relationships... and strategies employed and patterns displayed in the learning of reading and writing” (Kucer, 2005, p. 3). The “critical” dimension of literacy is all about the questioning and analytical aspect, exploring norms and values within texts (Kucer, 2005).

In sum, education can empower individuals through teaching and learning processes that acknowledging multicultural priorities, social justice, inclusion and critical literacy practices. An examination of foreign languages curriculum in the broader context of subject areas in the curriculum is now outlined as a particular way of empowering learners.

5. AN INTERCULTURAL ORIENTATION TO LANGUAGES EDUCATION

One of the subjects or courses studied in school and universities programs is the foreign language course. It is situated in the curriculum alongside a number of other subjects in the hope of combining in a suite of subjects for study to “empower” the individual during the course of their education. In a number of education systems, the goal of learning a foreign language is to achieve spoken and written fluency (and sometimes even to produce near-native speakers).

This paper posits that an intercultural orientation to the teaching of languages and cultures is a new thinking about languages education. It is a new understanding of the relationship between language and culture in languages education, building on communicative language teaching.

An intercultural orientation to foreign language teaching and learning concerns wider student learning outcomes in such programs than just learning the structures and some facts about the peoples (as might have been the case in the past teaching of languages). It concerns wider learning about the possibility that every time we speak we perform a cultural act, wider learning about ourselves, wider learning about seeing others’ perspectives, and wider learning about language per sé.

Moran (2001) posits a theory about “cultural knowings”, and notes that the term is not “knowledge” rather “knowings”, indicating not a fixed static notion, rather a dynamic and changing notion about learning being continual and developing. Moran’s theory proposes that in a foreign language class we are not “language teaching”, rather we are “culture learning”. This frame offers a means for describing culture in terms of what students need to do in order to learn it. The culture experience is (1) knowing about (2) knowing how (3) knowing why and (4) knowing oneself (Moran, 2001).

Regarding the idea of “knowing about” culture learning (Moran, 2001, p. 15), Moran states that this interaction involves all activities of gathering and demonstrating acquisition of cultural information – facts, data, knowledge about products, practices, and perspectives of the culture. It is information about the specific culture and language, about the nature of culture and the processes of learning and entering other cultures in general or of students’ own cultures. Learners master this information.

Regarding the idea of “knowing how” to learn culture, Moran (2001, p. 16) explains that this interaction involves acquiring cultural practices – behaviours, actions, skills, saying, touching, looking, standing, or other forms of “doing”. It needs direct or simulated participation in the everyday lives of the people of the target culture, following their customs, using their tools or technologies, and their language to establish bona fide relationships. This means changing behaviour.

Regarding the idea of “knowing why” for culture learning, Moran (2001, p. 16) states that this is developing and understanding fundamental cultural perspectives – the perceptions, beliefs, values and attitudes that underlie or permeate all aspects of the culture. Learners inquire into observations, information and experiences with the culture. They need to probe, analyze, explain the cultural phenomena, and this requires comparison with their own.

Regarding the idea of “knowing oneself” in the process of culture learning, Moran (2001, p. 17) explains that this interaction concerns the individual learners themselves – their values, opinions, feelings, questions, reactions, thoughts, ideas and own cultural values as a central part of the cultural experience. It deals with self-awareness. Learners need individually to understand themselves and their own culture as a means to comprehending, adapting to, or integrating into the culture.

In knowing what we then know about the target culture as a result of studying in the foreign language program, we develop our identities – sometimes an identity in our first and our second languages. Joseph (2006, p. 487) cites Dunbar from 1996 who stated that “language allows you to

say a great deal about yourself, your likes and dislikes, the kind of person you are; it also allows you to convey in numerous subtle ways something about your reliability as an ally or friend". Norton (2006, p. 502) says "language is thus more than a system of signs; it is social practice in which experiences are organized and identities negotiated." Risager says (2006, p. 129) "Every act of identity is both a confirmation of oneself as a unique being (personal identity) and an identification with some group or other (social and cultural identity)."

Language exists, says Joseph (2006, p. 487) "for the purpose of reading the speaker". Essentially then, in learning a foreign language, in learning the (foreign) culture, we are knowing more about our own identities, developing an identity in the second language, and operating "in between" these two identities, in a space called the "intercultural" place (Kramsch, 1993), so that we may "read the speaker".

6. AN EMPOWERING LANGUAGES EDUCATION PEDAGOGY

The teaching pedagogy required to be able to convey these key concepts and constructs and values to the language learner requires an "intercultural orientation". Moran (2001) describes how his theory has resulted from the experiential learning cycle theorized by Kolb (1984, from the work of Kurt Lewin, John Dewey, Piaget) and published as a model of learning from experience. There are four stages that occur in sequence in a set of pedagogical steps:

- concrete experience
- reflective observation
- abstract conceptualization
- active experimentation (cited in Moran, 2001, p. 18)

Concrete experience is "where learners participate in the experience and are engaged on a number of levels – intellectually, physically, emotionally, spiritually – depending on the nature of the content and the form of the experience itself" (Moran, 2001, p. 18). Reflective observation is "where, subsequent to the experience, the learner pauses to reflect on what happened in order to describe what happened, staying with the facts of the experience" (Moran, 2001, p. 18). Abstract conceptualization is "where the learner assigns meaning to the experience by developing explanations or theories – either the learner's own or drawn from other sources" (Moran, 2001, p. 18). Active experimentation is "the point at which the learner prepares to reenter experience by devising strategies consistent with personal learning goals, the nature of the content, and the form of the experience." (Moran, 2001, p. 18).

Moran (2001) labels his conceptualisation as per Kolb's (1984) work: where "knowing how" is Kolb's "participation" from concrete experience; "knowing about" is Kolb's "description" from reflective observation; "knowing why" is Kolb's "interpretation" from abstract conceptualization; and "knowing oneself" is Kolb's "response" from active experimentation.

With what we now know about an experiential cycle to learn a culture, we know that language must play a role. Moran says, "regardless of variables, language learners are engaged in an experiential cycle of gathering cultural information, developing cultural behaviors, discovering cultural explanations, and developing self-awareness. These are the keys to the cultural experience" (Moran, 2001, pp. 21-22).

This experiential process of culture learning through that set of steps can be argued is empowerment – allowing our students to participate in the content of the curriculum, trained how to interpret it, and add their personal response, responsibly. That is empowerment: where language and culture is not something done "to" us, rather "with" us.

Similarly, Scarino and Liddicoat (2009) advocate five principles for an intercultural orientation to languages pedagogy: involving active construction of new knowledge, rather like Moran's (2001) concrete experience; learners making connections, linked to Moran's (2001) abstract conceptualization; social interaction, linked to Moran's (2001) active experimentation; reflection, linked to Moran's (2001) reflective observation: and a responsibility to utilize the cultural knowings responsibly and ethically.

Empowerment through this languages pedagogy also relates to how once there has been a change in our mindsets of what comprises a languages program, there may no longer exist assumptions that foreign language teaching intends to produce native speakers and that other kinds of

learning, which have possibly never been accounted for and reported on, are now valued, assessed/judged and reported on.

Moran's Guidelines for teaching culture (2001, p. 137) are also noteworthy and included here in an Appendix.

7. LANGUAGE PRACTICES FOR AN EMPOWERING INTERCULTURAL LITERACY

The argument has already been posed in the above sections about literacy and its link to empowerment of an individual within an educational process. Freebody and Luke's (Freebody, 1992, as cited in Freebody & Luke, 1997) outlined four roles for the reader who is becoming literate within an elements-of-reading-as-a-social-practice frame: the code breaker; the meaning maker; the text user; and the text critic. If viewed from an intercultural orientation, we might understand that becoming interculturally literate is all about making meaning, but in addition to definitions of literacy *per sé*, making meaning across cultures (Heyward, 2004, p. 20).

Heyward defines intercultural literacy (2002, p. 9): "... *as the competencies, understandings, attitudes, language proficiencies, participation and identities necessary for effective cross-cultural engagement.*" An interculturally literate individual has a set of attitudes and competencies "including the ability to take multiple perspectives, to see things from the point of view of the other, and to identify with a global shared humanity" (Heyward, 2004, pp. 37-38). Intercultural literacy must be viewed as an empowering educational process if it involves "successfully identifying, interpreting, integrating and navigating [their] parallel or layered cultural worlds" (Heyward, 2004, p. 26).

If critical literacy practices (Kucer, 2005) include ways of examining meaning in texts, gauging their purpose, questioning text construction, analysing power intentions, encouraging attitudes, values and stances to be developed, then intercultural literacy practices must logically be practices encouraging such investigation of text from the standpoint of the intercultural "third place" (Kramsch, 1993), that is, as the individual refers to ideas in his/her understanding of the situation for first language, first culture, second language and second culture. In sum, it appears that we can view intercultural literacy as being an individual knowing "what counts" in both their own first culture (L1 and C1) as well as in the second culture (L2 and C2) (Walat, 2003). And it is through foreign/second language learning that both the first and second language functions, notions and symbols can be explored for effective meaning-making.

In relation to this, the notions advanced by Walat (2003, p. 5) include another model for intercultural literacy: one that does not see first language and culture being outcast by the "domination" of the second language and culture, but rather one characterised by a "dialectic, i.e., of debate and argumentation" between L1/C1 and L2/C2 including all the pausing, noticing, observing and reflecting processes required to achieve new understandings about both contexts.

What Heyward and Walat advocate is the developing of a dialectic orientation towards what we are doing when we learn a foreign language and culture: the developing of an intercultural literacy. In the process of learning to know about the foreign/second culture when teaching or learning in a classroom context, a process of transformation may occur, which Akazaki (2002) states may be "perspective transformations [occurring] when individuals reflect on their values and assumptions."

8. NOW CRUCIAL FOR THE EDUCATION OF OUR YOUTH

Scarino and Liddicoat (2009, p. 49) advise that in planning student learning, it is important to consider how the learning matters to the student. They say "the focus is on learning to become every mindful of the interpretations that they make and why, and how, in turn, they themselves are being interpreted by others." Teachers empower their students to do this through interculturally oriented processes such as "making comparisons... focusing on particular words to develop a metalanguage... providing and explicating fruitful examples... highlighting patterns... questioning to probe... feedback..." (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009, p. 49).

The "empowering" argument is solid when considering the transformative potential of language learning through an intercultural orientation. In Pegrum's words, (2008, p. 143) "critical awareness is of little value if it does not lead to change".

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Appendix

Patrick R. Moran (2001, p. 137) Guidelines for Teaching Culture

A set of 12 statements, outlining what the role of the teacher is, what might be the content of curriculum, how culture learning might be delivered

1. Teaching culture consists of guiding learners through the cultural experience to develop cultural knowledge.
2. Organizing the cultural experience involves joining cultural content and the learning process through the four stages of the experiential learning cycle.
3. The cultural content learners examine derives from an analysis of products, practices, and perspectives of the culture, which are set within certain communities and uniquely manifested in persons of that culture.
4. As learners move through each of the stages of the experiential learning cycle they develop cultural behaviours (knowing how), acquire cultural information (knowing about), discover cultural explanations (knowing why), articulate personal responses (knowing oneself), and, by repeatedly employing this process, build skills as culture learners (personal competence).
5. To engage in each of these stages, learners acquire the language and culture of participation, description, interpretation and response.
6. The teacher needs to identify culture learning outcomes. Outcomes vary greatly depending on the educational context, the curriculum, the learners, and teachers, and they can range from culture-specific understanding in a foreign language context to assimilation into the culture in a second language context.
7. Every learner goes through the culture learning process in a unique way. Because of these individual variations, one of the primary tasks for the teacher is to help learners express and respond to their cultural learning experiences.
8. The experiential cycle, by organizing the learning process into four distinct stages, delineates language-and-culture content, activities, and outcomes. Each stage – participation, description, interpretation, response – deals with a different aspect of culture and culture learning.
9. For each stage of the cycle, the teacher needs to select and structure particular content areas, learning activities, and accompanying learning outcomes. In each stage, learners are thus engaged in distinct tasks.
10. In teaching each stage, the teacher must play different roles. These roles stem from different teaching strategies and call for different outlooks or attitudes on the teacher's part. Teachers need to consciously interact differently with learners when teaching knowing how, knowing about, knowing why, and knowing oneself. The working relationship the teacher establishes with the learners through these roles is crucial.
11. Teachers need to be versatile. They need to be able to present or elicit cultural information, coach and model cultural behaviours, guide and conduct cultural research and analysis. They also need to be able to enter learners' worlds by listening, empathizing, and sharing their own experiences as culture learners so as to help learners step out of their worlds into another language, another culture.
12. Teachers need to be learners of culture. They need to go through the cultural experience that they propose for learners in their language classes. Such experiences will help teachers learn the culture of the learners and may also help lead teachers to new areas in their own culture learning.