Incorporating Our Own Cultural Narratives in TESOL Education: A Reflective Team Approach by Four TESOL Educators*

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Twenty-first century educators who teach in the era of globalization should recognize the growing importance of cultural sensitivity and understanding culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. The purpose of this study was to investigate the potential of using cultural narratives (CNs) as an instructional strategy in educating some pre-and in-service teachers who may approach teaching from a monocultural and monolingual mindset but who are likely to work with students who are multicultural and multi-linguistic. Using a “reflective team approach” (Jones, 2003), four TESOL educators from diverse backgrounds and settings analyzed and responded to the CNs of Burcu, one of the co-authors and co-researchers, to examine the effectiveness of CNs as instructional tools in TESOL education. We found that

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integrating authentic, first-hand stories of English language learners in TESOL education can be an effective instructional strategy to deepen pre- and in-service teachers’ recognitions and understanding of CLD students. CNs could play a potential role in connecting students with their teachers and with content that might otherwise be abstract and meaningless.

INTRODUCTION

The field of education is more diverse than ever before (Linn, 2010). It is projected that in 2043, the U.S. is going to become a majority-minority nation for the first time in its history. Although the Anglo-white population will still remain the largest single group, no group will make up a majority (U.S. Census, 2010). By the year 2023, 50% of the student population under the age of 18 will consist of racial and ethnic minorities other than the majority (white). In particular, youth immigrants are the fastest growing population in the U.S., a factor that will transform and diversify the U.S. school population culturally, ethnically, linguistically, and racially more so than ever before. Despite the rapidly changing student population in American schools, the teaching force remains unchanged (Zeichner, 2006, 2012). Eighty-four percent of the teaching force is white, female, and middle class, according to 2011 National Center for Education Information reports (Fiestritzer, 2011). Therefore, a significant gap exists in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender between the student population and teacher population in the U.S. at the pre-kindergarten through grade 12 (P-12) levels (Gay, 2010; Nieto, 2010).

Educators who teach in the era of globalization should recognize the growing importance of cultural sensitivity and understanding. With the increasing number of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students paired with the non-diverse teaching forces in the U.S., there has been a concern over how to educate teachers to become culturally aware, sensitive, and competent in order to meet the needs of the diverse student population (Linn, 2010). As Gay (2010) states, “even without our being consciously aware of it, culture determines how we think, believe, and behave, and these, in turn, affect how we teach and learn” (p. 9). Also, as De Jong and Harper (2005) note, the “just good teaching” (p. 102) approach is simply not enough. Cultural awareness, sensitivity, and competency can assist both pre-service and in-service teachers in being able to understand some of the challenges CLD students are experiencing in the educational system (Taylor, 2010). Teaching diverse students requires well-informed and thorough linguistic and cultural knowledge bases, pedagogic knowledge, methods, and materials (Rosen & Abt-Perkins, 2000). In the era of globalization, many students cross cultural and linguistic boundaries, which could “provide the context for an exploration of the necessity for teachers to understand their own world-view and its impact on their practice” (Walker, 2004, p. 433). Teachers need to deepen their understanding of the students they are teaching because teachers’ unfamiliarity with “students’ cultures, learning styles, and communication patterns may result in negative assumptions and expectations of students, use of culturally
inappropriate materials, and poor student-teacher interactions” (Kang & Hyatt, 2009-2010, p. 44).

Because of the multiple factors that make up one’s diverse background and ways of viewing the world, having teachers engage in authentic CNs of language and culture learning experiences can be an effective instructional strategy to use in order to help teachers be prepared to teach CLD students. The four TESOL educators from diverse backgrounds in this study examined the usefulness of CNs in teacher education to ascertain how they could be used as an instructional strategy to sensitize pre- and in-service teachers in teaching CLD students.

BACKGROUND OF CULTURAL NARRATIVES
IN EDUCATION

After a brief definition of CNs, we describe cultural-narrative-incorporated instruction and then review some studies that implemented CNs in education.

Cultural Narratives

Stories are products of the human experience. Through creating our own stories and reading the stories of others, we come to make sense of the world (Bruner, 2003). Personal meaning or reality is actually constructed during the making and telling of one’s own narratives. It is through stories we tell what we have experienced, and “stories are our way of organizing, interpreting and creating meaning from our experiences while maintaining a sense of continuity through it all” (Atkinson, 2007, p. 232).

Cultural narratives (CNs) can provide a deeper insight into a person’s perspective that will illuminate what that experience means for him or her, to which others can compare and contrast their own interpretation of the same experience. Utilizing CNs as a strategy facilitates understanding of the “concept of the individual within a social context” (Jones, 2003, p. 69). CNs are generated from our complex lives and influenced by multiple factors, such as the contexts and environments surrounding us and the realities we face in our daily lives. People do not exist in a vacuum; instead, our lived experience is shaped by our encounters and how we have interacted with others, and been interacted with.

Narratives involve more than just telling and reading stories; they are useful tools that “capture the situated complexities of teachers’ work and classroom practice, often messy, uncertain, and unpredictable” (Lyons, 2007, p. 614). According to Lyons, narratives help student teachers construct their knowledge for professional development; they are the medium for reflection and understanding and the means of connecting people with others. Bridging the gap between diverse students and the non-diverse teaching force in P-12 U.S. education from non-understanding and misunderstanding to connective understanding is important for pre- and in-service teacher candidates, so that they can be prepared to work with the diverse 21st century learners, including English language learners (ELLs). Incorporating CNs in TESOL education can be one way to bridge the gap to manifest
cultural awareness, sensitivity, and competency among individuals so that pre- and in-service teacher candidates are prepared to work with ELLs in their own classrooms.

Cultural-Narrative-Incorporated Instruction

Cultural narratives as a teaching tool are an analytical framework as well as a practice by which to develop empathetic understanding. Narrative approaches have the ability to provide us with access into understanding the experiences of other people and also enable us to recognize our own selves in the selves of others. As Jones (2003) writes, “the paradox thus develops that by expressing individual differences, we uncover common ground.” (p. 60) In other words, the more we express our unique story of experiences and individual differences, the more similarities we can discover with other people.

The use of narratives is influential in creating meaningful learning opportunities for pre- and in-service teachers. Carter (1993) discusses how in teacher education “stories capture, more than scores of mathematical formulae ever can, the richness and indeterminacy of our experiences…the complexity of our understandings” (p. 5). Carter (1995) further explains that personal narratives in teaching and teacher education are “spirited and important” (p. 327). However, too much focus on personal knowledge can sidestep the teacher education curriculum. This means narratives need to be contextualized. In other words, teachers should use their life stories but “not be prisoners of their own experiences” (p. 327). They need to focus on stories that are applicable to classroom topics.

One of the difficulties in the narrative approach is its attention to personal experience that is narrated and the examination of it as knowledge (Atkinson, 2010). In teacher education, certain narratives do not provide conclusions or solutions to the practitioners about practice but cause them to reflect critically, which can be viewed as a limitation of narrative inquiry. In addition, narrative inquiry may reflect “selected interests and representations of teachers’ lived experiences that are not necessarily representative of every member of the larger teaching community” (Atkinson, 2010, p. 100). However, there are more strengths than weaknesses in the narrative approach, as highlighted in the following examples.

Several studies include the implementation of a narrative approach in courses with predominantly white, female, pre-service teachers so that they gain a better understanding of diversity. Taylor (2012), in a social studies methods class, assigned the “cultural narrative project” to help early childhood education pre-service teachers gain a better understanding of diversity and to learn about themselves and another individual from a different racial and cultural group. Kang and Hyatt (2009-2010) reported on the use of multicultural narratives as part of their instruction in a multicultural education course with pre-service teachers. The students were required to read and reflect on 10 narratives. The authors stated that through reflecting on these narratives, pre-service teachers “developed a deeper understanding of what equality, fairness, and justice mean in the context of multiculturalism and diversity” (p. 47). Glenn (2012), in a senior-year English methods course, required pre-service English teachers to read and discuss two young adult novels that represented counter-narratives. They read *Mexican White Boy* by Matt de la Pena
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(2008) and After Tupac and D Foster by Jacqueline Woodson (2008). After reading, the students responded to the prompts, “This book made me feel...This book made me question...” (p. 333). Glenn stated that pre-service teachers thought “the counter-narrative text encouraged the consideration of unfamiliar culture” (p. 334). Many of the teachers emphasized the commonalities between cultures even when the experiences of an individual could be different based on the influences of class, race, geography, and so forth.

These studies demonstrate the use of the narrative approach to inform pre-service teachers on different aspects of diversity using various methods, and all of them discuss how students benefited from such assignments and projects. Another commonality in these studies is that we see teacher educators using their own cultural narratives as a base for instruction to educate the pre- and in-service teachers about CLD students. By using our own CNs as an instructional tool, we make the content personal and provide our own interpretation of the situation our students are learning about, which can resonate with them in powerful ways. They learn from us and through us.

Although some researchers have emphasized the importance of using autobiographies, stories, and personal narratives as a pervasive and meaningful way of teaching and learning (Atkinson, 2007; Bruner, 1986, 1987, 1991; Miller, 2005), these strategies have yet to draw much attention among second language (L2) researchers. There is limited literature in the field of TESOL in regards to cultural narratives being incorporated by teacher educators as pedagogical tools in the training of pre- and in-service teachers.

RESEARCH QUESTION

To fill the research gaps in utilizing cultural-narrative-incorporated instruction, this study explores the usefulness of cultural narratives in teacher education and ascertains how CNs can be used as an instructional strategy in order to positively and authentically impact pre- and in-service teachers’ growing knowledge and application of ability to teach CLD students. This exploration is carried out through a synthesis of the views of four TESOL teacher educators from diverse backgrounds who are co-authors and co-participants. The overarching question we are trying to answer is:

What did the four teacher educators learn from a TESOL teacher educator’s authentic, firsthand cultural narratives about educating pre- and in-service teachers to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students?

To answer this question, the researchers, who have all taught multicultural education courses to address ELLs’ needs, working as a “reflective team” (Jones, 2003), analyzed the cultural narratives of Burcu, one of the co-authors. She is a U.S.-born TESOL teacher educator who grew up in Turkey and completed her undergraduate degree in Turkey and her graduate work for both her master’s and doctoral degrees in the United States She currently works as a teacher educator at a public university in Texas. Our reflections through our intimate engagement, as well as our interactions and reflexivity, during the collaborative cultural narrative development and its data analysis were all used as data sets to answer the
research question that we developed as co-participants and co-researchers. As a team, the participants embodied a wide array of differences that was reflected in our analysis and interpretations. Burcu’s story was analyzed by all four co-researchers, who are from various academic, cultural, and professional backgrounds (i.e., different regions and L1 backgrounds, native English speaker vs. nonnative English speaker status, and currently working in various states around the U.S. and Korea).

This study is significant in that it addresses a dearth in the literature and evidence regarding the efficaciousness of instruction that incorporates CNs, thereby advancing the literature in this area of teacher education. We make a case for the use of CNs as an effective pedagogical tool to train the teachers of ELLs. The methodology design utilized a reflective team approach to data analysis (Jones, 2003), which facilitated the “introduction of multiple voices, so creating a mix of meaning and encouraging communication and collective means of deliberation” (p. 67). This study is unique because the main research participant explored her own cultural narrative as an insider and outsider, as a teacher educator and researcher. It included authentic, first-hand experience data from a former ELL, now a teacher educator in the United States. This study is an illustration of the difficult work TESOL teacher educators do in assisting their teacher candidates with consciously engaging with ELLs and immigrant issues. Teaching and learning this specific content often requires a reframing and rethinking of previously-held beliefs and may involve thoughtful questioning of hidden biases resulting in a new analysis of ourselves and/or the Other. Similarly, this study demonstrates that “Reflecting on one’s life is fundamentally a metaphorical one, giving form to one’s previous and present experience” (Freeman, 1993, p. 30 as cited in Jones, p. 69, 2003). We show that this kind of reflective inquiry can be utilized as a tool for developing insights with our students, and assisting them in understanding the political, cultural, linguistic, and social forces on the lived life (Jones, 2003).

METHODOLOGY

Reflective Team Approach

The purpose of the study was to investigate the potential of using CNs as an instructional strategy in educating pre-and in-service teachers who may not be as diverse as their students but who are likely to work with CLD students. We employed a reflective team approach, a collaborative process where members of the team interpret the same transcript differently, adding their own unique way of viewing the lives of others (Jones, 2003). The four TESOL teacher educators from diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and racial backgrounds analyzed and responded to cultural narratives of Burcu, a co-researcher and co-author. This reflective team approach was effective for our study because it facilitated the collaboration of multiple voices and encouraged communication among four educators. This approach served to add additional strategies we can employ in our teaching with our
students. This procedure provided rigor and served to facilitate the group analytical process in uncovering meaning from the data (Jones, 2003).

Research Setting and Participants

The research setting of this study was virtual in that the four authors worked together from different locations and countries via the web video conference program, Skype. The variety of our locations represented a variety of personal, academic, and professional backgrounds as well. Soonhyang is originally from South Korea and completed her master’s and doctoral degrees in Kentucky and Ohio in the United States. Given, who is also from South Korea, completed her master’s and doctoral degrees at a university in Texas, United States. Yurimi was born and raised in the U.S. with a Japanese mother and an American father and completed all of her studies in Tennessee, United States. Soonhyang, Burcu, and Yurimi work as teacher educators at different universities in the U.S., and Given works as a teacher educator in South Korea. Burcu served as the primary research participant, by providing her cultural narratives as the main data source. At the same time, all of us were engaged as co-participants, co-researchers, and co-authors of this paper throughout this study.

Data Collection

The data of the present study came from one teacher educator’s reflective cultural narratives and a reflective team analysis of her narratives. The data collection took place in the spring semester of 2013. At the beginning of the semester, we met every week virtually via Skype for about two hours to discuss and decide our research foci while documenting our own CNs that we had used for our class. After three rounds of Skype meetings, for the current study, we decided to analyze Burcu’s narratives because her CNs were most developed at the time. Out of many stories, the co-researchers selected four topics to explore further because they were found to be meaningful and critical incidents in relation to her teaching. After choosing the four themes, we provided multiple comments, and Burcu revised her draft based on our discussions and suggestions. At first Burcu felt reservations about writing about herself and sharing some of the experiences with us because there was a great potential that one day these stories would be shared with the professional community. Although she could be in a vulnerable position, she shared many of her stories with us because she trusted us and would like to share the insights from her stories with other teacher educators. After writing her first draft, she sent it to the other three researchers, who responded to each theme in her draft reflecting on our own teaching via Skype and emails. Thus, the four researchers’ collaboration became the vehicle for data collection.

Data Analysis

Narrative research focuses on how individuals assign meaning to their experiences through the stories they tell (Moen, 2006). After the data collection was completed and the
final narrative emerged, the data analysis process started. After reading Burcu’s personal and professional narratives and responding to them multiple times, we used the constant comparative method by continuously comparing and contrasting her stories with ours to understand her perspective and connect with why each story held meaning for her and how it applied to our own teaching settings. Burcu also analyzed the data in two steps. In the first step, Burcu analyzed the narrative under a writer identity. During the data collection, she wrote personal and cultural narratives that were either important, meaningful, or critical as episodes in her personal, academic, and professional life. In the second step, she removed herself from the role of writer and took on the role of teacher educator, looking into the narrative as if she were not the person who wrote Burcu’s story. The first time she analyzed the data she followed the critical reflection approach. Critical reflection generates learning by articulating questions and confronting bias and deepens learning by challenging simplistic conclusions, inviting alternative perspectives, and asking “why” repeatedly (Ash & Clayton, 2009). As a teacher educator she analyzed it from the interpretive approach, taking meaning from the data. She did not assume that there was only one way to see her stories. Burcu confessed that it was not an easy task to analyze her own data both as a writer and a teacher educator. With the interpretive approach there is also constant interaction between theory and empirical data, which enables the researcher to understand and gain insight into the new information (Moen, 2006).

Validity and Reliability

While narrative research cannot be judged by the same criteria as more traditional research methods, an individual’s interpretation of his or her life story requires a careful analysis to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. In narrative research validity refers to strength of the analysis of data and reliability refers to dependability of data (Polkinghorne, 1988). Polkinghorne also notes that reliability is acceptance of the trustworthiness of the narrative data records. Often the stories’ meaningfulness surpasses the factual truthfulness that gives the story its credibility. As Parry and Doan (1994) state, “the hearers of the story believed that it was true because it was meaningful, rather than it was meaningful because it was true” (p. 2).

Burcu’s cultural narrative, written by her, provided the validity necessary for this research project. As she offered up stories for analysis, we took on the role of researchers who made meaning from the events she communicated. The four of us, who have diverse backgrounds but teach similar courses, with the aim of helping our pre- and in-service teachers to be better prepared to work with ELLs, participated in a reflective team approach to conduct our own interpretations on Burcu’s narrative and assisted in addressing issues of reliability. Each of us took turns in making meaning from her story and in responding reflexively, considering Burcu’s story on its own merit, as well as comparing and contrasting our own experiences with hers within the group. An added benefit from utilizing this method is that this dialogical approach sometimes caused revelations to emerge that would not have happened if we had not engaged in group discussions. However, one important point is that objectivity is not a goal in narrative inquiry (Glesne, 2011). Burcu
did not claim to be objective, as her stories were shaped by her lens and life experiences. Narrative research is not a neutral activity (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012). The parts of the story the subject chooses to share or highlight are all subjective. Polkinghorne (2007) believes validating knowledge in narrative research is not a mechanical process but an argumentative one. As he further explains, “Narrative research issues claims about the meaning life events hold for people” (p. 476). Burcu feels biased towards her stories because she shared the ones that were the most meaningful for her.

Burcu’s narratives had a setting, characters, and unfolding events. She expressed the contexts of the events and their impact on her, and we read the words she had written multiple times at different stages in order to learn about the meaningful events in her life. She delved into and relied on her past memories when documenting her narratives. In writing each one, she told us what was important to her and which events had been poignant, limiting, difficult, and rewarding for her. She lived the experiences not only once but multiple times through their retelling. Burcu contacted her mother, who is living in Turkey, throughout the narrative writing process to confirm the correctness and sequence of events that included her parents. Since her father is deceased she was not able to do a member check with him. In this process, she had to be quite vulnerable with us, and it was important that we honored the level of trust she showed us by allowing her story to unfold as she wanted to tell it with the insights she wanted to share. Burcu as the storyteller had a close relationship with her co-researchers, which enabled her to share her narratives with trust and the confidence that others would believe in her honesty and integrity in constructing the events. Through the project, we met regularly and discussed our interpretations, which served as peer debriefing.

CULTURAL NARRATIVE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our study attempted to explore the role of cultural narratives in teacher education and ascertain how they could be used as an instructional strategy in educating pre- and in-service teachers for teaching CLD students. This section first introduces Burcu’s CNs and then presents the reflective team analysis containing our responses. In this section we include the four stories that provoked the most reaction from us as readers in terms of easy connections we could make to Burcu or the event she detailed in her story or the possible use of her story as a teaching tool in our instruction.

Burcu’s CN #1: My Parents

My father and mother came to the U.S. in their mid-twenties, knowing very limited English. Both of them were motivated to learn the language for different reasons: my father to be successful in graduate school and my mother to be able to carry on daily conversations. My father first started taking ESL classes at a U.S. university’s intensive ESL program, thanks to a small scholarship he received from the Turkish government, in order to eventually do graduate work at a university in Michigan in the 1970s. He ended up
completing his M.B.A. and Ph.D. in international marketing, becoming the first person in his family to not only graduate from college but also from graduate school. My mother, who followed my father to the U.S., did not have the opportunity to enroll in English classes due to limited financial resources. After living in the U.S. for seven years, she naturally acquired a low-intermediate level of the language from her surrounding environment through interacting with friends and working as a seamstress at a department store and later as a building manager. My mother is an extrovert and loves talking and interacting with people. Therefore, even though she lacks full knowledge of all the grammar rules of so-called proper English, she is always eager to speak English without worrying about making mistakes.

Reflective Team Analysis

Burcu’s parents’ story teaches us several lessons. Primarily, like many ELLs in America, her parents added cultural and linguistic diversities to U.S. society that all educators, including pre-and in-service teachers, need to be aware of in order to see how their students’ diverse backgrounds can affect their language learning process. Also, as Gardner, Lalonde, and Pierson (1983) state, motivation consists of three components: “attitudes toward learning the second language, desire to learn the language, and effort expended in learning the language” (p. 2). The different motivations to learn the language between her father and mother can serve as an example of integrative versus instrumental motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1959; Dörnyei, 1998). In addition, Burcu’s mother’s story can be used as a real-world example to explain how interaction plays a role in practicing and improving the language (e.g., Interaction Hypothesis Theory) (Long, 1996). The story also demonstrates gender expectations and roles within cultures and how they may affect second language acquisition.

Burcu’s CN #2: My Language and My Country

Growing up in Turkey and learning English as a foreign language, I have always considered myself a lifelong English language learner. I was born in the U.S. at the time my father was a doctoral student at a university in Texas, but I grew up in Turkey because my father went back to Turkey after completing his study when I was 10 months old. My native language is Turkish, and English is my second language. Although I was born in the U.S., I did not have the opportunity to visit the country again until I was a college student. Like many other students in Turkey at that time, I spoke Turkish at home, and I heard and learned English only at school. I was eight years old when I started to learn the language.

Throughout my schooling in Turkey my peers often made fun of me when we filled out a document that contained questions about our place of birth. I would write down “Denton, Texas,” and they would laugh at me, saying “hahaha bang bang, Kovboy [cowboy], Teksaş [Texas]” as if it was something I made up. As one can imagine, kids can be really mean occasionally. Most of my teachers were not much different though; they would usually laugh and say, “Aha so you were born in Texas where the ‘Dallas’ TV series
is filmed?” and they would hum the opening theme music of the TV series. *Dallas* was a very popular TV show during my schooling, which I thought did not help my specific situation. For some reason, I felt no one was taking me seriously.

When I was 8 years as a family we went to Irbid, Jordan for a year where I learned English for the first time in an international school. We only stayed for one year; however, during that time I learned pretty good English as a third grader. When we came back to Turkey and continued to learn English, I was too shy to pronounce certain words in English among my Turkish peers and teachers because I was being perceived among peers as a wanna be native speaker of English.

**Reflective Team Analysis**

We learn from Burcu’s story about her country and language that individuals create their unique stories and construct their diverse identities based on various life experiences. In particular, as people cross cultural and linguistic borders, they often construct more dynamic stories of the transformation of their cultural and linguistic identities. Like Burcu, with her negative early school experience in Turkey after having learned English in Jordan, there are many returnees in Korean classrooms who have learned English in English-speaking countries. When they read English in class in their home country, they are often laughed at by their classmates due to their different accents (Choe, 2010; Kwon, 2003). Analyzing Burcu’s cross-culturally and linguistically loaded stories, we can acknowledge the misperceptions and misconceptions that pre- and in-service teachers may have of immigrant ELLs and help them realize that ELLs may have vastly different backgrounds and experiences. The fact of Burcu being born in the U.S. and her parents returning with her to their native country Turkey might be surprising to some students, who might subconsciously and erroneously equate U.S. citizenship with English language ability. This story serves well to remind our pre-and in-service teachers of the challenges of newly arrived CLD students’ attempts to fit in with the new classroom and the importance of teachers’ roles in helping their transition be as smooth as possible so that they can feel part of the classroom community (Miller & Endo, 2004).

**Burcu’s CN #3: My Name and My Identity**

When I see my students for the first time in class they are usually surprised to see a female professor. Later in the semester they open up and share the truth; they state that they thought I was a male because my first name looks like “Bruce.” People usually do not pronounce my name right—I am neither “Burku,” “Bursu,” nor “Bruce.” It is pronounced as “Boor-djoo.” I genuinely do not mind when people do not pronounce my name correctly when we have recently met or have not spent much time together, as I also have difficulty pronouncing unfamiliar names. However, when you work with them for months you have some hope that they will eventually get it right. Over the years many have decided to call me “B,” which I do not like (it reminds me of the B-word), but I do not say anything because, without waiting for my response, they state “I am going to call you ‘B’ because
your name is too difficult.” The name Burcu is more than a word for me. My name represents who I am and where I come from.

**Reflective Team Analysis**

Names are markers of cultural and linguistic identity, representing who we are and where we come from (Gavigan, 2010; Yihong, Limei, & Wei, 2010). Pronouncing and addressing someone’s name appropriately is a sensitive yet interesting cultural and linguistic issue that challenges both students and teachers across countries. Like Burcu, who had negative and embarrassing experiences in America due to her unique name, many students who are living in America as cultural and linguistic minorities have a strong sense of identity attached to their names. For them, a name can be a strong indicator of their racial, ethnic, and cultural origin. When their name is not correctly pronounced by their teachers and peers, they might feel that they are not being fairly and equally treated and valued, especially when they are developing their new identity. For teachers who have students with names not common in the teacher’s own ethnicity or language, remembering and pronouncing their students’ names correctly can be a challenge. However, it is an important challenge they need to learn to overcome.

**Burcu’s CN #4: My Thick Turkish Accent**

Hearing different accents around me has always intrigued me. The diversity of voices, tones, and inflections is just beautiful. After all, if we all spoke the same way, wouldn’t the sounds around us be boring and monotonous? However, accents usually have been used as tools to marginalize nonnative English speakers rather than to complement them on their ability to speak another language. Over the years I have had my own share of bias and marginalization experiences as well. About ten years ago, when I used to have a thicker accent than now, I recall asking for directions while driving (this was before GPS technology) in southeast Texas. People would often automatically increase their voices as if I were hard of hearing and could not hear them as they described the route to me. I would always want to say “I can hear you fine; you don’t need to speak S-L-O-W and shout at me.” Of course, I never said anything like this because I did not want to be rude, and I was appreciative of the kind act of simply taking the time to explain the location of my destination. Yet similar experiences seemed to happen repeatedly to me in different contexts, either when shopping or running other errands, while at school, you name it. I would go shopping and feel as if I were being treated as an incapable customer when all I asked was a simple question. It is as if I can feel the mental halt happening in the brain of the person in front of me as they realize they are speaking to someone with an accent. Sometimes I wonder if in their eyes they are saying, “Oh no…this will take time and effort.” On a different note, I always wonder if the people who judged me to be an incompetent individual ever reflected on how they sounded to others, and if they are aware of how all marginalized accents (i.e., those that tend to be non-British) carry with them perceptions of the people who speak them in the listener. Knowing what I have been
through as an adult who is in the ESL profession, I cannot help but feel sadness toward our ELL students and the hardships they may be going through in schools simply due to their accents.

**Reflective Team Analysis**

Given that accent is only one of the many components that foreign language learners need to learn, it should not be an indicator of CLD students’ ability. In America, an accent is often perceived as a negative factor to marginalize rather than be recognized (Rubin, 1992; Rubin & Smith, 1990). Burcu’s story supports Lippi-Green’s (2012) remarks:

Degree of accentedness, whether from interference of a native language other than English, or a socially or geographically marked language variety, cannot predict the level of an individual’s competency in the target language or skill as a communicator. In fact, high degrees of competence are often attained by persons with especially strong foreign language accents. Nevertheless, accent will sometimes be an issue in communication, especially in the case of nonnative speakers of English who are in the early stages of learning the language (p. 73).

ELLs’ diverse accents do not mean that they do not have advanced cognitive and thinking abilities. Therefore, rather than making an assumption about students’ intelligence levels or hearing acuity and speaking very slowly or raising one’s voice when talking to ELL students, teachers need to be tolerant of ELLs’ various accents. Lippi-Green (2012) states that in the educational system, “a child who tells her stories in stigmatized varieties of English is quickly corrected. She must assimilate, or fall silent” (p. 68). We need to educate pre- and in-service teachers to empower their CLD students, not to stigmatize them due to their accents. For example, we can have our students expose to different local and international dialects and accents by inviting guest speakers or by showing educational videos or documentaries (Kubota, 2000, 2001).

**CONCLUSION**

**Implications in Educating Teachers of ELLs**

In this study, we investigated the potential of using CNs as an instructional strategy in educating a population of pre- and in-service teachers that consists primarily of white, female, native English speakers who work with ELLs from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. “Telling stories privileges our experience, reawakens and recovers our capacity to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar” (He, 2003, p. 115). We also need to make an effort to hear our students’ stories (Linn, 2010). By listening to the narratives of our students, we as teacher educators can come to understand how their life stories have shaped their thinking, and by telling our own stories and the stories of others,
we hope to instill in them the ability to understand and relate to their own diverse students. For this reason, we conclude there is great potential in using cultural narratives in educating teachers of ELLs. A brief summary of the instructional recommendations for teachers of ELLs are summarized in Table 1, grouped by the CN that gave rise to each.

Table 1  
*Burcu’s CN and Its Classroom Implications*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CN</th>
<th>Recommended Instructional Strategies</th>
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| Parents             | Be aware of how ELLs’ diverse backgrounds can affect their language learning process.  
|                     | Develop awareness of second language acquisition processes.  
|                     | Become aware of ways to bridge the home and school cultural environments.  
| Language & Country  | Gain knowledge about demographic shifts in the classroom.  
|                     | Don’t equate U.S. citizenship with English language ability.  
|                     | Be more aware of challenges newly arrived ELL students’ face in attempting to fit in with the new classroom.  
|                     | Be more aware of possible stereotypes and biases you as a teacher and some of your students may have towards ELLs.  
| Names               | Try to remember and pronounce all students’ names correctly.  
|                     | Avoid giving nicknames or automatically assigning English names simply because of the convenience.  
|                     | Show sincere interest in your students’ lives and backgrounds.  
|                     | Create profiles of students with their pictures and practice their names.  
| Accent              | Do not stigmatize students due to their different accents.  
|                     | Demonstrate sensitivity and respect for your students’ diverse regional language differences and dialects.  
|                     | Expose all students to different local and international dialects and accents by inviting guest speakers or by showing educational videos or documentaries.  

Limitations of the Study and Suggested Future Studies

This study explores the usefulness of CNs in teacher education by analyzing the CNs of Burcu, a culturally and linguistically diverse teacher educator, and illuminates how the narratives could be used in educating teachers who work with CLD students with a reflective team analysis by the four teacher educators. We did not intend to provide any concrete solutions to the practitioners about their own practice but have them to reflect critically because the selected Burcu’s CNs are “are not necessarily representative of every member of the larger teaching community” (Atkinson, 2010, p. 100). We hope that readers make meaning from her stories and in responding reflectively to learn from them about working with their own CLD students in their classrooms, as we did as a reflective team. This study is an analysis by four instructors whose backgrounds are culturally, ethnically, linguistically, and racially diverse and marginalized in the United States. Therefore,
although we tried to be objective as much as possible, our analysis may have been influenced by our backgrounds and cause uncomfortable feelings for those who come from mainstream backgrounds. It would be interesting to see how teacher educators from mainstream, non-diverse backgrounds use their own narratives as a teaching tool in teacher training to achieve the same teacher training goal. It would be also noteworthy to further study how pre- and in-service teachers respond to or reflect upon such cultural narratives as Burcu’s and examine the effectiveness of CNs as an instructional tool from the teacher trainees’ point of view.

**FINAL REMARKS**

We have shown instruction that incorporates cultural narratives to be a viable and personable way to connect students with content that could otherwise be abstract and meaningless, especially if that content is outside their realm of experience or knowledge. As TESOL teacher educators who use our own cultural narratives in the classroom, we hope our pre- and in-service teachers will acquire ways they can relate to their diverse students that will increase the likelihood of engaging them on academic and personal levels. As teachers, we believe in teaching to the students in our classroom, as well as the adults who will leave our classroom to be a part of their world. We hope to reach beyond the walls of our classroom and have an effect on society in general by encouraging people to improve themselves by seeking to understand each other a little more. If students leave class with the same biases and stereotypes they entered with, we hope they are at least changed in a small but meaningful way and that they have acquired the tools to better aid their students. As Laubscher and Powell (2003) stated, we “hope that they also leave with a different model of pedagogical and interpersonal engagement—one that emphasizes continued dialogue, openness to complexity, affect, respect, honesty, and a committed search for a truth that resists emotional foreclosure” (p. 218). We hope that cultural- narrative-incorporated instruction using our own authentic, first-hand cultural narratives can be a useful tool in educating our pre- and in-service teachers to work with culturally, linguistically diverse students.

**REFERENCES**


