EMPIRICAL TESOL RESEARCH
Letting the Data Speak for Themselves

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PART I: FOCUS ON EDUCATORS
INCORPORATING OUR OWN CULTURAL NARRATIVES IN TESOL EDUCATION:
A Reflective Team Approach by Four TESOL Educators

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OVERVIEW

The 21st century educators who teach in the era of globalization should recognize the growing importance of cultural sensitivity and understanding of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. The purpose of the study described in this chapter 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 monocultural and monolinguisitic mindset but who are likely to work with students who are multicultural and multi-linguistic. Using a “reflective team approach” (Jones, 2003), the four TESOL educators from diverse backgrounds and settings analyzed and responded to the cultural narratives 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 integrating authentic, first-hand stories of ELLs in TESOL education can be an effective instructional strategy to deepen our pre- and in-service teachers' recognitions and understandings of CLD students. CNs could play a potential role in connecting students with their teachers and the content that could 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 her 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., which will transform and diversify U.S. school population culturally, ethnically, linguistically, and racially 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 (Fiestrizer, 2011). Therefore, a significant gap exists in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender between student population and teacher population in the U.S. at the P-12 levels (Gay, 2010; Nieto, 2011).

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 students (CLD students hereafter) paired with the non-diverse teaching forces in the U.S., there has been a concern of 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 “[J]ust good teaching” (p. 102) approach is simply not enough. Cultural awareness, sensitivity, and competency can assist both pre-service and in-service teachers to be able to understand some of the challenges CLD students are experiencing in the educational system (Taylor, 2010).

Teaching diverse students requires well-informed and versed linguistic and cultural knowledge bases, pedagogie knowledge, methods, and materials (Rosen & Abi-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 backgrounds and ways of viewing the world, having our teachers engage in authentic cultural narratives 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 cultural narratives, we describe cultural narrative-incorporated instruction and then review some studies which implemented cultural narratives in education.

Cultural Narratives

Stories are products of the human experience. In making stories and reading the stories of others, we can use them to make sense of the world (Bruner, 2003). Personal meaning or reality is actually constructed during the making and telling of one’s narratives. It is through stories to tell what we have experienced, and "that 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, hereafter) 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 contract their interpretation of the same experience. Utilizing cultural narratives as a strategy facilitates understanding of the “concept of the individual within a social context” (Jones, 2003, p. 9). CNs are generated from our complex life influenced by multiple factors, such as the contexts and environments surrounding us and the realities we face in our daily life. 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 are more than just telling and reading stories, and they are useful to “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 non-diverse teaching force in the P-12 U.S. education from non-understanding and misunderstanding to connective understanding is important for our pre- and in-service teacher candidates to be prepared to work with the diverse 21st century learners, including 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 our pre- and in-service teacher
candidates of ELLs 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 for which to develop empathetic understanding. Narrative approaches have the ability to provide us with access into understanding the experiences of other people but also in letting us recognize our own selves in the selves of others, like a patchwork quilt others’ viewpoint of human experience: “The paradox thus develops that by expressing individual differences, we uncover common ground” (Jones, 2003, p. 60). In other words, the more we express our unique story of experiences and individual differences, a contradiction occurs in that the more similarities we discover.

Use of narratives is influential in creating meaningful learning opportunities for our 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.

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 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 the reflection of 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 which represented counter-narratives. They read *Mexican
White Boy by Matt de la Pena (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 them 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 narrative approach to inform pre-service teachers on different aspects of diversity using various methods. However, in none of these studies do we see teacher educators use their own cultural narratives as a base for instruction to educate the pre- and in-service teacher about CLD students. By using our own cultural narratives as an instructional tool, we make the content personal and provide our faces to the situation our students are learning about which can resonate with them in powerful ways. They learn from us 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 training of pre- and in-service teachers.

**Issues Motivating our Research**

To fill the research gaps in utilizing cultural narrative incorporated instruction, this chapter explores the usefulness of cultural narratives in teacher education by analyzing one teacher educator’s cultural narratives and ascertain how they could be used as an instructional strategy in order to positively and authentically impact the pre- and in-service teachers’ growing knowledge and application of teaching CLD students with the views of the four TESOL teacher educators from diverse backgrounds. The overarching question we are trying to answer is:

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

To answer this question, we, four TESOL teacher educators who have taught multicultural education courses to address ELLs’ needs, as co-researchers, 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, completed her
undergraduate degree in Turkey and her graduate work for both her
master’s and doctoral degrees in the U.S. She currently works as a
teacher educator at a public university in Texas, U.S. Our reflections
through our intimate engagement, 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 all participated in as co-participants and co-researchers. As a team,
the participants held a wide array of differences that was reflective in
their analysis and interpretations. Burcu’s story was analyzed by all
four co-researchers and co-authors that were from various academic,
cultural professional backgrounds (e.g., different regions, L1
backgrounds, native or non-native speakers of English, working in
various states around the country, and Korea).

This chapter is significant in that it addresses a dearth in the
literature and evidence regarding the efficaciousness of cultural
narrative incorporated instructions, thereby advancing the literature in
this area of teacher education. We attempt to suggest the use of cultural
narratives as an effective pedagogical tool to train the teachers of ELLs.
Our study is appealing in that the methodology design utilized a
reflective team approach to data analysis (Jones, 2003), that facilitated
the “introduction of multiple voices, unsettling and creating a mix of
meaning and encouraging communication and collective means of
deliberation” (p. 7).

This chapter is unique because the main research participant
explored her own cultural narrative as an insider and outsider, as a
teacher educator and researcher. Also unique is that the study described
in this chapter used authentic, first-hand experience data from a former
ELL, now a teacher educator in the U.S. This study validates the
difficult work TESOL teacher educators do in assisting their teacher
candidates with consciously engaging with ELL 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... giving form to one’s previous and present experience”
(Freeman, 1993, p. 30 as cited in Jones, 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, and linguistic, and social forces on the lived life” (Jones, 2003,
p. 3).
OUR APPROACH TO THE QUESTIONS

Reflective Team Approach

The purpose of the study described in this chapter 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 culturally, linguistically diverse students. Using a “reflective team approach” (Jones, 2003), the four TESOL teacher educators from diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and racial backgrounds analyzed and responded to the processes of cultural narratives of Burcu, a co-researcher and co-author, and the forces that may have altered or biased our own interpretation of not only her cultural narrative, but of how narratives could be used in the classroom as an instructional strategy. We employed a reflexive inquiry, a process “constructed around notions of personal empowerment,” and “self-directed learning with an emphasis on personal history” (Krishnamurthy, 2007, p. 16).

The reflective team approach was effective for our study because it “facilitates the introduction of multiple voices, unsettling and creating a mix of meaning and encouraging communication and collective means of deliberation” (Jones, 2003, p. 7). This strategy allowed us to not only connect to Burcu in a more personal way, but 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” (p. 7) in uncovering meaning from the data (Jones, 2003).

Research Setting and Participants

The research setting of the study was virtual by connecting the four TESOL educators, Soonhyang, Yurimi, Given, and Burcu, in different locations—New York City, Chicago, and Houston in the USA and Seoul, South Korea in a virtual space using a web video conference program, Skype. Having incorporated our own personal and cultural narratives into the courses we taught before brought us together and to share examples of our cultural narratives as our instructional tools by reflecting on Burcu’s CNs.

The variety of locations of us 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, U.S. 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, U.S. Given who is also from South Korea completed her doctoral degree at a university in Texas, U.S. 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.

Throughout this study we embodied the three roles at the same time as co-researchers, co-participants, and co-authors. As co-researchers, we reflected on the stories that made up Burcu’s personal narratives and compared and contrasted meaningful notions gleaned from them relative to our own stories. Despite different teaching contexts, we found the potential of using Burcu’s (and others’) cultural narratives in educating pre-and in-service teachers in our own teaching settings. Burcu as a co-author during the data collection, wrote her personal and cultural narratives that were either important, meaningful, or critical as episodes in her personal, academic, and professional life. As the co-participant, she actively negotiated with the narratives she had written and her colleagues who were part of the study. Burcu joined her three teacher educator colleagues, as a co-researcher, and analyzed the data like another teacher educator.

Data Collection

The data of the present study came from one teacher educator’s reflective cultural narratives that she co-composed with the three other TESOL educators and their critical reflections on her cultural narratives. The data collection took place gradually in the spring semester of 2013. In early spring 2013 we met every week virtually via Skype for about two hours to construct the data collection. Soonhyang took the responsibility of the weekly meeting. At the beginning of the writing process, all of us documented our own reflective cultural narrative stories that we had implemented in our culture course. After completing our stories after three rounds of Skype meetings, for the current study, we decided to analyze only one teacher’s narratives from various angles to provide rich descriptions.

We chose Burcu’s narratives as the example story to analyze. Based on her rough draft that she had made, the co-researchers brainstormed with Burcu the topics that we collectively believed were meaningful and critical incidents in her life and that she had shared with her students in class. After choosing several themes, Burcu revised her draft. At first, Burcu felt reserved writing about herself and sharing some of the experiences with us. Being the hardest critic of herself, she had to ask a myriad of questions to herself whether she was explaining herself clearly or how readers would perceive her. However, as we had more meetings and discussions, she was able to overcome uncomfortable feelings, due in part to the co-researchers’ and co-participants’ encouragement and similar experiences that we shared with her. After writing her first draft based on our discussions and
comments, she sent it to the other three researchers who had to respond to each theme in her draft. Through the project, reflecting our own teaching constantly, the four researchers wrote numerous responses to Burcu’s stories and revised them based on one another’s feedback via Skype and e-mails. Thus, the four researchers’ collaboration and language 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 compared and contrasted her stories with ours to understand her perspective and connect with why each story held meaning for her and how it applies to our own teaching settings. As the co-author of the narrative, Burcu analyzed the data in two steps.

In the first step, Burcu analyzed the narrative as a writer identity. In the second step, she removed herself from the writer self and took the role of another 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. As a teacher educator she approached it from the interpretive approach, meaning making of the data. Burcu confessed that it was not an easy task to analyze her own data, both as a writer and a teacher educator.

Validity and Reliability
While narrative research cannot be judged by the same criteria as more traditional research methods, an individual’s interpretations of their life story requires a careful analysis to ensure validity and reliability of data. Validity refers to dependability of data, validity refers to strength of the analysis, and trustworthiness refers to ease of access to data (Polkinghorne, 1988). Polkinghorne also notes reliability of data is rather trustworthiness of the narrative records. Often times the quality of the stories meaningfulness surpasses the factual truthfulness which gives the story its credibility. As Parry and Doan (1994) state, “[t]he 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.

Four of us who have diverse backgrounds but teach similar courses with the aim to help our pre- and in-service teachers to be better prepared to work with ELLs, participating in a reflective team approach to conduct our own interpretations on Bureu’s narrative assisted in addressing issues of reliability. Each of us took turns in making meaning from her story and in responding reflexively, considering Bureu’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.

Bureu’s narratives had a setting, characters, and unfolding events. Contexts and their impact on her were expressed by her, and we read her words she had written multiple times at different stages in order to tell us the meaningful events in her life. She delved into and relied on her past memories when documenting her narrative. In writing her narrative, she told us what was important to her, what events had been poignant, limiting, difficult, and rewarding for her. She lived the experiences not only once but multiple times. Bureu contacted her mother, who is living in Turkey, throughout the narrative writing to confirm the correctness and sequence of events that included her parents. Since her father passed away she was not able to do a member’s 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.

Bureu as the storyteller had a close relationship with her co-researchers, which allowed her to open her heart with trust when sharing her narratives and hoped that others would believe in her honesty and integrity when constructing the events. Through the project, we met regularly and discussed our interpretation, which served as peer debriefing. In addition, we visited previous literature to confirm our analysis and interpretation.

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 the pre- and in-service teachers for teaching CLD students. As Bureu, co-researcher and co-participant, wrote her story up for analysis, the other three co-researchers took on
the role of reader and analyzed each story in a reflective team approach. We analyzed and offered our interpretations to the story and the themes that emerged for each of us. Each analysis embodied the diverse experiences and varied backgrounds that altered our interpretations somewhat. This analysis procedure was done in the group with all members present each time. Burcu also reflected on her own narrative. As Meier and Strengmel (2010) state, “[r]eflection involves teachers’ conscious scrutiny of their own interpretive points of view, which are rooted in personal and formal theories, culturally learned ways of seeing, and personal core values” (p. 250).

This section will first introduce the cultural narratives (CNs) of Burcu and then include the reflective team analysis exhibiting our responses. In this section we included four of the stories that provoked the most reaction from us as the readers in that they elicited easy connections we could make to Burcu, 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. Most of all, like many ELLs in America, they add cultural and linguistic diversities
to U.S. society, which all the educators, including pre-and in-service teachers, need to be aware of how their 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 well exhibit the example of integrative versus instrumental motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1959; Dörnyei, 1998).

In addition, Burcu’s mother’s story can be used as an actual 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, Kowboy [cowboy], Tekses [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 shy to pronounce certain words in English among my Turkish peers and teachers because I was being perceived among peers as a wannabe 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 ambiguous and dynamic cultural, linguistic identity transforming stories. Like Burcu’s early school experience in Turkey, there are many returnees in Korean classroom who have learned English in English-speaking countries for a number of years. When they read English in class, they are often laughed at by their classmates due to their different accents.

Analyzing Burcu’s cross-culturally and linguistically loaded stories, being born in the U.S., returning to Turkey, and becoming a teacher educator at a U.S. university, we can sensitize the misperceptions and misconceptions that pre- and in-service teachers may have of immigrant language learners and help them realize that ELLs may all have vastly different backgrounds and experiences. 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’ attempt to fit in with the new classroom and importance of teachers’ roles to help their transition in our classrooms as smooth as possible so that they can feel as part of the classroom community.

**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 never 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 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). Pronouncing and addressing someone’s name appropriately seems 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 their unique names, many students who are living in America as cultural and linguistic minorities might 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 adequately labeled or pronounced by their teachers and peers, they might feel that they are not fairly and equally treated and valued, especially when they are developing their new identity.

For teachers who have students from culturally and linguistically originated diverse names, remembering and pronouncing their students’ names correctly could be a challenge. However, it is an important challenge they need to learn to overcome. It is important as teacher educators that we emphasize the importance of this to pre- and in-service teachers and ask questions such as, “How would you feel if you were at another country and if you were ascribed a nick name or an easy name just because it is easy to pronounce?” This will be a vital discussion to be explored further. On a personal note, as teacher educators who have international names we were all able to relate with Burcu because all of us had our own stories with our names where we were given nicknames (Yurimi was called “Worny”), addressed by initial letters of our names (Soonhyang was called “S”), and shortened versions of our names (Yurimi was called “Rimi”) and so forth.

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

Hearing different accents around me 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 non-native 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 voice 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 as 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 one of the many components that foreign language learners need to learn, it should not be the indicator of CLD students’ ability. We often observe that in America, an accent is often perceived as a negative factor to marginalize rather than be recognized. Burcu’s story reminds us of 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 non-native 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 cognitive and thinking ability. Therefore, rather than raising one’s voice when talking to ELL students, teachers need to be tolerant of ELLs’ various accents. Lippi-Green states (2012) in 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 sensitize the pre- and in-service teachers to empower our CLD students, not to stigmatize them due to accent.

CONCLUSION

Implications of Our Study

"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 student’s stories (Linn, 2010). By hearing the stories (narratives) of our students, we can understand how their life experiences have shaped their thinking, and by telling our stories and the stories of others, they can hopefully understand and relate better to their diverse students. For this reason, we conclude there is great potential in using cultural narratives in educating teachers of ELLs.

In this study, we, three teacher educators, investigated 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 work with ELLs from diverse cultural, linguistic backgrounds. As part of the research purpose, the direct classroom implication was discussed in depth under the Findings and Discussion section after describing each story. A brief summary of the instructional recommendation for teachers of ELLs are summarized by each CN.

Figure: Author 2’s CN and Its Classroom Implication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CN</th>
<th>Recommended Instructional Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Be aware of how ELLs’ diverse backgrounds can affect their language learning process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop competence in second language acquisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Become aware of ways to bridge the home and school cultural environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language &amp; Country</td>
<td>Gain knowledge about the world and demographic shifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t equate U.S. citizenship with English language ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be more aware of challenges of newly arrived ELL students’ attempt to fit in with the new classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be more aware of possible stereotypes and biases of yourself as a teacher and classmates towards ELLs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Names</td>
<td>Try to remember and pronounce all students’ names correctly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Avoid giving nicknames or automatically assign English names simply because of its convenience. Show your sincere effort that you are genuinely interested in them. Make a profile of students with their pictures and practice their names. Do not stigmatize students due to their different accents. Demonstrate sensitivity and respect for learner’s diverse regional language differences and dialects. Immerse all students into different local and international dialects and accent by inviting guest speakers or by showing educational videos or documentaries.

**Limitation of the Study**

This study is an analysis of the four instructors whose backgrounds are culturally, ethnically, linguistically, and racially diverse but yet marginalized in the U.S. Therefore, although we tried to be objective as much as possible, our analysis could be influenced by our backgrounds and cause uncomfortable feelings for those who come from mainstream backgrounds. Secondly, utilizing a reflective team approach methodology design is highly dependent on the group members feeling open enough to share their stories to a safe and responsive audience as the stories can be quite personal and the author is susceptible to feeling vulnerable.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study explores the usefulness of CNs in teacher education by analyzing CNs of Burcu, a culturally and linguistically diverse teacher educator, and learn how they could be used as an instructional strategy in educating teachers who work with CLD students with a reflective team analysis by the four teacher educators. 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 hers and learn from them about working with their own CLD students in their classrooms to examine the effectiveness of CNs as an instructional tool from teacher trainees’ views.
Final Remarks
We have shown cultural narrative incorporated instruction 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 in 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 we can reach beyond the walls of our classroom to a society that strives to improve itself by understanding each other a little more. Yet if students leave class with the same biases and stereotypes they entered with, we hope they are changed in a small but meaningful way, 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.

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