



Volume 1, Issue 1
Spring 2017

WESTCLIFF INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL OF APPLIED
RESEARCH

WIJAR

APRIL 2017

ISBN: 978-0-692-86819-5

Wjournal@westcliff.edu

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About the Journal

The **Westcliff International Journal of Applied Research (WIJAR)** is a multi-disciplinary, open access journal, pioneered by the faculty at Westcliff University.

Westcliff University is an accredited institution focused on educating, inspiring, and empowering students from around the world through innovative, high-quality distance and campus programs.

The fundamental objective of the Westcliff International Journal of Applied Research is to create a platform for faculty and students to publish their work in any discipline. This journal brings together faculty from different industries and students who are at any level in their academic career, thereby bridging the gap between faculty and students.

Published by: Westcliff University, 4199 Campus Drive #650, Irvine, CA 92612
Tel: 888-491-8686 Fax: 888-409-7306
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Letter from the President

There is a tremendous amount of knowledge in the faculty and student bodies to be shared. Collaborations between students and faculty enhance education by creating opportunities to explore undiscovered regions of theory and practice. Scholarly activity has a dramatic impact on our students and the university. By way of this open access journal, Westcliff University is aiming to make our expertise accessible to existing professionals and those curious about what the knowledge our faculty and students are capable of constructing.



As part of an effort to highlight and encourage greater faculty and student development through academic writing, I am pleased to announce the first edition of Westcliff International Journal of Applied Research. I am confident that you will find the selected articles and the diversity of research and scholarly topics valuable as they address complex challenges facing our society. The work of our faculty and students published in this Journal contributes to new ideas, presents creative thoughts, and challenges the community with questions for us to ponder.

Anthony M. Lee, Ed.D.

President & CEO
Westcliff University

Call for Articles

The *Westcliff International Journal of Applied Research (WIJAR)* is published biannually by the faculty body of Westcliff University with support from the Office of the President.

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Faculty and students in all academic disciplines may submit articles to *WIJAR*. A call for articles will be sent one month before publication, so dust your research and writing off the shelf, polish it up, and take the next step in your professional development--submit an article to *WIJAR* today.

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WHEN PARENTS BECOME STUDENTS:

An examination of experiences, needs, and opportunities which contribute to student parent engagement in community college

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Abstract

While college and university student profiles are changing rapidly, many of our practices and support systems are geared to traditional student profiles. This article focuses on findings from a recent study examining the experiences of student parents enrolled in community colleges, and examines the kinds of student services that help student parents remain engaged in their classes and persist to graduation. This study offers insight on transformative practices for supporting non-traditional, student parents on community college campuses. This study offers a paradigm shift for advisors, counselors and faculty at higher education institutions so that they may effectively engage and support student parents. The research includes student parents who have one or more dependent children aged 17 or younger and who are enrolled as full-time or part-time students. The study investigates some of the barriers to student parent success as well as the challenges they face. The study identifies, describes, and analyzes the support services which are being utilized by student parents, and review successful models of support in surrounding institutions. Nora's (2006) Student Engagement Model is used as a theoretical framework for this study. The results from this study should be of interest to student affairs professionals and higher education administrators alike, as they reflect the needs and challenges of the growing student parent population and inspire those searching for ways on how to support this unique, growing community of students.

Introduction

Nearly a quarter of postsecondary students in the United States are parents, yet only 40 percent of these students are expected to complete their degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Limited research has been conducted on the experiences and unique needs of those who decide to pursue a degree while concurrently holding the role as parents (Brooks, 2011; Springer et al., 2009). Research has shown institutional support services to have one of the biggest impacts on student success (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Cofer & Somers, 2001; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Woosley, 2003). Many colleges and universities encourage nontraditional students to enroll and emphasize their mission of promoting lifelong learning, but the research, services, financial resources, and programs do not reflect an understanding about nontraditional students' needs and circumstances, thereby maintaining an institutional system designed for a different type of student (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Hadfield, 2003). Published articles and studies note various suggestions for higher education institutions to implement in order to improve the success rate of nontraditional students (Belcher & Michener, 1998; Hadfield, 2003; Purslow & Belcastro, 2006; Urchick, 2004). Yet most of these studies fail to address the specific support needs and programs for a subcategory of nontraditional students, student parents. It is essential to better understand who this population is, what programs are in place to support them, and what support services can help them remain engaged in their classes in order to persist to graduation (Hadfield, 2003; McGivney, 2004; Sandler, 2000).

The overall aim of the study was to contribute to existing literature and develop student support services for this population in higher education by focusing on three research questions: 1) What are the experiences of student parents which can help them remain engaged in order to persist to graduation?, 2) What student services are provided to student parents?, 3) What support services can help student parents remain engaged in their classes in order to persist to graduation?

The study was conducted at Purdue Community College¹, a large, public, 2-year institution located in Northern California (NCES, n.d.). While the number of student parents is not tracked at this institution, Purdue College's Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) program

¹ Pseudonym

has been serving over four times the amount of nontraditional students than allocated by State funding, indicating a large target population ("Program Review," 2009).

Discussion

The discussion of study findings is based upon themes which emerged from the interview protocol. The interview protocol framework was provided by Nora (2003) who emphasized the unique interaction between the student and the institution. The interaction produces a connection, such as engagement, between the student and the institution which ultimately leads to persistence (Nora, 2003). The interaction is influenced by a variety of elements and addresses pre-college, institutional, and environmental factors which are associated to the college experience that influence student persistence and graduation: (1) precollege/pull factors- past experiences, prior academic achievement, financial circumstances, level of encouragement and support from family and significant others, (2) sense of purpose and institutional allegiance- educational aspirations and commitment to attend and graduate, (3) academic and social experiences- student perceptions of the relationship between student and support staff, opportunities for academic and social integration, provision and utilization of support services that promote student success, (4) cognitive/non-cognitive outcomes- demonstration of investment in the students and validation of their presence on campus, (5) goal determination/institutional allegiance- student perceptions of sense of belonging, and whether the attainment of their education goal was a worthwhile experience, (6) and persistence- demonstration of investment in their education through persisting to the next semester and/or higher degree.

Pre-college and Pull Factors. Nontraditional students have limited interactions with other groups within the college community, and therefore draw support from external sources such as family, coworkers, and friends (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Graham & Gisi, 2000; Kasworm & Blowers, 1994). Family support, defined as help getting children to school or caring for children, along with emotional support, was named as an important life experience contributing to the student parent's ability to manage dual roles (Burriss, 2001). When asked to describe the kinds of encouragement and support they were receiving in their academic journey, the majority of participants in this study mentioned a spouse, family member, friend, or therapist who provided

various types of support. Verbal encouragement, brainstorming essay topics, providing child care during class times, and simple reminders to finish homework assignments were some of the types of support student parents named as having received from their support persons. For these participants, support was a significant factor that made persistence in college possible.

Many nontraditional students find it difficult to juggle the roles of student, employee, and family member and that a great deal of assistance is needed in building their self confidence as students, restoring study skills, and time and resource management. For many of these individuals, balancing multiple life-roles creates a unique set of challenges and requires services to address their needs (Fairchild, 2003; Medved & Heisler, 2001; Mercer, 1993). Time conflicts, sick children, lack of child care support, work responsibilities, inconvenient class time, employment, and adjustment difficulties are a part of the lives of this growing student population (Carlin, 2001; Jacobs and King, 2002; Mercer, 1993; Fairchild, 2003). For the participants in this study, juggling multiple roles came with its own challenges, including lack of time. Various degrees of difficulty were reported by the participants, depending on the roles being balanced and the amount and type of support available. Only three participants were involved in campus clubs and activities. Others expressed interest in attending activities and joining clubs, but said they could not due to time constraints. The majority of student parent participants expressed a desire to restore study skills and learn time management skills via workshops and guest speakers.

Purpose and Allegiance. Literature has demonstrated that student parents often do not persist in the community college sector (Berkner et al., 2007). However, in this study, ten out of the twelve student participants demonstrated a strong commitment to attend and graduate through the various statements made in the interviews as well as their discussions regarding recent classroom and GPA success. All participants were maintaining a GPA above 3.5 and were striving to earn a 4.0 GPA. Four participants who were a semester away from graduation had been accepted to transfer to a nearby university.

Academic and Social Experiences. Building relationships with faculty members plays a crucial role in retention through a stronger sense of integration for nontraditional students in community colleges (Kasworm, 2003). Encouragement and support from staff members can also lead to validation of nontraditional students' needs and experiences (Nora, 2003). Participants in

this study indicated that faculty members had a positive impact on student parents and their engagement in the classroom. Examples of faculty understanding and support was expressed in examples of flexible homework and exam due dates, working with student parent learning disabilities, allowing participants to bring their child to class when childcare fell through, demonstrating understanding of tardiness due to a breast milk pumping schedule, and deep, encouraging conversations between student parent and professor.

Due to time constraints in caring for their families, nontraditional students are much less involved in campus activities and may only interact with their peers while attending class (Graham & Donaldson, 1997). All participants mentioned a strong connection to their professors, and described interacting with faculty outside of the classroom environment. This finding coincides with the Weaver and Qi (2005) study, which discovered that nontraditional students visited their professors more often than their traditional counterparts.

Having children and raising a family while trying to complete homework assignments and study for exams introduces new barriers to an already difficult and often overwhelming process (Detore-Nakamura, 2003; Gerber, 2005; Jirón- King, 2005; O'Reilly, 2002). Participants mentioned some challenges which impeded their success and engagement, including frustration with locality of the campus child care, lack of time to finish school and personal transportation, and homelessness. Of the challenges mentioned by the participants in this study, homelessness was a challenge which was not found in the literature reviewed.

Institutional support programs have one of the biggest impacts on student success (Braxton et al., 2000; Cofer & Somers, 2001; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Woosley, 2003). The support services available at Purdue College are Admissions, Assessment and Orientation, SWORC, CARE, Career and Transfer Center, Cashier, Counseling Office, DSPS Office, EOPS, Financial Aid, Welcome Center, Duo, Tutoring, and Veteran's Affairs. Participants who had received assistance communicated that they felt that they were a valued member of the college. An analysis of the interview responses indicated that all the participants were aware of the services available to them, but the degree of usage varied among the participants.

The stress of asking for assistance is greater in nontraditional students when compared with their traditional-age peers (Conrad, 1993). One participant gave an example of this when

she stated that she only asks for help when she runs out of options. Another participant also demonstrated this when she stated that she did not know how to ask for help when she first started college, so she set herself back in the application process. Many student parents have difficulty accessing information about services which are available to them, which may mean that students may potentially leave their program perceiving no way to accommodate their parental and student status (Springer, et al. 2009).

Childcare was a primary concern for the participants. Participants recommended a local child care referral program where student parents could access a list of students or daycares in the area. This idea came second to having a child care center on campus. Availability of child care has been found to be important to the success of student parents, and there is a positive relationship between the accessibility of child care on college campuses and retention rates (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Gmelch, 1998; Keyes & Boulton, 1995; Matus-Grossman & Gooden, 2002).

Support services identified for student parents include peer group support meetings, mentoring programs, and workshops. Another idea brought up by the participants in this study was an integration of personal life workshops into the already existing budgeting workshops on campus. Participants expressed an interest in learning about time management, balancing their personal and student life, being a single parent, and positive child rearing. Participants also expressed interest in hearing directly from alumni student parents, as they stated that workshops which featured these guest speakers would be of great benefit.

Some child care centers also have readily accessible academic advisors or counselors specifically assigned to the child care facility to discuss academic, personal, or parenting issues (IWPR, 2009). Green (1998) even suggested that a swift transition to college was possible through the creation and implementation of a Re-Entry Student Center that incorporated all phases of a nontraditional student experience. In this study, the idea which participants expressed a great amount of interest in was the creation of student parent clubs, organizations, and centers. Participants described this idea in depth, noting that the student parent club would be made up of student parent peers searching for support and belonging at the college. Members of the club would focus on assisting each other in working through academic and parenting issues. The

student parent club would be a small branch of the student parent center, an idea which they expressed the most interest. The student parent center would mirror that of the neighboring state university, which included readily available financial aid and academic advisors as well as representatives from specific programs such as SWORC, EOPS, and Duo.

Cognitive/Non-cognitive Outcomes. Higher education institutions must create academic and social environments in and out of the classroom which make the nontraditional student feel validated (Kim, 2002). In this study, all student participants mentioned struggling with finding validation of their presence on campus more than once.

Goal Determination and Institutional Allegiance. All participants in this study mentioned an initial sense of uneasiness and felt that they did not fit in to the college environment when they first started their educational journey. Kim (2002) found that nontraditional students have personal apprehensions begin before even enrolling in college, primarily through a fear of rejection from their college application and a negative self-assessment. The pressures and anxieties that student parents carry with them as they make their decision to enroll after being away from the academic setting can often lead to increased negative feelings toward entering higher education once again (Conrad, 1993). In this study, students who felt a sense of belonging to the college also mentioned feeling supported by the college. For students who had yet to develop a connection, it was difficult to find support for academic advising, opportunities for involvement, or financial advising.

One of the aspects of their experiences agreed upon by all participants was that the attainment or near attainment of their education goal was a worthwhile experience, and that their graduation plans were solidified and reachable. When participants were asked what had prompted them to begin or return to college, getting an education that could lead to a better salary to better provide or help provide for their families was a resounding answer. More than half of the participants also indicated that they wanted to set an example for their children. Overwhelmingly, all the study participant interviews stated that their reasons for beginning or returning to college was due to having increased employment opportunities or the ability to change their vocational careers. The research has shown that the majority of nontraditional

students state a motivating factor in attending college is for career advancement (Kasworm, 2003).

Nontraditional student maturity and life experiences can lead to higher academic achievements than anticipated (Kim, 2002). Participants in this study mentioned that having experienced and succeeded with struggles in life provided them a sense of determination and strength, which assisted them in reaching educational goals, and earning higher grades in their classes.

Persistence. Student engagement, retention, and development theorists (Astin, 1999; Kuh, 2009; McClenney et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993) suggest positive correlations between engagement, student learning, and persistence (Hunter & Linder, 2005). Engagement influences the level of commitment during the academic journey, enhances their educational experiences, increases personal development outcomes, and thus the likelihood of successfully completing that journey (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Pace, 1980). The student participants made efforts locate college services and strived to earn the highest GPA possible. They sought ways to incorporate classroom material into their lives. Despite difficult circumstances- like financial issues, homelessness, concern about caring for children and family members- these students persisted.

Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions

The three recommendations which emerged from this study can be used to improve student parent engagement and retention at Purdue College. However, these recommendations are applicable at any college or university.

Recommendation 1: Annual Review of Institutional Practices Related to the Delivery of Services and Support of Student Parents. The results of the study indicate a need for an institutional policy that encourages an annual review and monitoring of student support services. In this study student parent participants indicated that they felt the college was not interested in their initial or continuous feedback. Higher education administrators should evaluate whether student parents are engaged in ongoing dialogue designed to help learners make informed educational planning decisions. Administrators should also evaluate whether student services are accessible and convenient to student parents through a variety of venues. Student service

office hours were centered around business hours, 9 am to 4 pm, tailored to the traditional student class schedule. Institutions should evaluate whether the high-quality services are provided during the hours that student parents will be available to utilize them. Colleges that serve a large student parent population should evaluate whether the establishment of programs to ease the entry of these students into the institution are feasible. Specific examples of this include a student parent orientation program, a student parent club, and/or a student parent center, where student parents can bring their children to a nearby play area while receiving financial, social, and/or academic support.

Recommendation 2: Enhancement of Physical Facilities. Many institutions have been paying more attention to physical facilities recently in an effort to modernize and beautify their campuses through adding space to accommodate increasing enrollment. These small campus transformations are designed to reflect the high-quality of educational programs offered to students and engage those enrolled. The researcher confirmed a lack of changing space in restrooms as well as lack of lactation rooms at Purdue College. This tends to be the case with many colleges and university. Therefore, the researcher recommends colleges should spend time exploring and developing similar updates designed for student parents such as lactation rooms and changing tables. In some cases, adding these small physical details is low-cost, as small, unused rooms and closets can easily be converted. Corners of a lounge adjacent to the women's restroom can be walled off with either permanent walls or portable partitions. These small changes would provide a direct connection to validate the student parents' presence on campus, nurture their development, and could increase retention. Services most desired by student parents are local child care referral programs, personal life workshops, student parent clubs, and student parent centers.

Recommendation 3: Tracking of Student Parents. Purdue College does an excellent job of recording and publishing student population statistics. While the college has utilized the student engagement surveys in the past, the concept of following up with students is not consistent. The student participants felt that there was no commitment to track their engagement or satisfaction. The college does not have any data on why student parents leave without completing their degree, as they do not keep record of student parent data. With student parents

encompassing such a considerable portion of the student population in the United States and with the tightening distribution of tuition dollars, it is imperative that institutions track the retention of all student sub-groups. A study that analyzes the retention of student parents might yield rich data that could enhance programs and improve student satisfaction and engagement.

Conclusion

The results of this study support Nora's (2003) perspective that student persistence and graduation are influenced by pre-college, institutional, and environmental factors which are associated to the college. The data found in this study supports the idea that when there is a connection between the student parent and the institution, students demonstrate a greater degree of persistence through their experiences. Finally, students who had various types of social and academic support also shared a greater connection to the college community and a higher likelihood in achieving their educational goals.

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Finding Balance in a Spiritually Diverse Classroom

A Teacher's Guide to Awareness, Sensitivity, and Respect

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Abstract

While many scholars focus on the spirituality of the teacher and its effects on a class (Byler, 2009; Purgason, 2009; Morgan, 2009; Ferris, 2009), the students' spirituality and how it reveals itself in the classroom cannot be disregarded (Vandrick, 2009; Smith, 2009). Students have the potential to add and change any classroom dynamic through the beliefs they have. These spiritual beliefs can influence student reactions in communicative activities and interactions with teachers and peers. Learning motivation and attitude can also be linked to a student's spiritual or religious identity (Lepp-Kaethler & Dornyei, 2013). Learners should be free to be themselves and think for themselves in class, without any occurring bias or coercion. (Brown, 2009) This paper provides suggested approaches of how teachers can maintain balance in a classroom of religiously diverse students, allowing for the expression of various beliefs, while being aware, sensitive, and respectful of those variances.

Introduction

Defining Imbalance

From a dictionary perspective, imbalance is defined as a lack of proportion or relation between corresponding things. Teachers are the head of a class and can forget how much power and influence they have, based on their role (Purgason, 2009). If teachers are not careful and hold their opinions and beliefs about spiritual topics above the students, the risk of imbalance increases. A one-sided class, influenced by one set of beliefs and convictions, can overpower or dominate the students (Purgason, 2009). There is also a risk that teachers could choose to eliminate all spiritual or religious dialogue and topics from a classroom. Avoiding certain controversial topics creates a disconnect between the class and a “natural part of humanity” (Purgason, 2009 p. 191). If students are expected to be active members of a classroom dynamic, their beliefs and convictions should be equally represented and upheld.

Maintaining Balance

After defining imbalance, it is important to understand why balance is necessary. In the language classroom, typically in ESL (English as a Second Language) contexts, teachers have classes of diverse groups of students. Knowing what place spirituality and moral values of both teacher and student hold in the classroom, as well as the intentions behind decisions that teachers may make, add to the long list of requirements for an aware, sensitive, and respect filled classroom (Ramanathan, 2009). Every topic discussed in class has the potential to open up complexities and unaddressed intentions. Instead of avoiding certain topics, what if teachers could consider, include, and accommodate the place and role of student spirituality?

Discussion

Awareness in the classroom

Some teachers may already be cognizant of the cultural and linguistic differences that make up a classroom and the challenges that come with those aspects. However, what should be considered when a student suddenly disagrees with something and leaves the classroom? What is the underlying problem between the two students who are having a hard time working together? Why is the normally outgoing student hesitant to participate at a certain time or about a certain topic? Does this student not know that plagiarism is wrong? A teacher’s religious (and cultural) beliefs can limit his or her vision and cause a lack of acknowledgment of other ways and

perspectives (Ramanathan, 2009). Expecting students to be or act a certain way takes away from who they are as a person as well as creating potential conflict in their religious (or non-religious) identity. Teachers can become dependent and trusting of their own way of seeing, so much so that it leads to clouded vision and bias (Smith, 2009b). Instead, teachers should be looking for ways to become more knowledgeable to who their students are and what they add to the classroom. In order for teachers to gain that knowledge, they should start learning about and understanding factors that shape student views and identity (Kubota, 2009). Considering the social, religious, political, and cultural factors of students can initiate understanding and open dialogue that integrates different perspectives (Kubota, 2009). Humbling oneself as a teacher and placing the focus on the student perspectives can help remove any concerns one may have about denying their own identity, humanity, or spirituality. That shift allows the teacher to be in a place of listening and understanding rather than with a stance of disagreement and lack of acknowledgement.

Knowing the background of the students is important, but not enough. Knowing who the students are and the context of the class serves to provide a more complete framework for teaching and learning. Listening to students and getting to know them can help set a deeper foundation for topics that may be controversial (Purgason, 2009) A teacher starts this awareness by recognizing that students may not “leave their faith at the door” (Smith, 2009 p. 242). Smith (2009) also brings to light that these students will “not only come to class with language aptitude, affective filters, language acquisition devices and the like, but also as Christians, Muslims, agnostics, atheists, etc.” (p. 242). According to Lepp-Kaethler and Dornyei (2013), “language, identity, and faith are closely intertwined” (p. 173). Bakar, Sulaiman, and Razaai (2010) found that there is a religious motivation that is linked to language learning, motivation, and one’s beliefs. In some cultures in which religion plays an integral part, one’s identity can be influenced and derived from those beliefs (Kubota, 2009). For teachers and learners, these factors are “likely to influence attitudes and behaviors in classroom settings” (Smith, 2009a, p. 242). Teachers should consider all of the above-mentioned factors when facing a classroom full of students and deciding the best approach for language study and appropriateness of chosen topics.

Sensitivity in the Classroom

The classroom setting is not the place for a teacher to focus and share their own beliefs, rather a place for teachers to encourage and empower students. This does not mean that teachers should never state their opinions. Through questions asked to students, a teacher's identity can become more transparent. It is the responsibility of the teacher to keep a "clear vision of your own mission of a teacher" (Brown, 2009 p. 270). Through neutrality and respect, students will see the teacher's values that come out in a lesson. Purgason (2009) stresses the importance of creating a classroom that allows students to use English to express their own voice and opinions in a safe and encouraging way. Both Ferris (2009) and Purgason (2009) see value in the discussion of social issues and controversial topics. Ferris (2009) and Purgason (2009) don't shy away from delving into topics that may lead to deeper discussion or stronger critical thinking skills. These types of discussions should be done so in a manner that sensitivity is a main focus. Even if teachers are sensitive to students' opinions, needs, and feelings, other students may not be as sensitive in their comments. (Vandrick, 1997) Teachers need to create a place where students feel comfortable and able to share their beliefs without judgment. Teachers should consider dialogue as Canagarajah (2009) does, as a form of collective achievement. Creation of a classroom where all sides are active listeners and participants can interject their ideas and beliefs without fear of judgment may lead to eventual overall development of student thoughts and values (Canagarajah, 2009). Through a teacher's example, students can learn some basic concepts that White (2006), deems as crucial to success; "acceptance of difference, willingness to learn, and trust in each other" (pp. 5-8). When a teacher models this approach that accepts differences, students can learn to be sensitive to the opinions and values of their peers.

Brown (2009) stresses the importance of language learners having the ability and opportunity to be free to form their own opinions and thoughts. Armed with this knowledge, teachers need to be sensitive to and aware of the power that comes with their role as a teacher. Kubota (2009) shares that "teachers must be aware of the power relations that might position their students and themselves differently" in certain topics or beliefs (p. 230). If students come with certain ideas, it is the teacher's responsibility to be sensitive to their feelings (within reason) and ensure that other students are appropriate in their responses and interactions. That being said, it is crucial to be conscious of how far certain opinions and beliefs can be represented before

becoming offensive. If a student truly believes something that could be hurtful, harmful or disrespectful to others, it may be a good time to shift the focus on other topics. Being sensitive to students and their beliefs should consist of knowing how far to take a discussion or debate. Being in control of a topic in order to remain fair and open to the comments when they arise is necessary for a successful classroom dialogue.

Respect in the Classroom

Wong (2009) addresses a fundamental rule for respect in a reminder to treat others as we would like to be treated. To understand this statement fully, it is important to break it down in two ways; how do teachers expect to be treated and how can that transfer to learners? Expectations of respectful treatment may consist of listening for understanding and humility in learning from others. Familiarity with Canagarajah's (2009) collective dialogue and openness to learning from students can increase the respect level in the classroom. This opportunity can move classroom discussions from the superficial side of a conversation to a deeper opportunity for understanding. Giroux (1983) and Canagarajah (2009) stress the importance of learning from students through listening and humbling ourselves to a different view. Through this engagement, new ideas and positions are introduced and in turn, a broader perspective can be found (Canagarajah, 2009). Humbling oneself as a teacher serves as a model and as a teaching element. Canagarajah states, "If we want our students to learn from our experiences, values and knowledge, we have to give them (students) the courtesy of listening to their wisdom" (p. 85). This opportunity gives everyone the chance to be both a learner and a guide on new perspectives and deeper understanding. It must be noted that being open and active listeners of other beliefs and perspectives does not mean that one should not have a set position or values of their own. Rather, by including that knowledge in a new perspective only strengthens it and allows for deeper engagement (Canagarajah, 2009). Values and strong moral beliefs don't disappear from someone while entering into a discussion with someone of differing beliefs; instead, beliefs can expand and deepen with further consideration and new perspectives.

Byler (2009) writes about the role of being a gracious guest. While he is making the connection between Christian English Teacher (CET) and a host country, this could also apply to a teacher in regards to an ESL setting. A teacher should "focus first on waiting, listening, and

learning” (Byler, 2009, p. 127) and be a gracious host. Such an attitude creates a classroom dynamic that does not attack anyone or any stance, but rather invites students to travel through the intricacies and differences that make up a controversial topic through exploration rather than finger pointing and ostracizing.

General Guidelines for Teachers

When it comes to the spirituality of students and moral beliefs of students in the classroom, a teacher cannot be too cautious. The above information stresses the need and areas for awareness, sensitivity, and respect, but what guidelines are there for teachers to follow? Brown (2009), introduces three guidelines for dealing with controversial topics that all place significant responsibility on the teacher to give opportunities to students, create an atmosphere of respect, and maintain a threshold of morality and ethics in the classroom. These guidelines show that it is not necessarily imperative to leave controversial topics at the door- including religion. Teachers shouldn’t feel like religion or other controversial topics are off limits. These topics can and should be discussed, debated, and contemplated in class. If teachers can create the respect and maintain balance in the classroom, there is a lot that can be discussed and learned from one another. In the following list of guidelines, Brown’s (2009) are among several others that should be taken into consideration when faced with a class and the opportunities to allow true dialogue and understanding while balancing differing views and morals.

1. Treat others as we would like to be treated. (Wong, 2009)
2. Know the students and what shapes their views. (Ferris, 2009; Smith, 2009a)
3. Actively listen with humility and respect. (Canagarajah, 2009; Purgason, 2009)
4. Give students opportunities to learn and analyze important issues. (Brown, 2009; Canagarajah, 2009; Ferris, 2009)
5. Create a classroom that demands respect. (Brown, 2009; Purgason, 2009)
6. Create opportunities to view others’ perspectives. (Brown, 2009; Canagarajah, 2009; Kubota, 2009)
7. Get comfortable with learning from students- don’t view them as culturally or spiritually deficient. (Smith, 2009b; Wong, 2009)
8. Check and recheck personal intentions and agendas. (Ramanathan, 2009)

9. Shift the focus from learning about student to learning from and with them. (Canagarajah, 2009; Giroux, 1983; Wong, 2009)
10. Give students the language to talk about their faith and beliefs with consideration of discourse structures, body language, and tone of voice. (Brown, 2009)

Conclusion

Addressing student and teacher spirituality can have a number of positive outcomes. It provides the teacher with a deeper understanding of his or her students and allows for more effective instruction. It allows the teacher to teach moral values of respect and courtesy, potentially leading to students being better global citizens and peers. There is a created opportunity for teachers and students to understand and deepen their own faith upon reflection of questions that may arise during discussion. Students gain the ability to internalize the language by speaking about things that are of importance to them. With all things in life, balance is necessary. Finding that balance in the classroom between language instruction, varied spiritual beliefs and one-sided perspectives can lead to teacher and student fulfillment.

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Rejecting the Gender Binaries in Hunger Games Trilogy

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Abstract

Suzanne Collins, in Hunger Games trilogy, challenges the traditional gender roles by creating mavericks—characters that do not fit into just one gender box, but possess both masculine and feminine characteristics. Dystopian novels are all cautionary in nature; alarming us about the gloomy tomorrow if we do not correct our behavior at present. Even though Collins has set her stage in a dystopian world, her gender politics find resonance in the contemporary world.

Keywords: Hunger Games trilogy, Gender, Young Adults

Introduction

Patriarchal society puts impracticable standards of the 'ideal man' and every male is expected to be decorated with all those qualities society perceives as maleness. A society run by masculine ideals places attributes such as strength, competitiveness, toughness, rationality, autonomy, self-sufficiency higher in rank. The opposite of these qualities have been assigned as feminine therefore they are depreciated.

Young adults about to enter the doorstep of adulthood are perplexed by such gender binaries. To be a man, every male has to have all those qualities that a hegemonic masculinity ascribes to a man (Johnson, 2014, p.6-7). Gendering is inculcated since childhood; however, performing gender prescribed roles, when a child, is done almost like sleepwalking. It is only as young adults that individuals come to process the gender diktats imposed by the adult world.

Inclusion of traditional-gender-role-defying characters in young adult literature (like Katniss and Peeta in Hunger Games trilogy) normalizes the trend of crossing over the supposed gender fences for the young readers. It is a thought widely accepted that masculinity and femininity are situated at the opposite ends of a continuum; but the trilogy in question is resolute to prove the notion wrong.

Discussion

Emancipation of the Young Adults

Katniss Everdeen is a 16 year old female who is strong, intelligent, and confident. In conjunction, she is skilled at hunting and archery. Peeta Mellark, the male counterpart of Katniss, is a physically strong, emotionally expressive male who is a baker and cake decorator (Collins, 2008). Katniss and Peeta reject gender binaries. They cross over gender identities. They do not conform to governance. They are, without a strand of doubt, two of the most remarkable dystopian characters of late. They embody 'stereotype defying' characteristics. It is not only Katniss who discards "traditional gender roles that mandate female submissiveness" (Trites, 1997, p. 12), but Peeta also infringes the traditional gender roles that command male superiority. In fact, Katniss and Peeta are nothing short of radical figures for 'undoing gender'. They disturb the gender binaries by going against hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. "Perhaps a criterion for identifying undoing gender might be when the essentialism of binary distinctions between people based on sex category is challenged" (Risman, 2009, p. 83). When

we dissect the trilogy, Peeta and Katniss stand tall as characters that shake up the stereotypical gender roles. “The main characters in ‘The Hunger Games’ refuse to play the roles written for them. Almost all YA dystopians at least touch on this theme—refusing to let anyone define you” (Claudia Gray qtd. in Donston-Miller, 2014). The subjectivity, power, and agency that the young protagonists have are used to carve identity and resultantly, individuality is attained by the exercise of all mentioned three. Since dystopian young adult literature (DYAL) is targeted and marketed to the young readers, subjectivity shaped by the external and internal forces is at its core.

The wedding between Katniss and Peeta—the latter a flagbearer of ‘marginalized masculinity’, and not Katniss and Gale—the latter the poster boy of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Gale is tall, handsome, strong, aggressive, insensitive) in the last part of the trilogy (Collins, 2010) is a slap to patriarchal society that places unattainable and needless demands on males to become ‘ideal men’. The lesson to take home is: the alpha-male or “hypermasculinity” is not the ideal requirement; in fact there is no such thing as ideal.

Both Katniss and Peeta contribute to creating balance in the relationship. Both draw energy from each other. Both rescue each other. They are stronger when together because when one struggles, the other acts as the anchor and vice-versa. Moreover, both have the best qualities of masculinity and femininity. “‘Tomorrow’s a hunting day,’ I say. ‘I won’t be much help with that,’ Peeta says. ‘I’ve never hunted before.’ ‘I’ll kill and you cook,’ I say. ‘And you can always gather’” (Collins, 2008. p. 290). Katniss and Peeta strike as an unconventional pair given their oddity. The underlying fact is that each complements the other. “...as men move beyond traditional gendered scripts (e.g., the sturdy, silent, nonexpressive, hegemonic male), wives are happier. When men undo gender, marriages thrive” (Risman, 2009, p. 82). The Hunger Games trilogy offers ample evidences to posit Katniss and Peeta as nonconformists that discard gender divisiveness. It is not just Katniss who is a divergent. Peeta too identifies himself as nonconformist by not obliging to the gender norms set by the patriarchal society. Both are disturbing agents. Both participate to bring change in the gendered universe.

An analysis of Katniss’ character concludes that she demonstrates both vulnerability and power. She is confused and decisive. She is not only individualistic but also practices conformity.

She is caring and heartless. She is strong and weak. She takes on an active role and remains passive at other situations. Katniss is therefore not a quintessential heroine because an ideal hero or a heroine is perfect and we have enough evidences to corroborate that she is not. An ideal protagonist does not swing to and from between two binaries; whereas Katniss does. Does that make her an anomaly?

Young adult literature of the past thirty years departs from the classic hero, who is unfailingly admired, a member of the dominant culture, male, and a brave battler...However, contemporary readers are much less likely to identify with this hero in an increasingly multicultural and global society, and a postmodern hero with weaknesses, an antihero, or an unlikely hero may well be more satisfying than the classic hero. (Tasillo, 2006, p. 116)

That definition by Tasillo makes Katniss an ideal postmodern hero since she fulfills all the set criteria. According to Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz (2014, p. 4), the liminality palpable in Katniss is the characteristic of “young women in late twentieth and early twenty-first-century dystopian fiction”. Young adults are at the juncture of life wherein they are still discovering themselves. They do not yet know where they belong. “Liminal entities are ‘between this and that’, they are ‘neither here nor there’. “They are “not ‘here’ anymore, but they are not ‘there’ yet, either” (Turner qtd. in Jaskulska, 2015, p. 96). According to Van Gennep (qtd. in Jaskulska 2015, p. 95-97), liminal phase is “a period of preparation to accept a new role”, the subsequent phase – the postliminal phase is ‘incorporation’ which, in case of the young adults, means assimilating in the adult world and “gain a new status and, together with it, rights, duties and rules that they submit to”. The process is not all black and white though. The anomaly with Katniss and Peeta upon their adulthood is that they retain some of the attributes collected during their liminal phase. The diversion demonstrated by Katniss and Peeta can be decoded as ‘permanent liminality’. Jaskulska names it “a prolonged liminal phase” – something attuned to – “remaining in the transitory state observed in contemporary societies” (Jaskulska, 2015, p. 100). The liminal beings connect “the lines of childhood and adulthood, of individuality and conformity, of empowerment and passivity. They may also be understood as representations of contradictions, of strength and weakness, of resistance and acquiescence, and, perhaps especially, of hope and despair” (Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz 2014, p. 4).

Androgyny in Katniss and Peeta

Portrayal of females as protagonists in *DYAL* is not just about usurping male roles; it is as much about embracing femaleness as it is about adopting maleness. “It seems feminine qualities are praised alongside masculine ones, Katniss possessing both makes her strong enough to carry her burden but also strong enough to defeat anyone on her way to Snow...” (Bitoun, 2014). Katniss is an epitome of androgynous character which celebrates the ownership of both masculine and feminine characteristics. Trites (1997, p. 25) elucidates, “For most feminist children's novelists, both genders have good and bad traits. Successful feminist characters are those who adopt the best traits of both genders to strengthen themselves personally and within their communities”.

If we consider Trites’ opinion on the requirement of a ‘successful feminist character’, then Katniss and Peeta both pass the test with flying colors since both espouse the best traits of both genders. She further asserts the ultimate benefitting aspect of embracing both masculine and feminine characteristics, “...in the process of maintaining her personal strength, she often subverts traditional gender roles, playing on stereotypes and stretching their limits by incorporating characteristics that are typically associated with both genders into her actions” (Trites, 1997, p. 11). The subversive behavior that Trites is giving room to is the transgression of a female protagonist to move back and forth by drawing strength from both gender roles. A feminist character is inherently androgynous in essence. But what androgyny is not is — it is not anti-male. Feminism does not vilify males; it disparages patriarchy. Seltzer (2013) explains the feminist lesson we can take home, “The enemy is a system that pits people against each other, not the people you are pitted against. Turn your anger away from your competitors to the powers that be. This is a feminist message if there ever was one and a collectivist one”. Feminism liberates both females and males and androgyny does the same. Androgyny undercuts gender binary. Intellectual and emotional growth is evident in an individual blessed with a balance of masculinity and femininity. Further commentary on androgyny is provided below:

Androgyny is a combination or balance of masculinity and femininity. It allows for the possibility that individuals can express both masculinity and femininity. Instead of conceptualizing masculinity and femininity as opposite ends of a continuum where masculinity on one end

precludes one from being feminine on the other end, in androgyny, masculinity and femininity are separate dimensions that can be combined. People can be masculine, feminine, or both (androgynous). (Stets and Burke, 2000, p. 7-8)

The thrust of androgyny is that masculinity and femininity are not mutually exclusive. Or for that matter, what constitutes as 'maleness' and 'femaleness'? What is 'femininity' and 'masculinity'? Is there even such a thing as 'feminine' and 'masculine' characteristics when according to Butler being a woman or man is akin to multiplicity? Is there such an attribute that binds all the women together? Must all the women across the whole wide world exhibit the same behavior to be qualified as a woman? Rejecting singularity of thoughts and ideas on gender, Butler propounds the concept of multiplicity. "There is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women" (Butler qtd. in Trites, 1997, p. 27).

Hunger Games trilogy subtly but firmly presents the ramification when the society clouds an adolescent's perception of the self with the societal gender requirements. A failure to accept and celebrate the duality prompts Katniss to question her identity throughout the trilogy. An individual wrestles with the self perpetually if society shuns ambiguous characters. Woloshyn, Taber and Lane (2012) underscore the androgyny rampant in Katniss but according to them, that makes her a flawed character since "she is neither sufficiently feminine nor masculine" (p. 157). But the "Games of the Capitol" that the trio refer to which they conclude "forced her to question her identity and her actions; in the context of the Games and the rebellion," can unmistakably be replaced with patriarchy. It was Capitol headed by Snow which can be held responsible for Katniss' doubts about "her own strengths and the complex nature" (Woloshyn, Taber, and Lane, 2012, p. 157). Similarly it is patriarchy which restricts young adults from exploring the full potential of their identity by emphasizing on 'gender fixity'.

Conclusion

Instead of identifying with 'either masculinity or femininity' option, young adults want to imbibe the best attributes of 'both maleness and femaleness' thus making their life wholesome. Moreover, Katniss and Peeta are strong characters in that they are unafraid to borrow traits from both genders and wear those characteristics like bravery badges unhindered by traditional

gender decrees. They find themselves by acting the way that best suits them and not being swayed by the gender protocols.

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Advice for a Communicative Learning Environment

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Abstract

Currently the Philippines is the last country in Asia implementing a ten year education plan providing education until tenth grade before students reach university level. The education change will aid future Filipino professionals to compete globally since it is the recognized standard throughout the world. However, with expanding pressure for EFL teachers to implement new programs and systems it has left a gap between students being proficient academically and communicatively at the same time. The issue continues to increase since inappropriate implementation of activities leave students perceiving the communicative approach as frivolous and unproductive. As a result students do not appreciate an active learning environment in the classroom.

Introduction

There are only two countries in the world still implementing a ten-year education plan, Angola and Djibouti. This is why the current 2016-2017 schools in the Philippines will make a transition to a K to 12 system. After five years of planning, the determined result of this shift is that the general education college department will have fewer units and most subjects will be transferred to the upcoming 11 and 12 senior high curriculum, stated in CHED memorandum Order No. 20, series of 2013, according to The Republic of the Philippines, Department of Education (2016).

East Asian teachers have been introduced to the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach but according to Hiep (2005), as developing countries, "Gear toward reforming their education systems to meet the demands of modernization, new values may emerge. Local teachers need to continually examine these values and reflect upon how they relate to learner participation, autonomy, and equality in their changing context."

This study is aimed to see if there is a significant difference on the EFL teaching methodology specifically in terms of CLT as perceived by the observer and student perspective. Moreover, the result of the study will serve as feedback useful for the university and administration when planning teacher training objectives for the upcoming K to 12 educational structures. Results will also be considered as needs assessment for teacher training objectives in the Philippines.

Butler (2011) and Kelch (2011) identify the East Asia and Pacific region with unsuccessful implementation of CLT and teachers still face significant challenges even with governments promoting CLT. Butler (2011) mentions three obstacles of CLT implementation in Asia societal institutional constraints. Within the societal institutional constraints, Park (2012) identifies modern western ideologies compared to the traditional Asian values of classroom creating a barrier in the classroom because even with the strong pressure to implement CLT, teachers still have the role of gate keepers possessing all the knowledge and students still passively receive the knowledge from them. Salas, Fitchett, and Mercado (2013) state the concern of disappointment in the class when students had little practice communicating on the subject

matter in meaningful ways. Furthermore, traditional classes have competitive and egocentric nature; whereas, CLT classes have respect, empathy, and perspective collaboration goals.

Another constraint identified by Bulter is classroom since teachers themselves are not confident communicating in English; therefore, facilitating communicative tasks becomes daunting especially when teachers are inadequately trained in applying CLT to the classroom or training has not been provided. Teachers will lose face if they implement CLT and make verbal mistakes or can't respond fast enough to the students when they need guidance (Park, 2012). Hiep (2005) adds educational constraints when applying CLT in terms of the behaviors of international teachers has not yet been fully documented.

The third constraint stated by Butler is societal institutional level constraints which occur because of the exam-based culture. With the immense pressure on students to pass standardized bar exams, the teachers experience an increased amount of pressure to teach to the test instead of using CLT to strengthen communication skills within a given subject (Park, 2012). Parker (2003) shares a suggestion for such concerns by adding progressive discussion in the two forms of deliberation and seminar for group work. Deliberation is focused on finding solutions to controversial issues with a neutral middle standing which is the opposite as typical debate structures in classrooms. Seminars elaborate critical thinking skills of the students with ideas and concepts that students can expand their own understanding of it and learning the art of questioning everything. Parkers adds that these methods help, "Align progressively more demanding dialogue with student's goals and expectations."

Along with seminar, TED-motivated speaking activities helps the students change their mission from a "knowledge receiver to an explorer" since the content is real and not fictional like some classroom drills that are solely for the sake of practice (Li et al., 2015). If the students don't apply the language in real world contexts specific to their field of study they will not be motivated for the CLT approach. As a solution, TED talks challenge traditional listening-speaking EFL courses by motivating the listener to strengthen their critical thinking capabilities while developing appropriate body language and manners, essential non-verbal language skills, during their own public speaking engagements. Li, Gao, and Zhang add that TED inspired speaking activities reduce the affective filter and actual give students a scenario where they keep learning and watch more

than one seminar because the content is so satisfying. When students are able to pick their own videos based on their personal preference or career choice the “Affective Filter Hypothesis” (Krashen, 1985) stating in a stress free environment motivate accelerates language input. Li, Gao, and Zhang state, “To reinforce the effect, students are required to give comments on their performance in the video by themselves and peers as records for their improvement.” With the Ted inspired speaking tasks students become the policy maker, teacher and coach of the learning ideology.

In addition, Butler recommends “communities of learning” beyond the classroom setting. This can also be true for the teachers. Faculty learning communities can end the isolation in teaching and give the instructors changes to communicate in meaningful ways on pedagogical discussions and reflections (Eddy & Mitchell, 2012). Butlers continues that because of the exam-based culture there are less opportunities for English communication inside and outside the class. The shift is important since the Republic of the Philippines, Department of Education (2016), states one of the four mission statements as, “Family, community, and stakeholders are actively engaged and share responsibility for developing life-long learners.” Salas, Fitchett, and Mercado (2013) believe, “Talking to learn across classrooms and communities can empower English learners of all levels with the skills and stances upon which our cultural and political democratic traditions are grounded and upon which our collective futures as open societies depend on.”

This study employed both qualitative and quantitative types of research using a descriptive survey method and participant observations with a descriptive reference sheet. The respondents of this study were all fourteen English teachers and eighty of one hundred third and fourth year students majoring in English under the School of Education, Arts, and Sciences, Language Department during the Academic Year and Summer Year 2015-2016 at the University of Saint Louis, Tuguegarao City, Cagayan, Philippines. The total number of student participants was established using the Slovin’s formula at 0.05 margin of error to ensure a reasonable accuracy of results.

This study utilized two separate methods for teacher and student participants. A peer-observer reference sheet was used patterned from *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* by Brown (2007) used during and after the Commission on

English Language Program Accreditation process (CEA) in 2015 at California Polytechnic English Language Institute (CPELI), College of the Extended University at California Polytechnic University, Pomona. However, modifications were made by the researcher to suit to the country and culture of the participants. The revised teacher observation form was used to evaluate the presentation and implementation of teaching methods. To determine the extent of CLT of English teachers, the four-point Likert's scale was used in the form to guide the observer in answering the questions. The four categories included: exceed expectations, meets expectations, needs improvement, and not applicable.

After collation of the observation results, a self-made questionnaire was distributed to the student participants after the researcher oriented them on the objectives of the study. After the participants answered the seven questions on the survey the answers of all respondents were tallied. To triangulate the findings of the data from the observations and surveys, two focus group discussions were conducted separately to half of the participants, seven teachers and forty students.

Discussion

In response to the teacher observations the area of highest concern is applied appropriate principles of EFL learning and teaching methodology such as: scaffolding, repetition, adhering close to the 80/20 rule, pair work, group work, drills/practices, peer-teaching/peer-coaching, group work, appropriate wait time, and a variety of task based activities. Out of fourteen teachers, ten teachers were rated as needs improvement due to the traditional teacher-centered methodology being employed such as student recitation drills. Teachers asked a knowledge based question and students raised their hands until one was called on to stand up and recite the answer. Some of the ten teachers created groups to work in but ended up not helping with English with any of the four integrated skills and was more about visual arts instead of a task based approach focused on outcomes based education. It is recommended that teachers utilize the 80/20 rule, peer-teaching/peer-correction, and a variety of task based activities as an

alternative means of assessment. However, three teachers exceeded expectations and one met expectations, which shows CLT methodology was taught to the respondents.

Teacher observation results correlate with the student survey responses since 85% of students feel only somewhat confident speaking English. Furthermore, students said they would feel more nervous rather than excited if the survey was conducted as an interview instead of being written. In spite of those results, sixty-nine of the one hundred participants stated they preferred an active learning environment where they typically communicate more than the teacher or as much as the teacher during class. Most students said they would like to “enhance speaking skills” this way. Students who do not prefer the CLT approach stated, “Students might just make noise instead of learning.” Surveys also show that the majority of students perceive their English classes contain less than half of the class time dedicated to English.

Another area that CLT promotes is implementing an engaging warm-up activity related to what students will learn. Unfortunately, twelve of the fourteen English teachers did not include warm up activity and began their classes with a statement or question about the topic of the last meeting. For example, “What did we do last class?” or “Last class we discussed_____.” In order to achieve successful CLT a five to fifteen warm up activity task based on what was previously learned would make a better approach for the start of a communicative environment. This strategy could lead to students communicating more in class since forty-five out of eighty students view less than half the time of English classes is given for students to communicate with each other.

When students were asked to name and describe one or more activities in English classes that involved the community or any off campus extension, thirty of the eighty students responded “none”. The other students instead wrote activities that were based in class or on campus. Therefore, zero of the eighty students were provided opportunities to practice English in an authentic real world environment. In reference to the observation sheet, nine of the fourteen teachers were given “not applicable” for the question if they provided students opportunities to practice outcomes independently outside of class. Also, during the observations nine of the fourteen teachers were given “needs improvement” or “not applicable” on goals were connected to authentic “real life situations”. These findings on presentation and implementation

of teaching methods may be linked to the reason students are nervous and only “somewhat confident” to speak English, even though in the Philippines English is the target language for classroom instruction starting in grade three.

Conclusion

School and government policies don't match what is actually going on in terms of teaching in the classroom. Teachers may know what CLT means but revert back to using traditional pedagogy so students don't overpower them with superior language skills. Teacher training sessions with specific criteria to ensure effective CLT will produce educators who are able to facilitate lessons with outcome based learning activities which also reduce the affective filter. To overcome such barriers teacher must reform ineffective tasks with demanding yet achievable exercises that heed in the enhancement of language proficiency and conversational skills simultaneously. Workshops that demonstrates, through example, activities with the advancement of social and academic skills also containing practical real-world objectives would be highly beneficial as a teacher training program. As a result teachers would develop productive social communities with increased participation while reducing anxiety allowing students to converse and collaborate with others effectively throughout their professional career.

Conclusion

It is recommended in the Philippines that teachers guide the students how to communicate in meaningful ways using TED talks as a tool to strength their confidence. After it is also recommended that the teachers implementing the new speaking strategy make a community of practice where they can discuss and document successes or failures with the new activity. Also, teacher should involve their community and give the students chances to speak outside of class once they are more confident communicating in authentic ways. In the end,

teachers will be able to adapt the guided activities to their specific subjects and tackle the challenges of CLT in the multicultural era.

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Teacher Trainers' Perspectives and Practices Regarding Written Corrective Feedback in L2 Writing: A Mixed-Methods Study in a Venezuelan University

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Abstract

This study takes place at a university in Venezuela where Spanish is the first language. The participants are teacher trainers on a five-year program in a subject area called English Practice, where future English language teachers develop their language skills. Adopting an interpretive stance by examining qualitative and quantitative data gathered from two online questionnaires, this exploratory research aims to explore the practices and beliefs teacher trainers have regarding written corrective feedback (WCF) on their learners' writing in English. The findings reveal that trainers use more than one WCF strategy, favouring the use of codes and the provision of the correct form; the trainers report they aim to correct all errors encountered in their students' written productions since they think it improves learners' grammar accuracy while raising their language awareness. Data demonstrate that trainers WCF beliefs are influenced by previous experiences as language learners, institutional guidelines, views of second language teaching and learning and teacher development programs. Results show that trainers believe they should adopt a more rigorous WCF approach with pre-service teachers than with other learners due to the fact trainees are regarded as prospective language models who need to avoid errors in their future teaching practice.

Introduction

Genesis of the study

It has become axiomatic in teaching that providing error correction is a burdensome task and has been the topic of numerous professional academic discussions. As Hyland (2010, p. xv) states, written corrective feedback (WCF) has been documented as “one of the language teacher’s most important tasks” and how to provide appropriate and effective WCF in writing has been focus of many research projects in recent years. However, I feel that few practical outcomes have emerged for English language classroom teachers and that is the reason why I agree with Ferris’s (2011) advice to focus research and discussion on how to address the treatment of errors with an insight into when and why we should do so.

The way teachers respond to learner written productions is a field I have always been interested in since not only as a teacher, but also a teacher trainer, I have encountered uncertainties when providing my students with written corrective feedback. When discussing such reservations with my colleague teacher trainers, we seem to have different views concerning the potential role of error in teaching and learning, the value of written corrective feedback in students’ writing performance and what works best for learners to enhance their writing skills. In the same way, pre-service teachers seem to be confused about the different strategies their tutors use when correcting errors in their writing; they report that each tutor has a different way to correct written errors and they sense there is not a strong principle regarding the matter: what is an error to be corrected by some trainers, might not be considered as such by others.

As an English teacher and teacher educator with more than 17 years of experience in the field, I think the issue of WCF practices and beliefs becomes more crucial and complex if we take into consideration the fact that those learners we are referring to are future language teachers, who will also provide corrective feedback to their students and who may emulate their teacher trainers’ classroom practices in regards to approaching error correction.

It is well acknowledged that teachers’ beliefs greatly influence the choices they make in their classrooms; predominately their views about language, learning, teaching, errors and communication. (See for example, Borg & Al Busaid 2012, p. 6). I believe teacher trainers make

assumptions about what novice teachers should know and learn and their expected performance in the classroom, so they use those hypotheses as a basis when making decisions in their teaching practice.

Thus my own teaching and teacher training experiences, and the discussions held with pre-service teachers and trainers, are the reasons for me to pursue research in this complex field. They have also driven me to look for deeper insights so as to reflect on what teacher trainers really do, and what is behind their choices in general and when providing written corrective feedback in L2 writing in particular.

Background

This exploratory study is a mixed-methods project undertaken at the Modern Languages Department in the Faculty of Education of a public university in Venezuela. The participants are trainers in a subject area called English Practice, where future English teachers whose first language is Spanish, pursue a five-year teacher training and education degree.

Most teacher students are between 18 to 30 years and come from different educational backgrounds; some come from private upper schools where English is taught intensively several hours a week, and some others previously studied at public institutions where English is taught as a subject but just for 90 minutes a week; that brings different language level proficiencies in the same classes as a consequence. Once students graduate, the majority is expected to hold more than one job and teach at the elementary and secondary level in both private and public educational institutions. It is important to mention that, after finishing their university studies, these pre-service teachers do not have the need to use either spoken or written English outside their workplace.

With the objective of taking the trainees from elementary (A1 CEF level) to advanced English level (C1 CEF level), on the course this subject area, which is placed in years two and three and where I have worked for the last nine years, is divided in four modules titled: English Practice I, II, III and IV. Because Longman's *New Cutting Edge* textbooks apply the principles of communicative language teaching and task-based learning, they are used in the four modules as the core of the curriculum. Sessions are completely delivered in English and their aim is enhancing

students' English language proficiency; putting major emphasis on the development of listening and speaking skills. Little time is devoted to the improvement and practice of reading and writing. 18 teacher trainers, who are in charge of the four modules above denoted, meet students 12 hours a week for 18 weeks per module. Since there is not enough time for students to write in class, a portfolio task is set every semester to allow them to develop their writing skills while producing texts dealing with a topic of interest. Written feedback is provided by the trainers, thus trainees are expected to submit more than one draft taking into consideration the comments made by tutors. Although the institution recommends the use of linguistic codes to correct students' writings, such WCF practice is not mandatory or stipulated at any formal level so, it is the teacher trainers' choice to decide what WCF is best for their learners, taking into consideration their beliefs, teaching styles and other factors that affect ELT.

Research Questions

This small-scale exploratory mixed methods research does not claim to make any generalizations about the practices and perspectives regarding WCF by L2 teachers in general. Instead, I strive for a deeper understanding of the issue in the case of these teacher trainers in Venezuela. I pose the following research questions for this study:

1. *What are the current practices among teacher trainers regarding WCF of L2 writing?*

- What strategies do they use to provide WCF?
- How frequently do they provide WCF to students?
- What types of errors do they address?

2. *What are teacher trainers' beliefs on WCF?*

- What do they feel is the role of errors when teaching writing?
- What are their criteria or principles which predict their WCF practices?
- In their experience, has WCF been effective in reducing the amount of errors L2 writers make?

Discussion

Teacher trainers' WCF current practices

First, according to the findings reported, the WCF practices teacher trainers use in L2 writing follow the WCF typology established by Ellis (2009) and Ferris (2011) (see table 1) No

other strategy was found in this study, but the use of not one but many strategies was indicated by these participants, when they chose more than one option in the questionnaire.

<i>Type of CF</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Direct</i>	The teacher provides the student with the correct form
<i>Indirect</i> Indicating + locating the error Indication only	The teacher indicates an error exists but do not provide the correction. This takes the form of underlining to show errors in students' texts This takes the form of an indication in the margin than an error has been made in a line of a text
<i>Metalinguistic</i> Use of error code Brief grammatical description	The teacher provides some kind of metalinguistic clues as to the nature of the error. Teacher writes codes (e.g. ww: wrong word; art: article) Teacher numbers errors in the text and writes a grammatical description of each numbered error at the end of the text.
<i>Focused and unfocused</i> <i>Unfocused CF</i> <i>Focused CF</i>	This concerns whether the teacher attempts to correct all (or most) of the students' errors or select one or more types to correct. This distinction can be applied to each of the above options. It is extensive It is intensive

Table 1: typology of written corrective feedback strategies

Also, the present findings that indicate that, when dealing with WCF, teacher trainers prefer coding the error and/or providing the correct form, seem to be consistent with other research (Furneux 2007) which found that when providing WCF, teachers play two major roles: the initiator and the provider. However, my findings also suggest that number + explanation along with indicate line, are the two least preferred WCF practices (see Table 2). A possible explanation for this might be the fact that all respondents have considerable experience training teachers and they all work at different levels within the same university. Besides, they might

know what works best in every specific situation. It might also be that since teacher education is involved, these teacher trainers want to model different strategies for their future language teachers to imitate later on as they did when they were trained to be teachers in the past.

Table 2 below sets out the most commonly used WCF strategies: Providing the student with the correct form, along with the use of codes are the two most used strategies for error correction in L2 writing. Indicating without supplying the right form is by far the least-used strategy with only 8% applying it.

	% of teacher trainers who use this strategy
Correct form	85 %
Code error	77 %
Highlight error	38 %
Number + explanation	23 %
Indicate line	8 %

Table 2: WCF strategies: frequency of use

Furthermore, teachers have very positive perceptions of WCF and its potential use in English language teaching. This research identifies the use of indirect strategies (use of codes) as one of the preferred WCF practices for teacher trainers and the best when working with teacher trainees. This positive perception may be due to participants' previous experiences as language learners and their professional experience as teacher trainers which might help them recognize WCF potential uses in ELT. The preponderance of using codes to provide WCF can be due to the fact that, according to the data collected, there are certain university guidelines which have shaped the way they approach grammar correction in L2 writing.

Finally, this study revealed teacher trainers use WCF in L2 writing for promoting autonomy, raising language awareness, enhancing grammar accuracy, among others. These findings are similar to the study of Evans (2010) whose results indicate that WCF is commonly

used by experienced and well educated teachers for diverse instructional reasons. It is likely that this is due to the fact that these trainers are well-versed in methodology and WCF strategies so as to acknowledge the importance of taking into consideration students' individual needs, language level, context, etc. Also, I think that when deciding what WCF strategy to use, trainers not only take into consideration institutional guidelines, but also time constraints and teaching style as previously discussed.

Teacher trainers' WCF beliefs

Regarding teachers' beliefs, this study produced findings that can demonstrate teacher trainers describe learners' errors as resources for learning and teaching a second language. This endorses the view of Richards (1974) where errors are seen as learning information to enhance the planning of the teaching. Richards also adds that errors can help learners in mastering the language and the findings of this research show how teacher trainers believe errors can enhance language awareness and autonomy, hence become a crucial part in the learning of an L2. As well, Brown (2000, p.205) determines that "interlanguage" is a key concept when addressing errors; participants also agree with this statement due to the fact they see errors as illustrations for teaching and as a personalised/individual picture of learners' skills and language level. But one question arises from the findings of the present study: if errors are addressed as a resource and a natural feature of learning, why did the respondents reported the need to avoid them when training teachers? Participants' responses suggest that trainers think unfocused WCF leads to accuracy, and an implication of this is the possibility of overcorrecting students' productions and its consequences in the learning process. First, the importance of fluency and communication is neglected: by focusing only in accuracy as a synonym of mastery of the language, teacher trainers might not be setting the best example to their trainees. Secondly, they are also language role models to follow. Due to a small sample size; caution must be applied, as the finding cannot be transferable to all teaching settings. This contradictory conclusion needs further research for a deeper understanding.

Ellis (2009) states that using codes (See Table 1) (metalinguistic WCF) promotes a deeper understanding and thinking for advanced students. However, this study indicated that teachers feel the use of such strategy as the best for teacher trainees regardless of their level, since it

encourages reflection and awareness. This can be seen as an indication of the influence teachers' beliefs have on the choice of the WCF strategy that best suits their students' needs and as a corroboration of Richardson's (1996), Johnson's (1994) and Hampton's (1994) view of teachers' beliefs as a way to understand their instructional decisions and teaching practices, as a major source of influence when planning a class.

In addition, this research was successful as it was able to distinguish the three sources that mainly influence teacher trainers' beliefs regarding WCF: previous language learning experiences, teacher development programs and views of language learning and teaching. However, the findings did not mention anything dealing with the participants' instructional experience and the way they modify their beliefs as indicated by Baleghizadeh (2010) and whose results suggested the importance of the role of teacher training courses in the shaping of teachers' WCF beliefs. It may be the case that respondents did not receive WCF instruction while training to become teachers. It would be interesting to assess whether teacher trainers are provided with any kind of WCF during their teacher education and if that really greatly influences their professional practice. This can usefully be the subject of further research.

Time constraints and pre-training or clear guidelines to students were found to be some of the criteria respondents take into consideration when deciding on the amount of WCF and the strategy used. Although time is an unanticipated outcome that has not previously been described and which I could not find any readings related to, one explanation to this issue is the reality Venezuelan teachers face: really low salaries and the need to hold two to three jobs at a time which leaves little time to the correction of writing. It is advisable to do further research on this. More broadly, additional examination is also needed to determine why if time is named to be a key factor when providing written corrective feedback to L2 writing, indicating where the error is but do not providing correction was the strategy they report as one of the least used. That is obviously not a time-consuming WCF strategy and it would save time to teacher trainers when correcting. The reason for this is not certain but it might have to do with the institutional guidelines provided where the use of codes for WCF is preferred.

Finally, the most striking finding to emerge from the data is that 100% of the teacher trainers who took part of this research pointed out they approach WCF in L2 writing in a stricter

way than when they teach at other institutions where students are not language teacher trainees. Maybe that explains why most of them (77%) say that they correct almost all the errors encountered in their students' L2 writings. They see their teacher students as language role models who should achieve accuracy through the understanding of the feedback provided. But, do teacher trainees learn in a different way from any other person? Should accuracy be a goal when training teachers or even when teaching at any level or setting? What role do fluency and communication play? I think these trainers assume the language knowledge teachers should have is merely prescriptive grammar: syntax, morphology and semantics (Mittins, 1991, p. 22) and not knowledge of the language as a communication tool in an interactional real world context. I believe what makes a good L2 teacher goes beyond this finding: personality, adaptability to different roles in the classroom, good rapport between the teachers and the class (Harmer, 2009, p. 25), efficient management, among others are key elements that make a good teacher. These are important questions for future studies.

This study has indicated that there may be a link between teachers' practices and their beliefs. Whatever decision they make in the classroom may be connected to what they consider important and necessary for their students. This small research study does not pretend to make any generalizations but seeks for a deeper understanding of what Venezuelan teacher trainers do and their reasons for doing it, reflection, awareness, students' active and committed learning from errors and the major role teachers play in the L2 learning process, as role models, are key features that come alive when providing written corrective feedback in L2 writing to teacher trainees. The possibilities of further research in the field are enormous and a similar study in another country or setting is advisable.

The present study shows that giving written corrective feedback is complex and exhausting, but the value of providing appropriate WCF to students is crucial for their learning and development of their language skills. Understanding the English language system, planning lessons to meet different learning styles, manage mixed-abilities classrooms, promoting interaction, enhancing learners' various and individual motivations along with providing an efficient and effective feedback seem to be a lot for a teacher, but who said it was easy? Teaching is art; it is a craft, a way of life and should be embraced and enjoyed as such.

Conclusions

To conclude, the need to offer appropriate written corrective feedback to trainees as a means of learning reflectively while analysing errors, should also encourage trainers to incorporate reflective teaching in their professional practice. The data collected in this study should be used as basis for critical reflection about teaching, specifically about the provision of error correction in L2 writing.

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