# Toward Justice: Education of Empowerment in the Multicultural World

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### Abstract

This ethnographic case study explores the nature of situated transformative pedagogy that empowers linguistically and culturally diverse adolescent English language learners. Grounded in theoretical perspectives of critical multicultural education and sociosemiotics, this study, through developmental, spiral analyses of data collected from classroom observations, interviews, and records reviews, presents tri-dimensions of Transformative Mediated Instruction (TMI): (a) microgenetic journey in the transformative zones of empowerment: Zone of Origin, Zone of Intensive Learning, and Zone of Beyond Learning, (b) Signature Pedagogical Rituals of the transformative zones: golden principles of learning, mini conferencing, Initiation-Conference-Work, and digital video task-based learning, and (c) dialoging diverse cultural worlds in the transformative zones through multicultural story producing, genuine-question flood, and home heritage renaissance.

*Keywords:* English language learner, transformative pedagogy, multicultural education, English as second language, mediated learning

As school-aged students who speak a language other than English at home constitute the student population of American education increasingly—8.5% in 1979 (Spring, 2010) vs 21.1% in 2009 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2009) and 23.5% of language minority students speak English with difficulty, it is a tall order for education stakeholders to take responsible part in ensuring equality of educational opportunity (Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; Gollnick & Chinn, 2013) and improving educational practices for liberating the less privileged, linguistically and culturally diverse students from the myth of cultural deprivation (Baugh, 2006; Gorski, 2008; Hakuta, 2011).

Acknowledging the need in the profession to resolve tensions between the institutionalized press toward standardized knowledge and assessment and alternative visions of emancipatory education (Sleeter, 2013; Sleeter & Grant, 2009) and changes in teacher certification (Pearson Education, 2014) including: rightly, all teachers, not only those who teach English as a Second Language (ESL), should be prepared to address different needs of minority students ('people of color', Roman, 1993), this study intends to address following overarching research question: What is the nature of education that empowers linguistically and culturally diverse students in general and situated classroom pedagogy in particular?

### **Perspectives**

To guide the inquiry on pedagogy of educational and social justice, this study is grounded in socio-reconstructionist perspectives of transformative pedagogies (Banks, 2009; Cummins, 2000; Freire, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Nieto, 1992; Sleeter, 1991). In these perspectives, teachers and students are viewed as agents ('transformative

intellectuals', Giroux, 1988) who are or have become able to engage in emancipatory 'dialogue' (Bakhtin, 1981; Clark & Holquist, 1984; Freire, 2003; Holquist, 2002; hooks, 1994).

In addition, in order to understand situated pedagogy that micro-developmentally empowers language, culture, and heritage, following theoretical and interpretive constructs also guide the study: 'third space' (Bhaba, 1990; Moje et al., 2004), 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991), 'zone of proximal development' (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1986), 'Discourse' (Gee, 2004), 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), 'multimodality' (New London Group, 2000), and 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1991).

### Methods

This research is designed in the tradition of ethnographic case study (Creswell, 1998; Ely, 1991; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003) in order to provide in-depth accounts of situated pedagogy of empowerment documented in one-year microgenetic development trajectory. Addressing the need for less studied but increasing adolescent English language learners, an exemplary case of high school ESL class in a Western New York urban school district was purposefully selected (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Collected data as a non-participant observer and learner from Ms. Sunim Kwon's class with 40 linguistically and culturally diverse pupils from low socioeconomic class were systematically analyzed through developmental, spiral, NVivo10-complemented (Bazeley, 2007) procedures of induction and constant comparison.

Introspective and retrospective data from multiple sources for triangulation (Denzin, 1978 as cited in Mathison, 1988)—videotaped class observations, semi-

structured notes, audiotaped, semi-structured, individual interviews with the teacher and six focal students, and pedagogy-related documents and cultural artifacts--were collected from prolonged engagement in the field.

## **Findings**

The goal of empowering minority students is realized through systematic actions of understanding, acknowledging, respecting, and utilizing their cultures, languages, and heritages, all of which are inseparable (Risager, 2006), as 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzalez et al., 2005) for students' learning and development. Finding 'semiotic mediation' (Vygotsky, 1986) to be the core mechanism that enables and sustains the pedagogy, I term the pedagogy of empowerment *Transformative Mediated Instruction (TMI)* and, below, describe featuring dimensions: (a) microgenetic journey in transformative zones of empowerment, (b) signature pedagogical rituals of transformative zones; and (c) dialoging diverse cultural worlds in transformative zones.

Transformative Mediated Instruction (TMI)

Microgenetic Journey in Transformative Zones of Empowerment

What they do in class is not 'doing school' as prescribed; rather it creates 'third space' (Bhaba, 1990; Moje et al., 2004) with their own microculture (Banks, 2009) in the situated 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991) ("class itself is a social association"). Empowerment in this class is traced in its 'microgenetic' history (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) through Zone of Origin, Zone of Intensive Learning, and Zone of Beyond Learning (see Table 1 for major characteristics of transformative zones of empowerment practices).

Zone of origin. As Vygotsky (1986) aptly theorizes about the origin of learning and development, empowerment through learning in this class originates in the social ("They always work together. Kids always prefer"), rather than the individual, in multiple forms—whole-class lectures, one-on-one mini conferences and group video projects.

Table 1
Major Characteristics of Transformative Zones of Empowerment Practices

| Zone                             | Agent of Practice/Role        | Major Characteristics of Practices  |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Zone of<br>Origin                | Teacher/Master                | Terse and seamlessly embedded in the whole-class session<br>Recursive and woven in developmental layers<br>'Situated' (Gee, 2004), focused, purposeful, and relevant to the<br>learning task at hand<br>'Multimodal' (New London Group, 2000), hybrid, and flexible |
|                                  | Student/Apprentice            | Developmentally autonomous with their individual work in class Individually progressive with own pace   |
|                                  | Class/Learning<br>Community   | Collaborative Ongoing teacher-led discussion  |
| Zone of<br>Intensive<br>Learning | Student/Author /Filming Staff | Initiating the student-teacher interactive communicating ('ICW') Privileged speaking rights Multimodal and hybrid Equal speaking rights   |
|                                  | Teacher/Co-Author             | Responsive to the needs of individual author's work Goal-oriented in the 'activity' system (Leontiev, 1981) e.g., one-on-one writing-in-progress mini conferencing for interactive feedback on individual work in class Multimodal, hybrid, and flexible            |
|                                  |                               | Quiet at individual seatwork except Author and Co-Author Noisy ('Sound of Collective Learning') Shared learning laughter (Mariage, 2001)  |
| Zone of<br>Beyong<br>Learning    | Teacher/Enabler               | Finding and guiding the real-world opportunities of students' shining e.g., Western New York Student Film Festival  |
|                                  | Class/Producing<br>Community  | Creating and producing signs of identity development and empowerment (Cook, 2002; Kress, 2003) e.g., collaborative, multilingual letter to the U. S. President and collaborative films submitted to the regional film festival                                      |

Zone of intensive learning. When an individual student is developmentally ready, the Zone of Intensive Learning unfolds in pairs for one-on-one writing-in-progress mini conferencing—or as a whole class for a class video project, with a clear goal of learning ("You are not here to socialize. We don't come to play"). Learning is aimed at "[helping] them to be a valuable member of the society...productive member of the society", not those "disabled in their mind...accept welfare check."

Zone of beyond learning. Education in this class defies cultural deprivation expectations ("everybody has a different gift"); their committed learning opens up the opportunity so as to experience the moment of *Shining* as film producers and multimodal sign-makers (Cook, 2002; Kress, 2003) out of multimodal funds of knowledge of language, culture, and heritage.

Signature Pedagogical Rituals of Transformative Zones

The functional system that enables and sustains the class' microgenetic development (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) was not given top down; rather, the new 'Discourse' (Gee, 2004) of ESL 'third space' (Moje et al., 2004) was created and practiced fluently and solemnly by societal minority members. Their 'internally persuasive' (Bakhtin, 1981) 'Discourse' that represents the closet-sized 'discourse community' (Borg, 2003) is featured in a series of pedagogical, social actions regularly and seamlessly practiced by the participants in the learning community.

Signature Pedagogical Rituals (SPR) are (a) observable, (b) shared and systematically practiced by all members, (c) needs-based and situated, (d) transformative in that each SPR mediates them to leap to the next level of language learning and identity development, and (e) practiced in multiple ways. The first SPR involves Golden

Principles of Learning—including "Keep Your *Dignity*" [emphasis original]. The 'third space' walls present heterogeneous cultural heritages—drawn, written about, or painted in their memoirs. Regardless of overt social oppression ("Go back to your country" [student-created signage as a video project prop]), what they do in class strengthens their awareness of heritage. Second, Mini Conferencing is how Ms. Kwon practices 'caring pedagogy' (Noddings, 2005) (see Appendix A for the procedure). Recursive timeconsuming consultation helps students' writing skills needed in the present and the future ("I fix with the student...show them how to fish"). Third, dialogic (Bakhtin, 1981) Initiation-Conference-Work (ICW) distinguishes 'Discourse' (Gee, 2004) here from the prevalent classroom interactive pattern of 'IRE/F' (Initiation-Response-Evaluation/Feedback) (Mehan, 1979) in that 'Initiation' is performed by the student, 'Conference', by the student and the teacher, and 'Work', by the student. Fourth, exceptional Digital Video Task-Based Learning (DVTBL)<sup>1</sup>—in practice by only 1% of the district ESL teachers—plays a pivotal role resulting in outstanding learning process and outcomes (see Figure 1 for 4C Teacher Talk of Empowerment dimensions and Appendix B for the DVTBL procedure). The once-oppressed do not longer remain on the ideological margins (Freedman & Ball, 2004) as they build liberating 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1990) of making a video—once considered "white" students' unearned privilege (McIntosh, 1989)—and use it to advance knowledge ("My goal is usually, always, get the kids ready for their regular English language arts classes").

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> In-depth analysis of 4C Teacher Talk of Empowerment in DVTBL will be presented in a separate paper.

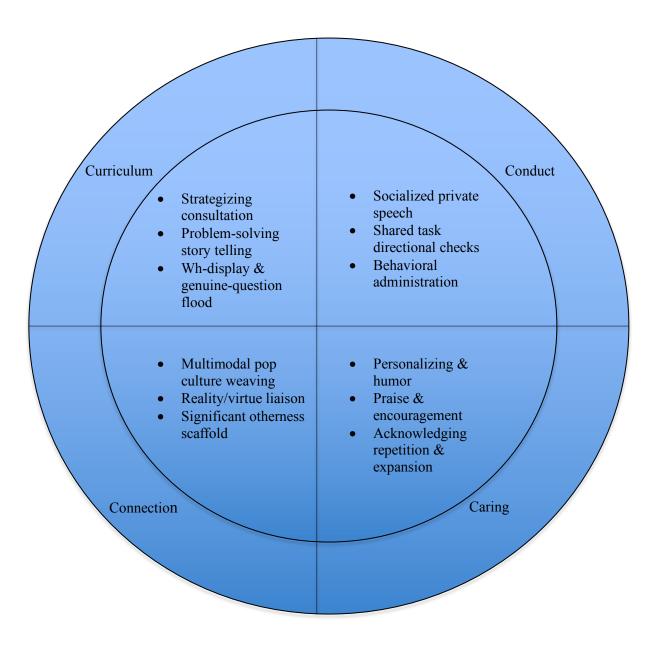


Figure 1. 4C Teacher Talk of Empowerment of Digital Video Task-Based Learning

Dialoging Diverse Cultural Worlds in Transformative Zones

The key to empowering this community relates to how language-culture-heritage is 'dialogically communicated' (Clark & Holquist, 1984) and becomes active 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzalez et al., 2005) for intensive learning, not oppressed by 'authoritative' (Bakhtin, 1981) school language policy ("Easy for them to speak in their own language. But that's not allowed in ESL classroom"), nor denied personally ("I am American. I was born here"). The class converges, sharing some similarities; they diverge, standing out in terms of other differences (Holquist, 2002). Inspiringly, their 'third space' (Bhaba, 1990; Moje et al., 2004) does not suppress sociocultural differences; rather, it seems to generate and nurture simultaneous 'heteroglossic voices' (Wertsch, 1991).

Enriching diversity in multicultural story production. As shown in the vignette (Appendix C), this class' multicultural story production time is unique in that the teacher and students "expand on it [textbook story], make the culture as best as possible" and freely add additional cultural stories out of their 'cultural capital' to the curricular story in the making. Empowering are their new roles; all are multicultural story producers. What the class does with the district-book story is not answering reading comprehension questions to prepare for a required unit test. The test result is formidable enough to determine whether each passes or not in the year-end; this class does, however, not seem to be slaving to the test. Students as 'transformative intellectuals' (Giroux, 1985) demonstrate genuine interest in sharing and building knowledge collectively.

Thus, the story producing is voluntary, collaborative, and engaging. Their shared involvement transcends to 'deep learning' (Gee, 2004) of other cultures—once-foreign

cultural beliefs. Such 'dialogic communication' often leads to life-relevant 'virtue lessons' ("I can't, never, do...what you are told to do.... Character education teaches moral values"). Notably, despite the heightened level of engagement, each contributor respects others' speaking rights and practices their "keeping dignity" SLR. Ms. Kwon, as a more knowledgeable one, shares ownership with the class and expands the others' 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1986). Through multicultural story coproduction, this 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991) co-builds 'interculturality' (Dietz, 2009) and empowers their heritages.

Flooding dialogic learning with genuine and scaffolded display questions. Ms. Kwon's 'pedagogical content knowledge' (Shulman, 1987) is demonstrated in (a) known-answer-soliciting 'display questions', particularly 'Wh-questions' that scaffold higher order thinking and (b) unknown-response-inviting 'genuine questions' (Long & Sato, 1983; Thornbury, 1996). Ms. Kwon's simple genuine question, "Who did not see Mummy #1?" (Appendix C), stimulates immediate uptake by students including oftensilent students, Yebier and Dante. The teacher uses students' popular movie microculture as a bridge ("you have to learn...how kids like to learn and use them, media") to connect with the curricular topic.

Connecting and revitalizing home heritage. 'Dialogical communication' extends to restore voices of home, possibly silenced and often disconnected to school in the Old World. Even when parents come to school, often without communicative competence in English, they may not find themselves to take real part in the parent-teacher conference. Home heritage revitalization practices include: (a) mentioning and asking about family members as motivators ("You probably get the highest mark. It'll make your mother so

happy"), (b) visiting student homes or making phone calls voluntarily to learn how to better help the students in need, (c) writing a teacher's 'grade letter' in the linguistic mode communicable with home, (d) encouraging video production in which parents can take pride ("your parents don't know what's going on in class....They don't read English. This [movie], they can see"), and (e) personally inviting parents to the film festival event. Thus, home connection restores and revitalizes the parents' righteous rights to understand and participate in students' school life as other cultural majority parents do. Home renaissance fuels pedagogical equity and social justice.

In brief summary, Ms. Sunim Kwon's situated transformative pedagogy— *Transformative Mediated Instruction (TMI)*—for and with her linguistically and culturally diverse students mediates students' empowerment through microgenetic, developmental interaction in the transformative zones, co-creates signature learning rituals, and bridges diverse cultural worlds through dialogue.

## **Implications**

The findings of this study provide in-depth insights of much needed transformative pedagogy for less privileged students and enrich theoretical knowledge in the literature on critical multicultural education for *all* in the present multilingual, multicultural society. Also, detailed accounts of practice inform interested educators and education leaders of the ways to develop their professional competency.

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## Appendix A

# Signature Pedagogical Ritual:

# Mini Conferencing Ritual Procedure

## Phase 1: Setting the Zone of Intensive Learning

After the student's initiation and the teacher's invitation to the *Dark Side* Zone of Intensive Learning, the pair sits close facing each other and sharing the teacher's desk where the notebook is to be put. The teacher checks on her formative assessment booklet and announces the current status of the student in the agenda of the current writing task ("So, this is your second writing for the second marking period. You have two more to do for this marking period.").

## Phase 2: Reading the Text and Creating a Graphic Organizer Simultaneously

The student creates the graphic organizer in the format that s/he selects such as a box and two circles by selecting task-relevant information from the text and writing it down on the notebook while reading the text. Optionally, the student can choose to take written notes, as prewriting practice, on the notebook while reading before creating a graphic organizer.

## Phase 3: Consulting the Graphic Organizer (Mini Conferencing I)

The student and the teacher sit close face-to-face and correct the parts needed for improvement. The teacher leads multimodally; the student participates multimodally. Often a red pen is used to saliently mark the feedback. A constant gaze, close proximity, and finger pointing at the part of writing are also used to

draw the student's attention to and raise awareness of the written error, which suggests what is needed to be improved.

# Phase 4: Revising the Graphic Organizer

With the marked notebook, the student comes back to the seat and revises the marked graphic organizer.

## Phase 5: Consulting the Revised Graphic Organizer (Mini Conferencing II)

When the student is ready, the student initiates the second mini conferencing and the teacher acknowledges the second round by inviting to the Dark Side again. The conference participants meet again to read and critique the revised graphic organizer in the similar way it was done in Mini Conferencing I.

## Phase 6: Writing the First Draft

The cycle of Phases 3 and 4 is repeated until the revised graphic organizer is acceptable. When the teacher assesses it as enough a tool to be used to write the first draft with, the student returns to the seat and writes the first draft on the notebook, referring to the selected information on the revised graphic organizer.

## Phase 7: Consulting the First Draft (Mini Conferencing III)

Using the same ritual of initiation and invitation, the consulting pair meets again to read and critique the first draft as done in the previous mini conferencing above.

### Phase 8: Revising the Draft

The student revises the draft, if needed.

# Phase 9: Consulting the Revised Draft (Mini Conferencing IV)

The student and the teacher meet again to read and critique the draft.

# Phase 10: Writing the Final Draft

The cycle of Phases 7 and 8 is repeated until the revised draft is accepted through the spiral mini conferencing. When the revised draft is good enough to be written up, the student writes the final draft.

# Phase 11: Archiving the Final Draft in the Student Portfolio (Mini Conferencing V)

The student and the teacher meet again to submit and accept the final draft with the final graphic organizer. The teacher writes the grade on the final submissions and on the grade book, and keeps the final submission in the student's portfolio.

## Appendix B

# Signature Pedagogical Ritual:

## Digital Video Task-Based Learning Ritual Procedure

# Phase 1: Brainstorming the Movie Theme

The whole class, sitting but not in the usual columns but in a half circle, brainstorms and discusses possible movie themes. The teacher, standing, leads the discussion in front and writes down the ideas from the students on the blackboard. Everyone has the equal say. The movie theme is decided unanimously.

## Phase 2: Drawing the Storyboard on the Blackboard

The whole class, still sitting, expresses the idea of each scene to make up the whole story line of the movie on the chosen theme. The teacher draws the idea scene on the blackboard one by one.

## Phase 3: Writing the Storyboard on the Blackboard

As the storyboarding drawing continues, the whole class, sitting, decides what to say in each scene, and who, referring to the drawn scene. Teacher, standing, writes utterances on each scene.

## Phase 4: Discussing Props and Roles

The whole class, still sitting, discusses the materials that they need to act each scene. The teacher, still standing, writes the material list of available resources--a lamp, a shower curtain, a painting of iceberg, to name a few--on the blackboard. Students and the teacher volunteer to bring the material. Also, the whole class decides who will be responsible for the needed role—for example, a painter of

iceberg, actor one of scene one, actor two of scene two, a camera person, a lamp holder, an film editor. The teacher writes down the responsible persons' names on the blackboard.

# Phase 5: Shooting the Footage

The whole class, now standing, moves the desk chairs to make space for shooting footage. Everyone has a role to participate; the teacher is the director with the cue sign, which is her index finger. Acting, supporting and, thus, shooting the footage according to their storyboard takes place. They move around in the classroom. The learning noise—Sound of Collective Learning—with excited, shared learning laughter is heard.

# Phase 6: Viewing and Critiquing the Footage

The whole class, now sitting, views and critiques the recorded footage. They pay intensive attention. The teacher leads the critique by asking the students what they think and how they want to improve it. Continues their learning noise with shared learning laughter as each scene of their shooting is showing on the screen.

## Phase 7: Re-Shooting the Footage

According to the decision based on the collective critique on the first footage, the whole class, standing, acts for the new footage. Continues learning noise with excited, shared learning laughter.

# Phase 8: Re-Viewing and Critiquing the New Footage & Selecting Music and Sound Effects

The whole class, sitting, views the new footage. Critique continues. They also discuss what music or sound effects fit each scene. The teacher plays options and

lets the students decide their preferred fit. The learning noise with shared learning laughter continues.

## Phase 9: Editing the Movie with a Computer & Working on Textbook Seatwork

The editor of the day or of the movie edits the movie with the teacher's training and help. They sit close in one corner of the classroom and edit the footage using the teacher's laptop computer and movie making software (iMovie). The teacher tells and shows them overtly editing steps one by one. After the training, the student editors do the rest by themselves. Their training and editing are done in a hushed voice while the rest of the class work on their own textbook seatwork. Various actions take place simultaneously. The class is quiet.

## Phase 10: Screening and Evaluating the Edited Movie

The whole class, sitting, views the edited movie. Using the teacher-made video project evaluation rubric, the whole class discusses their collaborative movie production to answer the central questions--what they learned from the video project and how they can improve the process and the product. The teacher leads discussion to give student producers fair turns to speak out the opinion freely. Learning noise with shared learning laughter fills Zone of Intensive Learning of their own co-constructing.

## Appendix C

# Multicultural Story Production Vignette:

## The Boy King

Ten students are sitting in three columns in Ms. Kwon's third period. They are reading the text in the print textbook together page by page. Students take turns to read aloud a paragraph. Their seat indicates the turn; students know their turn; no one has to be called on. The assigned chapter of the period is entitled 'The Boy King'; it includes stories of Egypt.

Yesenia: (as she hears Ms. Kwon's announcement of the story about Egypt)

I don't know about Egypt.

Ms. Kwon: Miss Yesenia says she doesn't know about Egypt.

Ms. Kwon asks Yesenia to read the passage aloud. After she finishes reading the page, Ms. Kwon asks the class about a popular movie, 'Mummy'.

Ms. Kwon: Who did not see Mummy #1? Did you see those guys chasing after

you?

Student: Mommy or mummy?

Ms. Kwon: That's mummy. Egypt. If you saw Ten Commandments, that's

Egypt.

Hidalgo: Yeah, I saw it in cartoon.

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION OF EMPOWERMENT

25

Yesenia: Yeah! In the cartoon!

Ms. Kwon: (tells other stories of Egypt than the one in the textbook)

Dante: Miss, Egypt had the light bulb.

Ms. Kwon: (stands and draws on the blackboard) You learn Pythagorean....

They knew it.

Leonardo: (laughs at the drawing on the blackboard) That's ahahahahah.

Ms. Kwon: ....Egyptians believe in life after death.

Then, Leonardo adds what he knows about Egypt to the story in the making. And, Yesenia adds what she knows about Egypt to the story in the making. Ms. Kwon draws more on the blackboard, and tells more stories. Mohamed adds to the collective story. So does Yebier. Ms. Kwon joins telling stories about Peru and Easter eggs. Now, the whole class looks more attentive to the text through the story production to which they contribute. Then as soon as they hear burying part of the story of Tutankhamen, some students express cultural rejection, discomfort and even disgust verbally.

Mohamed: I don't get it. They put them in rooms.

Yesenia: I don't understand.

Ms. Kwon: It's their belief. It's their culture. You have to respect them.

Then they continue to read more of the story.

Mohamed: He married his niece. Oh my god.

Ms. Kwon: Pure blood. Sometimes, brothers and sisters. They believe in pure

blood....That's their culture to preserve their blood.

Yesenia: You have to respect them!

Then, their story about the pure blood touches on cultural equity issues of the present time. Their story production continues.