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# A novice ESL teacher's experience of language learning in France: an autoethnographic study of anomie and the "Vulnerable Self"

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A Novice ESL Teacher's Experience of Language Learning in France:  
An Autoethnographic Study of Anomie and the "Vulnerable Self"

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
Eastern Washington University  
Cheney, Washington

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree  
Master of Arts: English  
With an emphasis in  
Teaching English as a Second Language

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By  
Christopher Ryan  
Winter 2012

Master's Thesis

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## Abstract

This thesis combines diary study with autoethnography to report an MATESL candidate's study abroad experience as an advanced learner of French. The writer summarizes language-learning experiences in Quebec and France while focusing on his second study abroad experience in France, where he encountered an educational system that was inconsistent with his training as a language teacher and his learning style as a language learner. He discusses challenges he faced in a language institute he was required to enroll in before he could matriculate in the university. Rote memorization and test preparation were the primary focuses of two classes, but the other three were more engaging. The author contrasts his teaching philosophy with the learning arrangements he experienced in his third study abroad experience. He concludes with a discussion of what he learned from the experience and how the learning environment influenced his future practices as a language teacher.

## Acknowledgments

I have several people whom I wish to thank for their inspiration and support over the years leading to the completion of this document.

First, I would like to thank my friend and former classmate, Catharine Cooper, who was my classmate in our Chemistry classes at Yakima Community College. Cath is one of the most brilliant classmates that I have ever studied with, and she is a friend who, by her own example, has always inspired me to do my very best.

I want to thank my first French teacher, Dr. Nathalie Kasselis-Smith, who helped me to realize that I was able to succeed at the university level of study, and she made me believe that I could and would learn French.

I also thank Dr. Kelton Knight, my French professor who was so patient with me as I worked to learn the nuances and intricacies of French grammar. Dr. Knight is one of the only men whom I love in this world, and his patience will always serve to inform my own teaching style.

I want to give thanks to Dr. Patricia Black, who was my first mentor when this work was little more than an idea. Though as the Department Chair of Foreign Languages and Literatures at California State University, Chico, she did not have a vested interest in my project, she graciously agreed to my request to receive her guidance. This was indeed fortuitous for me, particularly since this kind of guidance was not available to me from my own program at Chico.

With Dr. Black's mentorship, the idea of what a thesis is and what it should be was forever demystified for me. Together, we tilled the ground, and we planted the seed for this work. In the ensuing years' time, that seed has had many different influences, and it has assumed a new life in its own right. But it has grown from my early work with Dr. Black, and I sincerely hope she realizes the important contributions she made to my project. Thank you, Dr. Black!

I want to thank Dr. Margaret Heady, my French teacher at Eastern Washington University, and the Department Chair of Modern Languages and Literatures. Margaret has inspired in me a true and lasting love of French literature and poetry as a result of the literature classes I took with her. It is my belief that literature is the door through which one passes to truly understand a culture, and it was Dr. Heady who conferred on me her own love of French literature.

My teacher, my mentor and my friend, Dr. LaVona Reeves, MATESL Program Director at Eastern Washington University, is the central figure in my graduate education. No teacher has ever done more to support me in my academic career, nor have I ever learned more from any teacher with whom I have ever studied.

She found a way to teach me, by her example, the meaning of community in relation to the classroom culture. Her beautiful heart is a reflection of her humanity, and this is the single aspect of her teaching style which has most deeply affected me as her student. She is the example whom I will always try to emulate as a professional and as a man.

To everyone here mentioned, and to every teacher that I have ever had, particularly in Québec, QC, I offer you my deepest and most heartfelt thanks. I will do my best to be like each of you and to make you proud of me.

## Preface

I heard about the MATESL program at Eastern while in the process of researching such programs about the state. I have chosen the emphasis of Teaching English as a Second Language primarily because of my idealistic belief that conflict resolution, at any level, may be best addressed through communication. Additionally, given the status of English as the current *lingua franca*, I am well positioned as a native English language speaker and eventual holder of graduate professional degree to help second language English learners to gain their competency in this language.

As to the multi-part question as to why I have “opted-out” of my previous program affiliations I will share this: my personal learning and teaching philosophies are in accord on the point that education is a co-creation between a student and his teacher. I feel strongly that this is a concept tied to democratic principles. I see a teacher’s role to be more a *facilitator* than of a *fountainhead*. Elitism, intellectual cultism or group think has no place in the academic context, in my opinion.

Why Eastern?

Simply put, I am hoping and praying that at Eastern I may find the kinds of relationships with my teachers which came so effortlessly to me as an undergraduate student at Central, in Québec and in France. I have teachers there with whom I am in regular contact and about whom I unashamedly say I love as teachers and professional role models. I chose not to apply to Central’s MA/TESOL program only because one of my teachers once cautioned me against academic inbreeding when considering my options for graduate school.

My undergraduate degree is in Foreign Language with an emphasis in French. It was conferred in December 2008. French is my passion. I believe that this degree has prepared me as no other could have to become an English teacher in that my French language studies have taught me more about my first language, English, than I learned previously in the totality of my English language studies. And in this process, I have come to love language studies more than any other field of interest that I have been involved in, including art and science.

The short response to the question of my career goals is 1) become a Peace Corps volunteer upon finishing grad school 2) teach my way around the world, leaving the door

open to advanced studies, most likely in Applied Linguistics. I dream of one day arriving at a level of competency in French that one may describe as fluent, though I am unsure whether or not I am fluent in my first language. In a perfect world though, I will find a home in a Francophone culture where I might continue to approach fluency, and this would be the ultimate motivator if I choose to pursue advanced studies.

I do not wish to teach in the United States. My first hope would be to land in a francophone culture where I might teach English and become fluent (whatever that means) in French. I could also be as comfortable teaching English in a cosmopolitan city such as Buenos Aires, as in an isolated mountain monastery in Bhutan. I want to live the rest of my life in the milieu of cultural and linguistic diversity *comme un citoyen du monde*.

I have studied in Québec and in France (the former for an academic year 2007-2008, and the later for a summer intensive in 2008). Without comparison, these stand as the most wonderful experiences of my life. Though not bilingual from birth, I am sure that being multilingual is in my DNA. As a language learner and a pre-service teacher, the impact of these immersion experiences has been profound. The impact of the stay abroad experience upon the acquisition of second language and culture is the primary focus of my culminating project. For the sake of my desire to acquire linguistic competency in Spanish, and of my desire to produce a professional thesis, I hope that one more study abroad trip is in my future here at Eastern.

I would characterize my writing ability in English as serviceable whether in academic writing in general, research writing or writing for science. One might say that I am able. It is interesting to note, however, that there is no particular joy for me when I write in English. It simply does not challenge me. My joy comes from writing in French. As I have gained competencies in writing in my second language, my writing abilities in English have improved in a mutually reinforcing manner. *Néanmoins, la joie demeure seulement dans l'acte d'écrire en français.*

Last semester, I had my first student teaching experience at CSU, Chico. Of all my classes, and out of all the theory I have learned related to my first two years of graduate level work at Chico, nothing had been so important, relevant or exciting to me as was this experience. The students with whom I worked were international students

from the on—campus English language institute, the American Language and Culture Institute. For most of these students, their work at ALCI was in preparation for the opportunity to apply to mainstream classes at CSU, Chico.

I am sure that they taught me more than I taught them, and my relationship with their teacher, Karen Duffy was one of the most outstanding relationships that I have forged in my academic career. This experience confirmed for me the fact that I had made the correct decision in choosing to become a teacher.

### **Language Learning Experiences during the MATESL Program**

During the entire work on my Master's degree here at Eastern, I continued to take advanced level French courses. I have taken French 305, French 431 and French 433 in residence while at Eastern and during my study abroad I also took French Film, Contemporary French History and Francophone Literature and Culture.

### **Language Teaching Experiences during the MATESL Program**

While in residence in the MATESL program at Eastern, I was an intern for the English 112, Composition for Multilingual Writers in the Fall quarter of 2010. In the Winter and Spring quarters of 2011, I continued to work with two of my original four students who went on to take English 101 and English 201. And once again in the Winter quarter of 2012, I was an intern in the English 459 class where I co-taught the Grammar for Teachers class with Dr. Reeves and tutored international students.

### **Language Teaching Philosophy**

Students are the reason that I became a teacher. They are important. I see my job to be to connect the curriculum I will teach to their lives in culturally sensitive and personal ways that reflect their needs and desires as they express them to me.

I will use any method or combination of methods necessary to accomplish these goals, but invariably my pedagogical approaches will be consistent with the principles of the Whole Language philosophy of language teaching. Specifically, I will seek to use authentic materials, the students' own input and a situated pedagogical approach that keeps these students as active participants in the language community I will try to create in my classroom.



## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Preface.....	iv
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2 Review of Literature .....	29
Chapter 3 Research Methodology .....	39
Chapter 4 Autoethnography: Diary Study .....	53
Chapter 5 Discussion and Final Reflections.....	81
References .....	97
Vita .....	103

## Chapter 1 Introduction

I am a storyteller. I find this story of French language study so improbable that it almost defies telling, yet it is so amazing and life-affirming that it must be told unabashedly through autoethnography. In this work, I will be true to my vision, my dreams, my values and my interpretations of my lived experiences. It is the story of study abroad and is based on concurrent and retrospective journals I have written in the past six months. As a novice language teacher, I wanted to know what language learners experience when they are in an academic setting overseas and are trying to learn that language well enough to function optimally in that setting. I also wanted to know how learners' perceptions of themselves might change as a result of language study abroad.

Stuart Hall, in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," defines cultural identities as "the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence, but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position" (in Powell, 2012, p. 299). This thesis is based on the assumption that language learner identity is a kind of "positioning" and that identity changes in both perceptible and imperceptible ways, often through immersion in the target language and culture.

Katrina M. Powell, in her 2012 *College English* article, "Rhetorics of Displacement: Constructing Identities in Forced Relocations," affirms my thoughts about displacement and a sense of shifting identities that many of our ESL students must feel, especially those who experience forced relocations: "As displaced bodies move, the identities they inhabit also move. Complexities arise as identities interact and move across space and time as they are displaced from 'home.' The inextricable linking of

bodies and language produced by and about the body is crucial in understanding how identities are constructed” (p. 300).

Although autoethnography is not a well-established research method in the humanities, it is one that lends itself well to language study. In her doctoral dissertation, *The Autoethnographic Call: Current Considerations and Possible Futures*, Kendall Smith-Sullivan traces the history of this relatively new genre of qualitative research.

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Anthropologist Karl Heider was the first to use the term ‘autoethnography’ when he studied the Dani people and published an article titled, ‘What do People Do? Dani Auto-Ethnography’ (1975). Soon thereafter, David Hayano (1979) modified the term to refer to cultural studies whereby the researcher is a full insider by virtue of being ‘native’ and, as a result, has an intimate familiarity with the group that is studied (p. 100). It took many years for the specific term ‘autoethnography’ to take root and, over the past two decades, it has been described in a variety of ways. (2011, p. 3)

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For the purpose of the present study, I underscore the point that whether one is an insider or an outsider changes, sometimes from one moment to the next—both inside the country where the target language (TL) is being spoken as the primary language for the people and outside the country where the TL is being learned as a foreign language. Those who commit decades to TL study will tell of deep connections they have to the language, the speakers, and the culture. In this thesis, I will explain the very positive experience I had while studying for one year in Quebec and living with a francophone Canadian family, where I was accepted and treated as one of them, not as an outsider. I will also present

retrospective diary entries of my experience studying French in France, which was overall a less positive experience.

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At the University of Warwick, there is a course, “Expatriation, Dispatiation, and Modern American Writing,” taught by Daniel Katz, who states there are “several overlapping and complementary aims: first, to examine the long tradition of American expatriate writing, while seeing this writing not as an escape from questions of American identity, but as a paradoxically privileged space for a dialectical encounter with them” (2012, web). Here he engages students in discussion of works by James, Hawthorne, Stein, Eliot, and Baldwin—all expatriates who lived and wrote in Europe for extended periods of time. He argues that “Europe becomes an indispensable space and conceptual construct, be it often a fantasmatic one, for the interrogation of any sort of ‘Americanness’” (web). The interrogation of “Americanness” is addressed in this thesis as well, but it is restricted to informal comparisons of the two higher education systems—in particular French and American ways of teaching their languages to foreigners.

Studying abroad means taking on roles of the expatriate, though students are often in sheltered settings within a university, not living in Paris and trying to make a living by writing, as Stein did, for example. The stories of those studying a foreign language abroad are varied, and yet all of them provide language teachers with perspectives they might not otherwise have. Our international professional organization, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, founded in 1966, asks language teachers to engage in critical ethnography and provides extensive guidelines, noting that “because of its firsthand, experiential nature, ethnographic knowledge is necessarily tied to particular contexts and periods of time” (2012, TESOL.org, web). Because this thesis is primarily

an autoethnographic and retrospective diary study based on selected, concurrent diary entries (Nunan & Bailey, 2009), I have followed TESOL guidelines for critical ethnography. In the present study, I offer “firsthand” knowledge in the context of studying French in a university-based language institute for one semester in 2011 after discussing other language-learning experiences in Quebec. TESOL guidelines ask ethnographers “to acknowledge the instability and ever-evolving nature of the cultures under study, and to explore their nestedness in and interdependence with broader sociocultural contexts” (2012, web).

### **Purpose**

This thesis examines the ways that French as a Foreign Language (FFL) is being taught in an academic setting within a university where language institute study is required prior to full university entry. Some of the FFL learners there will continue their studies and become fully matriculating students in the university while others will remain in the institute until their language skills reach university level. To exit this institute, FFL learners must pass a number of tests, and most of these tests require memorization of vocabulary, verb forms, and other grammar features. Many courses focus primarily on preparation for these exit exams.

While TESOL and the National Council of Teachers of English ask that English be taught within a meaningful context, not focusing on memorization and rote learning, it appears that in this particular institute in France, the exam is the focus. Mastery of French for Academic Purposes (FAP) is measured by discrete point testing as opposed to integrative and authentic testing in which learners synthesize materials into an essay, for example, or participate in an interview on the

subject of instruction, such as the French Revolution or Francophone African Literature.

Further, TESOL asks ethnographers to distinguish “between insider (emic) and outsider (etic) perspectives” while asking them to acknowledge that their “relative outsider status and generalized etic perspectives can offer interpretive angles that are not available to the insiders” (web). They are also asked to explain that “attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and practices, as the objective of ethnography is to come to a deeper understanding of how people in particular contexts experience their social and cultural worlds” (web).

In this thesis, I will explain my perceptions of the educational system in which I studied, and my perceptions may be different from the insiders’ view of the system. I will also write about discussions I had with professors who were primarily French, though one was Swiss and had taught in the United States. These discussions are reported anecdotally within the diary excerpts and, therefore, are not meant to be objective views of the system or of my experience as a student.

Following TESOL guidelines, I “[p]ractice reflexivity, a process of self-examination and self-disclosure about aspects of [my] own background, identities or subjectivities, and assumptions that influence data collection and interpretation” (web). This thesis, therefore, is a practice of reflexivity, which is also required in the master’s program I am now completing. TESOL asks autoethnographers to “expect patterns, categories, or themes to evolve as data collection proceeds rather than imposing them a priori,” and by this they are asking researchers to proceed with an open mind rather than forming hypotheses done in quantitative experimental research.

TESOL requires that we address the “different subject positions of the researcher. Adopt a reflexive approach; interpret [our] own biases, backgrounds, and identities (e.g., of scholarship, ethnicity, class, gender, region) both in the field and outside” (web). The researcher must also consider the ways that his or her background may “shape the research and cultural representation” (web) while making every effort not to “stereotype, essentialize, and generalize [the] culture reductively. Thus, a critical interpretation represents the culture in all its complexity, instability, and diversity”—no small feat when the researcher is examining his own experience as a language learner within a system that is different from his own.

In brief, autoethnography is a self-narrative that “places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text, as in the case of ethnography” and it can be done by “either an anthropologist who is doing ‘home’ or ‘native’ ethnography or by a non-anthropologist/ethnographer” (Smith-Sullivan, 2012, p. 3). In this latter case, genres merge, and the writing takes on elements of memoir and/or autobiography.

Autoethnography, according to Trahar (2009), is a genre in which the author exposes “the vulnerable self” and that disclosure can be painful for the writer and for the reader. It is, however, a genre that takes us into the heart and mind of the language learner, and that is my purpose. It is a genre that gives voice to learners, and that voice may help novice teachers understand the struggles learners are experiencing as they work in an academic setting in a language other than their own.

In the present study, readers will hear my voice change from a detached academic voice to a frustrated language learner’s voice. I have mixed codes by

switching to the vernacular in the diary in English, and I have also written in French at times and provided English translations in footnotes where needed. So what I am doing in this thesis is a hybrid kind of research. It is experimental, but this kind of insight into language learning is needed in our field. This methodology continues to be “a target of criticism within the academy because it is evocative, therapeutic and—‘popular,’ yet this is also its strength and makes it *ideally* suited to go to the mainstream” (Smith-Sullivan, p. 203).

It is a genre that presents particular challenges for both readers and writers, yet TESOL asks teacher educators to provide language-learning experiences for pre-service ESL teachers because it is believed that we become more empathetic teachers if we put ourselves in ESL learners’ shoes. We are also asked to keep diaries of our experiences in learning and teaching language (Nunan & Bailey, 2010; Numrich, 1996). While there may still be problems with such methodologies, I embarked on the project and will trace my recent paths to becoming a Francophone who will be an ESL teacher. And this is my journey.

### **Struggles with French**

I wish I could say that I chose my passion and then describe how it came to pass — but in reality, it chose me. I remember that day as if it was yesterday. It was the first hint of the real spring to follow in March, 2005....a classmate and I found ourselves sprawled out on the floor looking at photos—dozens of cherished memories from her time in Kenya as a Peace Corps Volunteer. As she told me her stories, sometimes in English, sometimes in Kiswahili, my world changed forever. She took me to Kenya that afternoon. In retrospect, I can see clearly that it was that very March afternoon when events



conspired to lead me to my passions: language and culture. It was that day when I began to dream beyond my world, my culture and my language.

Around that time, I began to notice a critical difference between my friend and myself: Kath is a brilliant and gifted thinker. She is the most rational woman I have ever met to this day. I began to realize that this was her *least* endearing trait. A certain vulnerability, a certain lack of sureness, a certain shadow of a doubt — these were all missing behind her impeccable wall of reason. I thought about how I was so different from her; in a pinch, I could put on that thinker's cap and rationalize with the best of 'em, but that was not my inclination, nor was it a place where I was most comfortable.

In my world, things are a bit more convoluted; they resonate with chance; they are a little vague. Having come of age in the 60's, I'm a wee bit more spacey than rational — I was gifted with an intuition deeply perceptive, and I am always most comfortable thinking in abstraction, the farther out 'a the box, the better; I still hate rules — and perhaps the most problematic of my character traits is the fact that I am a little too autonomous in my thinking for my mentors in the academy. My intuition had begun to lead me away from my first second language, Science. But it was my dear friend, Kath, who served as the mirror, which helped me to clarify what I am and what I am not.

### **Study in Québec**

Two springs later, I was about to take my first abroad trip to Québec, Canada. In the interim, I had been seduced by the most beautiful language in the world, French. In those early years as I was developing my linguistic competencies in French, it was form (grammar) which dominated (tortured?) my linguistic experiences — de-contextualized

and inauthentic though it was, those seeds found fertile ground in my imagination and in my inter-language (IL). I had begun to dream in French.

I was, however, very poorly prepared to succeed in socio-pragmatic terms in Québec. I could conjugate many irregular French verbs and define each and every one. I could not, however, form simple sentences (SVO), using each of those forms to communicate a message in the target language (TL). And then, I stepped onto the tarmac in la Ville de Québec, and the adventure was on. Like many, if not most, first-time study abroad students, my abilities were simply not up to the challenges of the immersion setting. Upon arrival in Québec, I will always remember the anger I initially had towards my French teachers whom in reality, I love to this day.

The focus on form I had been exposed to at Central Washington University was woefully inadequate to prepare me for any communicative competencies whatsoever in Québec. I felt like a moron. For most of us, this first immersion experience is learning by trial and error. And if all the errors in oral communication were the measure of what I learned that first abroad year in Québec, I had learned a great deal. And this is exactly what happened.

At about the two-thirds mark of the school year at l'Université de Sherbrooke, it started to come together for me in that immersion setting: I could finally begin to decode, with success, that unique Québécoise accent; I had started, little by little, to lose the self-consciousness and fear of speaking (read, misspeaking). Finally, I began to feel more and more at ease in my bilingual skin. Then, suddenly, it came.

The culture shock everyone had warned me would come, but it came upon my return home. In the eleven months I lived in Québec, I joyously absorbed the Québécois world around me. I felt comfortable and safe hearing French from Québec and living with and among the Québécois. At home, in the United States, I have always felt a stranger — an outsider. I am here to tell you, culture shock is all too real a phenomenon.

### **First Experience Studying in France**

Fortunately for me, in the summer of 2008, my next *séjour* abroad was only weeks away; I would be travelling to France for the first time. Better than this though was the fact that I was to travel with a group of my fellows from my university of origin, Central Washington University, and this trip was to be led by my beloved French Professor, Nathalie Kasselis-Smith. This time, I was ready to excel: this was continental French I would encounter. My competencies were accelerating without any effort on my part. I was in my element. I was becoming a Francophone. I was becoming bilingual!

In France, the good was great, but the bad was awful. Though I only tested into Level 5 of 6, Advanced Intermediate, after the first day, I felt that I would not be challenged, as I needed to be challenged in that level. I petitioned for and was granted entry into the Level 6 class. I was easily the least competent of any student there, yet I thrived in that class (this was the good part). I think that it was there in France that I first recognized how critical it is for me to be challenged to the limits of my abilities — at all times — in order to excel.

I was challenged and very patiently supported among an entire class of more advanced students. Why did I feel so at ease, so comfortable in such an environment? Sadly, in our own group of Americans, Nathalie's idea of differentiated instruction was to speak English at all times to our entire group . . . so many teachable moments were lost forever (this was the bad part).

At this writing, it is three full years since that time; I have worked diligently and tirelessly, not just to cling to my French competencies, but also to continue to improve them. I have done all I know how to do in order to try to continue my growth in the language; however, this is difficult in an Anglophone world, to say the least. Yet an inspired, motivated and passionate student will do all he can to further this end. This is not labor but love.

In hindsight, I may accurately describe this period since my first return from France as the full blossoming of my passion for all things Francophone: films, music, literature, poetry and conversation. This describes the world of my dreams now.

During this time, I have largely focused on graduate work in TESOL; it has truly been a bi-polar experience between French and English. In many ways, I believe it is quite fair to say that I am still displaced between these two linguistic worlds and in the full throes of culture shock.

I still remember Kath's words on that sunny March afternoon: ". . . there are two kinds of Peace Corps Volunteers: those who cannot take the shock of being away from what they know, who break and run back to momma's breast, and those who just never want to come back to the U.S."

## **Toward Becoming a World Citizen**

In many ways, I see this culminating work for this degree as a critical step towards my eventual and inevitable emancipation from being American towards becoming a world citizen. But how can this come to pass? I will attempt to answer that question in this way: I will recount my own journey on my third *séjour* abroad, with its mistakes and false steps, as well as, with the victories which are sure to come. I will be a player, one positioned in the field. I will approach this research with eyes, heart, and spirit wide open — I do not aspire to do more than to tell the stories, my own and those of others, who have contributed to my understanding of a second culture (C2) and the acquisition of a second language (L2) while I am in Grenoble, France. Thus, rather than formulate hypotheses, I will instead tell how the lived experiences unfolded. My idea was to collect the stories as I live in them, and then I planned to reflect upon them and try to find the meaning therein. In this thesis, as I envisioned it prior to my second trip to France for study, I wanted to

1. describe relationships among passion for language study, discipline and motivation;
2. illustrate the critical role that SLA research plays in contextualizing a reflexive process for language learners and teachers;
3. describe my previous abroad experiences in Québec and in France;
4. explain the connections between research and pedagogical training;
5. describe the first-hand experiences as a continuing (and some say, advanced) language and culture learner; and finally,

6. connect my language-learning experiences in Canada and France to my language teaching philosophy.

### **Researcher's Assumptions**

Based upon the social locations noted above, there are certain assumptions, which I listed prior to my departure for Grenoble in August of 2011 and which TESOL asks ethnographers to disclose:

- From the perspective of a language learner, I reason that my inherent passion for my continuing development in my abilities in the French language and culture will be sufficient to allow me to overcome unexpected difficulties while improving my linguistic competencies.
- I believe that my previous abroad experiences will be invaluable in helping me to adapt to my new “familial” setting in Grenoble with my host family.
- I assume that my cultural and linguistic foundation in French is so solid as to predict unqualified development in my sociopragmatic competencies in French.
- From the perspective of a researcher, I expect that the results of SLA research cited herein will be born out in practice; specifically, the recommendations drawn from studies cited here will be accurate road maps to success (as defined by sociopragmatic gains in the knowledge of the language and the culture) in the abroad setting.
- I believe that in following the models of critical ethnography, narrative inquiry through the diary, and autoethnography described earlier in this chapter and

elsewhere, my cultural and linguistic experiences in Grenoble will be contextualized and clarified to increase my own understanding of this process and, with the completion of this work, contribute to the body of qualitative research in SLA.

- I believe also that as I continue on with my teacher training, that the reciprocal relationship which informs an individual's linguistic development, as a learner and as a teacher, will continue to contribute to my sociopragmatic linguistic gains in *both* of my languages.

In keeping with the TESOL guidelines mentioned elsewhere in this work, the above list of assumptions helps to establish an important baseline against which the lived experiences may be compared and contrasted in the conclusion of this thesis. In addition, the identification of these preconceptions is an important first step in the reflexive practice recommended in the TESOL guidelines on ethnographic research methodology.

### **Misconceptions about Ethnography**

Let me then continue my story by acknowledging the guidance, patience and support of my mentor and thesis chair, Dr. LaVona Reeves. It seems, more than any teacher ever has before, she understands the intuitive and perceptive skill set which I bring to bear as a pre-service teacher, and she has somehow been able to tolerate my “deviant” approach to learning by creating the space in which I could flourish. As we have talked about my ideas concerning this work, she has adroitly led me to readings and research approaches which have helped me

tremendously to give voice to and to legitimize my deep desire to simply tell this story.

A common interest that Kath and I both shared was a deep appreciation for and love of anthropology, and as it happened, this was my minor field of study for my undergraduate work at Central Washington University. For me, ethnography seemed to hold a “magical” meaning as I began to formulate how this work could “unfold”.

It is just here where my mentor’s influence is so keenly felt. I now recognize that I was laboring under a view of ethnography that was *très, très démodé*. I had been well indoctrinated in the modernist view that Science *could* and *should* guide and objectify the proper approach to ethnographic research, in the classical manner of Franz Boas. In this view, one *imagines* oneself capable of objectivity, and that one may safely assume the position of an unbiased, uncritical and unaffected recorder of all which passes before one’s eyes. One imagines as well that one may surely and cleanly separate the “emic” from the “etic”.

However, a post-modernist, critical, grounded ethnographic approach deconstructs this classical perspective. The piece which completely changed the playing field and, with it, my understanding of the post-modernist view of critical ethnography was the publication from *TESOL Quarterly* (April 2011) on Qualitative Research Guidelines for Critical Ethnography, as described earlier in this chapter.

TESOL guidelines had a very grounding and positive effect, leading me to find my real voice. Through introspection, the researcher continuously examines his beliefs, assumptions, and biases. He makes these “subject positions, social locations,



interpretations” and personal experiences transparent to himself and to the reader (Chase, 2005, inTrahar, 2009). The effect of having discovered this “post-modern” view of ethnography may be easily summarized in a word: liberating; I am free to tell my story.

I remember another day in my mentor’s office. I was well into the process of writing this piece. I think I understand writing from the point of view of “style” or of “genre” — most certainly, from the point of view of mechanics and rhetorical conventions. Throughout my academic career, whether writing for science, writing for persuasion, or writing for research, I have found easy, consistent success. But as I continued deeper into the current work, I began to realize with great *dis*-ease that I was unsure of what writing is. That is to say, I felt I knew how to “mimic” a style or a “genre”, but I had never set about with intent to write creatively.

It was a similar moment to that in which I realized that to continue on with Science, I would have to continue the transformation of becoming a more “rational” and linear kind of thinker, like my friend Kath. In this case, I realized that I was darn good at “academic speak”, but that it no longer said anything to me. This was not my voice. I didn’t want to write, to think or to talk like that anymore . . .

### **Narrative Inquiry & Feminist Mentoring**

In a landmark article appearing in *Feminist Pedagogy* in the summer of 1992, the Briskin and Priegert Coulter assert that “[f]eminism is about social change; it is a politic of transformation. Feminism recognizes education both as a site for struggle and as a tool for change-making” (p. 247). Thanks to my thesis adviser, I

came upon a body of work that was strongly influenced by a feminist theory of education.

When I asked her, “What is a writer?” she told me that a writer is someone who writes. Then she gave me the second clue that would lead me to my voice(s) I am discovering here in this work—an article from Sheila Trahar, “Beyond the Story Itself: Narrative Inquiry and Autoethnography in Intercultural Research” (2008). To my amazement, Trahar’s article vectored the transformation which had already begun and which was fostered by the *TESOL Quarterly* guidelines and accelerated it.

The effect of this article upon my approach to this work is that it has reaffirmed my simple desire to write the current work as a story. Narrative inquiry and autoethnography are set firmly upon the same post-modern precepts as the critical ethnographic approach to qualitative research as described in the *TESOL Quarterly* Guidelines, and it is for this reason that they dovetail so nicely. I will merely introduce it here and remind my reader that it will be expanded upon in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Narrative inquiry, as with critical grounded ethnography, springs from the participatory research movement in which the researcher acknowledges being in the landscape of the research field — a player. Narrative inquiry embraces the narrative as both a *method* and a *phenomenon*. Autoethnography, according to Stenhouse, is research *in* education, as compared to research *on* education (Stenhouse, 1981, p. 113).

Autoethnography is “. . . an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural . . .” (Ellis

and Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Through the broader scope of ethnography, the investigation is linked to the culture in question; through a personal, first-person narrative, a “vulnerable self” (Chase cited in Trahar, 2009) is evidenced in the linking of these experiences to self.

According to Trahar, narrative inquiry is a qualitative form of research which involves gathering of narratives, written, oral or visual, which focuses on the meanings and interpretations which people give to their experiences. Trahar states further that “this kind of inquiry looks at the ways in which stories are constructed, for whom they are constructed, and why they are constructed” (Trahar, 2009, p. 2-3).

Narrative inquiry does not depend or limit itself to gathering one form of data; rather, through openness to multiple voices, perspectives and cultural phenomena, the research vividly depicts lived experience(s). Thus, for this researcher, this methodological approach allows me to incorporate my entire experience, emic and etic, within in the context of the story I wish to tell.

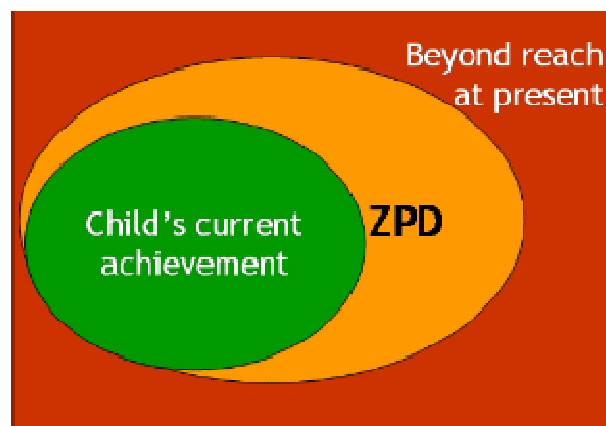
Therefore, different “media” include dreams, diaries, advertisements, impromptu discussions on the way from class, an evening at the opera or a day at the museum—poems, literature, music, learning French cooking skills or *les renseignements dans la gare*. All of these and more are valid data sources as they accurately reflect lived experience. Hopefully, my reader may easily imagine how these ideas are so liberating and inclusive in their effect.

### **Pioneers in the Field**

There is one more essential part to this introduction. I want to now mention some of the most important scholars and educators who have individually and collectively oriented my teaching philosophy. As has always been the case for me

among my three languages and cultures (*Anglais, Français et Québécois*), a reciprocal relationship exists between them that informs and reinforces each upon the other. This feedback system exists across all aspects of this process: in dreamscapes, in everyday experience, in the pedagogical (research and training) and the practical (application of theory through teaching).

The pedagogical part of this process, for me, has had profound effects. For example, as I again read Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), whose writings I first encountered in connection with his work in *Developmental Psychology and Learning Theory*, I discovered his contributions to Second Language Acquisition. I often wonder, “Why is this theory of learning so intuitively self-evident?” In order to situate the reader, I will briefly explain the Vygotskian idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as it relates to second language acquisition. The ZPD, in its essence, asserts that children will learn a (language) task more quickly and more fully if they have the opportunity to work in an engaged manner with an adult, an older peer, or tutor than they will if they attempt the task on their own. This is the essence of social constructivist theory.



**Figure 1** – Schematic Representation of the ZPD (adapted from Google Images).

When this learning theory is applied to language and culture acquisition, it is completely within its niche. When one recognizes the impossibility of separating culture from language or language from culture, it then becomes self-evident that meaning, of any kind, is an agreed upon or “co-constructed” social phenomenon—as are culture and language.

In terms of Trahar’s premise, “. . . ownership of stories is one of the complexities of narrative research. If the story is constructed collaboratively, then who ‘owns’ the story? Has it become a communal story of which we all have ownership? Or, indeed, do any of us have ownership because the story was not my story or their story but became a story through those stories?” (Yardley, in Trahar, 2009, p. 14). Neither culture, nor language has any meaning except within a social context, and I believe that one may argue effectively that they do not exist at all except within a social context.

Vygotsky’s work builds upon earlier constructivist traditions of John Dewey and complements his contemporaries. The case may rightly be made that John Dewey (1859-1952) has had the greatest influence on education in the U.S. in the 20th century. However, I will only touch upon his contributions here in describing how he, in turn, has informed this work. Dewey was as prodigious a writer as he was influential; one could easily devote an entire thesis to an interpretation and evaluation of his writings and their influence. Though such is not my goal here, I do want to honor an admonition from my mentor not to blindly disregard writings simply because they are old. It is important to examine primary sources and consider how ahead of their times they may have been.

To that end, I will briefly discuss a journal article from 1897 written by Dewey entitled “My Pedagogic Creed” which lays the foundations, in the familiar, linear, Cartesian manner of his thoughts on Education and Teaching. First, Dewey notes the psychological and sociological sides of the educational process. He gives prime importance to the psychological side as it is, in his words, “the child’s own instincts and powers which are the basis of all education; the sociological side, in comparison, serves as the means of interpretation, or contextualization of these individual expressions” (p. 77).

Second, Dewey writes about his opinion the school: it is primarily an organization that exists for the purpose of “enculturation of children and the transmission of its values” (p. 77). He further states, “I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (p. 77). This is consistent with communicative language teaching in that focus is on the here and now (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011), not on what someone might say or how it might be said in the future in some hypothetical setting. There is immediacy in both cases.

Third, Dewey addresses the topic of the Subject-Matter (Curriculum) of Education. He writes, “I believe, therefore, that the true center of correlation of the school subjects is not science, nor literature, nor history, nor geography, but the child's own social activities.” He continues, “I believe finally, that education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience; that the process and the goal of education are one and the same thing” (p. 78). Please consider the unique correlation between the following quote from Dewey and the implications of the

Process-Inquiry Model of Curriculum to be outlined just below (in McKiernan): “I believe that to set up any end outside of education, as furnishing its goal and standard, is to deprive the educational process of much of its meaning and tends to make us rely upon false and external stimuli in dealing with the child” (p. 79). This is pure, post-modern Dewey. Again, there is a focus on the here and now of educating the whole child for this immediate environment.

Fourth, Dewey addresses the Nature of Method. Dewey explains, “I believe that the question of method is ultimately reducible to the question of the order of development of the child's powers and interests and it is only through a careful and continuous observation of a child's interests that one may glean an accurate indicator of the child's intellectual development” (p. 79). Finally, Dewey deals with the issue of the school and social progress, or in fact, his view of the role of education to that of human development. He notes, “I believe that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform . . . that education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction” (p. 80). The implication is that it is through the child's involvement in the school that this transmission of social consciousness may be affected. His thought as a constructivist and his post-modernist view of the curriculum ring in deep resonance with my own philosophy of teaching, and these tenets find their complements in each of the other educators and social theorists herein cited.

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) was trained as a biologist but came to specialize in research concerning how children learn. Most notably were the twin pillars of his

thought: assimilation, which concerns the manner in which input from the environment is taken into the mind and the associated processes of making sense out of that input, and second, accommodation, which refers to the differences which result to previous ideas or thoughts as a result of the process of assimilation (assimilation, 2010). Equally significant to the field of developmental psychology were Piaget's ideas about the stages of Cognitive Development in children.

I want to briefly discuss the work and thought of two other important Educators: James McKiernan and Lawrence Stenhouse. I must again point out the significant contribution to my own learning as a result of my work with my mentor, Dr. Reeves. I took the second of two curriculum classes I have had with her; as a result of her bringing McKernan's work *Curriculum and Imagination: Process Theory, Pedagogy and Action Research*, 2008 to our attention as a supplemental text for that class, my own thinking about teacher and curriculum development has been clarified and refined as it never had been before.

That text was my introduction to the idea of "post-modernism" in that it was my introduction the idea the "banking system" of education (Freire). It was also my introduction to the idea of the *product* vs. *process* models of curriculum design, and it was my initiation to action research. There is an interesting connection to be pointed out here linking Freire's notion of the "banking system" of education in which students are essentially viewed as empty vessels to be "filled-up" with the knowledge from their teacher and the thought of John Dewey and his fundamental assertion that ". . . education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for



future living.” The connection between these writers is that learning, indeed knowledge itself, is for the moment, not for some imagined far off time.

Again, it was Dr. Reeves’ influence upon me which has fostered a total “deconstruction” of the dogmatic pedagogy of objectives-based curriculums which I had previously been indoctrinated into at CSU Chico, just the year before. One of the distinctions I came to better understand in McKernan’s writings was the differences between training and education. McKernan does support an objectives-based curriculum model for certain technical or trade specific training applications, for example in computer programming. But for education, McKernan argues effectively, intelligently and passionately for a Process-Inquiry Curriculum model. His model values expression over standards; excellence over productivity; understanding over measurement; education over training; freedom over control; diversity over unity; subjectivity over objectivity; *imagination* over uniformity. The following quote from one of the most influential of his mentors, Lawrence Stenhouse, can best explain why an objectives-based curriculum is misplaced in an educational setting: “Education as induction into knowledge is successful to the extent that it makes instructional objectives of students unpredictable” (Stenhouse, in McKiernan, 2008, p. 70). That is, it is Stenhouse’s position that the educated mind leads to unanticipated destinations.

There are extreme implications to the thoughts of these educational theorists: in our real-world condition of high-stakes, standardized testing which dominates the landscape of the educational systems in the U.S. and in Canada, if a teacher pursues education as a goal for his students, his head will certainly fall from the block as a result of the drop in the test scores (the product) of his students. It is

product (test scores) that counts in the U.S. and Canadian educational systems — not always education.

Essentially, the process-inquiry model is at irreconcilable odds with the product-based model which is in place in the schools and universities across our country. Can there be any further need to explain the deteriorating state of our educational system in America? My thesis and indeed, my teaching philosophy will remain in resonance with the process-inquiry model as now described. As previously mentioned, the process model of curriculum contrasts markedly with that of the product model. The product model appeals primarily to the work place, where the process model appeals to the world of experimentation or discovery learning. In the words of Stenhouse (1975):

The idea is that of an educational science in which each classroom is a laboratory, each teacher a member of the scientific community. The crucial point is that the proposal is not to be regarded as an unqualified recommendation but rather as a provisional specification claiming no more than to be worth putting to the test of practice. Such proposals claim to be intelligent rather than correct. (p. 188)

These are a few of the theorists and educators who have contributed to the foundation of my pedagogical training, beliefs and teaching philosophy; two more contemporary writers round out these pedagogical influences: Paulo Freire and bell hooks.

Paulo Freire (1921-1997), was a Brazilian Professor of History and Philosophy of Education. From his early work with adult illiterates in northeastern Brazil, a method called *conscientization* came to signify his approach to education. Briefly, conscientization may be explained as the development of the awareness of

one's social reality through the twin vehicles of reflection and action. Freire writes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970:

The struggle begins with men's recognition that they have been destroyed. Propaganda, management, manipulation — all arms of domination — cannot be the instruments of their rehumanization. The only effective instrument is a humanizing pedagogy in which the revolutionary leadership (teachers) establishes a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed (students). (p. 55-56)

One may conclude from Freire's writings that no educative position is neutral: it *either* serves to restrain, contain and repress its victims, *or* it exists to deliver and liberate the minds, bodies and souls of its followers; it is *either* a tool of colonialism, *or* it is the practice of freedom. These are powerful, post-modern ideas about the possibilities of education.

Born Gloria Watkins (1952- ), bell hooks feminist, poet and "cross-over" academic is perhaps the person in whom all of these above influences, and many more, converge seamlessly. She is a black woman who learned to talk back, while speaking the language of the dominant culture in a vulnerable, autoethnographic style. Important for me has been my introduction to *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, hook's 1994 collection of essays concerning education (teachers) as the repressor (see Freire) compared with education as the practice of freedom (a critically engaged pedagogy).

For me, her writings on education ring with true clarity and with a vision of hope (2003) from within a familiar cultural context. A fundamentally critical

precept of hooks's view is that of engaged pedagogy; she compares and contrasts this concept with those of critical and even feminist pedagogies by emphasizing its focus upon healing and well-being; she notes that her concept of engaged pedagogy has been deeply influenced by the writings of the Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, as well as, Paolo Freire (hooks, 1994, p. 13-14).

These writers are some of the most important influences in my pedagogical training who have made meaningful contributions to my understanding of what education can be and who have helped me to continue to clarify with precision my own philosophy of education and teaching. These writers and educators stand as exemplars of how education may become an instrument of justice and of freedom.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

“Teaching which accepts fidelity to knowledge as a criterion can never be judged adequate and rest content. Teachers must be educated to develop their art, not to master it, for to claim mastery merely signals the abandonment of aspiration.”

Lawrence Stenhouse

In “Telling Stories, Speaking Personally: Reconsidering the Place of Lived Experience in Composition,” Daniel Mahala and Jody Swilky consider the value of “academic storytelling and the limits of conventional knowledge” (1996, p. 362). It has been decades now that composition specialists have called for “interjections of the ‘personal’ in professional writing. When we advocate attention to the personal in writing, we are talking about discursive strategies through which writers can present themselves as historically situated subjects exploring how their knowledge has been shaped by lived experience” (p. 364). The present study is an answer to the authors’ call for the teacher’s “story,” “testimony,” and the “personal” writing [which] “in professional discourse is a complex and many-sided phenomenon. In one sense, storytelling as a mode of professional discourse is nothing new” (p. 362). They assert that “[a]utobiography, the ‘personal essay,’ the memoir, the travelogue, and other written genres of storytelling have long enjoyed an important position in the pantheon of Western literary genres, and reading and writing in some of these genres has long been a staple of writing instruction” (p. 362). They argue that the genre of personal writing has been isolated “within literary studies” and “has been reductively perceived as the ‘subjective bias’ of personal writing” (p. 362). They insist that personal writing about lived experience is needed in rhetorical studies. TESOL has called for similar personal writing about teachers’ and students’ lived experiences.

This review of literature in the present study provides a foundation for the diary study in Chapter 4. Reviews of earlier diary studies are readily available, so no attempt will be made to do an exhaustive review of those works. The majority of those diary studies focused on language teachers describing their foreign language teaching (Bailey,

1991); foreign language students describing their language learning; and pre-service language teachers-in-training describing their first teaching experiences (Nunan & Bailey, 2009; Numrich, 1996). As second language learner and pre-service teacher, I hope to make a small contribution to the body of qualitative ethnographic research from a different perspective.

For this thesis, there are multiple points of departure; that is to say, there are several different but related aspects of the overall process of second language and second culture acquisition represented in the literature that is reviewed here. Some of these points of interest include, but are not limited to, the following —

- How can I, as a second language learner, maximize my sociopragmatic competencies in my second language of French based upon my choices while in the immersion setting?
- How will the research from SLA, which has informed my pedagogical training and my teaching philosophy, be supported or be found lacking as a result of my experiences abroad?
- How might my past abroad experiences affect my success or failure on my third séjour abroad?
- How will the ethnographic methods I have chosen to guide my research in this work affect the story that comes out of this experience?
- How will the paradigm shift from modernism to post-modernism (Hesse-Biber, 2012) evidence itself on such diverse issues as curriculum development, applied pedagogical practices in the classroom or the subjective position of a researcher

who chooses methodologies such as critical ethnography, narrative inquiry or autoethnography?

- What will be the discovery learning that will issue from my diary-based chronicle of my experiences in Grenoble, and how might it contribute to the body of qualitative research on second language and second culture acquisition?

Each of these questions is as broad as it is sweeping. The research cited herein addresses, in one form or another, each of these separate but overlapping questions. But I believe that theory (i.e., the SLA literature) can only carry the day to a certain point, and then one must live the story.

Several of the journal articles cited in this chapter (Amuzie and Winke, 2009; Kinginger and Blattner, 2008; Llanes and Muñoz, 2009; 2008; Raschio, 2001; Segalowitz and Freed, 2004; Trenchs-Parera, 2009; and Xu, Case and Wang, 2009) are concerned primarily with the topics of how one may maximize the sociopragmatic gains in the C2 and L2 while in the immersion setting.

These articles offer specific suggestions as to what a student must do to profit the most from the abroad experience. They also address the relationship between previous abroad experiences and a current abroad experience in terms of L2 uses *in situ* and sociolinguistic awareness in immersion settings. Considerations such as the length of previous stays abroad and the effects on sociolinguistic gains in terms of initial proficiency level, length of stay, age and their use of the L2 while in the abroad setting are the main thrust of these authors' research.

If only from the point of view of a second language learner myself, these are fascinating accounts to read — there is so much in those articles which resonates

with and reflects my own previous abroad experiences. But also, from my personal point of view as a teacher in training, this SLA research supports and informs many of the pedagogical methods I have learned in graduate school.

It is important for me to mention the significant influence of Richard Raschio's article entitled "Integrated Activities for the Study Abroad Setting" (2001). Raschio writes from the informed position of a study abroad facilitator who leads groups of students from the University of St. Thomas on excursions to Spain. In his research, he explains how he and the host university collaborate to articulate activities for these international students. Raschio expects his students in immersion settings to journal in a three-step process: report, react and analyse. In the report stage of their journals, students described the processes of engagement in the host culture and their interactions with the culture bearers. This stage offered excellent opportunities for students to apply and discriminate between past tenses as they wrote about their activities. In the react stage, students were given the opportunity to express personal responses to their immersion experiences. Here, the disparity between the emic and etic perspectives yielded a rich source of topics for classroom conversations. Finally, in the analysis step of the journal process, indignation or outrage, for example, were not permitted. The point of this step is to challenge students to get beyond their own cultural perspectives while seeking reasons for the observations made and more importantly, to be able to identify the cultural perspectives of the culture bearers (Raschio, p. 535-36).

Clearly, for Raschio's students, the journal was the fundamental tool around which all of the integrated and articulated activities between their own group



and the host institution revolved. Students identify “themes” — for example, what is the role of women in this society? What is the significance of the corrido to the Spanish culture? and so on. And these themes become the points of inquiry for the students to engage their host families and the greater society as researchers. Such themes were themselves the result of Raschio’s own experiences over time as he facilitated groups of undergraduates to Spain, and he offered these themes to each ensuing group to help them to frame their abroad experiences. From this effort, Raschio found that the second language use of Spanish was greatly increased but within the limits of the students’ abilities (p. 536). As relates to the present diary study, I chose to do similar writing in concurrent and retrospective diaries. Next, the idea came to me about “personal challenge activities”—the adaptation of the concept of themes mentioned in Raschio’s article. I thought that my own personal challenge activities may revolve around the above listed questions, and they may include suggestions from the culture bearers themselves: my host family, my professors and my fellow students—both French and other international students like myself. With able benefactors from the culture, a student may exert great influence upon the eventual outcome of his efforts to make sociopragmatic gains both culturally and linguistically.

I found Raschio’s suggestions so soundly reasoned and in such accord with my own previous abroad experiences that I decided to adapt his ideas and apply them to my own case while abroad in Grenoble, France. His article re-informs the notion from SLA that language acquisition is *independent* of the language in question. These suggestions will apply to any student, to any culture and to any

language. This research process guides and informs the testing of theory through practical application, and this is desired.

Other authors significant to the literature cited in this chapter (Chase, 2005; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Holman Jones, 2005; Naples, 1997; Shope, 2006; TESOL 2011; and Trahar, 2009) have contributed significantly to my improving understanding of the paradigm shift from modernism to post-modernism as it relates specifically to the shifting subject positions of the qualitative researcher employing critical ethnography, narrative inquiry or autoethnographic research methods.

I am compelled to state, without reservation, that my evolving understanding and acceptance of post-modernist values concerning research methodologies, as well as those concerning the transformation from product—to process—models of curriculum design, is the genesis of the most significant intellectual shift I can remember in my entire life. Yet, these post-modern views assert their notions tentatively; in this way, they resonate with my philosophy, my intent and my own values as a learner, as a teacher and as a researcher. This tentative view, as explained so clearly by Stenhouse, does not seek to announce a fact or to expose a truth. Rather, it states only that a given idea or theory is worth investigating. Thus, it is this continuing commitment to the investigative act which is one of the hallmarks which separates post-modernism from modernism.

I have made the connections to all but one of the above questions which are not dependent upon results from the diary for this inquiry, except for one: How will the research from SLA which has informed my pedagogical training and my

teaching philosophy be supported or be found lacking as a result of my experiences abroad? That is, should discrepancies be identified, how might these differences contribute to the discussion in the field of SLA?

In retrospect, I can remember three years ago the first graduate level class in MATESOL I ever took, Second Language Acquisition. I now recognize my earliest encounter with post-modernism. A seminal book by researchers De Bot, Lowie and Verspoor, *Second Language Acquisition: An Advanced Resource Book*, described a model of language as a dynamic system — that is to say a person's first, second or third, language is never stable but continues to develop as used. Conversely, stagnation or attrition are the resulting states from nonuse of the language. De Bot et al. view language as a group of variables which interact through time, and each variable affects all of the others. The foundation of their conceptualization is *systems theory* from applied physics and mathematics. I recognized immediately how intuitive these observations about second language acquisition were, even as a novice teacher in MATESOL.

From the beginning of my pedagogical training as a teacher, I have been fascinated with this kind of interdisciplinary overlap. Now, with a bit more seasoning, I would venture to add that each of these linguistic variables from *within* a given language, for example the L1, affects all of the other variables of any other language, for example, the L(n). It is for this very reason that I have chosen to examine the interplay, via this inquiry, between English and French and between learner and teacher.

Writers such as (Freire, 1970; hooks 1994, 2003; McKernan, 2008 and Stenhouse, 1975) are each responsible for the continuing deconstruction of modernist learning and teaching positions into which I had been initiated; each, in turn, has revealed a slightly different aspect of post-modernism for my consideration. Whether in terms of gender equality, social justice and freedom, new, more meaningful mandates and perspectives of curriculum design or the idea of teaching as a commitment to *service* — these teachers have contributed to the paradigm shift I am so deeply in the throes of at this writing. This, I believe, is the true nature of what *education* can be at its best.

At the same time, bell hooks (2003), writing on the topic of teaching as service, has voiced professional values which, though I arrived at them independently of having read her work, are in perfect accord with my own. She writes, “Commitment to teaching well is a commitment to service” (p. 83). There is no stronger point of agreement between our views of teaching. And on my path towards becoming a teacher, I have unfalteringly chosen to step in the direction of service. In my heart, service is synonymous with teaching: teaching our teachers, teaching our students and teaching our colleagues. Teaching is service. Continuing, hooks writes,

When professors “serve” each other by mutual commitment to education as the practice of freedom, by daring to challenge and to teach one another as well as our students, this service is not institutionally rewarded. The absence of reward for service in the interest of building community makes it harder for individual teachers to make a commitment to serve (p. 83-84).

This is harder, but not impossible. I believe that this commitment to service must be so strongly a part of a teacher's essence that it will show regardless of and independent of *any* extrinsic reward. Teachers serve (Reeves, 2006, 2011). I believe that it is only through individual acts of service that a community may develop and flourish. As an intern, I began to understand how important service is because I spent hours and hours each week with the four multilingual writers I was assigned for the 10-week quarter. And I continue to serve these writers, just sending one back home to China and still working with the remaining three—two undergraduates and one graduate student.

I offer a final thought from hooks: “Our visions for tomorrow are most vital when they emerge from the concrete circumstances of change we are experiencing right now” (p. 12). This quote has a poignantly sweet resonance for me as I near the end of this phase of my graduate preparation to become a teacher. That is, the change I am experiencing right now in my training to become a teacher has returned me full circle to the days before I ever imagined that I wanted to teach — in those days, my motivation for returning to school was simply to prepare myself to serve others. It seems in looking back that I have always equated teaching and service.



## Chapter 3

### Research Methodology

“Everything we write is fiction.” Art Bochner

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#### Introduction: The Distant Academic Voice?

In the earliest stages of this writing, a dramatic intellectual renaissance has occurred relative to my comprehension of the meaning of ethnography. My new understanding has stretched the possibilities as I imagine them, and it is the single most exciting discovery in the process of creating this work to date. This discovery is more exciting than having found my “story—teller’s” voice. And it is even more exciting than realizing the fact that I did not need to ask if I may do this work as a “research story.”

The word *vector* comes to mind here; in my personal case, my old ideas of the proper position of a researcher relative to his research milieu experienced a collision with the post-modernist influenced ideas of critical ethnography, narrative inquiry and autoethnography in such a way as to change their direction and their velocity radically and such is the true meaning of vector. I owe this amazing experience to the influence of my mentor, Dr. Reeves.

I remember the day in her office as I struggled to intellectualize and to verbalize my conflicts surrounding a *right* and *proper* approach to ethnography. I tried to express my desire and my fear of failing in the struggle to remain objective. Somehow, I needed to keep my distance, a bit removed, somewhat like a voyeur from my research setting and those who inhabited it. I was loath to even *imagine* that I

might influence, affect or re-direct events I wished only to observe, comment upon and conclude from my experiences, from an appropriately remote distance. Such was the effect of my having been indoctrinated with the scientific method's research position entrenched in the natural and physical sciences. On a purely subliminal level, I was struggling against the impossible, though it was only later that I realized this to be the case. Somehow, if only through the brute force of will, I would walk on water . . . I would remain "objective".

I can still see that enigmatic, Mona Lisa smile of my mentor's face as she calmly and reassuringly began to explain that what I was struggling just to *imagine* how to do, was all more impossible to *actually* do. I thought to myself, "Wait a minute. You are a creative writer; a poet and a musician; a teacher trainer in MATESOL, a feminist studies teacher – what can you possibly understand about anthropology, about ethnography?" I was mere moments away from being vectored, from being enlightened, and from being given second-sight. It is not an understatement to say that what happened next, as my mentor began to describe and discuss the merits of grounded constructivist theory and critical ethnography, as described in the *TESOL Quarterly* guidelines for ethnographic research from April 2011, as the single most profound experience I have had in graduate school.

### **Constructivist Grounded Theory & Subjectivism**

My mentor gave me an article on grounded theory, explaining it as "a widely used qualitative research methodology that seeks to inductively distil issues of importance for specific groups of people, creating meaning about those issues through analysis and the modeling of theory" (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006, p. 8). It was



“founded on the premise of critical realism.” In other words, proponents of such a theory believe that “there is a ‘real’ reality but that it can only be imperfectly perceived” (p. 8). Constructivist grounded theory, evolving from grounded theory, “has its foundations in relativism and an appreciation of the multiple truths and realities of subjectivism” (p. 8), and is “ontologically relativist and epistemologically subjectivist” (p. 9). This article changed my conceptions of ethnography, which had been so firmly entrenched in traditional perceptions of research under the influence of the scientific method. In what could only have been an instant, everything I thought I knew, valued and respected about that traditional approach to research was deconstructed, transformed and reinvented in an epiphany moment as I read and reread the this definition alongside Trahar and the TESOL guidelines for critical ethnography.

Finally, someone had given me a clue. Seeing now with new eyes, my research has led me to discover the interconnectedness of critical ethnography, narrative inquiry and autoethnography as disciplines which overlap other forms of research in the participant-observer research movement and which owes recognition to influences from feminist studies, psychology, sociology, communications studies and anthropology. With all due respect for Franz Boas, et al. and the “assimilationist illusion” I had found a new way of seeing research. I did not need to claim objectivity. I could guess and think of possibilities. I like to look beneath the surface of things. I like to think as much about what is implied as what is actually said. I like to read between the lines.

These strange habits have led me to the understanding of the critical contributions of the second-wave of feminism to the participant-observation research movement and its connection to ethnography, narrative inquiry and autoethnography. According to Schope (2006), “A feminist research method resides in the spaces between contradictions: between theory and experience, insiders and outsiders and writing and orality” (p. 163). This, I imagined, would be my way of writing and interpreting the language-learner diary I would be composing while studying French in France and upon return from study abroad.

One of the most important contributions from the feminist research perspective is that of the practice of *reflexivity*. Schope says about reflexivity, “. . . by constantly interrogating one’s own position, we open ourselves to new forms of situated knowledge; such expressions as race, gender, class or ethnicity, for example, are socially specific and they are not able to be viewed apart from their unique sociohistorical context” (p. 173). She explains further that “[r]eflexivity relative to one’s social location and issues of representation can help us clarify what we claim to know, what we cannot understand and the limits of our research methods” (p. 181). “If we fail to explore our personal, professional and structural locations as researchers, we inevitably reinscribe race, class, and gender biases into our work” (Naples, in Schope 2006, p. 163).

Shope’s definition is consistent with the *TESOL Quarterly* guidelines for Critical Ethnography (2011) briefly introduced earlier in this thesis. I want to expand that a bit more and contrast it where possible with the traditional approaches to ethnography from its anthropological origins. Significantly, the critical ethnographic

approach to research, as described in the TESOL guidelines, recognizes that the researcher is situated *in* the research context. It considers interrelationships between knowledge and how it is affected by human cultural values and how it is influenced by power relationships in society.

Critical ethnography sees culture as disjointed, becoming, at odds with itself and negotiated. And this view contrasts to the traditional view of culture as unified, cohesive and fixed. The idea of “triangulation” or the inclusion of multiple data sources is paramount to critical ethnography, as is the inclusion of multiple forms of reflection. This is where reflexivity is particularly useful: it can allow the researcher to identify his anticipatory set of expectations, biases and social position. It may also be useful in identifying how the researchers’ own actions or behaviours affect the ethical, social or political life of the community.

Critical ethnography seeks to identify the “emic” or insider’s attitudes, beliefs and behaviours in order to better understand how the culture bearers experience their world. Critical ethnographers approach analysis of their data openly; that is, they look for patterns or themes to *evolve out of the data*, rather than imposing them ahead of the results. And via reflexive methods, critical ethnographers demonstrate having wrestled with the differences between the emic and etic perspectives and their differing interpretations.

Further, it should be noted that, in order to better understand the participant researcher’s position, the distinction between emic and etic is not dichotomous. With regard to the ethnographic methods I employ, the insider/outsider subject positions will often be blurred or overlapping. Again, in the guidelines from *TESOL Quarterly*,

what has been described are the recommended methodological practices for a critical ethnography, which is one of several genres of participatory research. Two others are of particular importance to my own eclectic approach: narrative inquiry and autoethnography. I will now discuss each in turn.

“Holistic reflexivity” (2012, p. 575) is what I would be doing—looking a whole rather than parts, looking at connections as well as disconnections. In acknowledging the relativism and uncertainty of the modern world, the post-modernist constructivists, writers, academics, feminists, researchers and ethnographers have turned away from the notion of a singularity of truth (reality) – towards a world which embraces an array of realities, socially situated truths and a diversity of cultural manifestations, each equally deserving of being described, of being experienced and of being investigated. A post-modernist researcher looks for ways to describe the storied lives of the culture bearers and the interactive processes of meaning making in their storied landscapes.

Trahar (2009) describes a concept called “methodological agnosticism” which is the idea that post-modernism distrusts equally any proscriptive research methodology; this allows an “openness” to the possibilities of conducting research and allowing it to unravel as life does (p. 3). A hallmark of the narrative inquiry approach to research is that it embraces the narrative as both *method* and *phenomenon*. In the narrative inquiry approach, research involves the gathering of narratives—written, oral or visual, and it focuses on meanings which people ascribe to their experiences (p. 2).

Narrative inquiry does not depend or limit itself on gathering one form of data; rather, through openness to multiple voices, perspectives and cultural phenomena, the research vividly depicts lived experience(s) (p. 4). In the act of maintaining this *openness*, the narrative ethnographer de-emphasizes his own subject position, in favor of that of the narrator in his storied landscape.

Further explanation of narrative inquiry comes from Chase, 2005: “It is characterized as an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches and both traditional and innovative methods—which all revolve around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them” (p. 652). Narratives may be written, overheard or performed, or they may be epiphanal events: they might take the form of a short story or a story of an illness or a marriage or even one’s whole life.

Chase suggests to us a series of *analytic lenses* through which to better view the nature of narratives; she makes the following characterizations concerning narratives (bullets added):

- Narrative is a distinct form of discourse which is “retrospective meaning making” and connecting and seeing consequences of actions and events over time.
- Narrative express emotions, thoughts and interpretations.
- Narrator is the protagonist (as actor or interested observer of other’s actions).
- Narratives highlight uniqueness rather than sameness.

- To narrative researchers, narratives are verbal action (they explain, entertain, inform, defend, complain and confirm or disrupt the status quo).
- Narrators highlight versions of self, reality and experience created through the narrative, not being concerned with factual representations of the story.
- Narrative researchers view the stories as enabled and constrained by a range of social circumstances.
- Narratives are seen as socially situated interactive performances produced in a particular setting, for a particular audience and for a particular purpose.
- Qualitative researchers view themselves as narrators in the process of developing interpretations of the narratives they study. (p. 656-58)

As my own understanding of different approaches to narrative inquiry continues to expand and overlap, the following two descriptions from Chase are particularly important:

From Anthropology, narrative ethnography — it focuses on long term involvement with a specific culture or community; it focuses on one individual or a small number of individuals. The researcher and the researched are presented together in a single multi-vocal text focused on the process of the human encounter (inter-subjectivity). (p. 659)

In essence, Chase makes a fine distinction of the focus of the lens, shifting in and shifting out:

And the following description of Autoethnography — the lens here is on the researcher and those with whom he interacts but the researcher writes, interprets

and/or performs their own narratives about culturally significant experiences.

Autoethnographers often present their work in alternative textual forms such as layered accounts, as poems, as plays or in other forms. The goal of Autoethnography is to *show* rather than to *tell*. (p. 660)

The notion of inter-subjectivity from Chase above is the way I believe that life is really lived and that meaning and knowledge are really created. I believe that meaning and knowledge are interactively constructed realities. The tools of the critical ethnographer, the narrative ethnographer and the autoethnographer interlace seamlessly, and they are representative of post-modern and feminist research approaches to research. My own approach to research is without question a mixture of all three of these.

A final important concept from Chase must be mentioned here, and it is that of the “vulnerable self” (p. 666). Chase writes that “in narrative ethnographies and autoethnographies, researchers expose the vulnerable self through sharing their emotions, thoughts, their unstable interpretative decisions and their research relationships, and they might even include embarrassing or even shameful incidents. Through this methodology, researchers aim to deconstruct the myth of the invisible omniscient author” (p. 666).

Thus, as I continue to find the space in which to tell my story, my lived experiences, my mistakes and my successes — my voice as a writer is evolving. And through this evolution, I have found permission, and I am daring to tell my story in a most personal way.

I want to be clear on an important point here concerning the space around the methodological approaches I am focusing on in my own research: critical ethnography, narrative ethnography and autoethnography are not distinct, separate entities. They share many similarities and philosophical influences, and the distinctions among them are, in reality, blurred.

Now I want to bring my discussion to the subject of autoethnography. Holman Jones, 2005, writing in a chapter for the *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, has an interesting take on the nature of autoethnography. She writes, “[autoethnography is] a balancing act; it works to hold self and culture together — though, always in a state of ‘flux’. It leads us to charged moments clarity, connection and change” (p. 764). She further describes autoethnography as “setting a scene, telling a story, weaving intricate connections among life and art, experience and theory, evocation and explanation . . . and then, letting go” (p. 765).

I particularly appreciate and resonate with this last description as it reveals a certain unmistakable humility and an orientation towards Buddhist values. Holman Jones pulls no punches in her writing as she intends to *politicize* the process; indeed, in her view, autoethnography is a political instrument. She offers those who would venture into the territory of autoethnography the following suggestions on how to do just that (bullets added):

- Recognize the power of the in-between — open the door to the space between analysis and action and between theory and justice.



- Stage impossible encounters — confront people with ideas, situations or others whom appear to be totally different — use the encounter to negotiate debate and dialogue.
- Contextualize giving testimony and witnessing — through contextualization of our texts, we take the first step towards social change.
- Create disturbances — write to provoke, to raise questions and to implicate; write texts that insist that to be there — on location — is to be implicated.
- Make texts of an explicit nature — ask if your text creates movement, how it creates movement and towards what ends. (p. 784)

Trahar (2009) also defines the methodology as “autobiographical in its approach to research and writing. It evidences multiple voices; multiple positions; multiple layers of complexity. It disdains ‘objectivity’ as an error of modernist thinking; it embraces the subjectivity of the researcher, narrator, and author as central to the research and to the story” (p. 7).

In resonance with the politicized stance from Holman Jones above, Chase (2005) offers us her thoughts on the nature of the autoethnographic method: “Autoethnography seeks to disrupt the politics of traditional research relationships, traditional forms of representation and traditional social science orientations to audiences” (p. 660). In the same spirit as bell hooks’ intent to teach to transgress, Holman Jones and Chase appear to embrace autoethnography as a means of researching to transgress. This means writing about lived experience.

Finally, I want to bring into this discussion some aspects of ethnographic methodologies, whether critical, narrative or autobiographical. They are voice, interpretive authority and representation—all dimensions of multivocality. Chase (2005) writing in *The Sage Handbook for Qualitative Research*, describes three vocal positions the ethnographic researcher may assume in creating his work (bullets added):

- **Authoritative Voice:** From the psychological and sociological approaches there is a mingling of researcher's voice with that of the narrator; however, input is [always] followed by interpretation. This voice is a tool to separate the researcher's narrative voice from that of the narrator's.
- **Supportive Voice:** Researcher's voice is muted, and relegated as secondary, background information in favor of that of the narrator's voice which is emphasized. The goal here is to get the narrator's story told. The intent of this strategy aims to create a self-reflective and respectful distance between the researcher's and the narrator's voices.
- **Interactive Voice:** this strategy is about inter-subjectivity between the researcher's and the narrator's voices. The researcher's voices, subject positions, social locations, interpretations and personal experiences are examined through the refracted medium of the narrator's voices. (p. 665-66)

These “vocal positions” may easily appear throughout the same research. They are tools to be used to connect researcher, narrator, and reader. It must also be noted that in ethnographic research, narrative inquiry and autoethnography, the

subject position of researcher and narrator are often one and the same, further complicating the methodology. How does one separate the researcher's voice from the narrator's voice? In the present study, the diary in Chapter 4 is primarily the narrator's voice, while other chapters are a balance between the narrator's and the researcher's voices engaging with other researchers' voices from the literature in the field and with faculty voices from France and from the United States. The more detached academic voice comes in Chapters 2 and 5, though it is especially difficult in diary studies and autoethnography because of the mixing of roles the primary investigator is playing. His experience is the focus, so objectivity is not a realistic goal. In constructivist grounded theory, the narratives merge, and there is no claim to objectivity on the part of the researcher. As I have come to understand the different roles one plays in such research, I continue to feel empowered to tell my story in ways that allow disclosure of personal experiences I had while studying abroad.

Two researchers, Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2000), have posed two relevant questions: How will I choose to view my research—more as art or more as science? What is the difference between fiction and narrative inquiry? Most would agree that ethnographic methodologies (critical, narrative or autobiographical) are blurred genres. And many would agree with Chase, who posits, “Narrators highlight versions of self, reality and experience” and “[they are less] concerned with factual representations of the story” (p. 752). Art Bochner and others note, “Everything we write is fiction” (p. 752) to varying degrees. Everything we write is from memory—even in concurrent diary studies when the diarist is writing while engaging in daily activities. Sometimes, memories are selective; sometimes they are unclear. Past

events are never reported dispassionately but always from a subject position. Memory is selective, so Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggest some common sense ideas: don't put words into narrator's mouths; don't say something happened which, in fact, did not happen; be true to the experience. They note simply that if science is the style you are after, emphasize the facts; on the other hand, if it is art, emphasize the meanings that you (researcher and narrator) attach to the experiences which are described (p. 766).

This autoethnography is more art than science because there is so much freedom in art, and scientific writing requires more detachment than I can manage at this point since the experience in France is so recent. However, I value honesty, fairness and ethical research. As stated earlier, the diary in Chapter 4 is based on concurrent diary entries written in France, but these were selected and revised upon my return, so I consider them retrospective entries.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Autoethnography:**

#### **Study Abroad Diary Extracts**

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« Il est démontré, disait-il, que les choses ne peuvent être autrement, car tout était fait pour une fin, tout est nécessairement pour la meilleure fin. »

Pangloss à Candide<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "It is proven, he said, that things cannot be otherwise, because everything is made for an end, everything is necessary for the best end." Pangloss to Candide

In this chapter, I will summarize some of the experiences at the university in southwestern France and in the homestay environments where I lived while studying there. The thoughts, experiences and memories are drawn from my study abroad diary that I kept during the semester of study abroad. I freely “code mesh” in this work because I am bilingual, and I lived these experiences in two languages. As I recall these events now, it is in both languages. Where French is used, translations are provided as footnotes. Only about 10 weeks have passed since my return from France. I have needed this time to settle, to reflect upon and to begin to clarify my thoughts on this experience, and I want to describe them now in as even-handedly as possible now that some time has passed.

I have also chosen to use Voltaire’s character, Candide, as a metaphor for my own abroad experiences. I believe that this will allow me to take the edge off some very difficult experiences about which I will write, and it will allow me to poke fun at myself in the process. The recurring connections between the story of Candide and my own are twofold: a childlike naïveté and a drive to get out into the world to pursue our passion—for Candide, it was Mme. Cunégonde and for me, it is service to others as a teacher.

I can say, first of all, that nothing turned out as I had expected. I had hoped this study abroad would span an entire academic school year, but I decided to return home after just one semester. I had expected the stay with a French host family to be an experience richly rewarding, but it was instead disheartening and disappointing. When compared with my home stay in Canada, the French experience was far from acceptable to me. I had expected, too, that the experience at the

university in southwestern France would, at the very least, complement, if not reinforce the pedagogical methodologies by which I had been taught and for which I had been trained to teach in the United States. Nothing was farther from that reality. Having been trained in humanistic methods (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2012) and communicative language teaching that is situated in the context of language learners' worlds, I was disappointed to find rote memorization and high-stakes testing dominating the curriculum in the language institute I was required to study in before I could matriculate in regular university classes.

### **Growth and Frustration**

On a slightly more positive note, however, I was aware of my increasing ability to understand everything being said around me, even if only from context, even if I lacked the actual knowledge of vocabulary of the newest term I would encounter. But I could never fully articulate my own understanding or world knowledge in my L2 in a hostile, contentious and bellicose academic environment which was designed not for adult learners, but rather, for adolescents or young foreign adults.

I was experiencing the “normlessness” that is associated with anomie—a feeling of not fitting into the new culture as described well by Okabe (2008).

Lambert, in one of his earliest studies on bilingualism in Canada, noted:

Depending upon the compatibility of the two cultures, he may experience feelings of chagrin or regret as he loses ties in one group, mixed with the fearful anticipation of entering a relatively new group. The concept "anomie," first proposed by Durkheim and more recently extended by

Srole and Williams, refers to the feelings of social uncertainty or dissatisfaction which sometimes characterize not only the bilingual but also the serious student of a second language. (1963, p. 114)

Lambert also found that “feelings of anomie were markedly increased...As students progressed to the point that they ‘thought’ in French, it was noted that their feelings of anomie also increased” (p. 116). And this is what was happening to me, though I was not familiar with the term anomie at that time. Lambert concluded, “The pattern suggests that American students experience anomie when they concentrate on and commence to master a second language and, as a consequence, develop stratagems to control or minimize such feelings” (p. 116). This was also what Okabe (2008) found in her multiple case study in which 42 language learners at the college level discussed their feelings of not fitting in—both in the university and in study abroad in other countries.

In a chapter in our TESL methods text, “Teaching Adults,” Hilles and Sutton write: “Adult learners are also psychologically vulnerable, in a way that children are not, precisely because they are adults and have already formed a strong sense of who they are. They have a great deal invested in their identities as proficient speakers of their first language” (Celce-Murcia, 2000, p. 387). But it was more than just being a proficient speaker of English which formed the critical elements of self-identity, I was a highly successful graduate student, and I was very close to becoming a language teacher myself. I had successfully completed an internship in Composition for Multilingual Writers at EWU and a practicum at California State University at Chico. Despite years of working in a different career and recent success

in a new career in teaching, I was not recognized as an adult learner with lived experience that I brought to the university in France.

Thus, I had the makings of what, even at this late date after the experience, can only be called a *cauchemar*<sup>2</sup>. Before I left for France, confident in my prior two experiences abroad and in my sociopragmatic competencies in French and armed with a keen desire and strong motivation, I scoffed at the possibilities of encountering “culture shock”. I had, after all, been abroad twice before, having never seen hide nor hair of the beast. I did not believe that it was a real phenomenon. But it was all too real—real enough to undercut my confidence as I had never seen as an adult, real enough to nearly destroy my love of learning, real enough to blow away my self-esteem and my self-image, and real enough to make me doubt seriously my ability to become a teacher. I never saw this coming or even imagined the possibility of this ever happening. This was my first experience of culture shock. I am struck dumb by the parallels between Voltaire’s hero, Candide, and me—our shared naïveté.

I want to emphasize here, however, that in spite of the stories that will follow, I have never once generalized these negative experiences to *the French*. I have always recognized that these experiences were a unique cascade of independent, non-generalisable events that came together in my life at that place and at that time. Like Candide, *J’étais un peu malchanceuse – ou non*<sup>3</sup>. I believe that events in a life can only finally be called good or bad, lucky or not, as a function of how one chooses to respond to them. Like Candide, I went out into the world, I met the world, and I was changed by the world.

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<sup>2</sup> nightmare

<sup>3</sup> I was a little unlucky – or not.



Wisdom and maturity came to Candide through his travels, through his sufferings and through his passions. His constant reference point was his teacher, Pangloss. But the world affected his understanding; it was changed from a faith-based naïveté, to that of a more seasoned and world-wise pragmatism. This is not too different for me because my earliest abroad experiences taught and changed me, too. I held on to these lessons as tightly as Candide held to his belief in his teacher's dogma, "*Tout est pour le mieux, dans le meilleure des mondes possibles*<sup>4</sup>." In my case, I had the confidence in myself, my abilities and my world experience such that I felt that I could meet and overcome any challenge or any adversity that I might encounter in France . . . but I was easily overmatched. I certainly choose to try to learn every secret lesson these experiences hold for me and to apply these lessons to my life so as to become wiser and more compassionate. I believe that these experiences will also help me to be a better teacher.

### **Three outa' five ain't too bad . . .**

First, I will describe the five courses I was placed in—only three were of my own choosing. One of the first red flags I noticed was that nobody told me anything about how the classes I was taking articulated (or not) with my overarching language needs or goals. From the outset, it was not made clear to me how these five courses would be my bridge into the university and how long it might take to matriculate as a regular student in the university. There seemed to be no advising of new students and no handout about the steps to moving from the sheltered language program to the university. In retrospect, I can see that it was not at a Language Center, but rather, at a sort of French academic *rendering plant*. Nobody assessed or

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<sup>4</sup> Everything is for the best, in the best of possible worlds.

asked me my needs. After an initial battery of culture-dependent, standardized placement exams, I was just deposited on a conveyor belt. And off into the rendering plant, I disappeared.

I found, based upon the results of the placement exams, that I was required to take five classes: Vocabulary, the DELF preparation class, and three *elective* classes: Francophone Literature and Culture, Contemporary French History, and French Film. Fortunately for me, these three classes were in fact the ones that I had chosen and that had been approved as my course of study at my home university, Eastern Washington University, before I left for France. It was not until week 11 of the 15-week semester that I was told why I was in the two classes I had not chosen. It seemed that I had placed into these classes from the outset, and I now found myself in a *deficit-centered* or a *failure-oriented* model. This model seeks out and stresses only what a student is lacking. It does not acknowledge or credit what the student can do. This is residue from the behaviorist influence on teaching from the 50's and 60's that serves only to insert a student into a stratified society and to keep her there. This is a one-size-fits-all approach, knowledge transmission model which stresses uniformity and requires conformity. What I had been taught as a novice teacher was to focus on the lived experiences of the adult learners, not what they do not know. I was taught to situate learning in learners' worlds, to contextualize lessons, to make them relevant and communicative. I was taught a strength-based approach to educating the whole person, but that was not the approach or philosophy at this particular language institute in France. My thesis chair and mentor, a Francophone and Francophile, told me of her experience studying at L'Universite Catholique de

L'Ouest, where her professors—all priests—cared about students and taught wonderful courses in literature, language, and culture. She said that they studied the living language, and her professor had written a book of idioms so foreigners could understand the vernacular in France.

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In the institute where I was studying, however, performance on de-contextualized tests is taken as proof of learning. Further, in this model, the teacher appears indifferent to the needs and the interests of the students. This is neither a “student-centered” nor a “teacher-centered” system. This is a system hell-bent on perpetuating itself and its traditions. Students and teachers alike are its victims. This system is as feudal as it is futile. It appears to be education after the McDonald’s or Wal-Mart model of profit making.

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### **The Vocabulary class**

I wonder, how I can say this fairly and even-handedly. I would certainly describe this very differently if not for my target audience. The following flood into my mind as I recall this, uh, class: inauthentic; drill and kill; decontextualised; meaning-free; disconnected chunks of language.

It was little more than a complete and total waste of my time and effort. This was a common, if unspoken, sentiment from several of the American students in that class. Several of them mentioned the same impressions as my own to me in conversation.

### **Name it, claim it . . .**

This was the nature of the class: each week, as students entered the class, a packet containing several sheets of vocabulary words was passed out. The student’s

task was to find the right empty blank to fill-in with the appropriate vocabulary item. Nothing can destroy a highly motivated student's will to learn faster than brain-dead, archaic activities such as these. How does one make meaning from disconnected strings of words in a vacuum?

I found this to be an insult to my intelligence. I once mentioned this to Pierre who was my teacher and the closest person to a mentor as I could find at the university, and he responded to me « *Elle est pittoresque*<sup>5</sup> » commenting on our teacher in the vocabulary class. What exactly could he have meant by this?

Maybe, she was pittoresque, but she was not much of a teacher. Her idea, apparently, of differentiated instruction was having her class sit there three hours a week and fill-in the blanks week after miserable week. And she advised us in all sincerity to “*Mémoires, Mémoires, and Mémoires*<sup>6</sup>.” Welcome to the rendering plant otherwise known as French higher education.

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### **The preparation class for the DELF—B2**

Teach to the test. Such an approach to education has long ago been discredited, though even here in the United States, in certain high-stakes conditions, teachers are reduced to this kind of classroom behavior, more often than not, as a strategy to try to save their jobs. We also see this deplorable approach to education, make that *training*, in TOEFL preparation classes. This is a Europe-wide approach to language teaching.

In France, I truly believe that Pierre, my teacher, was as much a victim of this academic culture as was every one of the students attending there. The DELF—

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<sup>5</sup> Picturesque, colorful

<sup>6</sup> Memories, memories, memories.

B2 consisted of several testable subsections: grammar usage; oral comprehension; reading comprehension and for a demonstration of speaking competency, a twenty-minute oral presentation on a topic which the student could ready for thirty minutes, and then she would face an unknown professor from the university who would, in essence, act as her adversary in a question—and—answer period covering her topic. This adversarial role of a teacher was not encouraged in our program in the United States.

I know this because this was a teach-to-the-test class and the entire class had to take a turn on the *hot seat*. My one time mentor turned suddenly into an intellectual aggressor. He so badly intimidated one Chinese student that she was unable to speak or even look him in the eye. Welcome to French higher education. After my own turn in the hot seat, Pierre warned the class, “Be careful here – Cjhrise is not afraid of teachers.” Is this the mentality that is cultivated in the French educational system—an adversarial role between student and teacher. A role predicated upon intellectual intimidation? This is hard to say when trying to be even-handed and when writing for a professional academic audience.

As in the United States, dialects vary tremendously by region in France from north to south, and from east to west; rather than using “standard” French as might be easily found on any national radio or television broadcast in the country, the tapes we were given to listen to and directed to try to answer questions on, were decided non—standard. To make matters even worse, the quality of these eight-track tape recordings was horrible. On most if not all, I was completely lost in my ability to

decode or make any sense of these recordings. Most of the time, I had never before heard the given dialect.

Can you say *culture bound*?

Yet, later in the evening, at my homestay, I would watch and understand almost everything on the evening news. This was especially disheartening since there were minimum passing scores by section on the DELF—B2, and in practice test after practice test on these non-standard recordings, I consistently barely hit passing or consistently underscored on each try. As we were told, failing to pass any section would mean failing to pass the exam. But there was worse to come in this class.

Any student who has studied French grammar at an intermediate or advanced level is well acquainted with the difficulties which accompany the investigation of the *passé composé* vs. *l'imparfait* or the *subjonctif* tenses. These are the traditional grammar features of French which are the most difficult for second language French learners, if not for native French speakers as well.

In our *grammar* portion of the class, I actually paid exacting attention to the total amount of time spent on the subjunctive tense — five total hours in the entire semester; five. This university's approach to grammar preparation is the *speed dating approach*: get to know everything you can know about someone in five minutes. Then you move on to the next contestant (subject). This *scatter-gun approach* was totally ineffective relative to my learning style and to my needs.

This was the “classic” definition of David Nunan's notion of *mismatch*: the disparity between the preferences and/or needs of the student(s) and the way(s) in which the teachers present the materials. I tried at Week 3 to get help from the

teacher, Pierre. His answer was that I needed to see a doctor or a psychologist in order to get some drugs to help *calm me down*. For the next seven weeks in this class, I worked 50+ hours a week, mostly on a review of French grammar. I would simply do as I had always done. I would outwork the problem. Like Sisyphus, I kept pushing that boulder up the mountain and felt a moment of victory at the top before it rolled back down again. The result was that I never saw any sights, never went on any outing, never relaxed or had any fun — I never took any time off.

By week ten, it was apparent that my efforts were getting me nowhere. I was so stressed out that I could not sleep, I could not eat, I could not relax. It had also become apparent that I was not going to be able to pass the DELF—B2 examination. I tried again to seek guidance from my teacher, Pierre. He was not able to answer all my questions, but he had started now to recommend Buddhism instead of drugs. He advised me to speak with the Director of the institute, M. Mitterrand, in order to get some answers to my questions. This I tried to do five different times, without success. Was this a conspiracy of silence? Or is the French university system so out of touch with modern pedagogical practices that they are just inept? Difficult to say while trying to remain fair and even-handed.

*O Pangloss! s'écrira Candide, tu n'avais pas deviné cette abomination ;*

*c'en fait, il faudra qu'à la fin je renonce à ton optimisme.*

*Qu'est-ce que optimisme ? disait Cacambo. Hélas, dit Candide, c'est*

*la rage de soutenir que tout est bien quand tout est mal<sup>7</sup>.*

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<sup>7</sup> O Pangloss! Cried Candide, you would never have guessed at this abomination; it is done, I must, at last, renounce Thy optimism. What is optimism? said Cacambo. Alas, said Candide, this is the madness of maintaining that everything is good when everything is wrong.

And like Candide, at this point, I could no longer hold to the idea that I could or would succeed. I as being processed by an education system patterned after a corporate model aimed only at profit and self-preservation.

I finally received an audience with the Assistant Director. Then it was explained to me that in order to demonstrate, to the university's satisfaction, my level of language competency, I would be required to pass all five classes, including the two worst excuses for college classes I have ever run into, the Vocabulary class and the DELF—B2 exam preparation class. This was the all-time low-point in my academic career. None of my motivation, desire, passion or learning strategies would be able to help me to succeed in such a feudal, futile educational system. I was looking failure in the face for the first time as a student. And this was devastating to me.

At the story's end, Candide has settled down from his travels, having “won” the hand of his beloved, Mme. Cunégonde, and having reconnected again with his teacher Pangloss who recounts to Candide insufferably,

*Tous les évènements sont enchainés dans le meilleure des mondes possibles ; car enfin, si vous n'aviez pas été chassé d'un beau château à grands coups de pied dans le derrière pour l'amour de Mme. Cunégonde, si vous n'aviez pas mis à l'Inquisition, si vous n'aviez pas couru l'Amérique à pied, si vous n'aviez pas donné un bon coup d'épée au Baron, si vous n'aviez pas perdu tous vos moutons du bon pays d'Eldorado vous ne mangeriez pas ici des cédrats*



*confits et des pistaches. Cela est bien dit, répondit Candide. Mais il faut cultiver notre jardin*<sup>8</sup>.

In my garden, even in that sick season, were growing three other classes which had captivated, engaged and challenged me; I realized that I, too, needed to cultivate my garden. These three classes, Contemporary French History, Francophone Literature, and Culture and French Cinema were the best part of my experience at this university; this is their story.

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### **Contemporary French History**

This is one of the three best classes that I had at the university. Our professor was a master of *entertainment* in the classroom. That is, he had a certain *joie de vivre*<sup>9</sup> that was infectious before a large group of students. For me it was the first time I had ever really been interested in history of any kind which did not link directly to science.

I was truly captivated both by our professor, as well as, by the subject material of French history: the intricate web of events and intrigues which contributed to the French Revolution such as the bankruptcy of the French government in no small part because of its support of the American Revolution; the food crisis due to poor harvests in France for two consecutive growing seasons; and the hatred of the French people for the privileges of the Church, the Nobility and the Monarchy.

Our professor would describe a scene or condition upon which he was to lecture: take, for example, the presentation to the King of the Cahiers de Doléances

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<sup>8</sup> All events are connected in the best of possible worlds, because finally, if you had not been chased out of the beautiful chateau for the love of Mademoiselle Cunégonde, if you had not been put to the Inquisition, if you had not run-off to America, if you had not given the Baron a great sword thrust, if you had not lost all of your sheep from the good country of Eldorado, you would not be here eating these preserved citrons and pistachio nuts. That is well said, replied Candide. But it is necessary to cultivate our garden.

<sup>9</sup> zest for life

which were the lists of grievances drawn up by each of the three Estates in France (*les Tiers-états, l'église and la Noblesse*), between March and April 1789, the year in which the French Revolution began. Then he would circulate around the huge lecture hall tapping one student after another to represent the King, the Queen, the representatives of the Church, the Nobility and the People. Then he guided a sort of impromptu role-play set according to his lecture.

A direct benefit of this kind of engagement was a sharp rise in my skills of note taking in French: there was no book for the class. Instead, all of the material was presented from the same set of lecture notes which had not changed in more than ten years, at least. I know this to be true because at my homestay where many previous students at this university had resided before me, I found a printed set of these same lectures, the same exact ones, with a date of 2001 on the cover.

*C'était une découverte révélatrice*<sup>10</sup>. Honestly, I still find that discovery hard to understand. I began to wonder: "In France, was there any kind of impetus for on-going professional development in the teaching profession? Had anyone there ever heard of Action Research?" It is hard to say while trying to remain fair and even-handed. Now, my teacher's training was causing problems as well.

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## **Francophone Literature and Culture**

I really adored this class. Last year, beginning at my home university of Eastern Washington, I developed a true love of French literature and poetry. This class continued to deepen this love and allowed me to gain a critical new perspective on francophone literature from Africa, in particular.

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<sup>10</sup> That was a revealing discovery.

In our exploration of the *Négritude* movement, a political and literary impulse born out of the refusal by people of African heritage to continue to accept neo-colonial treatment as second class citizens, a global view of race relations was a theme we explored within the context of European colonial history.

The historical context of the 18th and 19th century was where my introduction to French literature and poetry began; this introduction started for me at my home university of Eastern Washington and it quickly deepened into a love affair with the language and cultural values so elegantly expressed through the context of Francophone literature. Thus, by the time of my arrival at this university, I was ready for much more.

In this connection, I will always remember something I still find as remarkable today as on the day it happened: with perfect serendipitous timing, my own mentor, Dr. Reeves, sent me some poems by a poet named Langston Hughes. Hughes, an biracial American of African descent, was an active member of the Harlem Renaissance movement here in the United States a decade before the *Négritude* movement got fully started in Paris.

He and his colleagues were later cited as inspirations by Césaire and Senghor in particular, and they were important influences in what would eventually become the *Négritude* movement. That some American student was able to share these cross-cultural insights in our francophone literature and culture class in a way that extended and clarified the subject at hand from an etic perspective was deeply appreciated by our professor and it solidified a bond between us. If only I had found more of this in France, I would still be there now.

I particularly love the work of Leopold Senghor; the way this man caressed the language created images which resonate in my own spirit. Though I doubt that this man was a Buddhist, his values concerning race and human relations are quintessentially Buddhist. This can easily be seen from this little poem:

*Cher frère blanc,  
Quand je suis né, j'étais noir,  
Quand j'ai grandi, j'étais noir,  
Quand je suis au soleil, je suis noir,  
Quand je suis malade, je suis noir,  
Quand je mourrai, je serai noir.*

*Tandis que toi, homme blanc,  
Quand tu es né, tu étais rose,  
Quand tu as grandi, tu étais blanc,  
Quand tu vas au soleil, tu es rouge,  
Quand tu as froid, tu es bleu,  
Quand tu as peur, tu es vert,  
Quand tu es malade, tu es jaune,  
Quand tu mourras, tu seras gris.  
Alors, de nous deux,  
Qui est l'homme de couleur ?*

**Léopold Sedar Senghor (1939) Web<sup>11</sup>**

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<sup>11</sup> Dear white brother/When I was born, I was black/When I grew up, I was black/When I am in the sun, I am black/When I am sick, I am black/When I die, I will be black/While you, white brother/When you were born, you were pink/When you grew up, you were white/When you go in

Senghor has a way of bringing things, bringing people together. At that time in France, I was as disconnected from everything as at any time I can ever remember in my life. Senghor helped to keep me reconnected to my humanity. And to my dream.

Another interesting thing about this class that I will always remember is that I still have never heard any speaker of French speak faster than did our professor in this class. Two skills followed from this fact: my oral comprehension ability improved unexpectedly as a function of this kind of input, and I learned how to be an excellent note taker in my second language. These were two skills which helped me tremendously in my other classes.

I gained a great deal of confidence from this kind of linguistic challenge: I am sure that, had Pangloss actually been right, and this was the best of all possible worlds, with better teachers and better classes which *I* was allowed to choose, I would have thrived in France at that university. *Mais, ce n'était pas comme ça*<sup>12</sup>.

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## French Film

Simply put, this is the best French class that I have ever had anywhere. Of course, it begins with the fact that I love French film. As a cultural “peep-hole”, French film is an outstanding way to live the French experience in a vicarious

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the sun, you are red/ When you are cold, you are blue/When you are afraid, you are green/When you are sick, you are yellow/When you die, you will be grey/So, between we two, who is the man of colour?

<sup>12</sup> But it wasn't like that.

manner; but more than this is the fact that it is also a way to continue to develop one's sociopragmatic and linguistic competencies well after the return home from France.

To make matters even better for so many of us was the fact that our professor, though a native French speaker from Switzerland, had taught nearly five years in the United States. This difference was clear and unmistakable compared to any other professors I had in France. To him, students were important; to him, he was not about to lower his expectations because we were second language learners of French; to him, he expected us to analyse, evaluate and synthesise. I remember thinking, "God, at least someone here gets it."

What I witnessed over the course of the semester is that his class rose to meet his expectations. I can count on one hand the number of English words I heard in that class. He was infinitely patient and supportive; he gave us the tools to do the work he expected: for example, to assist us in doing the film analysis, he gave us the terms we needed to use and several opportunities to practice using them in class before the mid-term or final exam. He actively engaged everyone in the class—there was nowhere to hide for those thus inclined.

There was a rich and eclectic variety of films which we studied including: *Rosetta*, *Parc*, *Beau Travail*, *Delicatessen*, *Méditerranée*, *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*, *Au Hasard*, *Balthazar* and *Les Triplettes de Belleville*. In as much as there was a wide choice of films in this class, so too was there a breadth of artistic and philosophic positions held by the various directors of these different films. Collectively this provided us, as students of French film, a wonderful cross-cultural interpretation of French life from emic perspectives.

Our class was a challenge: our professor had high expectations for us, and he prepared us to meet them. And we did. He gave us the tools to do film analysis; he helped us to understand how to use them with many opportunities for practice; and then, on the Mid-term and Final exams, we applied them.

By virtue of his respect for us as students, we worked hard to meet his expectations. Every class was thoroughly engaging for me because our teacher posed open questions which required of us interpretation, analysis, and integration of the principles which we had been taught and they required us to formulate and defend our positions in our second language. I still have the stretch-marks from these exercises.

I thought him to be very supportive because rather than in the *deficit model* other of his colleagues at this university imposed upon their students, our teacher challenged us to think and to defend our statements; often times, he clearly did not agree with an answer, but rather than to judge it *wrong*, he would re-direct or reframe the question or the answer in such a way that students were able to reinterpret their own positions. I always felt myself and all of my classmates respected by our teacher. This is an *American* approach to education.

As often as not in this class, I was aware of a whole other level of engagement: that of watching how great teacher performs his art. I learned never to lower the bar, that is, my expectations for my learners—this teacher proved that works right before my eyes. I have learned about the need to use *authentic* materials from which to situate my pedagogical approaches—this teacher benefitted me (all of us) tremendously by doing exactly that for me in this class.

I had learned about the differences in the types of questions teachers often use in the classroom: *display questions* which require no thought and which everyone already knows the answers to and *open questions*, those to which no one right answer exists and which require higher-order thinking from the students to interpret and analyse—again, this teacher demonstrated theory as a function of its application in the classroom.

My opinion is that our teacher is easily in the top five of all time if I were to rate every teacher with whom I have ever studied by my own subjective standards, and I do. This single *academic environment* at this university was the only refuge where my passion, motivation, desire and inherent ability survived to thrive. Did I mention that he had taught in the United States for a number of years?

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### **Les Inquiétudes Doméstiques<sup>13</sup>**

In the last section, I described, class by class, the learning experiences I had at a university in southwestern France. The story is intentionally tightly focused upon the classes themselves and not the effects of these academic experiences. Those effects will be discussed later in the discussion section of this work. At this point, I will aim that same tight focus on the second part of this abroad experience, the home stays where I lived in France. Names of host family members have been intentionally left out so as to conceal their true identities.

Having had wonderful experiences in Québec City on my first study abroad trip and then again on my first trip to France, I had every reason to hope for, if not to expect, the same thing in staying with my host family in Grenoble. Over nearly

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<sup>13</sup> Home worries.



three months of exchanging emails, we had asked many of our questions, and I was very comfortable ahead of my departure with the prospect of staying with this French family. For the first several weeks, about five, the honeymoon was in full swing. I was so thrilled to be in France again, to be immersed again and to be in my research setting where I would begin to compare and contrast so many of the aspects of French life with the life in the United States. The first curious dynamic that I noticed in the family home was that after day one, I never saw their daughter or their son ever again. Something else, as well, was that the husband and wife never ate dinner together with the boarders.

Then one day, I began to understand why: suddenly, heated yelling at the top of their voices rang throughout the home: the unhappy couple was in the throes of one of the many fights which would break out whenever they were in each other's company. I can only say that it made me feel very uncomfortable when these events happened, and it reminded me every time of the dysfunctional family in which I grew up. The honeymoon was ending.

So, in essence, the husband was the "host" family. He, an egotistical man with an inflated sense of self-importance, was a retired house husband. His passion was cooking, and he was excellent. I would later find out that this was not a generic trait for the French. This man was also a controller. He strove, by his nature, to dominate everything and everyone; where this became most apparent to me was at the dinner table each night. At the table is where the real courses in French culture are held: international relations, religion and politics were all common topics there. The other common experience at the table was hearing this man preach, always

dominating every discussion. Soon, I came to feel as if communication, under these conditions, was not possible. It was around this point too, that I realized that the man had a drinking problem. One day he was nice, but then next day he was unbearably rude. He only respected himself, his own ideas and the sound of his own voice. I soon grew tired of this.

One night, as usual, I was the only one at dinner with him. And due to my politeness, I was trapped listening to the same ideas, night after night. Suddenly, I heard him mocking me and my approach to learning. I began to realize that I was being criticized and being very negatively judged. I immediately got up, excused myself from the meal and returned to my room. I never again ate a meal with this man, and after about one week, I found an email from him telling me that he wanted me to find somewhere else to live as soon as possible.

To situate these events better for my reader, let me mention that the events just described with that host “family” were happening concurrently with the problems at the university. I was not learning anything in two of my five classes. Now the crisis had fully hit: I lacked the confidence in my second language skills to deal with this kind of an emergency. My self-confidence began quickly to falter. I soon could not eat or sleep. I could not become calm. My motivation, my passion and my previous experiences were not helping me. Things were spinning rapidly out of control. This is the point at which I began to fall into self-doubt, not knowing how to get out of this horrible dilemma. I began to fear failing and to fear letting down everyone who had shown confidence and support in me. I was in some serious trouble.

Then I found a new homestay. Madame was a grand old dame in the truest sense of the phrase. She was a throwback to earlier times who had been one of the “pied-noirs” born in French colonial Algeria. Easily into her mid-eighties, she was still intellectually sharp and vibrant, as well as, very conservative and egocentric as well. It seemed that her greatest joy was to correct her foreign student’s usage errors in spoken French—each and every one. Also interesting was the fact that, though she herself was a former school teacher of English in England, she violently disdained code switching of any kind. Given her obsession with error correction and her compulsion with French form over communicative function, it was hard for me not to view her as a *linguistic elitist*.

In the two months that I lived in her chateau, I continued my emotional and psychological decline in spite of my best efforts. The hopelessness of the situation at the university seemed only to reinforce the hopelessness and the fear of failure that I also felt off campus, in a reciprocal manner. About now, mentor had introduced me to the topic of *anomie*<sup>14</sup>, but intellectual awareness of the name of the problem couldn’t help me to change it. None of my goals were being met. None of my expectations were realized. I was not learning anything in two of the five classes which I had to pass in order to enter the teacher training program I had come to Grenoble to take. I was failing, and I was ashamed. Things were falling apart all around me, in front of my eyes, and I could not fix them. I felt that I was going to fail the one person who had done more than anyone to help me get back to France, my teacher, Dr. Reeves. This is the lowest point in my academic career and one of the lowest in my whole life.

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<sup>14</sup> A lack of social connectedness which leads to a fragmentation of self-identity

Only two things helped me to survive this experience: my love of French poetry where I often sought shelter and my mentor and teacher, Dr. Reeves. And I held on for dear life . . . I have a promise to keep. In this hauntingly sad poem by Robert Desnos is one of the places in which I took shelter:

***Conte de fée***

*Il était un grand nombre de fois*

*Un homme qui aimait une femme*

*Il était un grand nombre de fois*

*Une femme qui aimait un homme*

*Il était un grand nombre de fois*

*Une femme et un homme*

*Qui n'aimaient pas celui et celle qui les aimaient.*

*Il était une fois*

*Une seule fois peut-être*

*Un homme et une femme s'aimaient*<sup>15</sup>                      **Robert Desnos (1932)**

Desnos reminded me that the only lonelier place in which I could have found myself would have been across from a lover estranged. Yet, in his sadness, I feel the hope that love is possible, and with love comes redemption and healing. I hold out hope.

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The truth is that I benefitted greatly from the time in the enriched linguistic environment of France, but in completely unexpected ways. It is not a very

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<sup>15</sup> Many times upon a time/There was a man who loved a woman./Many times upon a time/There was a woman who loved a man./Many times upon a time/There was a man and there was a woman Who did not love the ones who loved them./Once upon a time,/Perhaps only once,/ A man and a woman loved each other.

scientific way to describe it, but one thing I notice now after this experience is that when I write, and even when I am engaged in conversation in my French literature class, I am thinking in French, and I am able to respond or write at the *paragraph level*. Comparatively, before I left, I would construct my ideas, written or verbal, at the *sentence level*.

This is an astounding advance, particularly under the conditions in which it took place. I notice as well, that my ability to spell has become instinctual now, not perfect, just right most all the time. I notice, too, that even complex texts such as magazine articles or news stories do not appear as intimidating as long ago because I have become much more familiar with the rhetorical conventions in the written language of French for one, and secondly, I have learned how to scan quite effectively for information, the big ideas. I have come to better understand at a glance how they are packaged. Upon my arrival at such a main idea, the rest of the grammatical functions of the words in the sentence usually become apparent.

What I have always loved the most in French is writing. It is hard for me to tell if my writing has improved since my return; I still remember three to four-page essays I wrote in French *just because I loved to write in French* which were given back to me covered in red marks. My French teacher at school, evidently sharing her countrymen's obsession with form and perfection, loved to mark every possible error, leaving the student little motivated to continue to try to improve. What I do notice is that, much like in my first language, ideas now are just so much bigger. It's as though I'm getting to the point where I can think on my feet because my vocabulary has caught up with my ideas. Could this be because I have tended to my garden?

And as alluded to earlier in this chapter, now I have found the love of poetry and literature. With such authentic texts to guide me, and an undying love of this language, can further development in my writing abilities be too far behind?

I am so grateful for the care and support of my mentor, Dr. Reeves. I had always felt, *even before I left*, that she had a kind of extra sense relative to my trip to France. She made it clear, and she kept her word, that she would be there for me throughout the experience. In the role of my thesis director and as French majors, she and I have become very close, in no small measure, due to these experiences we shared while I was abroad. When I got home, I was happy to be *home*—I had not experienced this feeling upon my return the earlier two trips abroad. Dr. Reeves has long insisted as part of her eclectic approach to language teaching that journaling, daily writing, and guided reflection are essential activities along the way towards literacy and self-discovery and along the way to becoming a language teacher. It has proven to be true for me as well.

As I put these experiences into perspective, as I dig out of them out of the rubble and as I get them on the paper here in this work, I am realizing that I am healing, and that I am just now starting to understand these experiences. There remains a long way to go, and there is a lot of writing yet to do.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion and Final Reflections

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**“Never goin’ back again . . .”**

**So, was it culture shock, or was it really something else?**

There are many theoretical models of culture shock. One of the most well—known is the classic *5 Stage Model*:

- The Honeymoon stage
- The Distress stage
- The Re-integration stage
- The Autonomy stage
- The Independence stage

My own view of this model is that, like so many other psycho-social descriptors of human behavior, this model is an oversimplified and insufficient attempt to label a complex interaction of psychosocial factors. It simply does not account for the phenomena in a useful way. And more importantly, it is different from *anomie*.

My reader who, being less familiar with the differences between the classic culture shock model above and the psycho-philosophical position and definition of anomie as originally described in the work of Jean-Marie Guyau and later in the writings of Émile Durkheim, might easily arrive at the conclusion that in my case, what I describe here is an *arrested* or frozen point along that imaginary continuum, perhaps at the distress stage.

Those who would suggest this may not be aware of the psychological state of normlessness called anomie. A further difference in the present case is the fact that this was my *third* trip abroad and my second to France. In each of the other two stays, I had ample time to pass through each of the proposed stages of the classic model. I was not stuck in a particular stage of culture shock. I was experiencing *anomie*.

I first heard the word “anomie” from my mentor, Dr. Reeves, in a personal correspondence sometime in November 2011 while I was still in France and still in a full decline. It was French sociologist, Durkheim’s term, which he coined in his studies of suicide (Okabe, 2008). My mentor explained that Lambert found in his studies of bilingualism in Canada, as a pioneer in the field of second language acquisition, that thinking in French marked a turning point for Americans studying French in Canada. Their anomie increased, and “they tried to find means of using English even though they had pledged to use only French for the six-week period” (1963, p. 116). This was clearly my case. As I came closer to native proficiency in French, I found myself feeling more alienated from the target language culture, but I hoped that would change with time.



Like many adult learners, I struggled to find a place in the target language culture. A major realization was that my training in language teaching did not match my language-learning experiences. I had been taught to create materials and use approaches that engaged learners in meaningful communication. I had been taught to scaffold activities and to consider the affective domain—how students were feeling about themselves, their peers, their teachers, their materials, and their lives outside the classroom.

Never before in my adult life had I ever had a fear of failure. Academic and every other kind of success had always come so easily for me. Never before in my adult life had I ever faced a situation in which my best could not help me to succeed. Never before in my adult life had I ever experienced the shame of certain failure and of letting down so many whom I respected and whose approval I so badly wanted. As I put a face to this *anomie*, I remind the reader that in using the autoethnographic methodology, it is the writer's obligation to show his vulnerable self.

Trosset (1986), in an article entitled "The social identity of Welsh learners," found that second language Welsh learners often experienced *anomie* which is described by Lambert et al. as "feelings of social uncertainty or dissatisfaction which characterize not only the socially unattached person, but also, it appears, the bilingual or even the serious student of a second language or culture" (1963, pp.38-39, cited in Trosset, p. 183). Lambert's work was founded upon writings of Émile Durkheim, who is widely credited for bringing the term into popular culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but in fact, it was Jean-Marie Guyau, a French

philosopher, who influenced Durkheim when he used the term *anomie* in its modern sociological and philosophical connotation in his book *Suicide* (1897). Essentially, in its connection to the present diary study, anomie is the manifestation of normlessness, disconnectedness, alienation and purposelessness.

As I am writing these final reflections, I have been back home from France for more than three months. This time, the return has been seamless and easy. It is not so easy, however, to forget the pain and the suffering I experienced which resulted from the feelings of shame I felt for most of the time I was in France. Years of well-honed and instinctual learning strategies culled from many years of highly successful academic experiences, both in the U.S. and abroad in Québec and in France, could not help me to succeed in Grenoble. Still, I did receive credit from the institute and applied some of it to earn the master's degree.

My self-esteem and my self-image were nearly destroyed by my experiences in France, in particular, for having been processed through the French educational system. I dare not even allow myself to fully remember it now because it is still painful, and I consider it the lowest point of my entire life's experiences. Is there any wonder that I have vowed never to return again to France?

It has been pointed out to me by my mentor the privileged status that I enjoy as an American. We both know of cases, due to our work with refugees and international students, of students who can never return home again because they are political refugees. In fact, one of our students spent 17 or her 19 years in a refugee camp, yet she is thriving here and working hard to complete a bachelor's degree. I am indeed lucky to have had the U.S., Washington State and Eastern waiting to

welcome me back home. I dare not even think of what the case might have been if this had not been so.

On a positive note, I confess that in so many subtle, yet clearly noticeable ways, my sociolinguistic competencies in French actually improved. But I was in a *deficit-centered* academic culture where one never received recognition for what one knew or did well (with the exception of my teacher of my Francophone Literature and Culture class). Because of the way the educational system devalued lived experience, my life which is rich in learning and philosophical understanding, in compassion and in respect for others, counted for nothing because I could not articulate it *argumentatively* with native speakers.

Instead, I was often condescended to and made to feel incompetent. I always felt infantile. I always felt that my *best* would never be good for *anything* in France. My single greatest fear was that I would let down the one person who did more than anyone has ever done to support me — my mentor, Dr. Reeves. Even as I think back now to these raw feelings, the pain is there . . . and so is the shame I feel for having not completed the full year in France.

Anomie could easily have killed me. It broke my belief in myself; it destroyed any positive feelings I had about myself; it almost took my promise away from me — my promise to become a teacher in order to best serve others. I think, as I consider these events three months removed, that these feelings of anomie are far deeper and more insidious than any generic variety of *culture shock*.

But I have an undying love of the French language, particularly in its finest expression, French literature and poetry. It is an unparalleled joy for me to

read this fine world literature, in the mother tongue, and to be forever transformed. The love of this literature was one important refuge I huddled in during those difficult times while I struggled in France; I am proud to say that that love only deepened, in spite of those experiences. It was as if while there, while living in France, the ugly outside experiences could not penetrate the safety of the beauty of the literature. There was another American, who like me, reached for the promise of France, and found the grace of his own land, the poet Langston Hughes, introduced to me by my mentor:

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**Moi aussi, je chante l’Amérique**

Je suis le plus sombre frère.  
Ils m’envoient à manger dans la cuisine  
Lorsque la compagnie vient,  
Mais je ris,  
Et bien manger,  
Et devenir fort.  
Demain,  
Je vais être à la table  
Lorsque la compagnie vient.  
Personne n’ose point  
Dis-moi  
« Manger dans la cuisine »  
Puis.

En outre,

Ils vont voir comment je suis belle

Et honte -

Moi aussi, je suis l’Amérique.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> **Me, too, I sing America**/I am the darker brother./ They send me to eat in the kitchen/When the company comes,/ But I laugh,/And eat well,/And become strong./Tomorrow,/I am going to be at the table/When the company comes./Nobody will dare/ say to me/”Eat in the kitchen” then./Besides,/They are going to see that I am beautiful/And be ashamed/Me, too, I am America.

This poignant poem was written on Hughes' way home from Europe after having just been denied passage on a steamer back to the United States *because of the color of his skin*. In this poem, we can trace the early outlines of the calls for racial justice and civil rights in our country more than twenty years ahead of the appearance of the "Civil Rights Movement" proper in the United States.

I grew up among racist, paranoid and bigoted people who did not accept people of color, of different faiths or of different ethnicities. This poem takes me back to those ugly days in the history of our country. And it reminds me of how far we as a nation have come since then.

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**"Just come home . . ."**

My most important connection was with my mentor, Dr. Reeves. We remained in regular contact via email, or through our blog on Posterous, and it is this connection above any other which helped me to remember who I was and to remember that I was truly an able, competent professional. And I knew that no matter what, I had a promise to keep. Things might have turned out very differently if it had not been for her commitment to support me in any way she could, particularly during this excruciating experience in Grenoble. I feel as if I owe her more than I can put into words.

It could not have been easy for her to watch my decline. It was even harder for me to admit that it was time to cut my losses and to leave France early. Here I assert clearly that I did not cut and run back home, like some Peace Corps volunteers. I chose the spot and the time to make a clean break, and I left on my own terms. I still remember the email in which my mentor said to me, "Chris, just come home; or stay if you want; either

way, Margaret and I will support you.” My first reaction was not one of relief, but of a profoundly deep sadness. You see, for me, the anomie was so total that I did not feel I had a home to come *home* to.

I felt far more foreign than American, far more French than American, and far more Québécois than French — I was lost in plain sight. I did, however, manage a final act of rebellion in the existential sense: I stayed until the end of the semester, and I dug deeper than I ever had before to finish the three classes that I was allowed to choose—French Cinema, Contemporary French History and Francophone Literature and Culture. But when I left, I never looked back.

### **The Pre-departure Assumptions Revisited**

In Chapter 1 of this work, I listed several assumptions I had prior to my departure for Grenoble, France. I will discuss each one here.

- From the perspective of a language learner, I reason that my inherent passion for my continuing development in my abilities in the French language and culture will be sufficient to allow me to overcome unexpected difficulties while improving my linguistic competencies.

Anyone familiar with the story of *Candide* can see the striking parallels between that story line and the present one. My inherent passion could not and did not stand up against the derision or the linguistic elitism I so often encountered in Grenoble, whether on or off campus. Once I recognized the twin misfortunes that I was being forced to find a new home to live in and that the “educational” experience there in Grenoble was a severe mismatch, my decline never abated.

Passion could not overcome the affective barriers which mounted as an effort to survive totally unexpected conditions. Nor were my life experience, my will or my motivation to succeed enough to turn the tide once my self-confidence began to give way. Shame and the fear of failure prevailed.

- I believe that my previous abroad experiences will be invaluable in helping me to adapt to my new “familial” setting in Grenoble with my host family.

Again, this was very, very far from the reality I found in Grenoble. In fact, there was, I believe, intentional deception on the part of the first host family, particularly the house husband. He had presented a wholesome, solid image of an intact family by use of his own website, but in reality it was little more than a typically dysfunctional family with substance abuse and verbal abuse issues. To have tried to establish trust and openness, and then to be insulted, mocked and ridiculed was a very, very harmful experience to have gone through. I still have a great deal of anger associated with these experiences. But in truth, even if these experiences had not happened, the mismatch at the university would have, in itself, led to a similar outcome.

- I assume that my cultural and linguistic foundation in French is so solid as to predict unqualified development in my sociopragmatic competencies in French.

So, in all of his naïveté, Candide was in my head even *before* I had left for France. Development is a very difficult prediction to assess, but I am absolutely sure that I achieved sociopragmatic growth. What I am unable to do is to quantify it, though I did earn credit in three electives, and that credit did transfer.

I have mentioned elsewhere in this work that I remember clearly that before I went to France, I was thinking and formulating ideas at the sentence level. Upon my return, and working in another class in French at my home university concurrent with the writing of this thesis, I can clearly see the development in my inter-language, that is to say that my ideas are now in the form of paragraphs — several sentences related to a single topic there all at once. Even here back home, I think constantly in French . . .

What is so sad about the situation is that in other circumstances, the gains in sociopragmatic competency could truly have been outstanding.

- From the perspective of a researcher, I expect that the results of SLA research cited herein will be born out in practice; specifically, the recommendations drawn from studies cited here will be accurate road maps to success (as defined by sociopragmatic gains in the knowledge of the language and the culture) in the abroad setting.

I do feel that this expectation was met, even in just the one semester abroad in Grenoble. The earlier article by Richard Raschio held key concepts that if followed faithfully, under the conditions of the best of all worlds, would surely have been proven out in action. Unfortunately, the events described in this autoethnography never allowed me to test these principles with my own practice.

- I believe that in following the models of critical ethnography, narrative inquiry and autoethnography referred to in the methods section of this work, my cultural and linguistic experiences in Grenoble, France will be contextualized and clarified in such a way as to maximize my own understanding of this



process and with the completion of this work, contribute to the body of qualitative research in SLA.

With the writing and reflection I am doing while finishing this work, my understanding of the events in Grenoble is indeed becoming clearer to me. I am working as an archaeologist now, digging my life out of the rubble of these experiences in France. Here, I do not have to feign objectivity — these were negative and harmful events, and I am free to name them as they are *because* of my choice of methodology. It is indeed precisely through the application of narrative inquiry, critical ethnography and autoethnography that I hold out hope for finding the hidden lessons these experiences hold for me, as a student and as a teacher.

- I believe also that as I continue on with my teacher training that the reciprocal relationship which informs an individual's linguistic development, as a learner and as a teacher, will continue to contribute to my sociopragmatic linguistic gains in *both* of my languages.

I feel that this is absolutely inevitable — the key idea here is reciprocity. The way I am using this term here is in the sense of a mutual influence and interdependence. It is dramatically evident to me since I am bilingual at this writing. Had I not been constrained by conventions associated with the production of this culminating activity for my degree, I would have represented more realistically the code switching in this work as a function of the code switching in my head, which occurs moment to moment. Much of the time, I have no idea at all what language I am thinking or dreaming in; similarly, I seldom know if I am a learner or if I am a

teacher. It is indeed a reciprocal relationship that exists between my languages (French/English) and my social positions (student/teacher).

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In the end, this outcome is as good as any other. No better, no worse. It was just another life experience. What I believe is so crucial now is to think these things through, to take my time and to reflect even more deeply. I believe that what is most critical in life is how one chooses to *respond* to the events which unfold. But I believe that to quit here, to never go out into the world again, would be to do myself a huge disservice. Like Candide, I will go out, again and again, because it is my passion to serve through teaching. When I find my own dream, it will be there that I will tend to my garden.

### **The Toughest Lessons Learned**

As I consider the lessons that I have come to understand from these experiences in Grenoble, France, I must now shift positions from the student, to that of the pre-service teacher who is preparing to graduate. I will discuss these from the perspective of my teacher training and my personal assessment of the problems I encountered in the French educational system as a student and more importantly, how this assessment has contributed to my identity as a teacher.

One of the most telling characteristics of the French educational system is its inherent lack of appreciation for the *individual* student. It is almost as if the philosophy there is, if we cannot shove you into our preconceived little box, that is proof enough to us, that you are unable to succeed. At the university language center where I studied, there was an established protocol of what students must do to prove their linguistic competencies, but at no point was there consideration or

recognition that different students have different learning styles. Their logic is like this: we've been doing things 'round here like this for hundreds of years. If you have a different style of learning, it is not just your problem. It is your *fault*.

Such a position towards teaching is in total opposition to the teacher training which I have received here in the United States. First, our philosophy begins from the point of view that students *are* important. There is an implicit understanding here that there are many different learning styles and combinations of those styles. As an important part of our teacher training, my mentor has taught us to differentiate instruction, that is, *to assume the responsibility* to reach each and every one of our students. We do not teach to the middle, we do not teach to the top and we do not teach to the lowest of our students. We teach to them *all*.

In my country, we know that one size does not fit all.

The kind of pedagogical philosophy that I encountered in France was disconnected from any of the ways from which I had learned in the past, it contributed significantly to the anomie that I suffered, and this pedagogy was in complete opposition to my personal teaching philosophy.

The system taught me one important lesson: *what never to do to my own students*.

Another irreconcilable difference between the way that I have been taught to teach here in the United States and their pedagogical approach in that language institute in France concerns the concepts of contextualization, authenticity and the whole language approach to language teaching. This is the very essence of what language teaching is, as I have been taught. This is the very essence of *my* teaching philosophy.

The whole language approach to language teaching has as its intent the goal of connecting the linguistic content being taught in meaningful ways to the lives, cultures and values of the students. Said intent is realized through a contextualization of linguistic features through the use of authentic materials such as literature, poetry, newspaper articles, videos, songs, movies, or student writing to name only some. This is also known as situated pedagogy and culturally sensitive practice.

The two experiences in classes in that institute, the DELF—B2 preparation class and the vocabulary class were absolutely without any contextualization of linguistic features that they tried to teach. In the few cases where authentic materials were used in the DELF—B2 preparation class, they were inaccessible. That is, due to the poor quality audio recordings of regional dialects, I was unable to comprehend these dialects that I had never before encountered. Again, I must emphasize that the intent of instruction at that institute was to mold a student into a preexisting concept of linguistic competency that, at every turn, failed to account for or acknowledge differences in learning styles.

I could not fit into their box, thus, this was my *fault*.

To try to teach students any linguistic features in ways which are disconnected from their interests, their lives or their cultures is not only an ineffective pedagogical strategy, but also a disrespectful disregard for a student's unique identity. I will strive, even if I am constrained by a predetermined, prepackaged curriculum, to adapt such a curriculum towards a Whole Language methodology.

I have, from my first study abroad trip to Quebec, always strongly identified as an international student. While I was fortunate to have had wonderful

experiences in Canada and in France on my first trips abroad, I believe that the events in Grenoble can still be used to the advantage of the international students whom I will teach in the future.

It is much more than being sensitive to their challenges as foreign students: it is a strong identification with them, as one of them. This is what I will bring with me from the start. As I have watched my teacher do, so, too, will I differentiate my instruction. As I have watched my teacher do, so, too, will I situate my pedagogical practices within the learners' world. And as I have watched my teacher do, so, too, will I apply Whole Language theory to my classroom practice.

There is another distinguishing characteristic which will separate my pedagogical approach from that which I suffered in Grenoble, France: in order to find out what my students need and want, I will *ask* them. It is my intent to offer a situated, culturally sensitive and contextualized pedagogical framework (curriculum) for teaching English even if proscribed constraints must be appropriately adapted to meet these ends:

...culturally responsive education recognizes, respects, and uses students' identities and backgrounds as meaningful sources for creating optimal learning environments. Being culturally responsive is more than being respectful, empathetic, or sensitive. Accompanying actions, such as having high expectations for students and ensuring that these expectations are realized, are what make a difference. (Gay cited in Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 3)

This lack of what I needed the most in order to demonstrate my French language competencies will inform my methods of English language teaching in a

way which will offer my students the maximal opportunity to demonstrate their English language competencies. Perhaps, this is the only good which can follow from my experiences in Grenoble. If this is so, it will be more than enough, because it will position my students optimally to demonstrate their *true* English language competencies.

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### **Professional Experience**

**Internship — Eastern Washington University**  
**Grammar for Teachers (English 459) January 2012 – March 2012**

Co-teaching a grammar class for teachers which focuses on syntax, rhetorical strategies and grammar usage. This class draws upon current literature concerning the current controversies on the subject of grammar instruction. It importantly demonstrated the efficacy of the Whole Language approach to grammar teaching.

**Composition for Multilingual Writers September 2010 – June 2011**

One-on-one English writing tutor for students in English 112, 101 and 201. Designed and delivered lesson plans for English 112 students at Eastern Washington University.

**Student Teacher — CSU, Chico January 2010 – May 2010**

Classroom analysis and teaching in Grammar and Writing Classes from the American Language and Culture Institute CSU, Chico for Writing Level 6 and Library Research Methods.

**Writing Tutor — ESL Writing Lab, CSU, Chico August 2009 – May 2010**

Assisted ESL students in the development of their grammar usage, essay content and research skills associated with their academic writing for mainstream university classes.

### **Other Mentoring Experiences**

**Conversation Partner September 2006 – June 2006**

Service Learning position for the Asia University America Program at Central Washington University.

**Tutor – Yakima Valley Community College August 2004 – May 2005**

Tutored Math, Biology, Chemistry, Anatomy and Physiology.

## **Professional Training**

### **English 582 – Modern Language Methodology**

**Winter 2012**

This class showed us the many methods and approaches to teaching across the six language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing and visual representation. We were given the skills to explain chosen components of English – morphology, semantics, pragmatics, syntax and phonology in comparison and in contrast with our own second languages. We were also instructed in ways to adapt our teaching strategies to various teaching settings: public schools, language institutes, two-year colleges or adult learning centers to name a few. Significantly, we were prepared to adapt and develop pedagogical materials for instruction at many levels: whether children or adults, and whether pre-literate, illiterate or literate in the first language integrating always a balance between form and function.

### **English 600 – Thesis - Eastern Washington University**

**Winter 2012**

#### ***A Novice ESL Teacher's Experience of Language Learning in France: An Autoethnographic Study of Anomie and the "Vulnerable Self"***

This thesis focuses upon research at the intersections of second language and second culture acquisition in study abroad settings. It is informed by SLA research from a historical perspective, and it is guided by an eclectic mix of Critical Grounded Ethnography, Narrative Inquiry and Autoethnographical methods. It is informed by the author's previous abroad experiences in France and Québec as a second language learner, and it is further aligned with the author's pedagogical training as a pre-service language teacher. Autoethnography is the vehicle for the exploration of the effects of anomie on an advanced language learner in France. A semester abroad at l'Université Stendhal-Grenoble 3 in Grenoble, France will provide the research setting for this investigation.

### **English 695c – Internship in English 112 Fall 2010 – Spring 2011, Winter 2012**

Interns in this class observed and participated in classroom activities concerning English Composition for multilingual writers. As an Intern, I facilitated small group and individual activities with a group of four students from Nepal, Iraq, China and India. These students met in weekly conference with me to receive one-to-one feedback on their writing assignments. I assisted them with their final project and coached them in preparation for their role play project. Additionally, I designed and presented a mini-lesson on library research methods.

### **English 564 – Grammar and Composition**

**Winter 2011**

By means of introducing a variety of English language rhetorical conventions, the important variables of style and content in text were examined and practiced. This course offered an in depth examination of grammatical analysis leading to a greater understanding of the nuances of “form” and “effect” in a final text. As the culminating activity in this class, a grammatical and rhetorical analysis of the chapter “*Aria*” from a **Memoir of a Bilingual Childhood** by Richard Rodriguez gave our class the opportunity to apply the theoretical underpinnings which had been presented on the theory side of this class.

### **English 581 – Second Language Curriculum Design and Assessment Fall 2010**

The subject of the 10-week Literature Focus Unit which I developed was Rosalind Franklin, co-discoverer of the DNA molecule. The aim of the unit was to develop writing literacy. Initially, my task was to orient non-science majors to the domain of basic genetics. Through a focus on her biography, *Rosalind Franklin and DNA*, this curriculum was designed to emphasize six language skills including Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Viewing and Visual Presentations. The curriculum was centered upon authentic classroom activities, materials and resources, as well as, a process oriented scheme of assessment. Throughout its development, this curriculum was guided and informed by the TESOL “best practices”. As my second class in Curriculum Design, this course allowed me to “demystify” and to fully integrate my professional understanding of the process of curriculum design.

### **EDCI 689 – Professional Field Experience CSU, Chico Spring 2010**

As a student teacher working with ESL students from the American Culture and Language Institute on the campus of California State University at Chico, I observed, participated and presented original lesson plans for the English Level 6 class and the Library Research Methods class. I developed prompts, rubrics, activities and authentic class materials for these classes. I delivered original lessons on Library Research Methods, Essay Structure and Organisation and various grammar topics such as Modals, Clauses and related structures, Question formation, Determiners and Articles and Adjectives and Adverbs.

### **EDSL 636 – Foreign/Second Language Education: Testing and Assessment Practices Spring 2010**

This course was focused upon the processes of testing, assessment and evaluation from the perspective of foreign and second language education. This course addressed such topics as principles of language assessment, foreign and national language standards and benchmarks, evaluation of language proficiency, selection and application of appropriate formats in language testing, test design, construction and evaluation and cultural issues related to fair practices in assessment and evaluation. This was my first course in Testing and Assessment, and for the culminating activity, I was tasked to

develop authentic assessment materials which reflected a culture fair and a process oriented form of evaluation for ESL students.

**EDSL 635 – Current Research and Developments in Foreign and Second Language Education      Spring 2010**

The emphasis in this course was on research methods in foreign/second language education, professional writing (e.g., Project Proposal, Literature Review, Portfolio and CV) and upon classroom inquiry which demonstrated reflective professional practices. This course was a survey course of quantitative and qualitative research methods, critical evaluation of research methods and research in foreign/second language teaching and learning.

**EDSL 637 – Curriculum Development: Foreign Languages and English as a Second Language      Fall 2009**

This was my first course in curriculum development, and I found it to be a real challenge. In this class, we examined the interface between curriculum theory and practice within the context of foreign/second languages. For this class, I developed a three-week Unit Lesson plan for a hypothetical high school Honors class in French. The curriculum focused upon a triangulated view of cultural misunderstandings between three groups: Americans, French and Muslims. This lesson centered upon such issues as cultural biases and prejudice, discrimination and xenophobic manifestations in one's own culture and in others. The materials developed and adapted for this curriculum were authentic and from native sources. The assessment paradigm was process oriented.

**EDSL 633 – Foreign/Second Language Teaching: The Cultural Dimension      Fall 2009**

This course provided our class with the opportunity to examine the cultural dimensions of foreign/second language teaching and learning. We investigated context and culture in language teaching, we examined ways of addressing culture related standards and we engaged in an in depth review of literature in this area. In this class, I was tasked to do a text analysis which examined and articulated the ways in which Culture is presented to language learners. I chose to investigate a French Language reader which was a text from my first French literature class. Through this analysis, the subtle cultural messages which underlie the presentation of texts, the need for culture fair materials and the efficacy of authentic materials for purposes of language teaching were clarified and elucidated.

**EDSL 610 – Foreign/Second Language Teaching: Methods      Fall 2009**





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