Shifting from Reflective Practices to Reflexivity: An Autoethnography of an L2 Teacher Educator

Laura Eunae Park
(Ewha Womans University)


The purpose of this study is to explore the researcher’s experiences as a teacher educator of a TESOL program at a private university in Korea. The study was inspired by a growing trend in postmodern approaches which seek to draw out the hidden voice of the researcher. In order to explore the dialogical engagement of the researcher/teacher educator and the participants, the researcher adapts an autoethnographic approach which seeks to understand the self in an ethnographic study. Furthermore, this study calls for a shift from employing reflective practices in teacher education programs to reflexivity, which emphasizes the mutuality of both structures. The study presents a series of self-narratives and compares them with narratives drawn from semi-structured interviews with three TESOL students. By employing the progressive/regressive method of data analysis, the researcher seeks to understand the historical, cultural, or biographical factors which may have contributed toward the discoveries made by the researcher. Findings of the study indicate that the researcher was able to gain a deeper understanding of herself as well as the students and the TESOL context in Korea.

Key words: reflective practices, reflexivity, autoethnography, teacher education

1. INTRODUCTION

As a researcher sets out to conduct a study in the social science field, one of the key virtues to remember is to keep an objective standpoint throughout the process. Whether conducting a quantitative or a qualitative study, the researcher must not shed subjective impressions upon the outcome of the study so as to capture the authenticity and the purity of the research context and the findings discovered from the analysis of the data. Indeed, the researcher’s moral obligation is to refrain from “becoming a complete insider because this would mean taking for granted the sorts of beliefs, attitudes and routines
that the researcher needs to remain detached from in order to observe and describe” (Richards, 2003, pp. 14-15). While it is important for the social science researcher to understand the rationale behind such tenets, there has been a recent movement toward drawing out the hidden voice of the researcher in recognizing the significance of their subjectivities (Anderson, 2006; Canagarajah, 1996, 2012; Chang, 2008; Denzin, 2014; Edge, 2011; Hayler, 2011; Holliday & Aboshiba, 2009; Mann, 2010; Norton & Early, 2011).

Norton and Early (2011) point out that the identity of the researcher has been ignored in most studies in the TESOL field which have primarily focused on the identity of L2 learners and teachers. Echoing Canagarajah’s (1996) call for the need to disclose the voice of the researcher, Norton and Early (2011) draw upon his article by citing the following:

For all practical purposes, the researcher is absent from the report, looming behind the text as an omniscient, transcendental, all knowing figure. This convention hides the manner in which the subjectivity of the researchers—with their complex ideologies, and experiences—shapes the research activity and findings. In turn, how the research activity shapes the researcher’s subjectivity is not explored—even though research activity can sometimes profoundly affect the researcher’s sense of the world and themselves. (p. 324; italics added)

As pointed out above, this study acknowledges the researcher as an important stakeholder within the research context and seeks to understand the “complex ideologies and experiences” of the researcher; in doing so, this study adapts an autoethnographic approach to not only represent the voice of the researcher but to explore how the researcher and the participants go about co-constructing their identities through their interactions with one another. Traditional studies in which the researcher’s subjectivity is absent from the findings typically conclude by summarizing how the participants were affected by the research. However, it is important to recognize that most researchers are individuals who share a high level of concern and interest in the research context and have the potential as well as the responsibility of creating change and influence within the field; and yet their personal voices and how they themselves were influenced by the studies are left unheard.

Such instances as mentioned above is problematic in that researchers simply seem to exist in order to represent the voices of the research participants when in fact it is the

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1 Autoethnography refers to an ethnographic study of the self. A detailed explanation is provided in the theoretical background section.
researchers who are often in a better position to make a difference in the research context. As a result, most research findings seem to ignore the importance of reflexivity, which emphasizes the mutuality of two different objects in a given context. As researchers, we are often focused on the research participants and fail to reflect upon ourselves and the extent of our influences upon the research context. Although theories of L2 learning have emphasized the importance of interaction, most L2 researchers do not seem to consider themselves as an active agent within their research contexts.

As a researcher/teacher educator of a TESOL program, I have come to realize that I am inevitably influenced by my students which in turn affect the way I perceive the TESOL context. This study acknowledges the dialectical relationship between the researcher/teacher educator and the students and seeks to understand the mutual influences that they may have had upon one another. In order to understand the dynamic relationship between these two groups, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How does an autoethnographic study help the researcher/teacher educator to discover new insights about herself, the students and the TESOL context in Korea?
2. In what ways can these insights be applied to the TESOL context in Korea?

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Reflective Practices vs. Reflexivity

Most teachers and teacher educators are likely to be familiar with reflective practices (Schön, 1983), a concept which has become a household name in teacher training programs. Dewey’s (1933, 1938) observation of teachers’ routines and reflective actions in teaching “highlighted the importance of teachers reflecting systematically upon their working contexts, resources, and actions and applying what they learned from reflection

An anonymous reviewer commented that this paper mostly seems to present how the researcher was influenced rather than showing how both the researcher and the students were mutually influenced by one another. In response to this very important comment, I discuss how some of the students were influenced in the data findings. Furthermore, I see the process of conducting an autoethnographic study itself as a way of influencing TESOL students because I am verbalizing my ideas and insights which in turn will subsequently affect how I perceive my students and the ways in which I go about designing my courses in the future.
in their everyday and long-term decision making” (Burton, 2009, p. 298). Reflective practices involve various types of introspective activities such as conducting observations and responding with reflective thoughts, completing self-evaluation reports after a practice teaching session, having students watch video recordings of their own teaching sessions and identifying areas in need of improvement, etc. Richards and Lockhart (1996) offer an enthusiastic approval of reflective activities in L2 teacher education by stating that “these experiences can find ways to capture the thoughts of and reactions to these events themselves and teachers can develop strategies for intervention or change” (p. 6). In short, reflective practices provide opportunities for student teachers to engage in self-dialogue and self-assessment and in theory, this is an ideal approach to teacher training in the sense that teachers need to negotiate with their complex identities (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Tsui, 2007; Varghese et al., 2005). While recognizing the significance of conducting reflective practices in L2 teacher education, this study also seeks to question the lasting effects of these activities.

Without a doubt, reflective activities are an important component to teacher education programs; however, researchers have begun to recognize that these activities are often controlled and institutionalized in higher and professional education (Boud & Walker, 1998) and more importantly, they have also begun to question whether reflection really explains how individuals learn professionally (Erlandson, 2005; Newman, 1999; Procee, 2006). In other words, student teachers often seem to go through the motion of completing reflective assignments just for the sake of fulfilling the course requirement. Likewise, most teacher educators simply do not have the time to respond to each student’s reflective assignments carefully and as a result, the reflective assignments are often completed hastily and mechanically by the students; furthermore, both students and instructors rarely have an opportunity to internalize what was supposed to have been internalized through the reflections, which in turn defeats the entire purpose of the assignment. Recognizing this problem, Johnson (2009) implies that there is a strong need

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3 I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer who pointed out that there seems to be a tendency to describe the negative aspects of reflective practices in order to promote reflexivity. I would like to clarify that this is certainly not my intention; as mentioned earlier in the paper, I recognize the value of reflective practices in teacher education programs and firmly believe that they are necessary in helping student teachers to develop themselves professionally. However, I am against reflective practices that rely on the completion of self-evaluation forms which often leads to student teachers going through the mechanical process of filling out forms and submitting them to their instructors for a grade. In most cases, teacher educators are unable to respond to these evaluation forms qualitatively due to time constraints and heavy teaching loads and as a result, teacher education programs may face the danger of becoming mechanical and non-reflexive.
for examining the dialogic process of student teachers and teacher educators:

L2 teacher education programs no longer view L2 teaching as a matter of simply translating theories of second language acquisition (SLA) into effective instructional practices, but as a dialogic process of co-constructing knowledge that is situated in and emerges out of participation in particular sociocultural practices and contexts. (p. 21)

When reflective activities are conducted solely by the student teachers, TESOL courses may face the danger of becoming mechanical, uni-directional and non-reflexive thus lacking the ability to examine the potentially circular, mutual influences that the participants may have upon one another. Block et al. (2012) refer to this phenomenon as the “MacDonaldization of language teacher education” (p. 12). The fast growing industry of language teacher training programs has become similar to that of the fast-food sector in that there seems to be a stronger emphasis placed on drawing more consumers and widening the training program rather than taking a sincere interest in the quality of the overall product.

While reflective practices have concrete functions and activities for individuals to carry out, the notion of *reflexivity* is a theoretical concept that emphasizes the *mutually shaping effects* (Giddens, 1991) among individuals. If reflexivity can be operationalized with specific tasks similar to that of reflective practices, then reflexivity seems to be a much more desirable approach to addressing L2 teacher education programs than reflective practices. Specifically, in order to shift from reflective practices to *reflexive* practices, reflective activities should become dialectical by allowing each member of the teacher education context (i.e., researchers, teacher educators, student teachers, etc.) to engage in reflective practices.

Although reflexivity has been described in many different ways by various scholars (Archer, 2003, 2007; Beck, 1992; Bourdieu, 2004), this study adapts Giddens’s (1991) definition of the term which focuses on individuals within the context of their sociocultural environments. Giddens (1991) discusses the *duality of structure*, a concept that emphasizes the mutuality of individuals and society in recognizing that individuals are not only affected by society but that they are able to affect society in return. In doing so, whereas Giddens’s interpretation of reflexivity recognizes the limitations that individuals face in society, it also acknowledges the potentiality of human agency to *transcend* social limitations and obstacles through reflexive measures. This is what he means by the *duality of structure*—the reciprocal and reflexive nature of individuals and society.
2.2. Analytic Autoethnography

Although autoethnography is still a relatively unfamiliar research method in TESOL, Anderson (2006) explains that it has been a widely accepted research approach that began in the early years of American sociology. Lately, researchers in the field of TESOL and applied linguistics have begun to endorse this approach for exploring self-narratives and researcher identities (Canagarajah, 2012; Edge, 2011; Mann, 2010; Norton & Early, 2011). Ellis and Bochner (2000) define autoethnography as “autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation” (p. 742). Canagarajah (2012) explains, “the best way to define autoethnography is through the three terms that constitute it: auto, ethno, and graphy” (p. 260). The auto obviously refers to the self and ethno refers to the cultural aspects of the study; and graphy points to the writing process. While accepting the above definitions of autoethnography, I adapt an analytic autoethnographic approach (Anderson, 2006; Hayler, 2011) for this study, which is slightly different from traditional approaches to autoethnography that places a sole emphasis on self-narratives.

Traditional autoethnography, also known as evocative autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, 2006) solely presents a series of self-narratives in a way that “the mode of story-telling is akin to the novel or biographies and thus fractures the boundaries that normally separate social science from literature” (p. 744). For the social science researcher, however, adapting such an approach may be problematic because evocative autoethnographers “bypass the representational problem by invoking an epistemology of emotion, moving the reader to feel the feelings of the other” (Denzin, 1997, p. 228). While I am aiming to disclose the subjectivity of the researcher in my study, the reason for taking this approach is to show the reflexive relationship between the researcher and the research participants, not to evoke emotional resonance with the readers. Thus I seek to adapt analytic autoethnography as an alternative approach to my study rather than employing an evocative autoethnography. An evocative autoethnographic approach denies the systematic methods (i.e., relying on interviews of other informants, following a theoretically based method of data analysis, etc.) that most traditional ethnographic studies call upon. Instead, an evocative autoethnography calls for a “narrative text that refuses to abstract and explain” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 744) and instead focuses on the self and the emotional reflections of the author.

The purpose of this study is not to focus on my personal thoughts and emotions, but rather to find the mutual influences that my students and I have had upon one another. Although I have chosen to write from the first person’s perspective, my goal is not to dwell on my own ideas or emotions but to explore the dialogical thoughts and
perceptions that were exchanged between the observed and the observer. According to Anderson (2006), an analytic autoethnography has key features which seek to honor the traditional characteristics of an ethnographic study in the social science field. Anderson proposes that an analytic autoethnography researcher should: (1) have complete member researcher status; (2) practice analytic reflexivity defined as “an awareness of reciprocal influences between ethnographers and their settings and informants” (p. 382); (3) present narrative visibility of the researcher’s self—contrary to traditional ethnographies in which the researcher is invisible in the narrative text, the researcher in an autoethnography is a “highly visible social actor within the written text” (p. 384); (4) have dialogue with informants beyond the self; and (5) have commitment to theoretical analysis. Anderson (2006) summarizes his theoretical perspectives on analytic autoethnography as follows:

The purpose of analytic autoethnography is not to simply document personal experience, to provide an “insider’s perspective,” or to evoke emotional resonance with the reader. Rather, the defining characteristic of analytic social science is to use empirical data to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena than those provided by the data themselves. (p. 387)

In sum, analytic autoethnography is committed to illuminating the researcher’s voice while at the same time seeking to find how the researcher and the participants intersect and interact with another. Thus, an analytic autoethnographic approach is primarily concerned with the mutual influences that the researcher and the participants have had upon one another. This obviously has the potential to produce stronger implications for the wider research context than a study that provides a sole representation of the participants.

3. METHOD

3.1. Research Context and Participants

This study took place during a two-year period in which I worked as a full-time faculty member of a graduate TESOL program at a private university in Korea. Along
with four other full-time instructors who are either native speakers of English or
bilingual speakers of Korean and English, I taught in the TESOL certificate program as
well as in the MA TESOL program. Due to the nature of the research method being
employed for this study, I am the primary subject and the other informants are TESOL
students who participated in semi-structured interviews with me.

I left Korea as a child and spent most of my life in the U.S. I returned to Korea in
2002 and have been studying and working within the Korean ELT context since then. I
have been teaching in Korea for nearly ten years: I spent approximately five years
teaching English language skills to Korean university students, one-and-half years
teaching undergraduate students majoring in English Education and two-and-half years
teaching graduate students of TESOL. Currently, I am only working with MA TESOL
students but the context of this study draws upon students who were enrolled in the non-
degree certificate program as well as in the MA TESOL program.

The main difference between the certificate program and the MA program is that the
former is a short, intensive non-degree program while the latter is a two-year degree
program. Some students enroll in the certificate program because they do not qualify for
the MA program while others take the certificate option because they simply do not wish
to commit themselves to two years of full-time graduate studies. After completing the
certificate program, some students continue on to the MA program immediately, some
return after taking a break while others never come back.

During the past two years, I have taught various TESOL courses ranging from the
pedagogical approaches to teaching the four language skills to the Teaching Practica as
well as courses addressing language and culture. All of the TESOL courses are
conducted in English and the curriculum mostly focuses on preparing students to teach
EFL in Korea. As an ethnographer, I took on the role of a participant observer (Yin,
1994) and made an attempt to interact with the participants as much as possible.
Although much of the interactions took place informally in my office or at a café where I
held casual (and at times very private) conversations with the participants, I also
conducted formal semi-structured interviews with them. In addition to revealing an
account of my experiences as a researcher/teacher educator, I have incorporated excerpts
from semi-structured interviews that I have conducted with one MA TESOL student and
two students from the certificate program. Although this study focuses on self-narratives,
they are also compared with narratives from the interview transcripts. In this sense, there
is a dialectical orientation in presenting the data as the self-narratives interact with the

classes are conducted in English and are often taught by native speaker or bilingual instructors.
Another difference is that the students are not given official teaching credentials upon
completion of the program.
narratives of the interview participants.

The informants for the interviews were Korean students who had never spent an extended period of time in an English-speaking country. The MA student was working part-time at a private language academy, one of the certificate students was not working as an English teacher, while the other was working as a full-time private tutor for Korean high school students. I conducted three semi-structured interviews with each student and each interview lasted approximately one and half hours. All of the interviews were conducted in Korean and they took place in my office. In order to recruit informants for the interviews, I spent a few minutes describing my research plans after class. Then I sent out an email to all the students and asked them to reply if they were interested in participating in the study.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Throughout the two-year period in which the study took place, I have kept two different sets of data: my own personal reflections and field notes and the data collected from the participants that include semi-structured interviews with four students from the certificate program and four students from the MA TESOL program. Due to the limited amount of space allowed for this paper and the nature of the autoethnographic approach adapted for the study, however, this paper mostly presents my own reflections and compares them with a few excerpts from semi-structured interviews of one MA TESOL student and two students from the certificate program. Rather than taking a close look at a series of narratives of a certain group of individuals (as most qualitative studies tend to do), I present the data from the perspective of my own reflections in an attempt to reveal how they intersect and interact with that of the participants. The interviews were audio recorded upon gaining permission from the participants and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The transcripts were then translated into English. I employed a thematic analysis (Creswell, 2007; Saldana, 2009) which seeks to find reoccurring themes or patterns within a set of data.

Furthermore, I adapted Denzin’s (2001) theoretical concept of the critical interpretive method. Hayler (2011) points out that the critical interpretive method stems from Sartre’s (1963, 1982) “concept of the individual, defined as a praxis that both produces and is produced by social structures” (p. 26). This theory resonates with Giddens’s (1991) notion of reflexivity and his theory of the duality of structure. According to Giddens, individuals and society mutually construct one another; in other words, individuals are not only influenced by society, but they have the ability to influence society in return.

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5Please note that interviews conducted with Nara was part of a group interview.
Such perspectives seem to be consistent with the primary purpose of my study which is to examine the mutual influences that the researcher and the research participants have had upon one another.

Denzin (2001) further suggests employing the progressive/regressive method of analysis when using the critical interpretive method. In short, the progressive/regressive method is structured in a way that “first looks forward from a particular point towards a conclusion of sorts as well as back to the historical, cultural and biographical conditions that moved the narrator” (Hayler, 2011, p. 26). The progressive/regressive method of analysis represents the psychological and sociological interpretations of human action. The narrative is located in a “particular historical situation” (Hayler, 2011, p. 26) by initially looking forward toward the conclusion of an episode and then moving back to analyze the historical, cultural or biographical factors that may have contributed toward the discoveries made by the researcher. In this way, we are able to understand the reciprocal conditions of a particular situation by first looking at the result or current status and then moving backward to analyze how and what may have created such effects.

Similarly, I adapt the progressive/regressive method by narrating the conclusion of particular situations and then by moving backward and discussing the historical, cultural or biographical details relevant to the excerpt. In doing so, my own narratives will be presented along with that of the research participants in an attempt to discover how our perceptions and experiences interact with one another, which in turn may provide an opportunity to discover “insight into some broader set of social phenomena than those offered by the data themselves” (Anderson, 2006, p. 387). For Giddens (1991), this explains the overarching advantage of reflexivity: when two social structures are seen as having mutual influences upon one another, insights and discoveries beyond current attainment have the potential to be found. Likewise, the primary objective of this study is to see how self-narratives of the researcher coupled with the narratives of the participants may reveal insights on how the two groups mutually shape and co-construct one another.

I began by reviewing the interview transcripts and identifying the reoccurring themes and patterns; then I selected excerpts from the themes and responded to the participants’ narratives by integrating my own narratives. Specifically, the reoccurring themes were identified from the interview transcripts; in response, I then incorporated my own narratives by looking forward and then moving backward to draw upon the historical, cultural or biographical insights which have helped me to gain a greater understanding of both sets of narratives. As a result, the findings represent an interactive dialogue in which I attempt to respond to the participants’ narratives.
4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Discovering Ourselves through Others

The familiar sound of my smartphone alarmed me of the arrival of a new email. The email had been sent by one of my former TESOL students named Shin Jung, who is currently pursuing further graduate studies in an English-speaking country. She briefly shared her excitement and expressed her gratitude for discovering her lifelong goal as a TESOL researcher. When I first met Shin Jung, she was contemplating the idea of dropping her classes to “figure out what to do with her life.” She had no idea why she was enrolled in the program and she was certain that she would not be able to find a job upon graduation due to her age. After a series of informal meetings and conversations, Shin Jung decided to complete the program and subsequently identified her goal and talent and has since made the bold decision to pursue further studies despite concerns pertaining to her age.

Reflecting upon my experiences with Shin Jung has helped me to realize that there were many more students like her in the department: students who felt powerless due to their age or status as nonnative speaker English teachers (NNSETs), or students who did not have the accreditation to be identified as legitimate English teachers. In fact, I began to realize that most TESOL students were without a clear direction and had worries about their future career options. Just as I had done with Shin Jung, I found myself engaging in countless discussions and conversations about future career prospects with many other students.

Naturally, most of the semi-structured interviews also seemed to focus on similar issues. In the following excerpt, a student named Min Hee who completed the certificate program reveals her frustrations:

Excerpt 1:

I don’t know why I’m here. I used to teach English at a kindergarten but I don’t think I can do that forever. I just want to work and have a stable job. Now I don’t even care if it’s related to English. I just wish I could have a stable job. In fact, I

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6 All of the names of the informants are pseudonyms.
7 In order to protect Shin Jung’s privacy, I do not reveal the specific country in which she is studying.
8 In order to protect Shin Jung’s privacy, I do not reveal her age. Please note that I am reluctant to share specific details about the informants in order to prevent other members of the community (the TESOL context in which the study took place) from recognizing the informants.
would be so happy if I could get a permanent job as an assistant in the TESOL office.

When Min Hee revealed that she wanted to work as an assistant in the TESOL office, I was extremely surprised. I could not understand why she would rather work in the TESOL office instead of teaching English. Subsequent interviews with Min Hee revealed that her desire to work in the TESOL office was her way of “working full-time” while at the same time taking advantage of her experience and qualifications as a graduate of the TESOL certificate program. Min Hee visited me for a second interview after three months and claimed that she still wanted to work as an assistant in the TESOL office:

Excerpt 2:
I doubt I'll ever find a permanent teaching job. Still I don’t want my certificate to go to waste. I still want to work full-time and since I have a TESOL certificate, I think I could do a good job in the office. I would understand how things run and I could help students who are enrolled in the certificate program.

Min Hee seemed to have two clear goals: to work full-time and apply her experiences of studying in the certificate program; however, she also seemed to believe that achieving these two goals simultaneously may not have been plausible for her. As a result, she seemed to have arrived at a compromise by aiming to work as an assistant in the TESOL office where she could fulfill her desire of working full-time and use her knowledge and experience of studying in the TESOL program.

The primary concern for both Shin Jung and Min Hee were not focused on becoming a “skilled, competent English teacher” (which most TESOL courses seem to emphasize); without a clear direction and an ability to make connections between the content of their studies and their personal lives, TESOL theories and approaches had very little meaning for them. As I began to notice this pattern among the other students, I also began to reflect upon why the topic of future career options had been such a crucial concern for me as well. In fact, until I began to question this to myself, I did not realize that this topic had been a reflection of my own personal concerns. As mentioned above, I have discovered that most of the students’ primary interests seemed to lie in their future career prospects rather than the course content; at the same time, I have also begun to realize that this point of interest had sprung from a subconscious concern for my own interest in establishing a stable career in the TESOL field.

One of the primary concerns that I have had has always been related to finding stability within the TESOL profession and as a result, I have always questioned what my students would do upon completion of their degrees just as I had always asked myself
each time I completed a graduate degree. Without a clear indication of where I was headed, TESOL theories and approaches were not relevant to me. In some ways, I have often been able to “see myself” in many of the TESOL students who were also faced with the challenges of overcoming instability and uncertainty within the field. As a result, what started out as a research project on exploring NNSETs and their identities has changed to an autoethnographic study of my own experiences and how they interact with the narratives of the participants. The decision to explore an autoethnographic approach was inspired by the notion of reflexivity which has helped me to see myself as an important agent of my research. As I set out to begin my studies on examining NNSETs in Korea, I began to realize that there were suppressed ideas and perceptions that I needed to draw upon in order to gain a better understanding of the research context. According to Bakhtin (1981), the self cannot exist with the other and thus I have come to realize that in order to understand my students, I must also understand myself.

The numerous conversations that I have exchanged with my students have helped me to realize that we shared a common interest and faced similar obstacles and that the process of reflecting and engaging in dialogue does lead to reflexivity, which in turn helps both parties to acknowledge their ability to take notice of what they may not have been able to on their own. In this sense, this insight resonates with most of the fundamental learning theories defined by social constructivism (Engström, 1999; Leont’ev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978) and the theoretical approaches to SLA which highlight the importance of interaction (Long, 1980; Pica, 1987).

4.2. The TESOL Classroom as an Authentic Site for Lessons in Intercultural Communication: Recognizing Language as Symbolic Power

I am preparing to revise my syllabus for one of my MA TESOL courses entitled Language, Culture and Communication. One of the most significant changes that will be made is going to reflect the dynamics of classroom interaction. Rather than asking for volunteers to speak and share their opinions upon immediate request, I am planning to conduct classroom discussion in a much more systematic manner in which the students will be divided into small groups and take turns leading the group discussions. At the beginning of the semester, the students will form small groups and designate a discussion leader for each week (making sure each student gets a turn to lead). The discussion leader will create a set of questions based on the weekly reading assignment and email the questions to the other students at least two days before class begins. This will not only give each student an opportunity to take leadership but it will allow the other students to preview the discussion questions and think about (or rehearse) what
they will say during classroom discussion.

The decision to make this revision came from an interview that I had conducted with an MA student named Eun Hee. Eun Hee was describing her feelings of discomfort toward some of her bilingual or gyo-po classmates and how some of the professors seemed to display a preference for these groups of students:

Excerpt 3:

Sometimes the professor spends half the class having personal discussions with them during discussion time and it’s like the rest of us don’t even exist in the class. The rest of us just sit in the back and check our smartphones and tune off…why bother? We’re not important in the class.

At the time of the interview, the complaint made by the above student did not seem to affect me directly so I did not dwell on the issue. However, another student helped me to realize that I may have been guilty of behaving similarly in my own class. About a year ago, I was teaching the same class for approximately seventeen MA TESOL students. As I was preparing to go to my class, one of the students in the class knocked on my door and asked to have a word with me. She explained that some of the students in the class felt ignored in class and that they believed I had a preference for one of their classmates. I was especially surprised by her comment because I had no particular feelings or opinions toward the individual that I had “supposedly” favored in class. At first, I felt as though I had been unfairly “accused” and that the students had developed a misconception toward the situation. However, reflecting upon some of the episodes that took place in the classroom helped me to see why the students may have developed such a perception.

The student that I had supposedly favored had received her high school and university education in an English-speaking country, and unlike most of the other students who seemed to feel uncomfortable with the casual, open discussion approach that I had adapted for the class, she seemed to enjoy the classroom atmosphere that probably resembled a typical graduate level seminar in the US or Canada. Without realizing what was taking place, I had been engaging in lengthy discussions with this particular student simply because she seemed to have more interest in the discussion topics. In the meantime, the other students were developing feelings of resentment and alienation. From that moment, I began to realize that managing classroom dynamics for TESOL students had two very important factors to consider: (1) cultural misunderstandings and tensions do exist in Korean TESOL classrooms despite the homogeneity of the student population; and (2) language represents symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991) which needs to be taken into serious consideration in TESOL classrooms which are typically conducted in
Symbolic power refers not so much to a specific type of power, but rather to an aspect of most forms of power that are routinely deployed in social life. For in the day-to-day life, power is seldom exercised as overt physical force: instead, it is transmuted into a symbolic form and thereby endowed with a kind of legitimacy that it would not otherwise have. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 23)

Inevitably, students who have a better understanding of the target culture and a stronger command of the English language may appear to have much more in common with their native speaker or bilingual professors than their classmates who may not have had the experience of living in English-speaking countries for an extended period of time. As a result, these students may develop certain perceptions toward their instructors who may appear to have more in common with their bilingual classmates. Furthermore, since all of the TESOL courses are conducted in English, students who have a weaker command of the English language are bound to experience a lack of power in classroom discourse and discussions. Students who are able to speak fluent English are likely to represent a hidden power within the classroom. In this sense, TESOL classrooms may also represent a site for intercultural tensions that continue to reproduce a certain cultural code for labeling “the good” vs. “the bad” or “the native speaker” vs. “the nonnative speaker.”

As I reflect upon the above situation, I am reminded of my own experiences as a child of an immigrant family growing up in the US. Back then, Asians were often considered to be refugees who could not speak proper English. One of the most embarrassing things that could happen to an Asian child was to have his or her parent or grandparent speak to them out loud in their L1 in public places. Asian children were often the target of ridicule at school and much of the teasing centered on the “funny, foreign” sounds of Asian languages that the other children loved to imitate. Despite the fact that most children of immigrant families eventually acquire native-like fluency in the target language, they often develop a sense of shame and humiliation for representing a “funny, foreign language.”

Similarly, Korean TESOL students may experience feelings of shame and inadequacy when they are forced to engage in lengthy discussions with their bilingual or gyo-po counterparts who may represent symbolic power in the TESOL classroom. As Bourdieu (1991) points out, “symbolic power is an ‘invisible’ power which is ‘misrecognized’ as such and thereby ‘recognized’ as legitimate” (p. 23). Unless TESOL students are given opportunities to acknowledge this fact, invisible power will not only continue to exist in the classroom but individuals may continue to “misrecognize” their inability to produce native-like English as lacking “legitimacy.” In this sense, helping Korean TESOL
students to understand critical perspectives of L2 learning and teaching is a crucial component because it addresses their own legitimacy as English language speakers and L2 teachers.

As an individual who has experienced the side effects of language as a form of symbolic power, I feel very strongly about introducing critical perspectives in the TESOL classroom. Ironically, I “see myself” in the Korean students (rather than the bilingual or gyo-po students) who are unable to recognize the legitimacy of their status as L2 users and teachers. Like so many of these students, I had spent much of my childhood and adolescence under the belief that I was an “illegitimate” citizen of the US. Needless to say, such perceptions are “misrecognitions” which should be identified as being flawed; and unless TESOL courses introduce critical perspectives that help students to acknowledge the misrecognitions, learning to teach with competent techniques and skills will have little value in the long run. As such, I have used my MA courses as an opportunity for my students to explore their identities as legitimate L2 users and speakers by introducing research articles on topics such as native speakerism and NNSET identities. Students like Eun-Hee were eventually inspired these topics and claimed that they had been empowered by the research implications.

Upon completing the course, Eun-Hee participated in another semi-structured interview:

Excerpt 4:

For the first time, I felt active, not passive. In most of the other classes, I always felt passive. I just sat in class and listened to the professor and the other students. Since my English is not that good, I always felt so passive in class. But I didn’t know that I could be an agent of my own life until I took this class.

At the beginning of the term, Eun-Hee had felt ignored and alienated as she sat in class silently while the other students actively participated in classroom discussions. However, when she discovered that there was a host of NNSETs who have addressed their conflicts through research and publication, she realized that she could become an active agent within the TESOL field. She explained that she would be able to do this by studying critical perspectives and embarking on training programs to conduct research on NNSETs in Korea. This experience has confirmed that helping Korean TESOL students to negotiate their identities as legitimate L2 users and teachers is an indispensable component in the TESOL curriculum; however, most TESOL programs in Korea seem to

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9 Native speakerism refers to the ideological belief that native speakers are better qualified to teach the target language than nonnative speakers.
place a much stronger emphasis on teaching methods and approaches.

Shin et al. (2008) conducted a study on examining the various types of TESOL courses being offered in Korean TESOL programs. Of the 220 courses that were examined, only nine courses were found to address socio-cultural theories. The researchers claimed that such results were problematic and that the “programs have not yet recognized and addressed the different needs of nonnative speakers of English teachers” (p. 463). Likewise, a language teacher education program (regardless of whether it is TESOL or English Education) that fails to recognize and emphasize the legitimacy of NNSETs face the danger of ignoring the legitimacy of NNSETs.

As shown above, the interviews and the informal interactions that I have had with the students in my Language, Culture and Communication class have led me to reflect back upon my own experiences as a child of an immigrant family growing up in the US. Recalling the feelings of shame and humiliation as a child who grew up “misrecognizing” my identity as one of “illegitimacy,” I found my students going through similar experiences in the classroom. The progressive/regressive method allowed me to begin by reflecting upon the outcome of the situation and then moving backward to explore the historical, cultural or biographical factors that may have contributed toward the discoveries. As a result, the dialectical method of moving forward and backward and positioning myself in various times and spaces has helped me to identify the “simultaneity”\(^\text{10}\) (Holquist, 1990, p. 19) of myself and others (my students); consequently, this process has led me to identify specific topics to address for my students.

\(^{10}\) In order to explain dialogism, Bakhtin emphasizes the “simultaneity” (similar to the notion of “intertextuality” which emphasizes the shaping of a text meaning by other texts) of the self and others. As individuals engage in dialogue, they are able to observe the other which in turn leads them to observe themselves. For example, when a friend shares a personal story, we are able to identify with our friend as the story is being told with graphic details of the time and place in which it took place; furthermore, as we contribute to the story being told with our own thoughts and experiences, we begin to see ourselves in different ways and perhaps in ways that may not have been possible without the dialectical process of the interaction. Another example may be seen in the process of reading novels. As we begin to immerse ourselves in the story, we are taken to the specific time and place in which the story takes place and as a result, we not only begin to identify with the characters of the story but we begin to discover new insights about ourselves. In this sense, Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism and reflexivity may be seen as similar concepts.
4.3. Creating a Community of Practice for TESOL Students: Extending the TESOL Program to Continuing Education

Hee Kyung, Jae Yeon, Jisun, and Nara came to my office for a group interview. It has been more than six months since they have completed the certificate program. None of them had moved on to the MA program (yet) and they all agreed that no significant changes had been made in their lives since the completion of the program. The interesting thing that I remember from this group of students (who were all in the same certificate program) is that they were extremely competitive with one another. In fact, the level of their desire to do well was so high that the students had created problems and tensions among themselves. I was certain that this group was extremely passionate about TESOL and that they would all continue on to the MA program but to my surprise, none of them had immediate plans to do so. They also agreed that their level of interest and passion for TESOL seemed to decrease gradually and admitted that even when they get together once in a while, no one ever brings up TESOL-related topics in their conversation. However, returning to the school campus for the interview seemed to trigger a poignant reminder of the enthusiasm that they had once felt when they were studying in the program. Nara explained:

Excerpt 5:

Coming back here and being in this building brings back old memories and seeing the TESOL posters on the wall makes my heart beat again. Actually, when I was studying in the certificate program, everything was so fascinating and interesting and I was so motivated to do something after I finished but now I forgot those feelings and my life is just back to normal and I don’t really know what to do.

Upon hearing this I am reminded of my own experiences of first coming into contact with TESOL. Like these students, I was fascinated by the TESOL courses and I wanted to learn more after finishing my MA. The major difference for me was that I never left upon setting foot in the TESOL field. As soon as I completed an MA TESOL, I enrolled in a Ph.D. program and continued to teach and work in the field up until this point. Indeed, pursuing a doctorate is not always a practical option for most students, and thus I have discovered the need to provide an alternative route for TESOL students to remain in contact within the field without having to pursue further degrees.

In order to provide an opportunity for TESOL students to continue to develop themselves professionally, I see continuing education in TESOL as the missing link in the curriculum. One of the most frequent comments that I have heard from graduating students is that they wish to continue taking TESOL classes upon completion of the
program. Nara was one of the many students who expressed a strong desire for this need:

Excerpt 6:

Every time I walk into this building, my heart beats and I start to feel so passionate about studying more TESOL topics. I can’t commit myself to full-time studies at this point but I really want to take more classes and learn more about teaching English.

For students like Nara, who was a full-time private tutor for Korean high school students, there were rare opportunities for her to develop herself as an English teacher. She also explained that she truly enjoyed working with other TESOL students and that the TESOL courses had helped her to gain new insights and perspectives about English language learning and teaching. As she mentions above, the physical presence of “being in the building” made her heart beat, but once she leaves the learning environment, she is unable to receive the challenge and stimulation needed to grow as an English teacher.

When Nara mentioned that the TESOL building had made her heart beat, I could certainly identify with the feeling. When I first began my own graduate studies, I had been out of school for many years and I was appreciative of everything; even the mundane act of walking around the university campus and sitting in a classroom as a student was an amazing experience at the time. I was fascinated and appreciative of everything around me. Students like Nara have helped me to recall upon the “aura” of a university building and classrooms, which is something that I had long forgotten. Nara’s narratives helped me to realize that the “stimulation of physical space” also plays an important role in motivating learners to maintain their enthusiasm and interest in the field and that it is important for students to keep coming back to experience the “aura of a classroom setting.”

Reflecting upon the above insight has helped me to realize that TESOL students need ongoing stimulation in many different ways. Unfortunately, students (especially graduates of the certificate program) come and go and each semester and we (teacher educators) do our thing and teach our classes as this is our primary duty. The students fulfill what we ask of them and they are granted their degrees and certificates upon successful completion of the requirements. As mentioned earlier, this repetitive cycle resembles the “MacDonaldization of language teacher education.” We provide the products (TESOL curriculum, certificates, and diplomas) and the students consume our products; they continue to come and go and consume the products while we continue to provide. Once they are gone, we never hear back from them again nor do we make an attempt to do so. When teacher educators in TESOL perform mechanically and non-reflexively, the programs become nothing more than a product consumed by the students.
Finally, perhaps the most important insight that I have gained may summarize the overarching findings of this study: TESOL programs need to become communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) in which the participants become legitimate members of a shared community. Experts (researchers, teacher educators, and graduates of TESOL programs, particularly those who have been able to establish successful TESOL careers for themselves) need to take on the role of mentors for newcomers and help them to move from the “periphery” to the “center” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, pp. 34-35) of the community to become full, legitimate participants.

From my observation and analysis of the interview transcripts, students do not seem to build relationships as “TESOL professionals.” Although many students bond with each other and become close friends, their relationships seem to resemble any other friendship that could have been made outside of the TESOL context. In other words, students do build relationships that may or may not continue after graduation, but their relationships do not always center around their common grounds as TESOL professionals; this is problematic because once students leave the institution, they are disconnected from their peers and the TESOL context, and in many cases, they are unable to develop themselves professionally on their own. In this sense, the TESOL program needs to extend itself beyond the certification and the MA degrees by creating a continuing education program in order to provide opportunities for ongoing development as TESOL professionals. This need has been confirmed by many students (both certificate and MA) who have expressed an interest in taking more individual courses and developing themselves professionally upon completion of their programs without having to pursue MA or doctoral studies, which is not always a practical option for some students.

Furthermore, TESOL programs do not offer teaching credentials as they do in the College of Education and this often limits their opportunities to find jobs as English teachers in primary and secondary schools. TESOL students also come from all walks of life as well as having a wide range of age and cultural differences. Aside from a small percentage of the students who are already established as permanent, full-time teachers in primary and secondary schools, most TESOL students do not have full-time teaching jobs nor are they able to find stable jobs upon completion of their studies. In this sense, the TESOL curriculum may need to place a stronger emphasis on helping students to develop themselves professionally by exploring creative and innovative routes to applying TESOL theories and approaches. As I have implied throughout this paper, the TESOL context is a unique environment and is in need of more research and analysis. Although researchers have explored Korean English teachers in various contexts (Ahn, 2011; Kim, 2009, 2011; Shin, 2012), TESOL students in Korea have rarely been examined despite the large number of students enrolled in TESOL programs in various universities throughout the country.
5. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study may be limited in that it largely represents the researcher’s self-narratives which may be seen as being problematic from the perspective of traditional social science research methodology. However, the purpose of this study is to reconceptualize the role of the researcher in qualitative studies in TESOL. Traditional approaches to ethnographic studies limit the researcher’s subjectivity by representing the sole voice of the participants of the study. I acknowledge that a preoccupation with self-narratives and taking an autoethnographic approach in TESOL research may create controversy and concerns regarding objectivity and accountability of social science research methodology. However, I would like to emphasize that this study stems from postmodern approaches that relate to critical pedagogy (Norton & Toohey, 2004) and poststructuralist feminist theory (Weedon, 1997) which have become prevalent within the TESOL field in other parts of the world. Holliday and Aboshiba (2009) argue that research methods that stem from postmodern traditions should be viewed separately from modernist traditions:

It is asserted that a researcher cannot help but interact with the social worlds they study, and that they bring their own ideologies to this interaction. Within a postmodern approach, scientific rigor does not therefore reside in methods such as interviews per se, but in the manner in which researchers manage their subjective engagement with the world around them. Rather than claiming validity on the basis of objectivity, postmodern qualitative researchers thus need to provide detailed justification for how their choices of research design suit the specificities of the social setting and the researcher-subject relations which they generate. (p. 673)

At this point, I am compelled to admit that I am not denying the importance of traditional social science methods. I strongly believe that objectivity, accountability, reliability as well as validity are all important factors to consider in social science research. However, the purpose of this study is to promote reflexivity in language teacher education programs, and in order to operationalize the notion of reflexivity, it has become necessary to draw upon my own self-narratives and juxtapose them to the narratives of my students in order to examine the dialogical exchanges made between the two groups.

Furthermore, it may be worthwhile to discuss how reflexivity might be operationalized in TESOL programs in Korea and provide suggestions for further research topics to explore in the future. First, researchers and teacher educators may benefit from creating a community among themselves and holding regular workshops and meetings to share personal concerns and discoveries with one another. Although
many academic conferences take place frequently throughout the year in Korea, there seems to be few opportunities to engage in constructive dialogue due to time constraints and the formal atmosphere in which these events take place. As researchers and teacher educators, we are often pre-occupied with research and students and forget that we are also human beings with an individual history and culture which are also important factors to consider. Creating an opportunity for researchers to encourage one another to reflect upon themselves may be a starting point in promoting reflexive practices. As a result of such gatherings, researchers, L2 teacher educators, L2 teachers, and graduate students may join to conduct a collaborative autoethnography (Chang et al., 2012) in order to explore the dynamics of dialogism and reflexivity.

Second, reconceptualizing the way we analyze interview transcripts may also be an important point to consider. Analyzing the interviewer’s input along with the interviewee’s input rather than presenting a sole interpretation of the interviewee’s contribution of an interview may provide new insights gained from the interaction. What is interesting about qualitative interviews is that the “interactive” aspect of the interview is often ignored in the interpretation of the data. Mann (2010) points out that an interview is “unavoidably ‘active’” and the term active interview is used to “underscore the perspective that all interviews are unavoidably meaning-making ventures” (p. 8). In this sense, an interpretation of an interview transcript that leaves out an analysis of the interviewer’s input may be a partial representation of the dialogue.

Third, teacher educators may also consider replacing (or partially replacing) peer/teacher/self-evaluation forms in teacher education courses with oral conferences in which they engage in face-to-face (individual or group) dialogue with their students. In order to avoid the “MacDonaldization” of language teacher education programs, engaging in constructive dialogue with students seems to be an inevitable option for teacher educators. Furthermore, opportunities to exchange dialogue should take place among the students as well as the researchers and teacher educators themselves. In addition to face-to-face dialogues, there are also other modes of interaction as we now have access to various forms of multimedia assisted communication.

Finally, taking a reflexive approach and endorsing an autoethnographic method to language teacher education may also lead to conducting a retrospective program evaluation or action research in which researchers and teacher educators gather to evaluate and reflect upon their programs on a regular basis. Program evaluations and

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11 I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer who pointed out that this study resembles a retrospective program evaluation and action research. I did not think of it in this way, but I agree that this study is indeed my way of taking action as a researcher and teacher educator who has found the need to reflect back upon my experiences of working in the TESOL program.
action research typically focus on the teachers and their students while researchers are busy analyzing surveys and interview transcripts; however, it is important to remember that reflexivity emphasizes the dialogical engagement of each member within the research context. Reflexivity also emphasizes the duality of structure – that individuals are indeed affected and influenced by society but individuals are also able to influence society in return. In other words, each member of a community should view themselves as an important agent within the context. This is the overarching theme that I wish to emphasize in this study: we as researchers and teacher educators, students and graduates of language teacher education programs share the ability of mutually affecting and influencing one another which in turn has the potential of helping one another to transcend social barriers and limitations.

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Laura Eunae Park
Department of TESOL
The Graduate School of Teaching Foreign Languages
Ewha Womans University
52 Ewhayeodae-gil, Seodaemun-gu
Seoul 120-750, Korea
Phone: 02-3277-6914
Fax: 02-3277-6911
E-mail: eunaelaura@ewha.ac.kr

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