

## Afterword

### Rethinking Global Perspectives and Local Initiatives in Language Teaching

*B. Kumaravadivelu*

Although the essays in this collection have been neatly divided into six thematic parts, they present an array of overlapping issues concerning global perspectives and local initiatives in language teaching and teacher education. Among these, I focus on five major ones that I believe straddle several chapters. They are: (a) expanding the professional horizon, (b) professionalizing the teaching force, (c) constructing professional identities, (d) aligning beliefs and practices, and (e) technologizing classroom practices. Several contributors address different aspects of these issues directly or indirectly. In this Afterword, I highlight some of the useful insights gained, and then suggest certain critical pathways forward.

#### EXPANDING THE PROFESSIONAL HORIZON

As I see it, a noteworthy intention of the editors of this volume is to expand the professional horizon of language teaching and teacher education by foregrounding the voices of (mainly) the periphery in a meaningful way. Their objective in putting together a volume on global perspectives and local initiatives is indeed commendable: “this global/local paradigm is not simply limited to a set of geographical exemplars but will also illustrate, for instance, how teachers and teacher educators are faced with the role of mediators and negotiators between global (e.g., curricula, stakeholders’ advocacies, idealized perspectives, expectations, among other things) and local (e.g., transition into professional lives, narratives, lived experiences, teachers’ socialization, integrating the teachers’ community of practice, etc.) dimensions.”

The editors have tempered this lofty objective by noting the ground reality “where being a native speaker is equivalent to being a qualified and competent teacher” and where non-native professionals are put at a distinct disadvantage. This is followed by a rather hopeful observation that such a reality is slowly becoming “obsolete in today’s world where a large number of non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) are actively engaged in teaching and research in the profession.” Continuing

a similar trend, the introductory chapter by Hayes and Chang on the politics of comparison between the global and the local reminds us, if any reminder is needed, that the model for educational progress in the periphery is still something that is imported from the Center. We live in a world where English language use among non-native speakers of English far exceeds English language use between native and non-native speakers. Nevertheless, it is sobering to note that Hayes and Chang found it necessary to end their essay with the plea that “teachers’ language expertise should be considered in terms of a model which reflects the realities of cross-cultural communication amongst NNES rather than NES models.” What the editors’ introduction and the Hayes and Chang chapter seek to emphasize is the need for expanding the professional space of the periphery in a meaningful way.

### PROFESSIONALIZING THE TEACHING FORCE

There is no doubt that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will increasingly demand that an educated citizen should become a global citizen as well. This demand puts an enormous burden on the shoulders of teachers and teacher educators, not only to equip themselves with high levels of professional knowledge and skill, but also to continue to upgrade them from time to time. This is particularly true for language teachers because language is the prime tool that carries global images and global flows. Recognizing the importance of this demand, several contributors (e.g., Hayes and Chang; Yoshida and Kambara; Kim; Andon and Leung) rightly argue that the best way to meet the challenges posed by the increasingly globalized society is to professionalize the teaching force.

The contributors tell us that professionalizing the teaching force entails promoting a culture of continuous professional development. In this context, they highlight the development of exploratory skills necessary to conduct classroom-oriented, locally-grounded teacher research. As can be expected, narrative inquiry has been found to help teachers develop their pedagogic concepts. Such an inquiry enhances teachers’ vision, and empowers their voice as well. Whereas we have been advised to share locally-generated narrative stories of ‘best practices’ among more global communities of practitioners (Yoshida and Kambara), we have also been warned that what is effective in one context may not be effective in another unless they are properly adapted to suit differing sociocultural and educational characteristics (Hayes and Chang). Such a cautionary note certainly warrants serious attention because, in the name of educational globalization and international comparison, several governments, particularly in Asia and Africa, tend to make the mistake of advocating the adoption of Center-produced ‘best practices’ whether they are appropriate to local conditions or not.

## BRIDGING BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Closely related to the task of professionalizing the teaching force is the role of the personal and professional beliefs that teachers bring with them to the practice of their everyday teaching. In order to shed light on this issue, some of the contributors explore the degree to which teachers are able and willing to bridge the gap between their entrenched beliefs and their classroom practices (e.g., Goh and Zan; Farrell and Tomenson-Filion; Fan). Their studies reinforce our understanding that teacher beliefs deeply and directly influence what and how they teach. They also make it clear that teachers' beliefs are shaped by several factors such as their personality, their exposure to teaching during their student days, what they learned in their teacher education programs, and their own ongoing teaching experience (Farrell and Tomenson-Filion).

Given the unfailing influence beliefs have on the pedagogic decision-making processes of practicing teachers, teacher educators are faced with the challenge of developing necessary critical thinking as well as analytical skills in their student-teachers in order to enable and encourage them to question their own beliefs, and to change them as warranted. The studies reported here demonstrate that changing beliefs takes time, that it is a gradual process, and that expecting teachers to change their beliefs dramatically is not a realistic option. It is, however, satisfying that teacher educators and practicing teachers in various international contexts are becoming more and more aware of the need to critically study one's own beliefs, to closely monitor the gap between beliefs and practices, and to continuously make efforts to reduce the gap.

## CONSTRUCTING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES

Any meaningful attempt to understand the complexities of teacher beliefs necessarily entails an understanding of teacher identities. The process of forming and reforming teachers' identities has become acutely complicated because of the challenges and opportunities posed by the ongoing processes of globalization. Construction of teacher identities is a multi-dimensional task, as revealed by the studies on professional subjectivities (Reis), projection of self (Ben Said and Shegar), teacher voice (Louw, Watson-Todd, and Jimarkon), teacher interest (Lee), and teacher perceptions (Zhou; Macalister). These studies bring out how student-teachers as well as practicing teachers negotiate the nature of their emerging professional identity.

In all the studies that are concerned with teacher identity in one way or another, one can easily discern a common emphasis: the imperative need to establish teacher education programs that are truly transformative in nature. We learn that only such a program can explicitly facilitate the construction of desired professional identities in the prospective teacher without casually

leaving it as a by-product of teacher preparation. We learn that institutes of teacher education can no longer assume that they can shape the professional identities of their student-teachers through 'prefabricated institutional images.' We learn that teacher education programs must provide student-teachers with opportunities to voice their unique professional subjectivities within the historical, social, and political exigencies under which they operate. In other words, what these studies show is that both prospective and practicing teachers do exercise their agency, and therefore it must be recognized, reinforced, and rewarded during and after teacher preparation.

## TECHNOLOGIZING CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Today's globalized world is a digitalized world. Internetization of information is the hallmark of our contemporary society. Many of the young men and women who enroll in our language classes all over the world are quite savvy about using the internet and other forms of social media. It, therefore, makes eminent sense to use various forms of technology for purposes of language learning, teaching, and teacher education. Some of the contributors to this volume illustrate how teachers and teacher educators can easily and profitably connect the global and the local by technologizing classroom practices (e.g., Yoshida and Kambara; Dooly; and Verity).

As part of technologizing classroom practices, a specific focus on Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) yields enormous opportunities for our learners to use the target language for communicative purposes. Such e-learning and e-functioning, we learn, helps teachers and learners to discover the 'distributive' characteristic of knowledge. Furthermore, if promoting negotiated interaction is considered to play a key role in successful second language acquisition, then the use of CMC provides unlimited learning opportunities. Whereas the use of CMC is definitely welcome, we have been cautioned that we should not become a slave to technology and that a sensible use of it requires a paradigmatic shift in our understanding of knowledge and learning.

The five major issues highlighted previously have been explored by the contributors using theoretical, practical, experimental, or experiential approaches. They have connected their local initiatives with global perspectives in a commendable fashion. They have succeeded in helping us understand how these issues play out in several international contexts represented in this volume. As a result, they have in some ways reinforced and in some other ways extended our current knowledge base.

At a different level of introspection though, a nagging question remains: To what extent can the professionals and practitioners from the periphery advance the frontiers of knowledge if they continue to do reactive research based on the Center-based methods and models of knowledge production? Perhaps what is needed is an epistemic break that signifies a fundamental

reconceptualization of research itself (for details, see Kumaravadivelu, 2012a). Minimally, such an epistemic break warrants proactive, not reactive, research on the part of scholars from the periphery. Proactive research involves “paying attention to the particularities of learning/teaching in periphery countries, identifying researchable questions, investigating them using appropriate research methods, producing original knowledge and applying them in classroom contexts” (Kumaravadivelu, 2012a, pp. 17–18). Rethinking global perspectives and local initiatives along the lines of possible epistemic break points us to certain pathways forward.

## PATHWAYS FORWARD

In order to prompt reflective thoughts on possible ways forward, I draw the readers’ attention to two recent publications, one from the field of general education, and another from applied linguistics. The first is *The Global Fourth Way*, co-authored by two leading educationists, Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley (2012). In it, they present an erudite treatment of the ongoing global quest for educational excellence at the school level, citing case studies that include success stories from countries such as Finland and Singapore. They extol global business models, citing how the models make a distinction between *incremental improvements* and *disruptive innovations*. The former is aimed at making small but substantial improvements in existing products whereas the latter is aimed at radically changing the product in order to get far superior results. The authors provide a telling example: electronic typewriters clearly marked a vast improvement over manual typewriters, but when in the 1980s a new innovative product called personal computers came into the market, they wiped out both electronic typewriters and the entire typewriting industry. And, the world is better for it.

Inspired by such a global business model, Hargreaves and Shirley ask: “What is the role of schools and educational systems in relation to educational change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Should they be *improving* what they already do, and undertake everything in their power to make it better, and more effective? Or, should they be embracing *innovation* in terms of new ideas, outcomes, and practices—not merely marking their existing practice more effective, but transforming that practice and perhaps even the nature of their institutions altogether?” (pp. 21–22, italics as in the original). The authors clearly prefer innovation, but settle for a combination of improvements and innovations. There are lessons here for us. Do we merely tinker with existing applied linguistic principles and products emanating from dominant global quarters, and improve them by adapting them to suit local historical, sociocultural, and educational contexts, or, do we want to challenge ourselves to go beyond incremental improvements and actively engage in knowledge production that will genuinely expand our professional horizon?

A partial response to the previous query has been attempted in the second book I wanted to mention. At the risk of sounding immodest, I wish to draw the readers' attention to *Language Teacher Education for a Global Society* (Kumaravadivelu, 2012b). For a long time, we have been engaged in a relentless pursuit of continuous quality improvement in English language teacher education. We successfully questioned the misguided curricular content of traditional teacher education programs. We advocated teacher-centered, pedagogy-oriented courses. We reduced course load on theoretical linguistics, and studies in second language acquisition. We incorporated Vygotskian sociocultural theories. We rooted for 'located' L2 teacher education.

But, with very few exceptions, we tried to do all this basically within the existing system of language teacher education that is flawed both conceptually and structurally. Conceptually, the system is aimed (a) at transmitting a generic set of pre-selected and pre-sequenced body of knowledge from teacher educators to prospective teachers without taking into account their specific needs, wants, and situations; and (b) at turning teachers into consumers of knowledge rather than producers of knowledge. Structurally, most of the current programs offer prospective teachers a series of discrete courses in areas such as linguistic theories, second language acquisition, pedagogic grammar, methods, curriculum, and testing, usually ending with a capstone course in practicum or practice teaching. It is within such a rigid system that the changes have been recommended and made. In other words, the emphasis has largely been on 'incremental improvements.'

The book cited previously seeks to go beyond 'incremental improvements.' It is based on the premise that "merely tinkering with the existing system of language teacher education will not suffice to meet the challenges posed by accelerating economic, cultural, and educational globalization, and that what is surely and sorely needed is no less than a radical restructuring of language teacher education" (Kumaravadivelu, 2012b, p. xii). Accordingly, the book presents a radically different model consisting of five modules—Knowing, Analyzing, Recognizing, Doing, and Seeing. It seeks to push language teacher education away from the perils of discrete, product-based, transmission-oriented approaches, and towards the promise of holistic, process-based, transformation-oriented approaches to teaching and teacher education.

The authors of the two books see incremental improvements as necessary but not sufficient to meet the challenges and opportunities presented by ongoing processes of economic, cultural, and educational globalization. They believe that improvement involves systemic continuity; innovation entails epistemic break, and it is the latter that can lead to fundamental changes. There is potential here for possible pathways forward. Perhaps we can begin by rethinking global perspectives and local initiatives in a way that blends improvement and innovation.

## REFERENCES

- Hargreaves, A., & Shirley, D. (2012). *The global fourth way: The quest for educational excellence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2012a). Individual identity, cultural globalization, and teaching English as an International language: The case for an epistemic break. In L. Alsagoff, S.L. McKay, G. Wu, & W.A. Renandya, *Principles and practices for teaching English as an international language* (pp. 9–27). New York: Routledge.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2012b). *Language teacher education for a global society*. New York: Routledge.