

Spirituality and Second Language Education

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Abstract—No doubt any discussion of language learning without taking into consideration the strong influence of social behavior will be in vain. Constructivist theories and methodologies of language learning have firmly refuted many key principles of cognitive theory which reckoned learners as individuals whose process of learning takes place in isolation. By putting accent on communication, the proponents of constructivism endeavor to bring into limelight the significant role the society and environment play in the development of language. No doubt any communication occurs based on shared value systems or spiritual outlooks. The present paper, in an unprecedented study, aims to establish a connection between language pedagogy and spirituality. The study provides ample literature to show how adopting a spiritual outlook towards teaching considerably accelerates the process of learning by raising autonomy, confidence, self-esteem and feelings of empathy and by reducing stress and condescending approaches.

Index Terms—spirituality, second language, education, religion

I. INTRODUCTION

For scholars interested in discussions of spirituality in educational context the book *The Heart of Learning; Spirituality and Education* (Glazer, 1999) would serve as a good example. Almost all the well-known writers whose essays have been compiled in the book, espouse distinct spiritual approaches which in one way or another seek to establish a connection between spirituality and education as they contend that such liaisons paves the way to unite the individual and occupational aspects of the self and to heighten social justice. Similarly, In Japan, emphasis on what is known to be *Kokoro no Kyoiku* or "education of the heart" has taken center stage which according to Parmenter (2006) should consist of 35 hours per year of classroom instruction for the nine years of compulsory education which starts from the first grade elementary school and continues until the third year of junior high school. Her proposition, she contends will fulfill the moral targets put forward by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Technology (MEXT) and is in line with "emphasizing continual improvement of oneself and one's group as well as emphasizing responsibilities over rights" (p. 151). She launches a strong tirade against METX due to their failure to promote "identity or citizenship in a transitional arena" (p. 151). As Palmer (1999) argued:

teaching and learning is not just about information or getting a job. Education is about healing and wholeness. It is about empowerment, liberation, transcendence, about renewing the vitality of life. It is about finding and claiming ourselves and our place in the world. (pp. 18-19)

Paolo Freire (1970), who is known as the founder of critical pedagogy, sought to empower learners by considering education as the practice of freedom_ as opposed to educations the practice of domination_ where the adults are encouraged to apply their new found literacy as a means to resist against the social forces which have made them subject to oppression and poverty. His resisting approach in favor of emancipation soon transgressed beyond his native Brazil.

II. DISCUSSION

Liberation theology, as Kristjansson (2007) has pointed out, seeks to interpret "Christian faith out of the suffering, struggle and hope of the poor" (Hiller, 1993, p.35). There is no shadow of a doubt that the readers will be immediately struck by the dominance of spiritual language applied in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). He, accordingly, necessitates instructors to approach learners from oppressed group with a spirit of humility and modesty and warns them not to treat them like all-knowing masters. He famously chants that "Revolutionary leaders cannot speak *without* the people nor *for* the people, but only *with* the people" (1970, p. 131). She firmly stands by the idea that moral education's primary purpose must be to cultivate relations to the self, other people, nature and society by young Japanese learners. This emphasis on the value of adherence to one's social groups is completely parallel to Palmer's (2003) theory that spirituality implies reading beyond the self.

Education of the heart, nonetheless, has been mistakenly interpreted as imposing instructor's diehard religious or political ideologies on educators. Contrary to the mentioned stereotype, in Noddings's (2002) opinion, the chief aim of moral education is "the maintenance and enhancement of caring" (p. 172). In line with Palmer's (2003) definition of spirituality which denotes forging relationships beyond the level of ego, Noddings believes that schools must be founded

as institutions which enhance a mutual relationship of caring between educators and instructors and this principle of caring needs to pervade all facets of school life, such as, grading, curriculum design and just enforcement of regulations. She and other scholars suggest that familiarizing students with the basic tenets of the world's major religion will help us enhance caring and tolerance for difference among them (Noddings, 2002; Postman, 1995). Aply attempting to take a conciliatory position between the above-mentioned camps, Varghese and Johnston (2007) held that the motivation of Christian professionals who teach English in missionary contexts is often complex and contradictory. They thus called for less essentialism and more dialogue between Christian ELT missionaries and those who call some of their actions into question. The dialogue that some have encouraged (Varghese & Johnston, 2007) was to some extent fostered in an interesting edited volume (Wong & Canagarajah, 2009). Unfortunately, with a few exceptions (e.g., Bradley, 2009; Morgan, 2009; Vandrick, 2009), the bulk of these discussions were limited to attempts at dialogue between evangelical Christians (e.g., Smith, 2009) and self-proclaimed atheists or agnostics (e.g., Johnston, 2009). Moreover, very few of the contributing authors to this tome discussed the importance of an exploration of spirituality outside of evangelical Christian contexts.

Nash (2002) citing Bruner (1996) firmly believes that telling stories play a crucial role in constructing meaning. He, therefore, suggests that spirituality, religion and ethics should be taught in the mold of stories to graduate students in order to promote open-minded dialogue amongst learners. This approach, according to him, will be based on their diverse religious and spiritual narratives rather than upon doctrinal issues. He argues that:

Stories help us to shift perspective more easily, to assume the vantage point of the other. The Greek root for stories or narratives is *mythoi*, the root of "myths." For example, in the study of religion, narratives, like myths, are neither true nor false; instead, they function more neutrally to remind us that people construct religious stories to explain the nature of life, and to provide a sense of cosmic purpose, personal identity, and morality (p. 155).

In children, spiritual capacities are sometimes recognized, valued, and cultivated or given the space in which the child might cultivate them, but at other times, they are not recognized and therefore not valued as essential to being human. In some instances, these capacities are recognized but not valued, or perhaps even seen as troublesome or threatening. In more sinister instances, these capacities are used as a means of exploitation, such as in the indoctrination of children into belief systems that are harmful to them. After recognition of the value—perhaps even the sacred value—of the spiritual nature of children, the next most important role of the adult in the spiritual life of the child is to engage with the child in these capacities. This speaks to the relational nature of spirituality—it is dependent on relational context for its development (Myers, 1997). In addition to conceptualizing spirituality or the spiritual as a particular type of experience it is also helpful to conceptualize it as integral to all experience, whether it is the specific focus of the experience or not. If our spiritual nature is that which makes us most fully human then our entire existence is infused with this quality of being. In children, spirituality and spiritual development are then seen as integral to growth and development, but spirituality also serves an integrating function. The meaning making involved in spirituality helps the child to put together a working model of (or perspective on) life that serves the purpose of furthering her development.

Spirituality is relational in that it is the bond of connection with oneself, others, and the transcendent or the transpersonal Self. Clearly, all human beings who survive infancy have had a base of relational experience, whether this was fully engaged, attuned parenting or being left in a crib in an orphanage. Being left in a crib would be a base of experience notable for the absence of engagement rather than the quality of engagement. Nonetheless, this base of experience sets the stage for future intrapsychic, interpersonal, and transpersonal relations and sets the stage for the process of spiritual development. It seems to me that when the self is taken into consideration from the point of view of the person as subject, not object, spirituality has to do with the person's orientation to self, others, and the world. The sense of self is infused with the person's spirituality—it is not a separate aspect of being, it is beingness itself. It is true there may be some people who take an active interest in spirituality itself, but that which "propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose, and contribution" (Benson et al., 2003, pp. 205-206) can be discussed as spiritual in nature regardless of whether these meanings, purposes, and sense of connectedness are attributed to the divine or the sacred. The capacities for wonder, awe, and wisdom, or the sensitivities such as awareness sensing or mystery sensing are spiritual.

Proponents of language socialization theory and critical Applied Linguistics (e.g., Atkinson, 2002, 2010; Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 2001; Simon-Maeda, 2011; Watson-Gegeo, 2004) firmly insist that the learners acquire a second or foreign language in interaction with others. This view stands in sheer contrast with the mainstream cognitive paradigm that has dominated Applied Linguistics, based on which the learner is viewed as acquiring the language in relative isolation. According to socio-cognitive theorists, thus, learners bring into classroom their various personae, be these political, spiritual or religious in nature. Concerning language education as a moral enterprise, some useful moderate Christian perspectives have also come to light. For example, definitions of missionary work as an endeavor that goes beyond the gaining of converts have been advanced by a few (Smith, 2009; Smith & Carvill, 2000; Snow, 2001). These scholars have held that an ethic of service to others must be the primary motivation of Christian English language teachers who work in a missionary capacity overseas, and that professional development must be an honorable and important end in and of itself (not merely a tool with which to spread the Christian faith). Finally, Smith and Osborn (2007) released an edited volume in which the contributing authors, all Christians, critically examined

various intersections of spirituality, social justice, and language learning and teaching from both theoretical and practical standpoints.

Even Johnson (2003) who vocally introduces himself as an atheist and expresses suspicion towards organized religion in general contends that "there is a profoundly spiritual dimension to human life" (p. 112). Watson-Gegeo (2004), too believes the vital role played by spirituality in language pedagogy and language socialization has been taken for granted but anticipates that this pattern will change stating that spirituality "will become a significant dimension of the paradigm shift in the human and social sciences that revolutionizes the way we view mind, language, epistemology and learning" (p.343). She reckons this possible paradigm shift in part due to growing pessimism towards the modernist view that spiritual experiences must at best be viewed through the lens of empiricist objectivity and at worst totally dismissed. She argues that as a result of the modernist approach towards language acquisition, the spiritual process of learning has been de-sanctified among third and fourth world peoples.

Borg (2003) in a comprehensive review of sixty-four teacher studies on the pedagogical knowledge of L2 teachers and trainees worldwide came to the conclusion that teachers cognition which is shaped by their prior beliefs about learning, in-service training and other contextual factors inevitably influenced their classroom practices. There are also many instances of prominent individuals in the field of SLE (e.g., Cummins, 1997; Foster, 1997; Vandrick, 1999, 2001), who have delineated how their religious backgrounds and occupations considerably affected their pedagogical practices as language teachers later and their pedagogical practices. Cummins (1997) and Foster (1997) for instance, recount how their education in parochial Catholic schools affected almost unconsciously their teaching approach in L2 classrooms. Similarly, Vandrick, who was grown up in India as the child of missionaries, relates how this experience made her later as an ESL teacher in America adopt unconsciously the well-meaning yet condescending view of someone who was "ministering to the natives all over again" (p.35) by "graciously dispensing the gifts, prizes, wisdom made available through the English language" (p. 35). Bradley's (2005) transformation from a diehard devout Christian to a broader spirituality has galvanized him into trying to practice composition and open-mindedness when teaching his L2 classes.

Duff and Uchida (1997) relate the observation made by a Japanese ESL teacher named Danny. Danny, by symbolically acting as a talkshow host which was modeled after U.S television shows made his students position themselves as talkshow guests. By doing so, not only did he attempt to become more empathetic to her students' needs and interests but also aimed to connect with his learners both with himself and the world beyond his classroom and to bring up issues associated with Japanese culture in order to make her classes timely and relevant. Carol, another teacher, had her learners bring to classroom their own narratives about extra-curricular activities and positioned herself in the role of a counselor. She could, whereby connect with her students by learning as much as she could from them about contemporary Japanese life and pop culture and by discussing international current events with them.

It should be noted that English have been the tool for preaching many religious trends such as Jesuits and Mormons. But as Varghese and Johnson (2007) have truly pointed out Christian missionaries have adhered to a sort of imperialism in order to convince people to convert to Christianity as the superior school of thought. English itself is also an imperialist sovereignty due to its acceptability as the international language. This imperialist nature completely contradicts the spiritual tenets of TESOL which has as its primary goal the value of the oppressed. If spirituality is to shatter the condescending presence of teachers and is to establish modesty, humility and tolerance of all ideologies and worldviews then effective measures should be taken in order to confront this imperialist approach. Furthermore, many scholars who mostly adhere to postmodern discussions of discourse have proposed that English is mostly a worldly materialist language which incapable of incorporating many metaphysical notions present in many religions especially Eastern ones. Baurain (2007) for example believes that many Quranic Islamic concepts could not be reliably interpreted in the mold of English language. English therefore, is sometimes pessimistically regarded as a discourse for disseminating imperialist and capitalist and colonial ideologies of the western power to dominate the East. In addition, the content incorporated in TESL books is believed to be creating a value-system which is spirituality-free or presents a quality of spirituality which is in line with the ideologies of Christians or the figures of authority.

Through the examination of the factors that play a role in the development and expression of empathy, it appears that empathic behaviors are unconsciously practiced on a daily basis, as children interact with other people, sometimes during times of need. In order to encourage this expression of empathy, children are often reminded to follow the *Golden Rule*, which is a biblical ideal (Coles, 1997). The Golden Rule to "Do unto others, as you would have others do unto you" (p. 10), or variations of these words, have been used by several religious figures within diverse cultures, from the philosophies of Plato and Socrates, to the divinity of Jesus Christ, in order to summarize their ethical teachings (Terry, 2006). Although this *rule* of ethics and ethical conduct "appears to have originated in England, around the 17th century" (p. 10), the ethic of reciprocity has been found to appear in written format over 5,000 years ago (Terry, 2006). Despite its ancient origination, it appears that psychologists have been slow in recognizing that spirituality may be related to human development (Holden, 2001). For example, Benson, Roehlkepartain, and Rude (2003) searched two databases, seeking articles that addressed spirituality in childhood or adolescence, and found less than 1% of articles discussed such spirituality. When the researchers narrowed their search to six leading developmental journals, they found only one such article.

Although spirituality is beginning to be more often addressed in research on children and adolescents, Mills (2002) notes that until the 1980s, the term spirituality had not even been used in the MedLine database. Despite the relatively

small sample of previous research, there is a growing awareness and interest in spiritual and moral influences in general (Benson et al., 2003; Smith, Faris, Lundquist-Denton, & Regnerus, 2003). In addition, these researchers explain that historical evidence from several cultures has shown that humans demonstrate a tendency toward spirituality in order to establish their existence. Thus, another variable that may be related to children's levels of empathy is their level of spirituality.

As researchers' interest in both spirituality and religiosity has increased over the past few decades, they have attempted to define, study, and theorize about these two constructs (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). As several definitions and meanings are attributed to the constructs, researchers continue to struggle to come to a consensus regarding a comprehensive and accepted definition for *spirituality* and *religiosity* (Compton, 2001; Hackney, 2003; Smith et al., 2003; Zinnbauer et al., 1999). By reviewing previous research regarding these constructs, this researcher views a notable difference between the two constructs. Specifically, this researcher views religiosity as the expression, practice of, or search for the significance of the connection between oneself and some larger, usually supernatural reality, or "ritual from the head" (Marler & Hadaway, 2002, p. 296). This connection is usually accomplished through using a combination of both personal and institutional belief systems. On the other hand, spirituality is viewed by this researcher as addressing the actual connection, the path, the search for, or an overall awareness of the sacred through a more personal, internal, non-traditional, independent, or experiential manner. More specifically, this could be explained as "what you feel from the heart" (Marler & Hadaway, 2002, p. 296). Since the focus of the current study is about one's personal connection or relationship with a Higher Power, the term spirituality will be utilized. Despite the difficulty in coming to a consensus regarding the definition of spirituality, and although there are relatively few research studies examining the actual levels of spirituality within individuals, there have been some important findings. Specifically, spirituality has been found to be related to positive mental health of adults and children (Doolittle & Farrell, 2004; Hackney, 2003; Houskamp, Fisher, & Stuber, 2004), along with positive social functioning and higher reported levels of empathy (Berger, 2002; Lickona, 1983; Maton & Wells, 1995; Smith, 2006). Smith (2006) also found that praying was highly related to empathy within Americans.

III. CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to put forward a comprehensive literature on the relationship between spirituality and second language pedagogy. Though most of the studies have in one way or another acknowledged the obstacles, they unanimously convince us that careful measures should be taken to integrate pedagogy and spirituality in educational contexts. By spirituality we never mean the imperialist imposition of fixed doctrines and ideologies on the learners. On the contrary we should aim to foster modesty, humility and a tolerance for all worldviews. By doing so, it is aimed to shatter the idol-like figure of an all-knowing instructor and to go beyond self by integrating learners with their social groups and to raise their awareness about the world surrounding them and to make them confident enough to resist imperial and colonial ideologies imposed on them. The adoption of this approach will be unquestionably in line with constructivist theories of language which unlike cognitivism take into consideration interaction, communication and community as the most important factors contributing to one's linguistic development.

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