

A “Complicated Conversation” with the Canadian Language Benchmarks

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Abstract

This paper examines the Canadian Language Benchmarks within the context of national second language programming. Findings from a qualitative study of veteran ESL teachers describe how students and teachers can view documents such as these as “complicated conversations” in contrast to process models currently dominant, especially in regards to the determination of cultural content.

Keywords: Second Language Education; curriculum; critical; TESOL; ESL; citizenship

Introduction

As Stern (1983) once observed, while TESOL has greatly benefited from input from the disciplines of linguistics, psychology and sociology, the potential contributions from what he termed *General Education Theory* have not been as enthusiastically embraced in the field. More recently, Davies (2007) has called this continued neglect of the concrete aspects of teaching evidence of “the dead hand of linguistics” (p.65) within second language education. In other words, the abstract theories related to the first three of these disciplines have been strongly emphasized over the concrete concerns that by necessity make up the focus of the fourth.

In this article, I make the case for how curricular practices within Second Language Education (SLE) can be better understood through a greater consideration within the field of two concepts from General Education: the *hidden curriculum* (Jackson, 1968) and the notion of viewing curriculum development as a *complicated conversation* (Pinar, 2012). I start by defining the concept of the *hidden curriculum*, in reference to seminal frameworks from the literature. I then summarize several research studies in General Education that demonstrate the concept’s complexity and how it can be used to illustrate how power is exercised over teachers in terms of Foucault’s (1978/1994) notion of *governmentality*. I then move to the significance of curricular tasks as a way of preparing the reader for a subsequent discussion of the findings related to a study examining the concrete example of the *Canadian Language Benchmarks* (CLB) within the contexts of national second language programming. I conclude with two sections in which I first describe the need for students and teachers to “talk back” to the curriculum and then describe how this could be done by viewing curriculum as a *complicated conversation* in contrast to the process models currently dominant within the field. In terms of the content of second language teaching, this is done in the interests of moving from an outsider’s point of view of different cultures, to that of an insider (Nation & McAlister, 2010).

The Hidden Curriculum

In General Education, many studies and theoretical frameworks have attempted to describe what students learn that is outside of formal curriculum content. This is nothing new, as the concept’s antiquity can be traced back to the Greeks (as is shown by the accusations levelled against Socrates as a corruptor of Athenian youth). This can also be seen, more recently, as being implicit within Dewey’s (1938) well-known conception of the school as an inculcator of democracy and Bourdieu’s (1977) influential notion of *cultural capital*. A number of progressive educators, including Freire (1989), Horton (1990), Neill (1960) and Illich (1973) have attempted to develop alternative

programming based on the notion that schools should teach much more than (or even against) the content found in official curricula in ways that help build societal change.

In General Educational theory, there have been several general frameworks advanced that have been critical of a limited focus on the formalized curricula found in most mainstream schools. Blumberg and Blumberg (1994), for example, use the term *unwritten curriculum* as a way of noting how the dominant focus of schools on cognition and learning has neglected the traditional nurturing roles played by caregivers and educators. Another model, provided by Eisner (1985), employs the term *null curriculum* to criticize the way schools ignore visual and auditory-based knowledge.

The most important of these various frameworks, however, remains Jackson's (1968) concept of the *hidden curriculum*, which emphasizes that subject matter content is among the least significant things learnt in school. Students also learn sets of implicit rules governing the privileging of certain kinds of knowledge and, more significantly, classroom behavior. Through the limited resources provided to individual students, the discipline associated with the denial of desire and social distractions, the contradictory roles played by teachers and administrators, and the unequal power relations found within schools, students learn:

- deference to the authority of the teacher;
- what forms of knowledge are considered authoritative;
- the ways in which ownership of knowledge is represented;
- the valid ways in which this knowledge can be assessed;
- the valid ways in which student progress is measured;
- when it is permissible to speak;
- who is permitted to speak;
- how one's physical presence affects one's classroom role;
- how behavior affects the ways in which punishment and penalties are allotted;
- how labels are used to reinforce social control;
- how conformity to recognized forms of social interaction brings long-term success;
- how non-conformity brings long-term penalties; and
- the need to suffer through short-term discomfort, humiliation and boredom in order to gain the long-term benefits of officially recognized educational success.

As can be seen from the above, Jackson's (1968) original notion of the *hidden curriculum* focuses on the control exerted over students by teachers. However, I argue that the *hidden curriculum* is a multidimensional field of play in which teachers are actors who both exercise power and are subjected to it. This is a perfect example of what Foucault (1978/1994) termed *governmentality*. In other words, while it is true that schools exercise power in relationship to students, the *hidden curriculum* also exerts control over teachers through curricular microprocesses. I argue that Jackson's (1968) formulation can be rewritten in regards to teachers. In other words, through control exercised via curricula, teachers learn:

- deference to the authority of the *administrator*;
- what forms of knowledge are considered authoritative;
- the ways in which ownership of knowledge is represented;
- the valid ways in which this knowledge can be assessed;
- the valid ways in which *career* progress is measured;
- when it is permissible to speak;
- who is permitted to speak;
- how one's physical presence affects one's *collegial* role;

- how behavior affects the ways in which punishment and penalties are allotted;
- how labels are used to reinforce social control;
- how conformity to recognized forms of social interaction brings long-term success;
- how non-conformity brings long-term penalties; and
- the need to suffer through short-term discomfort, humiliation and boredom in order to gain the long-term benefits of officially recognized *career* success.

There are a number of well-known empirically based research studies within General Education that serve to illustrate the importance of the concept of *hidden curriculum*. The first, conducted by Bowles and Gintis (1976), used extensive demographic survey data to suggest that schools replicate power relations in the outside world by perpetuating a hierarchical division of labor between administrators, teachers and students in ways that alienate and fragment the work that goes on within institutions. Power runs through the entire structure of schools. This exercise of power is complex, as is illustrated by the second example I wish to highlight: the *Learning to Labour* study conducted by Willis (1977). This study, which constitutes one of the first in the *cultural studies* movement, examines how a group of working class boys developed a counter culture within their school as a form of resistance. In this situation, power was a force not simply imposed from above. The boys both replicated and countered the dominant discourses within the institution in complex ways.

Various other researchers in education have examined how there are, in fact, many *hidden curricula* that operate upon teachers in multiple ways, even within the same institution or social setting. Lynch (1989) and Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, and Dowsett (1982) for example, examined how the curricula used in particular schools were differently framed according to the gender and class of the students the teachers faced. Similarly, Anyon (1980) noted how teachers used the same curriculum material in different ways according to the socio-economic conditions within which they worked. This echoes Apple's (1979) contention that teachers are forced to divide curriculum knowledge into various levels of status, according to the socio-economic background of the students in question.

As early as 1989, Hargreaves (1989) argued that assessment and testing were becoming the chief forces driving change in education and teacher professionalism, forces that in many ways later culminated in the American *No Child Left Behind Program*. As Hargreaves (1989) put it, "assessment, more than curriculum or pedagogy, has been the prime focal point for educational change" (p.41). He emphasized that top-down assessment procedures tend to restrict the autonomy of classroom teachers, who increasingly were being made to "teach to the test," even as these tests were becoming increasingly irrelevant. This is a reflection, as Hargreaves (1989) noted, on the way assessment was increasingly becoming one of the more important means by which a *hidden curriculum* was enforced.

Canadian TESOL Curricula and Citizenship

English instruction has never been simply about teaching language as a "stand alone" subject. As Benesch (1994) argues, citizenship preparation has long been an integral aspect of second language education where large numbers of immigrants are being integrated into modern nation states. Within the Canadian context, federal policy documents (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006) make it plain that TESOL programming is for the dual purposes of teaching the second language and integrating newcomers. The crucial importance of adult English as a Second Language programming for the integration of newcomers has also been acknowledged in a plethora of teaching materials and curriculum guidelines (Ilieva, 2000), and in the academic literature (Wong, Duff & Early, 2001).

For nation-states such as Canada, the integration of newcomers is a pressing problem in light of globalization and the unprecedented number of migrants on the move world-wide. Developed countries are increasingly competing with one another to attract skilled immigrants and take advantage of these vast diasporas in ways that preserve and strengthen democratic institutions, social cohesion and economic vitality (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002).

The string of events that led to the creation of the current structure of adult ESOL programming in Canada started in 1990, when the federal government initiated a major policy shift in response to changing demographic and economic forces. In response to the perception that high levels of immigration were vital to Canada's long-term economic and political interests, priority was given to second language education on a centralized and consistent basis for the first time. ESOL programming was seen as central to the removal of barriers to newcomer integration and the ability of the nation state to reap the full financial benefits of immigration (for a fuller description of the history of ESOL programming in Canada, see Fleming, 2007).

National TESOL assessment and curriculum procedures are framed by the *Canadian Language Benchmarks* (CLB). The CLB covers the full range of English proficiency (from beginning to full fluency), incorporates literacy and numeracy, emphasises tasks and situations, features stand-alone descriptors per level, encourages local curriculum development, and includes proficiencies related to learning strategies, socio-cultural and strategic competencies. CLB development is overseen by the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB), a non-profit organisation founded in 1998 and funded by the federal government. It is "governed by a nationally representative, multi-stakeholder board of directors including representation from government, English as a Second Language and French as a Second Language experts and language assessors" (CCLB). The official character of the CLB is attested to by government support for the CCLB and the fact that the CLB was painstakingly developed in a long series of consultations and draft formulations facilitated by federal agencies (Norton Pierce & Stewart, 1997).

The Significance of Curricular Tasks

However, before I proceed to a detailed examination of the CLB and a few of its related documents, I wish to review some issues related to the nature of task-based assessment and hidden curricula. These issues pertain closely to the place content plays in a document of this sort and to the relationship between assessment instruments and curricula. As mentioned, it is my contention that the CLB is a hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968) in the sense that it encapsulates a privileged body of content and methods meant to socialize learners (and teachers). In my view, it is significant that this document is framed as a series of pedagogical tasks since it is through the content of these tasks that curricular control is exercised over practitioners.

Tasks have been commonly employed, as both criteria for assessment and as ways to organise pedagogical activities, since the broad currency of *experiential learning* was established in General Education. This form of education, which is generally taken to mean "learning by doing," had its early roots in the mid-19th century shift from formal, abstract education in schools to practice-based education, elements of which are foundational in the pedagogy of both Dewey (1938) and Freire (1989).

Although the term *task* has had a long history in General Education theory, it is important to note that it was not common to use the term in describing SLE classroom objectives and activities prior to the late 1980's (Long & Crookes, 1992). In second language education (SLE), the use of the term *task*, in fact, has been closely associated with assessment since the advent of the communicative approach. In one of the first discussions of the communicative approach in curriculum design, for

example, Johnson (1979) makes the links between curriculum development, tasks and assessment very clear:

Fluency in the communicative process can only develop within a ‘task- orientated teaching’- one which provides ‘actual meaning’ by focusing on tasks to be mediated through language, and where success or failure is seen to be judged in terms of whether or not these tasks are performed. (p. 200)

Thus, within the communicative approach, the choices a TESOL teacher makes about what to teach are made in light of the outcomes and objectives their pedagogy is meant to achieve. In other words, one first sets one’s learning goals and then determines what sequence of tasks best achieves them. Achieving these tasks is the criteria used by teachers to determine whether or not their learners have successfully mastered the material and can thus proceed to the next level of instruction. What is key to my argument here is that content is integral to task design within the communicative approach to second language education.

In recent years, tasks have become prominent in many popular TESOL teacher education manuals and course texts (e.g. Brown, 2000). Many SLE scholars have elaborated task-based curriculum models (Skehan, 2002) and tasks have long been significant elements developed within many curriculum and assessment benchmark projects undertaken by national governments (Brindley, 1994).

Language Policy Implementation and Curricula

As Parent (2011) points out, teachers implement national language policy by virtue of being the chief intermediaries between mandated curricula and the classroom. However, as is often the case with national language policy implementation (Shohamy, 2007), the absence of a nationally mandated curriculum has meant that the assessment and placement instrument, in this case the *CLB*, has become the *de facto* guideline for instructional content in most jurisdictions and not a set of randomly chosen assessment criteria. It is no wonder, under these circumstances, that some curriculum resources centers have referred to it unambiguously as a curriculum document (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2006).

As the document recommends, teachers and assessment officers might very well feel free to extract the language embedded within the sample tasks and to add other content as they see fit. However, the content already found within the document is meant to be the starting point for those educators who use it. Thus, the content is privileged, in the sense that its importance is stressed by its inclusion. Absent content is not privileged and, as I detail below, reveals serious shortcomings within *CLB*. Because of the *CLB*’s nature as a national curriculum document, the content found within it (and excluded from it) takes on an official character.

These contradictory views on whether the document is an instrument for assessment or task/curriculum development are found within the *CLB* itself. Even though the author states in its introduction that the *CLB* is “not a curriculum guide” (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2000, p. V111), she does say, in the very next paragraph, that the *CLB* does describe, “what adult ESL instruction should prepare adult ESL learner to do”. Thus, the *CLB* quite clearly sets up tasks which learners are meant to perform in order to advance to the next level of instruction. Teachers, as the document plainly states, are expected to organize learning opportunities for the successful completion of these tasks. The claim that the *CLB* is not meant to inform curriculum development is rather dubious. As Fox and Courchene (2005) point out,

[a]lthough the *CLB* is neither a curriculum nor test according to its developers, providing details regarding text length and sample tasks leads anyone using the document to use these as guidelines for task development. (p. 13)

This point is reinforced by a study of LINC teachers recently conducted by Haque and Cray (2007), in which their respondents confirmed that the CLB was something they could not ignore as a set of reference points for curriculum development. As they documented, the teachers in their study were required to use the CLB in planning assessment, reporting student progress and making use of what the document contained in terms of “themes, skills, and grammar points, thus regulating what could be taught” (p. 636).

These contradictions reflect, as I shall elaborate on below, the lack of differentiation in the document between restricted and broad definitions of what constitutes a curriculum. The document clearly makes a point of NOT specifying HOW English should be taught. However, in my view, the document does privilege WHAT should be taught through the use of exemplar tasks.

It is important to note that making pedagogical decisions in reference to curriculum guidelines requires a fair degree of professional autonomy (Fleming, 1998). As I note below, restrictions on the curriculum development processes (especially in terms of time and resources) in this milieu inculcate a hierarchy. Unfortunately, the insecurity inflicted on ESOL programming within Canada through various funding strategies and conditions has served to deprofessionalize the field (Haque & Cray, 2007). In comparison to other educational sectors, ESOL teachers are often paid far less and have limited access to professional development in workplaces that are transitory and poorly supported in terms of resources. As a result, few ESOL teachers have time to focus on developing context-sensitive pedagogies related to critical citizenship and subsequently develop an over-reliance on materials that are superficially Canadian. In sum, the *CLB* performs the function of institutionalizing ESOL instructors by providing them with a template for their classroom practices and framing their assessment procedures. Under these circumstances, privileged content, in the sense I have talked about above, is difficult to augment or resist. It is an examination of this privileged content that I now turn to, in a detailed examination of the *CLB*.

The Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000

The Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Adults (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2000) was an attempt to define English language proficiency organized into 12 levels, from beginner to full fluency. As Norton Pierce and Stewart (1997) noted, the policy initiatives that gave rise to this document were framed around the need to develop a systematic and seamless set of English language training opportunities out of the myriad federal and provincial programs that existed previously.

A French version of the CLB entitled *Standards Linguistiques Canadiens* was released in 2002 (Canadian Centre for Language Benchmarks, 2002). According to Marianne Kayed, the Senior Program and Partnerships Manager for the Canadian Centre for Language Benchmarks (personal correspondence, February 4, 2014), the original French version was met with a great deal of criticism because it was simply a translation of the English. In fact, the Quebec government commissioned its own French language assessment procedures (Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés Culturelles, 2006) for utilization within that province.

Nevertheless, after an extensive consultation process primarily with practitioners, a second French version of the CLB was released in 2006: the *Niveaux de Compétence Linguistique Canadiens: Français Langue Seconde pour Adultes* (The Canadian Centre for Language Benchmarks, 2006). This latest version differs significantly from both the 2000 and the later 2012 English versions, in terms

of both its theoretical framework and citizenship content. The theoretical framework is more closely and explicitly aligned with Bachman's (1990) construct of communicative competence. Moreover, the citizenship content within the latest French version is substantially more extensive than in the English versions. Task exemplars within the document, for example, describe the need to participate in social and community-based politics (p. 65; p. 241) regardless of language ability. This emphasis on participation is lacking within the English versions of the CLB. Given the substantial differences between the French and English versions of the CLB, and the fact that the French version of the CLB is seldom utilized either in Quebec or the rest of French Canada, I will not treat the French version further here. The bulk of the content found in both the 2000 and 2012 English versions of the CLB was arranged for each level in a series of matrices that correspond to the language skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. As in the Common European Framework for Languages each benchmark (or level) contains a general overview of the tasks to be performed upon completion of the level, the conditions under which this performance should take place, a more specific description of what a learner is expected to do, and examples and criteria that indicate that the task performance has been successful.

Given the fact that the *CLB* is quite clearly task-based, some scholars have referred to it as a *de facto* curriculum document (e.g. DeVoretz, Hinte & Werner, 2002) despite contrary claims made within the first version of the CLB. As I have argued elsewhere (Fleming & Walter, 2004), the empirical content of pedagogical tasks are of key importance, particularly when they are represented as exemplars in documents used to inform curriculum development. Practitioners inevitably use the *CLB* as a set of guidelines to inform pedagogical choices, particularly in view of a lack of nationally prescribed curricula (Shohamy, 2007). In effect, given the official nature of the *CLB*, the document privileges content found within the sample tasks they provide. To be meaningful in terms of assessment or pedagogy, tasks have to have clear reference to non-linguistic content (Nunan, 1988). Thus, the *CLB* specifies what should be given priority in terms of English language training and, in view of its official character, represents itself as an instrument of national language policy.

In the entire 2000 version of the CLB there were only three references to tasks or competencies broadly associated with citizenship. These were to "understand rights and responsibilities of client, customer, patient and student" (p. 95); "indicate knowledge of laws, rights, etc." (p. 116); and "write a letter to express an opinion as a citizen" (p. 176). Unfortunately, these competencies are not elaborated upon further, and so remain rather vague and incomplete. Most revealing is what was missing, especially in terms of how language is connected to exercising citizenship. For example, the word *vote* did not appear in the document.

In addition, through admission and omission the document represented good citizens as obedient workers. Issues related to trade unions and collective agreements were given next to no attention in the document. This is not surprising, given the lack of such rights in the Canadian ESL teaching workforce (Haque & Cray, 2007). References to labour rights, such as filing grievances or recognizing and reporting dangerous working conditions, were non-existent. Employment standards legislation is covered in a single vague reference to knowledge about the existence of minimum wage legislation. The 2000 CLB fails to mention other aspects of standards of employment legislation, workers' compensation, employment insurance, or safety in the workplace. However, a lot of space in the document was devoted to giving polite and respectful feedback to one's employer, participating in job performance reviews and meetings about issues such as lunchroom cleanliness.

While the document did represent language learners as having rights and responsibilities, these were almost exclusively related to being good consumers. Learners were to understand their rights and responsibilities as a 'client, customer, patient and student' (p. 95), but not as a worker, family member, participant in community activities, or advocate. Adult English language learners enrolled in programs informed by the CLB often complain about consistently having been denied

overtime pay and access to benefits, being forced to work statutory holidays, or being fired without cause (Fleming, 2010). It was also disconcerting to note the limitations placed on the few references to citizenship and the manner in which they were often couched. Only one of the three instances noted above (writing a letter) provided a view of citizenship as active, albeit fairly limited, engagement. The other two were decidedly individualistic, vague, passive and abstract. No content linked citizenship to collective action or group identity.

Significantly all three of the competencies referring to citizenship occurred at the very highest benchmark levels, at which point students are writing research papers at universities. The document thus implied that opinions expressed in languages other than English had little value and that voting not informed by a high level of proficiency is an activity that warrants little engagement, a position that recalls the ways in which voting rights have been denied in other jurisdictions on the basis of low levels of education.

The Canadian Language Benchmarks 2012

The new version of the CLB (Hajer & Kaskens, 2012) is based on an extensive process designed to establish the validity and reliability of descriptors included within the document. As noted in the introduction to the 2012 version of the CLB, these revisions were made in consultation with selected experts in the field of language testing, who evaluated the document in light of technical guidelines provided by the American Education Research Association (1999) and the Council of Europe (2011). Unlike the 2000 version, the new version is forthright about claims that it is designed to be ‘a national standard for planning curricula for language instruction in a variety of contexts’ (Hajer & Kaskens, 2012, p. v).

Although a few references to labour rights were added in the new version of the CLB, the focus on consumer rights continues to dominate. Benchmark 5, for example, contains an exemplary task that requires an understanding of employment standards legislation (Hajer & Kaskens, 2012, p. 89). Within benchmark 7 there is reference to pedagogical tasks in which one ‘participate[s] in a union meeting to discuss workload, wages and working conditions’ (p. 57). These are laudable, if somewhat scant, improvements.

However, citizenship rights remain undeveloped in the new version. Voting is mentioned only twice and in reference to passive activities: once within an exemplar task in which a learner is expected to ‘listen to an all-candidates’ debate during an election campaign to analyse and evaluate arguments presented by each candidate and determine which candidate to vote for’ (Hajer & Kaskens, 2012, p. 35), and a second task almost identical in content that appears on the same page. Both references are found in the passive listening framework at benchmark 12 (the highest in the document), the level at which one is writing graduate level assignments.

The Hidden Curriculum within the CLB

As Stern (1983) noted, the term curriculum can be defined in two ways. The first has a restricted sense, as pertaining to the topics covered in a particular course or program. The second is much broader, as pertaining to the overall functions of an educational institution or instrument. Johnson (1989) was among the first within our field to systematically elaborate the implications inherent within this broader use of the term to focus on “all the relevant decision-making processes of all the participants” (p. 1). Johnson compared and contrasted three approaches to participant roles in policy determination and implementation. In the first, the *specialist* approach, a hierarchical chain of command separates different participants who have different responsibilities for decision-making. Needs analysts determine syllabus goals, material writers make materials, and teachers

implement teaching acts. There is little communication between the levels of this hierarchy that is not top-down. In contrast, Johnson's second approach, the *learner-centered*, involves all the participants, particularly students and teachers, at every stage of decision-making. The *integrated approach*, Johnson's third, allows all the participants to have an awareness of all the curriculum decisions being made, but delegates responsibility to those who are best positioned and qualified to make in particular areas. Communication and input goes both up and down the levels. The *integrated approach* sounds ideal. In contrast to the *learner-centred approach*, it is realistic in terms of the amount of time allotted to participants in the curriculum development process while being more egalitarian than the *specialist approach* to decision-making.

However, as Richards (2001) notes, there are numerous concrete restraints on classroom teachers that restrict their freedom to make decisions along these abstract lines. These restrictions consist of complex sets of environmental factors that relate to program goals, the concrete restraints related to the resources that are available and the particular learners and teachers involved. The most important of these concrete restraints is that of time. Most teachers have little time or resources to worry about things that occur outside of the immediacies within their classroom doors. As Nation and Macalister (2010) point out, most actual curricular processes do not follow sequences in which one step is fully treated before the next one is covered, despite the recommendations made by many curriculum theorists in the field (e.g. Breen, 1987; Graves, 2000; Markee, 1997; Murdock, 1989; Stern, 1983; Richards, 2001). So, for example, even though practitioners have been encouraged to use needs assessments as a starting point in determining curriculum components since at least the time of Nunan's (1988) seminal work on the *learner-centered curriculum*, very few teachers working in the marginalised field of settlement second language teaching actually conduct them in any kind of systematic manner for the reasons noted above by Haque and Cray (2007).

As a result, teachers in our milieu often adopt a position at the bottom of the curriculum development hierarchy. Typically, this means that teachers exercise control over the "how" of teaching but not the "what". In a study conducted by Linder (1999/2000), for example, teachers working under the auspices of an Israeli Ministry of Education curriculum were able to decide on "the organization and procedures one must follow" (p. 17), but had no power to modify contents and skills-objectives for their English language program. Similarly, teachers in a study in South Korea conducted by Parent (2011) complained that the nationally prescribed English textbook (which doubled as the curriculum) was too restrictive. Even though it provided leeway in terms of procedures, they argued that, "part of teaching is deciding what is to be taught, not simply how" (Parent, 2011, p. 93).

What is the *hidden curriculum* that is represented within the *CLB* and how is it meant to be actualized in classroom instruction? As I have indicated above, the policy that informs the document makes it clear that the *CLB* is designed for more than simply framing English language instruction. The *CLB* is designed additionally to acculturate second language immigrants into Canadian citizenship. However, as pointed out above, the ways that citizenship is defined in the document is very different than how it is commonly conceptualized by learners. Instead of the active participatory conceptions expressed to Fleming (2008) by a sample of ESL learners, the *CLB* represents second language immigrants as infantilized and passive, unable to exercise the rights of citizenship until they have mastered a highly advanced level of English language proficiency. For the majority of ESL learners, who will not have the opportunity to master English at the level of writing graduate papers, this official document effectively denies them preparation for active citizenship. They must be content with a second-class citizenship that entails the passive acceptance of their social and economic conditions. Maybe their children will move up a few rungs in this hierarchy, but not them.

Talking Back to the Curriculum

A key implementation document officially associated with the *CLB* (Holmes, Kingwell, Pettis & Pidlaski, 2001) provides explicit guidelines and examples of how teachers are to implement the document into their program. These guidelines recommend that teachers first determine how the *CLB* fits into the purpose and goals of their program and then identify and prioritize the possible initiatives that would correspond to appropriate CLB learner-centered competencies.

This orientation towards curriculum implementation reflects a *progressivist value system* (Clark, 1987), in which teachers are expected to design their own school-based curricula. In Clark's (1987) framework, this is in contrast to *classical humanism*, in which teachers are expected to implement the curricula recommended by administrators and *reconstructionism*, in which teachers are expected to implement curricula designed by experts. By adopting a progressivist orientation, the CLB and its associated documents *have the appearance* of avoiding the perpetuation of curriculum-planning hierarchies that maintain inequalities between ESL theorists, curriculum experts and practitioners (Pennycook, 1989).

However, as Giroux (1981) points out, one must go beyond the rhetoric and platitudes commonly found in pedagogical processes and examine concrete particularities if one is to see clearly how they operate as “agents of legitimation, organized to produce and reproduce dominant categories, values, and social relationships necessary” (p. 72). In other words, we must go beyond appearance and examine what is hidden.

Through this examination of the concrete aspects of the CLB, I argue that a hidden curriculum is at work in this instance that realizes and reinforces a hierarchical paradigm of citizenship. It does this by privileging particular aspects of curricular content that infantilizes second language learners and utilizing a hierarchized orientation towards the roles that teachers play in curriculum development. To reiterate: there are very few references to citizenship within the entire document and those that do exist link high levels of English language proficiency to trivialised forms of citizenship.

In terms of concrete practice, I think that the challenge is to develop curriculum processes that allow students and practitioners to “talk back” to language policy implementation documents such as the CLB. It is not enough to simply “start with” or “modify” a document such as this for one's own classroom. Students and practitioners should be able to expand on Clark's (1987) notion of a *progressivist* orientation towards curriculum so that they are helping design curriculum guidelines (in whatever guise they take: even as assessment instruments). In this way, the ground could be clear to develop curriculum content that contains equitable citizenship content

Viewing Curriculum as a Complicated Conversation

Transmission linear process models based on preconceived pedagogical objectives dominate the curriculum models currently in second language education (Aguilar, 2011; Arnfast & Jorgenson, 2010; Gunderson, Odo & D'Silva, 2011). In these models, content is selected through the consideration of a set of factors, such as learner needs, programming goals or predetermined linguistic elements. The content is formulated into sets of summative objectives. These processes are linear in the sense that the curriculum content is not modified once determined. These processes are transmission-based in the sense that course content, once determined, is transmitted in one direction from the teacher to the learner. The task of the teacher, in these models, is to impart the predetermined course objectives as definitive versions of knowledge.

This type of process can be seen concretely in the model provided in a recent overview of curriculum design by Nation and McAlister (2010), two highly cited seminal theorists in the field. In

their text, they outline sets of inner and outer circles that provide a model for language curriculum design. The outer circles list a range of factors (principles of instruction; teaching environment; and learner needs) that effect the overall course production. The sets of inner circles (course content and sequencing; format and presentation of materials; monitoring and assessment of student progress) are centered on the overall goals of the course in question. In this model, course content consists primarily of linguistic elements such as vocabulary, grammar, language functions, discourse, and learning skills and strategies.

Whether linguistic elements can truly be represented in the language classroom as sets of predetermined and definitive course objectives (“facts”) is a matter for another debate elsewhere. What is of importance here is the way non-linguistic course content is incorporated into this model. Borrowing from Cook (1983), Nation and Mcalister (2010) describe non-linguistic content as “ideas that help the learners of language and are useful to the learners” (p.78). These ideas can take the form of imaginary happenings, an academic subject, “survival” topics such as shopping, going to the doctor or getting a driver’s license, interesting facts, or a set of subcategories pertaining to culture.

It is the process of determining cultural content within this model that interests me particularly. Nation and Mcalister (2010) argue that a curriculum should move learners “from explicit knowledge of inter-related aspects of native and non-native cultures, to markedly different conceptualizations between the cultures, to understanding the culture from an insider’s view and gaining a distanced view of one’s own culture” (p. 78). In other words, course content moves in a linear fashion that first explicitly contrasts static versions of the first and target cultures and then acculturates learners into that target culture, turning them away from their first culture. Nothing in this model suggests the possibility of equitable or dual cultures or the notion of a fluid hybridity between or within various cultures. The implied goal in this model is to transmit the target (i.e. socially dominant) culture as a set of pedagogical objectives.

This linear and transmission model is the way, in fact, that the citizenship content operates within the CLB. As mentioned above, the CLB privileges rights and responsibilities that pertain almost exclusively to being good consumers and not to being workers, family members, participants in community activities, or advocates. These are explicitly started as objectives pertaining to the pedagogical tasks contained throughout the document. Thus, the CLB, through admission and omission, implicitly defines citizenship in a particular way and transmits this definition through privileged content to the learner. The teacher is admonished to develop specific learning objectives that frame the classroom activities and content. Again, as mentioned above, this implicit definition of citizenship was in great contrast to the conception of citizenship described by the learners in a study Fleming conducted in 2007.

Instead of the dominant linear transmission model that is expressed as pedagogical objectives, I advocate that TESOL practitioners explore viewing language curricula as *complicated conversations* (Pinar, 2012). Based on the notion that education is centered on trans-disciplinary conversations (Oakeshott, 1959) that are animated (Bruner, 1996) and within the contexts of action and reflection (Aoki, 2005), Pinar (2012) argues that curriculum is not a set of narrow pedagogical tasks and objectives, but lived experience. As he puts it, “expressing one’s subjectivity... is how one links the lived curriculum with the planned one” (p. xv). In such as conception, curricula are ongoing co-constructions between teachers and students that are always becoming. Individual curriculum documents are never fully realized, but are continually in transition.

Moreover, this “conversation between teachers and students [is] over the past and its meaning [is] for the present as well as what both portend for the future” (Pinar, 2012, p. 2). In other words, curriculum construction takes into account previous knowledge but dialogically examines it from the current and future perspectives. In terms of my discussion about citizenship, this would mean that classroom activities take into account received interpretations of what it means to be a

citizen, but examines these interpretations of citizenship from the viewpoint of the concrete present realities and the imagined future of those engaged in the conversation. It is this “conversation with others that portends the social construction of the public sphere” (p. 47) because this form of subjective engagement combats passivity and political submissiveness. The key is “self-knowledge and collective witnessing [which] reconceptualizes the curriculum from course objectives to complicated conversation” (p.47). In short, the trick is to convert the word curriculum from a noun into a verb (*currere*).

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