

**Identity Re-construction:  
An Autoethnographic Inquiry of an Experienced  
Non-Native English Speaking Teacher in an  
English-Dominant Country**

by

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M.Ed., Simon Fraser University, 2010

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

in the

Curriculum and Instruction Foundations Program  
Faculty of Education

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**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY**

**Fall 2014**

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## **Abstract**

This inquiry is an evocative autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) exploring the complexity of professional identity re-construction of an experienced Non-Native English Speaking Teacher (NNEST) who began teaching in an English-dominant country. Through vignettes describing incidents during the author's first year of teaching English in Canada, and drawing on Palmer's (1998) notions of identity and integrity, research on NNEST, and identity theorizing in language education literature, the study examines internal and external factors that may impact NNEST teacher identity re-construction in an English as a second language teaching context. External factors affecting the author's identity re-construction were linked to relations with, and positioning by, students and other members of the school community as well as broader discourses around NNEST circulating across English language teaching settings. The study points to previous teaching experiences, positioning of self and establishing a close relationship with one's inner self as internal factors impacting this experienced teacher's identity re-construction. Autoethnographic work as a means to contribute to teacher identity re-construction is also discussed.

**Keywords:** Experienced NNEST; NNEST identity reconstruction; Language teacher identity; NNEST identity and integrity

## **Acknowledgements**

This journey would not have been possible without the support of my family, professors and mentors, and friends.

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all my committee members for their time. I would especially like to mention my deepest appreciation to my supervisors, Dr. Roumiana Ilieva and Dr. Kumari Beck for their patience, their time, their insights, and their commitment to help me succeed not only with my writing, but also with my academic career.

I would also like to thank my friends and coworkers who not only asked, but also had the patience to listen to my “babbling” about my thesis topic and interest areas, even though it was probably not what they had asked for. Had they not asked, nor listened, I wouldn’t have been able to build the courage to use my stories for this thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their unconditional support. Words are not enough to express how privileged I am to be their daughter. I have to add an extra gratitude to my mother, who has always been my mentor, role model, and a big sister in all aspects of my life, especially in being a teacher. Mother, you are simply the most extraordinary!

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## List of Acronyms

NNEST	Non-Native English Speaking Teacher
NEST	Native-English Speaking Teacher
ELT	English Language Teaching
EFL	English as Foreign Language (Countries where English is not used in typical communication. E.g., Korea, Japan, China)
ESL	English as Second Language (Countries where English is learned/taught as second/additional language, such as Canada or U.S.)
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TESL	Teaching English as a Second Language
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages



# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

This thesis documents an autoethnographic study (Anderson, 2006; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000) exploring the complexity of professional identity re-construction of a Non-Native English Speaking Teacher (NNEST) who began teaching in an English-dominant country. It is a reflective personal narrative, based on lived experiences of the author/researcher, composed in a creative nonfiction style—an “informal act of reflective analysis” (Gilburne and Marshall, 2013, p. 167).<sup>1</sup> This introductory chapter provides the reasons behind the framing of my study and the story that follows, outlines my research questions and provides a roadmap for the rest of the thesis.

## How it All Began...

I love being a language teacher! And yes it is by far the most consuming thing I have ever done. I doubt that there is any other profession that requires me to utilize every bit of “self” in doing my job. It asks me to bring out almost everything I have learned and gained through life experiences. Sometimes, I wonder what it would be like to work in a different field—something other than education, or more specifically, other than *teaching*. I think of other paths I could have taken: singing, drawing, veterinary medicine (or even just grooming!), bar tending, or even cooking. Regardless of what path I imagine myself in, I see myself inevitably falling back on the idea of teaching at some point in that path: *teaching* others to sing, draw, how to take care of cats, how to mix drinks, or cook! Some say I may have been born a teacher—I have always tried to “teach” others, then I started teaching at an early age, and have been teaching for about

<sup>1</sup> However, some chapters will incorporate elements of a more traditional style of a thesis like, for example, review of relevant literature

17 years now. Teaching is also something I cannot imagine living without... I just love the experience of teaching, and being involved in the journey of someone else's learning while I learn from taking part in the experience. Yet, I sometimes ponder why teaching never gets easier for me.

'So why then does teaching make me nervous all the time? What am I afraid of? Why am I afraid after all these years?' These questions have been ricocheting inside my head, emerging to prompt me from time to time. And when they prompt me, no pedagogical or methodological reference books could comfort this feeling of insecurity towards the idea of teaching, or being in the classroom. In 2012, while working in Canada as an ESL teacher, my feeling of insecurity was at its highest peak—beginning with an encounter with a student from Korea—then amplifying...influencing my thoughts and views about every single incident surrounding me at the school. The feeling of insecurity was the igniter for this thesis. This piece is about *me*: the complex journey of fear and recovery to find my *self*—re-constructing my identity in an ESL teaching context and reclaiming my self-worth, the "integrity," as described by Palmer (1998), as an ESL teacher.

If what ignited my thesis was insecurity and fear of not knowing what was happening to me, what pushed me towards the finish line was my desire to make something out of this experience. I decided to try to make sense out of the frustration, simply because teaching is my passion, and I understood that being a teacher—as well as living any life—meant you are engaged in never-ending opportunities of *becomings*. I use the word 'opportunity' as it is really up to the person to gain something out of life experiences; for some, it may be a time or moment one wishes to simply "brush it off." I wanted to *heal* and ultimately become a better person—both personally and professionally; and sharing my story through scholarly inquiry was the way I saw fit.

There is a saying in Korean that tough times reduce in half, and happiness doubles when you share with others. Just like this old saying, sharing stories with others and learning from their stories have always been my way of resolving matters constructively. Apart from the fact that I generally enjoy writing down my thoughts, writing about one's life experience and reflecting on the incidents has value as scholarly form of inquiry by many, including, but not limited to: Freire (1970), Palmer (1998), Park

(2013), and Schön (1983). Freire argues the importance of praxis—critical thinking and reflection—as integral to emancipation and liberation from the oppressor. Palmer (1998) suggests that teachers maintain a constant connection with one’s inner self through reflective journaling, or simply keeping notes on daily happenings. Park argues that writing about the autobiographical self is not the ending of the story, but the beginning of an inquiry that informs future practice. Schön refers to two types of reflection: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Reflection-in-action refers to reflection occurring simultaneously as the action happens. Reflection-on-action refers to the process of reflecting after the action has taken place in order to improve the future implementation of the action. The form of writing down and reflecting on the encounter of the past to inform future action—which I have tried to do in this study—resembles the reflection-on-action as described by Schön.

The process of sharing with others may also give me a sense of belonging—that I am not alone in whatever concerns me. Sometimes, people can be afraid to share their feelings because they do not want to be seen “too different” from others in the community. ‘Sharing’ the pieces that I had written during my past is something new for me. As a NNEST in an English-dominant country like Canada, I have feared standing out, and my attempts to share a personal encounter seemed too courageous in the beginning. So how did I make the decision to *write* about my experiences? Why was it important for me to engage in scholarly inquiry about the encounters I had at work?

Palmer (1998) writes that change can occur only when one faces his or her own fear, while Park (2013) shares how much she had discovered by writing about her history—the complex and complicated connections surrounding her identity as a NNEST teaching in North America. Gilbourne and Marshall (2013), from their collaborative work of fact-based fiction writing, conclude that the process of writing and reflecting eventually provided insights into who they are (p. 167). In short, inspired and influenced by the power of reflective practice, I embark on this scholarly journey of becoming in order to illustrate the complexity surrounding the issue of identity of an experienced NNEST in an English-dominant context.

First, I would need to provide a brief description of my history until January of 2012, when I began working as an ESL teacher in a privately owned language school in

British Columbia, Canada. Details will unfold in the Story chapter (Chapter Five), but this background information will help you (readers) understand why I consider it important to make my experience the subject of my inquiry.

## **Teaching and I**

7 years ago, when I came to Canada to pursue a higher degree in Teaching English as Foreign/Second language (TEF/SL), what I expected to learn were new techniques in teaching English as an additional language; I think that is what many expect to learn when heading off to study in English-dominant places. Instead, what I learned was that good teaching is beyond acquiring new techniques in teaching (Pennycook, 1989). During my M.Ed., I was informed of the sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1978), critical (Freire, 1970) and poststructural theories of education (Peirce, 1995; Norton, 1997, 2006; Norton & Toohey, 2002; Toohey, 1998, 2000) and was introduced to new ways of viewing education—including the teaching and learning of an additional language. Among the insightful teachings, ideas such as teacher identity, the close relation between teacher identity and practice (Bourdieu, 1991; Cummins, 2001; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Ilieva, 2000; Palmer, 1998; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston & Johnson, 2005; Tsui, 2007), teachers as reflective practitioners (Freire, 1970; Palmer, 1998; Schön, 1983), teaching as scaffolding (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978) and learning as co-construction of knowledge through participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), the relational nature of learning and knowing (Buber, 1970; Bingham & Sidorkin, 2010; Noddings, 2005; Riele, 2009) were personally some of the strongest eye-openers. As I received my degree and contemplated on my next move—to return to Korea, or to stay in Canada, I began to wonder what it would be like to teach in a different teaching context.

Previously to studying and teaching in British Columbia, my teaching took place in Korea, an EFL context where English is not used as a primary language for communication. My students were usually Korean, or originally from Korea with extensive overseas experiences. Nevertheless, at a glance, there were more similarities than differences between the students and me. Everyone, including me, celebrated the same national holidays; spoke the same language at homes; and the ways we

celebrated the holidays were also very similar. Quite often, the word ‘we/us’ was used to identify that both the students and I were family by nationality<sup>2</sup>. In a context such as Korea, English is referred to as one of many ‘foreign’ languages people may learn for their own interests or advancement in their career. It is *foreign*, because opportunities to practice the target language outside of classroom are scarce. The classroom is where languages are learned, and the teacher is usually the sole input source. Hence, teachers who have better control of the target language are often more valued and are given precedence over those who speak English with a Korean accent.

Soon after my completion of the M.Ed., I did return to Korea for six months, but realized I wanted to try something different, as I recognized that I no longer was the same person I used to be prior to studying in Canada. Practices and decisions that never stood out as being unfair to me suddenly seemed intolerable. I wanted to make a difference, and by being an assistant director of a school, I was able to make small changes, especially in building relations with the employees. However, I wanted to be in a more diverse classroom setting, as an instructor. I wanted to be in the field, not behind a desk and disciplining students, who were timed-out from their classrooms by their teachers. I wanted to be where diversity was a typical scene.

What would be some of the differences I would encounter, if I taught in BC? Teaching in Canada would entail being in an ESL context, where English “happens” everywhere. I would be able to see if what I teach is applicable or useful in the students’ lives. I would also be able to meet students from all over the world; I might even meet students from Korea! English would be the only language every student would need to use to communicate with other students in the class (assuming they are from different countries). In terms of learners, I think I would mostly be teaching adult learners, since teaching children and young learners in public schools is a restricted occupation, which requires me to attend an additional certification program. I honestly love teaching

<sup>2</sup> The use of the pronoun we/us is also a very common way Koreans describe one’s family, school, or country. For example, while in English-speaking cultures, the first person pronoun ‘I’ will be used to describe relation or association of self (e.g., my mother, my country, my school, my home), Koreans would use the second person pronoun (우리/wu-ri/) to describe their relation or association with others (e.g., our mother, our country, our school, our home) instead of the first person pronoun (나 /na/).

children, but if I want to pursue a teaching career at a post-secondary institute in the future, I will need more experience with adult learners. At English institutes for adults in Korea, many English courses for adults are very subject focused, meaning I would only teach a particular skill (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, and listening) or the language as a system/structure (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, and function) separately. I wanted to teach English in a more integrated way, where grammar and vocabulary choice matters in order to communicate. Language schools in Canada seemed to fit the picture. I would be able to see if I can really put the relational aspect of teaching and learning I had been learning much about in my M.Ed. program into practice. How would my relationship with the adult learners differ from the ones I had with young learners and children? Simply thinking about the challenges excited me: I wanted to teach in BC, Canada!

My heightened expectations were crushed on my very first day at work, and eventually hit rock bottom during the first year. It all began with one student's actions, and then everything came tumbling down. It was something I had never experienced before. I was less worried about the questions mentioned before (i.e., Why does teaching make me nervous all the time? What am I afraid of? Why am I afraid after all these years?); the situation and the reason for my unpleasant feelings were beyond my initial worries of teaching adult learners from various countries; I had new questions preoccupying me—What was happening to me? Why do I feel secluded and isolated from this new teaching context? If I am being isolated, who and what are isolating me from where I want to be? Why do I feel so different from how I used to feel about my self? Questions arose beyond teaching techniques and methods.

The student, about whom I will give more details in my story chapter of the thesis, was a female student from Korea in her early 20s. She was a quiet student, not someone noticeable at a glance. On my very first day as a teacher at English Centre<sup>3</sup>, she asked for a washroom break and never returned. Even after I became a fulltime teacher (approximately a month later), she left whenever she found out that I was teaching her class. According to the student counselor, her words for not wanting to be in my class were, *"I didn't come all the way to Canada to learn from a Korean."* I had

<sup>3</sup> For confidentiality reasons, all names I use in my thesis are pseudonyms.

never experienced being rejected by a student without an understandable reason (e.g., differences in aims or approaches to teaching, etc.), so her silent refusal made me become obsessed with her. It was more disappointing to know that the rejection came from someone from my own country—a Korean, when I had thought being able to teach the English language in an English-dominant country as a Korean-born, was something not anyone could achieve. I was quite proud of myself, but she was saying otherwise.

That particular student opened my eyes and senses to be aware of the situatedness of my being, and as you (readers) will be able to see in the story chapter, the initial results of acknowledging my situatedness was not pretty. Even though there were some good times during the daily teaching assignments, my negative energy was growing to the point where I simply wanted to leave everything behind and return to Korea. Looking back now, I realize that simply being aware of the stereotypes NNESTs may have to endure in this field of profession could not prevent me from becoming so bitter and feeling negative towards the people in the new community. I may have known about the reality NNESTs face, but I for some reason did not relate to it personally—until I began teaching as an ESL teacher in Canada. Looking at the bright side of my encounter with that particular Korean female student—that year was the first time I was able to fully acknowledge my peripheral position within the field (as compared to being in Korea, where I was in the centre<sup>4</sup> and was wanted or preferred by the people of the community).

According to Medgyes (2001), I am an exception in the world of ELT (English Language Teaching): I am an NNEST from an EFL context, who found work in an ESL context. Medgyes describes teachers like me as “negligible percent” (p. 432): I agree. I was extremely fortunate, as I had also thought my wanting to teach “their (Speakers of English as their L1) language” in “their territory” and working for “their schools” felt more like a wishful thinking—something I could only dream of doing. Even though I have been

<sup>4</sup> In the field of TESOL Canagarajah (1999) introduced the terms “centre” and “periphery” to denote and critique the power and expertise that seem to flow in a unidirectional manner from English-dominant countries (the Centre) to EFL contexts (the Periphery) in matters of language teaching. I appropriate these terms here to reflect on how some NNESTs may be in the “centre” in their home countries in terms of their expertise, but occupy a “peripheral” position once teaching in an ESL context.

fortunate, that did not exempt me from being seen as a NNEST by some colleagues and students. Although so much research (Cook, 1999; Faez, 2011; Holliday, 2005; Kachru, 1992; Kramsch, 1997; Llorca, 2006; Medgyes, 1992, 2001; Paikeday, 1985; Phillipson, 1992, 2009; Widdowson, 1994, to only name a few) speak of the unreasonable and “pointless” (Medgyes, 1992) differentiation between NESTs and NNESTs, the reality in the ELT world is that I can either be a NEST or an NNEST—not neither one, nor both. This ‘either or’ way of perceiving language teachers conflicted with how I defined my self, and thus ultimately affected my professional identity as well as my identity as a whole being.

As much as I wanted to just hop on the next plane home, I also wanted to get to the bottom of this “swamp,” instead of giving in and letting it just devour me. If I wanted this to be my next phase in teaching the English language, I needed to see how I was going to change from this experience. The only way I knew, other than to let it go and move on was to write reflective journals and notes—pouring my honest feelings about the situation I was in. While I was looking for a path to “let out steam,” Parker Palmer’s book, *The Courage to Teach* (1998) urged me to tell this story as a way to regain my “dis-membered and disconnected” identity and integrity as a teacher. Palmer strongly urges that teachers need to start a conversation with one’s inner self<sup>5</sup> by writing stories of inner feelings. He argues that talking to/ with oneself is a way to form a relation with your self and that this relation helps teachers re-gain one’s identity and integrity as a teacher. There was now all the more reason to keep notes on my lived experiences. While keeping notes about my reality, I began to go back to some of the readings I’ve read during my first Master’s degree program.

This thesis is not only my *work*, but it has now become a mirror of *who I have become, and how I have interpreted the world—around me: my stories about my life experiences, interpreted in the way I found meaningful*. It sprouted from my feeling of weakness and insecurity as an experienced teacher feeling incompetent and unwanted in a different teaching context; the context where I was suddenly put into a group called NNESTs by the people involved in the field—students, staff, and schools. It was not

<sup>5</sup> On the basis of sociocultural and poststructural theorizing I see “inner self” as also dynamic. The idea of inner self as dynamic will be elaborated later in the thesis.



important how I perceived my self: I was in the periphery, and I could not agree with my status. For my sake, I needed to find out why this was happening to me after all these years. This is not another success story of an NNEST; it is a story of one particular teacher's insecurity, struggle, and recovery—or rather—*re-construction*. There is a strong emphasis on the *struggle*: feeling lost and confused, not knowing what to do. In Parker Palmer's words, this is a story of 're-membering'—putting my self back together and reclaiming wholeness of life" (Palmer, 1998, p. 21).

## **Research Questions**

Since the biggest difference I saw in my teaching practice was being in a different, an ESL, teaching context, the main question that has guided me through the reflecting process was, "how does/might an experienced NNEST re-construct his or her professional identity in a new teaching context?" This question also entailed some sub-questions such as, 1) what are some external factors that might influence identity struggle and negotiation for an experienced NNEST teaching in an English-dominant context? 2) What are some internal factors that might influence identity struggle and negotiation for an experienced NNEST teaching in an English-dominant context? and 3) how does using 'narratives of self' in the form of autoethnography support the negotiation and re-construction of my identity and reclaiming wholeness?

## **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this thesis is to use highly personalized account of conflicts that occurred while teaching in a new context, in order to understand some factors that may attribute to the re-construction of an experienced NNES teacher's identity when transitioning from an EFL teaching context to an English-dominant context. It is an exploration that will illustrate the complexity of professional identity negotiation and transformation of an experienced EFL NNEST in an ESL context. By reflecting on my personal experiences from the past—an inside perspective of my experiences, challenges, and accomplishments—I hope others in similar situations may gain better insight in regards to their experiences. Such understandings could also have useful

implications for future teacher training programs in English-dominant countries that involve teacher candidates from non English-dominant countries.

Park (2013) writes about how writing about oneself can be a way of understanding self-identity. I agree with her that writing is more than a final product, but a starting point—a way of “enquiry,” and a process of understanding the lived experiences of self. Palmer (1998) describes writing reflective journals as ways to communicate with your inner self. He suggests teachers should find as many ways to communicate and be able to listen to their inner selves for the sake of their work and their health (p. 33). Indeed, writing my inner thoughts and questions about specific moments at work not only helped me analyze the situation, but also played a huge role in understanding what kind of person I was as a teacher with multiple, and sometimes conflicting identities, situated far from where I wanted to stand. I hope to influence and inspire other experienced NNES ESL teachers—especially, teachers who feel as if their identities and integrities are being challenged by external factors (e.g., factors regarding recognition of qualification by others, different teaching discourse, etc.) and internal factors of teaching in a new context.

Using narratives and biographical stories may not be a new addition to the ways research has been done in this field in regards to identity construction in NNESTs. In fact, Moussu & Llurda (2008) state that many researchers include the stories of either self or research participants, and argue for the need for more research that combines both empirical and qualitative data as source of research. However, in addition to the perspectives reflected in previous narrative studies (Braine, 1999; 2010; Kahmi-Stein, 2004; Park, 2012; 2013), I believe my particular focus on an experienced teacher and adding Palmer’s (1998) perspective in “re-construction” of identity and integrity as “re-membering self as a whole being” seems to be new. Ellis & Bochner (1996) write that one of the purposes of an autoethnography is for “all people who can benefit from thinking about their lives in terms of other people’s experiences” (p. 18) to make use of it. My hope is these glimpses of my life experiences could provide insight for others as well.

## Roadmap

This thesis is organized into six chapters: Chapter One (current chapter) introduces the thesis—the “backstage,” where everything is getting ready for the main performance (i.e., the thesis) to happen. This chapter included the problem statement, the purpose of doing this research, and the research questions that guide me throughout the journey. Chapter Two, which I named Prologue, is a chapter introducing the context in which I am situated. In this chapter, I describe in greater detail who I am, or was, before beginning to teach in the language school in British Columbia. I also describe the “scene” or setting where this all happened: the Canadian-owned private language school, which I will call “English Centre” in this thesis. Chapter Three is the literature review where I provide a brief historical overview of the NNEST and NEST issues in academic literature, as well as discuss sociocultural and poststructural perspectives on NNEST professional identity negotiation and construction. I also discuss Palmer’s (1997; 1998) views on identity and integrity of a teacher as his perspectives guided me in reflecting and analyzing the incidents I experienced at work. In particular, his idea of identity as a holistic concept has helped me understand how to negotiate the conflicts I experienced in re-constructing my identity as an English language teacher. In Chapter Four I elaborate on the methodology I use for this thesis—evocative autoethnography.

Chapter Five is the story—the main section of the thesis. In this chapter, much of the reference to literature is embedded within the story and places connections between academic literature and lived experience at the centre of attention through reflections, which follow each short vignette. The stories are based on actual life experience during my first year teaching at a private language school in Canada, and yet it can be seen as fictional, in that I have recreated the short incidents into a whole story-like sequence, with characters and a plot that has a beginning, a climax, and an ending. On the other hand, it is still a non-fiction, because the rendered story is based on what actually happened. Reflections will follow immediately after the vignettes, which will draw on the NNEST literature and Palmer’s idea of identity and integrity as introduced in chapter Three. Chapter Six is the Epilogue—the closing remarks as well as the “aftermath” of the previous chapters. This chapter will not only serve as an epilogue of the main story, but will also offer my concluding comments for the entire thesis, as I revisit my research

questions and connect some of the insights I have gained from my lived experience with literature on NNEST issues.

Looking at my workplace alone, I see that the number of experienced NNEST professionals working in English-dominant communities is increasing. The once “negligible number” (Medgyes, 2001) of professionals working extensively to find voice and space as legitimate English language teachers within a professional community that might position them in the periphery is growing. Before they began working in English-dominant countries, these teachers were probably in the centre within their home countries. Braine (2010) suggests that “diversifying the scope of the research on NNS English teachers” (p. 88) is needed to better reflect the lives of NNESTs. He points out that research is “saturated” (p. 89) on particular topics, and needs to be more up-close and personal—relatable for NNESTs. Among his proposals, he suggests longitudinal studies that highlight “day to day challenges” NNESTs face, as well as “strategies for becoming more competent English teacher beyond basic linguistic competence” (p. 89). Hence, although my story may be personal, I think my story could contribute to further research, by casting light on experienced NNEST teachers’ journeys of coming to *belong* in a particular community of teachers of English situated in an English-dominant country.

If these experienced teachers are indeed increasing in number, the issue of identity construction or transformation cannot be limited to researching primarily novice teachers as most of the current literature about NNESTs in ESL contexts seems to be about (Braine, 2010; Bernat, 2008; Liu, 2006; Llurda, 2006; Moussu & Llurda, 2008; just to name a few). It is my belief that identity *re-construction* is more complex than the initial professional identity construction of novice teachers or TESL trainees. On the basis of my introduction to literature on language teacher identity in my earlier Master’s degree, it is my belief that once you are aware of how identity can change and evolve, even the subtle changes in your teaching environment would affect the way you perceive yourself and the way you teach. I am not saying that identity formation in novice teachers is a simpler process than the identity re-construction of experienced teachers: in fact, I know very well it is not. However, having an expert driver start over and go to driving school would be more difficult than having a “newbie” attend driving school to learn how to drive. In my opinion, an experienced teacher would have to navigate more

changes and challenges in 're-learning' what it means to be a TESL teacher in a different location.

The next chapter describes my reality: my workplace, and where I am situated within the workplace.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Prologue**

#### **Context of Study: The Person**

This chapter is to provide a sense of how I came to see myself. This will help you (the reader) understand who I am, and the reasons I have been seeing myself in a certain way. It includes an extended overview of my history as an English language teacher to better understand the context. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I have come to realize that the difficulty I experienced was fundamentally due to the conflicting views between how I was perceived among the people in this English language teaching (ELT) community (including the students) and how I perceived my self as an English language teacher.

I was a “valued and preferred asset” in the ELT world in Korea. In fact, I have always been envied by many since I returned from my life in Malaysia in 1987, in Grade 5. I went to Malaysia at the age of 5 when my father had to work for an overseas branch of a Korean company. There, I attended a British international school from Kindergarten to Grade 5 where English was the only language used in school, and students would be penalized for communicating in any other language. In the 80s, travelling abroad was highly restricted in Korea, and thus knowing English was not so “common” among the population, especially for young children. Back then the English alphabet was introduced in Grade 7. For these reasons, upon my return to Korea from Malaysia, everything I did differently from most Koreans was excused, because I was a “foreign transfer.” During my secondary school years and undergraduate years in Korea, English was my power and key to receiving “special treatment.” However, because I only showed high interest in certain subjects (excluding English) that were not as important in passing the

university entrance exam (e.g., Art, Music, P.E.), I was able to attend only a mediocre university in Seoul.

Despite being in a not-so-respected university, I began my teaching career during my senior year in college studying history. It was right after the 1997 Asian financial crisis when new jobs were scarce and those who had work struggled to secure them. Many of my friends decided to hide behind the safe walls of student-hood and decided to pursue a higher degree just because they could not find a decent job to support themselves. I was hired on the spot for a big Korean-owned English language teaching company based in Seoul. My proficiency in the English language and the ever-growing market of children's English education in Korea landed me a job teaching children aged from 5 to 18, when many of my peers could not find work. It did not concern the company how lacking I was in *teaching* the English language; they were just glad to have found a Korean instructor with advanced level of language proficiency.

The only training I received was a 2-week teacher-training program from the company. Besides that, I had no previous formal training or knowledge in how to teach a second/foreign language, but my 'difference' helped me get promoted more quickly, and be chosen for new projects (e.g., opening schools in the Philippines, modifying the Pre-K level program, forming a coursebook selection/feedback committee with teachers from English speaking countries—e.g., NESTs) more often than other Korean instructors. In my third year of teaching, I was a middle manager. Of course, I think I had some "gifts" as a teacher for children: I am naturally very empathetic, especially to children who are "slow or behind." I believe it came from my experience as a transfer student, naturally having to struggle to fit in with the other children. I am also quite young-at-heart, and can easily form strong relations with my students (from age 3 to secondary level). I had a wise and loving mother who was also a teacher in the 70s who had taught photography, early childhood education, and education technology in colleges and universities. She was—and is—my education "guru," who still scolds me most of the time I consult her for advice. She was the one who told me to reflect on my self, my actions, and decisions before holding anyone else accountable. Maybe without her, I could have turned into an egocentric, know-it-all who has no consideration for relationship-building in making learning happen.

While I was teaching and working as a curriculum developer, I realized I could not simply design a school curricula based on my experience as a learner in international school, and enrolled in a 6-month TESOL certificate course taught in a Korean university, by professors from a highly respected university in the United States. That was my first formal training in teaching a second/foreign language, although most of the courses were related to how languages were applied and processed—it was not about being a language teacher in an EFL teaching context. Perhaps that was why the by the end of the program, I wanted to learn more about language teaching and learning. Unfortunately, my desire to learn from practice was stronger, and I postponed my desire to study deeper into the theories and philosophies of teaching.

After my 10<sup>th</sup> year teaching in Korea, I decided it was time for me to find some balance between theory and practice: I wanted to see if others who study and talk about education would agree with my practice/understanding of teaching and learning an additional language. I embarked on a Master's degree in teaching English as a foreign/second language for international students in a university in Western Canada. My goal was to complete this degree as soon as possible and go back to Korea, where my real home was, where I would be welcomed with open arms. I assumed I would never get a teaching job in a Canadian-owned school, as there must be people out there that find me ridiculous: a Korean asking for an English teaching position in an English-dominant country? I was aware of the stereotypes that people might have about non-native speaking teachers. These people could be the students, the staff, or teachers. However, at the same time, there was a tingling belief that I may be able to overcome that barrier. Would not my past be the proof, that I am different from other NNESTs? Maybe I may have a chance at this. So I gave it a try.

Although I had a graduate TEF/SL degree, which also made me eligible for a higher level TESL certificate from TESL Canada, Canadian language schools asked for a level 1 certificate, as my previous teaching experience abroad (i.e., Korea) was not recognized as sufficient to get a teaching position in Canada. I had to be re-certified by taking another TESL certificate course (which is yet another painful story that I leave untold for now), and was lucky enough to be hired as a part-time instructor at two different Canadian-owned schools—one, a private language school owned and operated by a private company, and the other, a language school owned by a public institution of



higher learning. At that moment, I just felt like the luckiest person in the world. What I thought as being nearly impossible turned out to be possible! My self-esteem was at its highest, and I felt as if I was given the world.

Little did I know this experience was going to be one of the most memorable and insightful incidents of my career, no... *my life!*

## **Context of Study: The Place and the People**

My story happens in only one of the schools—English Centre. The other school—the public institute of higher learning—hired me as an ESL teacher for the fall session of 2012. The teaching experience there was great, but was too brief with little impact on my identity re-construction.

English Centre was a “playful” school with monthly events and projects, frequent field trips and parties. Students came from various parts of the world, and for different amount of times. The school, being a franchise of a worldwide brand, expected its teaching staff to adhere to the same teaching principles and guidelines as suggested by the headquarters in England. Teachers were expected to be aware of, and be able to teach based on the Communicative Language Approach, where communication is believed to be the “ultimate goal” in teaching this second/foreign language.

Unfortunately, I was not quite their ESL instructor, yet. To my surprise, I was told to first teach Korean as a foreign language to speakers of other languages. This was a new experience, which also put me outside my comfort zone. This is yet another story to be told, when the time is right.

After my months of probationary period as a language teacher had passed (despite the fact I did not teach the same language), I was offered a part time position as an ESL teacher. Being involved in the ESL part of the school, I realized that English Centre was a very *busy* school: students were accepted on weekly basis, meaning your classes or your students may change weekly. Graduation ceremonies were held every week as well, and depending on the number of students you have, your teaching assignments may change the following week. There was a monthly levels test that gave

the students an opportunity to “level up” to a higher level. Coursebooks were assigned for integrated language lessons (3 blocks), followed by a listening/speaking class (1 block). There were elective courses after the basic 4 blocks that students, depending on which package they enrolled in, could choose to take. Teachers taught 4 to 6 blocks a day, 5 days a week, and had paper work to submit, including the attendance roster weekly and lesson plans and report cards every month. In addition to the academic part of the school, English Centre also held monthly school-wide events that promoted everyone to feel as part of a community. In the cold months, there would be indoor activities such as talent shows and games nights; in the warm months, there would be outdoor events such as sports day, beach day, and picnics. Teachers were encouraged to take their students outside for fieldtrips, and class-based projects like collecting donations, doing a bake sale, and more. The school was, in one word, dynamic!

There were about 16 to 20 ESL instructors, both full-time and part-time, more than 10 administrative staff and student counselors/marketers, and more than 15 instructors for languages other than English. English Centre employed teachers from diverse backgrounds. Together with the Caucasian teachers born and raised in Canada or the United States, some were like myself—international professionals with valid work permits. Then there were professionals who immigrated to BC not long ago from Iran, Brazil, and Taiwan. There were some Chinese or Japanese Canadian teachers, born or moved to Canada at an early age and raised in Canada. This diversity could be seen among the administrative (non-teaching) staff members as well. The reason English Centre had such diverse group of people, was partially because of some of the management’s belief that the school would benefit more by hiring enthusiastic and well-qualified NNESTs than having NESTs who might believe they were better qualified teachers simply because they were born with a Canadian passport.

A brief school year would look like this: January, the month when I began to teach ESL, was the month many students from Brazil come for a short-term (4 to 8 weeks) language course during their summer vacation season. Each class could have up to a maximum of 14 students, with the majority coming from Brazil. In the summer, the majority of the students are from Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. The school also manages several summer programs for youth and children from Latin America, East Asia, and Europe. The number of students decreases from September, and by the end

of the year, there would only be a handful of classes opened until the next round of Brazilian students come to Canada at the end of December or early January.

During the first year working in Canada, I realized just how much the “native teacher fallacy”—a term coined by Phillipson (1992), or the idea of “nativespeakerism” mentioned by Holliday (2005), was visible among teachers and staffs. Interestingly, the construction of NNESTs and NESTs was not usually done on the basis of nationality, but was more commonly associated with the colour of one’s skin<sup>6</sup>. At English Centre, it manifested through a subtle, but visible division between the “white” and the “non-white.” teachers among the Canadian citizens and landed immigrants. As I made efforts to fit in, and having a non-immigrant status, I realized that I was somehow situated in between the two groups that constantly were unhappy about each other. To summarize, their views were quite similar: each group were saying they were better teachers, because of how the “other teachers” cannot (or would not) do thing as they did. I found it ironic that teachers held such stereotypical beliefs when they (we) teach students to be open minded towards differences.

For instance, the “white” teachers regarded themselves as being more fun and engaging, knowing how to use English more accurately, and being better representatives of the Canadian culture. They never expressed out loud that they were the owners of the language, but frequently commented on the teachers (non-white) who they deemed “unfit” to teach certain aspects of the English language. Most “white” teachers happily accepted party invitations from students, and were unafraid to share their personal information with their students. Often, the teachers in this group would come up with spontaneous activities and events, which made many—but not all—students excited. To them, the “non-white” teachers took things too seriously, and judged them (white teachers) according to what the “non-white” teachers deemed as best practice. The school usually assigned higher-level classes, or pronunciation or idioms classes to white teachers. Often, these were the classes that had room for extra activities (apart from the pre-designed syllabus).

<sup>6</sup> This brings out the issue of nativespeakerism, NNEST, and race, which I will discuss later in the literature review chapter.

The “other” teachers (i.e., non-white) considered themselves better teachers, because they were serious about what the students were getting out of their experiences here in B.C. Students paid high tuition, came all the way to a different country, and it IS the teachers’ duty to make it worth while. The teachers in this group felt they spent more time preparing for classes and getting to know their students in depth. They perceived themselves as being more sensitive to cultural differences, and always trying to incorporate diversity into their lessons. Some were determined to teach everything they could, some were more like counsellors for their students. These teachers maintained their role as teachers, and kept the “line,” but welcomed every student in need. Meaning that they did not cross the student-teacher boundary. This group talked about how the “white” teachers were very good at “winging” through their daily lessons, and were focused on only having fun without considerations for educational implications. The teachers in this group were often assigned to teach lower level classes, exam preparation classes, English for Academic Purposes (EAP), or grammar or vocabulary-focused classes. The classes were very “tight”—meaning that there was very little room for extra activities, and teachers were usually busy trying to meet the weekly objectives.

These assumptions each party seemed to hold towards the other were also stressors for me, especially while I was trying to find my space within this particular community, as I could not quite fit in fully to either groups seemingly caught up in a dichotomy. I was an Asian, holding an international graduate student status, enjoyed sacrificing my time for the students’, was always concerned of the educational implications of my actions and lesson plans, but at the same time was open arms about mingling and getting to know the students as individual persons by sharing my personal stories first. I enjoyed going out with students and colleagues, but also enjoyed thinking about future lessons and activities. I felt as if I were a tomato—is it a fruit or a vegetable? What am I?

In the next chapter, I elaborate on my understandings of identity, based on sociocultural and post-structural literature on issues surrounding NNESTs in ELT. Although academic literature on this topic discusses a variety of issues, I focus mainly on what I deem relevant to my thesis, i.e. 1) The NEST and NNEST dichotomy; 2) How the controversy has lead to inequality for NNESTs; 3) How the inequality has affected the construction of identity for NNESTs. Then I add Parker Palmer’s perspective on

identity and practice as means to justify why it is integral for experienced professionals to re-construct his or her identities when in a new teaching context.

## Chapter 3.

### NNEST in Literature

I inhabit many identities. As a professional, I am an experienced English language teacher (EFL), an international student in Canada, an ESL teacher and TESL trainer in Canada, and a bilingual Korean. As a person, I am a daughter, an older sister, a friend, a mentor, a graduate student, and more. Nevertheless, being involved in the language teaching profession, at first glance, the first label I am given by students and other teachers is ‘a Non-Native English Speaking Teacher.’ You can be many things in life, but, as already mentioned, if you are an English language teacher, you are *either* a Native English Speaking Teacher (NEST) *or* a NNEST. In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the NEST vs. NNEST dichotomy in TEAL, and review how the dichotomy of either/or has affected the issue of identities of NNES professionals.

### The NEST vs. NNEST Controversy

The field of teaching English as an additional language (TEAL), or teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) has typically employed two “species” of teachers (Medgyes, 1982): those who are from countries that speak English as their first language (i.e., the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Canada, and South Africa), and all the “rest” who are usually categorized as being NNESTs. Even though larger numbers of NNESTs teach ESL/EFL worldwide (Canagarajah, 1999), NESTs have been traditionally trusted to be better linguistic models and a more reliable source in one’s goal to master the English language (Chomsky, 1986). Chomsky’s argument—that language is best learnt from a native speaker of English—gave power to the already powerful language and the countries that seemingly “owned” it, thus giving NESTs superior status over NNESTs. It not only promoted linguistic imperialism in countries that were smaller and weak; it also became

a powerful money-maker for ELT as a business (Braine, 2010). On the other hand, this view also generated a lot of ‘talk’ among academics in the field of linguistics, applied-linguistics, and education.

Many have been calling for re-evaluation of this unfounded division (Braine, 1999, 2005, 2010; Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Cook, 1999; Davies, 2003; Faez, 2011; Kramsch, 1997; Liu, 1999; Mahboob, 2005, 2010; Medgyes, 1983, 1994, 2001; Moussu & Llorca 2008; Paikeday, 1985; Park, 2012; Phillipson, 1992, 2009; Stern, 1983, 1992; Widdowson, 1994), arguing the injustice of categorizing people by their place of birth or marginalizing people based on the so-called “lack” of nativity of a certain language, and that, “teachers are made rather than born whether teachers are native or non native” (Lipson, p. 192, 1992). Paikeday (1985) in his work, “The native speaker is dead”, asserts that the NES is an imaginary being (p. 12). Widdowson (1994) claimed that NESs have no advantage when the focus is put on *learning* the language, rather than the usage of language. Kramsch (1997) also questioned the idealization of NESs, saying that being a native speaker of the language is not a privilege by birth or resulting from education, but “acceptance by the group that created the distinction between native and non-native speakers.” (p. 363). She pointed out that even if learners and NNEs believed NESs are ideal for one’s improvement in spoken form of the target language, they have to be reminded that NESs do not speak the idealized, standardized version of the target language, and that everyone’s speech is influenced by one’s historical background and social position. In short, she stated that there is no reason for NNEs to try to imitate a NES’s speech. In her opinion, the ideal speaker of the target language simply does not exist.

Summarizing some of the research on the NEST and NNEST controversy argued by the scholars mentioned above it could be pointed out that the main reasons for disagreements on the term NNEST seem to be that: (1) nationality cannot be the basis of credibility as to who are better teachers of the target language; (2) there is no standard English: English among the NESs varies by region, country, and personal history; (3) the prefix “non” in NNEST has a negative connotation, implying that one lacks something the other has. This may lead to an inferiority complex among those who do not speak English as their first language; (4) NESTs may be better language models and references for learners. However, NNESTs also possess equally significant

advantages for learners who wish to learn the target language (i.e., being better learner models), and may sometimes be more qualified to teach the target language; (5) there are some qualities only NNESTs possess—deeper metalinguistic awareness of the English language, sensitivity toward the learners' culture and learning journey, and most likely ability to speak the first language their students speak (Medgyes, 2001). There is too much ambiguity in differentiating teachers into two groups and granting one particular group most of the power. Faez (2011) warns that “attempts to categorize individuals as NES/NNES can result in the misrepresentation of their true linguistic identities” (p. 396). Using a qualitative case study approach, she examined the NES/NNES status of six linguistically diverse teacher candidates in Canada, and found that the teacher candidates did not fall under the NES/NNES category, but instead, they actively negotiated and constructed their true linguistic identities. Her research proposed that “linguistic identities [are] relational, dialogic, dynamic, multiple, and situated” (p. 396), not set or fixed. In my story in chapter five I will offer an account that speaks to these features of linguistic identities as linked to how I was being positioned or positioned myself vis-à-vis others in English Centre. I will now turn to a discussion of literature that focuses on the legitimacy of NNES as teachers of English.

## **NNEST Status**

The majority of research in NNESTs status or legitimacy in ELT began since the work of Robert Phillipson (1992), Péter Medgyes (1983, 1994, 2001), and George Braine (1999). It is worth mentioning their work since they provided the grounds for many NNESTs to speak up against the inequality they face vis-à-vis NEST, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

Robert Phillipson (1992), while working for the British government to promote English worldwide, reflected on the imperialistic traits of English, and criticized the use of English as tool for maintenance and reconstitution of power, which continues even to this day. English language imperialism upholds structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages, and has put English—and all things closely related to English—in a privileged position. Phillipson criticized the five tenets of English applied linguistics and English language teaching theory and renamed them as fallacies:



1) English is best taught monolingually (“The monolingual fallacy”); 2) the ideal teacher is a native speaker (“The native speaker fallacy”); 3) the earlier English is taught, the better the results (“The early start fallacy”); 4) the more English is taught, the better the results (“The maximum exposure fallacy”); and 5) if other languages are used much, standards of English will drop (“The subtractive fallacy”) (1992, p. 185). His more recent work, *Linguistic Imperialism Continued* (2009) notes that not much has changed since his first work in 1992.

Among the 5 tenets, or fallacies, above, the second fallacy fits well with the purpose of this thesis, and I will explore it in a little more detail. Phillipson (1992) mentions that this fallacy is “old school,” when teachers did not have the additional tools/gadgets and materials to enhance their lessons. It was the time when all teachers had were themselves—no CD/ DVD players and audio tracks (and no internet). He also claims that NNESTs are capable of analysing appropriate usage and teaching the target language through teacher training and practice. Further, he also noted that once being learners of the language, NNESTs are better qualified to teach the target language than those who were born to it.

Phillipson (1992) also argues that powerful organizations that promote English describe the language as something providential (something other languages are not), well established (unlike other languages that are only spoken locally), and as the gateway to the world (English opens up new opportunities; whereas other languages cannot) (p. 309). His theory is illuminating as it exposes the hidden agenda and the “power game” underscoring the field of English language teaching. I personally thought it was insightful and more valid, as it came from a NES, rather than from a NNEST contesting his or her lack of power. I feel that many more NESs need to advocate the fallacy of native-speakerism, as it lends more power to the terms being considered invalid and unfair. The argument that disagrees with the differentiation of language teachers needs to come from both parties, or it does not gain enough power to create change. As the old saying goes, “It takes two hands to clap,” and in this case, I believe it takes two (both) groups of teachers to bring about change to the deeply engrained dichotomy.

Medgyes's work is more focused on the teachers and their teaching methods than the language itself. In *The schizophrenic teacher* (1983) and *Native or Non-native: Who's worth more?* (1992), he shares his experience as a NNEST in Hungary. For him, an NNEST is someone who speaks English as a second or a foreign language, and speaks the language his or her monolingual students speak (Medgyes, in Celce-Murcia, 2001, p 433). Instead of arguing that NESTs and NNESTs are equal, he begins by stating that they are actually "different species" (2001, p. 434), and the fact that they are different would make them equally important beings in the ELT world. He comes to this argument by comparing the two groups in terms of 1) language proficiency, 2) behaviour in teaching, 3) the correlation between the two factors (1 & 2), and 4) value or worth as being equally good teachers (2001, p. 434). His research, which collected self-reports from teachers (both NESTs and NNESTs), concluded that NNESTs shortcoming of language proficiency turned out to be the most valuable quality, as this shortcoming promoted the development of other capacities in NNESTs. These qualities of NNESTs, some of which are—metalinguistic awareness, sensitivity to learners' cultural diversities and struggles to learn the target language, and being better language learner models—were teacher qualities that NESTs either did not have, or had a very difficult time in trying to possess (p. 440). As a result, Medgyes concluded that the differences between the two species make it meaningless to judge who is better or worse. Hence, they should be understood as equally good teachers. Nevertheless, Medgyes does leave a distinction between NEST and NNEST, suggesting collaborative teaching to complement each other's "disadvantages." I respect his work for addressing how NNESTs are not a group of people who lack the qualities to be seen as a good English language teacher.

Edited by George Braine (1999), the book *The Non-Native Educators in English Language Teaching* is a collection of articles ranging from addressing issues of NNEST identity, to socio-political concerns, to implications for teacher education. The first part of the book, *Who We Are*, includes stories of self and others on the issue of credibility and identity on being non-native speakers of English in the field of ELT. Among them, Jacinta Thomas's (1999) autobiographical story on the various issues of credibility in NNESTs, are still major issues today after 15 years. It reflects how deeply the idea of "nativespeakerism" has been believed to be a nonnegotiable truth. The second part *Sociopolitical Concerns*, deals with bigger social and political issues such as race,

gender, and power in TESOL. The last part of the book (Implication for Teacher Education) includes suggestions and implications for teacher training programs, and for future NNEST teachers. Since this book was published, many issues concerning NNESTs in TEAL have been researched and shared. I could see why the book has its significance within the NNEST research: not only was it the first book to vocally and visibly show the reality of what it means to be an NNEST within the field of ELT, but most of the issues and topics the book addresses still seem to be on-going issues and topics of today. In addition to the issues presented, the suggested implication for teacher-training programs in the final part of the book (written around the 90s) also closely resembles the issues in language teacher training of today. In 2010, Braine published another book, *Nonnative Speaker English Teachers: Research, Pedagogy, and Professional Growth*, where he provides the past, the present, and the future of research in the issues of NNESTs. His book explores the discrimination against NNESTs in the inner, outer, and the expanding circles of English (Kachru, 1992). He also presents his research on the life stories of two NNESTs, analyzing the different lives they have lived. This book also provides guidance for future researchers who are interested in pursuing research in this field, by not only providing a historical overview of NNEST research, but also by stating the latest “trend” and shortcomings of NNEST research. He suggests that future researchers should avoid the already saturated areas of research (distinguishing NESTs and NNESTs, for example) and instead diversify the areas of research by investigating areas beyond the perceptions and distinctions (p. 89). For instance, research on self-perception, teachers’ and students’ perceptions are already common topics of research in ELT field (Braine, 2010). However, compared to the amount of research on pre-service or graduate level NNESTs in North American context, or issues with language learners, there is not much research directly using lives of experienced NNESTs, especially of those who are pursuing their careers in English-dominant countries.

Overall, there is an increasing interest and effort in finding voice for NNESTs within the field of ELT, yet such work is still in its early stages. Moussu and Llorca (2008) concur with what Medgyes (2001) said more than a decade ago: there still needs to be more research that gives voice and legitimizes the NNESTs positioned in the periphery. Braine (2005) speculates that the main reason why NNEST issues have not gained

prominence in the wider ELT field may be that NNEST graduate students studying for their Masters or Doctoral degrees in English speaking communities are the ones more interested in doing the majority of the research around NNESTs or NNESTs. However, these studies are mostly left with the schools' libraries as theses and dissertations, and rarely published.

In the next section, I explore some of the issues that are mentioned in the literatures that talk about the unequal treatment between NESTs and NNESTs.

## **Discussion of Inequality Between NEST vs. NNEST in Research Literature**

There is no "hard" evidence to justify the differentiating between the two groups of English language teachers (Moussu & Llorca 2008). Nevertheless, the inequality between being a NEST and a NNEST is still observable in textbooks and teaching materials (Cook, 1999), teacher-training programs (Ilieva, 2010; Park, 2012), as well as in many teachers' and students' beliefs (as I mentioned at the end of the previous chapter). I elaborate more in the following paragraphs.

The unfair treatment of NNESTs in the field extends its influence towards the hiring of NESTs over NNESTs, since many learners holding the belief that NESTs are the better teachers are the main clients for many schools (Mahboob, A., Uhrig, K., Hartford, B., & Newman, K. 2004; Moussu, 2006). For example, Moussu (2006, p. ix) found that overall, students' attitudes were more positive towards native English speaking teachers (NESTs) than towards non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) even though students taught by NNESTs had a more positive attitude towards NNESTs in general than students taught only by NESTs. The findings suggested that NNESTs usually needed more time with their students in order to be recognized as a legitimate teacher. However, schools' preference to hire NESTs more than NNESTs get in the way of giving NNESTs the chance to be recognized as "good enough" by his or her students.

NNESTs find it more difficult to find a teaching position in ESL contexts such as BANA countries. Even if they do find work, they are often limited to teaching certain skills or systems of the English language (Mahboob, 2010). Sometimes, NNESTs are bluntly ridiculed for their lack of NES status and language proficiency (Braine, 1999; Park, 2012). Interestingly, in a chapter Braine wrote in Llorca's edited book, *Non-native Language Teachers: Perceptions, Challenges and Contributions to the Profession* (2006), he mentions Moussu's research from 2002, noting that although the majority of students participating in the research (international students from 21 different countries) expressed positive attitudes towards NNESTs teaching their ESL classes in a US university, the Korean and Chinese students expressed negative feelings toward their NNESTs (p. 18-19). This research shows that not all learners reject being taught by NNESTs in an ESL context, and thus using the learners' teacher preferences as excuse cannot justify the inequality in hiring a NEST over a NNEST. Braine (2010) argues that this kind of unspoken filtering in hiring NESTs over NNESTs cannot be justified by putting onus on the EFL/ESL students' preference of NESTs or the complicated process of applying for work permits for the foreign workers. Braine sees these "hurdles" as NESTs' ways of defending their authority and status within the field of English Language Teaching.

In NNESTs' home countries that mostly do not speak English as its main language (i.e., EFL contexts, such as Korea), inequality is also visible, as hiring NESTs makes better profit for schools (despite the higher expenses). When reflecting on Moussu's 2002 research, the Chinese and Korean students' negative feelings towards NNESTs teaching ESL may be a reflection of deeply rooted belief that language is best learned from a native speaker. I cannot say much about China, but at least in Korea, I am aware of how much this deeply held belief feeds the enormous industry of foreign language education in the country. Braine (2010) states "NNESTs who return to their countries after obtaining higher degrees and teacher qualifications in the West are not always able to find work [because] [...] administrators— notably in Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong, for instance—appeared to prefer unqualified NESTs instead of qualified local teachers" (p. 4). Once hired, NNESTs are expected to witness and accept the reality of NESTs being hired more easily, and receiving significantly higher amount of salary with fewer duties compared to themselves.

From personal experiences being in managerial positions in Korea, it is also important to note that the preference of NEST as mentioned above is often limited to native English speakers with certain “looks.” This practice is also well reflected in literature on the topic bringing out sensitive issues such as race and language learning, teaching, and teacher identity (Amin, 1997, 2001; Kubota and Lin, 2006; Kubota, 2014; Lee, 2008, 2011, 2014). In general, the researchers argue that race cannot be treated as neutral, as the issue of race—or whiteness—has been one of the unspoken—or rather, intentionally ignored—but highly essential standard in causing inequality amongst language teachers. Kubota (2014) speaks how racialization should be understood beyond personal hate and stereotyping towards a certain ethnic group, but should be understood as “institutional and epistemological” (p.6). When looking at racialization as institutional practice in North American contexts, Kubota observes that it is not difficult to notice that the preference of certain skin colour, and what constitutes epistemologically appropriate knowledge or language is founded upon the assumption that “a legitimate English speaker is closer to a white settler” (p.6). Hence, for many learners, the process of English language learning is associated with *becoming white*. This desire to become white fuels the learners to believe only certain types of teachers to be legitimate (p. 7).

Being denied or being given a very small window of access to do what they want and are qualified to do, could only lead to frustration and an inferior complex amongst NNESTs in the world of ELT. Living in Canada, this reality as a NNEST is different for me than it was 7 years ago in Korea. I was in a different position back then: a NNEST who was regarded as a teacher with a native-like proficiency in the target language, a boss who had the power of hiring and training the less qualified NESTs. I rarely felt being inferior to NEST colleagues. I was so sure of who I was, and whom I wanted to be seen as. All of that changed when I came to Canada. The question of identity/identities was so new, yet somewhat discouraging for me as someone comfortable with the way I had been positioned. To address it I need to refer to literature on identity in general and on language teacher identity in particular.

## Language Teacher Identity

Even if what many researchers say is true—that the idea of a Native English speaker is fictional, and that English and ELT are tools for maintenance of power, the pervasive acceptance of NESTs as being more competent teachers than NNESTs has been engrained deeply over the years, especially into the minds of Asian EFL learners and schools (Braine, 2010). Consequently, NNESTs tend to have lower self-esteem than NESTs because their credibility is constantly being doubted and judged based on their “non-nativeness,” or simply their “looks” (Amin, 1999; Morgan, 2004). Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) point out that the widespread belief of viewing nativeness as basis of credibility influences NNESTs’ identity formation and disempowers them. In this section of the chapter, I attempt to clarify how I understand identity in general, and the identity of language teachers in particular, through multiple lenses guided in particular by a study by Varghese et al. (2005). I will also introduce Palmer’s (1998) notion of identity and integrity, which will help me to make sense of the re-construction of my identity as an experienced language teacher in a different teaching context.

I often observe confused expressions, when colleagues ask me about my thesis topic, and I tell them I want to explore how language teacher identities are re-constructed in context. When I ask how my colleagues understand their identity as a language teacher, they respond in adjectives, such as being an energetic, funny, knowledgeable, strict, a native, or a Canadian teacher and more.

Identity is typically defined by one self or by others as who or what someone is (Inbar-Lourie, 2010). For a long time, language teachers were seen “as technicians who needed [...] to apply the right methodology” (Varghese et al. 2005, p. 22) until the complexity of language teacher identity was raised beginning in the mid 90s (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Peirce, 1995; Varghese, 2000).

The adjectives that my colleagues use to “describe” themselves are indeed a part of who they are. However, they are merely descriptors based on physical appearances and actions; those adjectives do not define the person as a whole complex being. Then how does one understand language teacher identity? Is it more than a label one uses to describe oneself at work? The work of Varghese et al. (2005) provides a clear

understanding of the reason why understanding one's identity is crucial in the context of language teaching and learning. The authors use their previous studies to compare three main perspectives in understanding identity, and suggest that language teacher identity be theorized and viewed with multiple lenses instead of a single lens.

According to Varghese et al. (2005), classroom-based research in the 80s showed that a classroom is a highly complex place with the teacher at its centre of complexity. As the teacher became the focus of research, it became apparent that the "teacher's whole identity was at play in the classroom" (p. 22), and researchers began to research how teacher identity plays a huge role when taking into account socio-cultural, socio-political and poststructural views of what happens in language classrooms (Kubota, 2001; Norton, 2001; Pennycook, 1994, as cited in Varghese et al., 2005).

In general, sociocultural and poststructural ways of understanding identity—in contrast to conceptualizations of identity as neutral and static—are rooted in several ideas 1) "identity is not a fixed, stable, unitary, and internally coherent phenomenon but is multiple, shifting, and in conflict" (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 22). What this means is that identity is fluid and can be re-constructed through dynamic negotiation. 2) A person's identity is deeply connected to the context one is situated in. This includes not only the people involved in the context, but also the broader social, cultural, and political relations permeating it. One's prior experience as a student or a teacher, current credentials, and personal ideas and image of self, and other factors are intertwined within a specific space (Beijard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Golombek, 1998; Tsui, 2007) and impact identity construction. 3) Identity changes and re-constructs through language and interaction (Varghese et al., 2005, pp. 22-23).

Of course, being inherently connected to its surroundings, one's identity may not only be negotiable and modifiable, but may also be vulnerable—susceptible to negative surroundings such as relationships with one's colleagues, comments from members of the community, or one's position or status within the community all based on power relations and social hierarchy. In other words, identity being constructed socioculturally, not only could be transformed and re-constructed, but may also be ascribed to you by others—sometimes against your own will. Although Toohey's (2000) longitudinal research was specifically on young ESL children's ascribed identities and their effects on



the learner's school years, the idea that ascribed identities can highly influence how one is positioned within the learning community, suggests that a teacher's identity within his or her own community of teachers could be negatively or positively affected by the way the other members (of the community) perceive him or her. And just as the young students' classroom performances reflected the participants' positioning in Toohey's study, a teacher's teaching practice may also be informed by an identity ascribed to them by others in their educational environment.

Varghese et al. (2005) suggest that viewing identity through multiple lenses helps us understand various identity issues NNESTs may face in their teaching contexts. The authors use individual studies, each paired up with a particular theory on language teacher identity—social identity theory, theory of situated learning and communities of practice, and theory of image-text—to compare and contrast the differences and similarities in viewing language teacher identity. I chose Varghese et al.'s article as one of the main sources of conceptualizing my experience as process of re-construction of identity because of the way the article clearly lays out the differences (as well as the similarities) between the three major perspectives that seem relevant to my story told in chapter five. I will elaborate on these in the following paragraphs.

Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978), or social identity perspective sees identity as based on social groups created by society (p. 25). It is a theory of self-perception influenced by the group(s) one is situated in. Although the theory sees self-perception as a dynamic process, this theorizing may posit stereotyping of self, because of its "emphasis on group membership" (p. 25). The hiring preference of NESTs over NNESTs is a good example of how stereotypical identities associated with groups may affect the individual (Amin, 1999; Braine 1999; Flynn & Gulikers, 2001; Mahboob, 2010; Medgyes, 1992; Norton, 1997). The close connection between identity and social groups one may belong to may also cause one's identity to be assumed based on the group he or she is categorized in.

The second perspective is associated with the theory of situated learning as participation in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This perspective sees learning as an identification process (Varghese et al., p. 30). Wenger argues that learning is socializing and becoming, and becoming is constructing one's

identity; thus identities should be seen as lived experiences of participation in particular community.

Because learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity. It is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming — to become a certain person or conversely, to avoid becoming a certain person (Wenger, 1998, p. 215)

Wenger states that one's identity does not lie solely in the image one has of one's self, nor is identity ascribed by how others perceive one. Instead, identity is created and re-created in the way one lives day to day, amidst the "tension between our investment in the various forms of belonging and our ability to negotiate the meanings that matter in those contexts" (p. 188). In short, identity is co-created amidst the interaction between self and the world and gaining legitimate membership in a community/communities. Access is crucial to "legitimate participation", and it is understood as the interaction and the socio-political influences surrounding the community (Varghese et al., p. 30). Tsui (2007), viewing identity as outlined by Wenger (1998), describes a Chinese EFL teacher's identity development, stating that factors such as expectations of others and institution, and how one perceives his or her role within the community influences the way one forms (or reforms) one's identity. The subject's story highlighted the multifaceted relationships between "membership in a professional community, competence, legitimacy of access to practice, appropriation and ownership of meanings, the centrality of participation and the mediating role of power in the process of identity formation" (p. 657, 674).

Lave & Wenger's (1991)/ Wenger's (1998) theory of situated learning and community of practice is referenced often in studies that view identity in a sociocultural and post-structural framework (Harklau 2003; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton 1997, 2000; Norton & Toohey 2011; Pavlenko, 2003; Toohey 1998, 2000; Toohey & Norton, 2010; Toohey, Manyak, & Day, 2007). According to Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001), "individuals do not simply position themselves in a community; rather there is a dialogic struggle between the learner and the community out of which emerges the learner's position and identity" (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 149). Teachers are not seen as separate individuals from learners, but are seen as Masters or old-timers in the community, with all being legitimate participants in the community. In this sense,

teaching can be seen as a form of learning, as the teacher is also participating as another subject within that specific community of learners. So while learners construct their identities, the teacher also constructs or re-constructs one's identity through his or her lived experience as a participant of the community.

Situated learning and communities of practice theorizing is critiqued for not addressing sufficiently power relations and socio-political influences within the community. Pennycook (1989) argues that all education is political, and thus nothing can be seen separate from the sociocultural and political connections one is entangled in. The construction or re-construction of one's identity thus cannot be viewed solely as a process of participation and identification between members of a community, but should also be examined with a wider lens that encompasses not only what happens within the community, but also how it is connected to the bigger issues such as "the broader historical, cultural, political, and institutional forces that influence [...] classroom practices" (Toohey et al. 2007).

If the first two perspectives focus, respectively, on identity as associated with social grouping and identity as a process of participation, the third views identity as a form of pedagogy through day-to-day practice (Morgan, 2004). This perspective takes into account the daily-observed happenings in the classrooms, as well as the individuals' histories and expectations that influence the relations one has with his or her students and with other teachers. Morgan (2004) utilizes the notion of the image-text (Simon, 1995) that his students initially had of him, and, in his case, he acted against that image, and observes how both students and the teacher's identities changed through dialogical incidents in class.

Like the other two perspectives, Varghese et al claim that the third perspective, viewing identity as pedagogy of the image-text, too, has its limitations. Identity as pedagogy through image-text is not easily adaptable, or may have a negative impact on teacher's identity of self. Also, Morgan advises that the automatic authority that one holds in being a teacher can sometimes cause unintended threat for the students. Hence, it is important for teachers "to present ourselves – our image-texts – in ways that are unthreatening and respectful, indeed, similar to other 'texts' we bring to class: always open to critical analysis and reinterpretation" (p. 184).

These three major perspectives in understanding language teacher identity promote a fuller understanding of what I was experiencing, instead of viewing it narrowly from one dimension. The details will be elaborated upon during my reflective analysis section within the Story Chapter.

I do not deny nor disagree that identity is indeed a process, a fluid like form (if it has a form) that could transform and re-construct with and through the influences surrounding a person. In fact, I agree entirely with the outlined above ways of viewing identity. Nevertheless, when encountering work such as Toohey's (1998; 2000) longitudinal research on kindergarten children, I wonder how the TEACHER felt, how her identity changed from the experience with the specific group of children. The teacher's story was never told, as it was not part of the research agenda. However, it would have been a valuable piece if the teacher shared her side of the story regarding the incidents in class. What I am trying to point out is that, although the emphasis on the "social" is stronger, and undeniable, in regards to language teacher identity, I feel there needs to be more exploration on a personal level—the inner landscape (Palmer, 1998) of the teacher while he or she experiences the classroom and the context.

The sociocultural and poststructural ways of understanding identity highlight that one's identity is not deterministic, but is transformational with the person's *agency* acting at its core element. As mentioned, sociocultural perspectives highlight the importance of gaining *access* to the community as crucial in the learning (identifying) process. My question is, how does one cope with the situation, when one wishes to enter a community, while access is denied—or not adequately provided? For example, despite the rising number of studies that highlight the unique nature of identity, many times teachers in the ELT world are classified and viewed in a dichotomous way—as a NEST or NNEST. This grouping of people overlooks any particularities or individualities in people, and sets up a place of conflict and struggle, where NNESTs' efforts to claim legitimacy as language teachers is, it seems to me, often mistaken as a desire to "fit in" to the NEST world. Of course, there must be individuals who wish to become legitimate language teachers by becoming more native-like. However, that was not what I desired in being a language teacher here in Canada. I was curious as to why one wanted to be a part of a field that sees you with an either/or perspective. I was curious as to why it is

integral for one to know who he or she is within such a dichotomy, in being a teacher of language.

## **Parker Palmer's Notions of Identity and Integrity**

As I have noted in the previous chapter, the purpose of this inquiry is to understand the factors that influenced my identity re-construction. I use the word re-construction instead of construction, because I believe I already came into this new teaching context (Canada) with a clear idea of who I was professionally. Those blocks that were part of me had to be broken or disassembled and re-constructed in order to find a space and voice for my right to speak (Peirce, 1995). It is my argument that in order to understand what influences one's identity re-construction (of experienced teachers) not only is it essential to look at the social factors, but it is also important to understand how one—the self—views the social encounters in his or her lived experience.

In looking for insights into finding—or rather, re-finding—self, I found Parker Palmer's *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life* (1998) insightful. Palmer (1998) presents a more holistic view of teacher identity where he urges the teacher to ask the question, “*who* is the self that teaches” (p. 4), and reminds the readers that teaching cannot be reduced to technique; “[g]ood teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (p. 10). Stating that there is intimate connection between one's inner-self and doing teaching, Palmer defines teaching as something that “emerges from one's inwardness, [...] (and thus) projects the condition of our soul” (p. 2). In other words, teaching mirrors the condition of our inner landscape: and one cannot see nor is able to know one's students or the teaching content with clarity, unless one knows who he or she is (p. 3). His understanding of identity is:

I mean an evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self: my genetic make-up, the nature of the man and woman who gave me life, the culture in which I was raised, people who have sustained me and people who have done me harm, the good and ill I have done to others and to myself, the experience of love and suffering—and much, much more. (p. 13)

While his definition of integrity is “whatever wholeness I am able to find within that nexus as its vector form and re-form patterns of my life” (p. 14). He also adds that both identity and integrity cannot be precisely defined, reflecting the complexity of defining the concept of identity.

Palmer argues that society and its people have been driven by fear—fear of being vulnerable—and in order to prevent being fearful, or to reduce the feeling of being vulnerable, one disconnects from one’s surroundings by distancing one’s self, including one’s emotions and beliefs. As teachers, we

disconnect from students, from subjects, and even from ourselves. We build a wall between inner truth and outer performance, and we play-act the teacher’s part. [...] We distance ourselves from students and subject to minimize the danger—forgetting that distance makes life more dangerous still by isolating self. (Palmer, 1998, p. 18)

This, in Parker’s view, is the characteristic of today’s education, which relies heavily on objectivism—isolating the mind and subjectivism from students and the teaching subject in the name of purity:

Objectivism, driven by fear, keeps us from forging relationships with the things in the world. Its modus operandi is simple: when we distance ourselves from something, it becomes an object; when it becomes an object, it no longer has life; when it is lifeless, it cannot transform us, so our knowledge remains pure (Palmer, 1998, p. 52).

Here, the word ‘pure’ describes the state of knowledge where subjective influence is eliminated from the generated knowledge. In other words, the most distilled form. The question is: can knowledge be pure?

In the Story chapter—a creative non-fiction of my lived experience teaching at a particular language school—parts of my reflections will be in relation to this notion of fear as described in Palmer’s book. Palmer illustrates fear as being multi-layered, and sequential (but not linear—from my understanding). It begins from the fear of diversity and pluralism, then the fear of creating conflict, where a truth is challenged by another truth. We fear pluralism and conflict of truth, because it causes us to re-examine our identities (third layer of fear), and ultimately, our whole lives (the last layer of fear). This fear makes it difficult for one to see fear as being healthy—that fear could help “enlarge

our thinking, our identity, and our lives” (p. 40). My reflections, following each short section in the story (Chapter 5) will try to explore my feelings at the time, and make connections to Palmer’s idea of fear in terms of language teacher identity<sup>7</sup>.

Palmer sees all knowledge and the act of knowing as relational. As Wenger (1998) insists that to learn is to identify with and through social interaction, Palmer describes knowing as a way to seek relations, and thus it is always communal (p. 55). It is because of the trend towards, and heavy dependence on, objectivity that turns disconnectedness into the norm that Palmer argues that teachers need to restore their identity and integrity. For knowing to be communal and relational, the subjects involved need to be able to communicate, and no longer be treated as lifeless objects. And in a classroom as a community, teachers are at the centre of the interaction—being a teacher, one is given a specific role. Teachers are “weavers,” according to Palmer, with the heart as “the loom on which the threads are tied” (p. 11). How the teacher utilizes his or her role becomes crucial in making knowing happen. “Good teachers join self and subject and students in the fabric of life. Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness” (p. 11), Palmer describes how one’s capacity to connect becomes the thread that weaves everything together. This act of weaving could be interpreted as the interaction and negotiation described in the relational and sociocultural understanding of identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Peirce, 1995; Toohey, 2000; Wenger, 1998). For Palmer, this would be good teaching—being at the heart of re-connectedness in all aspects of community. Then, what is needed for teachers to become good “weavers”?

In order to become better weavers, teachers need to build the capacity for connectedness (p. 11) in them. This capacity building is a result of “re-membering” by restoring identity and integrity and reclaiming wholeness from the state of dismemberment (p. 21). Palmer states that, “Identity lies in the intersections of the diverse forces that make up my life, and integrity lies in relating to those forces in ways that bring me wholeness and life rather than fragmentation and death” (p. 14), and communicating with one’s inner self is the path to understanding who one is as a whole

<sup>7</sup> Note that Palmer did not specifically write his book on teacher identity, but his words had strong influence in understanding my actions and feelings during 2012. Hence, I felt the need to use his ideas to make sense of my experience in the process of identity re-construction.

being. Hence, if one cannot speak with his or her inner self, he or she loses the “capacity for connectedness,” and thus becomes disconnected—“*dis-membered*” (p. 21). To summarize, good teachers are the ones who can balance between the “intellectual (how we think about teaching and learning), the emotional (how students and teachers feel as learning and teaching happen), and the spiritual path (one’s heart’s longing to be connected with the largeness of life)—thus being connected, able to be in touch with themselves, their students, and their subjects to bring further wholeness.

The emphasis on the teacher’s identity and integrity may seem different from the sociocultural and post-structural framework of identity formation as mentioned previously. It is important to note, that Palmer does not deny identity is influenced by one’s surroundings and is constructed or re-constructed through interaction. However, my understanding is that he focuses more on the individual’s state of being within the social nature of identity. I believe Palmer’s suggestion is a prerequisite to becoming a legitimate member of a community.

Palmer’s argument that teachers need to re-member themselves by listening and communicating with their inner selves through all means was the reason why I kept keeping records of my daily incidents and feelings. It did not mean a lot at the time the notes were written—sometimes, they were just messy pages of rage and frustration. It was only after I had decided to share my stories with others through this thesis, that I realized how valuable the “data” would be.

My research was not preplanned like many theses, and finding a method that allowed me to go back to the past and make sense of the situated reality from hindsight, was not simple. In pondering over a research method that would help me make sense of the complex reality (which I experienced), I came upon a fairly recent form of research methodology called evocative autoethnography, as defined by Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner (2011). The next chapter elaborates on the methodology: autoethnography.



## Chapter 4.

### Methodology: Autoethnography

“Autoethnography is...

Setting a scene, telling a story, weaving intricate connections among life and art, experience, and theory, evocation and explanation...and then letting go, hoping for readers who will bring the same careful attention to your words in the context of their own lives.

Making a text present. Demanding attention and participation. Implicating all involved. Refusing closure or categorization.

Witnessing experience and testifying about power without foreclosure—of pleasure, of difference, of efficacy.

Believing that words matter and writing towards the movement when the point of creating autoethnographic texts IS to change the world.”

(Holman Jones, 2005, p. 765)

As already mentioned, the narrative (Chapter five) of this thesis is conducted using autoethnography. The type of autoethnographic methodology I chose to use is evocative autoethnography, as described by Ellis (1997, 2004, 2009), Bochner (1994, 2002,), Denzin (1986, 1997, 2014), Spry (2001), and Holman Jones (2005). In this chapter, I elaborate further borrowing the words and arguments of some of the main researchers behind the debate regarding autoethnography as a methodology.

Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis (2013) conceptualize autoethnography as an approach using personal experience to examine or critique cultural experience (p. 22). From this general understanding of autoethnography, there are two major differences in how the research is usually written up: as analytic autoethnography or evocative autoethnography.

Evocative autoethnography has no universally accepted format or methodology. Ellis (2004) describes the structure and writing of an evocative autoethnography as being lost in the woods without a compass (2004, p. 120). Many times autoethnographic studies are simply to be written in a format that best suits the researcher's needs; Bochner and Ellis (2002) express how "performance, visual arts, and embodied narration can give [...] more evocative power and encourage empathy and engagement on the part of its audiences" (p.3). Subjective autoethnographers describe that autoethnography can take on a number of formats, including, but not limited to, "short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739; Ellis, 2004, p. 38). The followers of Ellis and Bochner's autoethnography (i.e., subjective evocative interpretive autoethnography) reject the realist and analytic traditions of doing ethnographical research by insisting that the traditional framing of autoethnography goes against the very value and integrity of writing as evocative autoethnography.

The scholars of evocative autoethnography, mainly Ellis (2004, 2009), Bochner (1994), Ellis & Bochner (1996, 2000); Denzin (1986, 1997, 2014), and Holman Jones (2005) argue, "autoethnography is an autobiographical writing that reflects multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), and that its emphasis is on the narrow scope of viewing and making sense of the world/experiences instead of trying to generalize an individual's experience into some social phenomenon. Ellis (2004) describes that evocative texts "showcase concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness, (and) [...] appear as relational and institutional stories affected by history and social structure, which themselves are dialectically revealed through actions, feelings, thoughts, and language" (p. 38). For the readers of these evocative "stories," it is more than merely reading what someone said to have happened, as "[a]n evocative text is a more demanding and interactive text because it assumes that readers will be active partners in dialogue with the text rather than 'receivers' of unmediated knowledge" (Bochner, 1994, p. 31).

Norman Denzin (1997, p. 228) writes that evocative autoethnographers "bypass the representational problem by invoking an epistemology of emotion, moving the reader to feel the feelings of the other." Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2000) further explain

that in evocative autoethnography, “the mode of storytelling is akin to the novel or biography and thus fractures the boundaries that normally separate social science from literature... the narrative text refuses to abstract and explain.” (p. 744)

Anderson (2006), one of the realist researchers, who do not fully agree with the scholarly goal of evocative autoethnography, describes evocative autoethnography as, “narrative fidelity to and compelling description of subjective emotional experiences (to) create an emotional resonance with the reader” (p. 377). Indeed, researchers and writers of evocative autoethnography base their works’ trustworthiness on how much their stories can “evoke” emotional response of others. A well written personal story, from their point of view, can provoke and engage the readers, making the readers think and feel, reflecting on their own lives and relationships. Ellis (2004) argues that evocative autoethnography (storytelling) should be judged by whether or not it evokes the reader to believe the described experience to be authentic, and possible. While Anderson proposes the importance of improving theoretical understandings about broad social phenomena when doing an autoethnographic study, Ellis believes that evocative autoethnography should be judged on how much it speaks to the reader about *their* lives, just as her partner and colleague Bochner (1994) voices that, “We can judge a narrative, if judge we must, in terms of the consequences it produces—the new stories it arouses, the possibilities for reforming and reshaping a life it introduces” (p. 31). This untraditional, and rather new format of autoethnography is challenged by the realist ethnographers, who argue the need for a more structural and analytic format in writing an autoethnography. Their argument is that autoethnography, although it sounds like a new genre of research methodology, has always been a branch of ethnography (Atkinson, 2006), and thus needs to be seen and handled as “autobiographical data with ethnographic methodology and intent” (Chang, 2009, p. 56).

Anderson argues that the problem with subjective, interpretive/evocative autoethnography is that Ellis’s “evocative ethnography” might become known as the only type of autoethnographic research (when it is not). His proposal—analytic autoethnography focuses on traditional research values such as gaining insights into broader social phenomena through empirical data, and drawing wider implications from personal experience. This is also what Chang (2008) suggests in doing autoethnographic research. He notes that while evocative autoethnography as

endorsed by Ellis and Bochner and others assumes that previous research in social sciences detach the researcher from the subject in the name of objectivity, there has always been a close relationship between the researched and the researcher and one cannot assume any study to be fully objective.

Atkinson (2006) agrees with Anderson's argument against the subjective (i.e., evocative/ interpretive) autoethnography and praises Anderson's argument (2006) with great enthusiasm. He also adds that subjective autoethnographers and their work are still highly marginalized from the mainstream social science research, because they reject and oppose the traditional values and styles of writing, and promote "experiential value, its evocative qualities, and its personal commitments rather than its scholarly purpose, its theoretical bases, and its disciplinary contributions" (p. 402).

Chang (2008), in her book *Autoethnography As Method* writes how the methodology can be useful in doing research for social scientists and practitioners such as counsellors, teachers, medical personnel, and human services workers. Her suggested conceptual framework in doing autoethnographical research is not much different from that of Anderson and Atkinson, as she also states that telling a personal story is not enough to gain understanding of self and others/ culture, and that deeper understanding could only be possible through cultural<sup>8</sup> analysis and interpretation (p. 51). Chang identifies researchers such as Carolyn Ellis, Arthur Bochner and Norman Denzin as researchers that "stand on the opposite end" and endorse an "evocative," "more subjective" approach to autoethnography (p. 46), however, does not clarify her stance throughout the book, reminding the readers that that is not the intent of her book.

Through this comparison between the two different understandings of autoethnography, I found myself leaning towards the post modernistic view of autoethnography, promoted and practiced by Ellis and Bochner (2000) and their colleagues and students. As expressed in the beginning of the thesis, my goal for this thesis is for it to not only be a story that illustrates the complexity of language teacher identity re-construction for experienced teachers, but also to promote—or "evoke"—

<sup>8</sup> Here Chang describes culture as group experience (p. 15)

conversation among other experienced NNESTs currently pursuing their careers in English-dominant countries like Canada. I consider my personal purpose for the thesis aligns well with the scholarly goal of subjective autoethnographers; hence, it seems fit to frame my thesis—especially the story chapter (Chapter five) with a subjective and evocative lens. Another reason I believe evocative autoethnography is the better method of research for my purposes, is because evocative autoethnography encourages reflexivity—the constant conversation with one’s inner self, interpreting one’s life experiences and making sense of it using writing as its expressive tool (among other ways of expression). I have mentioned in my introduction of the thesis that Park (2013) describes writing as the starting point, as opposed to the common belief in writing as the final outcome of expression. This idea resonates strongly with what I believe my thesis should be—an expression of my past that also transforms as a starting point for readers and more importantly: myself.

## **Method**

As mentioned above, in an autoethnography, the researcher is the subject and the researcher’s interpretation of the experience is the data (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The researcher usually writes about epiphanies—memorable moments that have or had significant impact in his or her life. These epiphanies are usually in some form of crisis, where one is forced to reexamine and analyze his or her lived experience (Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Denzin, 1986). However, these epiphanies should not be left as interesting stories, but should serve a purpose: these personal experiences, and the stories that illustrate the epiphanies should be critically examined and analyzed with the help of other existing research or other means (Denzin, 2014; Ellis et al, 2011). Ellis et al (2011) uses Mitch Allen’s quote, describing that autoethnographers

"look at experience analytically. Otherwise [you're] telling [your] story—and that's nice—but people do that on *Oprah* [a U.S.-based television program] every day. Why is your story more valid than anyone else's? What makes your story more valid is that you are a researcher. You have a set of theoretical and methodological tools and a research literature to use. That's your advantage. If you can't frame it around these tools and literature and just frame it as 'my story,' then why or how should I privilege your story over anyone else's I see 25 times a day on TV?" (personal interview, May 4, 2006 as cited in Ellis et al, 2011)

Being informed by what Ellis & Bochner define as data (i.e., epiphanies), my autoethnography uses some of the vignettes from my first year teaching in Canada as data, then my data is “restored” (Creswell, 2013, p. 74) and presented in a creatively rendered nonfiction format. The story (data) is based on my life experiences, which I gained by observing and experiencing first hand, and were recorded through my personal journal entries. This main data, named—Carol’s story (Chapter five)—will be the subject of reflective analysis. By creatively rendered, I mean only the significant stories were selected from my life experiences, and were crafted so as to form a story that has a beginning, a climax, and an ending. Data (each vignette) will be reflectively analysed using my research questions as signposts guiding me in my analysis, while looking at each epiphany with a lens influenced by the relational nature of identity. The reflective analysis of the data will help generate and illustrate some of the issues that influence an experienced teacher’s identity re-construction.

Typically the quality of research is determined by its credibility, validity, and generalizability (Creswell, 1998). In qualitative research, however, Lincoln & Guba’s (1985) criteria for trustworthiness<sup>9</sup> of research is commonly discussed and used as determiners.

I noted in the previous section in this chapter that Ellis (2004) and Bochner (1994) suggest that autoethnographic work be judged by the degree as to how much the stories evoke others through providing verisimilitude and resonance. Autoethnography, although Creswell (2013) categorizes it under narrative inquiry, cannot seem to be fully judged either by the typical quantitative nor qualitative criteria for assessing the quality of research. Ellis et al (2011) and Bochner (2002) argue that, for an autoethnographer, reliability and validity depend on how credible both the story and the storyteller are. For example, “Could the story actually have happened to the author?” “Is the story/Are the stories believable?” “Is the story coherent?” “Does it connect the reader and the writer?”

<sup>9</sup> Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest that trustworthiness of a qualitative study refers to establishing credibility (confidence in the findings), transferability (findings have applicability in different contexts), dependability (findings are consistent and may be repeated), and confirmability (a degree of neutrality is achieved through triangulation shaped by respondents, not researcher).

could be some of the questions related to the criteria. In other words, Ellis (2004) emphasizes the need for verisimilitude.

In autoethnographic work, I look at validity in terms of what happens to readers as well as to research participants and researchers. To me, validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible. You also can judge validity by whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers- or even your own (Ellis, 2004, p. 124).

Another criterion, in contrast to generalizability, is to assess the validity of the research by its evocativeness—or resonance—in the readers. In (evocative) autoethnography, how much the story moves the readers matters. Ellis (2004) argues, “Readers provide validation by comparing their lives to ours, by thinking about how our lives are similar and different and the reasons why, and by feeling that the stories have informed them about unfamiliar people or lives” (p.195).

To provide a clearer format, my narrative has two distinctive parts within each sub-section in Chapter five. One part is the actual story, written in a personal narrative format. Then, each section of the story has its own reflective piece following it. The reflective analysis part in this thesis is formatted in a different font to distinguish it from the actual story, and is where I link my experience and thoughts with other literature mentioned and referred to in Chapter three (literature review). Although I share stories from my past, the story is mostly written in present tense to provide a sense of “being in the journey” for the readers. Chapter six is also an extension of Carol’s story (Chapter five), and is where the story meets the research questions. Although my story does have an ending by the end of Chapter five, I leave it quite unfinished, as this story is just a glimpse of a never-ending journey of identity re-construction.

## Chapter 5.

### Carol's Story

#### Guide to Chapter Five and Six

Different fonts and timesteps are used throughout Chapters five and six in order to differentiate the story sections from the reflective analysis parts.

Palatino Linotype: Used throughout the reflective analysis sections to distinguish them from the stories

*Italics*: Used to show my thoughts within the narrated vignettes

**Bold**: Emphasis. Usually to express strong feelings

### Daisy

#### First Encounter

It's January 2012. 4 months ago, I was offered a part time position as a Korean-as-a-foreign-language instructor at English Centre. Then after 4 months, the school offered me a part time position as an ESL instructor. Finally, after 4 months, I was going back to teaching English, this time in Canada!

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Here I am at English Centre, and it's about 8:10 A.M. I came in early to get ready for my first class. I am nervous, but at the same time feel excited to be back to what I am used to doing. Oh, how I longed for this opportunity! Wait till my colleagues in Korea hear about this!



Last night, I couldn't sleep well. Then again, every first day has been stressful for me.

This is not my first "Gig." Although my students were all Koreans, I HAVE taught adults before. Yet sitting in the teacher's room now, constantly looking at the teaching schedule (i.e., class roster), everything seems, or at least I feel it to be quite *foreign*. This is truly a transcontinental experience!

*Wow... look at the names. I wonder where they are from.*

So many questions go through my head.

*Will I be a good teacher for adult learners? (My specialty is teaching children and young adults)*

*Will grown ups see and accept me as their teacher?*

*Will I be able to change my teaching habits from the past?*

*Then again, do I have to be a new person?*

I also constantly look for my teaching materials, even though I have them all organized in my bag (even to the extra paper clips!).

*Do I have my books and CDs?*

*Do I have the attendance roster?*

*Do I have my notes (cue-cards) ready?*

*My board markers... where are they?*

Sitting in the teachers' resource room, I am thinking of all the things that could go wrong.

*What if students don't understand my lesson?*

*What if there are more students than I initially thought?*

*Should I make extra copies now, just in case?*

*What if they didn't bring their books? What should I do?*

At this moment, all I wish for is to have a mentor or someone whom I could ask for advice....

For some reason, I feel that I can do this. What could go SO wrong? It's teaching—and I have been doing this for a long time. Teaching language was my first job and would probably be the last thing I'll do till I retire. This is just a first day thing...something I always go through. I am doing the same thing—with different people and in a different place; that's all.

8:30 A.M. Teachers come in, Susan—the head teacher—double-checks if I am ready,

“Are you ready?”

“Sure, I guess”

“I think you'll be fine. You said you taught English before, right?”

“Yup!”

She briefly introduces me to others,

and it is time.

The first three hours go quickly. I am too nervous to remember what went well, or what I could have done better. All I could think now is that I still have three more lessons to teach today. I can't eat. I can't really engage in conversations with fellow coworkers either. My goal for today is to *survive* the day, and I am halfway done.

I have a Listening and Speaking focused class in the afternoons. It's my first day, so I am going to use a tic-tac-toe game where students try to find out information about me as an ice-breaker/conversation starter.

I enter the room, and see it is a full class. All fourteen students are glaring at me as if they had seen a new animal at the zoo. At the same time, I am also trying to make eye contact with every single student. It is not going to be easy to remember all their names—I have heard that Caucasians cannot differentiate East Asians, but wow, I now understand where that comes from: All Brazilian students—despite their different ethnic backgrounds—looked so similar (especially the ladies!). I am usually very good with names, but this is going to be extremely difficult.

I personally believe calling students by their names is the very first step in beginning a relationship in a teaching/learning situation, and I work very hard to remember my students' names within one or two days. I am usually confident about this, but right now, it simply seems impossible; I thought Brazil was a multi-ethnic country like Canada, yet all I could see were similarities. Their names are written with the same Roman alphabet, but are pronounced in a different way.

So you are not Diana, but /Jee-Ah-Na/?

You are not Simone, but /See-Mou-Neh/?

And you are not Roberta, but /Ho-Be-ta/?

For the first time, checking attendance feels like a “task.”

As I start to sweat reading out the Brazilian names, two female students catch my eye: Koreans!

How delighted I am to meet Korean students in my class. I am so excited, that I almost say hello in Korean; I stopped myself just before my head was going bow-mode (slightly nodding gesture).

How long has it been since I met a Korean in a school setting?

The last ones I met were children when I was working for a Korean-owned school for children as an academic supervisor about two years ago. It just feels... comforting to see someone from my country. Maybe living away from your home country makes you more attached to people, food, and things from your home country. ..

One of the Korean students, Amy, is a young lady in her early 30s, and as I learned later, newly wed, who came here with her husband. I haven't told the class yet that I am from Korea—this will ruin the activity I prepared, but I think Amy figured out why my face lit up when I saw their (her and Daisy's) faces among the 12 Brazilian students. Amy blinks one eye and gives me a small bow—I think she sensed that I am from Korea.

The other girl, Daisy, is another petite female student in her early-20s. She seems to be prepared—pencil case, notebook, everything neatly ready to jot down whatever I write on the board. She seems like a shy student, and her sitting posture tells me that she is the serious type: She is sitting without slouching, her eyes on the board, ready to write something down. Based on my childhood, this is the ideal attitude for a “good student” in Korea; someone who wants to learn (from a teacher).

Daisy has a solid poker face, which makes it difficult to tell her emotions from her facial expressions. Is she OK? Is she uncomfortable?

I briefly demonstrate the ice-breaker activity, by asking the students to make the appropriate questions about me that would go with the answers I write on the board (in a Tic-Tac-Toe grid). Students work in groups and make their best attempts to find out who I am. I could hear them discuss and negotiate in English, trying to form the best questions that would fit my answers on the board. I slowly walk around and monitor their use of English. This not only helps me tap into their language proficiencies, but I also

gain a sense of who take on the role of group leaders and who prefer to be passive followers. Daisy fits the latter. Everyone is engaged, doing their best to find out who this person (me) standing in front of them is. After the first round is done, I ask the class to find someone who they haven't talked with today, and play the game again. Students move around, exchange awkward hellos and greetings; they find pairs and grab seats, and begin playing the "Who am I?" tic-tac-toe. It's amazing what something so simple can do...so highly useful...and so full of language-use opportunities. The class is becoming noisy with questions and answers, and laughter. I think I'm going to enjoy this afternoon block.

Just before I ask the students to wrap up the tic-tac-toe, Daisy raises her hand. I quietly go and ask if she needs anything. Maybe she needs help forming a tricky question.

"Can I go out?"

"Oh..."

I assume she wants to use the washroom, as I have been told it gets really crowded during lunch hours. *Why not...*she is not a child who needs my permission.

"Why not? No problem. You don't have to ask me to go to the washroom every time"

She swiftly packs her bag—very odd...I think to myself. Then she leaves. My classroom is right across the washroom, so she should be back soon. I hope she comes back and gets to hear her classmates reporting on their partners.

It's already 1:15, and I only have about five minutes left before the class ends. Huh... *Daisy isn't back yet. It's been more than 10 minutes. Was I too nervous to notice that she was in fact feeling ill?*

I have to end the class in five minutes.

*Do I wait? Or do I just end the class?*

I can't do anything at the moment. As much as I want to run to the washroom and check up on her, my time was also with the other 13 students in this class.

*I'll have to ask her later.*

I write a note on my journal to remind myself to look for her after class.

On my way to my next class, I see Daisy with a group of students, just chatting and enjoying her break time. She does not look ill or seem to be in any kind of trouble.

Maybe I was wrong. Maybe she just couldn't return...being shy and all...or maybe she just didn't want to interrupt the class. Who knows? This is something definitely different when teaching adult learners: you aren't really in control.

Then if it wasn't a run to the washroom, the question is...why.

*Why would she suddenly leave?*

...

...

*Am I missing something?*

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3:20PM: I am done for the day! What a relief!

I survived the day, and it was just so exciting.

Susan is already downstairs, working on the computer. Boy, she is quick!

"Finally, done!"

"So, how was it?"

“Oh...I think it went well, thanks.”

“Any difficulties?”

“...” a little bit of silence, then—

“No. all good!”

“Good, so I’ll see you tomorrow!”

I have officially survived my very first day teaching in a new place.

## **Reflection #1: Being an Experienced Newbie**

Teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability (Palmer, 1998, p. 17)

My first day as an ESL teacher at English Centre, was exciting, enjoyable, but exhausting. These feelings were also influenced by how I perceived myself, and my ways of teaching.

I was excited because I actually started teaching English in Canada—an English-dominant country. Although the professional organization of English language teachers TESOL issued a statement in 1992 declaring that there should be no discrimination in hiring of teachers, many studies that dealt with hiring practices in ESL contexts (Amin, 1997, 2004; Avra & Medgyes, 2000; Braine, 2010; Flynn & Gulikers, 2001; Kahmi-stein, Lee & Lee, 1999; Llurda, 2005; Mahboob, 2003; Moussu, 2006; Samimy & Brutt-Giffler, 1999; Tang, 1997) mention that there is a big difference in the number of hired NNESTs

compared to their NEST counterparts. While much had to do with the administrative staff's perspectives on who is "qualified" to teach, many pointed out that NESTs possessed the necessary cultural knowledge to teach in an English-dominant country which is often "weak" or lacking in many NNESTs, as well as NNESTs' "weak" control in the target language—compared to the NESTs. Researchers such as Amin (2004) and Tang (1997) see this as racial preference—of hiring people based on one's looks—i.e. preference for white teachers.

Honestly, I thought I may have a chance to be hired, given my higher level of proficiency of the target language compared to my other colleagues at graduate school, as well as how I was always "complimented" by people around me about how my English was "near-perfect." At the same time, I have managed to adjust to this new country quite well—I had to, because my parents needed me to adjust to this new country. In short, I thought I was both well adjusted to the new context, and well-equipped with the linguistic knowledge as well as the ways to teach this language to others.

Nevertheless, I was aware of the hurdles I had to go through to get hired for a teaching position being a NNEST. It is NOT uncommon for employers to resist hiring someone like me—an NNEST, an Asian, who was neither born nor raised in an English-dominant country—over a NEST (a native speaker of the language) even if the NEST was less qualified to *teach* the English language (Braine, 1998; 2010). It is a common practice—something I have been very much aware of and was a part of in Korea. Wasn't that the reason why I initially decided to return to Korea in 2010? I was really lucky to find work as soon as I completed the Canadian TESL certificate, and because I knew the reality I was in, the opportunity meant more than anything. Hence, this first day meant more than just any first day at a new workplace. For me, it felt as if I had stepped into a new stage of my career. However, having gained access, now I became worried about entering and staying in this new teaching context.



As seen in the story, my biggest worries, before I began teaching in the classroom, were about my coming from a different teaching background. I had been involved in teaching English to younger learners, and was worried that my teaching experiences would actually hinder my being a good teacher of adults in this new context. I was still feeling less secure about teaching in Canada, and was worried that I myself would be a negative factor in making myself legitimate in this new place.

Since I first began to teach English as a foreign language in Korea, I've seen how NNESTs were considered less valuable than their counterparts. Even if I was not particularly affected by the ill treatment of NNESTs in Korea, I was not entirely exempt from it. And since I was never taught about how to productively deal with the issue of NEST preference, the only thing I could do to make me "feel better" about my self was to think in polarities—that while they (NEST) have something I do not have I have something they don't; they may have been born in Canada, but I have experience and education, and so forth. Some research does this—comparing NESTs and NNESTs as polar opposites, for the purpose of presenting equal legitimacy of both (Medgyes 1992; 1996; 2001; Benke & Medgyes, 2005). However, I think I may have been focusing a little too much on how I am better than them (NESTs) in regards to what I can/they cannot do.

Comparing and thinking in a 'them & us' perspective may have been the reason why I became worried about "entering" a different teaching context. My questions and the nervousness were derived not from my lack of capabilities, but from having been looking at this field in a binary way—them & us; yours & mine; and theirs & ours. The questions I had were based on my concerns of stepping into "their" teaching context, being away from "my" comfort zone. I felt like an intruder—a fully qualified one (without a doubt), but nevertheless—I felt like I was trying to walk in someone else's shoes; I knew how to walk, but it just felt uncomfortable. My questions being heavy on

teaching technique also reflected my worries of being seen as incapable in “someone else’s territory.”

However, teaching itself was more enjoyable than I had imagined. It seemed there was not much of a difference in teaching adults to teaching younger learners; there were more commonalities than differences, which was quite insightful. My questions about my legitimacy as a teacher for adults seemed meaningless...it seemed not to be as much of a problem as I had thought it would be; even if this was only my first day.

I think I was truly lucky, or it was the influence from my recent Masters Degree program, that as soon as the day was over, I realized how I was wrong about my feeling of “trespassing.” My feeling of insecurity led me to look at the differences between teaching children from teaching adults. From the differentiation, I tried looking at “other ways” to teach this new age group. Then I realized that techniques and methods were least of my worries, as there is not much new from when I first learned about them; they were “constant recurrence of the same teaching techniques” (Pennycook, 1989, p. 599). In the introduction of Palmer’s (1998) book, he writes that “technique is what teachers use until the real teacher arrives” (p. 6). With the quote he urges teachers to grow—not with knowledge of techniques and methods, but with a deeper understanding of one’s inner self. Acknowledging that not much is different, and that I cannot reduce teaching to mere techniques, calmed me down a great deal.

Overall, “their teaching territory” was not as prickly as I had imagined it to be. My usual ice-breaker (tic-tac-toe) worked well with the new students, and soon I could put things in perspective. In other words, the different “shoes” I tried wearing weren’t as awkward. My worries about different techniques receded greatly.

There was one exception to my exciting first day—Daisy’s actions triggered my curiosity: I couldn’t stop thinking about why she would have left my class and never returned. From what I have learned from my first Masters degree in relation to the

realities NNESTs have to face, I had a hunch that it had to do with either my teaching style or my being me, but I did not want to admit it at the time. I remember hoping she left because I didn't teach in her style. If I had never come to Canada, and had never received my first Masters degree here, my worries would have been left there. Sometimes, yes, ignorance IS bliss—Daisy's different response (compared to other students), made her stand out amongst the crowd, and I couldn't stop thinking about her.

According to Palmer (1998), your fear causes you to alienate yourself from others—students, colleagues, and the school, as well as from yourself (p.36). You wish to be disconnected from moments where you might have to reveal your weaknesses, because you worry that they would make you feel weak, and thus threatening your view of the world and self (p. 38). Fear is the feeling of not wanting to be put in situations where one feels vulnerable or weak; not being seen good enough to be accepted.

On my first day, the fear of crossing boundaries—boundaries that I have created (in the past) to justify myself throughout my career—became my reason for fear. That very day—the greatest fear I had was not being wanted or valued—by the students and the school—for being a teacher from Korea who specialized in educating foreign language to younger learners. That very day, I was reminded that I could not think in a dichotomous way, thinking that if I found the right technique, everything would be OK.

## Second Encounter

The very next day, I come to school early again. I decide to start the day with some positive thinking, as it was a bit difficult to focus last night while prepping for today. I guess this is the aftermath of my first day jitters!

I breathe a deep breath, and think of the good things that will continue today: I had an overall good day yesterday (*I think!*), and it feels like a lot of my worries were not really serious. But when I go through my notes from yesterday, I am reminded of Daisy—“**Talk to Daisy**”—that’s what I wrote on today’s agenda. Yes... she was a bit odd. I’ll see if this “talk” is necessary after today’s class. Now I am getting nervous again, thanks to her. I had better focus on the job at hand. I really have plenty to worry about already.

Interesting...I am busy, yet am distracted: my head is occupied with thoughts of “what if”s, and this is making me nervous again. I have things to do right in front of me, but my head is elsewhere—thinking about what might happen during the 4<sup>th</sup> period (listening & speaking class).

*Should I smile and greet her as if nothing happened yesterday?*

*Did I make enough copies?*

*Should I ask why she didn’t return yesterday?*

*So are there any other possible questions students might ask in class that I haven’t thought of yet in prepping for class?*

*Should I ask her to stay and talk to me for a bit after class?*

*Do I have the materials for the first class?*

*Should I...*

*Did I...*

It feels like two Carols pacing back and forth inside my head.

### **My head hurts...**

Lunchtime. I don't recall how the morning classes went, but I feel good. I always learn more from the students while I teach, but being in Canada, I can see that I am actually a part of a 'bigger picture.' I learn so many things—and yet, I am supposed to be their teacher! Oh, my... this is so exciting!

12:30 P.M. Here I am in my speaking and listening class again. I am still not used to the names. I make a promise to the class that I will be able to remember their names by the end of the week. Everyone laughs. I don't think I said anything funny, but I guess they can tell I'm sweating, while desperately trying to match their faces to the names.

*Hmm... I count 13, not 14.*

*Oh... I know why... Daisy is not here.*

*I am sure I saw her in the morning.*

*I wonder if she is stuck in line at the washroom (washroom...again??)*

Honestly, adults are free to make their own choices: they can decide to skip classes or change teachers, or even ask the person in charge for re-consideration on his or her levels test results. Daisy is an adult, who also seemed serious in her learning. If she had a reason to skip class, I am sure it was for a good reason. I have a scenario buzzing in my head, but I don't want to think about it. Call it denial, but I would rather believe that Daisy had a good reason to be absent today.

I write a capital 'A' for absence on my attendance roster.

### **I move on**

1:20 PM Class ends.

Everyone is rushing to make use of his or her 10-minute break time.

Daisy and I bump into each other on the stairways. It was the most awkward and weird feeling for some reason. Her eyes are cold and empty, as if she is looking through me... ignoring my existence. I have always thought Koreans are vocal about their feelings and emotions (compared to some neighboring countries), but Daisy is an exception: I can't read her feelings. Is it just her, or does this have to do with ME?

We have a brief staring moment, facing each other on the stairways.

Students and teachers are passing by...

Bumping, slight pushing, changing directions...

It's noisy

I pause for a moment

She pauses as well

My eyes widen, eyebrows raised, and I tilt my head to show I am confused

Her eyes widen, just as mine,

but then she quickly lowers her head and walks by.

My head turns as I glare at her going downstairs.

### **She's gone**

What is this I am feeling now? I felt an urge to stop her and ask for a "good reason" I *believed* she had. Yet instead, I just looked at her walk away... as if nothing ever happened.

My face burns, but why am I getting red? I didn't do anything wrong! Her facial expression felt so cold and empty; it was even scary.

My head does not fully comprehend what just occurred: it actually feels blank.

I check my phone for the time: *Oh! Time for the next class!*

My busy schedule nudges me to make a quick conclusion for this awkwardness:

My positive nature kicks in—***She must be trying out classes***

2:00 PM—pronunciation class. My students are practicing in pairs

It is amazing what one odd behavior can do to you. I can't erase Daisy's face from last break time. What was she trying to say or express? What is this strange feeling I sense between her and I?

I still decide to hold onto the naïve belief that Daisy had a good reason to skip my class. It feels better that way.

I am aware that she cannot change her classes in the middle of a session, and thus the head teacher likely did not approve whichever class she is taking during this period. However, there are exceptions. Should I go downstairs and check with him?

Apart from my encounter—or non-encounter—with Daisy, my second day went well. To be honest, I cannot remember how the next two classes went that day. All I CAN remember is Daisy's blank stare.

I try to dismiss the negative thoughts and treating her as some representation of “the young Koreans.” But I can't...But I should...

***'She was trying out new classes...that's all'***

After this (non)encounter I didn't see Daisy for a long time as she no longer was a student in my class.

## Reflection #2

### Hiding Behind My Credentials; In Denial

To avoid a live encounter with teachers, students can hide behind their notebooks and their silence. To avoid a live encounter with students, teachers can hide behind their podiums, their credentials, their power. (Palmer, 1998, p. 38)

We fear encounters in which the other is free to be itself, to speak its own truth, to tell us what we may not wish to hear. We want those encounters on our own terms, so that we can control their outcomes, so that they will not threaten our view of world and self. (Palmer, 1998, p.39)

Daisy began to take over my thoughts. If she had casually walked by, with a nod or a short “hello,” I don’t think she would have seeped into my everyday thoughts this quickly. That short silent moment of pause was too unique of an experience to disregard as being nothing; it was *something*. I wondered if she actually had something to tell me. Then I wondered if I could have changed that atmosphere. Again and again I thought about “that moment” when I was not planning for my next classes.

I am a person that cannot let go of something that I am curious or intrigued about. I NEED to know! With Daisy, the desire to know more about this uneasiness was clashing with my fear of finding out the truth. What if Daisy’s reason for not being in my class had something to do with my nationality, or my being an Asian? Was I courageous enough to set forth upon that journey of facing my fear? Hence, the “cover up” — she was trying out new classes.

I chose the quotes from Palmer’s notion of fear, because they reminded me how much I had tried to move on, telling myself that all the unpleasant experiences with Daisy were a part of my imagination, and that she simply did not like my teaching style. It had only been a couple of days, so Daisy was actually being unfair, but I preferred



thinking that this had to do with my way of teaching. Experience has taught me that you cannot please everyone.

One might be curious why I would like to believe Daisy left my class because of my teaching skills. From my experience, students who decide to change classes typically look guilty, and try to avoid eye contact with you, or approach you with an explanation (even if you did not ask them for one). This is typical of Korean students whom I've taught in the past. Daisy had neither. Instead, her cold stare triggered my worst fear in becoming an ESL teacher here in Canada—my being Korean. Giving meaning to Daisy's stare as if it meant more than 'I do not like the way you teach' may sound too soon, but perhaps I have already had the fear and was trying to cover it up, as Palmer says, with "my credentials and power" (p. 38): Daisy's stare simply triggered my fear, and turned it into reality. However, I tried to believe otherwise, because it felt like a war I would never win.

I really wanted to deny that there is something more to her absence from my class, because admitting it would only raise my sensitivity towards her. Perhaps that was why she kept on lingering in my head the previous night. Her second stare on the stairs only strengthened my "hunch," but still... proving my hunch to be true would only damage my perception of self. I wanted to avoid this "confrontation" as long as possible.

On the other hand, I was also too proud to admit that I—my being Korean—could be the reason for complaint. I had enough teaching experience to "back me up." I strongly believed that if a student has doubts about my legitimacy as a teacher, all he or she had to do was spend some time to get to know me. I may sound narcissistic, but that is how most doubts about my worth as a teacher were resolved in the past.

This possible scenario I hypothesized was already affecting my performance as a teacher: I could not believe I could be UNWANTED...especially by a Korean learner.

While I wanted to clarify these unsettling “hunches” with Daisy or with anyone, for that matter, I also did not want to make this ‘noticeable’ by the school: I was a newbie—and I still had a lot to prove to the school. I seriously wanted this “ache” to subside. This ache is also an illustration of how identity, in this case my teacher identity, is a site of struggle (Norton, 2000) where the complex dynamics of being an experienced teacher, and yet a newcomer in an English-dominant setting encountering the rejection of one of my OWN people began to impact my professional activities.

Palmer (1998) identifies the first layer of fear as the fear of acknowledging otherness—once one “admit(s) pluralism, we are forced to admit that ours is not the only standpoint, the only experience, the only way, and the truths we have built our lives on begin to feel fragile” (p. 38). If I applied this idea to my journey of identity reconstruction, in January 2012 I was met with a challenge to see my self differently. Nevertheless, I was not ready to admit that there could be a different opinion—especially from a Korean, since Korea *was* the country that made me believe I was SPECIAL. I could not comprehend the reality that a student left my class because of ME—of who I am, not what I can or cannot do: I may have been modest on the outside, but I knew, and strongly believed, that I was a qualified language teacher. To be honest, my pride did not allow me to admit that this quiet girl may be avoiding me for this “ridiculous” (that’s is how I felt) reason.

Since my encounter(s) with Daisy this day, I began over-generalizing Korean students, who were in their 20s: I tried my best to avoid having Korean students in my classes. I became defensive when a Korean student asked about my life experiences, because I was afraid of being judged differently by them.

Now, in 2014, recalling this memory makes me want to crawl into a mouse hole<sup>10</sup>. I can't believe I had acted and felt this way, when I was one of the teachers who had the longest prior teaching experience at the school. The fear of being seen as not good enough, having the feeling that I may not be acknowledged as I had been in the past, took over my capability to think critically. The more I felt weak, the more I pushed back using my credentials and teaching experience. I kept telling myself, 'What does she know about being a teacher, anyways?'

<sup>10</sup> A Korean expression that describes when someone is too embarrassed to face others.

### **Third Encounter & A Little Confrontation**

It's been more than a month since that second encounter with Daisy. As much as she avoids me, I try my best to avoid her as well. I would really like to keep it that way, where she goes her way, and I go mine. Actually, I haven't told anyone, but I have been silently following Daisy's whereabouts. I couldn't tell anyone, as it would seem so unprofessional. On the surface, I have been doing my job, working hard to make the most out of my time with the students I have. On the inside, I was always aware of "The girl who resented me."

So far, from what I could tell by tracking her class decisions is that she prefers "white" teachers. I wonder if she knows not all of them are actually born and raised in Canada. What would she do if I told her? That would be interesting to see.

I chuckle, then immediately stop myself from acting so childish. Sometimes, I am amazed and shocked at how childish I can become when it came to Daisy. Every time someone complained about her moving around, I was "glad" to hear that. When a colleague didn't know what to do with Daisy being too silent in class, I wished Daisy would hear this and realize she has to make some serious changes. Sometimes, teachers would ask me about her, simply because I am Korean. This puts me in an awkward position, as I do not have anything nice to say about her. Then, almost at the very same time, I am startled at my ugly inner thoughts, and quickly scold myself for being so childish and immature. I am beginning to feel embarrassed at who I have become.

I have tried to look for solutions in journal articles and websites for teachers, but all I find is that "this" is reality—NNESTs are treated differently—and yes, NNESTs may be better qualified, and NESTs have their advantages as well. Some researchers (Benke & Medgyes, 2006; Braine, 2010; Liang, 2002; Mahboob, 2003; Moussu, 2002; 2006; Moussu & Braine, 2006) even say students in ESL contexts do not quite differentiate between NESTs and NNESTs; nevertheless, that's not how I feel. I was told during my first Masters degree that it is always better to examine personally perceived problems through other research and literature. However, my beginner skill in finding research that speaks to me was more stressful than I had thought, and only added frustration to gain

insights into this uncomfortable feeling I have in me. I was not exactly what Medgyes (2001) would identify as a NNEST—yes, I spoke the same first language as my previous students in Korea, but I never taught English using my first language. I was never considered a Korean English teacher while I taught there as well. Thinking about the feeling I have for Daisy, keeps on leading me to think about who I am in this reality. Who am I?

Anyways...

I only have a half day today. Can't wait to do some grocery shopping on my way home. Just as I am about to leave school, Mike—one of the bosses—comes to the teachers' room,

'Carol, do you have a minute?'

"Sure. Do you need something?"

"Can you sub today? Just an additional hour instead of Conrad."

"I was going to do some shopping...but, OK. Why not."

"Subbing" for others happens quite frequently, and unexpectedly. It rarely gives you time to prepare for the class, and most of the times, you would have to improvise once you get there; and today was just like any other "subbing" days.

Since Mike just asked before the class was to begin, I hurriedly step into the class. I have no idea who is in the class; all I know is that this is a vocabulary and speaking class.

As I hand out a blank paper and ask students to write their names (this is going to be my attendance sheet for the day), I see none other than Daisy sitting in class with a frozen face. She must be surprised to see me come to her class. Why wouldn't she be? She tried so hard to take the perfect classes (taught by her ideal teachers). I can feel I have a nasty smirk on my face.

*Oops! Don't forget, you are a teacher, Carol.*

Although I am slightly content to see her surprised, I don't want to startle or worry her, so I tell the class (even before I introduce myself),

"I am just teaching this class for one day. Your teacher is coming tomorrow."

Some students nod, some say "ah..."

I hope this would suffice.

Daisy is the same as I remember her from that first day: calm and quiet; serious looking with an upright posture. If only she would smile. If only she would engage in my class. Daisy may have been physically and visibly present, but the learner Daisy isn't here with me.

Some twist of fate... Oh, I should have followed my guts and said NO when Mike asked me to sub. Now I feel sorry for her. It couldn't have been easy for her to get into classes that she "thought" would perfect her English. Then I show up again and again... you poor young lady. Had I known you were in this class, I would have told Mike that I had to be somewhere.

On the other hand, I am still trying to build a reputation at English Centre, and I didn't want to turn down his request.

*Ah! The perks of being a temporary worker in Canada!*

Just as I look at Daisy (from afar) to see if she is doing the pair work, she asks to be excused (again!). *No, young lady, I know what you are thinking, and I cannot let you leave the room this time.*

"I'm sorry, but can you stay here and finish the task first? Without you, Akiko won't be able to finish the work." I use Daisy's partner as an excuse to keep Daisy in class. "I promise you can leave as soon as the clock hits 1:20."

Deep in my heart, despite the anger I have towards her, I want her to stay, I want her to change her mind and give me a “break” for once. I am ready to forgive and understand her; I wanted her to do the same. This unspoken avoidance could easily be broken if she would just stay and decide to give me a chance! Honestly, she and I are only meeting for the SECOND TIME in a classroom setting. Surely she is old enough to know how irrational it is to judge someone based on a short encounter (I would estimate it to be about an hour worth). And even if she hated me that much, she knew her actual teacher would be back tomorrow!

I force myself to smile and be pleasant, but it is hard to keep the corner of my lips up. My hurt feelings and urge to confront her was affecting my already unnatural smile, my facial expression, and my hands. My cheekbones are trembling.

“...”

“Daisy?”

She looks straight at me in the eye. She is silent, but I feel resistance and a strong negative energy from her. Maybe all this negativity is purely my imagination, but I quickly change my mind and tell her she could leave.

**I give in**

No, I don't. But I don't want to make a scene. Students will notice the strange vibe between us.

Then, as she did before, Daisy packs everything and leaves. I only have about 10 minutes left, and I know she won't return, so I move on to the next task with the rest of the class. The awkwardness lingering in the classroom reminded me of the blank stare from over a month ago. Can someone really dislike me too much to find it hard to stay in the same room with me? If not seeing me in class really means that much to her, I can prevent it by telling the bosses. She is tactless enough to leave my class, but is not brave enough to tell me why.

I feel like I lost a big battle. My poor class was left with a sub-teacher who was zoned out by a single student.

### **Round 3, and I was Knocked Out.**

I meet Daisy in the hallways after class. I can't take this anymore. Her hostility towards me has been really torturing me inside and I feel like I am not the person I used to be. She is draining me out, and she isn't even in MY class!

I may have been Knocked Out 3 times, but I needed to hear the answers from her. All my theories and hunches need to be clarified, or else I will probably be submerged in this black hole called Daisy. I had a right to know, and I had a hunch, but I wanted to hear it FROM HER. If she tells me, it will become a reality I would have to face; right now, it's all an imaginary tale—that sprouted from my suspicion (of being Korean); and I wanted to avoid it, deny it, as long as possible—because I believed I was “different.” Now if Daisy tells me she doesn't approve me as a legitimate teacher because of the place where I was born, then I would need to deal with the gap between how I see my self, and how I am “categorized” by others (or maybe just her). Regardless, I needed to know...

I stand in the way. She stops. She looks up, stares at me right in the eye. I give her a stare as well. She wants to go around me, but I make sure I block her path. Looking straight into her eyes I am reminded that this is a *student*; and I am or was her teacher.

*'What the heck am I doing with a student?'*

I inhale deeply and calm down. I remind myself, *'I am not here to start a fight. I am here to resolve this through dialogue.'*

*Dialogue. Dialogue.'*

Showing a faint smile, I ask her if she has time to talk. She nods. I escort her to a corner of the building, away from the moving crowd.



I decide to ask her in Korean, as this could be a sensitive matter. When I taught youth and children in Korea, the teacher using Korean meant there was something important to talk about. I figured Daisy might feel the same. I talk to her in a casual polite form (of the Korean language).

Carol: “저기, Daisy 학생. 제 수업시간이 불편한가요?”  
(Daisy, is there something you are bothered during my class?)

Daisy: “...” (No answer. Just a stare)

Carol: “내가 뭐 도와줄 것 없나요?”  
(Can I help you in any way?)

Daisy: “내가 못 알아들으니까.”  
(‘cuz I can’t understand... )

### **That is it.**

She gives me the blank stare again, nods and leaves. She just simply tells me she can’t understand me. I notice the Korean tone and the form she used, and with that in mind, her response sounded more like, ‘Ok, I’ll just say this so I can get away from you.’ Among the seven speech levels in the Korean language, I chose to use the causal-polite form—a form that is not too formal, yet shows just enough respect for the other. On the other hand, she used the lowest form of speech level, which reflected lack of respect or no intention of making acquaintance. She sounded cold, very certain of her feelings. Call me hasty, but she did not want anything to do with me. I couldn’t ask any more questions, and my hopes to build something (or get rid of a wall) through dialogue became water under the bridge.

At least I got to hear something from her. It wasn’t the answer I was hoping to hear from her, nor did her response make any sense to me—students came to my class because it was easier for them to understand me. I was never told to be speaking English unintelligibly. Perhaps Kris—the school’s Korean counselor/marketer (who is also Korean)—knows something more than I do. Surely, Daisy would have talked to Kris about school life. I should go and ask Kris one day. It’s clear Daisy dislikes being taught by me, but I think her answer was not the real reason.

**For now.**

**I am letting go.**

**For now.**

### **Reflection #3 Facing a Full-Length Mirror**

We fear the live encounter as a contest from which one party emerges victoriously while the other leaves defeated and ashamed

If we peel back our fear of conflict, we find [...] the fear of losing identity. Many of us are so deeply identified with our ideas that when we have a competitive encounter, we risk losing more than the debate: we risk losing our sense of self” (Palmer, 1998, p.38)

My “obsession” with Daisy had consequences. I especially feel sorry for the other students that were in my class(es) when I met Daisy. My obsession with Daisy caused me to lose my capability or the capacity for connectedness (Palmer, 1998, p. 40) with other students, and to build an invisible wall whenever I saw a young Korean student in class. When I became too occupied thinking about her, I would forget promises I had made with other students. The fixation was too strong that I think I did not really focus on building relations with other students, even though they deserved equal amount of attention. I should have let it go, just as Kris (the student counselor for Koreans) suggested later in the term; but instead, everyday I was in a battle with her...ALONE.

Palmer’s “student from hell” describes the feeling I had about Daisy: The “student from hell” was a student who prompted fear in Parker Palmer, to doubt himself being teacher-worthy. Palmer describes the moment as, “I became totally obsessed with him, and everyone else in the room disappeared from my screen [...] I learned that day what a black hole is: a place where the gravity is so intense that all traces of light disappear” (p. 44), and I concur—my eyes, my thoughts, my energy were

all focused at Daisy that even though she was never my student, she was the first name I would look for in the teaching assignment list (class list), and was the person I kept tabs on, unbeknownst to other colleagues.

What I hated most about my situation was that the more I felt that my dignity as an experienced teacher was being threatened, my sense of pride as an experienced teacher became stronger, and I wanted to validate myself through students and the school as who I was and am; not how they wanted to see me. My life experience as a teacher of English in various teaching situations was not something I could easily disregard, nor did I want anyone to call it “unworthy.” How I saw myself, or positioned myself within this reality—English Centre—did not seem to be agreeable to Daisy, and this did not sit well with me. It was also visible in the way she responded to my question—the choice of words, the tone of her articulation was neither seeing me as a teacher or someone who deserved respect. My encounters with Daisy also are a good illustration of identity theorizing from a sociocultural perspective (e.g. Toohey, 2000) pointing to identity as relational in demonstrating how one student’s actions and words undermined my sense of self as a professional.

At the same time, my identity as an experienced teacher—the image I have about how I should “behave” suggested I let this go, instead of making a “fuss” out of something that has been prevailing for years: as Moussu (2002) shares in her research, Koreans and Chinese learners are not shy at expressing negative feelings towards NNESTs. Why not adhere to the students’ expectations to be taught by someone who was born and raised in Canada? Why do I have to insist on telling the class that I am from Korea?

Unlike the time I was in Korea, and certainly unlike the time I was an actual “newbie” in the field, I wanted to be seen as who I was—a whole being—and didn’t want to be in the position where I had to either lie to be seen differently, or prove myself

worthy by explaining to my students by “flashing” my credentials and years of teaching experience. I thought it was time to stop giving “excuse-like” reasons for students and schools to put their faith in me.

I could have also “embraced” the stereotypical image Daisy (or other Korean students, if there were more, could have of me), and counter-performed against that image-text (Simon, 1995) students had created of a teacher like myself, similarly to what Morgan (2004) did with his Chinese students. However, as I have mentioned in my literature review chapter, Varghese et al. advise that it make take a toll on the teacher’s identity of self. On top of that, with my state of mind—being obsessive and paranoid—it might be difficult for me to present myself in an “unthreatening, respectful way” (Morgan, 2004, p. 184).

By moving from Korea to Canada, the different teaching context seemed to have triggered an alarm, telling me it was time to reassess who I am, who “they” see me as, and who I could be. Norton’s (2000) defines identity as “how people view themselves in relation to the social world, how their view is constructed over time, and from that view, how they perceive their future possibilities (p. 5). Although her study is focused on language learners and their cases of negotiating identities within the English-dominant country, I find that definition of identity to be relatable to me as a language teacher.

In my case, trying to “fit in” and find my place in Canada was not very difficult (in general); but trying to position myself as a legitimate language teacher was a different story. The world (Canada, or in this specific case, Daisy) saw me as another NNEST—someone whom she could not possibly learn from (according to my “hunch”); I believed I was a well-qualified language teacher. My belief also came from another negotiated identity from my past. Regardless, that previously negotiated identity clashed when I was situated in a new place. I needed to re-negotiate, but the years

backing up my previous identity made it very hard to view this circumstance as being anything but productive.

Still, after this incident with Daisy, I knew something had to be done; and to actually negotiate; I needed to look at how I saw myself—or, how I became to be me.

Living in Canada, not many connect the “international” label with me at first glance. Honestly speaking, I was not sure if I wanted people to. I enjoyed being the centre of curiosity, making people wonder and try to guess my history and my proficiency in ‘their language’: “How do you speak so fluently?” “You don’t have the Asian (Korean) accent’.” There were times when I had been bothered by the curiosity of others, telling them the ‘*when I was young...*’ story over and over again until the listener(s) would nod and say, “oh, that’s why!” This “ah-ha” moment varies, and although I enjoy the attention at times, I would get frustrated feeling like I somehow had to justify my own being everywhere I go.

Well, now, almost 40, I am at the point where I think I take advantage of “being in between a NNEST and a NEST” more than sulking over it. I have gotten used to it, and I think I enjoy seeing people’s reactions when I tell them that I am not actually, “one of them.” I have been taking this ‘diversity’ to my advantage—being somewhat ‘exotic,’ or surprising, gives you this indescribable “power” when you need something. And I have learned that being able to express my thoughts and desires in the language “the others” speak is ultimately the most powerful weapon to achieve my goal(s).

Faez’s (2011) study on linguistic identities of six teacher candidates from various backgrounds revealed, “native/nonnative categories could not capture the true linguistic identities of all of the participants” (p. 395). Faez claimed that categorizing individuals in an either/or way is problematic and does not reflect the true linguistic identities, and that future studies should be aiming at highlighting “the relational, dialogic, dynamic,

multiple, and situated nature of identity” (p. 396). Yet, the reality is far from this suggestion.

In a language teaching situation: where majority of my colleagues are NESTs, the school is owned and operated by NESs; and students from all over the world come to this English-dominant country to learn the language; and where businesses make profit out of these desires to learn, my “exotic-ness” is not as impressive, rather—it is obscured by my non-nativeness.

Palmer quotes a dean of an experimental college that teachers spend too little time in trying to know the students, and the way teachers “diagnose” the students “determines the kind of remedy we (teachers) offer” (p. 42). I say it also works the other way: STUDENTS determine what kind of a teacher they see in front of them, and “diagnose” how they will treat the being. SCHOOLS also “diagnose” the teacher, assigning classes that THEY (the schools) think best suits the teacher.

What the incidents with Daisy had made me realize was that THIS was the reality for many NNESTs—people are put into an either/or category. What I had been experiencing back in Korea was an exceptional case, something I cannot expect to receive in an ESL context like Canada. I could not believe I was seen as one of them—the NNESTs—who are in the periphery, struggling and negotiating their way to the center and somehow being denied access as a legitimate participant (Lave and Wenger, 1991). I thought I was aware of my positioning in the ELT field, but what I realized was that for a very long time, hidden deep inside of my mind was the belief that I was different from the rest of NNESTs. This meant that I had been a self-loving, narcissistic, egocentric language teacher, who believed she was different from the others, and who believed she deserved something different. It was only when I began writing this autoethnography that I started to see how I had been seeing myself in relation to others, as well as how I expected others to see me. My initial reason for using autoethnography as method of

research was because the method embraced highly personalized and situated accounts of a person to shed light on some of the issues or topics related to the field he or she is involved in. However, while writing this thesis, I experienced the power of having conversations with the inner self (Palmer, 1998), as well as “see[ing] and understand[ing] the world around me” (Park, 2013, p. 3).

I was not necessarily saying out loud how I felt, that I deserved better, nor was I saying I was “better” than other NNESTs; the identity I had constructed while teaching in Korea was through interaction with the Korean student, parents, colleagues, and NESTs working there. It made me believe I was somehow different and special, perhaps, even “better” than other NNESTs. Now, after almost 15 years, I am confronted by a person from the same country that helped me become who I was. She is telling me that I am not seen as the same person anymore. This brings me back to the quote from Faez’s (2011) research on the linguistically diverse teachers, that “linguistic identities [are] relational, dialogic, dynamic, multiple, and situated” (p. 396). Indeed, how I believed I deserved to be seen, how I saw myself, as well as how “the other” actually saw me was being influenced by the situated reality I was in.

Nevertheless, in 2012, I had no mental capacity to reflect to this level of consciousness. I was engaging with my situation as being in a conflict as competition (Palmer, 1998)—you either win or lose. This urge to “keep” my self from OTHERNESS and “divergent truths” (Palmer, p. 38) was blinding me from seeing things clearly. I was hurt and was becoming furious and very confused; I had no intention of “losing” (i.e., letting go of who I think I am) in order to “win.” I did not know that at the time, or perhaps have known it all along—only in my head, but was too angry to embrace the idea that I had to let go (my self-conception of self) to gain something better (the capacity to connect and thus be able to re-construct my identity). My personality of wanting to “find out” and getting to the bottom of this confusion helped me become the person I am now, but two years ago, that same eagerness was fueling my anger and

literally making me “schizophrenic” (Medgyes, 1983) towards almost all Korean students, school staff, and colleagues.

## The Daisy Effect 1: The People

It’s been another three weeks or so since last time I spoke with Daisy. I haven’t fully understood Daisy’s reasons for disliking me, and I haven’t consulted the student counselor Kris about the issue either. After that day, I decided that time was too precious to waste on finding out why Daisy left (or leaves) my class. I told Mike that I do not wish to sub a class that Daisy is in, because it messes up my time with the other students. When I see Daisy pass by my classroom, I freeze; when I teach a class and if her close friends are there, I can’t stop myself from asking how she is—not that I wish to know how she is...actually... I have no idea why I even ask her friends about her. In short—Daisy makes me forget what I was initially going to do. The biggest problem I have is that I forget to focus on being “present” in class—both physically and spiritually.

Life at English Center is not so bad either, if I ignore the whole Daisy-incident: students enjoy my classes, I get along well enough with other colleagues, Susan-the academic head-teacher loves my company, and I feel as my presence is becoming more noticeable now.

But my unanswered questions linger.

I am 90% sure she left because I am Korean.

Yet, I am hopeful for the 10%.

*Who knows?*

Again... the mind-boggling thoughts. **I must stop.**

I must applaud at what Daisy has turned me into, though. While I am becoming more needed in school—exactly how I wanted the school to think of me—I am also feeling and experiencing hostility towards other people at school.



**Yes, I think I am being paranoid.**

**I am becoming extremely sensitive.**

A paper (Medgyes, 1983) I once read talked about being schizophrenic of being a non-native speaker of English, and I am beginning to feel that way. It is actually fascinating how one person (e.g., Daisy) could put you in this fragile state of mind, where you suddenly become sensitive to everything; it didn't matter how minor it is—every little utterance, every little gesture or the way other people talk or respond in a conversation, the tone of a question, how one looks at you, even to the order one shares snacks (yes, this is a little too much)—makes me think twice about the other person's intentions. I am getting suspicious about my surroundings—especially the people, and their utterances. And of course, my negative feelings towards others are building up and affecting the way I perceive my colleagues (some, not all), and students.

So while I am trying to maintain the Carol I want the school to see me as, I am being consumed by the darkness that is getting bigger and darker every day.

And this is **all because of her**—Daisy.

I have begun to doubt everything and everyone around me at work. These doubts were never mine... until Daisy "touched" my life.

Once, I was answering the head teacher Susan's question about Koreans' eagerness to know other people's age, and I almost yelled at two NESTs who had been teaching there in the beginning of their teaching career. The way they were interrupting my say, and raising their voices as if their story was the fact, was both humiliating and infuriating.

**Jack:** "Nonsense, that's not why they ask you about age!"

**Daniel:** "NO way!"

They both are too loud for my liking.

**Jack:** “It’s the old bureaucratic c##p that is governing the Korean people’s minds.”

**Daniel:** “They are just full of curiosity. They are born nosy. That’s why.”

**Jack:** “It’s a habit just to intimidate the other younger person, so that the older can have complete control. It doesn’t matter who is more capable or worthy of better pay; it’s all about pressing the young to stay shut. That’s what it is.”

**Daniel:** “I agree. When I lived in Korea, they would always talk about how young I was. It was not a compliment, ‘cuz then they would tell me to do things I didn’t want to do. Just because I was younger. Whole lot of BS.”

Their gesture to ask me for confirmation was also so irritating. I was annoyed, so angry, and couldn’t believe what these non-Koreans were saying! How dare they define my country’s culture as if they knew it all! How dare they think they have the right to define my country as they see it! How dare they make Susan believe that asking about her age is for the purpose of trying to check her worthiness as a teacher! How do they know? Did living in Korea for some years give them the right to talk about the country and its people in such way?

Jack and Daniel both lived in Korea while teaching English. Jack came back after a few years, but Daniel lived there until quite recently. He began as an instructor for a private language institute, but in the end, worked for a post-secondary institution (which is another privilege as a white NEST—you can be a professor without a PhD). They knew enough, I suspect. But they judged the country and its culture with a Western mind. Nevertheless, they thought they had it right. They thought they knew the country. Really?! Where did that ego come from?

I have been living here for 5 years, but never feel right to judge the people, their ways of life, or their social issues. I still feel as a visitor (technically, I am a temporary resident), and I am still learning about this place and its people. Some things I don’t understand, some things I find amusing and fascinating. Still, I do not judge—or at least do not try to judge or make fun of the country in front of its people.

They then went on and on about their so-called “ridiculous” lives in Korea. All the crazy things that happened to them while they were there: the schools, the mothers, the students, the coworkers, the drinking, etc. Not one word about how pleasant it was living there, or how the experience in Korea helped them become the teachers they are now. Not one word about how that experience helped them go to graduate schools and further their multiple degrees. Not a single good thing was being said about Korea and Koreans. Perhaps that is all that is left from the experience—the crazy years of drinking and teaching (on the side?). Ignorant people!

The anger and rage fed my paranoia, and it expanded to a different path...eventually merging with my unstable confidence as an English teacher here (with them). I had this boiling urge to confront them and ask, “Am I invisible to you?” “Are you underestimating me as a fellow teacher, or even as a person—because I am from the country you underestimate?” They may have been talking ill of my home country, but it felt more personal than ever—*had they respected me as a legitimate colleague, would they have been this rude?*

Anger is nowhere close to subsiding...

But I am silent. **I could not fight back.**

I am about to cry out of fury. I leave the room and run to the washroom.

I start flushing the toilet to cover the sound of my sobbing. I am not sure which makes me cry more—the things Jack and Daniel were saying, or the fact that I just sat there and listened without saying a word. Mostly, I was angry at myself for what I have become. Teacher Carol has become **voiceless**. This was like going back to 1998 again...when I first began teaching.

**Maybe Daisy was a sign— I don't belong here.**

## **Reflection #4 It Matters Whom You are With**

We still face one final fear—the fear that a live encounter with otherness will challenge or even compel us to change our lives. (Palmer, 1998, p. 39)

This part of the reflection is somewhat a continuance from reflection #3, as it illustrates times of conflict with other members of the community. The reason this segment of my lived experience is included is that it shows how I was blind and furious about everything—yet had not quite found out how to deal with the fear of conflict. I was not ready to open up my feelings to other teachers, because I was afraid what they would think of me, and I also thought that confronting them was “just not my style.” The ignorant and insensitive colleagues—white NESTs—did have a right to share their opinion about my home country; just as I had the right to critique theirs. However, just like Lisa in Lee & Simon-Maeda’s research (2006), I also was disappointed at my colleagues for not noticing how impolite their opinions were from my point of view—they did not notice my facial expression of frustration and disappointment. They just kept on going and going.

Just as Lisa told Lee (2006; 2011) that she was skeptic about things ever changing for visible minorities in the field, I felt the same ...and the fact that I was teaching with them in their territory (that was how I felt) was another factor of my silence. Then there was the political factor—that I should not cause any trouble while I still need the school’s support to gain a permanent status at English Centre (and the country). Perhaps, if “Lisa” was with me at that scene, I would have been able to at least gossip about Jack and Daniel’s insensitive comments. Lisa related on a personal level with the researcher—Lee—because Lisa identified Lee as a fellow teacher who was also a visible minority and an academic who taught in Canada. Throughout the interview, Lee writes how Lisa relates to her and finds comfort in her (Lee’s) presence, reducing the feeling of alienation from her other colleagues

I cannot turn back time, but I wonder how this story would have turned out if I had another colleague from Korea—more specifically, a Korean NNEST. Would having another experienced colleague from the same country have helped me overcome the feeling of helplessness? Would knowing that I was not alone in feeling “left out” prevent myself from going berserk over things that could be easily dismissed?

In reference to Palmer’s observation that “We still face one final fear—the fear that a live encounter with otherness will challenge or even compel us to change our lives” (p. 39), looking back on this day, I have realized how much I had changed in viewing others’ and their actions. After failing to create any level of “bond” with Daisy, all upsetting things that happened—were understood as something related to my non-nativeness, and non-whiteness. Nobody told me I was illegitimate (compared to my NEST counterparts); yet, every unpleasant incident that happened at school SEEMED to somehow end up being related to my non-nativeness. To put it differently, my encounter with Daisy, and the “trauma” the experience had on me, changed the way I saw and made sense of everything and everyone around me; it completely changed my view of reality. I was bitter and sarcastic in viewing things around me. Now, reminiscing, I find that Jack and Daniel’s bickering about their lives in Korea was not something I should have been that furious about. Yet, each and every utterance from them made me angry and sour. It felt as if they were making fun of ME—everything, every utterance felt personal. Power imbalances linked to gender and racial dynamics in the context (Kubota, 2014) might also be relevant in reflecting on the story with Jack and Daniel I told above, but these did not transpire for me as I was processing these events. Rather I continued to connect everything to my experiences with Daisy. The question of race will come up later...

After having the chance to engage in dialogue with one student whom he calls The Student from Hell, Palmer writes that, “Student from Hell (SFH)” was not born that way, but created by his or her surrounding conditions” (p. 45). He embraces the

sociocultural understanding of identity, and how that influences the person's becoming, hence influences the way a teacher may view the student. In this case, "I" was at the centre of the cycle. Palmer's SFH had the urge to engage in a dialogue with Palmer on one occasion. This action seemed to be SFH's longing to find a way out of the pressure he was situated in. His father's not approving of the SFH's desires to receive a degree in a post-secondary institution was influencing the way SFH himself viewed his desires (to finish school). For me, SFH's decision to "ask" Palmer for advice showed how although one's identity may be strongly influenced by one's surroundings, it is the person's PERSONAL desires and longings to 'not settle' that bring out change, despite the views and negative influence of others. Becoming a SFH may not have been the student's choice, but trying to understand why things happen and finding a way was definitely HIS CHOICE or perhaps agency.

Again, I only realized the significance of the SFH's actions afterwards—while reflecting on my notes. In 2012, I was very negative in responding to my surroundings; and instead of talking it out, I kept it sealed inside, and let the anger rot my heart. There was this invisible cloak over me, which made me see things in distorted ways. I felt like everyone was out to get me, trying to test my validity as a teacher, underestimating my life experiences. My visions of life had changed tremendously—and I did not know a way back.

This experience is a reminder once again that identity is relational (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and the kinds of relations I have within the community, greatly influence the (re) forming of my identity. However, the story also prompts the importance of being connected with one's inner self as suggested by Palmer (1998). This short encounter with Jack and Daniel proposed potentially racialization and being a person of colour as factors of identity re-construction, as well as how I perceived my position in relation to others in the situation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Norton, 2000, Toohey, 2000) as influential aspects of identity re-construction.

## The Daisy Effect 2: The School

### [Vignette #1]

Several months have passed, and I just began experiencing the ‘big summer intake.’ Classes are full, and yet more students are arriving every week! Wow...

In terms of fitting in, I think I am making my way through...gradually becoming a full member of English Centre. I feel more comfortable being at school, and have begun hanging out with some of the teaching staffs after work. I am gaining voice—but I feel that I need to tread this path lightly, as I do not wish to seem arrogant or vain. Daisy is still at school, but thanks to the help from Mike, I never meet her in class. Nonetheless, she still holds a place in my head...seeped in my thoughts...affecting the way I comprehend incidents around me. The most memorable of these follows...

English Centre has a couple of summer camps for youth and young learners. Mike was asking around if anyone wanted to teach children during the summer. Children! I haven’t yet told Susan that I am interested, but if the school had read through my resume carefully, they would easily tell my passion used to be in teaching children. Well... it still is. I enjoy teaching adult learners, and am excited at the endless possibilities in teaching grown ups, but you never forget your first love—and for me, it is teaching children. I wonder if I should tell Susan first.

The day begins, and I am busy as always—teaching. I enjoy my morning class—I teach the Elementary level, currently the lowest in the school. My students are amazing and a lot of fun to be with! When I am with my students, I do not think about Daisy, or inequality, or unfairness... The classroom is my world I share with my students. At least in this room, I can forget about the idea that someone resents me for who I am. My class—my current one, that is—is my sanctuary.

During lunch, I ask Susan what the summer program for children looks like and ask if I could be a part of the team. She tells me that she could talk to Janet about my interest, and that she will inform me if Janet needs more teachers.

Indeed, I was getting good feedback from the students at school, and within such a short time, I can feel that I have become somewhat a needed member of the teaching staff. I do not have a fulltime contract yet, but Mike tells me that it will happen soon.

I meet Janet after the fourth period. Janet is one of our senior teachers who have been with the school for quite a long time. She is a very 'direct' teacher...sometimes blunt: when she likes you, you know; when she doesn't; you know.

"Janet, are you still looking for teachers for the junior program?"

"Yes, are you interested?"

She shows a huge smile. One I have never seen before. This must be a good sign.

"Actually, YES. I am interested in working with children."

"Oh, great! I never knew! I'll put you in my list and let you know when the dates are confirmed."

"Sounds good! Let me know."

That was almost too easy. That's it? One second I ask, and the next second I'm in? Wow... that must be the shortest job interview!

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**A few days later...** no news on when the teachers for the junior program will meet.

**A few weeks later...** still no news on when I'll be involved in the junior program.

**A month...** It's June now! I see Janet's assistant making copies of workbooks for the program. I don't see my name on the teaching staff list. Mike keeps on giving me classes in the regular ESL classes, and does not seem to know I am on (supposed to be on?) Janet's list. **What is going on?**



Janet cannot be reached, as she is on-leave getting ready for the junior program.  
I go to Mike first thing in the morning.

“Mike”

“Yes, Carol.”

“Do you know Janet hired me for the junior program?”

“Oh, no, I told her she couldn’t take you.”

“Huh? When did this happen?”

“Quite some time ago. I figure she hasn’t gotten  
back to you?”

“No... not yet.”

“You see, Carol. We need you at ESL. So don’t  
even think of going anywhere else, ok?”

“All right. I guess that’s a compliment?”

“Of course!”

I chuckle and leave Mike’s office. That was interesting... *wonder why Janet never told me she couldn’t keep me. Hmm...*

Then the Korean counselor Kris calls for me. She never asks me to talk. *I wonder if this is about Daisy...* I am not getting a good vibe from her facial expression: she looks... sorry.

“Kris, did you want to talk to me?”

“Yes, Carol Ssaem<sup>11</sup>. Please have a seat.”

She points to the chair in front of her desk and starts talking to me in Korean. I am guessing she does not want the English speakers to understand what she is about to say<sup>12</sup>.

“I am SO sorry you couldn’t teach the junior program.”

I sensed that she did not hear everything Mike told me. She seems to want to give me a reason. But what reason? I thought Mike already made that clear.

“You have to understand... most of our clients for the junior program are from Korea.”

“Oh...o...k...of course...”

*(OK. Got it!)*

Now I know the main reason. I realized as soon as she pointed out that the children are “**from Korea.**”

Probably Kris was afraid that she would receive complaints from her clients that the school brought in a Korean to the program (when they advertised as Canadian teachers).

“I had to ask Mike to keep you in ESL. I am sorry.”

“uh...”

*(Really?! YOU? Why would you? How could you? You don’t even know me!)*

“Mike didn’t want you to go to the junior program anyways...so...”

<sup>11</sup> Ssaem (쌤) is a informal casual way of addressing ‘teacher’ /seon- seng- nim/

<sup>12</sup> The conversation was in fact in Korean. I have written it in English for the readers’ convenience

I am not sure what to say. Why did Mike *lie* to me then? Does he think I am that sensitive (honestly, I was. But he wouldn't know)? Yes, it IS a sensitive matter, but to lie about it?

Suddenly, I feel betrayed. I don't think I can trust anyone.

...

"Oh, I understand, Kris. I have been in your shoes before."

I act like it doesn't concern me that much.

"Parents can be very demanding, right?"

"Yes! I'm glad you understand, Carol Ssaem. It's just... we never had a Korean teacher in our Junior program, and sometimes I receive complaints about teachers who are originally from other non-English speaking countries, like China or Hong Kong. They are just so outdated...but they are my clients...and I can't risk getting complaints about having a Korean teacher."

At least, Kris is honest. I am grateful for that.

"Thanks for telling me. It's unfortunate that parents think that way, but I understand where this is coming from."

"Thank you, Ssaem. I really appreciate it."

Feels odd...again. I am being reminded that my "enemies" are my own people. I am being told to hate or distrust my own people—Koreans not wanting Korean teachers... for being Korean. What disgrace! This is embarrassing. Perhaps this is why Janet never contacted me in person to tell me I am going to be with the adult ESL group. Being a messenger can be tough. Another unfortunate incident—again, because of who I am.

I feel sick.

But I need to teach.

I am thinking I should refrain from visiting anyone before the day begins: things tend to take an unexpected turn, and this ruins my class(es). Again, I feel bad for the students in class. I am in my sanctuary, but I don't feel safe. I feel...distant...alienated. The place that gave me great joy in the morning has been under siege... The Daisy effect kicks in.

*Of course, they don't trust me—I am a NNEST... how did I forget this?!*

I smirk. I was hurt. I am angry.

My poor students have no idea why I have “transformed” within minutes.

My teaching becomes a performance—a lie.

**I hate it.**

**I hate me.**

Ironically, Susan asks if I was off the schedule soon (because of the junior programs).

“No, you'll see more of me, Susan. Hope you are happy about it.”

We engage in a light, casual chat about students in our classes while we prep for tomorrow.

The sun will come out, tomorrow<sup>13</sup>...

Right?

<sup>13</sup> a phrase from the song, Tomorrow, in Annie (movie)

## [Vignette #2]

Another new day: I need to start anew. I am still not sure how to positively cope with yesterday's incident, but I am fine. I mean... I WILL be fine.

What else could possibly add to the already paranoid self?

I have been rejected by a student,

then felt totally humiliated by colleagues (although not directly, but indirectly),

was taken off the junior program's teacher list,

all because of **who I am**.

What else could possibly disappoint me now?

Maybe, really, Daisy WAS a sign.

And maybe, just maybe...I should have listened to it.

A couple of new students join my afternoon class. I am surprised—not because of their joining my class, but because they are Korean students. Why...

I have been hiding my “paranoia” quite well. Even though I ask around to see if it's just me, or if this “rejection” happens among other teachers originally not from Canada. For the last six months, I think I have been hiding the withering side of me quite well.

And I hope to keep it that way. At least until I figure out how to deal with this frustration of feeling like I hit a dead end, just when I think I am ‘almost there.’

One of the new students raises his hand.

He asks, "Are you the Korean teacher at English Centre?"

"What do you mean by THE Korean?" I ask politely.

I'm curious. *Was it a mistake that the student inserted a definite article in front?*

He whispers with his friend, then tells me,

"When we wanted to change classes to your class, school asked if we were OK with a Korean teacher."

"Oh..."

"Well, what did you say?"

"We said it doesn't matter. And you don't look Korean."

I didn't get to ask what he meant by I don't look Korean, because I was a little shaken by the fact that the school asked the students if they were comfortable with a Korean teacher.

*Does it mean the school **doesn't trust me** as a qualified teacher?*

*I thought the school liked me as their teaching staff...*

*IF there were more Daisy-like students, does it mean the school would have to let me go?*

*How am I supposed to interpret and understand this situation...I have no idea yet.*

Even though the school did not consider nationality as a factor for hiring teachers, they were aware of the possible complaints by Korean students and warned them ahead.

I didn't know if I was offended, or thankful to the school for "filtering" students for me.

### **How considerate!**

If only they had a little consideration for me... my **dignity** as a teacher.

"Well, they just wanted to make sure you could handle my class. This is a special class, haven't you heard?" I make up a clever joke (I think it was clever and humorous enough) and laugh. The whole class laughs as well.

These students are not the reason I feel hurt and betrayed.

I should actually thank them for letting me know what goes on downstairs.

I am laughing, but my heart is weeping.

I think I have had enough heartbreak from one place.

Last time I checked with the graduate school, I didn't have to be in Canada to finish my second Master's degree.

Yes, I really think it IS time for me to see if there are opportunities back at home.

It seems I am making a lot of people uncomfortable by being a teacher from Korea.

A student not liking you is one thing; a school not believing in you is a HUGE thing. I do not feel safe to be me; I do not feel as if I belong in this community. Without the feeling of being wanted by the school, how can you expect to work and build your space within the community?

**Seems like I have hit a dead end.**

## **Reflection #5 It Matters Where You are From**

Fear is everywhere—in our culture, in our institutions, in our students, in ourselves—and it cuts us off from everything. Surrounded and invaded by fear, how can we transcend it and reconnect with reality for the sake of teaching and learning? The only path I know that might take us in that direction is the one marked “spiritual.” (Palmer, 1998, p. 58)

How can we move beyond the fear that destroys connectedness? I am saying, “By reclaiming the connectedness that takes away fear.” [...] The only question is whether we choose to stand outside of the circle or within it. (Palmer, 1998, pp. 59-60)

Fear is everywhere. Students’ silence in class could be an act of fear; a teacher’s domination of “talk time” may also be an act of fear; and the school’s decision to pull me out of the teaching staff for summer camp, as well as “warning” the students that the teacher is from the same country as they are—also acts of fear. Working in the ELT field, you know there is an “in season” and “out season” in an academic year. In the summer, schools will be accepting a much larger number of students; during the fall, the numbers will go down, and the schools will need to act creatively and diligently to survive the “long winter.” What the school has earned during the summer will greatly affect the school during these hard times. Therefore, my head understood the school’s decision to keep me with the adult ESL program, even though I was highly looking forward to sharing my expertise by being with children and youth.



As an experienced teacher, knowing the market, not being included for the junior program was understandable, so I tried not to express my disappointment, and “played cool” in front of the people involved in the program. I played cool by admitting the “reality” schools face in bringing in clients from Korea. “Sure, Koreans tend to want to learn from a WHITE teacher. When I heard there would be students from Korea, I sensed I wouldn’t be a part of that team” —this was how I responded to questions from other colleagues, asking me why I wasn’t being a part of the summer children/youth program. I ACTED as if I was aware of the reality and was “totally cool” with the presumed norm. But...was I?

No. I was really disappointed to realize that even if the school had nothing against hiring NNESTs, when it came to pleasing clients—a teacher’s non-nativeness mattered. I am focusing on the non-nativeness, because some of my colleagues who are originally from China became instructors for the junior program during the summer.

In an edited piece by Kubota and Lin (2009), they describe, “[w]hiteness refers to not only skin color but also cultural knowledge constructed in Western colonial histories” (p. 25), and argue that “whiteness” has become an unspoken, taken-for-granted social norm, along with native-speakerism and sexism (and more). Even in Lee & Simon Maeda’s (2006) research on racialized identities in ESL/EFL, Lee’s subject of the interview—Lisa endured the feeling of being unnecessary and illegitimate in the eyes of her students and co-workers because of the colour of her skin. The more and more I reflect on my experiences in English Centre, and in the ESL field in Canada, the stronger I FEEL and REALIZE where my skin colour positions me. From Lave & Wenger’s (1991) LPP—Legitimate Peripheral Participation—perspective, I was a new member to the community; thus I needed to stay in the periphery and gradually work my way towards the centre. Based on my experiences, I speculate that I continued being positioned in the periphery based on my nationality, being a visual minority, and Korean students being a major clientele for the school. Yet, this ‘picture’ does not reflect how I see myself within

this community. I personally do not regard my skin colour to be a factor of legitimizing my being; in fact, I believe experience should be more valued. I think this inconsistency between how according to others I “should be” verses how I think I ought to be demonstrates the complexity and struggles in the re-construction of my identity as an experienced teacher.

In a study of students’ perceptions Braine (2010) mentions that Korean participants were more “vocal” in wanting to be taught by NEST, rather than NNEST, compared to the other participants from other countries. Does that make me feel better? Not really. It makes me feel sorry to be born Korean, which I do not want to be. Not only was I getting “exhausted” being Korean, but also was becoming furious at Koreans in particular. And I “thanked” Daisy for these dreadful insights into Korean students’ understanding of what makes a good teacher. The insight I have gained from the experience is how others may judge and position you based on visual differences, rather than valuing your qualification as a teacher of language; how I internally and interpersonally deal with this insight will determine how I re-construct my identity as a member of this community.

How ugly is it to blame someone for everything wrong that is happening to me? In 2012, as I have mentioned numerous times, I had no consciousness to reflect on myself, and my anger, towards Daisy. I was simply TOO angry. Now, in 2014... I feel that “Daisy effect” ignited an amplifying effect on my reactions and responses towards others whom I felt hurt me. Just as the fictional character Hulk could not think straight—and acted out of rage. Again, the act of writing my feelings down, communicating with my self, and reflecting on it after some time has passed with different perspectives of other studies brings back my sense of “cool.” By constantly engaging in internal conversation and external conversation (with other research), I can see myself both from the insider and outsider’s perspective. As I continue to write this thesis, I am becoming more aware of the power of using writing as means to re-

construct my identity, just as Park (2013) describes her writing experience “as a way to connect critical issues of language learning, teaching, and identity” (p. 337).

Palmer (1998) notes, when teachers’ hearts become fearful, they blame it on the others and hide behind credentials and qualifications (Chapter Two). I was doing the same by blaming it on the Koreans who preferred to be taught by all teachers, but me—a Korean. I don’t think I wanted to blame the school for pulling me out of the team. I was angry with the school, but my managerial experiences and the fact that I still needed the school to fulfill my goals to immigrate prevented me from aiming my arrow towards the English Centre. If Koreans were less “picky” or “stubborn” about who should be teaching them the target language, the school would not be asking students if it was OK for their teacher to have a certain ethnic background. If clients did not complain about this issue, Kris would not have been so worried about my being involved; then maybe, I would have been a part of the junior program team... It was all about ‘them (the Koreans)’—and it hurt more because they were MY people.

On the other hand, I think this is where the identity re-construction of experienced teachers differs from that of novice teachers. Experienced teachers may have higher pride in them as teachers, but may also have a well-rounded understanding of what is at stake for others in the community. What I mean by this is that my years of experience as a middle-manager/manager at schools in Korea developed an aptitude to understand language teaching as a form of business. Hence, even though I find it unfair for me to be excluded from the summer youth program, there is a part of me that understands the corporate/business logic behind the decision. My frustration comes from another part of me that values WHO I am—an experienced teacher who has numerous years of experience with children and their parents. However, my past experience being a boss also tells me, “It’s just business; nothing personal.” These experiences demonstrate the dynamic and complex nature of identity re-construction and the notion of identity as a site of constant struggle (Norton, 2000).

Situations like these where my past experiences tell me two different stories, confuse me in making a suitable decision to respond: in this case—do I get angry at this mistreatment, or do I let it go, because it was probably just a “decision made based on business profit?” Where do I stand in this dilemma? I felt problematic, unwanted, and unnecessary—which are radically different feelings from how I felt back in Korea. Would it have made a difference if I were a pre-service teacher in my first year of teaching? Perhaps it would. As a teacher who has always been needed and wanted by schools and students, it was very difficult to swallow the reality I was positioned in—professionally. This shaky professional identity eventually affected the way I perceived my self—I began to “forget who I [was]” (Palmer, 1998, p.21) and suffer what Palmer calls “dismemberment” (p. 21)—losing oneself, and losing one’s heart.

I remember being confused and frustrated, not knowing how to deal with this disconnectedness with the people in the community, in which I wanted to belong and believed I belonged. The quote I chose for the start of this section reflects my desire to re-connect. However, as my story shows, I was quite certain that year’s summer would be my last session with English Centre. As much as I understood from a business point of view the reality I was facing, I was greatly discouraged to realize that I might be a liability when selling a program to Koreans—one of the school’s largest clientele. I could never “un-do” my Korean-ness, nor did I have the courage to argue that I cannot be treated this way in the future. I also could not change how Korean language learners define “a good language teacher.”

I remember worrying about whether I would ever be able to heal.

## Standing at the Tipping Point<sup>14</sup>

I decided to talk to Kris—the school’s counselor for Korean clients—before making the decision to leave. As I haven’t been offered a fulltime contract from the school, leaving won’t be difficult. I want to take the time to clarify the things that hurt me, and I wanted to share with someone from Korea. It just feels right to share my feelings with her. She might understand me more once I honestly tell her how I have been feeling. I do understand, that as a Korean marketer for the school, she had to do what she had to do because of her clients. Nevertheless, it was unfortunate to see how she never told the clients about how their demands were “outdated” and prejudicial—based on something (i.e., you can learn to speak like a native, when you learn from a native speaker of that language) so...unproven.

As I approached her desk after work, I wonder how she would respond.

“Kris, can I ask you something about Daisy?”

I explain what was troubling me. How she has been in my head for so many months.

“Well...Carol Ssaem, you KNOW, right?”, asks Kris with a sigh, after a long pause. She talks as if I’d already know the response.

In that case...maybe I DO know what Kris will tell me—why Daisy refused to be in my classes.

I could tell from her facial expression that she had accepted *the*—unproven - MYTH that only native speakers can help learners to achieve the level of proficiency they hope for as a norm. In short—NESTs are better teachers when you want to “master” the target language. Her question—one that didn’t really ask me for an answer—seems to be telling me, ‘you know how it is with Korean students: they don’t

<sup>14</sup> *The point in a situation at which a minor development precipitates a crisis*  
*The critical point in a situation, process, or system beyond which a significant and often unstoppable effect or change takes place*

like to be taught by one of their own. What can you do about it? Just accept it and move on.'

Kris talks in a tone that seems “less bothered” by this issue. Perhaps the only person bothering her was I. Maybe it is the way she passed on Daisy’s message...or maybe it is the way her eyes aren’t really making eye contact with me. It doesn’t matter—

### **I get it**

I am feeling a chill from the top of my head. My blood pressure must be going down; a symptom, which I usually experience under extreme stress—a symptom that could either lead to my fainting, or bursting into tears. I hope I don’t faint—that would make an awful scene.

I try so hard not to start an argument on how our school, starting with Kris—the counselor—should help narrow-minded students like Daisy to open their eyes and break away from their stereotypical views such as believing nationality, or place of birth, plays a strong factor in defining better teachers. On top of my legs, my left hand presses my right—a gesture suppressing my desire to tell how I really feel about Daisy’s comments about me. But, if I speak in order to defend my dignity as a teacher, as a way to argue that I too am a good teacher, I will probably choke and cry out of anger in front of her. And that, too, will make a scene.

I hate feeling helpless and weak. I hate that a single student could make me feel so unworthy. For the first time in my life,

**I**

**Actually**

**Hated**

**A student**

I am trying to rationalize this situation...I have split thoughts:

*Nonsense! How can I actually hate a student? She is practically a kid, just out of school. How can you—an experienced teacher of 15 years in this business, use such a strong word towards a girl in her early 20s? What do you know about her?*

*But that is exactly my point; she is not really a “kid”; she is actually a full-grown adult. She never gave me a chance to get to know her as well. This is so unfair, and I may not hate the person, but I hate her for not playing fair!*

During the brief moment of hesitation before saying anything back to Kris, my heart and mind are in a tug-o-war. So many thoughts, so many emotions...the anger and frustration combined with the logic my brain was sending me were tearing me apart. My heart is telling me to be honest, but my head is telling me to look at this logically:

*Calm down, Carol. Calm down.*

“Yeah, I guess. She did invest a lot of money to come all this way for English.”

I reply as a way to convince myself that this too shall pass and be forgotten. And my future is too important to let a girl, I barely know, ruin it. I begin to convince myself, assuring myself that getting over Daisy as well as the ripple affect she has on me is like getting chicken pox—something I have to go through—to become recognized as a valuable teacher here at English Centre. This will make me a better teacher, like all the other unfortunate incidents that happened throughout my 15 years of being a language teacher. One day, I will laugh at this incident, just as I laughed at the things that happened during my novice years in Korea. I repeatedly assured myself.

*This too shall pass*

*This too shall pass*

***This will pass...***

Just when I am ready to leave her desk, Kris adds a comment. “But you know, Carol Ssaem, many Korean students LIKE you.” She must have sensed that I am not fully satisfied with the information she shared with me.

“So far, SHE is the only one who told me that **she didn’t come all the way here to learn from a Korean.**”

Oh, if I knew how to curse, I would have cursed just as she uttered that last sentence! Maybe this was the way Kris thought to be comforting, by reminding me that Daisy was an exception and this incident does not reflect all Korean students’ beliefs. I get her point: it’s only ONE student.

Despite Kris’s good will to make me feel better, it just reminded me why Daisy did not want to be in my class: because I was *a Korean*—and it hurt more than when parents in Korea went behind my back and told my supervisor that they didn’t feel safe to leave their child with me, because I was never married. Being single was my choice; being a Korean was something already decided. I didn’t choose to be born in Korea!

My feet were stuck on the floor. I wanted to yell, show my anger, and let out my frustration against Daisy, but Kris was implicitly telling me to let it go and move on.

This is not a simple question of *taste*, like choosing your favourite gelato flavor at a gelato place. If it were the teaching techniques and methods, I could modify and adapt in ways that would meet more students’ learning styles. However, I was literally not wanted for who I am;

*How can ANYONE move on from this?*

*Can anyone MOVE ON from such accusation?*

After almost 15 years of teaching, this is what I hear from a student—that I am not worthy of being her teacher for none other than my place of birth.

I push the chair from Kris’s desk, stand up, and force myself to smile. It’s not Kris’s fault, anyways. Why let out my frustrations on her?



“I guess I’ll have to try. I must be making it hard for you as well. Who knows when you’ll get another complaint about me, right? Just in case, I apologize in advance.”

“No problem, Carol Ssaem. As I said, don’t think too seriously about it. Think of the students who like you and prefer to be with you.”

I try to be considerate and act mature, despite my urge to talk with Kris on how ridiculous Daisy’s opinion is. *No, Carol. You cannot act childish towards the girl, just because she didn’t want you as her teacher.*

Logically speaking, it is not Kris’s fault, although I would have loved to hear how she disagrees with Daisy’s opinion about who is worth more as a teacher. Kris is the one who listens to the complaints by Korean students. She too must have felt awkward being put in the middle by the student and me. I should let Kris go.

“See you tomorrow, Kris.”

I wish I could say more. I wish I could tell her how I feel deep inside, as a person, a Korean, a teacher who “made it” here in Canada, teaching the language that does not belong to a Korean. I wish, I wish...

I come back to the teachers’ room and begin prepping for tomorrow’s classes. Many teachers are gone. That’s good. That means fewer people will want to talk, and I really don’t feel like talking to anyone. Only the head teacher Susan is busy checking if other teachers had finished inputting the attendance data onto the online server. I could feel the blood pressure rising back. My head is feeling less chilly. I lean my head on my left hand, and look at the lesson plan. Suddenly, my eyes feel burning; my nose begins to hurt as if I inhaled water through my nose. I can’t see straight, water is filling up the bottom of my eyes, and...

Plop!

Drop.

Drop.

Drop.

I see round wet marks on my plan. Oh no, what the...

The letters on the printed lesson plan begin to smudge as the drops are absorbed through the paper. Jesus Christ! This is embarrassing.

I quickly wipe my face, look in the mirror and make sure my eyes look OK. I usually get a red line at the end of my right eye when I cry, and it shows that I was crying. OK, not there yet. Whoa!

I look at my now-ruined lesson plan: with smudges from droplets of water.

*Pathetic!*

The ruined lesson plan resembles me.

The paper is wet here and there, and I can't write on top of those smudges. I can't use a white-out (correction tape) to cover the smudges either, as they are wet. My plans are gone.

Just like that—I had plans, I had questions, I was excited to be offered membership to this community; but it's all smudges and blur.

Just as Daisy's comments will forever be remembered, my lesson plan will never be the same. What I heard today cannot be forgotten or be taken back; my *self* was hurt and I really won't be the same. I wanted to know...but knowing was painful.

At least I could throw the paper away, and rewrite or reprint my plans

*What can I do with my self?*

After talking to Kris, wiping my endlessly welling up eyes, everything seems clear: I don't think I can stay here any longer. I wanted to forget and forgive, but I realize

that I was angry with almost everyone—the school, the staff members, and the students from Korea.

*How can I work in this community with such displeasure and anger?*

*My feelings would certainly affect the people around me, as well as the classes I teach.*

*I am so disappointed at the people who pushed me to the edge.*

***I deserve better!***

**My head hurts.**

**TREMENDOUSLY**

## **Reflection #6**

### **It Matters How Much You Know and Can See**

Through all our lives we are faced with the task of reconciling opposites which, in logical thought cannot be reconciled... How can one reconcile the demands of freedom and discipline in education? [...] [We] do it by bringing into the situation a force that belongs to a higher level where opposites are transcended—the power of love... divergent problems, as it were, force us to strain ourselves to a level above ourselves; they demand, and thus provoke the supply of, forces from a higher level, thus bringing love, beauty, goodness and truth into our lives. It is only with the help of these higher forces that the opposites can be reconciled in the living situation. (Schumacher's "Small is Beautiful," as cited by Palmer, 1998, p. 87)

Going to ask Kris about Daisy was a decision I made to "get to the bottom" of the months of frustration. She was the trigger that caused me to re-examine who I was in this teaching context; she was THE ONE who made me see people and situations with such sarcasm and negativity. Perhaps, it was not only her actions, and she was only a trigger to what would have eventually happened at any point of my being at English

Centre (or any school in Canada, for that matter). Nevertheless, I needed to confirm that my source of rage and paranoia was not just invented from my head.

I remember hoping how wonderful it would be to find out that all of this “stress” was a part of my imagination. Then all I needed to be free from rage and feeling vulnerable would be to “fix my SELF” and learn how to be with others in this new context of teaching.

I was uncertain if I could ever heal from this experience; recovering from feeling so inadequate and illegitimate (by others) while my inner self told me ‘it’s not YOU, it’s THEM.’ If this were my very first year of teaching English, I would have succumbed to the thought—yes, they are at fault here, not I. However, I knew in my head that it was not entirely “their fault.”

Experience taught me to recognize the political facets of education; the political aspects of doing (school) and taking part in education (teachers and students) influence people and schools in making decisions. In a micro-perspective, one’s prior experience as a student or a teacher, current credentials, and personal ideas and image of self, and other factors are intertwined within a specific space (Beijard et. Al, 2004; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Golombek, 1998; Tsui, 2007) and impact identity construction. In a more macro point of view, a school and its constituents are all a part of a larger social and political context (Pennycook, 1989; Toohey et al., 2007). In my opinion, gaining more experience in the language-teaching field, one would be more aware of the bigger connections individuals and schools have with the world. Having the deeper understanding of the effects one may have, it seems difficult for one to raise voice and cause “trouble” for others.

For once, I wished I were less experienced in the field. I wished I could see things from only one side of the picture; I wished I didn’t have to understand (or try to understand) that I might be making things difficult for some students and the school.

Experienced teachers should not be causing problems, but should be a part of the solution to problems caused by novice teachers and students—this was my belief in being an experienced teacher, but I felt as if I was the one causing all the commotion, and I really hated myself for this. Knowledge (i.e., being experienced and knowledgeable in being a teacher) may be power, but being experienced was a liability that caused a schism between the I, who was seen by others, and the I that I saw myself to be.

Schumacher's quote helped Palmer understand tension as something positive: tension that arises when trying to hold a paradox. According to Palmer, tension is "a power that wants to pull my heart open to something larger than myself" (p. 87). He describes that tension as always "difficult, and sometimes destructive," but if one can work with the tension's true intention (rather than to resist it), the experience will expand one's heart, instead of breaking it.

In my case, the paradox I dealt with was being a good teacher and a bad one at the same time. I taught well (based on the reviews from students), but I kept a gap between the self that teaches and the self that defines who I was as a person. I was a teacher not being able to disclose myself as a whole being to my students. I saw this as a paradox, because identity and integrity influences our teaching, and being a teacher: Good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher (Palmer, 1998). Yet, at English Centre, many times I 'performed' to teach, because I feared of the consequences of being a NNEST in an English-dominant context. I did not feel safe to open up and present myself as who I am (at the time), and instead resorted to presenting myself as closely as to who (I presumed) they thought I was. I tried to meet the expectations others had of me, while my inner self was becoming ill. The more I received good reviews from my past students, the more I felt guilty of being their teacher. Again, this should not be seen as my trying to simply "fit in." That was not the legitimacy I was aiming or hoping for.

Identity is co-created amidst the interaction between self and the world and gaining legitimate membership in a community/communities through conflict and negotiation (Wenger, 1998). Tsui (2007), using Wenger's idea of identity in doing research, identifies that factors such as expectations of others and institution, and how one perceives his or her role within the community influences the way one forms (or reforms) one's identity. Tsui's study, which highlighted the multifaceted relationships between "membership in a professional community, competence, legitimacy of access to practice, appropriation and ownership of meanings, the centrality of participation and the mediating role of power in the process of identity formation" (pp. 657, 674) resonates with my experiences.

I think I was able to juggle performance and true self quite well—I think experience taught me how to do this. Nonetheless, I wanted to close the gap between my performing self and the true self—I wanted to be a whole being. Having thoughts about Daisy lingering in my head prevented me from doing that. In class, I was preparing tasks and activities that encouraged my students to open up about themselves, to share with other peers about them; yet, I was hesitant in becoming an example.

## **...A Jarring Moment; an Epiphany**

Another new day begins at English Centre. I have decided to stay till the summer session ends. I didn't get a chance to tell the school about my wanting to leave, so I am going to play "cool" until I calm down and cool off my head. I like working here—teaching and getting involved in all these different activities are fun! It's the feeling of being a full member that I wish I had while working here. Right now, the feeling is so inconsistent: one day, you feel like you are needed; the next day boom! Something hits you from behind! I don't feel supported fully by the school and the people here, and that is why I think I should leave.

However, the school needs all the help they can get, and it will probably be better to work and earn some money before I become in between jobs. I somehow feel OK. I am ready to give in to the "signs" and move on. I do not need to be put into this agony, when I could live a better life elsewhere—where I won't be seen as "second choice," where I am wanted and needed for who I am. I have tried...but in the process have realized that this—being a good English language teacher in an English-dominant country—was not mine from the beginning. Admitting is heart-breaking, as I wanted to be here; but deciding that I might leave puts my mind at ease.

A student wearing a funny bright yellow hooded sweatshirt that ends just above her knees runs to me with her friend Luna. Luna is a new girl in my class who has a great voice—she is full of energy (and loud vocals!). She is a new addition to my class, but I know she will be moving up, soon. Her confidence level is through the roof, and she is not afraid to make mistakes. She'll make a great learner wherever she goes.

This other girl—Zoe, seems very similar to Luna. Zoe wears the "nerdy" glasses, which seems to be a trend among many Korean students. She is also as bright as the Canadian summer—full of laughter, full of brightness. I have never had her in my classes (she is in a higher level), but I am certain her teachers would love to have her in class.

And this Miss Sunshine is heading towards me, accompanied by Miss Moonlight (Luna).

“CaRooooL!” calls Luna. Boy, does she have a gifted voice trajectory!

“Yeaaaaas?” I reply, with a similar voice tone. She brings out the “fun” in me.

A big hug—Thud!

Ouch... I think chin just hit my collarbone.

“Carol! This is Zoe”

“Hello, Zoe, nice to meet you. I’m Carol.”

“Zoe has something to say to you.”

“Sure, what is it, Zoe?”

“I heard you are Korean.”

—a little pause there for a moment. *Hello? What are you trying to ask me, Miss Sunshine?* I am feeling a little worried. I have been feeling pleasant the whole day, and just as I was about to forget the “dark-side,” this highly animated student comes to me and asks if I’m a Korean.

“Well, ye...s. I am.”

I hope she doesn’t ask how I could be a teacher here in Canada, when I am not born or raised here. I hope she doesn’t ask me when I immigrated here. She is smiling... where is the fun in this? Luna, what is your friend trying to do? The two overly bright ladies looking at me as if they had won the lottery is somewhat unpleasant—why are they so “happy” when they want to know about my nationality? Is this some kind of a joke?

“Teacher, I am very proud of you, and I want to be just like you.”

“!!!?” I couldn’t believe my ears. *Did I just hear that correctly?*



“Sorry, Zoe, could you repeat that, please?”

“I am very proud of you. I want to be just like you when I grow up!”

I wasn't going to tell her she already has grown up (she was in her mid 20s!). I couldn't believe what I just heard. She is PROUD of me. Really? I make her proud?

“I came here to go to university again, Teacher. And Luna told me about you. She told me you were Korean...and you studied here...and you became a teacher...and this is not easy...and I don't think I can do it, but you can be my role model.”

“I don't know what to say, Zoe. That is the most grateful compliment a teacher can get from a student. And you are not even my student! Are you sure about this?”

Haha!”

If I didn't lighten up the mood, I was going to cry—of gratitude, not of sorrow or anger. She was melting my inner self, that was getting ready to bid farewell to this teaching context. I am touched. My eyes are welling up. I can hardly look at Zoe and Luna right now. I must leave the scene.

I give Luna and Zoe a big bear hug.

“Zoe, you don't know what a difference you have just made in my life. I will tell you one day when you get to know me more. Thank you so much.”

“Luna...Luna Luna... thank you for this precious moment.”

I am quite certain they see my eyes and nose changing colour. Yet, they won't be able to imagine why their little gesture made the biggest change in me.

Zoe will never know how her words changed my life.

How she saved my life.... How she made me aware of my misperceptions

In English, if you look at something through rose-colored glasses, it means you view things positively. In the Korean old saying, it is the opposite: Looking at something with tinted lenses depicts a perspective with strong bias or prejudice—like wearing dark tinted sunglasses on a dim day.

The little epiphany with Zoe (thanks to Luna) put my life and me in perspective. I cannot forget how ecstatic I was during the rest of the day.

I rush back to my car. No prepping for me today. I can't wait to be alone and celebrate the moment. I wish I could share this event with someone, but for some who do not know what I had been through, I would just sound like a show-off. Yeah, so, a student likes you, so what? –but this was so much more for me.

I cannot stop smiling. As soon as I get into my car I weep with joy. I am laughing and crying at the same time—something a stranger might feel threatened by if he or she saw me in the underground parking lot.

My mother used to tell me how it feels to be blessed with the grace of (Christian) God—how magical it feels to be reconnected again; to be forgiven, to be relieved of all burden. Then you feel the pain for the One who sacrificed for your sins...she described it as a feeling of grief and gladness that becomes gratefulness. Sadly, I have never felt that way—electrifying thrill to feel the love...from the bottom of my heart. But if I did feel it, I am sure it would feel like how I feel right now.

All tears.

All smiles.

I am sobbing, but feel peaceful inside.

Such ironic moment—of sadness and happiness and relief

--blended into one concoction...

expressed in tears and laughter...

Such breathtaking moment of calamity and calmness ...

**My tinted lenses were off**—flashbacks of incidents begin:

Daisy's reason for not wanting me as her teacher;

Daniel and Jack's ignorant and hurting comments about Korea;

Being taken off the list to teach children from Korea...

The school asking Korean students if it was all right that I am from Korea...

--All of these incidents that I felt as a conspiracy to make ME feel small, inadequate, and less valid as a professional...

--don't seem entirely conspirative anymore.

**The tinted lenses are off,**

**and the world already seemed like a better place**

## **Reflection #7**

### **Reclaiming the Capacity to Connect**

To become a better teacher, I must nurture a sense of self that both does and does not depend on the responses of others—and that is a true paradox. To learn the lesson well, I must take a solitary journey into my own nature and seek the help of others in seeing myself as I am—another of the many paradoxes that abound on the inner terrain. (Palmer, 1998, p. 76)

There were a lot of things that made this day very significant: First, I was taken by surprise. Zoe's existence was never mine to acknowledge, as she was never my student. Second, I had already made up my mind that perhaps all these happenings were signs that I should pack my bags and leave. I was looking for opportunities in Korea by contacting my friends who taught at post-secondary levels, as well as my former colleagues. Third, I began re-reading Palmer's book, and the words he said began putting things in perspective. I was just beginning to re-examine my position and worth at English Centre.

I was also, carefully, making friends with some of the Korean students who felt disrespected by NESTs for not meeting their (NESTs') expectations. I have been good at recognizing students who were improving slowly, or were implicitly and sometimes explicitly being ignored and unrecognized by their teachers for not meeting the teacher's personal expectation. I may have been feeling vulnerable because of a student, but I was also gaining the meaning of being at English Centre by making myself useful and approachable for the students at English Centre; it was a way I decided to negotiate my space within this place during the time I had. What I mean by I 'recognized' the students is that I related to their frustrations of not being able to be themselves. Trying to become someone different—to perform—in order to meet someone else's personal expectations was something I could relate to in great deal now. Research in learner perception towards NEST and NNESTs did not show a strong preference of one type of teachers over another (Benke & Medgyes, 2006; Braine, 2010; Moussu, 2002, 2007; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999). Instead, much of the results revealed that, unlike the hypothesis

that students would prefer NESTs to NNESTs, some students preferred NNESTs, because of NNESTs' deeper awareness of learning an additional language, and their knowledge of their first language. Perhaps some learners at English Centre perceived me this way—that my being from Korea, would actually support their learning of the target language.

Through the experience of helping them gain courage, and seeing them “build up the nerve” to engage in dialogue, I was slowly recovering from the trauma that haunted me for months. I was finding my reason for existence in the community through the interaction with the learners. These students were not changing or eliminating my fear of being a NNEST at English Centre, but their cries for help reminded me that I am “useful” in a different way—and that was good enough for me to sustain. Then, all of a sudden, Zoe shows up and tells me something that unlocked my scarred heart: She told me I was more than what I thought I was in this context. These new relationships that I was building and the way Zoe positioned me are good examples of how teacher identity is relational, but there is something more that I needed to address inside of me to be able to feel a whole being again.

Palmer's (1998) solution to disconnectedness caused by fear was simple—reclaim the capacity to connect. How does one reconnect and build a capacity of connectedness? It is by reclaiming one's identity and integrity as a teacher. And how does one do THAT? By keeping in touch with his or her inner self—talking and listening to one's inner emotions and fears—acknowledging one's fears without BEING the fear; by keeping in touch with one's subjectivism and emotions to break free from objectivism and the objective ways of knowing; by being able to see the fear in everyone, and everywhere. However, is this 'cycle' necessary in being a teacher? Why do I become frustrated and angry at these incidents at English Centre? Why can't I simply move on and “just teach?”

Palmer describes that the circle (i.e., “moving beyond fear that destroys reconnectedness by reclaiming connectedness that takes away fear” pp. 59-60) is actually WITHIN us: “Our intense fear of connectedness, and the challenges it brings, is pursued by an equally intense desire for connectedness and comforts it offers” (p. 60). Thus to answer my question, “why can’t I simply move on and just teach?” is rather simple—as much as I wanted to move beyond and let go, there was a “yearning” inside of me that wanted to hang on to the feeling and make sense of whatever was going on in my life: I wanted to do justice to the feelings I had in me. I wanted to be recognized by the community as I saw my self—but not forcefully, but with integrity; and Zoe was the first to TELL me that just my being here meant something.

I am not sure if Zoe’s words meant more to me, because she came from Korea. However, given the frustration I had because of being a NNEST from Korea, and also the fact that “things happened” because of my non-nativeness—specifically, my being Korean—I am quite confident that Zoe’s nationality was a strong factor in beginning my healing process. Before the encounter with Zoe, the sensitive and frustrated ‘I’ approached incidents with an eye-for-an-eye kind of attitude, instead of trying to make meaning out of the conflicts. This attitude did not bring about a resolution of any kind, but resulted in accumulating more anger and frustration towards the school, NEST counterparts, and students mainly from Korea. The feeling of betrayal turned me into a ticking time bomb, and realizing the negative affects in my self, I decided to give up on teaching in an English-dominant context; I wanted to retract back to the place and time I felt more powerful and desired—my *comfort zone*.

Interestingly enough, what Palmer suggests (in building this capacity for connectedness) is not an analytical lens that sees everything by fragmenting it into “an endless series of either-ors” (p. 64). He criticizes that we are too used to viewing the world apart and dissecting it in order to understand it. Palmer urges people to rather view the world in “paradox” (p. 65), viewing the world as a whole: instead of looking

with an either-or lens, he suggests “embracing a “both-and” lens, arguing that “truth is found not by splitting the world, but by paradoxical joining of apparent opposites” (p. 65). His examples of how teaching can only be expressed as paradoxes were so enlightening at the time I read his book. Inserting ‘ME and my experiences’ into Palmer’s examples on page 66 of his book, I was able to make sense of how teaching was paradoxical:

1. My previous experience and the way I become scared when going into all new classes.
2. My “inward and invisible sense of identity becomes known, even to me” only when met with external and outside sources (e.g., Daisy, colleagues, and school)
3. “Good teaching comes from identity, not technique.” Yet when identity and integrity is reclaimed it guides me toward an integral technique, which will be used to express my identity. (The interrelatedness between identity/integrity and technique: When I am fully present in class, and have built a trusting relationship with my learners, my way of teaching changes—it adapts for the learners’ best interest. Thus technique comes from reclaiming identity and integrity of self.)
4. “Teaching always takes place at the crossroads of the personal and the public, and if I want to teach well, I must learn to stand where those opposites intersect?” (p. 66): I cannot be a good teacher when I intend to hide my self as a whole being behind credentials and performances—I cannot fix the deep pain I feel with techniques.
5. “Intellect works in concert with feeling”—if I want my students to open their minds, I must help them open their emotions as well. To do so, I must be able to teach as a whole being—opening my mind and emotions as well.

(Quoted and adapted from Palmer’s list on p. 66)

These adapted quotes from Palmer’s book, help illustrate the complexity in identity negotiation for experienced teachers teaching in an English-dominant context. Connecting Palmer’s paradoxes in teaching with my experiences in 2012 suggests that my identity re-construction not only involved external factors such as relations with other members of the community (teaching context), nationality, and previous teaching experience, the political aspect of school doing business, but was also influenced by the

internal state of my being—trying to make sense out of the unanticipated problems I faced, and the distance between my inner self and my present situated self.

The quote that I chose to connect with this epiphany describes the paradoxical life in being a teacher. The first sentence of the quote—“To become a better teacher, I must nurture a sense of self that both does and does not depend on the responses of others—and that is a true paradox” (p. 76) — reflects the “capacity for connectedness” Palmer urges all teachers to reclaim throughout his book.

It shows his understanding of identity being social yet personal: he does not deny the sociocultural aspect of identity, yet he argues that one should be prepared to be within the social by first being able to connect with one’s own inner self—knowing who one is (in a given moment and as a result of interacting with a myriad of sociocultural, political and relational aspects within a given context) and also what one can be helps build the agility one needs in facing different challenges situated in different social contexts. Palmer also confirms the sociocultural aspect of identity in his next sentence, “To learn the lesson well, I must take a solitary journey into my own nature and seek the help of others in seeing myself as I am—another of the many paradoxes that abound on the inner terrain” (p. 76). Identity cannot be constructed or re-constructed on its own, but requires a strong and persistent connection with one’s inner self, as well as the “help” of others.

Coming back to the scene of epiphany-----

I still remember clearly how I felt that day. The encounter I had with Zoe melted my heart completely, and literally, everything and everyone looked different. Being able to see the difference, I came to realize that I might have been overly negative towards people that I thought upset me in the past. I am not saying the incidents I have described as ‘stories’ did not happen—they DID in fact happen; but the way I interpreted the



words and gestures of the people involved were strongly influenced by the negative feelings I had towards the others (so-called, “Daisy affect”).

I am not saying I wouldn't have been able to re-construct my identity here in Canada, had I not met Zoe. The progress I was making with some students—helping the students emotionally and to gain confidence in learning the language—was also helping me form a sense of who I am and can be in this teaching context. I still do not know why those students came to me for help. The help they wanted was NOT academic—they wanted someone to listen to their frustration, and for some reason, they thought I was the right person. Even without Zoe, I might have achieved enough level of self-confidence to pursue my teaching career here in Canada. However, the identity re-constructed by being with those students may turn out to be different from the person I am now—influenced by the encounter with Zoe. While being with the “slow” students helped me understand what I could be in this new context, Zoe's words told me to be free from “being” the fear—the fear of being rejected by students because of my non-nativeness, and avoiding Korean students for the fear of being rejected by them. A few words—strong ones—from a stranger made me realize I had become a coward—blaming everyone but myself for the past months. It was really time to make amends—for my sake, and for the sake of others. I owed it to my broken heart.

## Chapter 6.

### Epilogue: Finding my Space and Voice

“I can’t believe you are leaving!”

“I am going to a college now.

Maybe I can transfer to the same school you go to, in the future!”

“Please do! I will try to be of help there. Take care, Zoe. Keep in touch!”

“I will, teacher! Don’t forget me!”

Graduation day. Normally it won’t be a special event, as English Centre has graduation ceremonies every week. However, today is a special Friday: Zoe is graduating and attending a college nearby. Her “don’t forget me” sounds ridiculous—how can I forget her? After all, I wouldn’t be here without her. She doesn’t know what an impact she had made a few months back, but one day I will tell her in person.

Luna’s yelling, “Don’t Go!”

*Yes, I feel the same.*

She has never been in my class, but her presence reminded me that I am worthy.

Thanks to her, my life at English Centre is not a constant stepping in land mines. They haven’t vanished, but I have come to terms with these unfortunate incidents that question my legitimacy as an experienced professional in the field.

I no longer am afraid or worried about making a scene—if it is reasonable, I gladly engage in an argument. I tell the other(s) why I think his or her logic and belief does not sit well with me. I state my position, and am ready to negotiate. I do not sob or get red out of anger. I am calm and quite... sensible with my words.

Once, Daniel was telling my colleagues about his life in Korea, where he couldn't understand why Koreans would do certain things. He would also make fun of the spelling and pronunciation mistakes Koreans often made. Then some other teachers decided to "chip in." Before the epiphany—before I realized I was wearing tinted lenses—I would just sit and listen to his "adventures" while I, using a Korean expression, would be "sharpening my knife." I would avoid any interaction with him and dismiss his opinion in almost everything. If he had no respect for me—why should I show any respect? This time it felt different. Since I found my "inner-peace," I felt as if I had to say something to him—and I wasn't even angry.

"Surely, there must be something you are thankful for your stay there, Daniel. I mean... didn't that experience—in MY country—make you who you are now? if it wasn't for the extra line on your resume that showed the international experience, would you be able to be where you are? Studying for a Masters degree and working part time here?"

Daniel, along with everyone else glared at me. They were probably shocked. I usually dismiss any comments Daniel makes about his experiences in Korea. When he asks me about my opinion, I usually just leave the room, as I do not want to be a part of his Asia-mocking black comedy, but I couldn't take it anymore. Just because I was silent towards his mockery, it did not mean I had no feelings towards his actions; and it did not give him (nor Jack, in the past) the right to "diss" my country. I add—

"I am not sure how you would feel if I started saying similar insults about your country. I also have a right, according to your logic, because I have lived here for more than 5 years now. Korean students, despite how much you make fun of them, love your classes. But I am not sure how much you actually respect them. Based on how you talk about my country, I am not sure how much respect you have for the people. That is not very professional, is it?"

A short moment of silence—

“You are right, I am thankful.”

“Really? Well, then please show some respect. Yes, you were living there, but you built your career based on the so-called ridiculous experiences there. The country deserves a little more respect, in my opinion”

Another short moment of silence—

“You are actually right.”

Daniel is silent, and then apologizes for sounding disrespectful. He explains he never thought of his experience that way—as the beginning of who he became. I wasn’t looking for an apology. This confrontation was a way I made peace with the disrespectful badmouthing of different nationalities. Of course I couldn’t stand the “joke” anymore, but I wasn’t angry—I spoke out, because I wanted him to understand that not all people consider his stories funny.

Some of the teachers there were gasping; some were just silently staring at me. It didn’t matter—this was the moment—the time and space—I wanted Daniel to be aware that my silence (in the past) was neither an agreement, nor avoidance of his “tales of adventure to the far East,” and that I too can speak out. It was a move to be acknowledged—I am here, I exist, and I do have my right to speech (Bourdieu, 1977, as cited in Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 416). Yes, people—the usually smiling, “pleasant” colleague of yours knows how to express her unpleasant feelings—**surprise!**

Daniel and I later went out to the pub and made peace—like any civilized beer lovers would do—by sharing our thoughts about both of our countries while sipping pints of ale<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Gendered power relations may have something to do with the situation with Daniel and Jack, but I will not be dwelling on these, since this is not the focus of my work.

A few days ago, I (the evolved me) also went to Mike and suggested that if my being Korean was going to affect the market, then there really needs to be something done. The paranoid Carol would not think of talking with Mike around this matter, as I wouldn't want to hear anything that would go against the image or idea I had about my self.

Mike invited Kris to the meeting. He explained, but I also explained in Korean—just to be sure we were on the same page. I elaborated on why I thought this meeting was crucial for my sake. Since the school wanted me to stay (By the way, I received a indeterminate fulltime offer from the school early this month: a gesture of necessity, I presume?), I needed to hear how the school felt about me, and my status as a non-native speaker of English. I shared how I was upset and disappointed with some of the things that happened to me (e.g., Junior program, asking students if they are OK with me being Korean, and of course—Daisy).

To my surprise, they were quite stunned that I felt their actions to be offensive, as they had no intentions of pushing me to the edge. We shared our versions of the stories and were able to reach a collective agreement. One thing was for sure—they **did not intend** to offend me nor underestimate my NNEST status. Their decisions were based on the business nature of ELT context, and I knew it from the beginning—I was just too offended to view their decisions in a more rational way. They were both very understanding and sincere about the affects their utterances caused (for me). That's when I realized again that I played a part in positioning myself in the margins within this teaching context. True, the omnipresent ELT "market" continues to favour the hiring of NESTs over NNESTs around the world and is one of the underlying reasons that fed my fear of teaching in what I used to call, "their territory." However, I felt relieved from the idea that I was in someone else's territory since I met Zoe, and talking to Mike and Kris confirmed that I should not be feeling as I was trespassing someone else's territory. I brought in my life experiences into the community, and it amalgamated and recreated a newer version of reality—one where I was a participant. Perhaps I only needed to throw away the tinted glasses sooner to see this was already happening.

My practice was changing as well. Since the "epiphany," I gradually became brave enough to use controversial or sensitive topics in class discussions. I am teaching

higher levels now, so I often spend a day within a week to simply talk about “stuffs.” We would talk about who are better teachers/doctors/pilots/bus drivers/presidents, etc. and the stereotypes associated with nationality, race, and gender. It is fascinating to see the biases people have regarding the topics of jobs and gender roles in different families and cultures. When the situation was right, I would share my stories with the class. Yes, I have also used my incident with Daisy as well. It is interesting to see the different opinions I hear from students, who are from all over the world. This is my way of making peace with the students—acknowledging who I am and how I see myself, then asking them to comment on what they thought about me.

I have also made friends with some of my ex-students who graduated from English Centre. Together, we go for dinner and drinks and share stories of their lives here in this foreign world. I never thought I would become such good friends with students, especially the ones from Korea—this must be an advantage of teaching adult learners! I became close enough to share the frustrating incidents I experienced, and this gesture actually grew us closer—like actual friends.

Unfortunately, I never got to speak with Daisy. By the time I looked for her, she was gone. Kris told me that Daisy just left after taking some vacation from school. I wish I had a chance to talk to her and tell her how much she meant to me—for the sake of my inner self. She meant a lot, yes...too much that her actions almost pushed me off a cliff. On the other hand, I would have to thank her for being brutally honest (silently) about how she felt about me. If not for her, I wouldn't have been able to experience these blessed moments now.

Finally, what all these peace-making gestures helped accomplish was finding my self again. I have finally (once again?) made peace with my inner self. No longer am I afraid or worried to tell people that I am a non-native speaker of the English language. No longer do I think twice before answering the question, “Where are you from?” I do not see myself as lacking or not belonging. If society and stereotypes positioned me at the margins of ESL teaching context, I knew it was because I also let them position me there. In fact, I actually pre-positioned myself in the margins, because I BELIEVED the outer influences that wanted to push me further away to the side, and when I witnessed incidents that fit the bias I had towards others, I poured out my rage and frustration

towards the others. So while I was blaming others for “othering” me, I was also alienating myself from the others—because of the fear of being pushed away.

Thanks to Zoe, I am working hard to negotiate with the students, teachers, and staff, as well as the beliefs and values they each hold about English teaching and learning.

Zoe comes to me and asks to take a photo together. I gladly agree.

Click Click Click

She then looks up and speaks to me in Korean,

“감사합니다. 안녕히계세요, 선생님!” (Thank you. Take care, Teacher!”)

I look at Zoe’s large smiling eyes. Full of hope and energy.

*Miss Sunshine...I should be thanking you.*

I smile back and reply,

“제가 더 고마워요, 정말. 연락하고 지내요.”

(“I should be thanking you, really. Keep in touch.”)

It was the first time I spoke publicly in Korean at school.

And I wasn’t worried...

The summer breeze felt so sweet and soothing.

## **Reflection #8**

### **Emerging from the Tipping Point**

Winning (a competition) means emerging from the encounter with a larger sense of self than one brought into it, in which we learn that the self is not a scrap of turf to be defended, but a capacity to be enlarged. (Palmer, 1998, p. 39)

I need to learn that the pain I sometimes experience in teaching is as much a sign that my selfhood is alive and well as the joy I feel when the dance is in full swing. If I learn that simple but profound truth, I might stay closer to my gift and farther from repressed anger and be more likely to teach in ways that will work for both me and my students. (Palmer, 1998, p. 75)

The root cause [...] was a sense of self-negation, or even annihilation, that came when my students were unwilling to help me fulfill my nature. (Palmer, 1998, p. 75)

I went through a phase of despair and misery and self-doubt caused by the differences between the self-I-see and the self-as-perceived, mainly regarding my nationality and teacher-worthiness. Looking back, it was one of the most agonizing struggles to find self-worth and value in my then 15<sup>th</sup> year of teaching (the first being my very first construction of teacher identity during my first few years in the field). At that time (late 90s), I had to overcome my student identity, learn how to think like a teacher and make decisions as a teacher. During the process, I got to know what kind of a teacher I was and wanted to be. Of course, every time I met a new student, he or she changed me—sometimes a little, and sometimes drastically. And the changes were not easy, but I could feel my “capacity” enlarging. I value change through dialogue and relation, and that is why teaching is such a unique kind of job—it is a job that never gets boring. Despite the fact that I was aware of the influence—or dependency my identity has on others, the situations and incidents I faced during the first year at English Centre as an experienced NNEST were something uniquely memorable than I had experienced before.

Some may say, ‘oh, you did it once, you can do it again,’ but constructing and re-constructing identity is not as simple as building a house out of Lego blocks. It is not like



disassembling what you had built and reassembling according to a new manual. There is NO manual, and sometimes, re-construction requires change from the core, the essence of who I am, or who I THINK I am.

Change did not come easier or smoother with experience; on the contrary, I think it was far more difficult this time, as I was almost certain as to who I was— at least that was what I thought—and I did not want to let go.

When change needs to be made in the deeper level, I think it becomes tougher. I went into the new teaching context knowing who I was and what my strengths and weaknesses were; I was significantly wiser than I was back in 1998; I had various experiences in the field as a teacher, teacher trainer, supervising staff, and a manager: I was no rookie English language teacher. I just happened to have taught in an EFL context.

Then, unexpectedly, I was questioned of my worthiness as an ESL teacher. It hit me hard... *very* hard.

My encounter with Daisy made me realize “contexts change how much people value you.” Later I met students who came to me for help, but that was also different from the way people used to perceive me in Korea. During the 15 years, I unknowingly had gotten so used to being the “desired teacher,” that I forgot how I could be seen in a different context. Perhaps “unknowingly” is not correct—I knew it deep inside, but refused to acknowledge that the reality for many NNESTs would also be applicable to me.

Palmer describes being a teacher as being able to “dance” with the students—co-creating a context where everyone learns from the experience. However, when students refuse to dance with me (the teacher), one becomes “closed and untrusting and hopeless far more quickly than need be, simply because they (students) have rejected my

(teacher's) gift" (p. 75). In fact, these moments of insecurity or weakness are when one can gain insights into one's identity—if only one decides to “dwell deeply in the dynamics that made us (teachers) vulnerable” (p. 74). He suggests pain and suffering are also signs of my self's desire to evolve from the experience—like the contraction and the pushing a mother has to endure when giving birth. What this means for me is that my rage and frustration towards others were not signs of my paranoia or my being overly sensitive about everything, but a process of trying to negotiate my identity from the core, and an effort to dis-member my self in order to re-member my selfhood.

While I restlessly negotiated and almost gave up on re-constructing my identity in the new teaching context, Zoe reminded me to “look in the mirror,” because not everything about me had to change or be thrown away. Her words became a stop sign for me when I was driving a car fueled by rage and frustration. What that tiny stop sign made me realize was that, even if pain and suffering was indeed a sign of my lively selfhood, it was going a bit too far—too far, because I was blaming everyone and everything but myself as the cause. I was focusing too much on how others SHOULD be viewing me, I neglected the very thing that needed me—my inner self. I forgot to reflect and reconnect with my inner self, to re-examine the reality I was in from within (my self). I have mentioned a “cloak” in one of the reflections, and I will mention it again—Zoe freed me from a spell I had cast on myself—I was able to see that I was looking through a cloak that made everything and everyone seem as a threat to my identity and integrity as a legitimate language teacher in an English dominant country. Once the cloak was off, the world was already a better place to be.

Two more quotes from Palmer's book challenge me for the future ahead:

My sense of self is so deeply dependent on others that I will always suffer a bit when other refuse to relate to me; there is no way around that simple fact. At the same time, I will have a self when relationships fail—and the suffering I experience is evidence of it. (p. 75)

I want to learn how to hold the paradoxical poles of my identity together, to embrace the profoundly opposite truths that my sense of self is deeply dependent on others dancing with me AND that I still have a self when no one wants to dance. (p. 75)

These quotes are goals for my inner self, reminding me that re-construction of identity requires both social, and personal effort, and from what I have experienced—the personal learning (i.e., the constant relations I form with my inner self) are at the deepest core, preceding the social “I.” Even if identity is fluid, and ever changing, being influenced and negotiated through social interaction, if I lose touch with my inner self, I will get lost in the midst of negotiation and expansion of my heart. As my story shows, I have changed, but some won’t even notice the difference, as the change happened IN me more than between the relations I had with others. The transformation or evolution (Or as Parker Palmer would call it “expansion”) of my inner self gave me the courage to face the new context with a wider and clearer lens, and in that context, no one was “out to get me” if I didn’t allow them to.

I still side with sociocultural and post-structural perspectives in viewing identity; yes, identity is relational. But I also want to highlight the power inner self has on one’s being—without a strong relation with one’s inner self, a person can be lost trying to desperately build relations with others (in a new context). Being lost only detaches one from one’s inner self; it is our life jacket that needs to be tightened before being submerged into the deep sea filled with new people, beliefs, and values. Tighten the jacket; making sure it’s properly worn before and while you dive into the new world—you will learn to float through. Holding on to the life jacket and diving in—you risk of losing it amidst the chaos. I was doing the latter, but was luckily saved. However, there is no guarantee that I won’t be thrown into the “sea” again in the future; at least now I have learned to check on my life jacket at all times.

## Revisiting My Research Questions

Drawing out a set of conclusion does not exactly fit the evocative autoethnography style of writing, as evocative autoethnography is not intended to write out a conclusion FOR the reader, but prefers to leave it open for the reader's interpretation of this personal encounter in the author's life (Ellis, 2004). However, for the purpose of the thesis, I have decided to add a few concluding comments on my personal findings from this experience of writing an autoethnographic piece.

Keeping my research question—"How might a NNES teacher of English re-construct his or her professional identity in an English-dominant context?"—in mind, I have tried to summarize what I have learned from this insightful journey. However, note that these "threats to identity and integrity" I identify below, as well as the concluding remarks I make here are based on my personal observation, and thus cannot be seen as necessarily similar to the journeys of other experienced NNEST teaching in an English-dominant context.

As noted in the previous chapter, the experience strengthened my belief that the construction and re-construction of one's identity is indeed mediated by social interactions and influenced by the historical self, and the particular time and space in which the person is situated in. In Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the term 'agency' is often seen as in close relation to learning, learner identity, and social interaction. Agency refers to one's capacity to take control and make decisions reflectively in relation to the world and relationships around the being. These meaningful decisions, eventually, would lead to personal or social transformation (Canagarajah, 1999; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; McKay & Wong, 1996; Morita, 2002; Norton & Toohey, 2001;).

To summarize, some of the external factors affecting my identity re-construction were linked to relations with, and positioning by, students and other members of the school community as well as broader discourses around NNEST circulating across English language teaching settings. In addition to the external factors, my previous teaching experiences, positioning of self and establishing a close relationship with one's inner self were possible internal factors that were impacting my identity re-construction.

Members of the community—students, teachers, and admin staff members involved in school—were influential in how I positioned and saw myself as member of the community. Their views, as well as their utterances and decisions were all strong factors influencing my view of my self in relation to the others as issues of race and identity could be inferred from my interaction (non-interaction, to be exact) with them. My teaching experience—which I presumed to be an external factor for my identity re-construction—turned out to be an internal factor, because it influenced greatly how I interpreted and made sense of my situated reality. This was very interesting, as I initially thought my teaching experiences would be informing my teaching techniques and methods while teaching in a new context.

Teacher agency can also be applied to the process where a teacher negotiates one's presence within a new social context. My understanding of Palmer's (1998) dialogue with one's inner self as essential in reclaiming the identity and integrity of a teacher, is similar to this notion of agency as situated in the core of identity construction, as it puts the self at the center of transformation. On the other hand, Lantolf and Pavlenko, (2001) saw human agency as the 'relationship' that one co-constructs and re-constructs through interaction, while Palmer (1998) stated that losing connection with one's inner self will create performers, "wearing" the new identity—without completely becoming whole.

I would like to think that agency<sup>16</sup> is both very intrapersonal as well as interpersonal: just as my identity re-construction process required my eagerness to overcome the conflict I observed between how I was seen by others in the community and how I positioned myself within the context; the process also involved interaction and negotiation with other members of the community. In the beginning, I dealt with my feeling of insecurity intrapersonally by conversing with my inner self with the help from literature and books. However, that was not enough to be acknowledged by others in the community—I needed to negotiate my position interpersonally. Constructing identity

<sup>16</sup> I have only been introduced very recently to literature that discusses in detail agency as enacted in interactions (Fotovatian, 2012). As my focus throughout my story has not been on my agentic actions in the process of identity re-construction, I am only signaling this direction here as it could be another fruitful avenue to explore in making sense of the struggles of experienced NNESTs beginning to teach in an English-dominant country.

based on what a person believes is right for them would not be sufficient enough to bring about change. On the other hand, dismissing one's voice and being too open to how others determine you would also be too imposing and partial.

My identity is not solely defined by who I think I am; neither do others solely define it. This belief hasn't changed since my first Masters degree program in 2008. What my first year of work experience in Canada added to this belief was that, without acknowledging—in depth—who I am as a whole, my identity re-construction will not happen smoothly, nor will the new evolved identity become fully a part of my self, completing me as a whole being. Having already gone through the initial identity construction as an English language teacher, and having been that way for a long time, simply 'knowing' about the social qualities of identity was not enough; it was not until I was confronted by the new teaching context that I realized how complex this process could be, not to mention painful.

What the writing process also brought out were more questions that may be topics for future research in relation to experienced language teacher identity, including the need for research in understanding the social dynamics and positioning of experienced NNESTs in ELT in regards to race and gender. Being dropped from the summer program, raised issues of race and the business element of language schools to be factors affecting my being within the community. Once I felt that the school was hesitant in letting me teach students from Korea, my professional identity as an experienced teacher of English shook a great deal. Even if the school did not intentionally "screen me" from all Korean students, my motivation and drive to belong in this community seemed meaningless, and I made up my mind to quit working in Canada. Had I not been reminded by the words from Palmer's (1998) book of the importance of dialogue, especially being involved in dialogue with one's inner self through stories, it would have been very difficult to make my experience at English Centre meaningful. Making use of the conversations I had with my inner self, reflecting on the stories while re-formatting them into one short story, then reflecting on the short stories once again while re-living the moment provided insights beyond my expectations.

Writing an autoethnography and using reflective analysis following each segment of the story, not only gave me the opportunity to re-examine my self in depth (as noted above), but also helped me see the need for further research that focuses on:

## **Diversity**

As I mentioned in the previous section of the chapter, there needs to be more research that highlights the diversity in NNEST research. Moussu & Llorca (2008) suggests as avenues for further research diversifying teaching context (i.e., understanding ESL and EFL context as substantially different), NNEST's places of origin, by regions, or by the first language. However, this may not be 'specific' enough, as regional or national differentiation, may also be a form of simplification (Holliday, 2008). Another issue, raised while I was discussing my work with a colleague was the level of students the teachers teach. My colleague and I were casually sharing our "difficult moments" teaching at English Centre, when we both raised the question if students' language proficiencies are somewhat lower, is it more difficult for them to recognize NNESTs from NESTs? It was fascinating to see how Moussu and Llorca mentioned a focus on students' language proficiency in their article under areas for future NNEST research.

Another area that could benefit from more research is studying experienced NNESTs pursuing their professional careers in a new teaching context—especially, in English-dominant countries such as Canada, and Australia, where many skilled workers immigrate and embark on a new stage of their lives. Medgyes (2001) and other researchers who study NNEST teachers' may have once labelled teachers like myself as being "rare," but I no longer consider this to be the case. With the rise of globalization, the lines between the Kachruvian circles (1992) have become blurred, and it is becoming more common for careers—including English language teachers—to take a global path, rather than staying local. Working in Canadian language education settings, I have always met one or two experienced NNESTs, who originally began their career in their home countries. Simply speculating, I no longer think NNESTs teaching in English-dominant countries should be categorized as exceptions. These experienced NNESTs could have also experienced a struggle in their professional identities while working in a different community. Adding research around experienced language teachers might

reveal some differences between the findings from researches studying the experiences of novice or pre-service NNESTs.

### **Race and Identity**

Going back to my encounter with Daisy, you would remember how she silently rejected being taught by me—a Korean. When examining critically Daisy's actions, it seems they were about more than rejecting a Korean; from Kris' account it is obvious that she made a decision to not be in my class under the assumption that language is best learned through a native speaker of the target language— or what would seem nativespeakerism (Holliday, 2005) in action. However, the more I think about it, in connection to my being pulled out of the junior program teaching staff (for being Korean), I have to wonder if this was in fact a form of racial discrimination, and less about my nationality.

Amin (1999) notes, the ideal teacher of English is a White, Anglo Male, who speaks a dominant variety of English. My being a non-native woman of colour may have been the reason for the emotional turmoil I had to go through. Lee (2014) describes race as being “social rather than a biological construction of essences” (p. 1). In other words, the idea of racism is discrimination based on “the perceived meanings of particular visible characteristics of human bodies” (p. 2). Braine (1999) and Park (2006), having experienced racial discrimination in their teaching contexts, add voice to the need for research on racial discrimination in ELT. Kubota & Lin (2009) argue that for too long race has been at the core of many problems in ELT, yet it has always been regarded as too sensitive or politically inappropriate to discuss publicly. It would be interesting to study students' and teachers' perception on what makes a good language teacher (or how students respond to individual teachers), with strong focus on teachers' racial identities.

### **Writing as Means of Identity Re-construction and Praxis**

Another sub-question I had under my research question was how writing narrative of self would contribute to the re-construction of identity. The process of writing about oneself turned out to be more powerful than I had expected in the beginning. I have used Palmer's (1998) suggestion to use writing or 'keeping notes' as a way to keep in touch with one's inner self for the sake of re-claiming or maintaining one's



identity and integrity. Being inspired by the unconventional approach to research explained by Ellis (2004), and Palmer's (1998) advice on how "[s]tories are the best way to portray realities" (p. 14), I embarked on a re-membering journey by creating an "autobiographical self" (Park, 2013, p. 338). Park (2013) notes, "constructing my autobiographical self was a goal-directed activity that allowed me to see and understand the world around me" (p. 338). For Park, writing an autobiographical piece helped her understand "how [her] identities around race, gender, and class intersected with language" (p. 338). Her findings also confirmed how the process of writing an autobiographical piece convinces one to reflect on one's history and how the historical self intersects with the present self. This critical reflection of 'self' will in turn influence the way one designs, plans, and teaches his or her class. This act of reflection and action; theory informed action that emancipates oneself from the margins; empowering the oppressed to create and transform is what Freire (1970) describes as "Praxis."

In terms of biographical narratives as research methodology, Pavlenko (2007) also describes autobiographical narratives to be a useful source for insights into "private worlds, inaccessible to experimental methodologies" (p. 165), which also provides an insider's view, becoming a transforming reality for the readers. Braine (2010) writes, "few biographies of individual teachers revealing their socioeconomic backgrounds, levels of education and training, and day-to-day association with the English language have been published" (p. xi), and calls for more biographical studies that reveal what could not be revealed with traditional research methods. In short, not only have I experienced the constant desire to 'go back and reflect again and again,' but also as a methodology, autobiographical studies possess the power of provoking praxis in the writer as well as the readers.

There are, however, limits to using autobiographical narrative as research methodology. The main "problem," as I described in my methodology chapter, will be the highly subjective encounter and interpretation of the encounter. On the other hand, evocative autoethnography does not intend to make generalization, but rather tries to look at things in a narrow scope—but in a deeper and more personal level of depth. Overall, my belief in evocative autoethnography as being the most suitable methodology for my thesis became stronger while I was writing this piece (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Revisiting the quote by Bochner (1994) that, “[w]e can judge a narrative, if judge we must, in terms of the consequences it produces—the new stories it arouses, the possibilities for reforming and reshaping a life it introduces” (p. 31), this is exactly how I wish my autoethnographic piece would be of value. As illustrated above, my short vignettes have touched on issues that were not initially visible; by writing them down, reflecting on the incidents, hidden issues were made visible, and became new areas for future exploration. Writing this narrative piece only expanded my level of thought, and I hope it has a similar effect on others (readers).

## **Closing Comments (Fall of 2014)**

Many things have happened to me since Zoe left school. While taking a break from work and trying to complete this thesis, I had to reach out and re-examine who I am, and why I felt that way in 2012, over and over again. The more I wrote about my self, something new was revealed about my self. At one point, I was utterly disgusted at the thoughts I had towards others. Now being so close to finishing this piece, I find that I could write another reflective autoethnography on my experience while writing this piece. Also, as a beginning researcher, I wish one day I would have the opportunity to formally interview other NNESTs teaching in English-dominant contexts, and compare the themes I find with this autoethnographic piece.

Since May of 2013, I have been involved in the teacher-training department at English Centre with another experienced NNEST. The challenge was delightful, yet brought out new conflicts in being a NNEST teacher trainer for both NES and NNEST trainees. We both constantly talk about the issues we face in meeting trainees who bring different stories (i.e., backgrounds) to the course. However, I do not feel too troubled like I would have been in 2012. The biggest difference could be because I work with another experienced NNEST, who happens to have very similar teaching experiences as I. Together; we share our stories and talk about “things that hurt or bother us” as well as moments that touch us. I am trying to keep a balance between ‘what is defined as good practices in teaching’ and ‘what I see as good practice.’ Being a teacher trainer has also been a journey of a new becoming—or as Palmer would say, “a journey of remembering.” This new journey is still on going, and will probably go on for some time. This too may become a topic for another creative non-fiction.

For now, I will keep on writing.

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