A Brief History of the M.Ed. TEFSL Program

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Introduction

This report was commissioned by Dr. Robin Brayne in January of 2012 to provide an overview of the inception and history of the Masters of Education TEFSL program. In order to fulfill that mandate, we contacted a number of faculty members, past and present, who have been involved in the program; as well, we contacted various alumni for their input on what the program has meant to them and the benefits they have derived from it. This report offers a primarily chronological accounting of the M.Ed. TEFSL program from its beginnings to its current incarnation by those who have been involved as administrators, faculty, staff, and students.

We noted with interest that beyond the understandable vagaries of memory, there were different perspectives on the program, but what is strikingly evident is the common vision that led to the creation of the program and that seems to have guided it since its inception in 2005. The significance of perspective lies in appreciating that when evaluating or understanding a program and its merits, it is worth understanding the different perspectives that inform that program and contribute to its perpetuation; it is our perception as a result of this research that the “big picture” that shapes is a complex and nuanced one. What follows is a recounting of the history of the program from those who were and have been involved.

This history is timely as it marks the shifting of the coordinator’s role from Dr. Bonnie Waterstone, who has been involved almost since the program’s inception, to Dr. Sepideh Fotovatian. It also comes not long after the formal retirement of Dr. Ian Andrews, one of the chief architects of the program and its vision.
Beginnings: The Vision; The Instigators; The Needs

Meetings of Minds

The M.Ed. TEFSL program emerged out of a perceived need, a vision of what might be possible, and the fortuitous confluence of a number of factors. In 2005, Frank Wang completed a Masters program at UBC in which he had examined the dynamics of and need for psychosocial support for Chinese international students studying in B.C. At the same time, Catherine Price was working for SFU International and, during the year Ian was acting Dean, she was seconded to replace Ian in his role in the Faculty of Education in heading up international education. Catherine had known Frank from his time as a graduate student at UBC and from her connections when working for the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and her knowledge and connections were definite assets in making this program possible; she was instrumental in bringing Ian and Frank together.

Frank and Catherine met with Ian, who had completed his doctoral work at SFU in international education and was keen to promote opportunities for international students; Ian recalls:

   I had lots to share and learn from and of course the international focus is the internationalization of what we do. So it’s not just a matter of having international education that is the raison d’être of this university, of this faculty; rather, it’s the style of getting into the cultural aspects, the research, the development of community, and the professional aspects of what we do as educators. You have to learn the culture of the students in order to be able to educate them effectively.
Ian had a vision of education—international education, in particular—that was ultimately grounded in relationships and learning in and through relationships and particular relational qualities:

I have always believed that if we are going to be appreciative of our university and our faculties, we have to give opportunities to students, faculty, and staff to actually work together, share together, and celebrate together. It’s not just a passing thing—that here are my students lets go for dinner tomorrow. That’s not what I am talking about (which, by the way, is very nice). But how do we involve people to really share ideas and make sure that they reflect the time for them to learn about our culture or academic perspectives and that this is a guide that is very respected and valued: this is how we do things.

Ian adds that those involved in the program since its beginning were people who embodied these ideals, a thought echoed by Catherine, who recalled that the coming together of the M.Ed. TEFSL program “speaks to the personal connections, the relationships we had.” These were both professional and personal relationships that embodied the ideals of international education, a love of international students, a vision of the possibilities in working with these students, and the very concept of language learning embedded in particular, consciously intended curricular and pedagogical approaches.

Shortly after Ian and Frank met, the two of them talked together with Dr. Kelleen Toohey to discuss the possibility of a Master’s program for international students and map out a plan for its implementation. Kelleen recalls that the meeting took place around a small, round table
in her current office (which, coincidentally enough, was Ian’s office previously). It was at this
table that M.Ed. TESL program had its beginnings.

As Kelleen recalls:

It was an emergent need. There were programs in Australia like this getting going at
the same time, and, for example, St. Mary’s University in Nova Scotia was doing
something in this regard. This program was part of an emergent trend, and we took
advantage of that. I was part of the design but not of the administration.

Because Frank by this time had started his agency, CanZhon International, an agency
dedicated to making it possible for Chinese students to have access to Western education. Frank
was already recruiting students to study in science, engineering, and business programs in
Canadian universities. He had sent proposals to the SFU administration for programs designed
for international students. Those planning the TESL program established a relationship with
him to help recruit students for the program. It is for this reason that the students at the
beginning and throughout the program’s history have predominantly come from Mainland
China. The value of a western education is not lost on them, as Ian points out:

The Chinese people really value education and learning at a post-secondary level,
they value it all the way through the whole system, kindergarten all the way
through to grade 12. But know it’s a very important thing to say, I have my degree,
my masters and my PhD degree, because I am Chinese.

As a result of his work in recruiting students to study in Canadian universities, Frank suspected
there would be an interest among language students to study the teaching of English in a
Canadian university; he felt there would be a sufficient number of qualified students whose English was good enough that they could study in a graduate program:

We needed to have people who have that kind of background [in language education] and [English] language skills, and I told them that I am confident we would have the qualified candidates for that. Ian saw there was an opportunity and I am very grateful to him, he had a vision which he shared with our vision and he said “Yes, let's try.”

Frank suggested that since there was an existing TESL program, a new one for international students could be modelled after it; Ian and Kelleen agreed, adding that it would be designed specifically for the needs of international students.

**Sociocultural Contexts**

Bonnie points out that the vision was set within the larger context of the demand for English worldwide. More and more countries began to require that their youth learn English as “it was becoming the growing lingua franca world language.” There was an increasing demand for English teachers and for more training for international language educators. Of course, China was part of this:

So of course also the other context would be the growth of China, the development of China and some other countries, as well—really taking off. There was something SFU could offer that was needed. So I would say that that one of the guidelines is that we just don't say, "Oh well, we have something for you"; rather, the question we ask is whether your country has some needs, does the world as a larger group have some needs? It doesn't have to be just one country that has
needs that we as a faculty of education can and want to meet. So that is how the
initiative began and it was very collaboratively developed with people in China
and a lot of thought taken into consideration of what would make a good
program.

There was another intellectual force that served as a foundation for the program, one Bonnie
also articulated:

The vision of the faculty of education and the vision of those who started the
program is definitely around social change, is definitely around social justice. If
they can be social change agents in their own country we are definitely happy.
Now sometimes that doesn’t happen. However, I think all of the faculty of
education would support this ideal of social change and justice. Certainly it was
true about my experience and I hope it is true for all; it’s certainly true for the core
instructors in the program. It’s about shaking up their world view and, yeah, you
can make a change.

This vision was articulated by Kumari, Roumi, Anne Scholefield, and Bonnie in a paper
published in the Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies
(Beck, Ilieva, Scholefield, & Waterstone, 2007), “Locating Gold Mountain: Cultural Capital and
the Internationalization of Teacher Education.” The authors write of being aware of and trying
to create a “new and generative situation variously identified as an interpretive zone ... or a
third space ...” that is “emerging new and unpredictable for all concerned.” This zone or space
exists in the context and tensions of what the authors identify as an increasingly
commercialized and commodified ethos of higher education: there is a new wave of immigrants
and international students who come prospecting for the financial benefits of ‘Gold Mountain’; the challenge for these scholars was how to position themselves and the program in light of these realities and the associated challenges of difference and diversity, along with cultural hybridity (the creation of the kind of ‘third space’ envisioned by Homi Bhabha (1994). The authors suggest that

we can re-frame internationalization of education as an ‘eduscape’ allowing for the simultaneity of convergence and fragmentation, and more importantly, making opportunities for the ‘flows’ of discourse to move in “increasingly non-isomorphic paths” rather than the assimilationist (or conformist) forms of centre-periphery expected from a western-eastern binary with its implications on curriculum and pedagogy.

They further suggest that it might be possible to think of international learners not simply a embodying a mix of cultural practices but, more significantly—in terms of both curriculum and pedagogy—of a “process of the emergence of the emergence of ‘something new and unrecognizable’” (Rutherford, 1990, p. 211), ‘the emergence of the interstices’ (Bhabha, 1994, p.2).”

The authors also identify identity as a site of transformation, thus aligning themselves with Etienne Wenger’s (1998) transformational vision of education and recognize that “the students’ journey is ours ... the educational aspects of this ‘international’ program have been transformative for us, as well.” The third space is, in the words Ted Aoki communicated personally to the authors, neither “here or there” but “here and there,” and it manifested itself in a program that was neither “this or that” but “this and that.” Aoki (2005) amplifies this in his
essays on a third space. Hongyu Wang (2007), who embodies the poststructuralist notion of existing globally and interculturally, writes that a third space is “... ever-changing, open-ended, and unpredictable, playing with the unknown—psychic, social, and cosmic—but never able to contain the unknown” (p. 389). This program serves as a transformative site where students can experience this dynamically complex process of existing in between worlds.

The conflicting double between two dramatically different cultures and between opposing gendered aspects makes me search for a third space in which multiplicity, relationality, and creativity are in motion to regenerate one another.

What is central to the notion of the third is its potential to enable differences to mutually transform each other without reaching any final fusion. I deliberately use the term “a third space” instead of “the third space” to indicate the openness and multiplicity of the third (p. 390).

Identity is clearly recognized as a site of transformation in the learning. In the program, the students are being offered, and, more importantly, are claiming the right to speak (Norton, 2000), sometimes against considerable odds. The poststructuralist perspective of identity that informs the program not only recognizes that identity is fluid and multiple but also that it is dynamically situated in the various contexts and environments through and in which the students traverse. Moreover, as the concept of claiming the right to speak suggests, identity is a site of ongoing struggle and negotiation. Those who framed this program were well aware that conversations about power and legitimacy would be central to the educational process (Bourdieu, 1991).
What I find compelling in the vision articulated by Beck et al. (2007) is not just the desire to make a change for students and see them as potential change agents engaged in the world but also the presence of praxis. From a Freirean perspective (Freire, 2006), those working in the program were walking the talk and trying their best to embody in their teaching practice and curricular offerings the very ideals and practices they were promoting for the students. The importance of praxis cannot be overemphasized. In my experience, without it, at best students become confused about ends and means; without it, at worst they become cynical and demoralized.

Ian adds to these points, from a somewhat different perspective, that

…it’s not just academic, that’s the whole point. These is also a cultural humanistic part of interacting, saying “I have time for you, let’s sit down and talk.” And not just saying please come and see me at three o’clock next Tuesday, that’s not the way we do it.

**Planning the First Cohorts**

Kelleen noted that despite all their enthusiasm, having Frank as a connection to China and Chinese students, it was very difficult to target that first cohort. While there certainly were language students, graduates of undergraduate programs for teaching English were not as numerous today or readily accessible. It took time to establish the necessary connections. A lot of effort went into establishing connections in China and developing these relationships.

Most of the students who first arrived in July of 2005 believed that this graduate degree would enhance their opportunities for good teaching positions in China, and, as well, give them
an excellent opportunity, in an English-speaking context, to improve their English oral and writing skills; theirs indeed was the journey to Gold Mountain.

Because the English skills of these students were not as developed as native English speakers’ skills were, Ian as acting Dean agree to an initial English requirement of an overall IELTS score of 6.5 instead of 7.0. This was done with the provision that the program start off with an intensive, one-month orientation program designed to assist the students in beginning to develop their academic literacy skills, both oral and written, and acclimatize them to both the academic culture of SFU and the multicultural ethos of the greater Vancouver region, British Columbia, and Canada. Frank, in his experiences with other universities accommodating international students, had noted that such orientation programs had proven effective; Roumi recalls that they realized an orientation program would be necessary and that ongoing academic support would also be necessary; the latter became an established part of the program.

The Coming Together of a Team

Kelleen points out that circumstances at the time were favorable: a perfect confluence. “We were extraordinarily lucky to have such high-quality people just graduating; I had complete trust in them.” Bonnie, Roumi Ilieva, Kumari Beck, and Anne Scholefield were doctoral candidates either just completing or well along the way to completing their programs. Bonnie’s dissertation was *Self, Genre, Community: Negotiating the Landscape of a Teacher/Researcher Collaboration;* Roumi’s 2005 dissertation was *A Story of Texts, Culture(s), Cultural Tool Normalization, and Adult ESL Learning and Teaching;* Anne’s 2006 dissertation was *International*
Education as Teacher Education: A Curriculum of Contradictions; Kumari’s dissertation was Being International: Learning in a Canadian University.

They all shared passions for social justice, international education, and language. As Roumi recalls:

Well the funny thing is that the four of us were Ph.D. students here at various times so we met through course work, as well. I’ve done some publishing with Bonnie before and some conference presentations with her and Kumari. I know that Kelleen suggested my name as a faculty member for the program, and I was Kelleen’s former student so I guess that is how it came to be. So they approached me and asked if I would be interested in working on this and I said, “Yes, of course!” One reason is that I was an international student many years ago so I certainly can identify with a lot of the issues that the international students we work with have.

It was more than just the confluence of established faculty and administrators and newly-minted or about-to-be Ph.D.s. It was in a more significant way, the coming together of a team.

From Roumi:

Okay, let me say that for me a lot of what defines this program is team work or that is how it feels, and I think that it is a really good program because of the team approach that has been part of it. As long as the program continues, and as long and as much as we can still work as a team or with others, the program will still have that strength.

You know, there are commitments that we have elsewhere, writing in or for other
program areas or other academic areas in general, but overall that's really been for me the key. It's been real teamwork.

The teamwork is a vital part of ongoing curriculum development. Through research, conferences, and reviewing the literature, faculty members are continually exposed to new and different approaches, so experimentation is part of the program. As Roumi observes: “So, for instance, if something has happened during orientation that’s somehow new, then the people who are teaching in the first semester try to take this up in terms of working with a topic or issue that has come up.” Then at the end of the first semester, we review again, to prepare the instructors for the second semester. “So we work step by step in terms of building on each other’s work, and not only about the content, but also in terms of developing critical analysis.

My observation has been that the ethos of teamwork has remained until this day. As Coordinator, Bonnie Waterstone devoted a lot of effort to communicating information among faculty, staff, and academic and cultural assistants. There have been regular team meetings to plan, share information, and discuss challenges and successes. Sepideh Fotovatian, as new program coordinator, is doing a wonderful job in carrying on this sense of teamwork, being fully supported by the faculty members.

Creating and Working in a Third Space

As Roumi recalls, “There was a lot of improvising and going with the flow in terms of determining what was needed”; those involved were learning as they went, based on their experiences with the students. I have found this to be the case in my own work with the students. As she reminds us:
I don’t think the third space is a stable space; it is always dynamic and you are always in process …. People who are working in this space are coming with different understandings, experiences, and values, and so there needs to be this negotiation going on.

The third space manifests for her in the classroom, as well:

I think that every moment I am in the classroom with these students, for example, I am aiming to build a third space … and sometimes it is successful and sometimes it is not that successful, but I think the important thing is that the goal is always there as one we have.

Roumi was selected as the first coordinator of the program and she selected the team, having been given “carte blanche” to do so by Ian. Bonnie, Kumari, and Anne planned the first orientation for the end of July 2005, along with the sequence of courses for the program and who would teach them. The orientation was a significant part of the program, as Bonnie recalls. She and the others, having worked in the area of international education and with international students, did not want to simply recruit students and then simply place them into courses designed for domestic students hoping they would succeed. Roumi notes there is initially a steep learning curve, both for students and for faculty. There are, as she says, “everyday changes in terms of thinking, reading, and the struggles they face as they grapple with making direct progress.” The organizers saw a need for an orientation.

The Orientation

The orientation was designed to help orient these students to both western academic culture and to western culture more generally. Bonnie, Kumari, and Anne did the teaching for the first
couple of orientations. Kumari had developed a curriculum for some students from Sri Lanka to develop academic literacy, and this curriculum formed the base of the orientation. Initially the team thought the five-week orientation would be sufficient to prepare them academically, but they found this was not sufficient, and the orientation extended itself into the regular course offerings insofar as EDUC 835, “Introduction to Educational Discourses and Practices in North American Contexts” carries forth the themes and practices in academic discourse begun in the orientation. As Bonnie recalls:

The fall semester has component now first we just extended the orientation for another six weeks into the term then we eventually realized that it had to go alongside all their other courses through the term and to a special topics course called Introduction to Educational Discourse in the North American context it became a regularized educational course called Education 835, it has a number and that means it has the same title. It’s a graded course alongside their course. The orientation is not graded; it wouldn’t be fair to them to grade it.

A student from cohort four recalls:

The orientation session prior to the actual start of the program was great. I had already spent a year getting lost and trying to figure out whom to ask things, and the program was basically guiding you through everything that was needed to study in a Canadian school. What I especially loved about this one-month session was the opportunity to feel involved: it could be quite lonely, studying away from home and being alone. The program emphasized everyone involved in the program, including students, to be a member of a community: where you
feel safe and secure to explore and learn from others while learning with them. While I did not understand the concept of changing identities (Now I deeply understand the importance of this!), I enjoyed the various activities we did to understand the multidimensional aspects of identity and self. I enjoyed the portfolio sessions where we had to use artifacts to tell who we were in the past, and who we are becoming at the moment. I remember I was extremely nervous at that time, but thinking about it now, I realize how the process got me constantly thinking about who I was.

Another student from cohort three adds:

This is the first time that I live and study abroad. Sometimes, adapting into Canadian life is tougher than study. Fortunately, I have cultural assistant helped me get familiar with Canadian life and it’s crucial for me to find an old timer to ask for help with my own language in initial process of settlement and adaptation.

**Academic and Cultural Support**

Kelleen had earlier insisted, on the basis of her prior experiences with EAL students, that academic and English language support would be necessary not just in the orientation and in EDUC 835, but all through the program. “If we were going to base our assignments on written representations of what they had learned, then we would need such support.” And so such support was also built into the program, with someone serving in providing academic support, primarily in the form of preparing students to better understand their readings, do their research, and write their papers. It has been my experience that providing meaningful and
effective academic support requires me to understand the student’s cultural background, situatedness, goals, apprehensions, and hopes. I can only provide ways forward if I anchor my assistance in an understanding of all these; to put it succinctly, I must know the student. I have to develop a close relationship with that student and work from and in that ongoing dynamic.

The dynamic of course involves language, but there is something more than just “language.” There is also the process of working in and through language, what Merrill Swain (2006) refers to as “languaging.” This concept emerges out of the poststructuralist perspectives on language and language learning, where scholars such as Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) argued that individuals engage in dialogue with one another in order to create meaning and understanding. Swain describes languaging as “… a dynamic, never-ending process of using language to make meaning” (p. 96). She adds that it is: “… a process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language. It is part of what constitutes learning” (p. 98). She points to one of the central curricular and pedagogical practices that is embraced in this program when she writes: “… languaging about language is one of the ways we learn a second language to an advanced level!” (p. 96). Not only are the M.Ed. TEFSL students engaged in this languaging process as a dynamic activity central to the program—whether in reading, classroom conversations, or writing, and whether they are engaging with fellow cohort members, faculty, or others in other communities—but they are also learning, through praxis, a curricular and pedagogical philosophy and model of language teaching and learning they can apply in their own work as educators.

The significance of this languaging as a cognitive learning process is noteworthy, for it squarely places language learning in situ: as part of an unfolding, dynamic, interpersonal and
intersubjective process that is ever situated in sociocultural and historical contexts that further add to the complexity of the educational process (Davis & Sumara, 2008), requiring educators to brave the unknown and winding ways of learning.

A student from cohort three writes:

Academic writing is really a big challenge for me in an L2. I need such an easy-going academic assistant making me dare to ask any questions without pressure.

I also hope that our international program can add another assistant helping with combing our minds before academic writing. Sometimes, it's really hard to clarify ideas exactly with an L2.

These are important comments. In my experience it is important that any academic support be offered in a non-pressured, patient, understanding fashion. Scaffolding, drawing out from the student, and working with the zone of proximal development are important. These take time. There are no substitutes. My experience has taught me that it is necessary for me to get inside of the world(s) of the student, to help “comb” their minds (and hearts). I am the student to my student-educator. Seen from another perspective, the students have to exert considerable skill and patience in helping us understand their epistemes, their experiences, and their values. Without my understanding these epistemes, experiences, and values, it is far less likely that I can offer effective and meaningful help.

The cultural support, both in the orientation and throughout the program, is equally important. Bonnie points out the many ways in which cultural support is significant:

We were aware that there would be cultural shock and cultural adjustment. So the orientation doesn't just focus on academic adjustment; there is also a cultural
component to that. It’s really simple things, have you ever lived in another
country? It’s like how to cross the street, even, what are those buttons for? How
to catch a bus. It can be pretty overwhelming and if that’s what you are dealing
with then how do you concentrate on your studies? So we really work on that
cultural adjustment part at the beginning. Also, homesickness. For many of the
students from China and from other countries it maybe their first time away
from home, not to just a different country, but also living away from home, away
from parents.

If they are more mature, that is not the case, and we have had mature students
with their own families—but they have other issues, because they have their own
families to think about and how their children are adjusting.

And, as you know, many of the students, particularly those from China, are only
children, so there is lots of pressure from the parents; well, I think for any of the
international students there is a lot of parental pressure partly because it’s a big
expense and they want them to do well—they have invested a lot, and
sometimes the entire family has invested, not just the nuclear family parental
unit. Anyway the students talk about these: pressure, homesickness, cultural
adjustment and the language difficulties. They come here thinking that their
English is great, because it is in their context but not necessarily in this one ....

There are real identity shifts, some kinda shocking identity shifts, so all of these
things are present.
They realized with the start of the second cohort that they could hire one of the graduates of the first cohort to serve as a cultural assistant—someone who had been through the entire experience. Bonnie recounts:

That cultural assistant has always been a graduate of the program, someone who really gets it: what the students are going through and who also has a similar body of knowledge to support them. Hopefully the assistant will also help them connect with the larger community, because the CA has been here awhile and obviously if the CA speaks the same language that’s true. But the cultural system support is not just about language it’s about all those cultural supports.

The support also comes from other sources. Ian recalls that as international programs director, he bore the responsibility of providing care and support:

“You ask for the support, let me know how I can help you.” That was my role. In my mind, as the former director my role is: how do we make sure that we know how they can help? Because we just can’t show up and say “Well, how are you doing?” I want to get into the depth of “How are you really doing? How is your family? How are your parents?

A cohort four student states:

The faculty members, including the head of International programs (Dr. Ian Andrews), were very understanding when it came to personal issues, yet firm in terms of academic achievements. I really respect that, and realize how difficult it must have been to be both a counsellor and a teacher for a group of confused international students. …
Apart from the course instructors, our program had a unique position—writing assistance—that helped us think and organize our thoughts when writing papers. I owe a great deal to the academic support helper for helping me think about my burning question, and also for introducing me to various thinkers of relations and education. I couldn’t have finished the program without everyone’s help.

Jane Pan, in her role as program assistant, provided valuable assistance to students on many occasions. It was help that was greatly appreciated by the students.

As I was a landed immigrant in Canada, I understand the cultural shock, the confusion, the difficulties a newcomer might face. Also, I often provided some suggestions to students when they were seeking post-graduate job opportunities. I tried to help our students as much as I can, not because it was part of my job. It is because that is my passion: to help the students, especially for international students. I loved the conversations that I had with our students when we ran into each other in the hallway, when they popped their head in my office, just for a trivial question.... It makes me feel that I could help other people.

As Kelleen concludes, on the subject of providing academic and cultural support: “The program demonstrates that ongoing academic and cultural support makes a difference.”

Fieldwork Courses

The planning team also realized the value of a practical component for language teaching, which evolved into the field work component of the program, consisting of two fieldwork courses. Because of her background in public school teaching and the International Teacher
Education Module (ITEM), Anne taught the fieldwork classes. These were later taught by Awneet Sivia and are currently taught by Rhonda Philpott. The fieldwork courses not only provide opportunities for students to visit primary, secondary, and university language classes, but also to interact with the Professional Qualification Program (PQP); here they get to interact with in-service teachers. Bonnie points to the significance of the fieldwork components:

Alongside the orientation, we also there needed to be that practical component.

We call it “fieldwork,” which has no meaning internationally; they have no idea what that means, but what it means is that they go into schools to make that connection between what it looks like in schools. So we needed somebody who had contacts with the school board was really able to figure their ways into schools. So this is how Anne Schofield got involved, and she was really the main person working with the fieldwork. Those were the two courses that Anne Schofield taught at the beginning and she really formed them as they became, not only did they go into public schools at the elementary, high school, and college levels, but they also had some interaction with PQP, the professional qualification program which is basically offered for immigrants when they come here and they have been teachers in their own countries but they don’t have the certification here. It seemed a natural fit and more cooperation with what is happening with what is in the faculty so they can interact with in-service, pre-service teachers. When these international students have a chance to experience Canadian classrooms, the theories about teaching and learning come alive. Over the two fieldwork courses, students will have placements at elementary, high
school and/or postsecondary levels. As of 2012, the second fieldwork course has become a graded course.

**Other Courses**

Roumi has from the beginning taught the first strictly “academic” course in the program, EDUC 824, the “Seminar in Second Language Teaching.” At first, she also taught a couple of other courses, and she notes with regard to student learning that it was important they understand the necessity of becoming autonomous learners.

I really felt it is important to prepare these students for what to expect in coursework, and the instructors would be looking forward to having them come up with their own ideas as to where they want to go with their learning and take control of it and be much more autonomous....

I am really very, very explicit as to what it is that I am doing in the classroom so they understand that if I am asking these challenging questions it is because I want them really to think on their own.

She will have the students bring questions based on the readings to the class for discussion so that they contribute to the curriculum; feedback from the students shows that they appreciate these moves toward autonomous thinking.

EDUC 856 focuses on issues of identity and language; identity is seen as an integral dimension of language; developing language develops identity and vice versa; both exist in an ongoing, unpredictable, unfolding dialectic. Given that the program comes at a critical time in the students’ lives—early adulthood—it is no wonder that this has become a very popular and meaningful course for the students; it often represents a turning point for the students, I have
noticed, when, because of the meaningfulness of the content and its connection to the material from other courses, the pieces begin falling into place: a larger vision of language and language education begins to emerge.

Huamei Han has taught EDUC 825, “Second Language Acquisition and Schooling,” for several years. It, too, has become a milestone for the students. It is there first encounter, usually, with an Asian professor in the program; for some of the Asian students, this is significant. For one thing, it challenges the prevailing ethos that native English instructors are “best,” a product of the colonial hegemony of English and English culture; as well, Dr. Han allows codeswitching for the predominantly Chinese students, and they find this to be liberating experience insofar as it represents the legitimation of Asian language and culture and further legitimates the develop hybrid identities. Kelleen mentioned that “having Huamei is such a great opportunity; her familiarity with both sociolinguistics and the cultures of Asia are great assets.”

Kumari Beck has taught ECUC 820, “Contemporary Issues in Curriculum.” In that course, students are offered opportunities to engage with the “big” questions of education: What are its aims? What should we teach? How, then, shall we teach these things? What are the social justice and ethical implications of our aims, and what and how we teach? Students are introduced to an overview of the contemporary history of curriculum development, and are afforded an opportunity to see emerging trends in education and to consider how they might apply the ideas and practices to their own work in language education.

**Coordinator Supervision and Comprehensive Examination**

The program culminates in the student doing a final project consisting of three parts: an academic paper developing a line of inquiry, a learning journey portfolio, and an oral
presentation. Second readers from the faculty at large or instructors in the program examine each candidate. The coordinator acts as the supervisor for the students, monitoring their academic progress throughout the term by liaising with instructors and academic support personnel, and meeting with the students individually as required. Roumi Ilieva was coordinator until 2007, when Bonnie Waterstone assumed that position; Sepideh Fotovatian replaced Bonnie after she retired in 2012. Dr. Naoko Morita joined Bonnie in supervising the comprehensive exams in 2010. The work of supervision of the comprehensive exams is challenging: up to 24 students who have not had undergraduate study in Canada and for whom English is an additional language. Over time, the “comps term” developed into six weekly classes for collective opportunities for students to develop their work, with support of the supervisor; after this period, the students work on their own. The oral presentations are open to all faculty members and usually occur in mid-November.

In reflecting on her experiences with the various courses and instructors, one student concludes:

I especially loved the addition of Dr. Naoko Morita by the end of the program. Her interest area was more multidisciplinary than our other instructors (That was my impression), and was aware of the TESL/TEFL world in both applied linguistics-field and in education. Her assignments pushed me to consider all necessary fields involved in language teaching and learning. It was a step away from the previous course readers, but was a necessary step-back. Honestly, I cannot choose just one instructor to be the most influential: I learned from everyone, including the fieldwork opportunities arranged by Awneet Sivia.
Roumiana Ilieva’s course was tough, because the readings she selected were complex. However, they were all from very influential people from the field, and the experience helped me identify what to read while preparing for my final comps. Bonnie Waterstone’s course and Kumari Beck’s course were also very fruitful, as they introduced me to the idea of identity and understanding the notion of critical thinking.

The First Two Cohorts

Frank Wang recalls the challenges of recruiting the first two cohorts: “I wouldn’t say the first cohort was the best, and some of the students didn’t like it, so they were not the right candidates.” The faculty members had their challenges; Kelleen recalls teaching the first cohort during in the summer of 2006. She laughingly recounts that they were “naughty,” arriving late, talking in class, and they seemed disinterested in the material she was teaching. And while there were a few bright lights, it was a challenging experience; she recalls, for example, that in teaching EDUC 856, “Sociocultural Perspectives on Education and Identity,” students would sometimes struggle in understanding the concepts, and she would struggle in trying to figure out how best to get through to them.

As the program has evolved, our ability to both target students who are suited to the program and to deliver a program that better meets their needs and developmental levels has improved. Bonnie notes that the development of both has been “huge” over the years between 2005 and 2011, from cohort one to cohort seven. The development reflects changing sociocultural and historical contexts.
In 2005, I taught a course where I tried to raise some critical issues about China and there was a lot of difficulty. A sense of patriotism just closed in: “Our country is good; our country is good!” There were some things they could be critical about, and they were used to being critical of the west, but to be critical of their own country—let’s not talk about that…. Now that is changing, which is more encouraging, as things in China are changing a lot…. So I brought up critical issues this time [with cohort seven] as I normally do, and I got a lot of engaged response, a willingness to engage with these issues…. You see the change, you see it happen.

But even in those first two cohorts, as a result of their experiences, students were changed and are now agents of change. Bonnie notes: “We still keep in contact with students from cohorts one and two and they are amazing people who are change agents.”

Because the program is only seventeen months, it is very intensive and the learning curve is a steep one (how many other graduate students in our faculty, even full-time ones, take three courses in a semester?). But in that space of time, significant and transformative learning occurs. As Bonnie continues, it is easier to see the big picture from a certain vantage point:

I think that the coordinator has a different viewpoint…. It is very satisfying as you get to see this incredible learning curve and, yes, you get to see people wake up to ideas, you get to see the development of new identities, of critical consciousness. It is quite amazing, so that is very satisfying.

The Ongoing Program

The program gradually evolved into more or less the current course structure:
Term 1 Summer Session (July – August)

5 week intensive orientation

This intensive orientation helps prepare students for the demands of graduate study, particularly graduate level reading and writing that is required in the program as well as cultural adaptation to Canada.

Term 2 Fall (September - December)

EDUC 835-5 Introduction to Educational Discourses and Practices in North American Contexts

Educational topics and academic and cultural adaptation to graduate study in Canada. Explores key questions in contemporary educational discourses, issues of culture, language and identity, and develops advanced academic literacy through intensive reading and writing.

EDUC 811-5 Fieldwork I (observations in Canadian classrooms)

Graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis.

EDUC 824-5 Seminar in Second Language Teaching

Theories of sentence, discourse, and context in second language education; teaching scientific genres and humanities genres, use of dictionaries and glossaries, use of standardized and alternative forms of assessment.

Term 3 Spring (January - April)

EDUC 820-5 Current Issues in Curriculum and Pedagogy

Focuses on educational issues, trends and practices which impact teaching and learning in schools and other educational settings.
EDUC 856-5  Sociocultural Perspectives on Education and Identity

Course activities will be structured for participants to consider recent formulations of learners as agents as well as subjects of culturally constructed, socially imposed worlds. Participants will examine a number of ethnographic descriptions of the experiences of learners in a variety of communities, noting in particular their use of diverse mediations/tools, including language. Participants will consider these ideas in relation to their own educational communities and develop plans for research activity in those sites.

Term 4 Summer (May - August)

EDUC 812-5  Fieldwork II (further experiences in classrooms)

Graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis.

EDUC 825-5  Second Language Acquisition and Schooling

Academic factors that impact language learning, the universal grammar model of language, speech perception and production in first and second languages.

Term 5 Fall (September - December)

EDUC 883-5  MEd Comprehensive Exam

The Comprehensive Examination in the last term consists of the development and presentation of a project that synthesizes the knowledge and experiences students obtain throughout the program.

The examination is graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis.

In addition to required courses, students may take electives with permission of the instructor, senior supervisor either by auditing or for credit from the following graduate courses with the Faculty of Education:
EDUC 816-5 Developing Educational Programs and Practices for Diverse Educational Settings

Investigates theories and issues associated with developing educational programs and practices in various educational contexts. Addresses the development of new programs and their implementation in schools and other educational settings.

EDUC 823-5 Curriculum and Instruction in an Individual Teaching Specialty

An intensive examination of developments in a curriculum area selected by the student. In addition the course will deal with major philosophical and historical factors that influence the present state and future directions of curriculum and instruction.

EDUC 830-5 Implementation of Educational Programs

Problems and practices associated with innovation and implementation including the nature of change in the educational context, the roles of teachers, administrators, change agents, and evaluators.

EDUC 833-5 Social and Moral Philosophy in Education

An in-depth study of the ethical foundations of education. Areas in education where ethical questions arise are identified and elucidated. Classical and modern moral positions are examined for their adequacy as theories of moral justification. The topics include the value of education, freedom and equality, and moral and values education.

Each cohort is unique and presents unique challenges and opportunities. The coordinator is able to see this more clearly perhaps, having to have an overall view of the program. Bonnie
notes: “And each group has lots of challenges, and the coordinator’s role is really important. This is a very big cohort and some of the issues are quite particular; for example, many are here without family resources, and there are other, similar issues.”

That there are challenges is, of course, no surprise. But the uniqueness also emerges out of rapidly changing international conditions, the emergence of digital, online technologies as powerful cultural and educational forces, and the internal dynamics of developing nations and the shifting balance of power, globally. I recall mentioning to a student in cohort three: “Well, remember Tiananmen Square.” She looked at me quizzically: “Huh? It’s a place? Why should I ‘remember’ it?” I realized that she knew nothing of June 4, 1989; my dilemma was whether to inform her (I chose not to at that moment; a later opportunity presented itself for engaging with that entire cohort on related subjects). But all the Chinese students today know about what happened in Tiananmen Square in 1989; they are also willing to talk about it. Kelleen echoes this experience: “I remember showing a film about Tibet to cohort two, and some of them were insulted that I would show this film, and felt that it probably was not true; now, of course, they know about Tibet.”

As Roumi points out, the coordinator and faculty members try to be aware of changing conditions and respond appropriately in terms of curriculum and pedagogy: “We’re always trying to bring something which we hope will respond and resonate with the new group ....”

The changes through the history of the program have been significant; Kelleen characterizes them as a “real ‘sea change’ kind of thing.” As she mentions, reinforcing an idea elucidated earlier, “We need to understand the kinds of investment they have and bring.”
Recruitment and Admission

Since 2004, there have been trips to China for recruiting and interviewing students; these have been undertaken by Roumi, Ian, Bonnie, Charles, along with Robin Brayne and Catherine Price. The majority of applicants have been and still are from China, recruited through Frank’s agency, CanZhong. Recently, there have been efforts to recruit student from other countries to deepen the breadth of international exposure. The first cohort was all from China and all of Chinese heritage. However, since then, the cohorts, ranging in number from 21 to 24, have had participants from Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Singapore, and Japan. The majority of students come from China and Taiwan. Because of the success of the Short-Term Non-Credit Programs for Korean teachers, we have had some experienced Korean teachers come to the M.Ed. program; they have excelled. Some students apply while they are already in Canada on a student visa; they find the program with its extra supports works best for them.

The application procedure for the program has been unique from the beginning. In addition to the standard requirements for entering graduate study at SFU, applicants must complete an oral interview and a timed essay written at the time of the interview. Interviews are conducted in person or sometimes via Skype or telephone. The application also requires a resume, since teaching experience is seen as an asset. Applicants also need to have required IELTS or TOEFL scores. In the past, we have been able to have “conditional admissions” where experienced teachers of English who had lower language scores could be admitted on the basis of the oral interview and other supporting documents in the file. However, all applicants now must meet minimum language requirements for graduate work at SFU. As Bonnie notes:
This impacts the composition of the cohort: most successful applicants are outstanding students either about to receive or in receipt of an undergraduate degree in language, but with little or no teaching experience.... Unfortunately, we find that those with more teaching experience often do better in the actual course work. Maturity and clear TEFL teaching trajectory are strong indicators of success.

The goal of recruitment and admissions is to have a cohort of 22-24, as the program is designed with that number of students in mind to be able, financially, to offer the additional supports that make the program successful within the scope of its budget and resources.

Selecting more suitable students begins, as mentioned, with the initial interview, carried out either in person or via Skype. That interview plays a major role in the selection process, aside from the language test scores, the overall GPA, and any experiences the student might have had. Roumi points out:

This is a great way to speak with somebody and get to know them better—their values and their maturity level, if you wish—because the thing about the students is that a lot of them from China continue on from a Masters degree to a Ph.D. It is normal for them to do that without any teaching experience and of course it is not the way that we work; we need to make sure that they are open to different perspectives and challenges.

**The Program Development**

As mentioned, the coordinator and faculty team work together to plan upcoming courses based on what has happened previously with a particular cohort. As well, over time there has been
developmental growth in the strength of the students and their work and the effectiveness of the program. Frank Wang notes the difference in the quality of applicants:

The first program was about 18 or 20 and a go ahead, and the second one improved and the third one improved and by the fifth we started to see better and better students and now we are getting experienced teachers and better English—they all are now IELTS 7.0 or TOEFL 90. We getting better because of our reputation and when you have better candidates you bring this programs reputation to a different level.

Bonnie notes how the program changed in response to the needs for a curriculum that addressed student needs:

At first, the program was designed with only the five-week orientations before the September course work began. However, the first cohort taught us that more was needed. By cohort two, academic literacy “workshops” were included in the fall term. These began to take form as a Special Topics course, EDUC 711, “Introduction to Educational Discourses and Practices in the North American Context,” which was seen as an extension to the orientation. However, alongside that first encounter with the expectations of a graduate class, the requirements for in-class discussion, critical reading and writing, and term paper research suddenly became more meaningful. Over the years, EDUC 711 evolved and was finally regularized as a calendar course, EDUC 835, a five-credit course that became core to the curriculum of the program; it was first offered in the fall of 2010.
There were also evolutions at a more overall programmatic level, as Bonnie points out:

Although the program was first set up as a general Curriculum and Instruction M.Ed. and admitted students had various plans for their professional careers, the program changed to a more focused degree with a corresponding name change. It was now called the “International M.Ed. in Teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language.” The change was made partly in response to the demands of teaching English internationally and specifically for a degree in this area: many tertiary level teachers of English in other countries did not have graduate degrees. Also, having a more focused degree helped in creating a more coherent program, with each term’s coursework building on the previous term to culminate in a substantial body of theoretical and practical knowledge in the field.

Candidates and their parents are aware of SFU’s reputation and rankings. As the program has evolved and improved, the reputation of the program has increased. Most applicants in China are aware of the program’s national and international reputation. Word of mouth plays a significant role in China and Korea; a number of recent applicants have mentioned they knew students who had been enrolled in the program.

Students’ expectations and goals of what they wish to achieve are also changing. Both developmentally over the years and in each cohort as it progresses through the program, there is a shift in perceptions of what is important. Roumi touches on this change over the years in her fascinating interviews with alumni in China:
I know that they are facing many challenges because one of my research projects was interviewing graduates of the program who are back in China teaching: what did they find relevant in what they were learning here, and what were the kinds of challenges did they face? The interesting thing is that when they are here initially they wanted tech things—“We want to know what and how to do things in the classroom.”

And we respond “No, no, no! Graduate work is not about that, graduate work is about thinking about big ideas, envisioning what education is, and these kinds of things. And so at this point they are a little bit sceptical. But they go back to China and I ask them “What is it that you have learnt that you have brought back to China?” and they say it is really the philosophy, my teaching philosophy has been shaped in the program.

One of the students recalls:

What surprised me the most was how “un-technical” our program was. At first I was expecting a more direct approach to how to teach, just as the TESOL program I had attended in 2000. However, the program kept on asking me think about what I was doing as a teacher, and what a language teacher was.

Interestingly, in the program the students study Alastair Pennycook’s (1989) critique of “Method” in his now-classic paper “The Concept of Method, Interested Knowledge, and the Politics of Language.” They learn that language represents power and that it is a site of political struggle. Furthermore, they see that the obsession over a “correct,” or “perfect” Method is
actually a product of scientism, and that Methods reflect cultural and historical forces and biases.

A clearer understanding of the situation, then, suggests that teachers make a whole series of decisions about teaching based on their own educational experiences, their personalities, their particular institutional, social, cultural, and political circumstances, their understanding of their particular students’ collective and individual needs, their knowledge of language and language learning, and so on. Any relationship between these decisions and theories about pedagogy and language learning are highly complex and need to be studied without the use of a priori categories, especially when those categories are as clumsy and unspecific as are methods. As any teacher who has taught through any of the alleged upheavals over Method can testify, there is a remarkable disparity between, on the one hand, the dictates of “experts” and teaching textbooks, and on the other, actual classroom practice. (p. 606)

A student from cohort one points not only to moving beyond Method, but also attests to the reflective work demanded of her; here we see the development of educational praxis:

When I first started the program, I just hoped to learn some useful teaching techniques and strategies that I could use in my future teaching career. But after reading works of educators like Parker Palmer and working with the teachers in my faculty and my fieldwork, I am realizing more and more that at every level of education, techniques are not by themselves sufficient and knowing myself as a person is crucial to good teaching. This realization makes me see the importance
of gaining self-knowledge as a teacher, of reflecting on my backgrounds and experiences that have made me who I am today and influenced my philosophy of teaching.

When Roumi asks them if they feel that anything they learned is irrelevant, they respond in the negative, adding: “It’s not anything about techniques that stays with me; it’s the kind of vision or understanding that, for example, I have to be taking into account my students’ needs, I really have to go beyond the textbook.” Roumi adds that some of the practices they engage in here—group work, for example—may not be applicable to their immediate teaching circumstances, but that when they can try to make a difference, they will try. “The interesting thing is that some of them are really excellent in trying to motivate things that work in their environment.”

Having said that, she recognizes that some of the alumni who are teaching English in public or private schools or in postsecondary institutions have significant challenges in coping with systems that are rigidly codified. But that is not the end of the story.

I interviewed a few people who had taught for about a year since graduating and then I was able to interview them later on so I had a bit of a longitudinal perspective on what is happening. Out of the three, one was really feeling “I don’t think I can do this because it is fighting against the system … I am trying to adapt to what [my students] need in this context.” The other two are really very much continuing on with their ideas and making changes at an administrative level. One, for example, brought some new understandings about negotiated curriculum to her university colleagues…. I would say these two are doing pretty
well in terms of negotiating their own understandings, and even the other one is not giving up entirely, but is having challenges.

Roumi also points to the students’ sense of social activism. The major earthquake in Szechuan Province occurred while cohort four was studying here. Bonnie helped the students initiate a campaign of support for the people of Szechuan; one of the students, upon returning to China, got involved in relief work in the province. Roumi points out: “I believe that in a way we are bringing this social justice perspective to them and they are picking it up and in the process they are able to find the spaces within their own environments where they are able to advocate.”

Frank suggests that about half of the students return to their home countries, while Roumi feels that probably more than half return with about 30-40% trying to stay in Canada and get landed immigrant status.

**Program Strengths; Student Strengths**

Those who we interviewed noted several program strengths. Good pedagogical practice was highlighted more than once. When asked whether the instructor takes on a role similar to that of a social worker, Roumi’s response was clear:

Oh yeah. Partly, it’s what a good teacher should do. I don’t mean taking on extra. Rather, it’s finding the times when you have to sit down and chat; sometimes you have to go and have coffee and other times you have to be a very good instructor, a sensitive communicator. I don’t think this is something I lay on the students or expect but I will show this as being really important, so that when they have the August orientation program, that month before they start regularly
classes, we spend that month engaging in these humanistic, interactive communications and counselling-type work.

When asked if she thought we were really doing good for the students rather than acting as agents for subtle forms of western colonialism and hegemony, Roumi was again emphatic: we are serving these students well. In the face of questions of whether the program should continue, she felt the program had demonstrated its strengths and would continue. Yes, she agreed, our constructivist and critical pedagogy approaches are in some ways very western, but they are applied in attempts to develop understanding; Roumi argues that these efforts represent “A vision of engaging with people coming from a different place, very different, and trying to negotiate understanding.”

As well, she felt that the ideals and practices of critical thinking and critical pedagogy (and, the latter, it should be remembered, emerged out of Brazil and so does not represent what we classically refer to as “western”). For students who have been indoctrinated to accept what they learn in what Freire (2006) refers to as “banking education,” critical approaches are beneficial. Ian Andrews feels we do change their epistemologies and ways of thinking through our pedagogical and curricular approaches.

Kelleen recounts her experiences in being a reader for the Comprehensive Exams:

The more experience we have with this, the more impressed I am with the students, and the more impressed I am with the teaching [we] are doing. I deal with the comps presentations and they are amazing! I am blown away by how good their work is. It’s not necessarily the English, although the English is great, but the conceptual depth—it is really good.
Students come away with a very solid understanding of the politics of English language teaching in the world, and they may not have gotten a pedagogical kit to take away but they certainly have a rich and nuanced understanding of what one is doing when teaching English.

She goes on to address the struggles they face in trying to apply what they have learned in different cultural contexts:

They really struggle with how they can apply these ideas and approaches on a classroom with 60 students—“How can I apply some of this in a really different sociocultural system?” They understand why it is hard and that it’s not just putting students in groups but having the resources to allow that work in groups to be helpful—having enough books and other resources.

It was interesting to me to see how they were quite aware of resource differences between rural and urban schools in China, for example, and this was a way of understanding what was going on for children who were disadvantaged.

She concludes her remarks on the strengths and effectiveness of the program by declaring how proud she is of SFU and the Faculty of Education that

... we have developed such a great program; we have been blessed by having people who were committed, conscientious, and had a particular ethical and moral view on language learning.

I think it’s a really good program; the Masters [degrees] that they get are well deserved. Because of the number of people they encounter in the program and the help and support that they get, a lot of their comps are better than the comps
I mark for the students in other programs, who are studying part-time and who have fewer supports for them. So if one wanted to look at an ideal program, there are a lot of lessons from this one to learn about effective graduate education for anybody.

Bonnie shares her memories of serving, after Roumi, as program coordinator:

I started as coordinator in September 2007. So first I can say, yes, it’s very satisfying and, yes, part of it is you get to see this incredible learning curve and, yes, you get to see people wake up to new ideas, you get to see the development of new identities of change and critical consciousness. It is quite amazing, so that is very satisfying.

There are also the considerable challenges.

There are lots of challenges. And the students: each new group has lots of challenges, and the coordinator plays a really important role. I think people don’t realize how big a role it is. These are bigger cohorts, so the numbers are big, so some of the issues are quite particular because students are here without family resources. Even though they have their own family and their kids here they don’t have any other family support here. Their husbands aren’t here or their partners aren’t here, if they have partners,

**Hybridity and Third Space**

Ian points out that continuing to learn the language in a western culture changes their ways of thinking and seeing the world. They indeed become hybrids who can live and work in a dynamic third space of possibilities, uncertainties, flux and change (Bhabha, 1994; Rutherford,
1990; Wang, 2004). They are expert in adapting. I will sometimes semi-jokingly suggest to other faculty members that we apply to study in a graduate program in Beijing or Seoul or Tokyo, studying in the native language, and live and work there, leaving our families behind or bringing them with us and trying to support them. The shocked expressions convey their newfound understanding of the enormous challenges faced by these students and their strengths in successfully navigating their ways through a demanding Masters program.

One cohort three student, now teaching at a Project 211 university in China, writes:

My way of understanding myself, education and the world were totally “ruined” after this program study. The knowledge created among peers and instructors via seminars and academic reading made me become a NEW [self].”

This is a very significant remark. I would suggest the program and the students’ experiences within it are often transformative; that is, there are significant ontological and epistemological transformations that students undergo. The significant transformations these students experience and the ability to develop and work from hybrid positions. It is not simply that they wholly accept western values and epistemologies; rather, it is a process of hybridization wherein they at the very least have the potential of living and working in a third space. Roumi writes:

It is my hope that this search for a Third Space in the relationships I attempt to build with the students would allow more students to echo what a lonely student seemed to imply in her letter of intent when suggesting that her goal with this program is to follow a Chinese saying to “Make foreign things serve China” in her future use of the knowledge gained through the program. This intent expresses, in
my view, a willingness to search for a Third Space rather than uncritically accept what Western educational perspectives have to offer. (Beck, Ilieva, Scholefield, Waterstone, 2007)

These experiences in the program can develop educators who have the potential of being transformative leaders. Carolyn Shields (2011) describes transformative leadership as:

- Acknowledging power and privilege
- Acknowledging and considering individual and collective purposes
- Deconstructing sociocultural knowledge frameworks
- Balancing critique and promise
- Effecting deep and equitable social change
- Working towards transformation—liberation and emancipation from oppression, democracy, equity
- Demonstrating moral courage, activism, vision. (p. 5)

In my experience with the students in the program, I see all of these dimensions addressed, and the students engage with the work of scholars—either in readings or with them in the classroom—committed to these areas of research, inquiry, and action.

As Ilieva (2010) argues, it is important that students not unquestioningly accept the privileged discourses of the west; the creation of classroom climates where discourses themselves are negotiated allows the development of a dynamic third space. The students frequently come to the program with a desire to make a contribution and a change in the lives of students. This desire gains strength and becomes critically informed; students are uniquely empowered but, as
Ilieva maintains, *within the situatedness of their own sociocultural and historical contexts*. It is within these contexts that hybridity exists and has the potential to effect change.

**Alumni Making a Difference**

In our interviews and conversations with alumni, particularly those who return to their home countries, Roumi, Bonnie, and I have noticed that the students feel they are making a difference; they see themselves as change agents. A number of alumni are teaching at language institutes or in universities in countries such as China, Korea, Thailand, Libya, Taiwan, and other countries. Bonnie notes: “They are just amazing people and they are being change agents.... There is a little bit of uncertainty in class—‘Can we really do this?—but you see the change, you see it happen.” I have certainly seen it happen. I have listened to their stories. I have seen how impressed Frank Wang is when he meets the Chinese alumni in China as they volunteer their time to translate and greet new applicants.

**Research**

Of course, one of the primary functions of the university is engaging in research. Faculty members involved in the program do engage in research related to language and language education; some of that research has been undertaken in attempts to shed light on the TEFL program itself. The following are some of the scholarly publications that have emerged out of research into the TEFL program:


http://www.uwstout.edu/soe/jaacs/vol3.html


Ilieva, R. & Waterstone, B. (under review). Curriculum discourses within a TESOL program for international students: Affording possibilities for academic and professional identities.

Conference presentations include the following:


This latter presentation includes two alumni of the program and was given at one of the most prestigious conferences in applied linguistics.

**Five Factors that Make a Difference**

**A. An overall vision**
The program was developed out of a vision of what is possible for international education in our faculty. That vision reflects ideas about inclusion, diversity, and “engaging with the world” that are expressed both in our faculty mission statement and three-year plan and in the overall aims of the university as expressed by SFU President Andrew Petter. It is a vision that is based on a win-win-win perspective: the students benefit from their education here, those who work with the students benefit from learning with and from them, the university benefits culturally and economically, and having the students here means China and the other nations from which the students come benefit from the quality education they receive.

B. Excellent coordination

Roumi Ilieva, Bonnie Waterstone, and now Sepideh Fotovatian do and have done an excellent job of coordinating the program, planning the scheduling of courses, being responsive by attending to the many and various needs of the students. The program has a well-integrated design and structure from the opening five-week orientation to the implementation and completion of the comprehensive exams. Moreover, the coordinators have developed and worked from a well-considered educational philosophy which includes but is not limited to (a) a balanced and comprehensive education and (b) the sociocultural orientation to language learning.

C. Close collaboration and teamwork

The coordinators have worked hard to ensure that there is very close collaboration between faculty members, staff, cultural assistants, and academic support helpers. There are regular meetings and everyone is kept informed; decisions are made through consultation with all
parties. One of the keys here is that the collaboration exists among all those who are involved with the program.

D. Good cultural and academic support

Recent alumni serve as cultural assistants, working closely with the coordinator and the students, providing assistance in everything from meeting students when they first arrive, providing ongoing emotional support and friendship, and organizing and implementing cultural events. Assistance with academic writing is also provided, including helping students with topic selection, and the organization, outlining, and writing of essays; doing such work is ideally situated within a context of working with the student to deepen understandings of what is important and meaningful to them about language learning and teaching.

E. Great students

Last, but perhaps most important to the success of the program are the students themselves. By and large, the students who come to the program have a strong work ethic. Their educational backgrounds from serve them in absorbing a lot of material. As Kelleen Toohey once pointed out to me, they already have and bring with them critical thinking skills that the program allows them to develop further, and most of them are successfully able to make the transition to a western-style university education with its focus on critical thinking. By the end of the program, many of them are writing comprehensive exam essays that are on par with and sometimes are even exceeding the standards we expect of our Masters Programs students. That they are able to achieve this in 16 months is highly significant, bordering on the remarkable, and is a testament to the students’ hard work, pluck, and adaptability and the excellence of the
program design and implementation. Their success is also made possible because of the recognition and legitimation of their intellectual, social, cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991).

**Win-Win-Win**

It bears repeating that the benefits accrue to students, universities, and countries. Frank points out:

> Now we see that maybe half go back to China half spend some time here, maybe ten years, and then some of them still go back to China. So in the long run it is a win, win, win situation. It's a win for SFU, Canada, and a win for students. They enter this program, they have their career paths, and they get decent jobs, and we see where they are moving on. It is a win for China, too, they do have TEFL programs in China, too, and they may not be able to deliver such a solid program, so in the long run China will benefit from having many TESL experts who were trained and educated in Canada. So it's beneficial for both countries' relationship—those people could be quite influential if we are looking ahead in the next 20 years.

Frank speaks from the heart of his many years' experience with Chinese students. One student from cohort one writes:

> I used to always complain that the educational system in China is too centralized and that as teachers we could hardly make any difference no matter how good our intentions or ideas are. My learning experience and fieldwork in Canada has made me realize that as teachers, we indeed can make a difference in students' lives and instead of dwelling on the problems that I have seen and
feeling overwhelmed, maybe I should try to be the one to start the change that I want to see in education in China. I agree with one of my instructors that I am actually already beginning to start that change through developing my philosophy of teaching.

This is just one example of how my experience in this international program has enhanced my personal and professional growth, as well as, made an impact on my understanding of education. I’ve gained more than just “big ideas” from this experience, I now think more critically about different strategies, models, and educational systems, and had the chance to witness the art of teaching demonstrated by many devoted and experienced teachers.

This program can serve as a model of how to engage in international education, not only for our faculty but also for the entire university; other program areas in our faculty and across the university can learn from our experiences how they can provide good, meaningful educational experiences to their international students. One of the key factors that emerges in conversations repeatedly is the relationship between students and instructors and others with whom they come in contact. Catherine Price point out:

I believe that the important part of any international program of any kind—not just masters, undergraduate, doctorate—is that you actually have to engage students and learn from this incrementally. It’s not a matter of there a sense testing your theories, but you have to learn from the students in conjunction with students.
A significant point can be made with regard to the quality of relationships and how this relates to critical thinking. Freire (2006) defines critical thinking as:

… thinking that discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them—thinking that perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity …. (p. 92)

Another salient point might be made with regard to our aims. Freire (2006) adds that the kind of critical education we wish to provide, one rooted in a critical pedagogy and a critical engagement with others and with the world, “affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (p. 84). This orientation recognizes the necessity of engaging the whole student in inquiries about language and its connections to the student’s life, and to the social, cultural, economic, political, and historical realities that surround that life and make demands on it.

**Additional Student Comments**

When asked if she would recommend the program to someone else, one alumnus with some teaching experience before the program and considerable teaching experience since graduating writes:

I would definitely recommend to a friend who had taught for more than 5 years, or at least 3 years. This program seems to complex for beginning teachers, or people who expect to get right into teaching after this degree. Without teaching experience prior to the program, it would be difficult for future students to think as a teacher (and many of our cohort members were told to STOP thinking as learners).
Her comments for prospective students:

People who do not know the program may think this program offers “easy access to a M.Ed. Degree. As an alumnus, I can confidently say, “NO.” It was guided, and students did not have a lot of free choices in selecting courses, but it certainly was not easy. For future students who are interested in this program, I would advise them to get ready for one of the toughest yet memorable challenges of their lives. It is a process of transformation—of ways of thinking, views, and values: And transformation cannot be done easily; it comes with a price (effort)!

Another alumnus mentions that she liked the balance of “kind” and “rigorous” instructors:

It really takes time to fit into Canadian teaching methods with different instructors. But I like these either kind or strict rigorous instructors in this program. As an international student without too much academic background, I need encouragement from these kind people. I also need academic training from those rigorous ones.

The Future: Suggestions

Alumni Relations

Bonnie, Roumi, and Kelleen have managed to keep in touch with alumni over the years and have also been able to visit some during their visits to China. During my recruiting trips in the past three years, I have also been able to contact and meet a number of Chinese alumni. Catherine Price is undertaking further efforts to update alumni listings and establish more regularized contact with them. Ian notes:
Actually between Bonnie, Roumi, me, and one of our assistants Jane Pan, we all
do our best to keep in touch with them. And what I personally do by the way,
and I think Bonnie and Roumi also do this, whenever students are in town, they
arrange to meet with other instructors so we catch up. We also have these
cultural assistants who work with each cohort, and part of their job is to keep in
touch with the previous years and also the current year. So that helps, too. We
don’t have as much hard stats as we should have but that is always again part of
the issue of collecting them and keeping them and storing them.

Upgrading and improving alumni contact information would be beneficial; alumni can offer
valuable information from their work experience about what is valuable for current students,
how work conditions are changing, and the trends they are noticing. They might also serve as
sources for recruiting new students.

It might be beneficial to develop a database of all the universities and language programs
from which the M.Ed. TESL students have come. We could work in alliance with Frank Wang
and the CanZhong agency in targeting specific universities and programs with email
announcements and/or visits when we visit China or other countries.

Frank Wang notes that he now has partner agencies in South Korea and in Dubai, UAE.
This might prove useful in our efforts to diversify the cohorts by recruiting from other
countries. Catherine Price is actively involved in such diversification efforts, seeking out new
agencies and alliances which might prove beneficial in this regard.

Alumni can also serve a valuable function in providing information for current students.
Ian recounts a conversation he had with one student who had left her family to study here in
the TEFSL program. In his recounting, we can see both how ongoing support is provided and how alumni’s stories about their work experiences can prove valuable:

I was meeting with one of our graduates; she was in town for about two weeks.

She was a very strong student, so then I said to her at the weekend, “How are you doing? What are your future plans?” She had this view of what she was going to do and I said to her in fact, “I think this is the kind of story that you have experienced that you have to share with future students who come to this faculty to our graduate program, to our TESOL program, most importantly you have to show that we continue to support you after you graduate.

Teaching Experience

A suggestion for improvement I have heard more than any other from students from almost every comment, including a large group of the members of one of the recent cohorts, is offering some teaching opportunities, so they can gain teaching experience. Rhonda Phillpot does an exemplary job in finding opportunities for students to observe language classrooms, from primary school to university settings, and there are even some limited opportunities for teaching lessons. There are obvious limitations for teaching opportunities; for example, students are not able to teach in the public education system without being provincially certified. It is also the case that the program is not designed as an opportunity for teacher training. However, a recent initiative undertaken by one of the students from cohort seven might bear consideration. She worked out an arrangement with the Chinese Students Association (CSA) on campus for her and some of her fellow cohort members to help new Chinese students with their English. Although there were challenges with this arrangement, there were also some
promising results. She feels that initiative is worth carrying forward, and the CSA is also still interested. This could provide a win-win situation where the TEFSL students get some experience and the Chinese students receive assistance in their English learning. If carried forward, such an initiative would need input on curriculum development, effective pedagogical practice, but students could work on understanding the theory of both these and then attempting to put them into practice. One alumnus mentioned how she found RA work and the volunteer teaching experiences she had made a significant difference in boosting her self-confidence.

**Conclusion**

In their oft-cited work on language teaching and learning, Bonny Norton and Kelleen Toohey (2001, 2011) point to the reality that language teaching and learning exist in and can be a part of social change. In their 2011 “State of the Art” review of the language teaching and learning field, they write “No longer are static views of language as system and language learning as internalization of that system seen as adequate in a world in which boundary-crossing, multilingualism, and human agency are recognized” (p. 436). They add that understandings of difference, global dynamics, and cosmopolitan identities will be required by those in the field. The students live in globalized worlds and struggle in creating, maintaining, and working and through third spaces not readily understood by those used to more fixed, modernist approaches (alas, still too common today!). This program recognizes these needs and strives to enact the curricular and pedagogical responses that emerge from recognition of these intersecting realities.

The authors cite Alastair Pennycook’s work in concluding that
…there are critical moments in language teacher education that can provide opportunities for student teachers to situate their own and their students’ lives and concerns in recognition of power and authority in the wider society, and to understand how their teaching might be directed toward social and educational change. (p. 437)

There is the need to recognize that the students are multilingual and multicompotent (Cook, 2002). Huamei Han (2009) writes

The issue of supporting minority learners in and beyond classrooms leads us right back to the issue that mainstream institutions must systematically recognize, value, and incorporate the multilingual and multicultural realities minority immigrants and their children live on daily basis. Monolingual bias toward minority groups in the form of devaluing their multilingual resources permeates public policies and everyday practices in the domain of immigration, settlement, education, and employment. Each and every individual and institution has the responsibility and capacity to induct newcomers into their host society; denying such responsibility and capacity is at the root of immigrants’ language problem. (p. 664)

Her words, although addressing the issues facing immigrants, are equally applicable to a program such as this one, which seeks to support these minority learners academically, emotionally, and culturally. She challenges us to recognize the power dynamics and the responsibilities that emerge from those.
Beck, Ilieva, Scholefield, and Waterstone (2007) remind us of an important point, one that is increasingly relevant as our university and faculty engage with international students:

... we need to re-think higher education and academic literacy not in terms of skills and effectiveness but rather at the level of epistemology, identity and power: What counts as knowledge? Who decides? How is the self and agency constituted in academic reading/writing practices? How does the academy present its activities as neutral and given rather than partial and ideological, particularly in requirements for and assessment of writing? This interrogation goes to the core of how the academy defines itself.

They add that this program can represent a site for “unsettling normative discourses,” for creating opportunities for “spaces outside formal discourse,” for “fissures to open and allow ‘flows’ to move in unpredictable paths.” They also add that working in the interstices of a third space is sometimes a “tortuous, perilous stumbling in the dark,” and that it is not easy both to represent the university’s practices while also aiming to allow them to be subverted, all the while trying to embody an ethical practice.

It has certainly been my experience that the TEFSL program allows these opportunities; just as much, it has been my experience that the majority of students who have gone through the program have contributed to the creation of these spaces and fissures, have challenged us delightfully and unpredictably, have demonstrated their academic and cultural genius through various forms of hybridity that sometimes go unnoticed, have helped transform us as they embody what Freire called the “student-teacher” contradiction in their engagements with us.
References


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