

When commitments to  
“inclusivity” and “good  
intentions” are not enough

Ena Lee (ena@sfu.ca)

Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University

“What educators do *not* do is as instructive as what they do . . . what educators communicate indirectly and often unintentionally through silence, inaction, gestures, casual conversation, and so forth is arguably more educationally significant than what they intend to and try to teach.”

(Kumashiro, 2002, p. 82)

# “inclusivity” ≠ “inclusive education” ≠ “radical inclusive education”

- from [www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)
  - inclusivity (noun) – the practice or policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who have physical or mental disabilities and members of minority groups

- “inclusive education”:
  - students w/disabilities (“special needs education”); social and academic inclusion; policies, strategies, processes, actions (Moriña, 2017)
- “radical inclusive education” (Greenstein (2015):
  - neo-liberal appropriation of “inclusive education” (Dunne, 2009; Portelli & Koneeny, 2018)
  - reframing “disability”, inclusion, and difference: normalization of being, behaviour, & embodiment
  - community & interdependence; reciprocity

# “inclusivity” – access = exclusion

- **the research:**

- language facilitates access to language learning communities/opportunities
  - i.e., we learn language through language, so the more language we are able to use proficiently, the more language we are able to potentially learn

- **thus, the paradox:**

- EAL learners face barriers to accessing language learning opportunities due to (socio-)linguistic challenges...
- ...but difficulty accessing language learning opportunities exacerbates already-existing linguistic challenges (i.e., fewer chances to access → fewer chances to learn and improve, which would assist in the gaining of access)...
- ...which then/thus further reproduces EAL learners' exclusion and marginalization from the learning community and learning opportunities.

# “inclusivity” is not enough

- learning is not exclusively a cognitive activity nor process
- creating language learning opportunities, alone, is insufficient; equally fundamental is a learner's ability to gain access to these language learning opportunities

“The interpersonal relations generated between teachers and students are not simply a context for language learning. At times, they are texts themselves, indivisible from the meanings produced through schooling.”

(Varghese et al., 2005, p. 34)

# “socioacademic relationships” → “schooltalk”

- socioacademic relationships: “a category of social interaction with peers and with faculty that proved to be critical to the students’ sense of satisfaction with their educational work and sometimes even to the possibility of doing that work.” (Leki, 2007, p. 14)
- “schooltalk” (Pollock, 2017) - the talk through which socioacademic relationships are shaped and negotiated
  - why “schooltalk”?
    - “Because everyone talks.” (p. 2)
    - “every word we say, or don’t say, about young people in schools has consequences for how young people are treated.” (p. 15)

# “socioacademic relationships” → “schooltalk”

- examples of “schooltalk” → educational labels (constructed through policy, assessment, programming, curricular, etc. discourses)
  - “at risk”, “special needs”, “honours”, “level 1”, “mainstream”, “on track”, “remedial”, “under-achieving”
  - “individual differences”: “attitude”, “intelligence”, “aptitude”, “learning style”
- discourse as reflective of--but, rather, is *constitutive* of--reality
  - discourse as social practice: identity constructed in and through discourse, and discursive practices situated within unequal relations of power
  - complex nexus of competing discourses intertwine within this identity construction/production process: student discourse, teacher discourse, institutional discourse, societal discourse, governmental discourse, global discourse

# “hidden” identities

schooltalk is often shaped by identities that are perceived via external, “observable” markers

BUT: how might/can identities also become “hidden”?  
(Vandrick, 1997)

- unmarked (vs. marked) = normative/status quo
- “passing”: LGBTQ+, ethnic or religious minorities, (dis)ability, illness, social class, survivor of violence

# “hidden” identities

- identities can be hidden consciously as a strategy/performance, but, is this a free-will, uncomplicated choice/decision?
  - implications of revelation and making hidden identities “un-hidden”
  - the symbolic violence of “doing” or performing particular identities
- hidden identities are often magnified in inherently disempowered spaces
  - e.g., “remedial” classes, EAL classroom, “Special Ed” (all with their own attendant stereotypes, assumptions, stigmas, and identity discourses)
- hidden identities are influenced by and reflective of the allowable/not allowable discourses of the classroom (e.g., “tellable stories” – “culture” as a proxy for race)

schooltalk is often shaped by identities that are perceived via external, “observable” markers

# educational ecologies: creating equitable teaching & learning communities

- positive educational ecologies analyze and/to understand barriers to success and impacts on learning and learners
- equitable multilingual educational ecologies:
  1. recognize EAL students as valuable and contributive members of the learning community
  2. understand that academic success is not just about “good grammar”

# recognize EAL students as valuable and contributive members of the learning community

- humanize students through self-introduction (verbal) and/or student information forms
  - offers insights into: (multilingual) language use, background knowledge and experience, possible concerns students may have
  - provides opportunity to (publicly) recognize and legitimize aspects of student identities that often go unnoticed/remain hidden (e.g., talents/abilities vs. “deficiencies” and stereotypes/assumptions)
  - acknowledge and affirm learners' contributions to the learning community using names (pronounced correctly!) and stating and/or describing explicitly the contribution
    - names (and the act of naming) as power/powerful (recognition, misrecognition, erasure, inclusion, belonging) (cf. “my name, my identity” campaign [<https://www.mynamemyidentity.org/>]: Santa Clara County Office of Education, National Association for Bilingual Education [NABE], McGraw-Hill Education)

# recognize EAL students as valuable and contributive members of the learning community (cont.)

- avoid creating dichotomy (“othering”) of “EAL”/“non-EAL” student or “Native”/“Non-native” students (equal membership of all in the learning community)
  - avoid making assumptions about a student’s cultural, linguistic, social, etc. affiliation and/or difference
  - minimize pop culture references, idioms, slangs (cf. Duff, 2002; Norton, 2000)
    - try to use sparingly and only if relevant to the moment (and, if so, plan additional time to explain these to students at the time of use)

# recognize EAL students as valuable and contributive members of the learning community (cont.)

- problematizing academic institutions as regulatory spaces of language use and language learning (Heller, 2006)
  - “Standard English”, monolingualism/linguistic containment, “well-writtenness” (Turner, 2018)
  - welcome multilingualism in classroom practice
    - requires explicit discussion, direction, and facilitation from instructor:
      - rationale – benefits to learning and diversity in schools, recognition of ability, and support from research contesting myth of “English Only”
      - strategies for integration of multilingualism based on respect for and responsibilities to classroom community

# understand that academic success is not just about “good grammar”

- “commonsense” teaching belief: reading and writing as default focus
- yes, to varying degrees and depending on the EAL learner/user, academic success and inclusion in and access to language learning communities and opportunities is impacted (sometimes significantly) by weak grammar

## HOWEVER:

- *all* students benefit from mentorship into disciplinary fields
  - “Biology as a second language”, “Economics as a second language”
  - genre and lexicogrammatical aspects
- language use is contextual (social, historical, cultural)

# understand that academic success is not just about “good grammar” (cont.)

- share responsibility of regular “check-in”
  - comment cards at the end of each class to illuminate questions, concerns, levels of understanding
  - open, available, and empathetic communication (e.g., email, “genuine” office hours) that recognize and do not minimize barriers to access
  - requiring student response to instructor feedback (can be short and informal, even just to confirm receipt and understanding)

# understand that academic success is not just about “good grammar” (cont.)

- recognize possibility of co-occurring (and non-linguistic) barriers impacting educational success (e.g., institutional, cultural, financial, health & wellness) (Kanno & Cromley, 2013)
  - on course outline or Canvas site, clearly list SFU student resources and open yourself to discussions about these resources
    - seek to mitigate and/or remove barriers to access (e.g., explaining where they are located, the role/responsibility of a resource, socializing/familiarizing students to the resource, etc.)

# problematizing “good intentions”: shifting consciousness from intent → impact/effect

- Kumashiro (2004) calls for the need to embrace uncertainty in educational practices as we can never predict the outcome nor consequences of any teaching or learning act. To teach as if we *can* predict such things fails to recognize the complexities and dynamics of interrelations between teacher and student or student and student.
  - students learn from what we say *and* do not say / do *and* do not do
  - all knowledge is “interested”; all education as “interested”

“[Anti-oppressive teacher education] involves learning to teach intentionally while learning to recognize the hidden ways we often teach unintentionally.”

(Kumashiro, 2002, p. 84)

# Thank you!

Questions, comments, concerns, ruminations?

Ena Lee  
ena@sfu.ca