

Bringing difference to using-learning

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When Noel invited me to edit this issue and I read the following articles, two thoughts came to me: China and the English language; and transnational communication. There is talk of China becoming the world's largest English language population, which Yang (2006)¹ contextualises by alerting us to differences between 'users and learners'. He notes that nativization of English requires performance of four functions: the instrumental, the regulative, the interpersonal, and the imaginative/innovative, and adds:

For English to perform any such functions, there needs to be a large number of proficient bilingual users of the language – which seems not to be the case in China, where English is primarily learned in the classroom as a foreign language. This means that college graduates should have learned the most English, but some constraining factors have prevented the majority of them from obtaining an advanced level of proficiency. (p. 3)

In Australia, where 150,000 Chinese students represent sixty percent of the international student cohort², this learner/user difference and 'level of proficiency' is a challenge not only for students. For higher education curricularists it brings a challenge to consider ways towards bridging difference in learning-using English for many students with less-than-advanced proficiency.

Alongside this first thought, I have become interested in the recently announced Apple iPad, which I have no difficulty in seeing another generation learning with and using as a 'post-keyboard' utility for transnational communication. As the iPad is foreshadowing an increasing evolution of hand-gestural tools in its use, similarly using gestures to facilitate transnational language learning-using hardly seems far-fetched, especially for such gestural calligraphic languages as Chinese.

With the articles that follow I attempted to foster my thoughts about bridging difference by reading these texts in the author's personal idiomatic context and not rewriting expressions that read 'differently'. My view of the current widespread outrage at purported poor literacy is to think beyond the rules that delineate what is 'poor' or 'proper' and work towards 'finding'³ otherwise. Doing this caused me to wonder how each of the authors would regard the two others' texts. With Noel's agreement I sent the following message:

We very much like your submission. Having looked at what we have in hand, we think that your article, together with two others would work well together, so we are sending each of you the others' papers for you to respond to - not to 'review' them, but just to

¹ Yang, J. (2006) Learners and users of English in China. *English Today*. 22(2) 3-10.

² Asian Correspondent. (2010). Education: Australia, China look to the future.
<http://us.asiancorrespondent.com/australiatop10/education-australia-china-look-to-the-future>

³ In the sense that Hongyu prefers in this volume, where 'seeking means: to have a goal; but finding means: to be free, to be receptive, to have no goal'

engage them in a bit of conversation. We are very keen to promote multiple conversations rather than ‘editorialising’ and this seems an excellent opportunity to experiment. We do hope you agree.

What proved interesting was how this suggestion to ‘respond’ was interpreted. Hongyu and Nicholas each generated a separate text – which is what I expected – but Jie chose another way. She incorporated her response into her original text and generated another Zen journey iteration with additions and ‘foot-notes’ referring to the other authors. So we see the conversations move not only between and across the texts but also within.

I attended a seminar recently where an interdisciplinary group of academics, interested in the scholarship of teaching and learning, discussed conceptions of teaching. After explaining that conceptions encourage reflection and contrast with observations, the question was asked: Where are conceptions taking teaching practice? My response resonates with a comment I heard about the forthcoming Apple iPad, which advised those who wondered what it was for to give it to their children and watch what they do with it. Conceptions, whether they are about teaching or learning or iPads, are not so much about determining what for, but more about findings for doing.

In this issue you will learn of findings about a curriculum of hospitality, curriculum as a Zen journey and an intercultural curriculum. More significantly, for me, you will learn about these matters through the conversations of scholars who bring quite a different culture and voice to readers of, and thinkers in, English. I recommend finding the differences these texts bring: like watching children using-learning with iPads, there is always-already learning happening.

Author

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