"I put myself in my parents' shoes": Dignity and dehumanization in EAL classrooms

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Abstract: This case study account documents and analyses the teaching experiences of Steven (name has been changed) – a southeast Asian man who taught English as an Additional Language in a Western Canadian province. The theoretical framework draws from Anthias' (2008) notion of intersectionality, which views identity and belonging as multifaceted and complex. Academic writings on language learning and identity as well as language learning policy are used to ground the personal narrative. This article critiques the prescribed nature of language learning courses used in the initial stages of settlement and integration. It offers suggestions to reshape language teaching practices and curricula for new immigrants and refugees to Canada. The conclusions drawn contribute to our understanding of the experiences of language teaching from a marginalized perspective.

Keywords: Critical Pedagogy, Language Learning, EAL, Equity, Education

Introduction

" I remember teaching someone how to mop... teaching my class how to mop"! This was the description of Steven,[1] a teacher who found himself positioned as a child of former refugees, now teaching a class for recent newcomers in a rural area in Western Canada. Steven describes:

> This is the word cleaner. Pour the cleaner into the bucket and then fill it with water, you know and sticking the mop in, and rinsing the mop out, and wiping the floor, and I just felt like, these people aren't stupid! (Steven, personal communication, December 29, 2017)

The "mop lesson" was part of a class that was recommended by a local settlement agency for newcomers to attend in their first six weeks in their new city. They were taught things like how to use local transportation and how to access health services. In the teacher's view, some parts of the course were helpful. Yet others, such as the mop lesson and reciting the alphabet at the beginning of every class were demeaning to the students.

As the child of refugee parents, Steven found himself simultaneously positioned as both an insider with common experiences as his students, and an outsider, removed from his students by his Canadian education and by identity markers such as race, gender, and age. In fact, he spoke the language of one of the newcomer students and could perceive the dissatisfaction and frustration experienced by the learners. Yet both he and the learners did not speak up to challenge a curriculum that was perceived as demeaning.

When questioned about that silence, Steven expressed his belief that this hesitation was due to power dynamics in the classroom. As Paulo Freire wrote, "They call themselves ignorant and say the 'professor' is the one who has knowledge and to whom they should listen" (1996, p. 45). Steven said he felt the students in the class had an attitude which suggested, "We're in a new country and maybe this is something we need to know and so there's that kind of diligence, and let's just go with it, and see what happens here." He described his own hesitation to challenge an older head teacher, and a feeling of resignation towards the curriculum: "Why am I doing this? Why am I teaching this? But it was the curriculum, you know, that I had to teach so I had to teach it."

In this case study, I explore the experiences in this class as described by Steven. I begin with a background description of increasing employment focus in English as an Additional Language (EAL), followed by a discussion of intersectionality, positionality, and identity. I argue that language training programs that are prescribed and pre-determined may serve to dehumanize students by failing to take into consideration the complexity of integration and the individual paths taken to settlement and language learning. Dehumanization, as it is used throughout this article, is a Freirean concept defined as "a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human" (Freire, 1996, p. 44). It is marked by "egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism" (p. 54) and an absence of dialogue between those in power and those without. In this article I argue that framing students as poor immigrants who will inevitably

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[1] Pseudonyms have been used throughout.

work in cleaning jobs is an act of dehumanization because doing so unilaterally denies the reality of their agency both in determining the content of their language learning and in their paths in the future.

Background

Language instruction for immigrants and refugees is necessary for integration. It has been well established that language ability plays a central role in integration (Derwing & Waugh), both in economic integration such as increased work productivity and access to higher-paying jobs and opportunities (Batalova & Fix, 2010) as well as social integration such as higher levels of participation in society (Hoehne & Michalowski, 2016; Nieuwboer & van't Rood, 2016). Language ability also affects sense of wellbeing in the new environment, with higher levels of language ability being shown to increase immigrants' sense of wellbeing in the new environment (Kim, Ehrich, & Ficorilli, 2012).

To understand the context of the "mop lesson," the wider background of shifts in EAL instruction needs to be considered. Although a relatively young profession, EAL has shifted its focus throughout its history from an assimilationist stance during its inception in 1947 (Guo, 2015) towards employment and skills training through the establishment of federal program called the Settlement Language Training Program (SLTP) in the late 1980s (Guo, 2013). The singular focus on the economic impact of immigration ignores the social or cultural involvement of immigrants within Canadian society (Li & Wilkonson, 2003). The SLTP program was eventually replaced by the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program in the early 1990s. The LINC program targeted lower levels of English learners and aimed to provide "survival language skills" (Guo, 2013, p. 31). Following LINC's inception, a separate program called Enhanced Language Training (ELT) was launched; this was a higher-level program, intended to prepare skilled immigrants with employment-specific language in their professional field as well as unpaid Canadian work experience (Guo, 2013).

The employment focus of language classes not only minimizes the social or cultural involvement of newcomers, it also excludes those who attend classes for other purposes (Guo, 2015). Integration should be a two-way street, where both newcomer and host society are changed (Wilkonson, 2013; Wong & Tézli, 2013) in accordance with the Canadian federal government's definition of integration (Government of Canada, 2012). The employment focus of bridging programs, which include strategies such as accent-reduction, anglicizing names, and an adoption of Canadian workplace norms, values, and soft skills have been criticized for their uni-directional stance to integration, placing the onus on the newcomer to assimilate (Esses, Bennet-AbuAyyash, & Lapshina, 2014; Guo, 2013, 2015; Hébert, 2010). LINC programs have been criticized for a "mandate of orienting newcomers to '*the* Canadian way of life'" (Waterhouse, 2011, p. 507; emphasis in original), as though there is a single Canadian identity to which all newcomers must subscribe.

The "mop lesson" did not take place in a larger program of levelled instruction such as the LINC or ELT programs mentioned above. Neither was it an employment-specific program aimed at a targeted group of workers. Rather, it was a general course aimed at welcoming newcomers to the community. The course had a restrictive, six-week curriculum that Steven was expected to follow. Although the program was not strictly an employment training course, the mop lesson was part of a module on employment that appeared to make assumptions about the kinds of work newcomers were preparing for. There was no formalized needs assessment or attempt to tailor the course content to the needs of the students.

Theoretical Foundations

Intersectionality, Positionality, and Identity

Understanding the unique situation Steven found himself in requires a nuanced view of positionality and the intersections of race and identity. Intersectionality theory describes how aspects of identity cannot be separated, but are interwoven (Crenshaw, 1989). Although originally coined as a term to discuss the intersections of race and gender, and to express that both contribute to oppression in an interconnected way (Crenshaw, 1989), the term is now used to highlight intersectionality across multiple markers of identity, not just race and gender (Anthias, 2013, 2016). Identity is not a simple, static concept. It changes across time and context, and shifts across social locations and processes (Anthias, 2008). These intertwining identities change and shift; not only can they create multiple arenas of discrimination, but they can negatively affect student outcomes (Grant & Zwier, 2011).

Just as researchers experience inner conflicts when studying both their own cultures and others because of the complexity of the intersections of their identities (Lee & Simon-Maeda, 2006), teachers also have to navigate complex and intersecting identities and positionalities within the classroom (Allen, 1990; Mckninney, 2005). In order to understand the complexity of Steven's positioning within the EAL classroom, it is important to recognize that the identity and sense of belonging experienced by Steven is multi-layered and complex. He identifies with students who speak the same language, but he is removed because of his Canadian background and his teacher status. At the same time, he is a teacher and is part of a settlement organization, but is removed from his co-teacher because of both age and cultural background. He simultaneously belongs, and doesn't belong, and as he teaches, these identities shift and change over time.

Position of Researcher

I approach this study as both an insider and an outsider in various spheres. I am an EAL teacher and continue to teach within the profession. Although I never taught the course described by Steven, I am "insider" enough to know of this course and other short-term "pre-packaged" courses within the profession. I also know about their well-intentioned but ultimately dehumanizing nature because of the lack of attention to individualized student needs. From my own experience, in levelled classes with larger enrollment, needs assessments are a regular and ongoing part of course design. We often begin by formally or informally inquiring about the needs of each student, even at beginner levels.

Yet in this course, the curriculum was planned before students arrived in the classroom, based on a best guess of what their needs would be. It is my belief that student-centred approaches, including regular needs assessments are an integral part of providing a meaningful learning experience to students. We must avoid the assumption that we know what is best for students, and we must honour the backgrounds, skills, motivations, and needs that they bring to the classroom. We must also acknowledge that the needs of students change over time, and continual assessment is required.

The interpretations of the interview data provided by Steven is filtered through my own position and experiences as a teacher, a researcher, and as someone who knows the context he speaks of, but views it from a white, middle-class, privileged lens. Alternative understandings and interpretations could arise had the interview been conducted by a researcher with a different background. For example, during the interview, Steven was careful to explain that he understood that changing language policies was a complex task. He said, "I get that it's not as simple as you know making that change and having those things happen. You know, there's intake procedures that have to change rubrics that have to be revamped…" I wondered if he would have made the same concessions had the interview been conducted by another minoritized teacher, and less of a "white EAL expert." In my second round of verifications, I asked him about this, and he remarked that he likely would not have felt it necessary to emphasize this had he been speaking with another minority peer. In his interactions with me, Steven felt it necessary to empathize with the process of course development and change, which was a careful positioning of himself as both critical of the course, and empathetic of the work that was involved in creating it. The fact that he would not have positioned himself in this way with a researcher of a different background shows that he considers there to be some distance between his understanding of the situation and his view of my positionality. Perhaps he felt that I would take the role of defending the course content or administration.

Research design and methodology

Case Study

Although there are many case studies exploring EAL classrooms, there is a limited number of critical case studies that help to inform the fragmented discussions of privilege, power imbalance, oppression and racism within EAL classrooms. I chose to use a case study in Steven's case because it provided an opportunity to understand a common classroom experience (learning about employment) from a unique perspective. Steven is someone who is positioned in such a way to shed light on both the experiences of teaching from a minoritized perspective, and who also can bring insight into the experiences of his students, as he speaks the same language, is viewed as an insider, and has the background perspective of his own parents' integration and language learning journeys.

Case studies can be defined as an inquiry into a bounded case, with specific and clearly defined parameters (Flyyberg, 2011; Putney, 2010). Case studies are an important addition to the body of literature for their presentation of detailed, in-depth research.

In order to frame the case study, I divided my questions into two broad categories: teacher motivation and classroom experiences. These categories were chosen because I wanted to a) understand Steven's motivation in light of his background and his unique position as a minoritized EAL teacher, as well as b) his specific experiences in the classroom.

The sample size was small, with only one participant. I chose to focus this case study on Steven's experiences after hearing him share about teaching EAL from a minoritized perspective, and because I knew he had left the profession for other opportunities and was curious if his decision to leave was related to his positioning as a minority teacher. I was also curious to know if his positionality affected his teaching practice and thought his story would add depth and insight to what is currently known about teaching EAL.

After receiving ethics approval, and following several informal meetings with Steven, I conducted a single interview, followed by two rounds of member checking conversations. Following transcription, I asked Steven to read and make any revisions that he felt were necessary. Beyond that, I also gave Steven the opportunity to read this paper before submission to ensure that my interpretations were accurate. At each point along the way these participatory discussions allowed for further clarifications and refining.

I also used my own experiences with teaching EAL, as well as my research and work in the settlement sector to interpret the content of my transcript and to identify themes and concepts. During the years that Steven was teaching, I was working in the same field and knew of the trends in EAL at the time, such as the push towards employment-focused language classes (Guo, 2013).

Specifically, I used the following question as an overarching frame to my research: How does a former refugee family background shape the experiences and perceptions of an EAL teacher in an entry-level class? Issues of identity, belonging, and the affective environment of language learning and teaching were all are considered relevant to the topic. Some topics that arose in the interview were not included, as they were not considered within the scope of the project. Specifically, the participant's opinions on local job opportunities for immigrants and his opinions on higher education for language learners were excluded.

Data was analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedure outlined by Wolcott (1994), which allows for understanding that goes beyond the single study. Relevant academic research and language learning policy was used to connect thematically, and to ground the personal narrative in a larger social and political context. Discussion and analysis of the data includes description of the data, an analysis which connects the data to the existing literature and theoretical framework, and then a conclusion which suggests ways forward.

Participant

Steven is a 36-year-old male who taught English as an Additional Language (EAL) in a Western Prairie province in Canada from 2008 until 2011. His training included a Bachelor's degree in humanities, and a subsequent TESOL training program which included a practicum. He taught several different leveled EAL classes through a settlement agency, and according to him, he obtained the job initially with very little effort: "they were desperate, and I got the job so that's pretty much it.". He describes himself as an effective teacher—"I'm good at teaching"—and speaks of his parents as a major influence on his motivations for teaching:

I put myself in my parents' shoes and I figured out … experienced what they had to go through when they first arrived into Canada back in 1980 and having to navigate this gamut of learning English as a Second Language so they could have better opportunities and thrive and all those things so maybe there was a natural draw there.

In many ways, Steven appears to embody the "Canadian Dream." He is successful, educated, and enjoys a comfortable life. In simplistic terms, his life has transformed from humble beginnings in an impoverished refugee family to becoming an established professional in Canada. This trajectory fits the stereotype described by Wu (2015), who used the term *model minority* to describe Vietnamese immigrants and refugees, as well as other Asian

ethnic minorities. The idea romanticizes Asian Americans as "a hardworking, successful, and law-abiding ethnic minority that overcome hardship, oppression, and discrimination to achieve great success" (Chao, Chiu, & Lee, 2010, p. 44). This romanticization becomes problematic because it is a one-dimensional stereotype and ignores the complexity of identity both at the individual level as well as the cultural level. The same stereotyping can be seen in English language learning contexts when decisions about learning objectives are made without student input. Students are reduced to one-dimensional learners, rather than complex human beings with a variety of strengths, needs, and motivations for learning language.

Steven is a fluent English speaker, well-educated, and successful. He describes this by saying:
I was born in Canada, you know and I have all these privileges that have been, you know that come with being born in Canada. I mean you look at compared me to a white male for instance, the only thing that's different from me and a white male is that I don't have white skin. Right? But I still have the same education and the privileges and that come from that.

But despite his achievements, Steven still experiences a sense of being treated "differently." He says:

People assume things about me and now that I'm kind of thinking about those things and being mindful and watching for them, people speak to me differently, at least until I open my mouth. And they treat me differently, until I open my mouth. And they assume things about me, until I open my mouth. You know … "Your English is really good," they say, and well …thanks, so is yours.

Once Steven begins to speak and reveals a standard Canadian accent, people's perception of him changes. They mentally switch from treating him like an immigrant ("differently") to treating him like a mainstream Canadian.

It is within the tension of this duality – being both an insider and an outsider, that Steven lives and teaches. As he begins to discuss the experiences of teaching this course, he reveals a deep struggle to continue to perform in his profession as a teacher, maintaining the status quo as an insider while still honouring the convictions embodied in his refugee roots. He finds himself caught between the constraints of curriculum and the understanding that to teach the lessons as prescribed would be stripping his students of their dignity.

Discussion and Analysis

Positionality and Power

When discussing the lack of overt resistance from the students despite a feeling of a large disconnect between the prescribed curriculum and the actual needs of the class, Steven made the comment, "You don't speak back to your elders, you don't speak back to your teachers, you just kinda do it…part of it is, well, the government's paying for this or sponsoring this for us, so we have to do it." This attitude of deference to elders, to teachers, or to those in authority could explain silence on the part of the students, and on the part of Steven himself. However, the absence of overt resistance does not necessarily mean consent, and silence itself can be a powerful form of resistance. For example, non-participation in class does not always mean a student does not understand. A silent student may be refusing to participate in discussion for a multitude of reasons.

It cannot be known for certain why the students did not speak up and say, "I am an educated newcomer and am not planning to work in the cleaning industry. Not only that, but mopping is pretty much the same in every country!" Perhaps the level of the language was not enough that they could explain, perhaps they felt that given their newcomer status they were not positioned in a way they could speak up, perhaps they were worried it would affect their outcomes in the class, perhaps they felt they needed the teachers' connections to the community, or perhaps as Steven described, it was a cultural expectation of deference to the teacher, or perhaps other factors were at work.

When the topic of the lesson is perceived as being humiliating or based on racist assumptions (i.e. all newcomers in the community will be working in the cleaning industry), the silence of the students is not a sign of respect or deference towards a good teacher. Gratitude, obedience, and docility were expected, and they were shown outwardly. But the discomfort perceived by Steven shows that the outward behaviours of the students in passively learning the mop vocabulary did not match their inner attitudes.

Claiming the Right to Speak

In describing his own lack of resistance to the course, Steven says:

> I was just glad I didn't have to teach that content anymore [after the course ended], and why I didn't say anything back then? Because you know you talk about having relational clout? You know, the relational currency to speak into these things? I just felt like I wasn't able to say anything and even if I did say anything I don't know if I would've been taken seriously or heard. Part of it too was resignation, you know, this is just the way it is for immigrants and newcomers to Canada.

It is not clear whether Steven feels he does not have the freedom to speak because of his minority status, his age, his novice teaching status, or some other factor. However, the intersecting and multiple realities of these identities (Anthias, 2008) result in his silence and feelings of resignation.

Social experiences are, as Ortega (2009) writes, "lived, made sense of, negotiated, contested and claimed by learners in their physical, interpersonal, social, cultural and historical context" (p. 218). Language learning and social experiences are intrinsically linked, as language does not exist in a vacuum but requires human beings. Learning a second language involves not only learning to speak, but learning to create an identity within society that allows learners to claim the right to speak (Norton, 2001). Understanding the complex and multifaceted nature of identity, positionality, and the intersections of each creates an awareness that language learning, and therefore language teaching, is much more than vocabulary acquisition, grammar rules, and pronunciation. It involves navigating a complex system of power and social relationships. Language learning is not only studying the form of language, but is also learning about socialization in the new community (Duff, 2007; Garret & Baquedano-López, 2002). Teachers must be aware of these complex realities to attempt to create equitable classroom environments.

In regards to newcomers, who are often construed as needy or deficient in the Canadian media (Tyyskä et al., 2017), the work of Betsy Rymes (2003, 2004) exploring the benefits of repositioning the teacher as a cultural novice in order to benefit language socialization and learning is particularly salient. Both Ortega and Freire argue for this repositioning of the teacher. Ortega wrote, "learning outcomes can be greatly improved when second language learners are not construed as definitional novices and instead their invisible expertise is made visible" (2009, p. 238). In this repositioning, the teacher is no longer depositing knowledge of culture, values, or personal interests, but is engaging in a dialogical dance with the students, in which both learn something new (Friere, 1996). Areas of interest are explored, with the strengths and background experiences of the students forming a significant part of the curriculum.

In the case of Steven, however, the teacher remained in the position of the "knowledge-holder" and the students were simply recipients (Freire, 1996). Steven describes his own frustration with this dynamic by saying:

> I also remember things like uh you know, okay we're going to start off the class by repeating, saying the alphabet. You know, and I get that it's important to know our alphabet, but just again the way I was asked to teach it, it seemed like I was kind of, you know these were adults I was teaching – people trying to settle into Canada and I felt like I was teaching them like they were 5-year olds. And almost belittling them, kinda giving them a pat on the head – oh good job, you can say ABCDEFG!

This patronizing classroom dynamic was frustrating for Steven. He understood that although his students lacked English skills, they deserved to be treated as adults.

Dehumanization, "Helping," and the Savior Narrative

If teachers "bring with them the marks of their origin: their prejudices and their deformations, which include a lack of confidence in the people's ability to think, to want, and to know" (Freire, 1996, p. 60), they are dehumanizing students, regardless of their good intentions.

When asked about how his background informed his teaching, Steven said

> I remember watching [another teacher] teach and I just remember cringing even more than when I taught and I just, I dunno, maybe it's a negative thing, but I just remember seeing this sense of pride and proudness, look at me, I'm helping these people settle into Canada by reciting the alphabet to them, and I'm just kind of like, hmmm. And I didn't know how to take it.

The "saviour complex" or notion that an individual with power is the answer to another person's (perceived) struggle portrays newcomer students as passive, homogenizing the entire group as "vulnerable, desperate, and in need of saving" (Tyyskä et al., 2017, p. 7), rather than highlighting agency and resilience. Steven recognized his own challenge in this area also, by identifying his own assumptions:

> I certainly have this bicultural duality thing but sometimes I get caught in that too - you know I'm Western educated and I'm going to help these poor, less fortunate people than I am learn English so they can have a better life but I've since learned seeing the other end that just because you have English that doesn't necessarily make things better.

As the child of refugee parents, Steven may have been more resistant to such a one-dimensional, "poor immigrant" portrayal, as he had witnessed the multi-dimensionality of his own family's journey. He alluded to this when he answers a question about his motivation in becoming a teacher:

> Some people… we just assume that oh, these people are new to Canada and they're all in the same boat, they all start from the same place… but that's not true. You have people with different life experiences, … not everyone's the same and it's hard to lump people together and make them... or assume that they're the same.

"Things Could've Been Different"

When reflecting on how his background affected his teaching practice, Steven said:

> Maybe because of the social climate, you know it's all racially charged and these things are kind of coming more to the forefront of my mind, and I'm starting to articulate them a little more, and I just felt, I don't know what I would change, to be honest, I haven't thought about it to that extent, but I think that a better job could've been done.

Despite a strong tradition in education research which compels educators to examine their own privilege and their roles in continuing systems of oppression (Dyment & O'Connell, 2014; Summerlee & Murray, 2010), the continuing injustices and systemically racist practices within EAL classrooms have not changed since Steven's parents studied language. Steven reflects back on his parents' experiences and said

> This is just the grind that they have to do. And maybe that's because I'm partly informed by my parents' experience. And not even just my parents, but growing up, I had a fairly significant Vietnamese community around me, and I had Asian friends growing up, and not just Chinese Vietnamese, but East Indian and the experiences were more or less generally the same. It's just the grind that our parents had to do to, to provide a future for us, and now that we're all adults looking back, you're kind of like, maybe some things could've been different but you didn't know any better back then, you just kind of accepted the way things kind of were dealt to you, life wise.

The "grind" as described by Steven above, involves enduring language classes that haven't taken your needs into account, don't recognize the skills and abilities you bring to the classroom but rather treat you as an empty vessel (Freire, 1996), and educators who view themselves as your personal messiah. In Steven's words

> These people aren't stupid and they don't need us to teach them how to mop the floors. And it was almost degrading, and I get that when you don't speak English, and there's a communication barrier, and these low menial jobs that nobody else wants these newcomers come in and do. But that doesn't mean that that's all they can do… they have skills and abilities to bring but because they can't navigate our country and our structures and systems language wise they can't … they're put in a box.

Dehumanizing Assumptions

The problem with "the mop lesson" is not the mop vocabulary, or employment focused language, – the problem occurs when it is assumed that all newcomers will benefit from such a class. This prescriptive approach fails to take the individualized needs, backgrounds, goals, and strengths of into consideration. It also assumes that newcomers are destined to clean the floors of their Canadian peers, rather than acknowledging the unique strengths and advantages they bring to our country.

Mopping itself is not dehumanizing, and janitorial work is just as valuable as any other work. The problem is with the assumptions made. Among these are assumptions such as, "these people are only going to be working menial labour jobs," and "they probably don't know how to mop properly."

In a recent study, Tysskä et al. (2017) analyzed the media content covering the Canadian resettlement efforts of Syrian refugees. Of over 300 media articles and videos, the representation of Canada's role was overwhelming positive, focusing on attributes such as generosity, openness, humanitarianism, and volunteerism. Yet despite our own press as a country with warm welcome and hospitality, stories such as Steven's highlight an alternate narrative and the underlying dehumanization that places newcomers as cleaners and teachers as benevolent alphabet-reciters.

Conclusion: Listen First, Teach Later

It is not pleasant, as a "mainstream" Canadian, and one currently employed in the EAL profession, to take a long and hard look at my own role and participation in a system which places the EAL teacher as the knower, the helper, and the cultural guide. Yet the antidote to this hegemonic system is not to stop helping. As Paulo Freire described in a video interview, the teacher has a duty to teach just as the student has a right to learn (International Literacy Institute, 1996). The antidote is for teachers, educators, policy-makers, and other invested parties to recognize the value of alternate, often marginalized realities and competing narratives. Steven's case study allows a window into a reality which emphasizes the need for a highly responsive and adaptable curriculum, even in the initial stages of settlement. In Steven's words

> I think it just needs to be considered, something we do - is this actually helpful and worthwhile? You know, is this something that's really beneficial to the person? I think in this class where I'm teaching how to mop, it was just kind of a canned 6-week course that was just put together thinking that it was going to benefit and give newcomers and immigrants getting off on the right foot or giving them a head start. I don't know how beneficial it was.

Perhaps rather than a simple needs assessment, where students are positioned as the ones with needs, we need a more robust practice, which allows students to express not only areas of weakness in need of improvement, but also areas of strength which they would be willing to share for the benefit of others in the class. This would balance the power dynamic in the classroom (Freire, 1996), activate students' prior knowledge and view their backgrounds as a positive benefit to the class, rather than as a deficit needing to be filled (St. Denis & Schick, 2003).

At the conclusion of the interview, Steven summed up his thoughts by saying

> I guess what I'm trying to say is that there needs to be more of a listening ear to gain insight to what opportunities the students are really looking for versus telling them what they should do.

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