±voice:
processes of discovery in praXis

by Emily 文曦 Lee

Author’s Note.
Friends, colleagues, alumni, esteemed professors, and strangers:

I invite you to join me in interpreting my “making sense” of the past three years of my life, from July 2005 up to spring 2008. This research represents a snapshot of my understandings and experiences as a developing language teacher, through the limited lenses of my present.

This is a scholarly paper created as the culminating experience for a master of arts degree in second language studies, with a specialization in language teaching. The methodology of this study was designed not only to seek a deeper understanding of what has helped or not helped my teacher development, but also to further that development through the cyclical reflections, interpretations, and representations required by this authoethnographic study. Autoethnography should write toward the sense of hopefulness (Ellis, 2004, p. 94). Through this cyclical process, I have found hope through situating my teacher learning within the contexts I lived in.

Many scholars have questioned how autoethnographic work can be evaluated, (e.g., see Richardson, 2000, p. 964; Sparkes, 2002) as it is not a typical form of research in many fields, and certainly not in the field of applied linguistics. Despite the increasing prevalence of the use of autobiography, teacher reflection, and teacher narratives in many teacher education programs (e.g., Bailey et al., 1996; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, pp. 434–437; Oja, 2003; Pennington, 2007), only a few studies have been published that focus on autoethnographic work in language teacher education or language teacher development (e.g., Edwards, 1993; Johnston, 1999). And given that many may not know how to evaluate autoethnographic studies, I ask to be evaluated based on the questions outlined in the following rubric. This set of criteria was developed through borrowing from Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth St. Pierre’s (2005, p. 964) framework for evaluating ‘creative analytic practices’ (CAP)—a type of ethnographic writing where the author/researcher not only seeks to illuminate insight into social scientific concepts, but also to write in an engaging manner, entering into dialogue with the reader. Within the framework of the four key areas outlined by Richardson and St. Pierre, I also added questions specific to evaluating this study. All the questions, inspired by autoethnographers of various fields, were adapted to the purposes of this inquiry.

Following this rubric and the initial telling of my story, you can find a scholarly explanation of the theoretical framework of autoethnography, some methods used in autoethnographies, and characterizations of past autoethnographic work across disciplines, offered in a writing style more typical of work in second language studies.

What can be characterized as successful completion of my purposes in this study? If, as reader, you answer in the positive for a few of the following questions, I would consider my goals somewhat met. If, inspired by this representation, you choose to respond either by contacting me or opening dialogue(s) about this topic of inquiry, I would consider my work a success, and my efforts fruitful.

I invite you to interact with this singular representation of my experiences. Thank you for reading; most of all, enjoy!

Signed, Emily W. Lee
ways of evaluating this autoethnography

1. **Substantive contribution**
   - Are the stories portrayed in this study useful (Bochner, 2001; as cited in Ellis, 2004) to my teacher development? To your understanding of how a teacher education program and personal attributes and background may influence teacher development?
   - Does this study give voice to stories and group(s) of people traditionally left out of social scientific inquiry? (Ellis, 2004, p. 30) In this case, the voice of in-service teachers studying their own experience in language teacher education programs?
   - Does this study “move toward illuminating social science concepts” (Ellis, 2004, p. 200), such as those of language teacher education, the role of a master’s degree in second language studies, praxis, and language teacher development?

2. **Aesthetic merit**
   - Does this piece of writing exclude unnecessary detail that you don’t want to know? Does it provide enough concrete detail for you to picture the full story?
   - “Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 964)

3. **Reflexivity**
   - Through this piece of writing, do you gain a sense the author—Emily 文曦Lee—as a full human being? (Gergen & Gergen, 2002, p. 14)
   - “Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view?” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 964)

4. **Impact**
   - Does this study evoke emotional experience for you as a reader? (Ellis, 2004, p. 30)
   - Does this study inspire you in exploring research practices you have not considered before (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 964), or move you to positive social action in your own social realms (Bochner & Richardson, as cited in Ellis, 2004)?
   - Does this piece of writing, in some small way, improve readers', participants', and authors' lives (Ellis, 2004, p. 30)?
It seems the biggest challenge in school is to learn to be free from it, and sometimes the only way to rid oneself of the structure is through education.
—Philosophy of Teaching, Spring 2006, Emily Lee

There is a difference between “education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination.”
—Teaching to Transgress, 1994, p. 4, bell hooks

While it may be unusual for a research piece in second language studies to begin with pieces of a narrative, in this autoethnographic study, I seek to draw you in by evoking emotions that you may identify with. I try to do this by showing pieces of my experiences as an immigrant child and, throughout my life, making sense of my immigrant and hybrid (Bhabha, 1997; Kramsch, 1993) identities, navigating the worlds of language teaching and learning.

In autoethnographic work, a writer may represent his or her findings as a play (Pelias, 2002), a collection of poetry (Austin, 1996), or drawings blended with text (Picart, 2002). What follows are vignettes that illustrate emotional experiences that have stayed with me, experiences that have fueled my passion for pursuing second language studies and becoming a language teacher.

Explanations of why autoethnography is a useful methodology for exploring teacher development in a teacher education program, and how my life experiences relate to my teacher development, will follow. While most research in second language studies begin with the theoretical framework for the study, writing in autoethnographic studies tends to allow for alternative structures in the analysis and theoretical framing. A story may be “sandwiched” between theory, or it may be presented as an open-faced sandwich, where social science concepts are further illuminated either at the beginning or at the conclusion of the story (Ellis, 2004, p. 198). In my story as a beginning teacher, I seek to layer my story with the theoretical framing and analysis, in a “layered account” (Rambo, 1992; as cited in Ellis, 2004, p. 198).

As you interact with this text, I also invite you to consider whether every research study must always begin with the theoretical framework, in the same way that Bailey et al. (1996) have presented their self-study of the “apprenticeship of observation” in a teacher education program, which first outlines relevant research and the context of the study before delving into the findings of the students. Because I seek to reach popular audiences and the scholarly community, I hoped to bridge more accessible, popular language, with scholarly writing that is known to contain field-specific terminology usually only understood by certain communities of practice (Wenger, 1998)—scholars of second language studies or applied linguistics.

It should be noted, however, that even in explaining social science concepts, it is possible to write in a style different from the more accepted forms of social science writing such as a traditional, APA-style research paper. In Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner’s (2000) article on autoethnography, much of their writing is in prose or dialogue, telling stories while informing about theoretical frameworks. Even the form of writing presented by Ellis and Bochner drew me into this form of research.

While the past 2.5 to 3 years of my apprenticeship into this community of second language studies has been largely to learn the language of the field, and to speak its vocabulary, I cannot stress enough that to make a difference in the world of second language learning happening all around us, we must also be able to translate scholarly language into language that can reach
many audiences. Thus, in this scholarly paper, you will also find a mixing of genres, a hybrid
text, that parallels my multiple identities as teacher, student, and researcher.
Thus, I begin by attempting to draw you, my reader, into this story of my teacher development
through introducing myself via short scenes of events that have happened in my life, shaping my
language learner/user and teacher learner identities. I have included my background because it is
crucial for understanding my motivations as a teacher, and thereby the contexts of this study.
After situating this study in my personal experiences, I then describe the theoretical and
methodological contexts within which this study was conceived. The two main frameworks,
autoethnography and writing as a form of inquiry, will be further explained. Then, the data and
findings on my personal experience will be found within a blended text of creative analytic
practice and language of representation typically found in second language studies.

Hsin Tian, Taiwan, 1984
The teacher in the only EFL class I attended demonstrates a dialogue:
Mary: “Hi, How are you?”
John: “I’m fine, thanks, how are you?”
“Teacher, what does Mary say after John asks how she is?” I can’t help but ask in my curiosity
The teacher looks annoyed, “Mary just says what was said before, like John.”
… hmm… so it goes, “Hi, how are you?” “I’m fine, thanks, how are you?” “I’m fine, thanks, how are you?” “I’m fine, thanks, how are you?”… When does it stop? English is such a stupid language,
I think to myself at the age of 4.

Boulder, Colorado, 1989
Night after night, my pillow is soaked with tears…. Just let me learn English, let me understand what all my friends are saying. I wish I could understand why the two Lindas were fighting with each other, and if it had to do with me, why can’t I understand what they are saying?! I don’t care if I look like the disfigured girl, I already look different from everyone anyway, I don’t care if I have to trade being able to walk with being able to speak English, and have to be in a wheelchair like the pretty red-head from the other class. I just want to be able to understand what everyone else is saying! Just let me be like them… let me be like them… let… me… be… like… them…
Population of Boulder County, 1990: 229,534
Asian/Pacific Islander in Boulder County, 1990: 5,508
Percent of Chinese in Boulder County, 1990: 0.57%
University of Colorado, Boulder, 2000
“Why can she be American, and I can’t?”
“Your sister was born in America; you weren’t.”
“But most of my education has been in America. I’ve lived here this whole time! You can’t expect me to follow the same rules of a society I don’t live in. Why can’t you understand that I’m not Chinese, that I’m American too, and I didn’t grow up in Taiwan? Why don’t you see me?”
“I can’t. You and your brother will always only be Chinese to me.”
—Click.—

Taipei, Taiwan, 2002
“So, tell me a little about your background. You’re not a native speaker of English?”
“No, I’m not, but most of my education has been in the States, and I have a BA in Linguistics from the University of Colorado. I’ve taught English pronunciation to undergraduate and graduate students at the university, and I have also tutored French and English.”
“Well, since you’re not a native speaker, I’m not sure if we can hire you, because we need experienced teachers….”
“I have a friend who applied here as well because I told her of the job openings, and she has no language teaching, EFL, or linguistics background, and she was hired as soon as she applied. I have teaching experience and a degree in Linguistics.”
“Oh, she must have had other qualifications.”
Yes, a distinctly not-Taiwanese face.

situating the reader

My experiences as an immigrant, English as a second language (ESL) learner, French as a foreign language (FL) learner, Mandarin as a heritage language (HL), and language teacher contributed to my eventual decision to pursue a master’s degree in second language studies. I wanted to explore many themes in my studies: My experiences in an immigrant family and my observations of other immigrant families made me want to explore how language learning programs can help mediate the generational and cultural divisions that are especially difficult for immigrant families (well documented by Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco). I was also interested in seeing how I could combat the attitude that language must be taught by “native speakers,”
which I saw as sending the wrong message to students trying to acquire the language—the subtext being that to be an “expert” language user, one must be “native,” and thereby invalidating many efforts to study language. This interest arose from my own experience in Taiwan, where I was deemed unqualified to teach in a commercial language school by at least five interviewers. The reason was simply that I was not a “native speaker,” meaning that English was not my first language.¹ The third main interest I had in entering the master’s degree program in second language studies was that I wanted to become a good teacher and have a solid understanding of language learning processes and how to teach language, so that I could indeed help immigrant families as a teacher. I decided to begin graduate work in applied linguistics because I felt that my background in linguistics did not provide adequate teacher training in theoretically sound methodology. While I understood certain mechanics of language, such as the morphology and syntax of various language families, I didn’t know how to apply this knowledge to language teaching. But applied linguistics, I believed, would help me in making these connections.

Additionally, as a beginning professional, I wanted to earn credibility as a language teacher. In the U.S., all the positions in the ESL profession that excited me (e.g., the Emily Griffith School of Opportunity, the Spring Institute, the International English Center) required a degree in applied linguistics, ESL, linguistics, or TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages). Because of the weight placed on advanced degrees in Taiwan, I believed that a master’s degree in second language studies would earn me credibility to work as a language expert writing about the discriminatory practices of only hiring “native speakers” in many commercial EFL schools in Taiwan. At the time of deciding on my field of study, I did not want

¹ It should be noted, however, that English is my strongest language. Although I am trilingual in Mandarin, English, and French, it is in English that I communicate best, in all domains and in all skills. Also, I am known to have a “Coloradan” accent.
to go into education, as it seemed that education did not specifically focus on the issues relevant to language learners.

My purpose in entering the master’s program was also to learn more about research; in retrospect, I had little understanding of what this actually meant. At the time of applying, I may have unintentionally focused more on research for my statement of purpose:

Now I would like to pursue the master’s program in ESL at the University of Hawaii to gain a solid linguistic foundation in second language learning, second language pedagogy, and research methodology. My hope is that this will lead me to perform classroom research on the possibility of teaching second language in a class of mixed age groups.

I did not realize I was using field-specific terms such as *second language learning*, *second language pedagogy*, *research methodology*, and *classroom research*. In fact, at the time of writing, I had thought that my statement of purpose clearly showed my main interest: to study and learn of the best ways to teach immigrant families. This interplay and tension between the focus on research and the focus on teaching practice will also be a recurrent theme throughout the exploration of my teacher development in the past three years.

From August 2005 through December 2007, I was enrolled as a full-time master’s student in the Department of Second Language Studies, at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, where I also taught as a writing teacher in the English Language Institute from January 2006 to December 2007 (four semesters in total). At the time of writing this scholarly paper in completion of the master’s degree, I am in my sixth semester, have finished my coursework, and am currently working full time as an assistant editor for an educational nonprofit organization.

**definition, philosophy, and methods of autoethnography**

The term *autoethnography* is credited to David Hayano (1979; as cited in Ellis & Bochner, 2000), who used the word to describe cultural-level studies of one’s own people. In the history of
autoethnographic work, broadly defined, many terms have been used to describe similar types of studies, including personal narratives (Personal Narratives Group, 1989; as cited in Ellis & Bochner, 2000), opportunistic research (Reimer, 1977; as cited in Ellis & Bochner, 2000), and critical autobiography (Church, 1995; for more examples, see Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Autoethnography is part autobiography and part ethnography, along with something even more, meaning "the process as well as what is produced from the process" (Ellis, 2004, p. 32). I decided to study my own teacher development not only to describe, but also to foster further transformation. These complementary goals in my autoethnography present two important philosophical orientations on the self as “social phenomenon” (Church, 1995, p. 5; as cited in Sparkes, 2002, p. 216) and the role of research in society.

As Pelias (1998) states, "The self can be a place where tensions are felt and uncovered" (p. 12). Autoethnographic research recognizes that all research is filtered through the lenses of the researcher (Kondo, 1986), and seeks to represent how the researcher’s experiences influence the processes of inquiry as well as the findings of the inquiry. In this way, the study of self as social phenomenon is “firmly rooted in a social context and the situatedness of author-self” (Sparkes, 2002, p. 213). Autoethnography also gives voice to those often silenced by the dominating view of what can be included in research, where the self is denied and lived experience is seen as atheoretical (Church, 1995; hooks, 2003; Song & Taylor, 2005). This type of study encompasses “theoretical validation” because readers are able to compare their own lives to story and “generalizability” because readers are able to experience through story (Ellis, 2004, p. 195). The personal story, examined through autoethnography, situates the individual within society (Kiesinger, 2002); in other words, autoethnography creates a link “between subject and structure” (Alheit, 1995; as cited in Stroobants, 2005, p. 48).
As Carolyn Ellis (2004) explains in *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*, autoethnographic work can vary in its approaches. Similarly, autoethnographic texts can appear in many different forms—“short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Text in autoethnography is not simply representation; the process of writing is also a method of inquiry in autoethnography. For example, in “Searching for Autoethnographic Credibility: Reflections from a Mom with a Notepad,” Elaine Jenks (2002) wrote field notes as a method to explore her own credibility as an autoethnographic researcher. Then in the representation of her autoethnographic study, she incorporated her field notes into social scientific prose. Both processes were part of the analysis in her study. For finding a topic, and to perform autoethnographic study, Ellis recommends the method of “emotional recall,” where the researcher imagines him or herself “being back in the scene [related to the social phenomenon studied] emotionally and physically” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 752) and writes about the situation evocatively. Here, evocative means writing that resonates with the intended reader. Richardson (2000), in addition, recommends writing about the story and of the story—in many different ways and from many perspectives. The method of inquiry continues throughout the process of writing and rewriting. And writing is not necessarily solitary, in that the revision process, also part of writing as inquiry, can involve many readers/responders. While writing is part of the analysis, the sources of data can be multiple. Karen Fox’s (1996) representation of a case study on child abuse illustrates this; she presented her analysis as a three-person account, laid out in three juxtaposed columns representing the offender, researcher, and victim’s perspectives. However, Fox had incorporated data from interviews, participant observation, and phone conversations with the case study participants. While writing as inquiry forms an
important part to analysis in autoethnographic study, researchers can choose to use only reflective writing, or, alternatively, many other sources of data such as field notes, poetry, journals, drawings, interviews, and other techniques commonly used in ethnographies.

Autoethnographic studies may also vary in their emphasis: While some may focus on the research process (graphy), others may focus on culture (ethnos), while still others may focus on the self (auto) (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 2; as cited in Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 740). The studies can involve the researcher and additional participants or the researcher alone. And the methodology used can be with a story, considered “narrative analysis” by Ellis (2004), or about a story, considered “analysis of a narrative” (p. 197). Ellis believes that “there’s nothing more theoretical or analytic than a good story” (p. 194). Therefore, within any particular autoethnographic research representation, the researcher may choose to present the story alone (e.g., Pelias’ [2002] play on a father-son relationship), or tell about the story (e.g., as represented through a set of correspondence on autoethnographic work between Bochner and Rushing [2002]), or write a layered text doing both (e.g., in the layered text incorporating drawings and text by Picart [2002]). The main criterion is that the work includes self-conscious introspection (Ellis, 2004). Also, because the relationship between the author and the reader is forefronted, unlike much of social science writing that seeks to tell the reader of the findings and conclusions, how a story is represented depends largely on the audience of the research.

applying methodology to my study

As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, this text takes into account my second language studies audience, and therefore much of it is written in the genre common in second language studies. My starting point in this autoethnography was not to ascribe to any single approach or type of autoethnography. Instead, I consulted as many examples of autoethnographies as possible
(particularly in the volumes *Ethnographically Speaking* [Bochner & Ellis, 2002] and *Composing Ethnography* [Ellis & Bochner, 1996]) and set out to compose my own autoethnography through synthesizing the methods and forms of representation exemplified. Because this study is mainly intended for an academic audience involved in second language teacher education—both professors and students—the representation of the study most resembles a social science personal narrative where the “phenomenon” of study is my own teacher development. I can also be considered an “opportunistic” researcher (Reimer, 1977; as cited in Ellis & Bochner, 2000) in that I decided to study myself as a member of a community that I was already a part of—students in the Department of Second Language Studies—at the time of designing and carrying out the inquiry. This meant that I had access to much of the information needed to examine my teacher development, including my own background and experiences that a researcher may not know unless they elicited the information. Meanwhile, the “opportunistic” nature of my study has also meant that the study holds a stake in influencing my completion of this program of study, which may also have constrained the way I conducted the study, as well as how others—professors and students alike—may have responded to my work.

This is why, while all three aspects, *auto*, *ethno*, and *graphy* are incorporated in this study, the focal point remains the self (auto). It is from this vantage point that I design my study to “gaze” and “zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, […] between the personal and cultural” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). During this process of introspection and reflection, my autoethnographic study involved a coding and reexamination of teacher’s notes created over the course of two years, which revealed distinctive themes among the issues I pondered as a beginning teacher. I also systematically examined the coursework in my master’s studies in the last two and a half years, searching for common themes in readings, class activities, and the
design of curriculum for each course. And, using writing as a form of inquiry, I gathered knowledge, experiences, and understanding through writing about my reflections on teaching and the contexts that have surrounded my teaching experiences. These analyses through writing have included dialogue, descriptions of settings, and retrospective journaling.

**research on teacher learning**

As far back as 1996, Freeman had pointed out in *Teacher Learning in Language Teaching* (Freeman & Richards, 1996) that research on teacher learning in language teaching has largely been an “unstudied problem” (p. 351). In their 1998 article on “Reconceptualizing the Knowledge-Base of Language Teacher Education,” Freeman and Johnson (1998) also noted that “A search of the TESOL Quarterly cumulative indexes from 1980 to 1997 reveals that only 9% of the featured articles are listed under the topic *teacher preparation*” (pp. 397–398). While some researchers have looked into teachers’ views of their learning in language teacher education programs (in Freeman & Richards, 1996) or have examined language teacher education programs themselves (in Tedick, 2005), only a handful teachers, not necessarily in second language studies, have published autoethnographic work examining their own teacher development (Attard & Armour, 2005; Bailey et al., 1996; Song & Taylor, 2005; see also Berry, 2005 for an autoethnographic study from a teacher trainer’s perspective).

As the common understanding about teacher development is that teacher learning and decision-making is very much entrenched in their own environmental and temporal contexts, in this study I present an illustration of how I have made sense of these various contexts. At the time that I applied for and enrolled in the Department of Second Language Studies, my understanding as novice teacher and someone who knew virtually nothing about what “research” meant was that the department offered instruction on theoretically sound teaching practice, and a
strong understanding of the connections between research and pedagogy. In lay language, this meant to me that the department was indeed a teacher education program, a program focusing on language teaching. When compared with my undergraduate degree in linguistics, certainly more was mentioned about language teaching. Note also that around the time of my application (for Fall 2005), the department was also undergoing a name change from *Department of English as a Second Language*; which, to me as a former ESL learner applying to the program, meant that the department must focus on ESL, especially given the relatively large population of immigrants in Hawai‘i. However, through the changing temporal and environmental contexts, I have come to a new understanding that the current name of the department is more reflective of its offerings and varying strands of inquiry, where many specializations are available other than language teaching (i.e., second language acquisition; language assessment, measurement, and program evaluation; critical second language studies; and language and social interaction). Throughout this paper, the generic term *language teacher education program* is used to describe the current Department of Second Language Studies, to reflect my original understanding of the master’s degree program that I was enrolling at the beginning of my studies. The department does not claim to only train language teachers; nonetheless, language teacher education is still one of its aims.

As a master’s student specializing in the Language Teaching strand, I seek to provide a richness of data through autoethnography that shows the types of prior knowledge and experiences a student of second language studies may take into a language teacher education program, the perceived needs by the graduate student, as well as how a graduate student’s goals may or may not be transformed through the process of pursuing a master’s degree in second language studies. While the world-renowned faculty members, and students, have a myriad of
interests and strengths, including but not necessarily focusing on language teaching and teacher education, many master’s students do enroll in the degree program as aspiring, mid-career, and expert language teachers.

**gazing in and out: writing about teaching/to develop as a teacher**

Ellis (2004) writes that she “tend[s] to write [autoethnographies] about experiences that knock [her] for a loop and challenge the construction of meaning [she has] put together for [her]self” (p. 33). Teaching, and participating in coursework while teaching, has indeed knocked me for a loop, and challenged the construction of many meanings I had gathered previously. In my search for careers, it has been teaching that has completely shifted my sense of identity, and challenged who I am. It has challenged me to reexamine many of my own life experiences, which, for a large part, happened in school. Therefore, examining my own learning process as a teacher and master’s student revealed itself as the most critical topic for autoethnography, as “emotions are central to knowledge construction processes” (Gray, Ivonoffski, & Sinding, 2002, p. 64; citing Jaggar, 1989; Ellis, 1991; Stanley & Wise, 1993).

Ethnography is not purely from visual observation. “All our senses are important in fieldwork, not just vision” (Ellis, 2004, p. 87). Ellis (2004, p. 98) speaks of writing with soul, and I’d like to also add that ethnography should also be performed with heart. As a researcher, this is my strong belief not only about ethnography, but for all forms of research. Inquiry, at its root a questioning, must come not only from the mind, but also from the heart.
question of inquiry

In view of my goals and intentions for completing the master’s degree in second language studies—to become a better teacher, and to better understand the relationship between research and teaching practice—this study seeks to examine the “heartful” (Ellis, 2004) research question:

• How does an aspiring teacher-researcher’s experience as a master’s student prepare or not prepare her to become a better language teacher?

To delve into this question, I examined the following sources along with the reflections created through the process of this study.

• My teacher’s notes, which were composed after each class meeting of teaching
• My academic and personal journal entries that were created as a way for thinking through my teaching and learning
• My own lesson plans for the course I taught, both online and face-to-face, at the English Language Institute: ELI 100, A Guided Approach to Expository Writing
• Materials I created to use for class sessions
• The course materials that were assigned to me during my master’s studies

The main social science concepts that this piece of research seeks to explore, as seen through my eyes and experience as in-service teacher, include: language teacher education, the role of a master’s degree in second language studies, praxis, and language teacher development.

These concepts will be represented in the following three sections:

• Teacher development through coursework and readings
• Teacher development through teaching practice
• Teacher development through discussions with colleagues

what does “better” mean?

To thoroughly consider teacher development in the context of learning and discovery taking place in a master’s program, it is important to first define what it means to become a “better” language teacher. I had arrived in Honolulu, Hawai‘i to attend the master’s program without much understanding of research and practice, in that I felt at a loss in the language classroom
when managing disciplinary issues and the classroom ecology. Even though I had previously taught a 12-week pronunciation workshop that met once a week, and a 15-week business English class that met twice a week for two hours, I didn’t have a toolbox of activities and strategies, such as knowing about how class grouping affects the effectiveness of certain activities that I could readily use in the classroom. As far as being a language professional, I had not read a single *TESOL Quarterly* article, or any other academic journal article in the field of applied linguistics, and I had not been trained in research methodology. In my statement of purpose, I wrote about my goals for entering the program:

… to gain a solid linguistic foundation in second language learning, second language pedagogy, and research methodology. My hope is that this will lead me to perform classroom research on the possibility of teaching second language in a class of mixed age groups…. My main concern in applying to graduate school is advancing my own theoretical and practical knowledge of teaching how to learn language, any language.

As can be seen from the first sentence, I placed a high degree of importance on understanding learning, pedagogy, and research. But in the last sentence of the excerpt, which also appeared at the end of my statement of purpose, I emphasized the integration of both theoretical and practical knowledge in teaching. It seems, then, that before being accepted to the Department of Second Language Studies, I found importance in having a strong foundation in both theory and practice. At the time of beginning the master’s program, I characterize myself as a preservice teacher because of the scant teaching experience I did have.

As a preservice teacher, my initial expectations for the master’s degree were to undertake coursework related to both teaching and research so that I could become a better teacher. At the time I applied for MA programs, I did not necessarily consider in-service teaching as essential to my teacher development. But further experience in my studies created a shift in my understanding of what type of training I did need in order to become a better teacher. I began with a vague idea that somehow, I needed to have some understanding of “theories” and
“research,” and the master’s program would provide me with a good understanding of how to apply that knowledge to my teaching practice. The vague understanding of the teacher knowledge base model more closely paralleled traditional models of language teacher education, where professional development in a master’s program is sometimes seen as top-down, and bound by the years of study (Johnson, 2006).

After having completed five semesters of coursework and two years of in-service “teacher training” as a second language writing teacher, my current understanding of becoming a “better” teacher incorporates praxis (Freire, 1970), as contrasted with simply theory and practice, where the locus of integration and application of these two points may be lost. For the theoretical aspects of practice, being a “better” teacher means having a strong understanding of second language learning and educational theories and being able to apply the theoretical understanding to specific classroom contexts and teaching practices. Meanwhile, practical aspects to theory are also necessary. Teachers may design curricula and lesson plans based on theoretical understandings, such as of developmental stages in language learning; but to implement lessons and create an atmosphere for the curricula to happen, they also need what may be considered “technical” skills such as classroom management, building rapport, and time management. My understanding of how to become a “better” teacher melds theory and practice as one. And, an essential component of doing this well is to have experience in various classroom contexts.

**teacher development through coursework and readings**

For the master’s in second language studies, I have been required to complete 39 credit hours of coursework (see Table 1). Given that I have chosen to pursue the non-thesis plan specializing in language teaching, the selection of coursework was quite flexible, as only four courses composed the core requirements of the department: Language Concepts for Second Language
Learning & Teaching, Introduction to Second Language Studies, Sociolinguistics & Second Languages, and Second Language Acquisition. All other courses were considered electives, part of my own designed path of studies. While some coursework better prepared me as a language professional in second language studies—in becoming well-versed in the language of scholarly expertise, other courses provided knowledge or skills that I immediately applied to my teaching practices in the English Language Institute.

**Table 1. Coursework Completed toward Master’s Degree in Second language studies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2005</th>
<th>Fall 2006</th>
<th>Fall 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• SLS 441 Language Concepts for Second Language Learning &amp; Teaching</td>
<td>• SLS 380 Bilingual Education</td>
<td>• ENG 713 Seminar in Creative Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• SLS 600 Introduction to Second language studies</td>
<td>• SLS 680P Task-Based Language Teaching</td>
<td>• SLS 680P Program Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• SLS 660 Sociolinguistics &amp; Second Languages</td>
<td>• SLS 680P Critical Pedagogy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2006</td>
<td>Spring 2007</td>
<td>Spring 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• SLS 614 Second Language Writing</td>
<td>• SLS 675 Second Language Interpretive Qualitative Research</td>
<td>End of coursework; continued work on scholarly paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• SLS 650 Second Language Acquisition</td>
<td>• SLS 699 Directed Reading/Research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• SLS 690 ESL Teaching Practicum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• SLS 490 Second Language Testing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**theoretical apprenticeship into understanding second language studies**

Even though I had earned my undergraduate degree in linguistics, I found that in second language studies, or applied linguistics, I had to learn a new set of terminology that I was completely unfamiliar with. Introduction to Second Language Studies provided me with a basic framework for understanding the field of second language studies. The course was divided into
three main sections, each with its own subtopics: (1) Introduction to second language studies: introduction to course/resources, scope of applied linguistics, applied linguistics and education, L2 education professionals, and roles of research; (2) Research methods for second language studies: introduction and overview, interpretive qualitative inquiry, case study research, microanalysis, surveys & correlational studies, experimentation & quasi-experimentation, and action/practitioner research; and (3) Domains of second language studies: second language pedagogy, second language use, second language learning, and second language analysis.

Additional coursework added to my bank of specialized concepts and terminology in second language studies: Sociolinguistics & Second Languages gave me the scholarly language to describe my own experiences, such as the phenomenon of English as an international language (e.g., Pennycook, 1994), issues of identity and language use (e.g., Ibrahim, 1999), and the native speaker fallacy (e.g., Lippi-Green, 1997). Second Language Acquisition also touched on basic concepts in second language learning, such as Krashen’s (1982) input hypothesis and socio-cultural theory applied in second language learning theorizing (e.g., Mitchell & Myles, 2004).

Many of the studies we read in the course used the constructs of NS and NNS as delineations of control groups. Unfortunately, given my experience facing discrimination based on this construct, I tended to completely disregard those research pieces in the course. In Bilingual Education, I learned that I had experienced additive and subtractive bilingualism, and that my own multilingualism varied depending on the domains of language use. In all, every course shed some light on my own language learning experiences, and gave me the vocabulary I could use to describe my personal experiences to a professional audience.
application in teaching

How coursework applied directly to my teaching from 2005–2007, on the other hand, varied greatly. The most concrete and direct application in teaching I can remember taking away from SLS 600 was learning from how the professor organized his course syllabus. Just from its structure, course expectations for the students as well as the professor were clearly articulated, and the pedagogical goals were transparent. In my own ELI 100 course, I also organized my course schedule to mimic the following structure:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Content/Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

This was a change from the course schedules that were used by previous ELI teachers, which were organized as such:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Topic(s)</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Homework for class</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Homework for class</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HW: Homework for following class</td>
<td></td>
<td>HW: Homework for following class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Second Language Testing, I was able to create a rubric for measuring students’ development in their writing, a project on which I collaborated with another writing teacher from the English Language Institute, as well as two other more veteran teachers. Because this project was completed after my first semester of teaching writing, the process of articulating the rubric helped me better understand my own expectations of students’ writing development over the course of a semester. The collaboration also allowed me to learn from other teachers. For example, I realized that the other writing teacher expected much more from his students’ writing, and this pushed me to consider setting higher expectations for my own students. Also, the process of learning how to match the course goals of a class to its assignments was an invaluable experience. Both the Second Language Testing class and the Introduction to Second Language
Studies classes resulted in concrete changes in the course material and curriculum in my teaching. Critical Pedagogy also affected the course materials I used: For the ELI 100 curriculum in advanced writing for multilingual students, I always included a component of freewriting in the course. Previously, topics were chosen by a pair of students each week and presented on. After considering the need to push students toward critical thinking and seeing the differences in systems, I added topics that I considered to be more critically oriented, such as asking students to examine newspapers from different countries/counties and explain why they think the headlines may differ. The Critical Pedagogy course also served to reorient my thinking as a teacher.

Sociolinguistics & Second Languages and Second Language Acquisition (both required core courses), although they did not influence me to directly change my lesson plans or course materials used, did alert me to certain issues in the language classroom. It seemed that from coursework in these two classes, I gained greater awareness of certain social and linguistic issues in the language classroom. For example, from Second Language Acquisition I reexamined a confusion I had that when students did not produce the correct forms, it did not necessarily mean that they did not understand the explanation of the grammatical rule. Also, Sociolinguistics & Second Languages made me more aware of issues of class, identity, and power in the language classroom, such as that many students may come from language classrooms where the language policy of the class is English only. In my teaching, therefore, I tried to clarify the language policy of the class we shared, where students were free to draw from research sources and literature available through their first languages.

Second Language Interpretive Qualitative Research gave me ideas for class projects and classroom activities inspired by various methodologies of qualitative research, and the professor
of Bilingual Education and Program Administration demonstrated and reinforced for me certain classroom techniques, such as class grouping.

The two most influential classes for my teaching, however, were ESL Teaching Practicum and Second Language Writing. This was perhaps partially due to the fact that these courses happened concurrently with my first semester of “real” teaching, where the class met regularly over the course of 16 weeks and was situated in a university where students had to officially register. As is commonly known, the first semester and year of teacher development contains a tremendous learning curve, and the amount of learning I gained in these two classes may be due partially to the context of that learning curve. At the same time, the coursework seemed essential to my learning in teaching, just as my teaching was essential in supplying a context where I could apply the concepts learned in the two courses.

Main topics covered in the Teaching Practicum included: teacher development groups and their interactional needs; philosophies of teaching; classroom techniques; moral and ethical matters in ELT; lesson planning, including improvising; connecting to reflective teaching; your version of the “knowledge base for teaching”; motivation; classroom management; social skills and classroom community; reflective teaching beyond the individual level; teacher portfolios; and teacher learning/development. The main topics covered in Second Language Writing included: What do you believe about writing; essential dilemmas in L2 writing; theories of writing; good writing; responding to writing; influences from L1: culture, rhetoric; audience, plagiarism, technology; writing across local contexts; and perspectives from L2 writers.

Because of the nature of the weekly meetings of both classes, and the small class settings where students established trust, I was also able to bring up daily questions and issues about my own teaching for colleagues and professors to offer advice on. It is interesting to note, as well,
that in both these courses, coursework and discussions required students to bring their teaching selves into their student lives.

Both classes also allowed me the space to write and reflect on my teaching experiences. In the Second Language Writing class, where one of the main topics for the course was “methods and philosophies for the teaching of writing,” I was also able to process the theories discussed as a student and apply them to my teaching. One of my required reflections reveals my thoughts on grammar correction:

As far as actual response to the grammar correction debate, I am simply torn. The ELI 100 syllabus emphasizes the importance of content and process writing, which is also recommended by the writers of the ELI Writing Handbook. Because studies are inconclusive as to whether grammar correction actually helps the application of grammatical rules in the long run, I was at first convinced I would have no problem asking my students to focus on content. However, as I sat to give feedback on my students’ papers, I realized my ambivalence on the subject.

Eventually, my ambivalence based on my own learning experiences and the research studies was resolved based on the context of my students, where many voiced their concerns about being penalized for grammatical mistakes in their coursework across disciplines. Rather than ignore the needs of my students, I had to adjust my understanding of theories based on my teaching context.

The concurrence of coursework and teaching also allowed me to examine additional ambivalences I felt as a teacher, and led me to discover some mismatches between my philosophies of teaching and my own teaching practice, as shown in the following email journal entry for the teaching practicum.

I believe in adhering to “an ethic of care” (Noddings, 1984; cited in Crookes, 2003, p. 90), yet at the same time I’ve noticed that in my scarce comments of encouragement, I have in reality not been operating under this principle. This is the task I have decided to focus on for this week and next week—I have an explicit reminder for myself to give encouragements in my lesson plans. (email journal, February 8, 2006, teaching practicum)
Built into both courses was the framework of research informing practice and cyclical reflective teaching, based on theories of writing and teaching. Thus, the two courses most closely matched the praxis I claimed to be searching for in my initial statement of purpose for enrolling in the MA program.

**common themes across coursework**

The Department of Second Language Studies is a program that:

strives to maintain a balance between theoretical and practical concerns by requiring courses that are concerned with linguistic, psychological and sociocultural aspects of language as well as those which treat the methodological and practical aspects of language learning and teaching. By stressing the interdependence of theory and practice, we cultivate in our students the intellectual basis for an understanding of principles that will help guide them in their future careers. (University of Hawai‘i MA in ESL Program Brochure)

It is interesting to note that across all 12 courses I participated in, no class, except in the teaching practicum, included any assignments that examined what a lesson plan may look like for a language classroom. Additionally, only in SLS 614 and SLS 690 were there teaching demonstrations, and throughout my MA coursework, classroom observation was only required for the teaching practicum and no other courses. Authentic course materials used for teaching second languages were also largely left out of discussions, save for a handful of student projects where I learned about various language teaching material from my classmates, through their own research on those texts.

This meant that the node for integrating research and practice, outside of SLS 614 and SLS 690, was myself. I was to make the necessary connections between the research studies I was assigned to read and my own teaching practice. Yet, as Tarone and Allwright (2005) note, “The discontinuity between these academic content courses and the language classroom appears to set up a gap that cannot be bridged by beginning teacher learners” (p. 12). For example, as a
beginning teacher learning about Krashen’s theory of comprehensible input of i+1, I am not sure how to determine what students’ i may be, or how to provide that comprehensible input. Meanwhile, according to Tarone and Allwright, “It is certainly true that SLA researchers themselves do not claim to restrict all their research only to that which produces results that are usable by teachers; much study of SLA is done as pure research, not for purposes of application” (p. 20). As a beginning teacher-researcher looking through all readings for my coursework, many research studies either do not mention pedagogical implication, or only briefly mention the implications, or insert the common statement that teachers can make better sense of how to apply the findings in their teaching practice.

This is reflective of the context of the Department of Second Language Studies, and the field of applied linguistics as a whole. Some professors in the department do not offer coursework that directly relate to teaching, and are not interested in making the link with teaching, as they seek to further knowledge in second language studies, not necessarily second language teaching. I also admit that some of my elected coursework were also not within the Language Teaching specialization, and this may also have contributed to my observed theme of the disconnect between research and teaching practice in some of the curriculum, and the fact that so few courses offered basic practical advice I needed about teaching, such as lesson planning.

In discussing teacher education, Tarone and Allwright ask for the distinction between teacher training, teacher education, and teacher development, accounting for the different teaching backgrounds with which graduate students may enter their programs of study. A more experienced teacher may not need such things as the examination of lesson plans and course materials in the context of discussing second language learning theories, and may not appreciate having assigned observations of various teaching contexts. As a beginning teacher, however, I
had hoped to be able to observe more classes through coursework, in varying contexts and for
different age groups, rather than on top of the busy schedule of teaching, grading, and doing
being a full-time graduate student. And I have sometimes found myself at a loss in applying
second language learning theory to my own teaching contexts. For many of my peers who have
much more teaching experience, they commented on how they could reflect on their teaching
background in order to apply their understandings of the research and theories in second
language studies. However, while some classes were seen to be useful in bridging the
understandings between theories and teaching practice, for others the theme was common that
the locus of praxis was purely within the individual—the individual made sense of his or her
language learning or teaching experiences through the theory. Again, those may be the classes
where teaching is not the emphasis, and under a different specialization.

Almost everyone that I was able to speak with about this issue noted that the foundations of
their teaching practice came from their prior teaching experiences and having mentors and
colleagues whom they could learn from. And one person mentioned that she learned to teach
from professors in the Department of Second Language Studies not through what was discussed,
but how class was conducted. Another friend attributed his successes and great advancements in
learning to the extensive teaching experiences he had, as well as other foundations from his
background. He suggested that collaborative planning of the course of study should be based on
a deep understanding of the incoming student’s own (level and contexts of experience in)
teaching, learning, life experiences, and aspirations. Through my discussions with professors and
classmates, it seems that there are differing understandings of what “pedagogy” or “practice”
means. To me, talking or researching about pedagogy cannot be equated with “doing” pedagogy.
While I am not advocating for the “skills” or “recipe book” model of language teacher education,
where courses in the language teaching specialization would only focus on lesson planning and classroom management, it seems we need to take a closer look at the points of praxis in teacher education. In Second Language Writing and the teaching practicum, I learned to apply theories to my own teaching practice through reflection and listening to others’ experiences applying their knowledge. What fosters an environment of praxis? Is praxis only at the single point of the individual, or can we praxis together?

**teacher development through teaching practice**

In applying for the master’s degree in second language studies, I had written that I wanted to eventually “perform classroom research on the possibility of teaching second language in a class of mixed age groups.” And throughout the progress of coursework, I came to realize that to be able to achieve my dream, I would first need to work on my skills and comfort level as a teacher. Because the culminating experience of the master’s degree required a research project,\(^2\) I decided to design the research to further my teacher development and work toward praxis—relating my research to my teaching.

Essential to my development as a teacher, was, above all, the opportunity to teach. And this is an opportunity for which I am indebted to the Department of Second Language Studies and the English Language Institute. Having searched for opportunities in the field of ESL, I know that while some job announcements may require at least two years’ experience in teaching, other job announcements will require a master’s in applied linguistics or a related field. For someone with my employment history, this presents a catch 22 of sorts, where I either do not have the experience needed to teach, or did not have a master’s degree in order to gain that experience.

\(^2\) Thankfully, some professors in the Department of Second Language Studies may insist that the culminating experience does not have to be a research project, but at the time of entering the program, my understanding was that it did. This standard, however, seems to be changing, as other students I’ve met have pursued materials development, including the development of a website, as their final culminating experience.
Through my studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, I have been able to gain both, experience and educational background. All of my teacher’s notes, reflections, and writing show that the most important part of improving my teaching, was to teach. I could not, in any way, have predicted my own strengths and weaknesses as a teacher, without having really tried teaching. And fortunately, I’ve been able to learn by doing in the supportive environment of the English Language Institute. As novice teacher, I could refer to a structured course syllabus, draw from veteran teachers’ experience teaching the same course, gather sample class activities from an online resource room, and direct my questions to the director, academic director, and lead teacher. I have been able to see a model of a “language institute” that works, and that fosters a positive learning environment for teachers. Because the English Language Institute is housed in the Department of Second Language Studies, I could consult the expert opinions of professors and the valuable advice of colleague students/teachers/researchers, which truly helped my practice in teaching and uncover the areas where I need further practice, research, and understanding.

In my first semester of teaching, I met weekly with the curriculum area lead teacher to talk over my plans for the following week of lessons, and to ask her any questions I had about issues in my class. She provided support such as giving me a handout on the different types of feedback a writing teacher may give depending on the purpose of the assignment, and sending me different class activities that she had used for topics I wasn’t sure how to teach. My learning curve also jumped when I took over a veteran teacher’s online class: Not only did I learn how to teach online, but I also saw how I could improve my own teaching through seeing how another teacher arranged his course curriculum.
As mentioned earlier, the co-occurrence of coursework in Second Language Writing and the Teaching Practicum were especially important. From the coursework, I was able to examine my own philosophies, beliefs, and experiences in learning writing, and apply those experiences to my teaching. For example, while I had been trained in process writing, I also had been trained to think that writing should not be ungrammatical. Therefore, I had to develop an integrated understanding of how I was going to teach writing to second language writers. And the development of my own philosophy of how to address this issue took into account what students were expected to do within my teaching context, where professors and instructors across disciplines often weighted grammar heavily in their grading. Therefore, the interaction of context, experience, and new theoretical understanding allowed me to maintain the philosophy of process writing, all the while helping my students with their grammar by giving mini-lessons and practices.

**teacher reflection—teacher’s notes as teaching tool and research data**

From an analysis of all my coursework reflections and teacher’s journals, the most surprising theme was the lack of references to language teaching. This may be due to the context of my teaching, because ELI 100 is for advanced bilingual/multilingual writers, and the course itself is an equivalent to the English 100 course offered by the English Department. The subject matter of the course was also not language, but that of academic writing.

All the issues I mentioned as challenging to me as a teacher involved themes such as classroom management, time management, classroom technique, rapport, group dynamics, flow, class energy, cooperative learning, continual assessment, and the role of the teacher. It was not evident from my teacher’s notes that my teaching context was particular to language learning and teaching.
To answer the questions I asked in my teacher’s notes, I had to turn to my peers and colleagues who had more teaching experience, and consult works other than those commonly assigned or read for individual research projects. As a beginning teacher, I found less difficulty in situating myself as a second language writing teacher because of the coursework in spring 2006, but the recurring questions in my teacher’s notes addressed those issues that were only mentioned in my teaching practicum and in no other coursework.

Throughout two years taking teacher’s notes after each class session, only one particular classroom issue arose due to the nature of second language teaching; all other issues that I reflected on had to do with what most teaching professionals, no matter their subject matter, might note. The one issue pertaining to the language classroom related to a particular class in a semester where language cliques formed in the class, and some Japanese students didn’t seem to want to work with others from different cultural groups.

*The groups worked well today because I was able to split up some of the language cliques, and people seemed to enjoy talking with one another. I think this pointed to the need for varying the activities in the class, sometimes lighter load, and sometimes heavier. And sometimes structured, sometimes not. (teacher’s notes, February 28, 2007)*

But the most prominent themes that were present throughout remained those of rapport, both student-teacher and student-student, time management and flow, and my own suggestions for self-improvement as a teacher.

Many of the issues having to do with rapport did not involve simply the mechanics of teaching. They included my own questions about becoming a teacher, my identity as a teacher, and how to present that teacher identity. In this sense, the theoretical view of the person as a brain that processes language, which has traditionally dominated second language learning, could not help me in discovering how much of my whole self to take into the classroom.
I need to value the person I am and let my personality come out in the classroom, because that is when people feel really comfortable talking with me, and want to talk with me. I don’t need to feel bogged down by the rules of the system anymore. (personal academic journal, February 24, 2007)
I’m not sure what to do about some of the animosity in the classroom, because there really isn’t respect among some of the students. I think I’m too nice, but in a way I am still shocked that I have to deal with behavioral problems at this level.
☒ I need to solicit some help in this. (teacher’s notes, March 12, 2007)

Time management also remained a recurring issue throughout my teacher’s notes, and may also be illuminating of how the class was managed in its flow, the variety of activities, and the pace of the classes.

Unfortunately I took too much time for the freewrite activity today, and didn’t get to let the students begin their proposals in class. Fortunately, though, they seemed to have a good idea of what’s expected for the research proposal paper after looking at the model paper. (teacher’s notes, January 19, 2006)
I keep running out of time! (teacher’s notes, January 24, 2006)
Students seemed to really enjoy talking with one another and learning about one another’s topics. I will have to do more fun activities like that. Just five minutes really made a difference, and it set the tone for the rest of the class. I’m going to do more activities where they have to move about more, need to be more active! (teacher’s notes, February 21, 2007)

Oftentimes, teacher reflection after each class allowed me to find some answers to my own questions, or to arrive at advice for my continual practice.

I guess also I shouldn’t take it so personally that everyone leaves right at 2:45. I should respect students’ time and know that they have to go where they have to go. (teacher’s notes, January 31, 2006)
Next time I need a more guided example of goal/task-setting and having deadlines. (teacher’s notes, October 9, 2006)
Most of the individual conferences worked out well, and I have found I need to ask more questions. Conferences should begin with questions. (teacher’s notes, November 13, 2006)

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3 The checkbox indicates that I had written this last line as a reminder to seek help, and later checked off the item because I discussed the issue with several colleagues and mentors.
teacher development through discussions with colleagues

But when I couldn’t find the answers on my own, I usually consulted other teachers in the English Language Institute or searched on the Internet (usually about content-specific issues) for answers.

I need to solicit some help in this. (teacher’s notes, March 12, 2007)

The culture of soliciting help from lead teachers, administrators, and colleagues was present from the beginning of my teaching, as shown in this note from the first week of my teaching.

While writing will be one of the major tasks of this course, I will have to plan my lectures better. Maybe that is something I can ask for help in. (teacher’s notes, January 12, 2006)

Throughout, I also demonstrated my continual discussions with colleagues to help improve my teaching, or to help me through issues that I saw in my teaching.

Conflict with one antagonistic student has been bothering me a lot, and everyone I have talked to has said that it sounds like it’s just her problem, and I think intellectually I know and I see the situation very well, that she is frustrated with a lot of things that have built up within her for a really long time. Ryan ⁴ says that by not being affected by it, then it would help my class not being affected by it. I am going to try that today, and hopefully that will work. (personal academic journal, April 18, 2007)

Learning from colleagues came in the form not only as discussions, but also through observations of others’ classes.

As I noted in my peer observation of Junko, I tried to open the class with asking the students about their weekends, and they seemed really surprised. (teacher’s notes, February 9, 2006)

how does one aspiring teacher-researcher’s experience as a master’s student prepare or not prepare her to become a better language teacher?

To examine the answer to this question, I use the framework of auto (self) ethno (culture) graphy (research). After nearly three years’ study as a master’s student in the Department of

⁴ All names mentioned in this paper are pseudonyms.
Second Language Studies, I have gained experience as student/scholar, teacher, and researcher in the field. I entered the program with little experience in teaching, and I am now exiting (hopefully) with two years’ solid teaching experience—though not full-time—as a second language writing teacher. Also entering with little understanding of the field of applied linguistics/second language studies, I have now been apprenticed into the vocabulary and concepts of second language studies. In addition, because of the master’s level of study, I am able to understand research and research methodologies across various disciplines, as I recently discovered in my current job as editor for an educational nonprofit, where I read reports and academic articles in the field of education daily. In these senses, I have indeed been apprenticed into an ethno—the community of practice of second language scholars.

Under graphy, through participation in this culminating experience of creating a scholarly paper, where I had to independently design and carry out a research study, I have been apprenticed in research. Also, as mentioned before, I am able to read and make sense of research projects in this field, so that they can (sometimes) inform my teaching as a language teacher. I’ve also gained an understanding of how research is applied to my teaching, as well as how I have continually researched while teaching, through my teacher’s notes, reflections, and use of available resources.

In the realm of self, I am now a language teacher, have been for some time since that first month of teaching in the English Language Institute. Teaching has now become an important part of my identity. Yet still holding on to the identity of beginning language teacher, I have continued to feel at a loss when trying to apply certain second language research to my own teaching practice. Similarly, I continue to struggle with issues such as classroom management, time management, rapport, and how to perform myself before a class of students. While it is
possible that I am just too hard on myself as a teacher, and that comfort in dealing with these
issues may come with experience, it is also possible that with further teacher training, I may find
some concrete solutions.

**continuing epilogue… cyclical discoveries**

Having completed my coursework for the master’s in second language studies, I currently work
full-time for an educational nonprofit in Hawai‘i. My choice in working as an editor and not as a
teacher currently stems from two conditions: First, I am not certified nor qualified to teach as a
full-time ESL teacher in State of Hawai‘i K–12 schools. Second, most of the ESL/EFL positions
available on the island of Oahu are short-term, part-time positions, without insurance. These are
not the best conditions for work in second language studies, especially when student loans loom.
In contrast, with the same degree, I qualify for positions at the assistant professor level in
countries such as Japan.

Because of my own perceived deficiencies as a teacher and lack of comfort in the classroom, I
am also now considering various forms of supplementary education. On the list include further
reading about teaching different age groups—my current target is to learn more about the
elementary context, volunteering at a local elementary school or Chinese language program, and
additional reading that builds on the knowledge base I’ve gained through the graduate degree in
second language studies.

* * *

As Tarone and Allwright noted, teachers at different stages in their development may need
different types of support. I wonder whether different tracks of teacher education may be laid out
as general guidelines for language teacher-researchers who are at the beginning of their teaching
careers, mid-career, or specializing in research. I also wonder whether coursework as typical of
teacher training programs, where many practica and placements into different contexts is the norm, may be integrated into a master’s program that attracts many language teachers.

The motivation for my entering in this program of study was to improve my teaching and to gain a better understanding of the link between research and practice. And the passion and interest fueling this desire to be a better teacher came from my own experiences, especially as an immigrant and ESL student. Personal experience directed my studies and teaching practice. Then, through my study of the link between research and practice, I turned back to personal experience. Moving my teacher-researcher lens inward, then outward, then in again, noticing all the layers of experience, I have come to realize that the past three years have indeed transformed me on this path as language professional.

Though the original motivation behind this inquiry into my teacher development was to better understand why I still feel rather unprepared in the classroom in some respects, I have confirmed that a master’s program in the Department of Second Language Studies, even in the specialization of Language Teaching, is not purely a teacher training program. Instead, it is designed to educate language teaching professionals for continual professional development throughout their lives and across contexts. The program seems to seek to prepare students in many different areas of study and/or practice, looking at the career of the language professional from a life-long perspective, rather than that within a single career.

But I am still missing some pieces on my path to become a better teacher… In a way, the strength in breadth and diversity offered by this department can also take away from the experience of the beginning language teacher, as it is difficult to navigate through the varying theories that may contradict one another, or the different frameworks and ways of knowing that are applied, all the while learning the art, mechanics, and knowledge base of teaching. Perhaps
prior teaching experience is the stable point that more seasoned teachers hinge on as they navigate through this world of learning and development in all respects. In their overview of teacher education programs across the U.S., Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) note that:

a number of studies have offered empirical evidence that teacher education programs that have coherent visions of teaching and learning, and that integrate related strategies across courses and field placements, have a greater impact on the initial conceptions and practices of prospective teachers than those that remain a collection of relatively disconnected courses. (p. 392)

Perhaps for more seasoned teachers, the center of cohesion across coursework and experiences also lies in their backgrounds in teaching. After three years as a master’s student and being apprenticed into the field, I am now able to see how certain coursework could have been planned more deliberately. However, this is not insight that I could have had upon entering my studies. While some coursework has proved complementary, as in the combined experience of teaching writing while taking a teaching practicum and a second language writing course, my selection of coursework has not always connected with one another. The SLS Letter to Students (www.hawaii.edu/sls/handbook/letter.html) states:

One of the major tasks facing new graduate students (as well as those in subsequent semesters) is synthesis of academic study so that the students emerge from the program with a balanced view of the field as a whole. While part of the responsibility for making the links between a course such as SLS 640 English Syntax and SLS 710 Teaching Second Languages is clearly the role of the professors teaching the courses, the student also has a responsibility for establishing relationships. Thus, the student should be actively trying to tie together the material presented in the different courses into a
coherent whole, rather than looking at each course independently and checking it off as completed once course requirements have been satisfied.

Through this study, I have sought to find the points of connection between my teaching practice, coursework, reflections, and discussions with peers. And I have found that the locus of coherence, or praxis, still remains largely within the individual. Fortunately, also through this study, I have been able to discover the bigger picture of language professional education, rather than language teacher education. In this larger picture, however, the beginning language teacher may sometimes be left out of the conversation, or left uncertain in areas such as classroom management, time management, and rapport—issues that are usually addressed via entire courses addressing each topic in teacher education programs.

I certainly agree with the attitude of *the more you know, the more you know you don’t know*, as should be the humbling experience of any advanced studies, also described in the SLS Letter to Students:

> We would prefer that our students remain a bit apprehensive about the whole craft of second language teaching rather than absolutely confident that they have the answers. In this field of second language teaching and learning we have many, many more questions than we do answers. Of course we are not alone; all disciplines are very much alike in this respect.

But the fact that only one teaching practicum is offered reflects the disconnect between the field of education and the field of second language studies. Mainstream K–12 teachers are continually asked to learn more about language learning concepts; after three years’ work in second language studies, I have found that it’s also time for me to learn more about the mainstream classroom.
This orientation has been a result of my transformation as a language professional—continuously seeking to learn, make connections, and ask questions.
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