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Sarina Chugani Molina
University of San Diego

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TRANSNATIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Sarina Chugani Molina

Introduction

As a teacher educator, I have long been interested in looking for ways in which to provide educational opportunities for students, particularly for those who are unable to receive education due to a variety of social and contextual factors. As a faculty member of a University dedicated to the values of equity and social justice, I looked for ways in which to embed these important principles into our TESOL teacher education program.

In the fall of 2012, I had the opportunity to meet the founder of Kito International, a non-profit organization in Nairobi, Kenya. At the time, our School of Leadership and Education Sciences had named this organization our “Partner of the Year”. The mission of this organization is to get homeless youth off the streets and provide them with professional development opportunities and skills to successfully transition into society as a means out of poverty. In my conversations with the founder of Kito, we considered how our TESOL program could continue to be of service to them. In collaboration with the founder, his staff at Kito International, and our graduate students, we developed an online business English program to support their entrepreneurial goals. During the spring of 2013, we piloted this project with four of Kito’s staff members. In the fall of 2013, I paired the Kito staff members with our TESOL graduate students into collaborative teaching teams. This project was a two-year initiative with the intention of training the staff members, working with them on training their youth, and then handing over the curriculum to them to use with their subsequent cohorts using the “train-the-trainer” approach to empower the local trainers to then take on the leadership around this work.

Because we were developing the program as we were simultaneously trying to understand the needs of the learners enrolled in the program, I instituted dialogical learning spaces (Molina 2015), which were weekly teaching-team sessions lasting from one to three hours, where we brainstormed lesson plan ideas, pre-screened and uploaded lessons, reviewed student submissions, provided feedback, while having conversations around our assumptions about language learning and teaching, particularly within this transnational context.

After a presentation of the literature that informed our understanding of the complexities of teaching in this transnational context, this paper will focus on the learning that teachers derived through their participation in this project. Lastly, implications for TESOL teacher education in this global context will be considered.

Conceptualizing Language Teacher Education in a Transnational Context

The Post-perspective Framework

In re-envisioning the direction of language teacher education in the global context, Kumaravadivelu (2012) provides an important conceptual model for teacher educators. These include five shifts in perspectives from the traditional ways in which language teacher education has operated. First, the postnational perspective is the recognition that countries or cultures are no longer encapsulated, but rather permeable, in that knowledge and cultural capital flows across boundaries. Second, the postmodern perspective takes into consideration, the evolving identity of individuals as having the power and agency to enact change. Third, the postcolonial perspective shifts the perception of English not as a language forced

Figure 1. Project Timeline.



upon those who were colonized (though we recognize the negative influences that still remains in some countries), but a language that is used as a tool for communication in this global society. This paradigm shift has become important as we begin to recognize English as a powerful medium for engaging in conversations on the international platform. Fourth, the post-transmission perspective deviates from the traditional model of transmitting knowledge and holds teachers at the center of learning, where they construct meaning and make sense of their knowledge and experiences as they interact with the broader contexts, which influence the practice of learning and teaching. Lastly, the fifth perspective, is the postmethod perspective, which shifts from the teaching of methods and strategies to empowering teachers to theorize about teaching practice through understanding the needs that continually manifest within their own teaching contexts, integrating changes to support those needs, analyzing their teaching practice and student learning and finally reflecting on the impact of their teaching in a cyclical process.

The post-colonial perspective requires some further discussion in the context of this paper because of our transnational work with Kenya. The imposition of the Western education system on the culture and heritage of its people (Canagarajah 2003; Crookes 2007) around the world has alerted us to how history can shape individuals' attitudes toward learning the English language. However, countries with a history of colonial imposition such as Kenya, have managed to maintain their own language/s, but have recognized English as a language that provides social mobility. Graddol (1999, 2006) further adds that "The international status of English is changing in profound ways: in the future it will be a language used mainly in multilingual contexts as a second language and for communication between non-native speakers" (Graddol 1999: 57). This movement of English ownership (Widdowson 1994) from traditionally English speaking countries to the majority of the speakers who use this language in a Lingua Franca context has been termed the *denationalization* of English (Smith 1983). Sharifian and Jamarani (2013), suggests that English then becomes *renationalized* in the sense that speakers use it to express their own unique identities and cultural values. As such, English is used both locally within the *local* context and *globally*, to express local identities on the international platform (Kirkpatrick 2010), which describes the complexity of linguistic variation and English use in Kenya.

Our approach to teaching in this transnational context draws from the work of Jenkins (2000) who stressed the importance of adjusting methods of teaching English to be in line with the changing patterns of English use within the local context. Kumaravadivelu (2008) further adds to this the importance of the larger social context in which the process of teaching and learning takes place, which he terms "social relevance." He states:

the need for teachers to be sensitive to the societal, political, economic, and educational environment in which L2 education takes place...L2 education is not a discrete activity; it is deeply embedded in the larger social context that has a profound effect on it. The social context shapes various learning and teaching issues such as (a) the motivation for L2 learning, (b) the goal of L2 learning, (c) the functions L2 is expected to perform at home and in the community, (d) the availability of input to the learner, (e) the variation in the input, (f) and the norms of proficiency acceptable to that particular speech community. It is impossible to insulate classroom life from the dynamics of social institutions (p. 207).

In terms of raising cultural consciousness, the traditional view of cultural consciousness or cultural relevance also does not seem sufficient for transnational language teaching contexts. Instead, Kumaravadivelu (2008) believes that what is now required is a "global cultural consciousness," which I found to be relevant for our study. He goes on to say:

For that purpose, instead of privileging the teacher as the sole cultural informant, we need to treat the learner as a cultural informant as well. By treating learners as cultural informants, we can encourage them to engage in a process of participation that puts a premium on their power/knowledge. We can do so by identifying the cultural knowledge learners bring to the classroom and by using it to help them share their own individual perspectives with the teacher as well as other learners whose lives, and hence perspectives, differ from theirs. Such a multicultural approach can also dispel stereotypes that create and sustain cross-cultural misunderstandings and miscommunications. (pp. 207-208)

Teaching in a transnational context demands an entirely different set of assumptions for our teachers. Based on the literature, it appears that in such contexts, it is important for us to situate our pedagogical practice within the post-perspectives paradigm outlined above.

Project Description

Teaching Team

The teaching team consisted of six, female American English speaking graduate students,

between the ages of 24 and 32. I served as a consultant to this project and supported their learning process through weekly meetings that served as a space for us to engage in dialogizing about teaching practice within this particular transnational teaching context. In the light of the literature, we focused our conversations around teaching practice in this context and developing a deep understanding of the needs and goals of our Kenyan students, as well as the historical, political, and socio-cultural dimensions that have influenced the status of English in Kenya.

Kenyan Youth

A total of 21 Kenyan students (ten males and 12 females) participated in this study. The Kenyan youth ages ranged from 18 to 25 years of age.

1. Linguistic backgrounds

All the Kenyan students in this study reported that they were bilingual in Kiswahili and the local Kenyan English variety. According to Muriungi (2013), English and Kiswahili are the two official languages spoken in Kenya. English serves sociolinguistic functions such as instrumental (e.g. national exam), interpersonal (e.g. common language of communication), regulative (e.g. law) and creative functions (e.g. literature) (Michieka 2005: 180-183). It is also associated with high status jobs, the government, “significant factor in academic achievement” and “social mobility” (Dhillon & Wanjiru 2013: 14). Kiswahili is used for social interactions within towns, trade between towns and some local jobs. Their native languages differed and included the following languages: Kereku, Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo, Dholuo and

Nubian. Budohoska (2011) asserts that these languages link them to their family values, ethnic identities and their rural homeland.

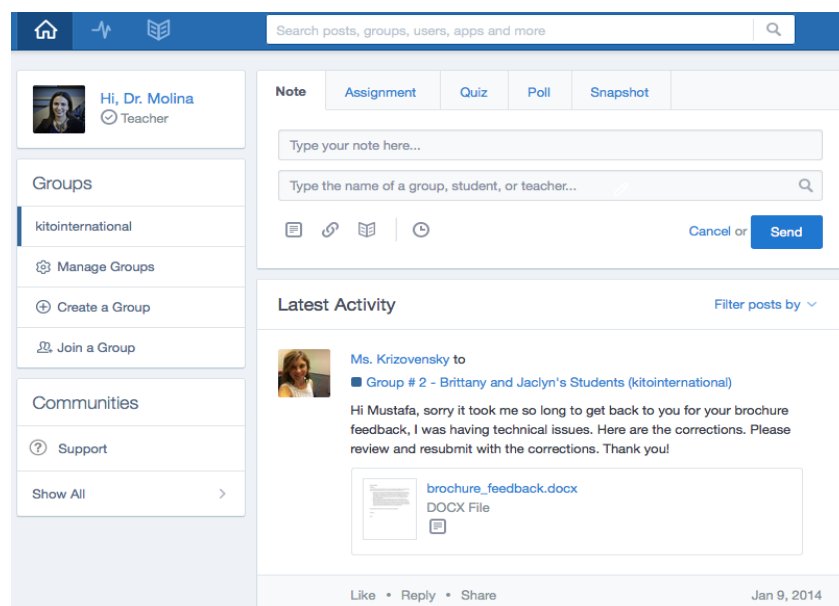
2. English Language Goals

Many of the students were planning to pursue entrepreneurial goals within Kenya. Their goals ranged from improving English language skills to pursue higher education, enhance their business skills (“market Eco Safi products to increase sales”), start their own businesses (“start a choreography school focused on acrobatics, dancing and youth”), and empower members of their communities (“I want to empower at least 100 youth in 2 years.”). Additionally, some of them wished to work for multinational corporations and organizations such as the United Nations, World Vision, USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development) and Amref Health Africa (International African health organization headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya).

Delivery System

iPads were used as a mode of delivery. The course was housed on the Edmodo online platform (Figure 2.) for education, which also has an app on the iPad to facilitate the creation and delivery of lessons and feedback on student assignments. Youtube was also used to share video lessons and for students to develop videos for responding to certain asynchronous assignments (e.g. self-introductions, sales pitch videos). Lastly, Skype was used to record synchronous assignments such as their mock job interviews. All of our data was housed on Google Drive.

Figure 2. Edmodo Platform.



Learning through a Dialogical Process

As a teaching team, we met weekly from one to three hours to work on the technical aspects of teaching such as lesson development, lesson online delivery, and assessment, but also the challenges we encountered while engaged in the process of teaching and learning with our Kenyan students. I drew on Sociocultural Theory (SCT) in setting up the teaching team meetings. These Dialogical Learning Spaces (DLS), is hoped to be a space for teachers to engage in a multidirectional process of reflection and inquiry in order to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges, concepts, or ideas under exploration (Molina 2015). SCT postulates that all learning occurs through the process of interaction. Vygotsky (1978) describes the process where first, he asserts that learning begins in the social realm or the interpsychological dimension where teachers or more capable peers (experts) can scaffold the learning process through the co-construction of meaning within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This learning then moves from the social level or the interpsychological dimension to the internal level known as the “intrapyschological category” (p. 128). These weekly meetings provided a safe place for the teachers to ask questions and reflect on their interactions with their students and reveal to me and the teaching team members areas that were, “ripe for mediation” (Johnson & Golombek 2011). These discussions allowed us to probe further and negotiate meaning, which served as a form of mediation where the graduate students serving as teachers, had an opportunity to ask for example, a question related to whether or not a particular form of feedback was appropriate in this transnational context. We relied heavily on our Kenyan students and research articles as our primary “experts” in scaffolding our learning process in this unique transnational context. As a teacher educator, I served as an “expert” on areas that I have conducted research and on instructional practice drawing from my teaching experience. Likewise, my graduate students also served as “experts” on areas they have had experience with in order to help support our learning process.

Opportunities for Learning

As we deployed the business English program through extensive research on best practices for teaching online and through assessing and addressing the needs of the students enrolled in the program, it became clear that we were met with some challenges and utilized the DLS as a

space to understand these challenges. In the following section, I present some of these learning opportunities we encountered, our learning from each other, our students, and further research that could shed light on the complexities of teaching within this context.

1. Development of a curriculum based on student needs

One of the learning experiences for our graduate students was the development of a curriculum based on student and institutional needs and goals. Though the Business English curriculum might resemble similar curriculums taught in any country on the topic of “Business English,” we found that there were many questions about the particularities of the linguistic and cultural nuances that were important to consider in light of the students goals. For example, if our students wanted to work for a local company in Kenya, we found that it would be important for our student to be able to communicate and write in a way that was appropriate within that context without imposing American English stylist elements we might use in the U.S. context.

Likewise, we felt as though we erred in providing them a sales pitch video by Steve Jobs pitching the iPhone because the language Steve Jobs used appeared to work within a particular context, which may not have been the style of pitching a product within the local companies. We believe it would be important to find mentor videos and mentor texts that most resemble the expectations of such interactions within their context or the context in which they wish to engage in business exchanges. Alternatively, introducing them to a variety of norms for business practices in global contexts we found might help them to better navigate business opportunities both locally and globally. In other words, we believed that the exposure to a variety of ways in which business is conducted in transnational contexts could empower our students to select those that best help them to share their voices in their particular local context or future global context. This essentially shifts the focus of English language teaching from approximating a native English speaker model to one that empowers the English speaker in these diverse, international contexts. Ideally, being able to simultaneously engage in the teaching and learning on both levels may be an important goal. (Additional curriculum details and lesson plans can be found on the following website: [Kito International Business English Project](#)).

Figure 3. Business English Curriculum.

Session	Topic	Assignments
Pre-Assessment	Understanding <u>General</u> Student English Language Training Needs (Integrated Skills)	Founder – email survey Students - Video & Writing Prompt
Pre-Assessment	Understanding <u>Individual</u> Student English Language Training Needs (Integrated Skills)	Asynchronous interviews through video for each student
Assessment Feedback		Individual feedback on oral interviews and writing
Lesson 1	Sample: Writing a Business Letter (Reading/Writing Skills)	Business letter draft (reviewing authentic business letters as mentor text in drafting their own)
Lesson 2	Sample: Marketing Kito International Products (Listening/Speaking Skills)	Research and presentation of products via power point/pamphlet of the various products of Kito International.
Lesson 3	Sample: Making a Sales Pitch (Listening/Speaking Skills)	Video recording of sales pitch of one of Kito International products
Lesson 4	Sample: Writing a Resume (Reading/Writing Skills)	Resume draft
Lesson 5	Sample: Researching Employment Opportunities	Website search and summaries of prospective employers
Lesson 6	Sample: Preparing for a Job Interview (Listening/Speaking Skills)	Partner Role-play on Video with Script Individual mock interviews via Skype
Lesson 7	Sample: Course Review (Integrated Skills)	Post-Assessment Video and Survey
Lesson 8	Interview and Survey to Understand Student Learning and Program Improvement Feedback (Integrated Skills)	Individual interviews via Skype
Post-Assessment	Interview and survey to understand student learning and program improvement feedback (Integrated Skills)	Individual Interviews via Skype

2. The Use of Mobile Technology for Teaching and Learning in Transnational Contexts

In designing our Business English curriculum, we looked at ways in which we can approximate face-to-face learning in this transnational context and found that mobile devices such as the iPads allow for both synchronous and asynchronous modalities that allowed for instruction and real-time immediate feedback made possible through the video, audio, Skype technologies. We build an asynchronous learning platform through Edmodo, which allowed for instructional engagement online including delivery of video lectures and assignments with a comment feature similar to that of Facebook. For interactive synchronous interactions, Skype technology was used and for asynchronous video lectures, feedback and assignments, iMovie and Youtube were used. Applications, such as Quark, that we had asked the students to download in order to develop their brochures required Internet access to function, so we had to include apps that could be used offline

in order to accommodate the needs of our students who did not have access to Wifi on a regular basis. Because there were several instances where the platform was not stable in saving all of our video uploads, we began to maintain a log of the lectures, videos, assignments, and our research and learning through the Youtube channel and Google Drive.

3. Flexible Time-table

Our teachers learned to be flexible with the students' schedules as they were in an area of the country with intermittent Internet access, often using the Internet cafés to download and upload assignments. There were also political and economic factors that affected the timeline in which assignments were accessed and submitted. During the election, some of our students also volunteered at the voting booths and therefore, were not able to complete the assignments according to the timeline we had set for them. Likewise, there were some demonstrations and

other such events that prevented the students from completing the assignments on time. Through these experiences, we learned about the importance of first, setting the timelines with our students based on the local events and holidays and being flexible with these timelines to account for unforeseen circumstances.

4. Differentiating Instruction

Another complexity that our teachers struggled with was the diversity of student proficiency levels. In this particular context, the diversity of proficiency levels were further complicated because our students had varying levels of proficiency in their own native tongue, the Kenyan English variety and British English. This often made our teachers wonder during our teaching team meetings if the features they identified were the norms for the Kenyan variety they spoke, a result of their native language or their individual developing English language system. In addition, our students had variation in strength, where most were stronger in writing than speaking. In our research, we found that in Kenya "...an examination-oriented educational system leads to instructional pressure and literacy focused learning of English leaving little space for creative and innovative communicative language learning opportunities" (Dhillon & Wanjiru 2013: 22). Within these circumstances, our teachers needed to negotiate how they could meet both the larger institutional, economic, political goals as well as support the students' individual goals.

5. Assessment in Transnational Contexts

One of the oft-debated areas within the EIL framework is the question of which variety of English to use in assessment. In one camp, Davies, Hamp-Lyons and Kemp (2003) take on the Standard English variety and in the other, we have proponents of World Englishes such as Lowenberg (2012). Lowenberg (2012) believes that the diversification of English can no longer be ignored in attempting to assess English language proficiency. Hu (2012) also criticizes traditional forms of assessment that do not consider the changing uses of English in transnational contexts. Canagarajah (2006) describes the challenges of the notion of assessment from the any particular variety of English and instead believes that assessment should focus on "strategies of negotiation, situated performance, communicative repertoire, and language awareness" (p. 230), though such ideas have not manifested into standard assessment practices in the field as yet.

Our teachers initially used the American English lens in providing feedback to our students in Kenya. For example, in writing the business letter, the Kenyan students dated their letters following the British English format where the date precedes the month, which is then followed by the year. One of the graduate student teachers immediately responded that the students needed to reverse the date notation to month followed by the date and then the year to which the Kenyan student responded, "This is how we write dates in Kenya". In another example, most of the teachers indicated that their students misspelled the word "learned," which they spelt with a "t" as in "learnt". I continued to document feedback data and realized the complexity of assessment practices in this type of transnational context.

After our teaching team meeting where we discussed the history of English in Kenya, my graduate students began to question their previous assumptions surrounding feedback and became more aware of their feedback. At times, however, they questioned themselves in what they indicated as errors until they checked in with the group. For example, one graduate student said, "I don't know anymore. I'm not sure if what I see as an error is really an error". We learned that the assessment of productive skills (oral and written) is challenging when considered from the perspective of World Englishes in post-colonial countries in particular (e.g. syntactic simplification of West African English; pragmatics; spelling conventions – colours, learnt, tyre). Language learning also requires time and we found that there were fewer errors in "controlled" formal written or rehearsed spoken language; however, some of these errors continued to manifest in informal emails and real-time spoken language.

We then studied the literature on Kenyan English and learned that given the diverse linguistic context in Kenya, it is likely that the English variety may have developed some characteristic features of its own (Budohoska 2012: 46). In other words, the English variety spoken in Kenya has re-nationalized and evolved through the interactions within this multilingual community. For example, Mwayngi (2004) compared the use of prepositions comparing prepositional usage in British English and Kenyan English through the International Corpus of English (ICE) and concludes that Kenyan English has gone through a form of syntactic simplification where closely related prepositions are "ironed out" and those with more general meanings are more commonly used, with less synonymous prepositions. This nativized English

spoken in Kenya may include some language mixing, code switching and use of emerging vernaculars, which adds to the diversity of Kenyan English, but could also add to the complexity of teaching English to Kenyans. Some of the features identified as errors in the teacher feedback to their Kenyan students such as the omission of articles and prepositions and misuse of prepositions, appears to be acceptable in the nativized variety of Kenyan English.

In addition to features unique to the nativized Kenyan English variety, there are also pragmatic, grammatical and phonological features that are unique to Lingua Franca communications. For example, Firth (1996) and Meierkord (2000) note the unique pragmatic features applicable to English in Lingua Franca communications. Seidlhofer (2004) studied the Vienna-Oxford-International-Corpus-of-English (VOICE) and describes some specific grammatical features that characterize some World English varieties that have developed and lastly, Jenkins (2000) describes the phonology of English as an International Language. Jenkins (2000) redefines the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) in EIL contexts with “greater individual freedom...by providing speakers with the scope both to express their own identities and to accommodate to their receivers (p. 158). She lists areas in EIL contexts that can be considered errors such as consonants, phonetic requirements such as aspirations, consonant clusters, vowel sounds, and nuclear stress. She does discuss some provisions such as the use of /θ/ and /ð/ as permissible. Given that these are considered the norms in Lingua Franca Contexts and were often considered errors in this transnational context of English language teaching, it brings to the forefront again the question of “Which English or Englishes?” should be the framework for teaching and assessment.

The teachers themselves had a diversity of linguistic exposure to different English varieties, and depending on their experience, their feedback was influenced or nuanced in approach. In our teaching team meetings, we employed multiple lenses in our attempts to provide feedback to our Kenyan students, but our lack of knowledge of Kenyan English, their local languages and the British variety often made the teachers revert back to what they knew and their own variety of English, though tremendous efforts were made in our attempts to exhibit caution in our feedback by considering these complex layers embedded within this language teaching and learning context.

Implications for TESOL Teacher Education

Technology has advanced to such an extent that it enables interactive real-time platforms approximating face-to-face interactions of the classroom. As such, it can serve as an important language learning tool to enable social mobility through economic opportunities afforded by knowing an additional language. At the ground level, mobile technology allowed “mobility” in the sense that our students were able to make their way to an Internet-ready café in town to upload and download their assignments, as their setting did not have Internet access.

Through this project, our teaching team attempted to take into careful consideration the importance of viewing English language teaching and learning from both a local and global perspective, which is an epistemic shift from the traditional national and colonial approaches (Kumaravadivelu 2012), and approached our instruction and feedback with a sense of critical consciousness towards teaching English as an International language informed by a “socioculturally sensitive pedagogy” (Alsagoff, McKay, Hu & Renandya 2012).

Language Teaching in transnational contexts may be an important consideration for teacher training in TESOL particularly in EIL contexts (e.g. Which English?). As English language teaching is continuing to transcend boundaries of English varieties, it opens up many opportunities for engaging in global understanding and exchange. However, in terms of pedagogical practice, the questions about which English to use, what materials and methods to use for instruction and what assessment measures to utilize continue to be important areas to examine in such contexts.

While engaging in this project my graduate students felt that this experience was meaningful in that it provided them an opportunity to use their knowledge and skills to support and reach out to students in need in another country made possible through the use of mobile technology. However, this study brought to light the various challenges that are inherent in teaching in transnational contexts. Though the graduate students serving as teachers in this study became more cognizant of the conceptual understandings of teaching in this transnational context, the questions around permissibility and intelligibility remained to be a challenge. Canagarajah's (2007) statement about the redefinition of language acquisition appears to apply to this teaching context where “previously dominant constructs such as form, cognition, and the individual are not ignored; they get redefined as hybrid, fluid, and

situated in a more socially embedded, ecologically sensitive, and interactionally open model” (p. 923).

As a teacher educator hoping to provide optimal learning experiences for my graduate students through participating in this project, it became clear that navigating their learning was indeed a complex and challenging task as I, myself, was learning alongside them. My graduate students and I began to truly value the teaching team meetings and learned the importance of creating learning communities centered on improving instructional practice to best meet the needs of our students, while, at the same time, designing an online learning and teaching platform that best approximates face-to-face interaction.

For teachers teaching within these international and transnational contexts, it might be important for them to develop the kind of “multidialectal competence” (Canagarajah 2006: 233) or “meta-cultural competence” (Sharifian 2009), which are essentially strategies used by English speakers in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) contexts to negotiate meaning (Sharifian & Jamarani 2013). Sharifian (2009) believes that it is important for English learners to develop “meta-cultural competence,” that is “a competence that enables interlocutors to communicate and negotiate their cultural conceptualizations during the process of intercultural communication” (p. 9). Not only do we find that these competencies are important for our students, but these may be necessary dispositional skills to nurture within teacher education programs for our teacher candidates who are intending to work in international and transnational contexts. This transnational language teaching experience afforded us the opportunity to take one step towards understanding what it might look like for our teachers to possess “meta-dialectal” and “meta-cultural” competencies, however, future studies that address ways in which teacher educators can nurture and develop these competencies in our teacher candidates may help to shed further light on this important area for teacher development.

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