

## **Negotiating Curriculum or Negating Curriculum: Student-teachers Crossing Borders to Shape their Voice and Identity**

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### **Biodata**

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### **Abstract**

Language Curriculums often seek tacit obedience from its teacher recipients. Consequently, the compliant culture infused by the language curriculum confines its recipients in a pedagogical deadlock. In learning to teach as per the prescriptions of the curriculum, student teachers lose out on their voice, agency, subject-hood and inter-subjectivity, which are vital to their educational practices and outcomes for the schooling community. With a view to encouraging my student teachers to challenge a handed-down curriculum in their PGCE English Method Module, I asked them to write a reflective essay voicing their perceptions on curriculum negotiation. Given their constant exposure to my socially attuned approach to language teaching predicated on a constructivist ethos as well as narrative knowing, they were excited to narrate their perceptions as their voice initiatives (VIs). Using their VIs this paper makes an attempt to put in perspective how student teachers can be inspired to negotiate their language curriculum using their VIs as manifestations of their voice, agency and inter-subjectivity underlying their border crossings.

### **Introduction: A Point of Departure**

Very often, teachers who enslave themselves to their language curriculum find it both demanding and demoralizing to determine their choice of teaching method(s) and a style of teaching that they would be comfortable with. As a result, they surrender their beliefs, values and intuitions and accept unquestioningly any choice of methods or materials in order to satisfy their superiors/stakeholders, who use the curriculum as an instrument of control and homogenization. Disempowered teachers, can thus find it both convenient and comfortable to carry out the choices and pre-determined objectives of a curriculum

designed by someone else. Because of this, they do not critically examine the role of the curriculum and their role in deploying it as a way of engendering their voice, agency and subject hood so as to cross borders and make sense of their world.

An uncritical engagement with the curriculum and its materials/texts reduces their teaching role to that of a perfunctory task. As a result, teachers become 'curriculum clerks carrying out other people's decisions about subject matter and classroom management' (Delawter cited in Langer, 1992, p 101). In light of this, a well-informed reception and response to a language curriculum can lay the groundwork for teacher empowerment thereby encouraging teachers into voicing their professional beliefs and concerns in order to consider and construct new perspectives on their role as teachers (Krammer-Dahl, 2008; & Postman, 1993). Such a position is even more important for student teachers who ready up for a career in language teaching. Therefore, the express purpose of this paper is to equip student teachers with the much-needed resolve and resilience by helping them listen to their own voices and beliefs about the English language curriculum in their Post Graduate Certificate in Education programme (PGCE). In this way, they can challenge the taken-for-granted conventions and assumptions that play out in their curriculum prescriptions by attempting a situated construction of their "self" as "empowered learners".

Using a representative selection of excerpts from the PGCE English Method students' reflective essays, this paper will illustrate the way students have personalised their curriculum as a way of negotiating it instead of attempting a non-agentive approximation to it as a set of linguistic codes. I am then inclined to view the excerpts as synonymous with first-person reflecting writing 'in that it starts with a description in context of personal experience' (Nunn & Brandt, 2016, p. 130). In sum, the ensuing narrative(s) will regard the student teachers' VIs for a negotiated curriculum as acts of border-crossing by which they make sense of their world and "self" via their agency.

### **Literature Review: Need for Re-inquiry**

Research in the bygone era, influenced by the Newtonian view of nature and the Cartesian search for certainty, examined knowledge independent of context. I argue that such an intellectual posture is unhelpful, especially in the New Millennium where our ideas of nature and society are subject to frequent change and re-inquiry. Such a position can encourage a pluricentric view of curriculum /community rather than a narrow/ reductive view of it in addition to encouraging a notion of curriculum negotiation enriched by its "context- bound characteristics' (Bailey and Nunan cited in Bailey and Nunan, 1996, p. 2).

Our attempts to explain as to how and why we should facilitate our students' curriculum negotiation necessitate our coming to terms with the inadequacies of modernist assumptions in language education (LE) and its detrimental consequences. The hegemonic prevalence of modernist assumptions in the teaching of English has conditioned us into viewing language as a closed system, a cognitive deficit or cognitive

deposit (Gass, 1997; and Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). By the same token, we have been conditioned into believing that for the sake of promoting objectivity, we as well as our students should not countenance subjectivity. In retrospect, such a position was meant to serve as justification for the negation of intrinsic meaning and the human agency accruing in our students' use of the English language. As a result, the role of English as envisaged by a curriculum, has come to be viewed as 'a psycholinguistic objectivity of inputs and outputs' (Breen, cited in Candlin and Mercer, 2001, p.307; Kramsch, 2002).

The above stated position appears to have characterized our learners as passive recipients of knowledge, who could then be easily conceptualized as programmed information processors. Consequently, our students have been socialized into a process of language learning that is predicated on correct grammar and comprehension instead of individual response, expressive use of language and hypothetical as well as analogical thinking. This appears to prompt and promote calculable thinking in our educational settings, which views and interprets educational outcomes in terms of a rationalistic-technological stance. The following views of Lehtovaara (cited in Kohonen et al 2001, p. 145) serve to illustrate the devastating effects of such thinking on our current practices of language education:

According to this line of thinking, schools are often seen as production plants, curricula as production plans, students as raw materials, products or customers, teachers as production managers or producers of 'educational commodities' and so on. Further, in the interest of measurable efficiency and the accompanying quality control, schools, teachers and students are forced to compete against each other for resources and power. This development results from a one-sided view of man and also maintains this view. People tend to be seen as nothing but competitors, successes or failures, winners or losers.

### **Pointing out a Mismatch**

There appears to be a mismatch between what science projects as a rationalistic representation of life and the real, personally meaningful lived life of the human being. This is to suggest that the quantitatively measured, value-free knowledge of science is fundamentally different from the personalized and the perspectival knowledge that human beings live by in their everyday real life. For this very reason the conceptualization of competence in language learning attempted by the rationalistic – scientific epistemology in quantitative approaches fails to account for the lived through experiences of the teacher and the students (Kohonen et al, 2001). Language-learning experiences are beyond the predetermined goals of a curriculum. Externally imposed syllabuses, text books, and examinations all define educational values and set certain standards, which are important from the standpoint of the individual as well as for national and social purposes; however, they make the spontaneity, flexibility and diversity which are an equally important part of education much more difficult to achieve (Skilbeck, 1982b; p.20). Spontaneity, flexibility and

diversity can accrue only through a process-centered pedagogy of voice, agency and response, which is consistent with and contingent upon curriculum negotiation.

In order for students to develop their voice, agency and identity, they should be allowed to play an active role in curriculum design by which they would regard the curriculum as a process instead of a predetermined, externally established product. Curriculum negotiation was developed by Garth Boomer and his colleagues in the 1980s. The main ideas constituting this approach were:

- Enable students to become meaningful agents in curriculum design.
- Integrate student voice into the curriculum and foster a more democratic environment.
- Develop specific citizenship skills and graduate attributes

The curriculum, as a result, becomes a ‘site for citizenship’ (Hoskins, Janmaat & Villabla, 2012; Bron & Veugleres, 2014 b). In light of this, curriculum negotiation by students becomes a venue to practice and develop abilities, experiences and values essential to sustain a democratic society.

Curriculum then according to Boomer should not be seen as a product consisting of content, activities, methods and outcomes, but as a process. This meant that negotiating a curriculum is meant to enable, enact and enrich student participation. By factoring in inquiry and negotiation as essential elements in the progress of civilization we would be well placed to lay the groundwork for collaborative radical democracy. That is why Boomer uses the verb “curriculuming” playfully to imply action and process (1992b, p.277). Should we then deliberately plan to invite our students to contribute to, and to modify, the educational programme, so that they will have real investment both in their journey of learning and its outcomes? As such a negotiated curriculum is no longer a pre-packaged course to be taken, but it is a collaboratively enacted composition that grows and changes as it proceeds (Boomer, 1982, p.150). In light of this, a negotiated curriculum by students becomes an act of understanding, which ‘is initially mediated within the ‘self’ (Nunn et al, 2018, p.88) before it translates into intersubjectivities.

Analysing developments in the English curriculum policy, Kelly (2009) notes that there has been an increase in government control of the curriculum and a progressive decrease in school-based curriculum development. This begs the question: Is this not fundamentally totalitarian and undemocratic? Students must be encouraged to ask questions about language curriculum content such as: Who says this? Why did they say this? Why should we believe this? Who benefits if we believe this and act upon it (Apple and Beane, 1995, p.14)? Curriculum negotiation in language teaching should then provide students with opportunities to learn, ‘citizenship as practice as opposed to citizenship as status’ (Lawy and Biesta, 2006). This, I believe, is synonymous with their border crossings.

## **Perceptions of Curriculum Negotiation as Manifestations of Students' Agency, Voice and Inter-subjectivity**

What do we understand by these terms?

“These are’ joint goals, the simultaneous development of English language abilities together with the ability to apply them to developing critical awareness of the world and the ability to act on it to improve matters” Crookes and Lehner (1998, p.320). The belief that language curriculum can work as a ‘detached and self-referential system of meaning’ is neither facilitative of our students’ agency, voice and inter-subjectivity, nor tenable in prescriptive practices that take a keyhole view of their competence (Nunn and Sivasubramaniam 2011). The fostering of agency, voice and inter-subjectivity would then entail encouraging our students to propose and present their knowledge through a personalized use of a language curriculum instead of a depersonalised one. Any attempt by our students to break free from prescriptive practices should be seen as indications/manifestations of agency, voice and subjecthood. The expression of voice evolves from the Freirean imperative to restore to marginalised groups their stolen voice, to enable them to recognize, identify and name things in the world.

### **Methodology**

As mentioned in the Introduction section of this paper, I decided to use my PGCE students’ reflective essay (45 in all) that they wrote in the conclusive phase of their coursework: Method of English /MTH412. During their yearlong stay in MTH412, I provided them with substantial exposure to open dialogue, ecological, expressivist-process approaches to the teaching of English, all of which were predicated on socio-constructivist stances directed at a ‘heterogeneous global English speech community, with a heterogeneous English and different modes of competence’ (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 211). Such a realization, I believed can go a long way in conferring voice and agency to them. I premised that by asking them to articulate their voice initiatives as to how and why they should negotiate their English language curriculum, I would be well placed to understand how they would develop their resolve for a critical response to a curriculum given to them rather than becoming curriculum clerks (Delawter cited in Langer, 1992, p.101). More importantly, I predicated my paper on a notion of curriculum based on Schon’s model (1983, p. 333) which views the curriculum as:

...an inventory of themes of understanding and skill to be addressed rather than a set of materials to be learned. Different students present different phenomena for understanding and action. Each student makes up a universe of one, whose potentials, problems and pace of work must be appreciated as the teacher reflects-in-action on the design of her work.

Taking into consideration the epistemic stance I have voiced above, I decided to use the premise: *If encouraged, can my students use their VIs to signpost their negotiation of the English language curriculum handed to them.*

Classroom research, it should be noted, originated as a movement to promote traditional pedagogic concerns, namely, the best method to adopt and the best technique to use. In the course of time, however classroom research shifted to other areas, for example, to the classroom interaction process. This, in practice, meant that classroom research focused on what actually happens in the classroom and how it influences what happens outside, and not on testing other people's prescriptions for what should happen (Allwright and Bailey, 1991; van Lier, 1988). In light of this, I viewed my students' attempts at curriculum negotiation as a retelling of their understanding. Therefore, I asked them to voice their deeply felt views and beliefs about the way curriculum constrains them into carrying out curricular directives just for the sake of fulfilling institutional requirements pragmatically. The following explanation of Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p. 160) can help illustrate this perspective:

We imagine, therefore, that in the construction of narratives of experience there is a reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story and reliving a life story. As researchers, we are always engaged in living, telling, reliving and retelling our own stories. Our narratives of experience as Jean and Michael are always ongoing ones. We live our stories in our experiences and tell stories of those experiences and modify them through retelling and reliving them. The research participants with whom we engage also live tell, relive and retell their stories.

I fervently believe that this paper by capturing the voice initiatives of my students' perceptions of curriculum negotiation is commensurate with a retelling of their response phenomenon as it necessitates my using a hermeneutic framework of understanding to propose meaning and knowledge through the interpretative explanations of what my students have done in the context of this paper. I believe that my mind is a dynamic and discursive construct in which my sociocultural history and the discourses available to me factor out the need for reductionism, prediction and universals (Vygotsky, 1978; Harre and Gillett, 1994). In this sense, the narratives presented in the paper are like an exploratory mission in which my lived through experiences relate to my students lived-through engagement with the 'ideational content' of a foreign language curriculum (Kramsch cited in Byrnes, 1998, p. 24). Therefore, my narrative should simultaneously tell two stories: how I believe my students made sense of their curriculum; and how their narratives of voice initiatives gel in with my epistemological, ideological and theoretical positions voiced in this paper via narrative knowing.

Narrative knowing, as being evidenced by this investigation, is metaphorized as a 'path'. The path metaphor in my narrative(s) avoids telling through any type of predictive/restrictive definitions of what my paths are like, where they start and end. In our real -life situations, we do not get to know all the aspects of our path beforehand. Our pathways, 'if they are truly human, unfold and take shape all the time as we move along, there is no need to define and name them in advance in exact terms' (Lehtovaara cited in Kohonen et al, 2001, p. 147). This is to emphasize that in narrative knowing, theoretical orientations cannot be pre-stated in the

same way they are stated by experimental researchers in quantitative/rationalistic studies (Polkinghorne, 1988; Pavlenko and Lantolf cited in Lantolf, 2000, p. 155-177; Willett, 1995).

According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998, p.156):

There are no guidelines in qualitative research for determining how many instances are necessary to support a conclusion or interpretation. This is always a judgment call.

Based on my judgment call, I then understand that a single incident or instance is sufficient to build a conceptual category. By the same token, the best insights might come from quite a small amount of data. The following views of Bleich (cited in Cooper, 1985, p. 261) provide further support to my position:

More is known about response and reading processes from small numbers of detailed reactions than from large numbers of one- word judgments. In this way, the process of teaching the development of detailed subjective response is simultaneously research into the nature of response processes.

In sum and spirit, this can act as rich underpinnings to our research practices with which we will be amply equipped to propose subject-centred conceptualizations of the phenomenon of my investigation. Voicing resistance to the discourse of quantitative researchers can then provide the stimuli and synergy for me as well as my subjects to foster our voice, agency and inter-subjectivities in developing ourselves.

“... it is difficult for any institution to enforce its own desired meanings and thought. The hybridity of language enables subjects to represent alternate meanings denied by dominant institution, if they can negotiate the inherent tensions strategically’ (Canagarajah 1999, p. 185).

Therefore, I hasten to argue that the researcher is not obliged to write a narrative ‘in which everything is said to everyone’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 349). By the same token, I believe that a presentation of selected data strands that constitute my students’ voice initiatives will be sufficient for the purpose of presentation and discussion of findings in this paper. So, I entreat my audience to view the following section as one that presents and discusses my students’ voice initiatives (VIs) in their curriculum negotiation.

### **Presentation and Discussion of Voice Initiatives (VI) as Data**

I believe that the illustrative stretches of discourse presented below can help elucidate how my students’ agency, voice and subjectivity accrued via their perceptions of curriculum negotiation. These are constitutive, indicative, representative and reflective of their VIs. The names of students have been presented as numbers in order to keep them anonymous and their voice initiatives are presented as VIs.

**VI 1:** “A negotiated language curriculum according to me means that it is not solely emergent for the child or from the teacher: it is child initiated as well as teacher supported.... Then it should be facilitative of a consultative engagement between the child and the teacher and this is what I strongly believe I should do in my class. Most importantly, I would uphold a wider

degree of learners' choice over what I to be covered and achieve in their language curriculum.”

**VI 2:** “Where and when my language curriculum doesn’t provide or encourage space for my students to examine questions and place them in themes, I would allow ample latitude to them to create a host of activities to accompany each theme that they will have identified and nominated. Such a move, I believe will, in addition to generating substantial language input will/can teach my learners what it means to be engaged as a priority democratic principle. This can help them practice what it means to be a democratic citizen.”

**VI 3:** “When my language curriculum overtly restricts space for debate, especially where my learners can construct a diversity of meanings, I will create that space wherein my learners will construct different meanings, which they will negotiate to come to a common understanding. In such situations my role as a mediator/facilitator will inspire a democratic transfer of information which supports my students’ autonomy”.

**VI 4:** “In my negotiated language curriculum comprehension takes on a whole new meaning, when my students are allowed to determine the meaning of the text for themselves. A scenario from Dickens’ *Oliver twist* could be the focus of comprehension question, which the students are expected to negotiate through.”

**VI 5:** “Presenting open-ended questions (which are missing in the text), which could relate to the learners’ own experience of Oliver's encounter having to make decisions as to whether he would stay with the gang or change the course of his life can create space for critical thinking for my students to analyse the dilemma that Oliver finds himself in and how they would respond to it. My assessment would then be done with reference to the ideational flow of my students’ writing and not necessarily with the grammatical correctness that my curriculum viciously stipulates!!!”

**VI 6:** “In my reflection on the identity formation of my learners via my curriculum negotiation, it is imperative for me to note that my learners should view me as their mediator of their language output (affordances) rather than as their mandatory authority. In light of this, I also realize that the much-touted canonised literature of the past is not to be my teaching focus, given that I must be open to other resources of learning, which are non-threatening to my learners’ sense of their self. Thus, I am led to believe that in my use of negotiated curriculum, I shall not be limited by the material provided by the institutional system as curriculum as I need to play a contributory role in fostering my learners’ identity through language practice.”

**VI 7:** “The course content in a language curriculum is ideally negotiated by all the members in a classroom, and this means that within my classroom there is series of identities that I need to take into consideration in actualizing my negotiated curriculum. With this in mind, I have decided that looking at the different roles of everyone involved in my classroom is profoundly valid as these relationships between these roles are what provides an ideal learning environment/ecosphere. So, I will use my remit to bring in all changes and



modifications that I deem necessary to negotiate my language curriculum as an instrument for promoting participatory and consultative democracy in my language classroom.”

**VI 8:** “If language is an open –ended social construct, then it can only be used as an educational practice in a negotiated curriculum. Allowing my students to take risks with their exploration of ideas, values and intuitions will significantly and positively impact their identity formation. It is only through the viaduct that a negotiated language curriculum provides, can I teach my students how to accept or negate things questioningly. This is central to their aspirations to be part and parcel of democratic citizenry.”

**VI 9:** “Without negotiating my language curriculum, I cannot be an empowering teacher, let alone my getting my students to become life-long learners. If I present the curriculum as it is handed down to me by my institutional superiors, my students will only become undiscerning consumers of knowledge or victims of extractive practices. In order for them to move from a language pedagogy of silence and homogenization to one of voice and agency, I need to show them how to negotiate their language curriculum for their empowerment and democratic participation in their society. This demands that I teach them embedded relevance making.”

**VI 10:** “I believe that my negotiated language curriculum still achieves the Department of Education's desired outcomes and objectives without my being sticky and picky about each lesson's assessment tasks as laid down by the curriculum. However, I can still maintain standards and improvise with a variety of teaching strategies and assessment practices. An example would be grade 10 English summary skills exercise. Instead of giving the one story or article as it appears in the text, I would give my students two or three stories to choose from or alternatively ask them to choose their own article /story and summarise it as well as justify their choice of it.”

**VI 11:** “Language teachers often become curriculum clerks as they create dependency on the text books they use with their students. Consequently, their students can no longer make sense of themselves or formulate their own interpretations of a theme/topic beyond the information found in their English language textbook. In short, for want of negotiated curriculum, the language teacher has used his enslavement to a course-book culture to perpetuate learning as one that values correct answers and rejects incorrect answers.

**VI 12:** “I have no doubt that a negotiated language curriculum can help nourish subjectivity in my students as well as their agency and subject hood. I also believe that the space created by my negotiated language curriculum helps my students construct their identities in relation to others and, in particular, in relation to my understanding of the ‘other’ (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 7). This is also known in South Africa as ‘Ubuntu’. It means “I am because of you”. It is this sense of humanity that my negotiated language curriculum instils in my students which makes it invaluable to my educational practices of language teaching.

The VIs presented so far can verifiably attest to my students' perceptions/ and their agentic reckoning of the curriculum. These signpost a significant shift in the axis of power from the

curriculum specialist/policy maker, not to mention “curriculum clerk”, to the classroom practitioner. (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). In addition, the VIs signpost my students’ “elaborate processing” (Beach cited in Lawson, Ryan & Winterowd, 1989, p.187) of the semiotic dimensions of the curriculum. In this sense, their emergent perceptions testify to their bold semiotic mediations of a handed down curriculum, which they felt was rather disempowering. This is to suggest that that my students have come to realize that they are empowered to receive, react and reconstitute the curriculum, which they see as an institutional/impositional semiotic. By the same token, I wish to argue that such realizations and bold positioning by my students should be seen as acts of their border-crossings by which they make sense of their “recreated self constituting their inter-sectional identities” as well as their world.

Our endorsement of negotiated language curriculum should then help us negate the main stream SLA’s preoccupation with the development and measurement of proficiency in language as a non-agentive approximation to a linguistic code rather than an agentive realization by which our learners cross the borders of their first language into a second in order to reconstruct their selves and world ( Sivasubramaniam, 2015). Our preoccupation with collecting evidence for language learning has led us to view language learning as ‘a reaping or harvesting act’. We have not paid any attention to ‘the sowing’ that precedes reaping. As pointed out by Bronfenbrenner (1979) our focus has been turned away from person, process, context and time in that our preoccupations have centered on reaping statistical analyses and numerical measures (Wittgenstein, 1980; Bakhurst, 1991). Given this, by encouraging and infusing a constant associative and negotiative discourse of reckoning in our student teachers, we can bring about vibrant curriculum negotiations as humanizing endeavours in any increasingly bureaucratized institutional settings that care only about outcomes and not those values and beliefs central to the very existence and nurturing of all those who come to the classroom. In the abject paucity of such a realization how can our educational practices of teaching ensure the prevalence and protection of democratic citizenry?

Taking into consideration all that I have discussed and argued so far in my paper can justify the need to contextualize my students’ VIs and interpret knowledge encapsulated in it as an outcome of that contextualization (Polanyi, 1958; Toulmin, 1990; Chopra, 2000). In light of this, my paper has chosen an internalist position in its attempt to conceptualize the relationship between myself as researcher and what is investigated. Such a choice is necessary because the paper needs to make value-loaded judgments by allowing me to become a participant observer in my role as a teacher and to factor in the teacher as well as my student teachers as the organizing voice to provide centrality and immediacy. It is argued that research of this kind, which views teaching in this way, will uphold the teacher’s and the students’ voice and the perspective required to validate it. Such a position synchronizes the demand for the utilization of personal knowledge (Polanyi, 1958; Toulmin, 1990) with a basis for redefining the relationship between teaching and research. By demonstrating the potential teaching as a way of knowing, it can point to what is going on with learners in particular lessons, or from the learners’ point of view. As observed by Paley (1986, p. 131):

The classroom has all the elements of the theatre, and the observant, self-examining teacher will not need a drama critic to uncover character, plot and meaning. We are all of us, the actors, trying to find the meaning of the scenes in which we find ourselves. In keeping with the above-stated issues, I have presented this paper as a story of lived-through experiences. In order to do that, I have drawn on narratives based on the live data: the VIs collected from the classroom. It should be noted that these narratives have used the live data discursively, indicatively and impressionistically to relate the story of lived-through experiences. Therefore, my paper should not be viewed as a rationalistic/positivistic/scientific account of a phenomenon. To the contrary, it should be viewed as a discursive narrative in which my students and I voice our autobiographical knowledge about language teaching and the beliefs, intuitions and values that underlie it. There is support for such an undertaking in research literature. Edge and Richards (1998, p. 334-356) have argued against quantitative interpretations that center on testing specific hypotheses related to narrow observations of linguistic or other types of human behaviour. In this connection, they have voiced support for research, which by being unequivocally subjective and dialectical, includes different and even opposing perspectives of the same phenomenon to investigate issues of position, voice and representation.

The above stated position is further supported by Duff (cited in Kaplan, 2002, p. 19) who has observed:

The personal accounts and narratives of the experiences of language teachers, learners and others, often across a broader span of time, space, experience and languages have now become a major focus in some qualitative research. Evidence of this are first person narratives, diary studies, autobiographies, and life histories of developing teaching or losing aspects of one's language identity and affective orientation.

It is argued that the accruing 'narrative is the fundamental scheme for linking individual human actions and event into interrelated aspects of an understandable composite' (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 13). By illustrating the identifiable features of my students' VIs as social activities, my narratives can serve to interpret and confirm the premise of this paper. As a result, the narratives have helped me to articulate my attempts to construct knowledge through the interpretive experiences of my student participants and the context in which these experiences acquire meaning.

Current metaphors in SLA such as, 'association', 'manipulation', 'conditioning', 'treatment' and 'system' characterize it as an asocial enterprise in that human beings while learning have come to be viewed as laboratory –based objects that have no agency and subject hood (van Lier cited in Candlin and Mercer, 2001, p.90). "To continue looking for operationally defined, discretely measured, statistically manipulated and casually predictive variables would be to approach one job with tools that belong to another. It would be like going to an archaeological site with a combine harvester or like shining shoes with a nail file" (van Lier cited in Candlin and Mercer, 2001, p.90).

Closure-focused students have come to be seen as idealized human beings by researchers in the rationalist/positivist tradition as they believe that learning is a closure-focused task aimed at producing determinate/fixed meanings, which are not only atemporal and universal but are also measurable and quantifiable and therefore, justifiable. In the VIs presented above, I hasten to point out that the evidence accruing from it can confirm that my students have moved away boldly from any intent or inclination to indulge in closure focused practices that their handed down curriculum can demand of them. This can confirm their democratic attitude and disposition underpinning their educational response to a handed down curriculum. Given the indeterminate/provisional meanings and ideas that they chose to signpost in their VIs, it is only reasonable to believe that these students have come to realize how and why a curriculum should be a fluid construct and not one that is seen as an inventory of imperatives and instructions.

### **Conclusion**

The students' VIs presented above can provide some tenable insights into who competent students are. As evidenced in the VIs, competent students perceive their curriculum as a space for constructing their own attitudes and opinions through "elaborative processing" (Beach cited in Lawson, Ryan & Winterowd, 1989, p.187). If the students view their curricular assignments as a sign, which can be interpreted and related to other signs, it would influence a multiple creation of texts/narratives besides contributing to a dialogic atmosphere in class thereby influencing a diversity of utterances/interpretations (Bakhtin, 1981). In the absence of a negotiated curriculum, the above-stated position and outcomes will not accrue in the educational practices of our language teaching. Therefore there is a lot at stake in not encouraging the practices of curriculum negotiation with our student teachers. The following quotation can help reinforce that:

"Education in this era of social transformation must serve critical and constructive ends. On the other hand, youth need the knowledge and the intellectual tools required for critical appraisal of ideals and social mechanisms-new and old. Youth need to develop positive emotional drives that will quicken intellectual insights. They will be able to free themselves from antisocial attitudes and will be impelled to achieve a world that will safeguard human values." (Rosenblatt, 1995, p.171)

Pavlenko and Lantolf argue that first person narratives such as journals can offer fuller accounts about the 'experience of becoming and being bilingual' (Pavlenko and Lantolf cited in Lantolf, 2000, p. 157). The same can be applied to my students' VIs as they are first person narratives. Their assertions echo the views of Searle (1992, p. 95) who observes:

... in ways that are not at all obvious on the surface, much of the bankruptcy of the most work in philosophy of mind, a great deal of sterility of academic psychology over the past fifty years, over the whole of my intellectual lifetime, have come from a persistent failure to recognize and come to terms with the fact that ontology of the mental is an irreducibly first person ontology.

In keeping with the position voiced above, I am inclined to believe that the narratives accruing in my students' VIs and mine can help signpost the value of the first-person ontology of the mental, which is often ignored in positivist persuasions predominant in quantitative studies. By the same token, given the international following that the PGCE English language curriculum enjoys, I believe that my colleagues around the world would find it inviting to deduce current relevance and translatability of the issues discussed in this paper with a view to inspiring their student teachers doing the PGCE to negotiate the curriculum via their VIs. This can help them understand their VIs as manifestations of their voice, agency, intersubjectivity. When this happens, they will be better placed to come to terms with the pedagogical border crossings attempted by their students. Perhaps such endeavours could lay the groundwork for launching into a series of longitudinal studies: autoethnographies of curriculum negotiations. I then wish to invoke the following lines in Choruses from the Rock by T.S Eliot (1915). These should exhort us to foster our agency, voice and intersubjectivity in our professional practices as an antidote to the prevalence of atemporal, asocial and calculable knowledge that has assumed hegemonic status, much to the detriment of our professional wellbeing as well as our students':

“The endless cycle of idea and action,  
Endless invention, endless experiment,  
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;  
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;  
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.  
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,  
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,  
But nearness to death no nearer to GOD.  
Where is the Life we have lost in living?  
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”

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