

NCLE notes

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Creating and Re-creating Self: Social Identity and the ESL Learner

Social identity can be seen as the various ways in which people understand themselves in relation to others, and how they view their past and their future (Peirce, 1995). The act of immigrating to a new country can profoundly affect a person's social identity. In fact, some people experience this change more as an act of re-creation than as a temporary process of readjustment. For example, it might necessitate re-creating one's parental role because one's child can more quickly acquire the new language and perform tasks such as talking with a landlord or paying bills. It might mean a shift in one's collective identity, so that being from the coastal village of Bucáy in Ecuador is overshadowed by becoming or being seen as Latin American. These transformations are complex and continual, redefining all aspects of self along the lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, religious affiliation, ability or disability, and so on. Although many teachers working with adults learning English as a second language (ESL) will find that issues of social identity are familiar strands in classroom conversation, most educators do not address this issue overtly in the classroom.

Social Identity and Language Learning

Recently, researchers have questioned the way in which second language acquisition theorists have understood the language learner's relationship to the social world (McKay & Wong, 1996; Peirce, 1995). Peirce (1995) asks why learners communicate successfully in some situations, while in others they falter or remain silent. Rejecting the idea that this can be sufficiently explained by personality traits such as introversion and extroversion or by a lack of motivation, Peirce argues that a learner's ability to speak is also affected by relations of power between speakers. Structural inequalities such as racism, sexism, and classism can limit learners' exposure to English as well as their opportunities to practice it. Peirce (1995) also questions the concept of instrumental and integrative motivation that have been especially influential in the field of second language acquisition (Gardner and Lambert, 1972). Peirce believes that instrumental motivation (learning a language for a specific reason, such as seeking employment) and integrative motivation (learning a language to become part of a particular community) fall short in describing the language learner's situation, because they assume a static identity and a singular desire on the part of the language learner. In order to better represent human complexity and account for the ambivalence that learners sometimes feel in the process of language learning, Peirce suggests that the concept of *investment in the target language* may be a useful comple-

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The Making of an Adult ESL Teacher

Traditionally, adult ESL teachers come to their jobs from a variety of backgrounds, combining formal and informal training and experiences. In some states, there is still no requirement beyond a college degree to teach adult ESL. But within the field itself, the need for increased professionalization has prompted a call for the clear articulation of qualifications that acknowledge both formal training and the value of experience.

Prospective ESL teachers should have some knowledge about second language acquisition and teaching. Because many teachers come from K-12 or similar settings with limited exposure to adults, it is important as well that they acquire an understanding of how adults learn.

The most common options for formal training are the certificate in TESOL and the Master's degree, although alternative structures are being explored for pre- and in-service education and professional development. These include mentoring, reflective teaching, and applied science models. The certificate in TESOL usually consists of 18-21 graduate credits from a university or teacher-training program. Master's degrees (M.Ed. TESOL, M.A. or M.S. in Linguistics, M.A. in English with emphasis in ESL, M.A.T. with emphasis in TESOL) usually require 30-36 hours of graduate level credits, depending upon thesis and practicum

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NEWS IN BRIEF

NCLE Authors Speak at Library of Congress



Dr. Reynaldo Macías debunks myths about immigrants and literacy.

On October 22nd, the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) and the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress cosponsored The Politics of Language and Literacy, a presentation and discussion with researchers (and NCLE authors) Dr. Terrence Wiley and Dr. Reynaldo Macías. More than 100 people attended the event, which was held in the Mumford Room at the Library. A lively discussion session on bilingual education, myths about literacy, and ways that public debate becomes polarized followed talks by Wiley and Macías. It was moderated by CAL board member Dr. Deborah Tannen of Georgetown University.

Wiley's *Literacy and Language Diversity in the United States* was published by NCLE and Delta Systems in 1996. Both Macías and Wiley contributed to the forthcoming re-issue of *The American Bilingual Tradition* by Heinz Kloss. To order either book, call Delta Systems at (800) 323-8270.



Dr. Terrence Wiley says that people ignore years of research when they attack bilingual education.

Photos by Pat Fisher.

RESOURCE UPDATE

English Digest is a new high-interest, easy-reading, bimonthly magazine for adult English language learners. Stories feature famous immigrants, health and beauty tips, national news, and job and consumer information. Subscriptions cost \$6.95/yr. for 6 issues (with discounts for multiple subscriptions). **Teacher's Tips**, included with orders (and soon available on Delta's and CAL's websites), is written by staff at the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) and has teaching suggestions for each issue of **English Digest**. A Spanish version, **La Familia de la Ciudad**, is also available. To order the magazines, call Delta Systems at (800) 323-8270 or visit their website at <http://www.delta-systems.com>.

Lee Weinstein of Invergarry Learning Centre in British Columbia, Canada called us with some sad news. For a long time the guiding star of published student writings, **Voices** magazine has now ceased publication. The Fall 1997 final issue (Vol. 8, No. 2) is an especially beautiful example. At 80 pages and bound more like a book than a magazine, it features the stories of ESL and other adult learners from programs in El Paso, Texas, British Columbia, and Newfoundland. You can see their faces in lovely full-page black and white photographs. ESL and literacy classrooms everywhere will miss this resource! For copies of the last issue (\$7 including postage) or of various back issues (\$1 each) contact **Voices**, 9260 140th St., Surrey, BC, Canada V3V 5Z4 (604) 730-6844. Fax (604) 730-6840.

Those who work with migrant farmworkers may want to check out **ESL for Farm Safety**—a low-literacy ESL text that teaches farmworkers how to be safe with pesticides and prevent agricultural injuries (\$25 per teacher's manual; \$12 per student workbook) and the **Radio Pesticida Worker Protection Kit**—a binder of Spanish audio cassette mini-dramas and a Spanish/English text on pesticide safety. (\$50 per kit; tapes only also available in Haitian Creole for \$25). Both are available from the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs (AFOP), 1611 No. Kent St., Suite 910, Arlington, VA 22209. (703) 528-4141. Fax (703) 528-4145.

Have you ever wondered why it is better for children to start learning second languages in elementary school? Or how you can help get a language program started at your child's school? A pamphlet called **Why, How, and When Should My Child Learn a Second Language?** just may have the answers. Contact Access ERIC at (800) 538-3742 for your free copy. Also, check out the Foreign Language Initiative's **Nanduti** website at www.cal.org/earlylang for more early foreign language learning information and links.

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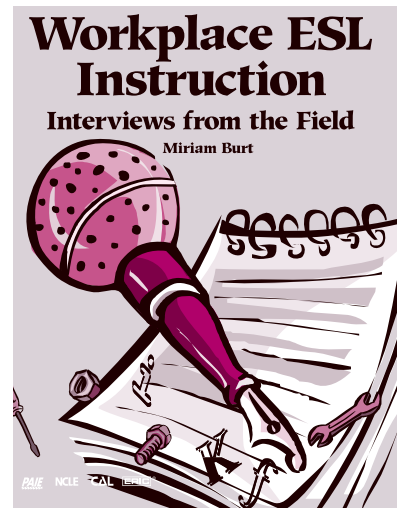
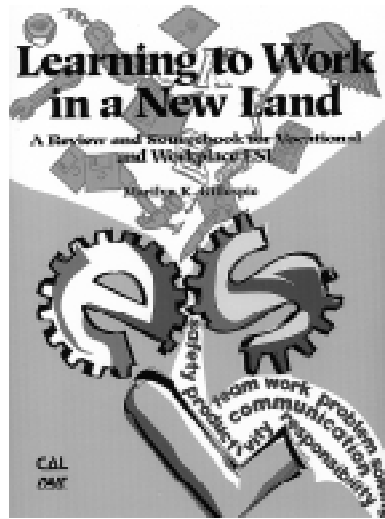
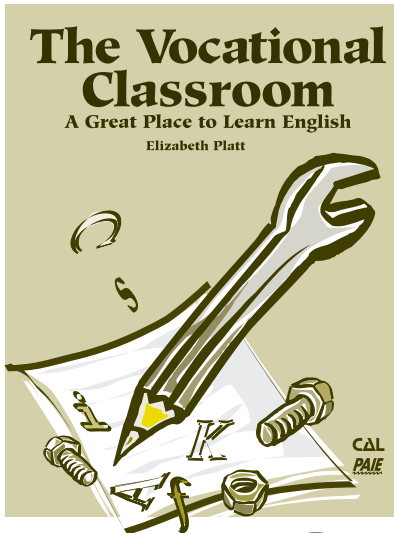
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Publication Order Form

Issues in Workplace and Vocational ESL Instruction (see prices below)



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ERIC Digests about Adult ESL are now available for



downloading from NCLE's website!



<http://www.cal.org/ncle>

Recent ERIC Digests (Free)

- ___ Using Volunteers as Aides in the Adult ESL Classroom (November 1997)
- ___ The Adult ESL Teaching Profession (October 1997)
- ___ Social Identity and the Adult ESL Classroom (October 1997)
- ___ Needs Assessment for Adult ESL Learners (May 1997)
- ___ Myths about Language Diversity and Literacy (May 1997)
- ___ Improving ESL Learners' Listening Skills (Q&A) (February 1997)

Recent Annotated Bibliographies (Free)

- ___ ESL Instruction in the Health Care Setting (November 1997)
- ___ ESL Instruction in the Hospitality Industry (November 1997)
- ___ Workplace ESL Literacy Curricula and Guides (February 1997)
- ___ Native Language Literacy Instruction (November 1996)
- ___ Spanish Language Literacy Instruction (November 1996)
- ___ School to Work and Vocational ESL for Young Adults (November 1996)

Issue Papers (Orders must be prepaid. Make checks payable to CAL.)

- ___ Workplace ESL Instruction: Interviews from the Field (1997) (56 pp./\$5)
- ___ Learning to Work in a New Land (1997) (165 pp./\$7)
- ___ The Vocational Classroom (1996) (31 pp./\$4)

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ESL Teacher, continued from p. 1
requirements. Typical course topics include principles of linguistics, second language acquisition theory, phonetics, psycholinguistics, and ESL teaching methods. Although not all MA programs offer courses specifically designed for individuals who wish to teach adults, Master's degrees offer the ESL professional—including those who want to work with adults—the most varied employment options.

Practical experience, such as volunteer teaching, tutoring, or working as an aide in an ESL class, is useful. Personal experience in learning another language, adapting to a new culture, or interacting with adults in an educational context is also helpful, as is familiarity with the lives and concerns of the target learners.



These articles are excerpted from The Adult ESL Teaching Profession by MaryAnn Cunningham Florez of NCLE and Social Identity and the Adult ESL Classroom by Char Ullman of The University of Arizona who was a Summer 1997 Tucker Fellow at the Center for Applied Linguistics. To get a copy of the complete publications, use the order form on the reverse or go to NCLE's website at <http://www.cal.org/ncle> and look under What's New or ERIC Digests.

Visit TESOL's website at <http://www.tesol.edu>.



CAL board member Dr. Deborah Tannen of Georgetown University moderates the discussion at *The Politics of Language and Literacy*. She says the press likes to describe debate as conflict and that doesn't help us talk to each other about issues. See p. 2 for details.

Photo by Pat Fisher.

Social Identity, continued from p. 1

ment to theories of motivation. Whereas motivation is understood as an aspect of the language learner, investment describes the complex dynamic relationship between the learner and the social world. In her study of immigrant women learning English in Canada, Peirce (1995) found that the women sometimes had ambivalent feelings about speaking English. This hesitation seemed to come from their resistance to the identities others were creating for them, not from a lack of motivation. For example, one woman avoided talking with native speakers of English because she did not want to be identified as an immigrant, an identity that she understood to have negative connotations. Another learner, a middle-aged woman working with native English-speaking teenagers in a fast-food restaurant, chose to confront similar barriers to her use of English by "claim[ing] her right to speak" (p.23). Because of her difficulties in speaking English, her co-workers forced her to do more than her share of the work. When they told her to clean up even though they had nothing to do, she positioned herself as a parent and them as children. This allowed her to assume more power in the conversation to get more equitable treatment.

References

- Gardner, R.C., & Lambert, W.C. (1972). *Attitudes and motivation in second language learning*. London: Edward Arnold.
- McKay, S.L., & Wong, S.-L.C. (1996). Multiple discourses, multiple identities: Investment and agency in second-language learning among Chinese adolescent immigrant students. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(3), pp. 577-608.
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