ABSTRACT: This explorative study seeks to deepen an understanding of how knowledge from students and their communities can be harnessed to enhance their agentive power as learners of English as a second or foreign language. The context is my participation as a teacher and teacher educator in a two year after-school English language teaching programme for socio-economically disadvantaged learners in South India. My study is framed by a ‘Funds of Knowledge’ approach that seeks to value what students bring to school from their community as the basis of their school learning. The findings show students making headway in developing spontaneous oral communication. However, in the case of writing, their development takes a recursive path. The implications for enhancing learner autonomy in the English classroom, and for teachers who want to put learners on the road to autonomy, are discussed.

KEYWORDS: disadvantaged learners, home-school disconnect, alienation, community knowledge, inclusive learning, learner autonomy, language across the curriculum

0. INTRODUCTION

The standard school curriculum often tends to ignore the resources that culturally diverse students bring to the classroom from their community. This neglect results in a home-school disconnect and makes classroom learning, particularly of English as a Second Language (ESL), an alienating experience for these students. Learning from students and their communities can be used to build productive relationships between teacher, student and community to enhance students’ agentive role in an inclusive learning environment. Learner-centred approaches to learning,

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1 Earlier versions of this study have been presented at the ILA Conference, Victoria University of Wellington in September 2012 and at TEC13, Hyderabad in March 2013. I thank the audiences for useful comments, particularly R. Amritavalli, whose perceptive suggestions helped me improve this paper. However, I alone am responsible for anything still wanting in it.

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including second language learning, acknowledge students’ voice as central to their learning experience (Dewey 1936; Vygotsky 1987). The voice that students bring to the classroom emerges from their experience and learning in their community. Therefore, language learning as an inclusive process needs to link students’ “word and world” (Freire 1970) to their new learning inside the classroom. This tenet aligns with the central pedagogical principles of the current curricular approach in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (NCERT 2005), which privilege local knowledge and experience in children’s learning within a valued multicultural setting.

1. THE CONTEXT

The context for this study is my participation as a teacher educator and teacher in a two year after-school English language teaching programme for socio-economically disadvantaged children in the age group of 14-18 years in a Muslim minority school in Karnataka.2 The course had a total of 360 hours with three one and a half hour sessions per week. I taught a batch of 25 students. We were expected to follow a task-based, learner-centred approach in order to promote students’ ability to communicate in English. This approach, however, was different from the one the students were exposed to in the regular school they attended, creating a tension-laden path for students to negotiate. These children’s ways of being in their community, their experiences and learning there, did not form the foundation of the new information given to them at school. The more ‘recitation script’ culture, where the teacher controls the classroom discourse (Cazden 2001; Gallimore & Tharp 1990), was not very responsive to student productions or voice in the regular school. My challenge, in this situation, was to bring out their everyday creativity by making space for participation from their cultural location.

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2 The programme, called ACCESS Micro-scholarship, is supported by RELO, US Embassy, New Delhi.
2. THE APPROACH: ‘FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE’

My effort to unlock and capitalize on the knowledge that these students already possessed is framed by a ‘funds of knowledge’ approach. This is a concept associated with the work of González et al. (2005). They define funds of knowledge as “those historically developed and accumulated strategies (skills, abilities, ideas, practices) or bodies of knowledge that are essential to a household’s functioning and well being” (ibid, p. 91-92). Based on the idea that people are competent due to the knowledge gained from their life experience, the funds of knowledge approach claims that this competence and knowledge opens possibilities for “positive pedagogical actions” (ibid, preface x). This lens helps alter our perception of culturally diverse students as being deficient and start to view the knowledge they bring from their communities as a resource. It helps us imagine an inclusive pedagogy where students’ funds of knowledge provide tools to create a bridge between their out of school experience and the learning in the classroom. It suggests a guided, inquiry-based strategy that gives an active participatory role to learners to engage in the process of learning from their cultural, experiential and imagined location.

3. METHODOLOGY

The data for my ethnographically oriented study have been gathered from multiple sources over two years from 2010 to 2012. These sources are class observation; conversations with students and teachers; audio and video recording of house visits and my class; student scripts; photographs; field notes; and my reflective journal. I have used learner development to categorize the data by identifying emergent themes. The development of my students showed a zigzag path responding to the divergent pulls exerted by expectations and practices in students’ school and out of school contexts on the one hand, and the alternative practices in my class, on the other. So the data analysis is presented as sets of tensions as learners negotiated conflicting conceptions of learning. Two salient tensions that the data analysis shows are ‘product vs. process’
and ‘dependence vs. independence’. I will not dwell on the tension ‘dependence vs. independence’ as it is not directly relevant to language learning, which is the main focus of this paper. The analysis also shows signs of increased agency reflected in the data and the mutual learning and support in a relationship of trust between parents, students and the teacher.

4. PRODUCT VERSUS PROCESS IN WRITING AND ORAL WORK

As mentioned earlier, the main focus in the regular school context seemed to be on the ‘product’ of learning. The structure of the learning experience provided there was characterized by the individual working in isolation. In contrast, my class focused on the ‘processes’ of learning by encouraging learner investment in pair and group work. In the beginning, students’ attention was centred on getting the right answer. They had the tendency to copy the answer from others. This collided with the process oriented questions I posed such as, ‘Why do you think so?’ or ‘How did you arrive at this answer?,’ and these questions were met by silent confusion.

4.1 Speaking and writing about a festival

In order to wean them from their mimetic leanings I tried to engage them with topics that they could respond to from their cultural knowledge and experience without the need to copy. For instance, in the first month of my teaching, the school had declared a holiday for a festival. I asked the students to tell me what this festival was about. The students seemed surprised that I was foregoing precious class time on incidental matters. This is probably because such topics from their culture were never valued as legitimate material for classroom discussion. The students seemed amused at my earnest interest in learning from them about their festival. At the same time, they were excited to tell me about it.

In the mutual learning that followed, there was genuine negotiation for meaning, with me trying to understand what they said while they were learning the language they could use to make themselves understood. After class, I overheard students comment that the class was fun. I was
pleased with their involvement in learning and felt encouraged enough to push them further with a writing task about what they did on the festival day.

In the following class all of them submitted their work. However, and to my surprise, all the submissions were identical – they were copies of one another. Even more surprisingly, as the sample below shows, the compositions consisted of transliterations of spoken Urdu, their home language, into Roman script.

**Figure 1. Identical student scripts**
*(transliterated from Urdu into Roman script)*

*Samples (in handwriting)*

![Samples](image)

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**Aakhri Charshumba**

*Hamare Huzur sallalahu alaihiwala salam charshumba ke din hi bimara pade thee aur aakhri charshumba ke din hi weh ache hokar, naha dhokar ghar se jab woh bahar nikle to ek aurat Huzur ku sawal kiya ke Huzur kya aapne pani nahaye hain; aur iske bad wo hariyali khundal se jab woh*

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**The development of oral and written communication**  21
ghar wapas laute toh bahuth hi zyada bimar pad gaye aur is ke bad wo wafath paye.

Translation in English
The Last Wednesday
Our prophet, peace be upon him, fell ill on a Wednesday and on the same day he got rid of his illness and when he came out of his house after taking a bath, a woman questioned the prophet whether he had taken a bath. After this, when he returned to his house stepping on the grass, he felt more ill and then he expired.

4.1.1 Attitudes to writing: writing for evaluation
I did not know whether to feel disappointed that the students had turned an open ended discussion about their festival experiences into a stereotypical composition on the festival, or to marvel at their idea of transliterating their language into ‘English’ script, indicating a resourcefulness on their part well beyond what had been taught or was expected. This set me thinking. I tried to understand why my hope and assumption that the developing spontaneity of students’ oral responses would automatically transfer to their efforts in writing had been belied.

Their use of transliteration can be seen as a compensatory tool for the students’ lack of adequate proficiency in English to accomplish the writing task. It also seems to point, more importantly, to the prevalent school culture, where writing in the classroom is largely seen as a preparation for the examination. In their regular schoolroom, most of the writing work students do is in the form of copying answers given by the teacher. According to teachers, “If we allow students to write by themselves, they write all wrong; the same thing they go and write in the exams also. So we have to help them.” It is this fixation with ‘writing correctly’ that seems to make teachers anxious to provide directive help to students in the form of readymade products of writing. This way of avoiding ‘mistakes’ rather than of encouraging students to explore the process of writing on their own, prevails even in their writing instruction in the students’ own languages, and in other subjects.
This lack of confidence in the students’ ability to produce ‘the right answers’ seems to encourage the practice of rote learning in the classroom. The students seem to copy the given answers mindlessly and reproduce the same in tests as a way to approximate to the expected ‘right answer.’ For me, this signalled the need to, first of all, mediate writing as a tool to accomplish a variety of tasks other than for answering tests. It was necessary to enable students to see writing as a communicative medium that they could use with the same spontaneity as the spoken word.

4.1.2 Writing without individual evaluation
In the next assignment, students were asked to write about their family. They continued to display the tendency to copy.

Figure 2. Writing samples on the topic ‘My Family’

However, the samples show them graduating from transliteration of Urdu to writing in English. They were also discerning enough to substitute the names of their parents appropriately even in what they had copied. Prior to this writing activity, I had had them note down the details they
orally provided about their family in class. A few students showed some differentiation in their writing by making use of the notes they had made in class.

I did not ‘correct’ their writing. Instead, I compiled some common problems they encountered in expressing meaning and set other tasks to address them. I also set a variety of fun activities, which needed them to write for different purposes, addressing different audiences (e.g. the game of shop which is discussed a little later in this section). The underlying purpose was to help them overcome the fear of evaluation by deemphasizing the focus on correctness. However, in the regular school classroom, creating such activity settings, which weave together spoken and written language with students’ prior understanding, poses a challenge to teachers in terms of their own English language ability. Besides, it calls for much more effort than the teachers are used to for preparing students in ways more profound than learning by rote.

4.2 Materials from the community to link up with the prescribed text

I looked for fresh material that students were familiar with, in order to engage them in meaning making, away from rote practices. This pursuit led me to establish links with students’ home community through house visits. These visits helped me understand the cultural system of students and my learning in the community enabled me to relate this community knowledge strategically to classroom teaching. For instance, the photographs I took of the work common in their community provided visuals for introducing the topic ‘Jobs’. This priming facilitated a transfer of teaching to a unit in the textbook about ‘Work and Workplaces,’ and helped engage students in different types of tasks involving listening, speaking, reading and writing.

All the activities that the students engaged in had a starting point in their culture and experience. This can be seen, for instance, in the following list of professions students compiled, which is a mix of the

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3 The dialogue I had with students and their parents also helped me understand and address, to some extent, students’ needs beyond the classroom by initiating some critical reflection and rethinking about issues pertaining to their lives, such as education, marriage and social practices.
professions in their community they were familiar with and had learned to name in English, such as housewife, porter, incense stick maker, beedi worker, scrap merchant, carpenter and gate man, and new professions mentioned in their English textbook, such as real estate agent, writer, architect and receptionist.

Figure 3. List of jobs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Merchant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incense stick maker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beedi worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrap merchant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carpenter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attender</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vendor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Packer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Real estate agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gate man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receptionist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A question about what the characters in the text did starts with what they do, as the following samples illustrate:
Figure 4. Samples: students learning to communicate meaningfully

I am Tabassum Khan. My father is no more. My mother is Beedi worker. I work at home. Embroider, wash the clothes, sweep etc after that my help to mother.

Mohammed Afaq

What work you do?

My father is work as (C.E.F.R.I). My mother is house wife. I do work at home. give food to school children. Repair.

Brandon Smith

He is study in junior high school. He is a part time job consistent. He want to go to the university.

Lauren Russell

She is studying 2 in senior high school. She work as a cashier. She want go to a new clothes go out on Saturday night. She want lot of money.

Erica Davis

She is studying in freshman college. She work as a law office. She want to lawyer.

Aisiya

I'm Aisiya. My father is Guiny merchant. My mother is House wife. I work at home such as washing the cloth, clean the floor, grind the masala and cooking. With help to my sister. And I will do home work.
However, even after several attempts at writing instruction, I found that mimetic tendencies coexisted with signs of developing spontaneity and agency. To illustrate, I shall describe one of the activities that the students engaged in, a game of keeping shop.

4.2.1 The game of keeping shop

This activity provided space for student contribution and learning in a “collective ZPD” (Mahn & John-Steiner 2002). There was a preparatory stage to expose the students to the vocabulary related to the things they were going to have in their shop, listing items that came from them and me, putting price tags on the items each one brought to keep in the shop. By assuming the roles of shopkeeper and customer, students developed the language to transact with in the shop. They put up a notice inviting teachers and students from other sections to visit their store. They took charge of different departments in the store and the show seemed to go well. The students seemed to have picked up a lot of vocabulary and some expressions in the process as the following sample shows.

Figure 5. Sample of shop inventory

A collective ZPD or Zone of Proximal Development refers to individuals operating at different zones of development sustaining mutual learning and creativity as they work collaboratively.
However, their post shop writing performance continued to be disturbing. In response to an unstructured writing task about their participation and experience in the shop, they all produced an identical ‘Essay on a provision store’ which was totally unconnected to the task on hand as can be seen in the following sample.

**Figure 6. Sample writing: back to mimetic ways**

![Sample Essay on Provision Store]

If I start a new business I'll love to open a provision store.

The reason to open a store is my idea of serving the society with good quality foods and hot food. Price also my continuous view and dedication will help me improve my store and capture a regular consumer. This will fetch me a good profit and also long term relation with my customers. And my future development will be to grow and branch out my service.
4.2.2 Cultural attitudes to writing in an oral society

The students’ response indicated that they needed more support for writing; but of what nature, was the question. They were more spontaneous in speaking. My assumption that this oral exercise would serve as a precursor to writing was not supported: these oral interactions did not seem to equip students adequately to attempt writing independently. They had not begun to see the possibility of carrying the self-expression activated in their oral communication into writing. They seemed to miss seeing this interface between orality and writing that I was trying to establish. The written word seemed to carry a different value, with an emphasis on correctness, which restrained them from risk-taking as they did with speaking.

This perception of writing as linked to given ideas rather than the expression of new ideas is probably what holds students back from investing in such production. This view of writing has cultural antecedents and arises from the way students are socialized in their community and school. These must be considered in order to understand students’ resistance to developing autonomy in writing. One of the cultural roots can be traced to Islamic calligraphy. It was the primary means of preservation and transmission of the Qur’an and therefore writing came to be seen as something sacred and invariant. In India, centuries later, British colonialism seems to have reinforced this image of writing. One of the prominent features of the colonial administration was the focus on diligent record keeping practices at all levels to maintain the power of bureaucracy and then through the introduction of the modern education in India. This emphasis on the correctness of what is written was further reinforced by an examination system where the writing of correct answers was the key to success.

The accountability linked to what is put down in writing seems to continue to haunt teachers even today as it is the records they keep more than the teaching they pursue in the classroom that is held up to scrutiny by the educational authorities during school inspection. One of the teachers pointed out, “Much importance is given to maintaining

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5 I am thankful to M. Assadi and B.P. Indira for the discussions I had with them on this, and J. Tharu for his valuable comments.
records, more than teaching. It takes much time. Sometimes we have to use class time to finish it.” Both the cultural veneration of writing and the bureaucratic accountability associated with what is in writing seem to be dominant in teachers’ notions. It is very likely that, through transfer, students also imbibe such deeply held beliefs about notions of correctness with regard to writing, which could explain their reluctance to venture into producing meaning beyond the given. It is important to note that this inhibition is less persistent in the spoken mode of communication.

However, with appropriate encouragement, challenge, and support in class from me and their peers, students were able to produce short pieces of writing. When left to themselves with homework, they seemed to revert to being other-regulated, with directive support from their teachers easily available in school.

Going by my experience, students seem to need time to understand writing as a process of producing meaning and not as mere imitation. Besides, they seem to need a lot of in-class collaborative support for developing the ability to write independently, and to learn to value self-authorship. The following excerpt from a student’s view corroborates this:

Pair work is better than individual work. If we have difficulties, we ask other person. If she has any views in her mind, she will express these views. I also express my views. We mix and get more ideas…our thinking is clear, then easy to write also.

5. A TRAJECTORY OF DEVELOPMENT

As mentioned earlier, my class and the school classroom appear to have worked at cross purposes with regard to the goals and means of language learning, making students’ developmental trajectories recursive. Nevertheless, the regressions in students’ developmental trajectories need to be seen not as the end of their development, but as transitional stages for further development when faced with new challenging tasks. Overall,
at the end of two years, I could see a marked progress in students’ ability in English, including writing, as they negotiated the opposing pulls exerted by their regular school and my class. This is supported by their comparative performance in the pre- and post-proficiency tests (see § 5.1.3 for samples) conducted before and after the ACCESS programme.

5.1 Signs of increased agency

5.1.1 Move from rote learning to understanding

The inquiry approach to teaching adopted in my class seemed to provide learning experience that helped students move away from rote learning to understanding using ‘autonomy motivated’ (Hill 2004) strategies. In all the support that students received for language learning, there was nothing didactic. The students had to learn to read by reading and not me reading on their behalf and explaining the text as in their school context. The students learned through collaborative meaning making as they engaged in activities such as buddy reading\(^6\) or working in pairs and groups.

5.1.2 Investment in developing their knowledge and language

The main factor that gave students their agentive voice was the incorporation of their funds of knowledge into classroom teaching. My learning about students’ lives and ways of making sense in their community served as the foundation for my classroom practice. I was able to set activities for them, which created contexts for productive interactions between knowledge outside the classroom and the academic content inside the classroom. Students felt very valued when the contribution from their community was acknowledged. It was a great source of motivation for them, which made them take the initiative and participate with interest in all learning activities. For instance, while we were planning costumes and props for enacting the play Cinderella, two of the students said that their sisters who were doing an art course could help.\(^7\) Another student’s mother, a tailor, made the gown for the fairy. These people were invited to the class and the students discussed

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\(^6\) Buddy reading is learning to read with a more experienced peer.

\(^7\) This was one of the stories picked from our class library by the students for enacting.
with them how they could get the appropriate stage effects such as turning a pumpkin into a carriage and mice into horses. The students coconstructed the dialogue for the play after watching a cartoon version of it. Language was being learnt in their effort to find and express meaning. The students had made a culturally alien fairytale their own by their investment. However, the readiness that students evinced in engaging in oral communication was still not forthcoming in writing, particularly, home assignments. The reluctance noted above proved to be deep rooted.

5.1.3 Improvement in academic achievement

Perhaps what is of most interest to the English teaching community in India is that the often recommended approach to teaching which recognizes and values learner autonomy and the cultural knowledge of diverse social groups (cf. NCF 2005) had a tangible effect at the end of two years on students’ proficiency in English as measured by the end-of-the-programme test. In the initial pre-ACCESS proficiency test, students almost drew a blank, as the following samples show. They couldn’t figure out the instructions, the reading passages or the writing task in the question paper.
The development of oral and written communication

Figure 7. Sample of student performance in the Pre-Test
However, their performance in the final test shows them responding to questions meaningfully, despite a lack of accuracy.

**Figure 9. Sample performance at the end of course: READING**

- I will say, 'Yes!' He will bring a garland of flowers and I will bend my head like this...
- And she bent her head, and the pot of milk fell down and broke.
- She carried a pot of milk on her head.
- One day a milkmaid went to sell milk in the market.
- She found a mendicant.
- She said, 'Will you buy my milk?'
- He said, 'Yes, I will buy your milk.'
- One day a milkmaid had a dream.
- She went to the city market to sell milk.
- She was very happy because she sold all the milk.
- She said to her mother, 'I will buy a new dress.'
- She said, 'Yes, I will buy your dress.'
- The pot of milk fell down and broke her dream.

**IV. Read the passage.**

1. Most Indian cities are much polluted because every motor vehicle produces dirty smoke. Doctors say that city life is so dirty that thousands of people die every year from chest illness. Cycling is clean because it produces no smoke.
2. Cyclists do not need to spend money on petrol, so bicycles are cheaper to run. Bicycle repairs are cheaper than motor repairs too because bicycles are quite simple machines.
3. If we get exercise everyday, we become healthy. Cycling keeps us fit. Driving motor vehicles does not!
4. Traffic moves very slowly in most cities- especially when everyone is going to work or coming home. Sometimes traffic doesn’t move at all! This is usually because there is so much traffic that there is not enough space on the roads.
5. Motor traffic is sometimes so noisy that we have to shout if we want people to hear us. You will know this well if you live near a busy road. Bicycles are quiet except for the gentle 'ring ring' sound of their bells.

**A. Complete the following sentences.**

In India, many people die from chest problems because of ______. Bicycles are cheaper than motor vehicles, because they don't need ______. Bicycles can go faster than ______ in traffic because they are ______.
Even in the case of writing, their performance shows signs of sustained development, as the following sample shows.

Figure 10. Sample performance at the end of course: WRITING

From the largely single-digit marks that the students secured in the pretest, most of them succeeded in scoring 70% in the final test that was required for graduation, while some scored above 80%. Another interesting point to note in students’ learning relates to the recommendation made in the Position Paper on the Teaching of English in NCF 2005 (NCERT 2006) for an across-the-curriculum approach that erases the divide between English and other subjects or other languages. The language the students picked up in the after-school programme seems to have helped them across the curriculum by making school learning more meaningful. This impact was reported by the school Head Mistress based on these students’ increased interest in class and their scores in the school final examination. Students also mentioned this point on the occasion of the certificate award ceremony: “Last year, we were very nervous about our SSLC Board exams. The English we learned in the
ACCESS programme made English exam easy for us.” Another student pointed out, “All [subjects] are in English, only Urdu different. What we learn in Access help in subject also. We can understand more.”

6. REFLECTING ON MY EXPERIENCE

The essence of my engagement as a teacher in this project can be summed up as an effort to mediate between two conceptions of teaching and learning grounded in different epistemological systems. The view of ‘education’ in the learners’ culture imbibed through socialization in their community and years of formal schooling had an overriding concern with the product, namely examination results. Students’ beliefs about agency as external, residing in the teacher, made them expect me to tell them what they should learn.8

In sharp contrast, I had a participatory, learner-centred approach emphasizing the process of learning, and I sought to promote self-regulated learning strategies among them. The idea of investing in their own learning, which was my major demand, was initially strange and confusing to them. The naturally informal context of discussion provided a small space for less inhibited and non-rehearsed production, and by and by they became more willing to participate and contribute to the construction of meaning from their cultural location, applying their funds of knowledge. They felt valued and motivated as their community resources were used in tandem with the academic content in the classroom. However, the resulting increase in their level of participation did not replace their tendencies to rote learning, particularly in writing. The difference in students’ attitude to oral and written work made me question whether the received ELT wisdom that oral activities form the basis for promoting writing (e.g. Dockrell & Connelly 2009; Williams, Stathis & Gotsch 2009) could hold across sociocultural contexts. While my students were responsive to my initiating moves toward oral

8 It is not uncommon to find research literature which reports that Asian students are less autonomous, more dependent on authority figures (Sato 1982; Song 1995; Sue & Kirk 1972) and closure-oriented, disliking ambiguity and fuzziness (Rao 2001).
interaction, their learning took uncharted paths with writing. For instance, in the first assignment, they transliterated Urdu text into English script. There was freer writing in contexts that I subsequently created, so some capacity to write was developing as expected. But there was a resistance to experimenting with writing. The pressure of the culture outside the class, dominated by textbook content, dictated notes, and model answers, was too strong for a nascent sense of agency to survive. All this goes to show that the cognitive and affective frames of a learner’s production-communication in speaking and in writing are not necessarily aligned. As my experience shows, the level of autonomy displayed can differ across the two modes.

This is a significant point to note in the context of multicultural sensitivity. For the development of such sensitivity, the issue of selection of content is only one aspect: more important is the nature of classroom practices and evaluation. The students’ writing anxiety, for instance, is not to be seen as their failure. Instead, it begs for an understanding on the part of the teacher of the cultural and social values and practices that make a difference in educational attitude and performance in school. In the case of my students, their resistance seemed to spring from two deep rooted beliefs about writing: as something sacred and carved in stone, and as the bureaucratic measure of accountability and the evidence of success or failure. These beliefs, operating below the level of consciousness, exerted a counter current against the views of writing in my class.

Nevertheless, autonomy motivated ESL learning can be mediated effectively by a dialectic relationship between students’ funds of knowledge and school learning. The principle of enhancing learner autonomy in an inclusive learning environment is often reiterated. The insights I have gained through my work offer some explanation for why the dominant teacher-controlled classroom with an emphasis on rote practice continues to prevail, despite every academic position (e.g. Kumar 2004; NCF 2005; Jayaram 2008) dwelling on the agency of the learner in the process of knowledge construction, not only for English, but also for our own languages and for the sciences. My experience with written work shows the difficulties of practicalizing these theoretical
principles in classroom practice. The constructivist approach calls for the teacher’s role “to be shifted from a source of knowledge to being a facilitator…” (NCF 2005:109). This shift is nothing less than a paradigm shift in the Kuhnian sense for a teacher whose socialization has been in a teacher-centred and knowledge-oriented culture. A reconstruction of teachers’ perspectives cannot be expected to happen overnight or be mandated externally in an input-output model of teacher training. Transmission pedagogy is in line with the assumptions of teaching as causing learning, reflected in the prescription of what students must learn and in class organization. Its practice, with features such as controlling students, delivering textual knowledge, and assigning answers for rote learning, is endowed with meanings developed historically and culturally, and helps maintain a stable work situation, achieving congruence with top down expectations. To the extent that teachers’ practice displays a cultural framework, changing it needs acknowledging the thinking implicit in this culture. My work, using the funds of knowledge approach, suggests that it is possible to initiate some change in orientation to learning by mediating learning as an additive process, without replacing the culture of learners’ home and school community. Teachers would appear to need similar culturally sensitive support to make classroom teaching and learning relevant to themselves and their students.
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