

# Students' Stories of Teachers' Moral Influence in Second Language Classrooms: Exploring the Curricular Substructure

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*Investigations concerning the morality of teaching, a recent theme in several strands of pedagogical research, have been carried out in classrooms ranging from elementary to university level contexts. In the present qualitative study, undergraduate second language students perceived teachers' moral agency through teachers' use of religion as a pedagogical tool, teachers' (re)actions in the classroom, and teachers' judgments of students. As key participants in the research process, students identified the presence of morality in their own academic experiences, clearly articulating specific situations in which moral issues influenced second language classrooms; in addition, students analyzed effects of teachers' moral agency on their own perspectives and actions as language students. This work demonstrates that language teachers and researchers need a heightened awareness of teachers' moral agency in the classroom as well as a more sensitive recognition of the complex effects that teachers' decisions, words, and actions have on students.*

It was in a Spanish course in high school, my senior year. I didn't understand an assignment and I did it wrong. When the teacher called on me and I answered incorrectly, I was really embarrassed because she had no idea what I was talking about. She then asked to see my paper and I said no. She came over to my desk to look and I covered it up and told her I didn't do it. She proceeded to try and take it from me but I wouldn't let her. We played tug of war for a few minutes while the whole class was laughing. (They were shocked that I wouldn't hand over my paper). I was humiliated first of all because I didn't understand the directions and secondly because she was making such a big deal of it in front of everyone.

After that happened I had little trust in my teacher. Instead of helping me to understand after class, or privately, but embarrassing me in front of my classmates [sic]. – Beatrice<sup>1</sup>

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MORALITY OF TEACHING

This student's narrative illustrates the complex and frequently overlooked relationship between a teacher's actions and a student's interpretation of those actions; the potential long-term consequences of a situation like this one warrant deliberate research attention. Beatrice's vivid, intense reaction highlights issues central to the notion of teachers' moral influence. The connections she makes between humiliation, embarrassment, and broken trust point to the often unacknowledged moral aspects of second language (SL) teaching.

Studies in various educational contexts have produced valuable findings

based on researchers' and/or teachers' analyses of classroom events and interactions. However, students' recognition and interpretations of the presence of the moral have yet to be substantively included in the literature (Johnston, Juhász, Marken, & Ruiz, 1998). The present study emphasizes the role of the student voice in SL research and education by focusing on students' encounters with issues surrounding the moral dimensions of teaching. These students analyzed particular experiences that took place in SL classrooms; though their interpretations are not limited to language teaching contexts, their stories offer insightful contributions which inform SL pedagogy.

## PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The morality of teaching has become a theme of several strands of recent pedagogical research carried out in classrooms ranging from elementary to university level contexts (e.g., Bergem, 1990; Buzzelli & Johnston, 2001; Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1993; Johnston, 2003; Johnston et al., 1998; Sanger, 2001). The authors of these studies have carefully defined *morality*, a term also widely used in both religious and political contexts (Goodman, 2001). In the present study, I will adopt a definition used by Johnston et al. (1998, p. 162):

[Morality] concerns judgments of what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad. These judgments, moreover, are produced at the meeting point between personal values, beliefs, and standards, and their negotiation in social settings. Morality, then, crucially includes both individual and social judgments. By the same token, morality in our use of the term does not involve prescriptive adjudication of right and wrong; rather, it is a much subtler, more ambiguous matter ...

That is, there is a significant distinction between the teaching of morality and the morality of teaching (Bergem, 1990; Dewey, 1909; Jackson, et al., 1993; Johnston et al., 1998; Noddings, 1984, 1992; Sockett, 1993): The first is the conscious and deliberate attempt to prescribe and communicate notions of "right" and "wrong" (Berreth & Berman, 1997; Goodman, 2002); the second concept, that of the morality of teaching, recognizes that the act of teaching is inherently moral in nature since teaching itself aims to change people for the better (Goodman, 2001; Hansen, 1998; Johnston et al., 1998; Johnston, 2003; Pring, 2001).

### **The Development of a Taxonomy**

Jackson et al. (1993) carried out a detailed, extensive, empirical study focusing on the moral dimensions of teaching. Their study, based on observations of eighteen K-12, U.S. school classrooms, was carried out over a two and a half year period in six separate schools. From these data, they developed a taxonomy of what they term *categories of moral influence*: the ways that teachers act as moral agents in their classrooms.

To underscore the distinction between the teaching of morality and the morality of teaching, Jackson et al. (1993) divided their taxonomy in two sets of categories. The first set describes teacher actions that are overt in nature, when instructors consciously and deliberately attempt to “teach morality.” To illustrate with a specific example, teachers in two Catholic schools included moral instruction as a formal part of the curriculum by explicitly acknowledging moral principles and discussing issues of personal character and social injustice in their classrooms. These teachers’ moral influence on students was evident in that they consciously tried to communicate moral messages, i.e., to teach morality.

Jackson et al.’s (1993) second set of categories reveals that teachers’ moral influence often extends to subconscious and unintentional actions; these actions represent moral aspects of teaching and are perceived by students as carrying moral instruction. Jackson et al. and Johnston et al. (1998) claim that the notion of teachers’ moral influence represents an important area for research due to its often subconscious and unintentional character. That is, its impact on students is strong precisely because of its embedded nature; a teacher’s actions and words carry moral influences which often are hidden from view and are frequently unacknowledged and even unrecognized by the teacher. As Jackson et al. state, these categories of moral influence “help us to see how morals might be ‘caught, not taught’, as the old adage says” (p.11). The three categories in this second set include classroom rules and regulations, the morality of the curricular substructure, and expressive morality within the classroom.

### **An Application of Jackson et al.’s Taxonomy: Three Categories of Moral Influence**

Using Jackson et al.’s (1993) framework, Johnston et al. (1998) applied these three categories of moral influence to the context of SL teaching. It will be valuable to explore Johnston et al.’s work in detail before moving to the present study as the latter is closely tied to the former. Their study, carried out in three adult ESL classes over the course of a seven-week session, included data that took the form of observers’ notes, class audio recordings, course handouts and syllabi, as well as teachers’ journals. In their words, they “sought to identify moments in which the moral substrate of the class seemed to make itself evident, breaking through the surface of the classroom interaction” (p.167). Through their analysis, Johnston et al. convincingly demonstrate that the notion of a teacher’s moral agency extends to the specific context of second language pedagogy.

The first category in the second part of Jackson et al.’s (1993) taxonomy, classroom rules and regulations, involves those formal, detailed, and often very explicit, descriptions of the moral code that outlines classroom and course behavior and which all students are expected to obey. These regulations include specific rules of conduct involving class attendance and tardiness policies, the collection of late work, the raising of hands in class, and so on. Johnston et al. (1998) point out that of the three categories, classroom rules and regulations is the most explicit

example of a teacher's moral influence.

Johnston et al. (1998) further argue that within this category of moral influence there is evidence of the interconnected relationship between classroom rules and regulations and power relations. It is their claim that "matters of discipline and control are not merely technical, but also reflect trust or the lack of it, and constitute judgments upon those who are being controlled" (p. 170). That is, through the expression and implementation of these rules and regulations, students are often presented with evidence of distrust; moreover, the very existence of this often explicit moral code reveals suspicion on the part of the "controllers" as well as places students, as the "controlled," in the disempowered position of constantly being evaluated.

Jackson et al.'s (1993) second category, the morality of the curricular substructure, highlights a less obvious area that requires sensitizing on the part of the observer to become visible at all; it operates below the surface of regular classroom activities as an often invisible, and sometimes supportive, structural system. This area is seen by Jackson et al. to be comprised of "conditions that operate to sustain and facilitate every teaching session in every school in every subject within the curriculum" (pp. 15-16). Unlike rules and regulations, these conditions are rarely explicitly acknowledged or discussed by either teachers or students but frequently carry significant moral meaning. They are "a set of largely unconscious expectations and values that makes interaction possible" (Johnston et al., 1998, p. 171).<sup>2</sup> They include teachers' and students' shared beliefs, understandings, assumptions and presuppositions—all of which function together to allow classroom participants to work together and concentrate on the pedagogical "task at hand" (Jackson et al., 1993).

According to previous research (Jackson et al., 1993; Johnston et al., 1998), these conditions include the assumption of truthfulness, which is the expectation that teachers and students will speak the truth when discussing what they know; the assumption of worthwhileness, which is the expectation on the part of all participants that what the teacher chooses to do in class is of value and is useful; and, the assumption of fair play or equity in classroom dealings, which is the expectation that teachers will not test what they do not teach or will not collect homework that they have not assigned or will not call only on one student in a class. Johnston et al. add the assumption of participation, which is the expectation that students' class participation is worthwhile to encourage and maintain. These assumptions composing the curricular substructure are shaped through classroom events and teacher-student interaction. In turn, within and through this substructure, teachers communicate moral messages to students: specifically, that part of being a good student is to speak the truth, carry out assigned tasks, participate in discussions, and so on. Thus, the curricular substructure is revealed as a site for moral agency.

The third category of moral influence in Jackson et al.'s (1993) taxonomy is expressive morality. Not only do teachers communicate moral judgments through their use of rules and the curricular substructure, they also act as moral agents in

the classroom in extremely subtle ways including their choice of words, tone of voice, facial expressions and gestures, and the arrangement of chairs or decorations in the classroom (Johnston et al., 1998). Johnston et al. point to a specific example in which a teacher discusses with her ESL class the issue of women in the workforce (p. 176):

*Teacher: Guys? Do you want your wife to work?*

*Student: If she wants a job, I'll allow her to work.*

*Teacher: You'll allow her?*

*[general laughter]*

Though the student, depending on his culture and/or generation, might have taken a rather liberal position, his teacher's response indicates some disapproval of either his attitude or at least his choice of verb. Since this particular use of the verb *allow* is in no way ungrammatical, in her question, and one would imagine, tone of voice, the teacher expressed her own moral judgment on the issue of women in the workforce.

In this case, one could also argue that the expression of the teacher's opinion was intentional thus serving as an example of a teacher's implied but deliberate moral influence. Either way, the point is still strong: whether deliberately and consciously or unintentionally and subconsciously, a teacher communicates moral judgments to students (i.e., exerts moral influence on students) in overt as well as in subtle ways.

This research on teachers' moral influence begins to recognize the importance of bringing both teachers' and learners' beliefs to the surface where they can be collaboratively acknowledged and explored, thereby beginning to bridge the gap that often exists between learners' and teachers' perceptions of classroom practices and pedagogy (Barkhuizen, 1998; Davis, 1997; Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Nunan, 1988). Johnston et al. (1998) suggested that future studies should resist speculation about students' interpretations of teachers' actions, and instead, "devise research that will allow these perceptions to be voiced" (p. 179).<sup>3</sup>

## **THE PRESENT STUDY**

In exploring the relationship between morality and SL teaching, this study pursues a two-fold goal: first, to provide a forum in which students' perceptions of moral issues in SL teaching are voiced; and second, to serve as an example of an emerging research paradigm that values the role of learner participants. Also, by bringing to the surface moral issues relevant to pedagogy and second language acquisition, this study seeks to sensitize SL teachers and researchers to some of the needs and challenges confronting language learners.

### **The Participants and the Context**

The present study was carried out in an upper-level Spanish course (An Introduction to Spanish Linguistics). Though rooted in its own context, this study explores many issues that may be transferable to other SL/FL classrooms (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). There were 14 students registered in the course; 13 participated in this study. Representing a wide range of majors, all were upper-level students, working toward a major, double major or minor in Spanish as a SL (see Appendix A). Participants were traditionally-aged university students; two were male and eleven were female. As part of the course, they engaged in discussions regarding the inclusion of students as participants in the research process and read a series of articles based on various issues of theoretical and applied linguistics. Included in this reading packet was the previously discussed article by Johnston et al. (1998).

These students' interest in and their voluntary identification with issues of morality in language pedagogy prompted me to respond to the call to include students' voices in research on the morality of teaching (Johnston et al., 1998). (For other studies in which students are directly involved in the research process, see Auerbach, 1994; Bailey & Nunan, 1996; Burns, 1999; Crookes, 1993; Ewald, 2001; Johnston, 2000; and Ramani, 1987). Though initially these students' stories were spontaneously offered as part of our class discussions, the more structured format of this study provided an additional opportunity for them to recount and analyze their own experiences.

### **DATA COLLECTION**

While Jackson et al.'s (1993) and Johnston et al.'s (1998) studies were primarily based on observers' accounts of teacher-student interactions, the present study focuses on students' own accounts of classroom situations. Specifically, students completed a questionnaire designed to elicit their perspectives on issues of morality in language teaching. The questionnaire included demographic information such as students' choice of pseudonyms, the Spanish classes they had completed, and their majors; they also responded to questions regarding the presence of morality in their SL classrooms (see Appendix B).

### **METHOD**

Students' responses were analyzed qualitatively. In this analysis, as in Johnston et al. (1998), the goal was to produce a "persuasive and stimulating" rather than "definitive or reductive" interpretation of the data (p. 167). Certainly, as in most qualitative research, the data analysis is subjective and open to various interpretations. Moreover, while the questionnaire provided a method through which the student voice was directly heard, the small number of student participants limits the generalizability of the conclusions drawn. However, since the objective of the analysis was transferability rather than generalizability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), a

“thick description” of the context was included in order to enable readers to judge the degree to which the findings might be transferred to their own contexts.

Because the experiences recounted by these students had already taken place, it was impossible for a researcher to be physically present to personally witness the situations analyzed in the questionnaires. Consequently, this study is based on students' views of what happened in their classrooms rather than on either the accounts of classroom observers or the perspectives of their respective teachers. Therefore, to achieve as much triangulation as possible, care has been taken to evaluate students' comments in light of the total questionnaire, students' written responses on another related class assignment, as well as our formal class discussions and informal one-on-one conversations regarding issues of morality. However, though these sources informed the analysis, all data presented in this study are from the questionnaires. Clearly, these limitations affect both the nature of the data themselves and, in turn, the scope of the analysis.

Questionnaire data were first evaluated by counting the number of “Yes” and “No” responses to the first question: “Have you had or witnessed an experience(s) in a language classroom in which there was a conflict related to morality (in the sense used by Johnston)?”. Each student's explanatory comments were compiled into one, unified answer, delineated by student-created paragraphs or divided by the sections of the questionnaire. Each student's situation was given a 1-2 word title based on its content; this title was then used for coding and thematically organizing the data.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Students' responses to these questions varied in terms of content and tone. Of the 13 participating students, 11 indicated that they, in fact, had experienced or observed a morality-related incident in the classroom. While the majority of the students (9) chose to narrate past class experiences, a few students (3) reflected on situations in classes in which they were currently enrolled.<sup>4</sup>

Students' responses were generally written in three or more separate paragraphs representing the three questionnaire sections; students explained the details of the situation, related it to the issue of morality and finally, characterized it according to the three categories in Jackson et al.'s (1993) and Johnston et al.'s (1998) framework. In addition to the situation introducing this article regarding Beatrice's tug-of-war experience, students wrote about several different topics including a teacher's use of a pop quiz, language class debates, group work, the incorporation of Christmas songs and religious prayers in the language curriculum, a teacher's correction of pronunciation errors, students' personality and appearance, and the oral participation of shy students (see Appendix C).

Though a few students related their own situations to more than one of the three categories used by Johnston et al. (1998), nine of the 13 students coded their experiences as an example of the third category, *Expressive Morality*; the remaining

four students simply did not answer this particular question, either leaving it blank or, in the case of one student, writing “I don’t know.” Initially, I believed that this was an interesting finding, reflecting a strong student sensitivity to teachers’ tone of voice, facial expressions and gestures used to convey moral messages. However, in analyzing students’ explanatory comments, it quickly became evident that many students misunderstood or did not remember the specific nature of Expressive Morality: teachers’ relatively subtle forms of communication used to exert moral influence. In actuality, all three of Jackson et al.’s (1993) categories represent ways in which teachers act as moral agents and express their views through words and actions, thereby exerting moral influence on their students. Several students literally interpreted this category title and coded their own situations as Expressive Morality because:

- ‘she was judging us and told us her judgment by her actions’;
- ‘this was about the teacher’s morality, not about the classroom setting. She indirectly expressed her morality to the entire class’;
- ‘she was expressing her own belief through a regular teaching method’.

As recounted by the students, their situations contain only minimal evidence of teachers’ subtle communication, characteristic of the Expressive Morality category. Therefore, the students’ analyses suggest that they did not fully understand Jackson et al.’s (1993) taxonomy. However, their comments strongly confirm that students do indeed view teachers as effective moral agents who communicate their views about issues and behave in ways that express moral judgments.

It was challenging to present students’ comments in a manner that reflected their beliefs about teachers’ moral influence. I hesitated to impose my own researcher view on their perspectives by framing them in Jackson et al.’s (1993) preestablished categories; rather, in each case, I wanted to allow the student voice to speak for itself. Nevertheless, because our study of the Jackson et al. taxonomy had initially prompted students’ reactions and interest, it seemed an appropriate organizational framework with which to organize their experiences. Consequently, I coded each student’s situation according to Jackson et al.’s three categories, comparing my categorizations with their own. Specifically, in each students’ description, I sought references to issues regarding teachers’ classroom procedures, teachers’ and students’ (un)shared assumptions and/or teachers’ subtle methods of communication; that is, I categorized students’ experiences, respectively, as instances of teachers’ moral agency communicated through *Rules and Regulations*, *the Curricular Substructure*, and/or *Expressive Morality*.

### **A Focus on the *Curricular Substructure***

The analysis confirmed that these three categories, though useful for exploring issues of morality, are neither absolute nor mutually exclusive. Examining the topics that students analyzed and the particular vocabulary that they employed, I

discovered that many of the students' situations contain elements characteristic of more than one category. Nevertheless, their stories most closely related to the Curricular Substructure, the second category of Jackson et al.'s (1993) taxonomy, which will be the concentrated focus of this study. Thus, exploring teachers' and students' (un)shared assumptions, this analysis groups all 13 students' situations into three overlapping thematic areas of teachers' moral influence: (1) teachers' religion as a pedagogical tool; (2) teachers' (re)actions in the classroom; and (3) teachers' judgments of students. These themes expand the original concept of the curricular substructure as well as illustrate the interrelated nature of Jackson et al.'s categories.

Though the reader might evaluate students' situations according to personal or professional criteria, the goal of this study is not to judge, praise or condemn teachers' or students' words, beliefs, and actions; rather, based on students' perspectives, its objective is to confirm the presence of and to begin to develop a sensitivity toward issues of morality in language classrooms.

### *1. Teachers' Religion as a Pedagogical Tool*

It is perhaps easiest to observe teachers' moral influence in a religious academic context, a setting in which one expects evidence of moral agency. To address this issue the responses of three students will be analyzed one at a time. These students' situations reveal their sensitivity to the context in which instruction takes place. First, the situation of student Janie:<sup>5</sup>

When I was in high school Spanish my teacher did an exercise where we sang Christmas songs in Spanish. Since I am Jewish, she told me that I didn't have to sing, but it still was awkward.

This is a moral dilemma because we didn't celebrate any other religion. The purpose of the activity wasn't to learn about Hispanic culture. We were celebrating "our" culture. The teacher assumed that we were all Christians or that I wouldn't mind only celebrating Christian religion. By only celebrating the Christian religion/holiday, she was sending a message that her religion is the most important one.

I would include this in the "expressive morality" part of the article because this was about the teacher's morality, not about the classroom setting. She indirectly expressed her morality to the entire class. — Janie

This is an articulate account and insightful analysis of a situation in which a teacher, perhaps unintentionally and/or driven by pedagogical motives, used Christmas songs to communicate a moral message; Janie perceived a message that a particular religion deserved students' attention in the classroom. Though not forced to participate, Janie felt awkward as her teacher "expressed her morality" to the class.

This teacher's choice to incorporate Christmas songs in the classroom could represent a relatively subtle means of influencing her students' views, characteristic of Expressive Morality. However, Janie's coding of this situation as Expressive

Morality is not entirely sufficient, given that her teacher's communication was not carried out through gestures, facial expressions or the like. In addition, this incident also touches on the assumption of participation, an issue related to the Curricular Substructure, that may have influenced Janie's interpretation of her teacher's actions. That is, from Janie's perspective, her teacher's suspension of the assumption of participation (i.e., freeing Janie from the obligation to participate) was due to her teacher's goal of expressing her own religious beliefs rather than addressing issues of Hispanic culture. In turn, Janie concludes that her teacher's purpose was irrelevant in that the Christmas song was "about the teacher's morality, not about the classroom setting." This example confirms the complex nature of a teacher's moral influence, operating simultaneously on various levels of analysis which, in this case, include both Expressive Morality and the Curricular Substructure.

Secondly, the situation of student participant Katie:

A teacher in high school used a catholic prayer every morning b/4 class started in order to use repetition and practice oral ability w/n the classroom. We used this prayer as a focus of pronunciation and translation as well. Also, she was catholic and some students in the class were not.

I felt that the teacher was imposing her moral beliefs through her specific use of her catholic prayer. She could of used a different form of teaching, possibly a story. By using the prayer she taught us a part of her religion because to this day I know the catholic Our Father in Spanish and I am not catholic.

Expressive Morality – because she was expressing her own belief through a regular teaching method. She taught us a part of her moral belief system when she used that prayer. It expressed her ideas about faith and religion as well in a class which was supposed to focus on language. — Katie

Like Janie, this student perceived a moral message in her teacher's inclusion of religious material. Whether a subtle means of expressing her views or merely a pedagogical tool for improving students' language skills, this teacher's prayer served to endorse Catholicism as a belief system to her students. However, because Katie did not see a relevant connection between a memorized Catholic prayer and a focus on language, she characterized her teacher's actions as "imposing" moral beliefs. Though Katie's teacher emphasized pedagogical goals related to pronunciation and translation, intentionally or unintentionally she communicated a moral message to her student.

Katie's words "supposed to focus on language" along with Janie's comment "not about the classroom setting" suggest that students expect pedagogical tools to be closely, and even directly, related to the curricular focus. When this expectation is not met, they judge teachers' actions to be driven by motives unrelated to SL learning; in these two cases, Katie and Janie viewed their teachers' actions as endorsing a particular religion or teaching a religious practice. Katie's "supposed to" indicates that she holds certain expectations for her classroom, the curriculum and the teacher's methods. In sum, Janie's reaction to not having to sing the Christmas song in class both supports the existence of the assumption of participation and

reveals an additional assumption of relevance as part of the curricular substructure, a set of expectations also confirmed by Katie.

Students then, expect teachers' practices to be relevant to curricular goals. However, as will be seen, students' expectations are not determined solely on the basis of the curriculum itself; their expectations are also affected by the instructional setting. Ironically, the third example in this category was not intended by the student participant to be a particular example of anything. In fact, the student, Marie, indicated on her questionnaire that she had not "witnessed an experience(s) in a language classroom in which there was a conflict related to morality." However, Marie commented further,

I went to Catholic high school where everyone was supposed to have the same morals. And if you didn't, you weren't allowed to say anything to the contrary. Since it was a private school they were allowed to force their morals on you and you had to follow them. — Marie

Marie's use of the phrase, "force their morals," indicates that religion itself assumed a role far beyond that of a pedagogical tool that communicates certain beliefs; rather, in this context, religion was an obvious curricular focus through which specific beliefs were overtly expressed. Though from Marie's comments we do not know if the "forcing of morals" she perceived took place in language classrooms, it is likely that religious themes were used as pedagogical tools given the school's Catholic affiliation.

Quite clearly, however, moral messages were communicated to Marie in this religious context. But, in contrast to Janie and Katie, Marie expects her teachers to express their religious beliefs more freely in this Catholic high school setting. In fact, her narrative includes the same phrase as Katie's, "supposed to"; however, their use of this phrase points to two opposing conclusions regarding students' expectations within the curricular substructure. While Katie expects her teacher's actions and classroom events to be closely tied to curricular academic goals, Marie recognizes, and grants her teacher, the right to communicate and even impose moral beliefs in a religious academic context.

Further clarifying students' view of the curricular substructure, these distinctions highlight their views of what is acceptable, relevant teacher behavior in particular instructional contexts. These narratives reveal students' sensitivity to the effects of instructional context both on teachers' behavior and motives as well as on students' own varying expectations; students expect teachers to avoid formal religious practices in a non-religious setting and view the introduction of religious activities (such as a religious song or prayer) as a method of communicating moral messages. In a religious setting on the other hand, students like Marie expect teachers to express religious beliefs and even to insist upon particular student behaviors. The issue of relevance, highlighted in these three students' stories, will be taken up again later in the analysis.

## 2. *Teachers' (Re)actions in the Classroom*

In the second thematic area, students analyzed evidence of moral agency which is perhaps less obvious to the outside observer. Their teachers' actions and reactions in the SL classroom often serve as a medium through which moral messages are communicated. These situations involve issues of student behavior including the completion of homework assignments and class participation as well as the evaluation of students' work.

For example, Beatrice, who was quoted earlier, claimed that the teacher's reaction to her concealed homework paper embarrassed her in front of her classmates and that their tug-of-war experience over the misunderstood assignment caused her to have little trust for her teacher. Similarly, but in a different situation, Bobbi narrated a classroom event that also resulted in a collapse of trust:

Class – Spanish culture

We came into class and the professor gave us a pop quiz about the 3 articles we had read as homework for that day. The quiz consisted of us writing the title of the newspaper articles, the thesis or main idea of each, and the facts or ideas that support the main idea.

This quiz was completely unexpected (a pop quiz), and quizzes of any sort were never mentioned on the class syllabus – so we still have no idea how it figures into our grade. Additionally, the quiz was very difficult because all 3 of the articles were very similar (only small details were different) and it was difficult to distinguish between the nuances of them just by memory. This was not fair because the students who hadn't read the articles probably did just as well as those who did, because the quiz wasn't an adequate mechanism to test what we'd learned: it was too detailed and nit-picky. Finally, the quiz showed us as students that the professor didn't think we were doing our homework, which is very frustrating. And I'm sure we were unable to show her any differently by the quiz. It was a collapse of trust and communication. She was angry we didn't do our work, we were angry that she didn't believe us, didn't talk to us about it, and didn't give us a reasonable way to show what we'd done. — Bobbi

Bobbi's reactions to this experience reveal its connection to the categories of Rules and Regulations as well as to the Curricular Substructure. In the view of her students, this teacher did not follow the established rules of their language course. Specifically, by surprising students with a quiz without first warning them of this possibility in the course syllabus, she violated a regulation viewed as legitimate by her students: that of respecting the written contract of the course. Also, she did not provide feedback on the quiz nor give any indication of its relationship to the students' overall grades. Furthermore, with regard to the Curricular Substructure, she violated the assumption of fair play by administering a quiz whose format was inconsistent with its purpose; that is, in Bobbi's words, the quiz was "not fair" because those who do the work, and those who read the articles should be able to do well, especially on a quiz supposedly designed to check homework completion.

Moreover, a quiz should not be “nit-picky” but rather should reflect “reasonable” expectations. Perhaps even more serious, in Bobbi’s opinion, this teacher’s action was motivated by a lack of trust (i.e., doubt that her students were working hard and doing their homework).

Both positive, and negative, moral messages are communicated through classroom regulations and the curricular substructure, comprised of the assumptions of fair play and the like (Johnston et al., 1998). For example, these rules and assumptions carry positive moral messages like “a good student completes homework assignments” or “a good student participates” and so on. But it is the negative, mirror image of these messages which actually grabs Bobbi’s attention. Bobbi views her teacher’s violation of the assumption of fair play as evidence of a negative message or judgment; in other words, bad students who do not complete homework are presented with surprise, “nit-picky”, unreasonable quizzes. This teacher’s pop quiz sent a message of distrust, motivated by her students’ apparent lack of dedication. Permeated with moral agency, this situation resulted in broken trust and in student anger.

On the other hand, Bobbi herself refers to “the students who hadn’t read the articles”; she realized that at least some students were not completing their work. Thus, to some extent, her teacher’s suspicion was justified. This situation illustrates the fact that moral agency is, at times, ambiguous. That is, while perhaps this teacher’s motivation for administering the pop quiz was justifiable, the consequences of her actions were both complex and undesirable. To students like Bobbi, who did complete assignments and deserved the teacher’s trust, the pop quiz communicated an inappropriate sense of distrust. Nevertheless, one can appreciate the dilemmatic nature of teacher decision-making. The moral dimensions of teaching are rarely so simple that they can be easily divided into “good” and “bad.” In this case, while it is relatively easy to determine that the use of the pop quiz was not the teacher’s best reaction to the problem as its implementation clearly broke the “rules” of the course, it is impossible to prescribe a solution guaranteed to be successful for all teachers and all students in every classroom situation.

In another classroom situation, Shelly writes of a teacher’s reaction to an incident involving student participation. She draws a commonly recognized connection between students’ participation and their personalities. Shelly wrote,

A teacher in my Spanish [Advanced Composition and Communication] class would create a high-tension atmosphere by only calling on shy students and those who did not know the answers. Eventually, the students who did know the answers to questions stopped volunteering and no one tried to give any feedback to questions. They just sat in silence and waited to be chosen.

There was no trust or respect for neither teacher nor student in the class. It was not a comfortable teaching or learning environment. — Shelly

Unlike Bobbi, Shelly doesn’t point to one particular moment in class but rather to a pattern of teacher behavior reflecting a student/teacher conflict within

their shared assumption of participation (i.e., the understanding on the part of this teacher and her students that participation is beneficial). Ironically, had this teacher simply ignored the students whose participation was unsatisfactory, she might have been accused of being interested only in certain students, thereby violating the assumption of fair play. But rather, she took action, appropriate or not, to draw out shy, struggling and perhaps uninterested students. However, instead of encouraging participation, the likely goal, this teacher's attempt to involve all students both resulted in less participation from students who previously had willingly volunteered and created an increasingly tense learning environment for everyone. Linking this teacher's practice to issues of morality, Shelly also points to a mutual lack of trust and respect on the part of the teacher and her students.

Shelly's perception of a direct moral connection between her teacher's practice and her negative attitude toward students supports Johnston et al.'s (1998) definition of morality, "the relationship between what people do in social settings and the inner values, beliefs, and standards that lead them to particular courses of action" (p. 162). The actions of Shelly's teacher, motivated both by her belief in the value of student participation as well as her own evaluation of their actual participation, reveal the complexity of teachers' moral agency; simultaneously, in her attempt to involve all her students, she conveyed the positive message, "good students participate," along with the negative message, "bad students do not." Thus, as previously illustrated, both positive and negative moral messages are communicated within the curricular substructure as teachers and students together shape assumptions and expectations which either support an amicable working environment or convey distrust.

### 3. *Teachers' Judgments of Students*

Turning now to the third thematic area, students also recognize moral influence in their teachers' judgments of students. The first example is directly related to language pedagogy: the correction of students' pronunciation errors. Keli questions the relevance of her teacher's actions to what, for Keli, should be the main focus of her upper-level courses. Keli wrote,

Professor [...] expresses his views of morality all the time in the classroom. He constantly makes comments about what he thinks are important and unimportant. Especially in my [Literature] and [Culture] classes. He makes pronunciation seem like the most important thing so no one wants to speak. Students are unmotivated to participate knowing they will be ridiculed if they make mistakes.

He corrects pronunciation all the time. He makes it seem like you are worthless if you cannot pronounce words properly. Linkage of words seems to be his main focus. —Keli

Likely related to the assumption of worthwhileness (i.e., the understanding on the part of teachers and students that what a teacher chooses to do in class is

useful), Keli's comments point to another expectation, shared by teachers and their students working amicably in a classroom: the assumption of relevance. This assumption could be formally framed as follows: the shared belief on the part of teachers and students that an appropriate amount of class time and effort will be spent on the main focus of the course. As a direct correlation, the reverse assumption also exists; an inappropriate amount of class time and effort will not be spent on an issue that is not the main focus of the course.

Though there is nothing inherently wrong with addressing pronunciation, perhaps especially at an advanced level where many students want to "perfect" their language skills, Keli, along with two other student participants who wrote about the same teacher and topic, believed that their teacher's actions violated the assumption of relevance within the curricular substructure. It is likely that their reactions have as much to do with the manner and frequency of the teacher's corrections as with the actual topic of pronunciation. In addition to Keli's terms "ridiculed" and "worthless," the other two students described this teacher's actions and perspectives with words such as "demanding," "condescending," and "distracting." Clearly feeling inappropriately judged, these students take issue with their teacher's perspective on course goals and his resulting actions. Consequently, it is Keli's perspective that this violation results in less student motivation to participate.

It is worth noting that in addition to serving as a supportive, facilitating system, the curricular substructure is also a site for potential contention (Johnston et al., 1998). As teachers and students discover and work through opposing expectations which are not easily compatible, moral messages are often communicated. At times, these messages are expressed directly; for example, Keli claimed that her teacher "constantly makes comments about what he thinks are important and unimportant." However, some teachers choose more indirect manners to express moral beliefs to students; for example, Samantha, one of the students who echoed Keli's description of the situation, wrote about two additional issues; the same professor also indirectly expressed judgments regarding students' names and appearance. She wrote,

In one particular upper level literature class, the instructor frequently demanded that students either read aloud or respond to questions in Spanish. Many students weren't very comfortable with this to begin with, but the instructor then proceeded to correct every grammar or pronunciation mistake. He corrected them to fit his own [country's] dialect, however, without telling us the rules he was basing this on. He would simply say "linkage" in a condescending tone, without really explaining what that is or when it applies.

In another incident in that same class, the instructor was relating aspects of a play we'd read to the class. I don't remember how it came about, but he said to one older male student some comment about his weight. He then realized that was less than appropriate, and tried to backtrack by saying that he was "Jolly, like Buddha."

In yet another incident with that instructor, he called on me to read, but before I began he asked if my name was "a boy's name." I said that it could

be. He then said “What the [h...]? There’s nothing like that in Spanish. Why is there in English?”

That instructor was obviously letting his ideas of what Spanish should sound like, as well as his stereotypes about name and appearance enter the classroom. He had no regard for how his students felt in the class.

I would say expressive morality because it’s more subtle than directly stating his beliefs. It’s more an indirect or unconscious way of conducting himself. — Sam(antha)

Sam(antha) correctly categorized her teacher’s “condescending tone” and the actions that he “demanded” as evidence of Expressive Morality. She coded her teacher’s actions in this category, claiming that he acts subtly and indirectly to express his beliefs and judgments. Sam’s association of her teacher’s perspectives with issues of morality is well-founded. As she points out, her teacher communicates his judgments to his students through the use of spontaneous comments which he tries to place in a humorous light. Though he assumes the position of a “subtle” moral agent, his students understandably perceive moral messages in his judgments.

Furthermore, Sam’s criticism of her teacher’s negative judgments regarding students’ names and appearance clearly represents perceived violations of the assumption of relevance. Perhaps the teacher sensed students’ discomfort with his emphasis on pronunciation and his teaching style; in the most positive light, his comments regarding their names and appearance might have been meant to foster a sense of camaraderie through humorous interaction in the classroom. His comments, however, were not perceived as such. Rather, in both formal and informal discussions that took place in our classroom, students expressed disgust with their teacher’s behavior and comments. Again, this situation offers evidence that moral agency is complex; this teacher’s actions resulted in undesirable outcomes. While his comments might have represented an attempt to connect with his students, they were interpreted as offensive judgments and made students angry. This teacher’s sense of humor and standards of appropriateness were certainly not shared by his students.

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDENTS

These students’ stories are significant for several reasons. First, as participants in an educational process which is meant to be dialogic (Bailey & Nunan 1996; Noddings, 1992) and student-centered (Nunan, 1988), these learners’ voices deserve consideration. Their particular experiences and, perhaps more importantly, their own interpretations of these experiences confirm the presence and significant role of the moral dimensions of teaching in SL contexts.

Second, these students’ observations confirm educators’ current understanding of the morality of teaching as well as expand the notion of the curricular substructure. Students explored teachers’ attempts to focus classroom attention on a

particular religion or belief system; teachers' expressions of trust in and respect for students; and teachers' judgments of students' personal characteristics. Specifically, students perceived evidence of moral influence when they believed that a teacher was endorsing a particular religion, ignoring a student's individual personality, or casting judgment on a student's name, ability, or personal appearance.

Furthermore, though educators might overlook the moral influence of particular pedagogical tools such as songs, pop quizzes, or pronunciation exercises, these students emphasize the implications of such practices. Teachers communicate moral messages when they use pedagogical tools that students perceive as irrelevant to curricular goals. From the students' perspective, for example, a pop quiz implied a teacher's distrust; a teacher's expectation that all students participate, regardless of individual personality traits, conveyed a lack of respect for students; and, a teacher's expression of personal judgments communicated a disregard for students' feelings.

Finally, these students' perspectives corroborated the findings of previous researchers (Jackson et al., 1993; Johnston et al., 1998) in that they recognized their teachers' moral agency in classroom situations and activities, and in teachers' communication of their own opinions. The situations they recounted confirm that Jackson et al.'s three categories of moral influence, Rules and Regulations, the Curricular Substructure and Expressive Morality, are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, students specifically affirmed the assumptions of fair play, worthwhile-ness, and participation as well as uncovered an additional assumption of relevance as part of the curricular substructure. Though students highlighted issues relevant to pedagogy in general, these findings are clearly applicable to SL contexts.

## CONCLUSIONS

The taxonomy proposed by Jackson et al. (1993) and applied by Johnston et al. (1998) is a valuable framework in which the presence of moral influence in SL teaching can be explored. Again, it is not the goal of prior investigations nor of the present study to criticize teachers' perspectives or actions. Though speculative, this analysis has both explored the justifiability of teachers' actions as well as acknowledged the challenges inherent to teacher decision-making, thereby affirming the complexity and ambiguity of moral agency in the classroom. Whether or how teachers' own religious beliefs, moral messages, and judgments of students should be communicated in academic contexts is not the focus of this study. Rather, its purpose is to argue that teachers and researchers need a much more heightened awareness of the presence of morality in the SL classroom and a more sensitive recognition of the complex effects—either negative or, one would hope, positive—that teachers' decisions, words and actions have on their students. Language teachers must recognize that both their conscious and subconscious perspectives powerfully impact their behavior and in turn, their students, in moral ways.

This study also exposes several areas for future research. Participating stu-

dents displayed a sensitivity to the effect of institutional context on expectations regarding moral issues; future investigations might therefore focus on both religious and non-religious settings. One would imagine that students' and teachers' expectations are also influenced by public, private, and military institutions, gender-specific academic contexts, as well as factors such as age and social class. Second, the stories highlighted by students in the present study focus primarily on teachers' communication of negative moral messages. Future studies should aim to reveal how both positive and negative moral messages are communicated within and through the curricular substructure. Finally, investigations should further explore the curricular substructure as a site for contention as teachers and students find themselves in opposite corners regarding classroom expectations. Ideally, these studies will begin to uncover successful strategies for bridging existing gaps between assumptions. And, clearly, integral to these lines of inquiry is the belief in the value of including students themselves as key participants in the research process. As in the case of the present study, the results are certain to be significantly and valuably informed by students' insightful observations on their own experience.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> To illustrate the complex nature of this category, Johnston et al. (1998) made reference to Grice's (1967; 1975) Cooperative Principle in conversation (1998, p. 171).

<sup>3</sup> For a recent example in which Johnston, Ruiz and Juhász (2002) explore students' perspectives on the moral dimension of ESL classroom interaction, see Johnston et al. (2002); and for an interesting discussion of students' moral agency, see Boostrom (1998).

<sup>4</sup> There is a discrepancy between the number of students (11) who claimed to have witnessed a moral incident and the number of students who recounted experiences related to morality in the classroom (12); this is because one of the students who indicated that she had not experienced a morality-related incident described a situation that in fact does reflect moral issues.

<sup>5</sup> All student data, including punctuation and stylistic characteristics, are presented exactly as written by the students.

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#### APPENDIX A - STUDENTS' MAJORS

Spanish	3
Architecture (minor in Spanish)	2
Art (minor in Spanish)	1
English (minor in Spanish)	1
Natural Resources & Environmental Studies (minor in Spanish)	1
Scientific & Technical Communication (minor in Spanish)	1
Double majors: Spanish & (Chemistry, Global Studies, Psychology, or Sociology)	4
No response	1

#### APPENDIX B - QUESTIONNAIRE

Choose a pseudonym by which you will be referred to in this study: \_\_\_\_\_

What specific Spanish classes have you completed? \_\_\_\_\_

Where have you taken Spanish and for how long? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your undergraduate major(s)? \_\_\_\_\_

In class, we have discussed the notion of morality and its relationship to teaching/learning a second language (Johnston's 1998 article). Johnston's article emphasizes that it is necessary to study the moral dimension of teaching in order to understand what happens in a language classroom with students and teachers.

Have you had or witnessed an experience(s) in a language classroom in which there was a conflict related to morality (in the sense used by Johnston)? Yes      No

If so, please explain the situation(s):

How does this situation(s) relate to the moral dimension of language teaching and learning?

Would your situation(s) be best analyzed in Johnston's sections on 'Rules and Regulations', 'The Curricular Substructure', or 'Expressive Morality'? Why?

**APPENDIX C - PARTICIPANTS' QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES**

Pseudonym	Major	Witnessed a Moral Incident?	Past or Current Class	Topic of Moral Incident
Alison	Sci & Tec Com	No	---	---
Beatrice	Art	Yes	Past	Tug-of-war
Bobbi	Span/ Chem	Yes	Current	Pop quiz
Eric	Span	Yes	Past	Debates
George	Span	Yes	Past	Group work
Janie	Eng-lish	Yes	Past	Christmas songs
Katie	Span/ Soc	Yes	Past	Catholic prayer
Keli	Span	Yes	Current	Pronun-ciation
Marie	Archi- tecture	No	Past	Catholic morals
Pinky	Archi- tecture	Yes	Past	Hair color
Saman- tha	Span/ Psych	Yes	Past	Pron/wt/ nam
Shelly	Nat Res & Env	Yes	Past	Force shy
Vanessa	Span/ Global	Yes	Current	Pronun- ciation

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