

Which colour in a rainbow is the best?



Voicing our identities

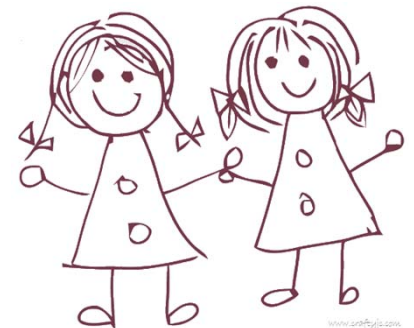
*Sara Salyers (Fife College, Scotland)
and Pip Bruce Ferguson (Dublin City
University, Ireland)*

- “As we construct language,
so we are constructed by it”
(Salyers)



How we 'met'

- Sara a Scots teacher working in Tennessee, USA
- Pip a New Zealand-based reviewer for Educational Journal of Living Theories
- Sara's paper went through review process and was published – see [http://www.ejolts.net/files/journal/5/1/Salyers5\(1\).pdf](http://www.ejolts.net/files/journal/5/1/Salyers5(1).pdf)
- Pip and Sara subsequently collaborated in a book chapter (free e-book), see http://www.waikato.ac.nz/data/assets/pdf_file/0009/260838/Digital-smarts.pdf.pdf
- Yet to meet face to face



Language can be used to exclude...

“...language is a living, cultural thing and formal English, the “lingua franca” of the academic and modern world, exists nowhere as a language in its own right”

(Salyers, 2012)

But unfamiliarity with it can ‘other’ students



Faced with this obvious alienation and a recognition of the 'cultural colonialism' of her classroom, how did Sara respond?



She 'voiced her own identity'

“Richt yuse tatty bogles; hawd yir wheesht, pin yer lugs back and gie’s yir foo, foo mind, attenshun. I’m no goany waste ma brathe, ye ken. This is whit yill hear whaur a cum frae... An er’s nuhin’ wrang wi’ it.”

Translation: Right you potato scarecrows, be quiet; pin back your ears and give me your full, full remember, attention. I’m not going to waste my breath you know. This is what you will hear where I come from... and there’s nothing wrong with it.

Conclusion from Sara's study:

- Disenfranchisement is a better explanation for the poor language skills of my students than lack of either intelligence or academic ability. Formal English, therefore, should not be taught normatively (which is educational colonization) but as a universal medium of national and international human communication – that is, truthfully and respectfully.



Pip's work:

Investigated colonisation of Māori language and educational practices over New Zealand's history (and with examples in her own practice!)

Schwimmer: "Our thinking can never be better than the words we use" (1968)

Increasing awareness that 'the goldfish does not see the water'

<http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/handle/10289/6656>



Do we actually want to 'homogenise' student voices?

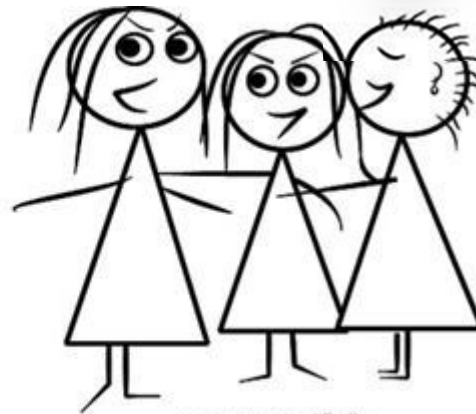


From www.huckleberry.nz

They make me feel
dumb – excluded –
Not 'one of the in
crowd'



We speak
exquisitely....
We 'belong'



How can we change these colonialist, oppressive practices? Should we?

One approach Sara and Pip use – Living Educational Theory



- Be clear about values
- Hold ourselves to account
- Look for contradictions in practice
- Investigate how to improve
- Seek diverse sources of evidence – not just own reflections
- Seek to bring hope for humanity

Let's not get paralysed by the issues.



“There is little point in being overwhelmed with guilt and shame for well-intentioned but unhelpful practice. Guilt and shame are positive emotions only to the point that they prompt us to consider better ways of practising with those negatively affected by our actions.

Soul-searching and commitment to change is a far more appropriate response than breast-beating”
(Ferguson & Bruce Ferguson, 2010)

Sara's work continues – her book was published last year

Effortless Eloquence

English Acquisition the Brain-Based Way (A Heterotelic Approach)

<http://leanpub.com/effortlesseloquence>

She writes: “As is appropriate in Living Educational Theory work, we hold ourselves to account to work in ways that enhance the life-affirming energy of those we encounter, and that carry a hope for the future: that in seeking freedom from our own invisible prisons, we might explore in wonder and delight, the undiscovered worlds behind the imposed silence of so many voices.

We recognise that this will be a life-long journey. We invite others to join us to discuss ways of improving our respective practices so that we can value, rather than denigrate, diversity.

We are in Africa. We conclude our presentation with the words of Kenyan author Ngūgī wa Thiong'o (2006):

Language as communication and as culture are then products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world.

How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their places, politics and at the social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings.

Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world.

