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"You really can practice English in real life": Mediating cultural and linguistic learning in a rest home

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Abstract

Our society abounds with underutilised human resources for mediating linguistic practice and cultural learning resulting in agency. Learners of English as an Additional Language (EAL) whether migrants or international students frequently report difficulties in finding contexts to practice English outside the classroom (Wright, 2006). Using a framework based around language socialisation, this paper reports on a case study identifying what learners gain linguistically, culturally and ontologically from prolonged interaction with the elderly at a rest home in Auckland. Four Chinese women who had undertaken a 10-hour community placement as part of a BA programme were asked to live onsite as caregivers as a result of their successful work as volunteers during their community placements. This project uses these students' reflective diaries from their first placement, plus the transcript of a focus group interview conducted during the time they were living onsite, to address key questions about how the rest home and the volunteer sector in general, impact on actuating practice into social learning. To "really practice" allowed the four to apply linguistic strategies taught in the abstract context of the classroom; to observe firsthand aspects of culture that resonated with the elderly; to report on what sort of language was used in the homes and for what purposes, and to emerge with the feeling that even they could "make a difference".

Introduction: "Really practising"

In a reflective diary written during her community placement, rest home volunteer 'Molly' writes: "to work in a rest home made me *really* practice speaking". In a focus group interview six months after her community placement 'Laura', another volunteer, comments: "You *really* can practice English in real life. It's not what you learn from classroom, because you know it's all the textbook *[sic]*." Molly and Laura, along with Beth and Dora (all pseudonyms), undertook community placements within Auckland rest homes as part of a second year assignment in an advanced English as an Additional Language (EAL) unit, *Culture and New Zealand Society* (CNZS). Interestingly, not only did they partake in these placements as part of their EAL programme; they also stayed on as rest home volunteers, living onsite for six months while completing their studies. This paper reports on the learning of these four women, all Chinese, who were motivated by CNZS to extend their volunteer work into their lives beyond the classroom, affording them opportunities for learning in the social world. While CNZS aims to mediate the local, national and transnational

aspects of cultural knowing through a combination of in-class and real world discoveries, it is merely a catalyst in the learning trajectories of Molly, Laura, Beth and Dora. Their stories are the focus of this case study.

The overarching research question asks what these students gained linguistically, culturally and ontologically from interaction with the elderly, supervisors and other volunteers at the rest home. Within the overarching research enquiry, the study addresses a range of questions about what students learn in the real world that they cannot learn in the classroom. To apply the central theme of the papers in this volume, 'mediating language learning', I describe how teachers can act as mediators for learning beyond the classroom. Broadly, this paper suggests that placing advanced EAL students in such real world contexts as rest homes helps mediate learning that impacts linguistically and culturally. Clearly, such a placement would not work for all students, so, with reference to the social constructivist notion of imagined community and the poststructuralist concept of investment, the case study presents its findings in the light of the particular investments and desires of Molly, Laura, Beth and Dora.

The literature review section that follows begins by examining the context and theoretical frames of the case study, an examination that segues into consideration of the mediational roles of teachers in culture-focussed EAL programmes, and the importance of onsite supervisors in community placements.

Literature Review

Context and Theoretical Frames

This case study of mediating language and cultural learning in rest homes arose out of the observations that New Zealand language learners frequently report difficulty in accessing native speaker communities (Andrew & Kearney, 2007; Cooke, 2001; Hunter & Cooke, 2007; Wright, 2006) and that Asians in the community were "filling the gaps" as volunteers (Peterson, 2005). It arose, too, out of the need to create contexts where learners could develop multi-faceted, self-knowing, future-oriented agency (Hunter & Cooke, 2007; Manosuthikit, 2007) as opposed to linear, cognitively-anchored if culturally malleable autonomy (Palfreyman & Smith, 2003; Ushioda, 1996).

While the theoretical infrastructure of the study lies in poststructuralist "language socialisation" (Duff, 2007; Duff & Hornberger, 2008; Pavlenko, 2002), the study is grounded in several contemporary theoretical frames, primarily social identity theory (Norton, 2000, 2009) and the constructivist notions of apprenticeship within communities of practice (Andrew & Kearney, 2007; Lave & Wenger, 1992; Wenger, 1998) and aspirations to imagined communities (Anderson, 1991; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Murphey, Chen & Chen, 2005; Norton, 2009; Norton & Gao, 2008; Pavlenko & Norton, 2005). The term "imagined community" describes learners' investment in their learning as it impacts on future goals, ambitions, dream communities and desires for belonging and recognition. These imagined communities, Kanno and Norton (2003) maintain, are "no less real than the ones in which learners have daily engagement" (p.242). They are desired communities, offering a gamut of future identity options. Imagined communities originated in the work of Anderson (1991). Alongside the work of Lave and Wenger (1991, 1998), imagined communities have been widely used in writing on learner investment (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton Pierce, 1995; Norton, 2000, 2009; Pavlenko & Norton, 2005; Pittaway, 2004).

Interestingly, researchers have specifically applied them to Chinese learners (Murphey, Chen & Chen 2005; Orton, 2005; Norton & Gao, 2008).

Community Placements and Authentic Assessment

Community placements are a form of community engagement using authentic pedagogies within the language socialisation framework. In such frames, human activities typically occur within cultural contexts mediated by language and with "the specific experiences we have with the artefacts produced by our ancestors and by our contemporaries" (Lantolf, 2000, p.79). Andrew and Kearney (2007) argue community placements are an educationally effective and identity affirmative vehicle for authentic cultural learning and language socialization. The range of potential placements is enormous: charity shops, help organisations, environmental groups or contexts of care for the young and old such as childcare centres or aged care facilities. They embody "a chance for learners to observe and participate in activities that happen normally" (Andrew & Kearney, 2007, p.32).

In this study, community placements simultaneously function as sites of linguistic, cultural and ontological learning via language socialisation and as "authentic assessment". In order to be truly "authentic" Power (2010) maintains there needs to be a "real world" element in the context of assessment. There also needs to be a chance for students to apply essential knowledge and skills. But even for an authentic assessment event in the real world students need to be prepared and so teachers need to mediate.

Teachers as Mediators

In preparing learners from all cultures studying in such countries as New Zealand for language socialization the teacher fulfils a range of roles to enable students to mediate language and cultural learning beyond the classroom. Setting up opportunities for communicative interaction is one way that teachers mediate, throwing light on activities embedded in specific socio-cultural settings (Huong, 2003).

Such mediation sets up not only potential linguistic learning, but also cultural. Dlaska (2000) observed the "independent" culture learning that would be coterminous with agency only yields results if "meaningful contexts for ... unfamiliar freedom are created" (p.258). In preparing learners for the unfamiliar freedom of engagement with and discovery in New Zealand communities, teachers both prepare the learners for cultural discoveries with content and ideas, and draw on the range of competencies. Students need to be culturally prepared to engage in future imagined communities, and also to communicate within them receptively and actively. Teachers, write Murphey, et al. (2005), "are in a powerful positions to help create ... imagined communities and to stimulate or stifle them" (p.84).

Teachers offer mediation training between the classroom and real and imagined communities beyond it. Instructors variously become "social and intercultural interpreters" (Dlaska, 2000, p.256) and masters of "Discourses" (Gee, 1996). Students are encouraged to learn in the community through apprenticeship, in this case to the rest home comprising elderly clients, doctors and nurses, supervisors and volunteer caregivers. Instructors can also support collaborative engagement in situated activities, making learners aware of the social construction of any affective factors impacting on their achievement of language learning goals and understanding learners' possibilities for the future.

Desirable frameworks for appreciating cultural difference as part of language learning and creating integrated, inclusive visions are well covered in literature (Buttjes, 1989; Byram, 1997; Dlaska, 2000). Drawing on these and other studies, instructors of CNZS teach the following in preparation for real-world interaction:

- the ideational knowledge (in this case, specifically about aged care in New Zealand and generally about identity, culture and language in use)
- the metacognitive framework (strategies to approach learning in community)
- the communicative strategies (ways of listening, responding, interacting; functional and situational language)
- engaging in language contexting, seeking links between language, context and the social world and noting them in journals

Supervisors as Mediators

In this project teachers also acted as go-betweens, soliciting supervisors for students with difficulty in locating a placement, and maintaining practical contacts with those supervisors for the future. The supervisor's support for the four women in my focus group testifies to their investment in helping others where their initial investments in community placement has been to participate in an assessment that gave them contexts for practising their listening, speaking and communicative competencies. Her role in mediating the students' socialisation into their community placements, while not empirically measured, is acknowledged in their journals and in her face-to-face and telephone communications with me. She gave the students status as volunteers, positioned them as international and migrant students interested in local and national culture and society, empowered them with caring skills to make a difference and gave them a place to stay.

Methodology

Participants

The case study focuses on four women, all from China, all aged between 20 and 26, who chose rest homes as their community placements. These four students were selected for the case study because they were subsequently invited to stay onsite as volunteer caregivers. Thus, this enquiry investigates the learning accumulated both from the onsite experience and from the original placement. Each woman's investment in the rest home is evidenced by the fact that they were still working as volunteers six months after the compulsory placements.

Data Collection

The study uses a teacher-researcher lens to examine participants' onsite linguistic, cultural and self-oriented learning and cultural engagement. Qualitative data used as the basis for this study derives from two main instruments: reflective journals and a focus group interview.

Journals

The first source consists in learners' reflective journals written during or just after their community placement experiences based on notes written during the placement. These journals, averaging 350 words and organised chronologically in four instalments, were written in response to a series of cues. Specifically, the students were asked to consider:

- their interactions in spoken English
- the situations where English was used
- their learning about language, culture and society
- any evidence of connecting classroom learning with community placement
- their individual reflections about what they would do next time.

Focus group

In order to triangulate data and gain a sense of how authentic learning in community impacts on learners, I invited students who had worked in rest homes to be part of a focus group, to take place in off-campus. Prior to the focus group session mediated by the teacher-researcher, the participants were given a list of cues. I asked the four participants to consider:

- any advantages you think working in the community gives learners of English and culture
- your personal reasons for getting involved in working in the community
- what you've noticed about language and culture from working in the community
- any differences between NZ and China that you've observed
- what working in the community has given you personally, in addition to being a chance to practice English and observe culture
- what you have learned about yourself that you couldn't learn in school.

The interview was subsequently transcribed and its content used as data. All quotations reported here are verbatim and spoken grammar has not been changed.

Data Categories and Analysis

The method aligns with one Sandelowski (1995) uses in nursing. She describes a method of closely reading the material, identifying key storylines in an attempt to understand everyday practices and underlining key phrases "because they make some as yet inchoate sense" (p.73). The researcher used a holistic, instinctive, multiple-technique method to bring out what Patton (1990) calls the "indigenous" themes from the texts. This method draws on recognized "word-based" and "scrutiny-based" techniques of readerly observation (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Other analytic techniques are "querying the text" to locate specific kinds of topics likely to generate major social and cultural themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The teacher-researcher used cutting and sorting to assemble a categorized database of student quotations. When the quotations were contextualized in this way, it was possible to identify sub-themes within the strings and to select those data pertinent to the research questions.

Findings

The study asks what Molly, Laura, Beth and Dora gained linguistically, culturally and ontologically from their volunteer work. Accordingly, the findings are reported in three categories: linguistic learning, cultural learning and ontological insightfulness.

Linguistic Learning
Socio-pragmatic strategies

In the process of real practice in the rest home, the four women learned about sociopragmatic regulation of their spoken language to suit their audience, specifically
elderly people. Beth recorded: "I realised that I need to speak slowly, clearly and
patiently as they need to listen carefully and properly". In the latter part of her diary,
she recorded moments of frustration and impatience, but also self-control, speaking of
her wards' "memory lapses ... I need to clarify and repeat what I say, should always
be patient and tolerant." Dora, too, went about applying such functions as what she
calls "asking for repetition", illustrating it with the gambits, "I'm sorry. I didn't catch
you. Could you say that again, please?" Molly spoke of the importance of getting the
rapport off to a good start with a clear introduction: "I greeted them by saying, 'Hello,
my name is --- I am a volunteer here, and what is your name?' for the opening gambit
so that keeps the conversation going". In addition to communicating with the elderly,
though, Laura also spoke of communicating with her supervisor and other volunteers,
where the register is quite different:

When they spoke to the elderly, the staff changed the tone of their voice; they spoke very clearly and slowly. But when they talked to volunteers, became fast again, and speak with linking and contractions: "How's everything going girls?", "Good on ya!"

Applying classroom language

There is also evidence of consciously applying language learned in the classroom to the real world context. Molly noted, quite globally, that her practised communication "connects with my classroom learning of researching, writing and speaking skills... such as asking, interrupting, clarifying, showing interest, paraphrasing, explaining, agreeing and disagreeing." Laura, similarly, speaks of application of listening strategies: "We need to apply reflective listening skills like in the classroom... 'do you mean...?', 'Do you want to ask...?' and so on". Dora spoke happily about the impact of using functional and situational gambits acquired during classroom study:

When I was serving morning tea, I tried to build a good relationship with them, so I began to ask some questions such as' How are you today?', 'Would you like a cup of tea?' or 'Please have a seat and a nice cup of tea', I realised that they are happy when I am talking and serving with them.

Molly, in the quotation that opened this paper, and Laura, in the following extract from the interview, show an awareness of the community placement's role as a bridge from the classroom to the community:

You can apply, you know, what you learnt, match what you learnt to identify, you know, the language features or the strategies you can apply. But in the community's life, *really practice*.

Noticing sociolinguistic phenomena

Beth considered the difference between the spoken language of her elderly wards and that of her peers, observing differences in the context and register of the language used:

I think the language they used is quite formal than younger. For example they would say 'Thank you very much indeed!' rather than 'Cheers' or 'Thanks a lot'. I guess the main reason is most of them grew up in the early of 19th century *(sic)*, so some new fashion words were not spoken at all.

Dora found the context unfamiliar, and hence a challenge to rise to: "I thought it was much more difficult to talk to them because they were older than me and don't use the same language as I do". Related to this is the politeness and use of terms of endearment noticed by Laura: "They all seemed very polite and they often used words like 'darling' and 'dear'." Beth observed they are fond of saying "lovely" and notes that when they seek clarification, they do so in a formal way: "I beg your pardon'" instead of 'Sorry?'" Molly thought she identified a feature of this generation's speech, but in fact she might have observed a more general phenomenon about Kiwi speaking: "In informal speech", she says, "elderly people often use the third person she in place of it as the subject of a sentence, especially when the subject is the first word of the sentence, such as 'She's a beaut day' (It's a beautiful day), and 'she'll be right', meaning 'It'll be OK'" She clearly understands the colloquialisms in contexts and observantly relates the use of the pronoun 'she' to a generational colloquial tendency.

Acquiring language in context

Beth was particularly redolent with stories about overhearing slang in the rest home. On day 2, she wrote: "Today I learned a kiwi slang, 'sweet as', pronounced 'sahweet-az'". She was keen to adopt it: "I am starting to use this kiwi slang". She was equally observant of Kiwi pronunciation: "Older people are more likely to pronounce words like grown, thrown with one syllable, and younger people...with two syllables (growen, throwen).

Laura described how she learned the term "seeing eye dog" and the idiom "out of the blue" and Dora was amused by the idioms "back in two shakes" and "down the drain". Beth noted, gesturing to the communicative context of the rest home, "working in a relaxed and friendly environment definitely can help with advancing my language fluency and my understanding of New Zealand colloquial language". In the focus group interview, Dora, excited and grammatically errant, spoke about acquiring another idiom:

I remember that I ask 'how are you' who is one of my colleagues; she said 'box of birds'. I said 'pardon me?' She realise I couldn't

understand, she explain me that what the meaning of that, so I learnt a lot.

Dora was also aware of how placements are intended to mediate language encountered in the classroom: "So, after I heard someone use the slang that you teach, so I can understand exactly the meaning and how to use that. It is more effective in the real situation". Asking her interlocutors the meaning of slang and idioms was, to her "really exciting".

Cultural learning

Anzac and Mothers' Days

The community placements occurred during two key dates in the cultural calendar: Anzac Day and Mothers' Day, opening windows into the cultural significance of these occasions to the four volunteers. Beth moved from the female to the male ward for April 25, when she writes: "To compare with having a chat with male elderly people, they liked to talk about the First World War (sic), ANZAC Day and armies instead of their families...It seems to me that they still cannot forget the wars". Dora, too, spoke of emotional stories where residents responded to the poppy, the dawn parade and the Anzac biscuit. Dora wrote:

Anzac Day, poppies, Anzac biscuits. A lot of elderly people fairly enjoyed a traditional Anzac biscuit, and enjoyed the pleasure of reminiscence as well. Stories and laughter filled the coffee inn ... one elderly dipped her Anzac biscuit in her tea and she was shaking. I could see a tear in her eye.

Although she could not understand the time frame or the cultural impact of the wars in New Zealand's history and identity, she was certainly able to interpret the emotion that memory engendered. In her focus group, she described her wards, who had baked their own batch of Anzac biscuits, insisting she try one:

After that I realised [it] is quite meaningful... [it] is not a biscuit is, but a piece of...I can't say it...maybe they put some inside they want people to understand their culture?

Laura made some keen observations about the first Sunday in May: "though Mother's Day originated in America, people in China take it with no hesitance because it goes in line with the country's traditional ethics-respect to the elderly and filial piety to parents". She noticed that "most kiwis think the ideal gift for their mother would be a card, chocolate, flowers, pampering, holidays". For Molly, caring for the elderly on Mother's Day triggered a comparison of the treatment of the elderly in her country: "We believe younger generations have the responsibility for taking care of the older, and when old people retire, they are expected to enjoy themselves and also keep healthy."

Laura, in the focus group, repeatedly referred to greater potential for enjoyment among the elderly in New Zealand in contrast to the family-focused stress of Chinese familial relations. Also drawing a cultural contrast, Beth said: "many Chinese older people like to live with their children, with up to four generations living

under one roof. However, it's common in NZ that the elderly stay at the rest home". Laura was surprised that so few Kiwis take their elders out for such occasions: "Inviting and paying for elderly to go to restaurants for tea is a traditional activity for holidays". Dora, after reflecting on the job of the volunteers, concluded, "they actually consider carefully about people's physical and psychological well-being here". The implicit learning is that the contrast shows the shortcomings in her country's approach to eldercare. Reflection brings her to an understanding that there might be a better way, and this analytical thinking has value as an aspect of cultural literacy.

Ontological Insightfulness

Students engaging in voluntary work in a rest home as part of a community placement assessment gain insight into their own capacities as a member of the human race as well as their abilities to adapt to sociolinguistic contexts and to acquire linguistic items. Laura reflected: "What I found out from my personality is like; I [gained a] more and more strong personality". But even small incidents can have impacts. For Dora, the ability to engender a smile was worth gold: "Every time when they were wearing a smile, I felt that it was just only a tiny work to me, but can make them happy". Molly, too, expressed surprise that she can "make a difference". Dora writes in her final journal entry:

Being a volunteer gives me a chance to contribute to NZ society ... I have learned some typical kiwi lifestyle, some kiwi slang and pronunciation. More importantly, it's a wonderful opportunity of broadening my perspective of NZ culture and society.

Beth gained an unexpected insight into how she would work under pressure when one of her wards collapsed when she was administering to her. She writes of her quick-thinking: "at that moment I dialled 1-111 immediately, my workmate Laura and I stayed with the man, reassured and made him comfortable until Care Supervisor came." Elsewhere, she spoke about the healthcare knowledge she gained onsite.

For Laura herself, working in the rest home was part of a wider journey which for her involved "integration" and immigration: "I will continue to do voluntary work either in rest homes or other community centres in order to integrate into the society, as it is a good opportunity to learn more about New Zealand culture and society outside the class."

In her focus group, Dora referred to her own capacity for patience among the elderly, even when their requests are "unbelievable". Her mantra became, "speak slowly, loudly, clearly". She is insightful about her choice of a rest home for a community placement:

personally I have a grandmother, she is 84 years old now. I grew up with her so I have to maybe special relationship with elderly people. So I really want to help them and build up the relationship between a younger generation and older.

Beth reveals a similar motivation. Working with the elderly is a vicarious but constructive way to deal with a major aspect of missing people back home.

Discussion

The learning reported in the findings transcends that available in the classroom, and its capital has potentially long-lasting effects evidenced by Laura's integrative motivation and the learners' common realisation that even they can make a difference. The ontological learning sits alongside the ideational and procedural. As Dora wrote: "I learned many things that I can't learn at school." Such learning might include the language and idioms seen as characteristic of the discourses situated in the rest home. Further, the fact that the women learned basic care-giving skills in addition to increasing their awareness of their lexical, socio-pragmatic and communicative competencies testifies that they gained 'how to' knowledge they can use in their future. The teachers' mediations during the classroom study discussed earlier impact on the learners' application of strategies and recognition of signs of culture in the social world. Similarly, the mediations of supervisors proved additionally motivating. Laura had been advised by the volunteer centre that volunteering is a great way to practice communicative skills: "you can see the local people they how they live their lifestyles". The supervisor at the rest home advised Beth to take advantage of her learning context of volunteerism: "Volunteering is a significant social phenomenon in NZ ... She pointed out that voluntary work opens up a window to observe and learn NZ culture and society".

The findings testify too that reflection plays a key role in the study. Norton (2000) wrote in a context of social identity theory, focuses interrogation "between cultural practices in [learners'] native countries and cultural practices in their new country" (p.152). This creates the intercultural competence Buttjes (1989) described as "the ability to mediate between one's own culture and that of others" (p.112). This ability to recognise differences and similarities between one's native culture and a host culture emerges as a core aspect of mediating learning beyond the classroom, and is seen in the women's new understandings about treatment of the elderly, the impact of the wars and the importance of festivities.

The findings also illustrate how the women's investment in their individual learning, encompassing more than the integrative motivation Laura recalled, is connected to their future conceptions of themselves and the imagined communities they might belong to. The learners have in their minds idealised visions of themselves as members of future academic, national, professional or creative communities.

Beth and Dora, both of whom returned to China, reveal investments characteristic of international students. Their imagined communities lie in their country of origin where they will apply their language skills in future workplaces, and both imagine themselves as caregivers for their grandmothers. Molly and Laura, who became migrants, might feel more of an integrative or nationalistic desire to continue to contribute to their chosen imagined community. Volunteering helps them to belong to local and national communities and to the idealised imagined community of humankind.

The fact that these students chose placement in a rest home, as opposed to a church group or an environmental action group, is significant too: these students see themselves as having the capacity to care for vulnerable or elder others in their future imagined communities. As I have said, two of the reflective diaries mention remembrance of a loved grandmother back home, and two mention their future expectation of looking after their parents when they are elderly. Laura and Molly also aim to score 7.0 in IELTS for entry into Nursing. Regardless of their imagined

educational and professional communities, these students are likely to have chosen placement in a rest home for more specific or personal reasons.

The findings show that volunteer placements put participants into real-world contexts where a number of language learning mediations become meaningful and lead to effective learning. The onsite mediation of the supervisor, other volunteers and of the participants' peers is effective. Another form of mediation is that of the classroom, preparing learners socio-pragmatically and socio-culturally for authentic encounters with the real and the strange (Barnett, 2004), preparing for "unfamiliar freedom" (Dlaska, 2000), and setting the stage strategically for learning lexis, particularly slang and idioms, and aspects of culture such as the significance of Anzac and Mothers' Days and the welfare, treatment and happiness of the elderly in Chinese and New Zealand cultures. Preparing students for the real world mediates language learning. Laura articulates this herself when she says in her focus group:

when you're working as a volunteer in the community, school you know - older - older people around you, no matter their English is native language or not, but you have all the opportunities to practice, to try. If it is easy for what you learn from classroom and make it in real life.

This points to progress towards the future-oriented agency that Manosuthikit (2007) and Hunter & Cooke (2007) describe as favourable outcomes for real-world EAL learning.

Conclusion

Limitations

While this case study focuses on the words and experiences of just four Chinese women, there is value in the stories of the few and valuable knowledge about lived experiences and situated learning can be focussed clearly in such a close and intimate approach. I acknowledge, too, that rest homes are likely to be sites of learning and reflection for just a few students, but I believe I have described the types of student whose investments in learning, sense of future self and desire for imagined communities might predispose them for community placement in aged care homes. I intend this case study to represent a microcosm of the wider community placement project (Andrew & Kearney, 2007). This project shows the value of a variety of community placements to the linguistic, procedural and cultural learning of migrants, refugees and international students.

Concluding Comments

Wong (2006) argues that the essence of dialogic, Confucian "learning in community" involves talking and listening within enduring relationships - those where learners have a high degree of investment - and that such contexts facilitate "cognitive changes" (p.49). In the light of the findings, I can conclude that learning in community is, then, especially natural to the Chinese learners who chose community placements in rest homes.

I conclude that teachers of culture-focussed language courses, and even of language programs generally, are in a powerful position to mediate linguistic and cultural through effective world-focussed, strategy-aware teaching interventions. Such

mediations are likely to have lasting impacts: impacts that can lead to agency and valuable knowledge about one's own capacity as a human being. They can experience an ontological turn (Barnett, 2004), making tangible possible and desired selves and taking lives off hold (Cooke, 2001).

Another conclusion is that volunteer placements instantiate language socialization and a key implication for further research is that we need more empirical and ethnographic studies of how learners apply linguistic and cultural learning in their lived experience. This study also shows that by harnessing learners' desires to 'speak' English and activating their imagined desire to use English in the real world, they can access and realise images of themselves as communicative participants engaged in community. They move towards the goal of performing their imagined and desired selves: the effective user of English, the member of an English-mediated community, the caring member of society.

For Molly, Laura, Dora and Beth, the rest home was a site of a special kind of cultural and linguistic mediation, requiring patience and empathy and leading to unexpected insights about themselves as language learners within New Zealand, as fellow humans and as potentially agential individuals.

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