

The Intentional Teacher: The Mediator of Meaning Making

HETTY ROESSINGH
University of Calgary

ABSTRACT: Current educational discourse promotes the notion that our instructional efforts must focus on helping our learners make meaning. Practitioners have adopted myriad ways for realizing this goal. The arrival of significant numbers of English as a second language (ESL) learners in our classrooms signals the need to reconsider what we mean by "making meaning." Dropout, failure, and underachievement of academically competent ESL learners suggest that we are failing to educate them at the level where meaning resides. An integrated framework for thinking about meaning highlights the need to transcend our commonly held views of the journey and the destination. Along the way, perhaps we will gain insight into the needs of other youngsters in their struggle to make sense of the world of school and the classrooms where they spend so much of their time.

RÉSUMÉ: Selon l'analyse actuelle du corps enseignant, nous devons porter surtout nos efforts pédagogiques à aider les étudiants à comprendre. Les enseignants ont adopté une myriade de méthodes pour parvenir à leurs fins, cependant l'arrivée d'un nombre important d'étudiants avec l'anglais comme seconde langue (ASL) dans nos établissements, indique que la notion de «faire comprendre» doit être repensée. L'abandon, l'échec et le fait de ne pas terminer ce qu'un étudiant ASL est supposé accomplir selon les critères universitaires, prouve que notre façon d'enseigner avec le sens que nous donnons au mot «compréhension,» est un échec total. Un concept de réflexion intégré sur la compréhension met en évidence le besoin de changer nos points de vue, en général tenus, sur l'approche et les objectifs. Par la même, nous pourrions peut-être pénétrer les besoins des plus jeunes qui luttent pour trouver un sens au monde scolaire et aux salles de classe qui sont leur environnement familial.

INTENTION: purpose, aim
 MEDIANE: intervene, going between
 MEANING: sense, significance
*Collins Pocket Reference English
 Dictionary (Drysdale, 1995)*

A Love Story

A handsome young man fell madly in love with a beautiful young woman. Unfortunately, he later discovered that she came from the wrong family – in fact, his parents' enemies. But, he was smitten. Nothing could stop his love for the young woman. And, she loved him in return.

The young woman's parents strictly forbid her from choosing her own husband. Indeed, they had already chosen a husband for her. Any association between her and her new love would result in street fights between the family members, and even death. But their young love was so strong, they would sacrifice even life itself in order to be together.

And so, the young couple made an elaborate plan for their future together. First they would elope and secretly be married. They might seek refuge in a neighboring country. In time, they thought, they could return home, and their parents might accept their love. But alas! Their plans for their happy future went badly wrong. They could never have foreseen the tragedy that lay awaiting them.

In an English as a second language setting (ESL), it is perhaps more evident than in any other teaching and learning context that to really understand or to claim to know something, the learner must attach personal meaning to it. Moreover, the underlying concepts must find their way into existing mental frameworks/schema structures or semantic networks where the essence of what needs to be understood can be integrated, assimilated, and stored; later to be recognized, retrieved, and activated as background knowledge in novel problem solving contexts. Language is our tool for accomplishing this task. Since language does not develop in a vacuum, *content* is increasingly assumed to be the vehicle for developing English language proficiency (ELP). It is a far more complex undertaking than we in the field of ESL have previously understood, particularly when for so long, our notions of literacy and its relationship to curriculum and syllabus design have been

largely limited to language – the tool and how it works and is used (the code) to accomplish daily tasks – rather than the larger question of its relationship to thought, and to how culture shapes language and thought (Ferdman, 1990). Meaning is found at the intersection of these elements, and the teacher must position herself accordingly to be an effective mediator, hence, facilitator of meaning making.

The purpose of this paper is to advance a tentative conceptual framework that will examine and explain the relationships between language, thought (concepts), content, cultural capital, and teacher-as-mediator. I draw on general learning theory – constructivism, recent developments in brain based learning, anthropology, second language acquisition theory, literary theory and reader response theory, and research in learning strategies / metacognition to posit an integrated framework that will serve as a foundation for the larger challenge of curriculum design and development. I want to contribute to the discussion of the roles and relationships among these critical elements that can inform curriculum decision-making. The work of classroom practitioners can be strengthened by focusing on the idea of *intentionality* as central to their role as mediators in the language through content equation.

The paper begins with an overview of general learning theory that relates to second language acquisition. The role of content and its relationship to language, underlying concepts, and learner strategies is explained. The significance of culture and metaphor is discussed. The role of teacher as mediator is given precision. Together, these elements form an integrated framework – illustrated and explained next. Implications and suggestions for application of the framework to the work of the classroom practitioner are provided. Throughout, examples of student work, teaching strategies, and the voices of students and colleagues – taken from (my) more than 30 years in the classroom – highlight the ways in which the intentional work of teachers can support ESL learners on their journey to making meaning.

As classrooms in large urban school jurisdictions across Canada and the United States change to include increasing numbers of students for whom English is a second language, the idea of the intentional teacher becomes crucial for all teachers, not just those who are directly involved in providing ESL support. And along the way, other learners who struggle to understand at the conceptual level just may benefit as well.

How do we Learn?

How do we Learn a Second Language?

There is general consensus among those of the classical rationalist school that knowledge is socially constructed (Bruner, 1964; Vygotsky, 1978; Piaget, 1967; Chomsky, 1969). Learning occurs as a consequence of students' active engagement in meaningful, purposeful (authentic) tasks that challenge (i.e., Vygotsky's zone of proximal development – ZPD) but do not overwhelm. The single most significant predictor of future learning is past experience and prior learning. Therefore, it is crucial for the teacher (or more competent peer / learning partner) to begin by activating background knowledge. The teacher must help the learner retrieve from existing mental frameworks or structures (schema) what is relevant to the problem at hand and involve the learner in active manipulation of language and knowledge structures. New knowledge and understanding must be integrated and assimilated within existing mental frameworks, thus enriching, expanding and forming connections among them. Memory plays a critical role. In order to remember something, we must create a neural trace or pathway in the brain. The more we use a word or a piece of data, the better worn the path becomes. We must internalize, automatize, and personalize information.

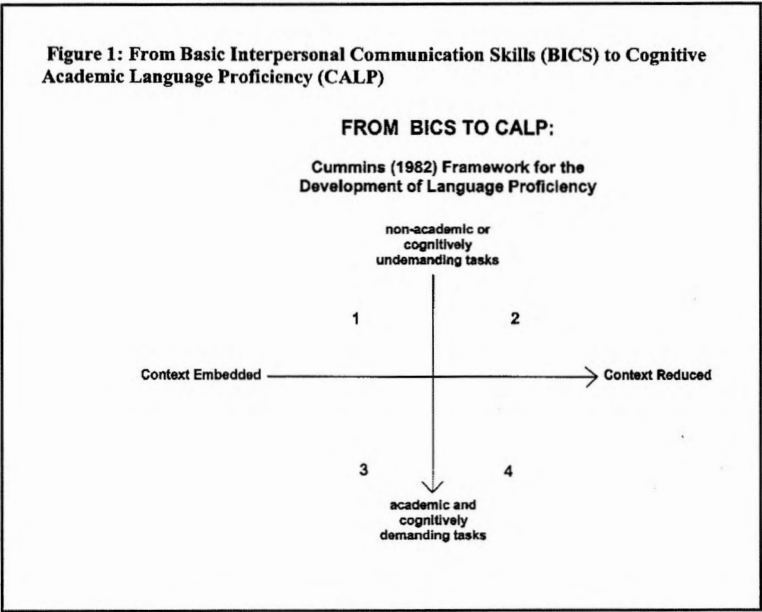
Internalizing, automatizing, and personalizing information may be accomplished by providing an interesting, motivating, personally relevant *context*, usually realized by way of content or materials in the classroom and careful task design that encourages students to interact with the content and to realize the instructional goals. Language is a tool for representing thought, for communicating in social settings, and for meeting the academic demands of school (Presseisen, 1995). Meaning is not found inherently in language since language is itself a representational system. Meaning must be located elsewhere and beyond – in the semantic networks described above that are accessed by way of language.

Research in the field of learner strategies and metacognition has further enhanced our understandings of the learning processes (Reynolds & Wade, 1986; Oxford, 1994). Strategies may be thought of as skills under inspection or conscious control. Strategic learners are aware of the processes that can advance their understanding. They select and deploy those skills (e.g., jotting down a telephone number, making a shopping list) that make them successful in monitoring and managing their engagement in problem solving situations. Language, thought, and

learner strategies, therefore, are closely intertwined and inextricably linked.

Second language acquisition theory builds on and borrows from the constructivist view. Krashen’s (1989) comprehensible input (CI +1) theory aligns with Vygotsky’s ZPD. Krashen posits a theory that instructional input must be comprehensible in order to be useful as raw data for second language learning and must be carefully targeted just ahead of where the learner is at to move learning forward. Nunan (1989) describes the types of learning tasks that can advance the development of ELP.

Cummins’ (1982) framework, adapted below in Figure 1, highlights the role of context (horizontal axis) in mediating the demands of cognitively challenging tasks in the development of English language proficiency.



Note that by organizing the framework around the critical elements of cognition and context, four windows open up for thinking about the interrelationship of language, thought, and context. Quadrant 1 may be described as the language of “here and now” – real language in real time for a real purpose: cognitively undemanding and context rich. Language is directly connected to seeing, making, doing, touching, tasting

something for example. Meaning is constructed through direct experience. Quadrant 2 may be described as the language of "my lived experience:" cognitively undemanding but context reduced. These two quadrants comprise basic interpersonal skills (BICS): the communicative competence that ESL learners appear able to acquire within approximately two years of their arrival in the second language learning environment. Cummins (1996, p. 111) uses the metaphor of an iceberg to describe this "above the surface" level of language proficiency.

Quadrant 3 may be described as the language and thoughts – not of "here and now" nor "my lived experience," but that I can access through a variety of scaffolds and supports: visual representations such as maps, charts, floor plans, time lines, and hands on experiments in science class, for example. Quadrant 3 is a transitional phase where many second language learners get stuck – they lose momentum, plateau, fossilize (typically at a grade 5 reading age – insufficient for the academic demands of high school) and are at increased educational risk (Roessingh & Kover, 2002). Most ESL learners sound good at the level of communicative competence (BICS), and their ESL support (and designation) may long since have been discontinued if they arrived at a young age. Their high school mainstream teachers are often at a loss to understand their academic underachievement and failure (Klesmer, 1994; Vollmer, 2000). Finally, Quadrant 4 can be thought of as the "language and thought that reside in the imagination" – and that only language itself can access. It is educating the imagination (Frye, 1963) and understanding the journey to that place of abstract thought that lies at the conceptual heart of making meaning and hence, curriculum decision making. How do we arrive at that place with our ESL learners? Quadrant 4 is known as cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), and may be represented by the beneath the surface depths of the iceberg image. Cognitive and linguistic maturity may be realized in the upper teenaged years (ages 15-18) for native speakers of English. While ESL learners often make dramatic gains in the early stages of developing BICS level proficiency, they require much longer to reach CALP levels of proficiency. Research suggests significant numbers of ESL learners never do reach this threshold (Thomas & Collier, 1997). In contrast to BICS level language which may be largely acquired, the development of CALP is heavily dependent on instructed support and mediation. The funding structure of many ESL programs is unlikely to take these learners that far in the educational trajectory.

While learning a second language shares much with learning the first, there are important differences, most significantly the opportunities for transferring concept information (the “beneath the surface” of the iceberg noted above) from the first to the second language – known as Common Underlying Proficiency theory (Cummins, 1982) and second, the transfer of metaphorical competence. An increasing number ESL learners in large, urban school jurisdictions are children who immigrated at an early age, or were born in the host country (i.e., Canada or the United States). They do not have recourse to a rich foundation in their first language nor the first language culture – they are limited in language and thought to playground and kitchen table talk. While these children sound good, they are unable to do the “cognitive pushups” in either language. Arriving as the children of well-heeled business class immigrant parents may not offer them the benefits or advantages in school of their privileged social status. The educational consequences can be devastating (Roessingh & Kover, 2002). Students who arrive aged 15 or older and who have acquired some English language proficiency while studying English as a foreign language in their country of origin, fare much better, since their task of developing ELP is largely one of transfer.

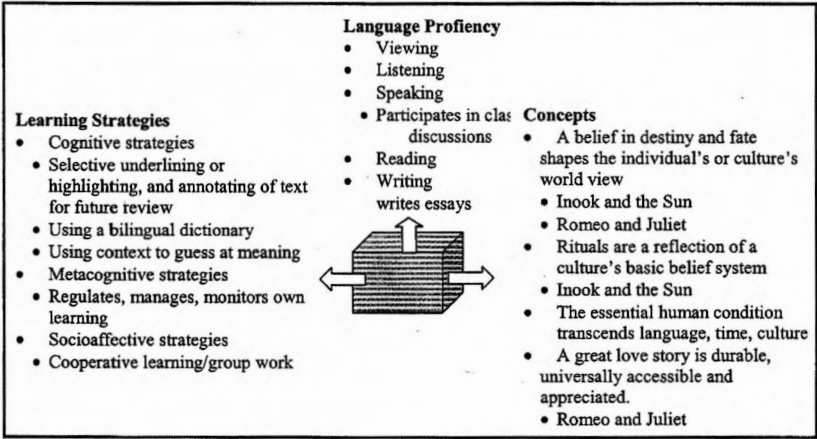
Knowledge is rich in structure, involves universals, and is highly organized. The brain is made up of two hemispheres that are qualitatively different. The right hemisphere is the pattern-seeking hemisphere, working constantly to interpret the oft-times scattered, incoherent data of everyday life and placing it into its knowledge frameworks (schema system). Rhythms, cycles, systems, relationships (whole and part, cause and effect, compare and contrast), structures, and forms are examples of those elements that are systematic, predictable, and meaningful. The left side of the brain is verbal, critical, and holistic. It has an affinity for narrative, story. Brain lateralization – the process that permits the free flow and transfer of information from left to right and back – is critical for the brain to be able to move from the system level to the schema level and to remember that which is meaningful.

The brain seeks to extract and to store that which is deep, enduring, transcendent, generalizable and transferable within its mental structures and networks. Perfetti and Curtis (1986, p. 48) take the view that everyday life itself should be sufficient for the brain to do its work of organizing, making sense, and attaching personal meaning. For them, teaching reading is about teaching the code (the system) – in the eventual hope that in the long run, the good reader will be less

dependent on prior knowledge and more able to acquire new knowledge independently. For the ESL learner (as well as many other learners), decoding skills are insufficient for the acquisition of new knowledge. For them, direct and purposeful instructional support can make a difference. Children must be able to see the forest *and* the trees – connections that many do not make independently.

From the foregoing discussion a tripartite framework for the development of general academic proficiency emerges that is comprised of language, concepts (schemes), and strategies. It can serve as a general model for conceptualizing curriculum. The framework is represented in the model below.

Figure 2. Framework for developing academic proficiency (Roessingh, 1995).



The *concepts* face of the cube can often be located in the curriculum guides of content area instruction, most clearly for example, mathematics, sciences, social studies. In every case, however, language and strategies play an equally important, inseparable role in the overall advancement of general academic proficiency.

The components of language, concepts, and strategies need to be contextualized (seen holistically) in order for students to learn most efficiently. The brain moves between the whole and the parts, and back again, always searching for *the sense / the essence*.

The Role of Content

The role of content is crucial in that it provides the *context* for developing language, concepts, and strategies. Content is the *vehicle* for achieving the identified core learning objectives of language, concepts, and strategies. Content provides the motivational “hook” and invites the learners “in.”

The metaphor for the brain in the discussion above is that of Meaning Making Machine. Others (Genesee, 2000) liken it to a computer with incredibly sophisticated hardwiring (an innate ability for recognizing patterns, for example, and a desire to create connections) but no software – it has to be acquired through experience, learning, and most significantly, language. Thus, while the brain is searching for meaning at the conceptual level, it has an affinity for narrative (stories). Every culture tells its young the stories that are required to gain membership into the group and to struggle with making meaning of man’s unavoidable existential dilemmas (Bettelheim, 1975). Embedded in the stories are the underlying understandings – the privileged insider information – of the group. Often, these understandings – even in the realm of emotions – are universal. I have come to understand from my ESL learners for example, that the joys of love and the pain of loss are common to all of us – tears don’t care who cries them. And a smile, no matter what language or circumstance, may be understood as a friendly gesture. Lazarus and Lazarus (1995) write, “the dramatic plot or personal meaning that defines each emotion is universal in the human species ... regardless of culture, no competent person fails to understand strong emotional events.” We are much more alike than different in our diversity. Teachers may select and sequence content with care so that it has personal relevance and interest to the learners, drawing on shared understandings between cultures. Understanding our sameness is a good place to begin respecting our diverse ways of contextualizing what is essentially universal by way of our lived daily experiences in the cultural particularities in which we are immersed. Appendix 1 provides a list of some of these conceptual universalities.

If content is organized thematically, multiple exposures (recycling) to language structures, vocabulary, and functions are possible. Concepts can be revisited in slightly more difficult contexts (spiraling). Grammar forms can be targeted, integrated, patterned, and taught in context. There are many advantages for choosing to organize content thematically, most significantly the possibilities for making connections

and recognizing patterns. Kovalik (1994) notes that patterns can be forged and constructed only when enough essential base information is already known. For this reason, theme based teaching may be more useful for older students, and for Intermediate to Advanced ESL learners of all ages when the integrative capacities and brain lateralization have matured. The very young (and Beginner ESL learners of all ages) may learn better when instruction is focused on the acquisition of universal concepts (Appendix 1).

Let's return to the "Love story ..." at the beginning, for a moment. If you think you know the name of the story, write it down. What was the young man's last name? The young woman's last name? Where did the story take place? When did this story happen? Who wrote this story? Some readers might guess this is the story of Romeo and Juliet. Others, from my experience, have "made the connection" judging from the phenomenological nod of my colleagues who know the jig is up. In truth, this is the story of Kunwar and Riffat, young lovers from rival ethnic groups in current-day Karachi (Appendix 2). It could just as well have been the story of newlyweds Kulwinder and Gurdawr Dulay, struck down in a hail of bullets on a spring day in Calgary, Alberta, by her brother for having dared to pursue forbidden love (Lunman, 1992). This illustrates that while the brain seeks to remember the salient message about young love as an idea (it is passionate, it is impatient, it is naïve, it will risk life itself for the joy of having known even a fleeting moment of love, it often ends in tragedy and tears), it does so best through the example of a particular, unforgettable story. Second, the brain remembers structure. Last – and perhaps least important – the brain remembers content details. Perhaps the genius of Shakespeare is that he understood the human heart and spirit so well, so long ago, that his story has endured ... it transcends time, culture, and language. The best stories do that, even if we do forget the details. To bring personal relevance and meaning to the study of Shakespeare, it might be worthwhile to start with a love story that is closer to home.

Students recognize that stories provide an example – a particularity – that offers a context for larger conceptual understanding, language development, and strategies acquisition. Rosie, a student from Bulgaria, puts it this way:

Students must apply language, concepts and strategies above the borders of the context of the particular content. This is crucial for ESL learners own independent further learning. Teachers don't actually teach content but the concepts, language and strategies

contextualized in this content. Their attainment creates the ESL learners' capability to compete with the native language speakers and to access, to shape the concepts of the content that can be understood only through language itself.

Rosie likened content to a kind of prison box. Only by thinking outside of the box (beyond the borders of the content) and by acquiring the requisite language and learner strategies are ESL learners empowered to begin the difficult task of competing academically with their native English speaking classmates.

The Role of Culture and Metaphor

Culture is the shared values, beliefs, and attitudes of a group that evolve from a strong sense of history. Culture includes deeply internalized everyday understandings of how the group works and gets along. Hanley (1999) uses the metaphor of an iceberg to illustrate elements of surface culture – those elements that are visible (e.g., dress, games, cooking) and deep culture – those that are invisible (e.g., patterns of relationships; concepts of justice, social responsibility, friendship). An outsider or visitor may observe the visible aspects of culture and make meaning, even through unmediated experiences. Hall (1959), an anthropologist, warned that it is the hidden, the most taken for granted and therefore the least studied aspects of culture that influence behavior in the deepest and most subtle ways.

Delpit (1988) writes about the “culture of power.” Those who are not of the dominant group are marginalized and disadvantaged by not having access to the privileged, taken for granted, ways of knowing that structure power relationships – perhaps most especially in the classroom. Explicit presentation and explanations of the rules of the dominant culture makes learning immeasurably easier. Freire’s (1970) concerns relate also to the power imbalances between oppressed and the oppressor. Critical pedagogy calls for those in power to make visible, the invisible. That is, to bring to conscious awareness those hidden dimensions of culture that minority members need in order to gain equitable access to the opportunity structures of the dominant culture. Self-awareness and reflection, and the desire to establish true and honest relationships with all learners lie at the heart of critical pedagogy.

While culture learning and teaching is highlighted above as a significant issue in the classroom, an overlay to this issue is the

metaphors used by a culture to make concrete the many abstract ideas that lie beneath the surface. Indeed, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphor is not an overlay, but in fact, infuses and structures the conceptual system of (a) culture to a much greater extent than we typically understand. "So many of the concepts that are important to us are either abstract or not clearly delineated in our experience (time, emotions, etc.). We need to get a grasp of them by means of other concepts that we understand in clearer terms" (p.115). Like our conceptual networks, metaphors are highly systematic, cohesive, and coherent ... and are selected for their potential to help make meaning of highly abstract conceptual wholes (gestalts). In Western culture, for example, time is often understood in terms of a banking metaphor ("time is money"): we save time, invest time, live on borrowed time, pay back time, spend time, waste time, and so on. But, while the concept of time is universal, the metaphor that structures understanding of time is not. In Eastern cultures, money is indeed "only money" – time is equated with life itself, and is seen to be far more precious than observed in the West. Wasting time is a serious matter indeed, akin to showing no respect for the essence of the life force itself – every moment must count. All cultures recognize the passing of time, aging, and choices made along the way. Many cultures recognize this as a journey, a path, or a road. But, not all cultures recognize the "seasons of a man's life" as a metaphor for aging, and thus autumn (denoted in Robert Frost's, 'The Road Not Taken,' as the yellow woods) is not generally understood by ESL learners as the decade of mid-life (young old life?), and hence, the bittersweet tone of the writer in (possibly) recognizing the opportunities lost, the lateness in the day for adventure, and risk-taking. And, while most cultures would recognize the road diverging as a choice point in life, the "fork in the road" means nothing – in fact, seems ridiculous – to Pacific Rim students who use the metaphor of a tree branch, not an eating utensil!

A Korean student in my class, Irene, reflects on her reading of this poem in this way:

The Road not Taken ... The Poem not Understood

It was too hard for me to comprehend this poem. It's mostly because of my English proficiency rather than metaphoric competence. To translate a poem, I first have to analyze the structure. The structure of poems is not comfortable for ESL learners. Therefore it takes more time to get the meaning. In addition to English proficiency,

intellectual ability and familiarity with literatures may be needed to understand metaphors. There might be some metaphors that ESL learners cannot understand due to the cultural difference.

Another student, Eileen, from Taiwan, notes:

I read this poem as a freshman (in Taiwan). We talked about the metaphors like life choices and decision-making, but never realized that the yellow leaves had a special function in the poem. Something interesting occurred to me when knowing the representation of the color yellow in "The Road Not Taken." A Canadian teacher had come to my school. She was trying to teach about the seasons. She asked, 'what's the color of the leaves in spring?' 'Green!' yelled the kids. 'What about in summer?' 'Green!' they yelled again. 'Autumn?' she go on her question, guess what? 'Green!!!' they yelled. She was trying to convince them that the leaves should turn yellow in autumn, but they just looked at her strangely and argued, 'Green! Green! Green!' Oh! My! The leaves surely stay "green" all year round in Taiwan.

How do we connect things we are not familiar with to things we already know?

She later on showed pictures and videos of different seasons in different countries and explained how leaves change their colors in autumn, and fall off in winter in some countries. We kids were so excited and almost everyone explained it to their parents after class.

Sometimes, a universal concept and the accompanying metaphor are aligned closely enough and are sufficiently transparent that they can be interpreted across linguistic and cultural boundaries. For example, Kahlil Gibran's book, *The Prophet* (1923), is remarkable in that it has been translated into 22 languages, and survives to this day to offer comfort and spiritual sustenance at times of crisis or to stand in for the liturgy of marriage and funeral services. Here Irene talks about the homily "on children" this way:

I can understand the content, but it is hard to translate the words exactly because there is more meaning attached to the words. Understanding the metaphor of this poem (bows, arrows, archer) I didn't have a problem with the cultural ideas. Koreans can get this culturally embedded understanding, although they don't agree with the idea. I do not think the bow-arrow relationship appropriately represents the parent-child relationship, although I like the metaphorical expression in terms of literature.

Mavis, from Taiwan, and Zoriana, from the Ukraine, both enjoyed reading *The Prophet*, and thought it was an excellent choice for an ESL class even though the metaphors were challenging. In Taiwan, the

metaphor of trees, branches, and fruit is commonly used to illustrate the relationship of parents and their children, or another one commonly encountered is the metaphor of birds, nests, wings, flight. Both students felt that the universal message of the relationships between parents and their children is a powerful one that would generate much discussion and debate.

Irene reflects on her reading of Gzowski's short story (1993), "The Game of our Lives:"

If the learners come from a country that does not have winter or if they do not have any ideas about what hockey is, they might have a hard time relating to the story. Even if they don't know the names of hockey players, I think, they may get the picture that Canadians are enthusiastic about hockey and it must be a popular sport in Canada.

They may be able to remind their pastime games such as football or baseball. I don't know what "beehive Golden Corn Syrup cards" are, and who Pierre Trudeau was. But I can still understand what the author is saying. The story is about growing up, favorite pastime sports, joy of playing games, sharing with friends, having your heroes ... don't forget your childhood ... don't forget your passion. Most of all, the childhood experiences – pastime sports – are connected to his or her later life. They have deep impact on the development of values, attitudes and behaviors. The rules and the way of relationship with people that they learned to play hockey shaped what they are now.

These examples highlight that meaning comes from much more than the words on the page. If meaning is not mediated, indeed, the words remain only that – on the page. At best, students will understand at the literal level, from a talking head.

Decades ago, as a young and inexperienced ESL teacher, I was asked by the Social Studies teacher to accompany one of my students to the office for a stern talking-to by the principal about skipping her class. My colleague wanted to be sure that Ahmad "got the message" that any further cutting of classes would result in suspension. The principal, a former PE teacher and "coach kinda guy" even now, launched into the meeting with catch phrases – "life is a game" metaphor – from the world of basketball: "I want you on the team," "The ball is in your court," "I want you to give this your best shot." Ahmad politely nodded his agreement – he would behave from now on. As we entered the hallway, though, he turned to me and said, "So lucky, Miss ... he only thinks I'm skipping PE. I be in big trouble if he knew Social Studies." "Not to

worry," I reassured him, "*just don't skip anymore Social Studies classes.*" "Yes, Miss."

How will the words and their meanings find their ways into the schema structures where, ultimately, the learner integrates them into his or her larger framework about life? In short, what are some strategies for educating the imagination and making abstract conceptual networks accessible?

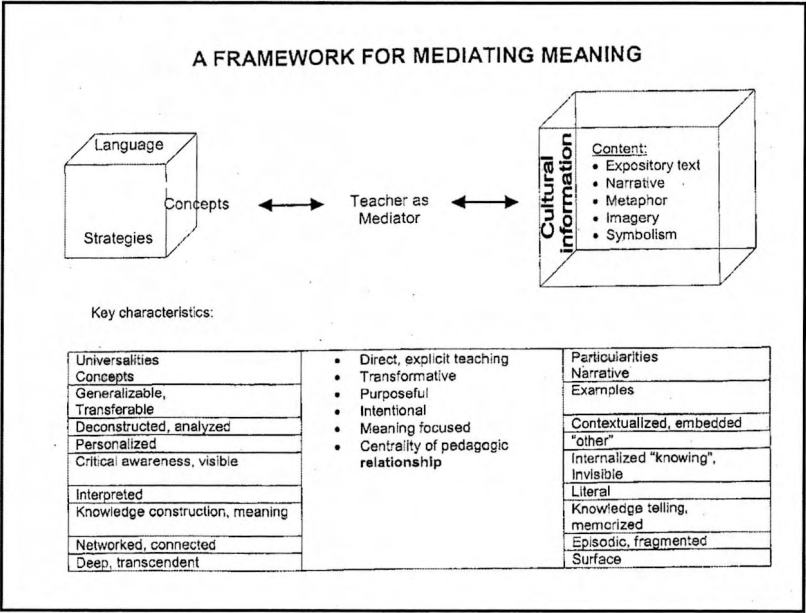
An Integrated Framework for Mediating Meaning

It becomes clear from the foregoing discussion that the teacher must position herself or himself (mediate) between the learners and their need to develop the core curricular objectives (language, concepts, strategies) and the content that will act as a vehicle to realize this goal. The core curricular objectives (concepts, language, strategies) are related to *curriculum design* (often the prescribed outcomes), whereas the content is aligned with *curriculum development*, an aspect of the teaching and learning equation over which teachers have a great deal of discretion. Figure 3 illustrates these relationships and describes key characteristics of each component of the teaching and learning enterprise.

The intentional teacher must constantly ask questions such as:

- what core curricular objectives have I targeted for my students' level of development?
- are the concepts likely universal? (e.g., density, gravity, romantic love, friendship)
- how linguistically accessible/considerate is this text?
- how relevant are the materials to my students' personal lives?
- what cultural understandings are assumed in this text?
- what metaphors are used in this text? How accessible are they?
- how can I design learning tasks that use the content as a way of integrating language, concepts, and strategies into meaningful engagements that result in understanding and growth, hence transformation of knowledge structures?
- How will I assess the learning outcomes that are a consequence of my involvement and the curricular decisions I make?

Figure 3. An integrated framework for mediating meaning.



It goes without saying that the student is at the center of these questions, and that teachers must know – really know – their students, their abilities, backgrounds, strengths, interests. And, perhaps even more importantly, teachers must listen – really listen – as much to what their students say as to their silences, to their implicit assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes. This is a key feature of critical language pedagogy.

Some Pedagogical Implications

In this section, I highlight some of the instructional strategies that I have found useful in mediating for meaning making.

Instructional Conversations (Goldenberg, 1993)

The teacher’s role here is to probe, draw possible analogies and contrasts, suggest possible interpretations, and reflect on choice of words. Teachers and students alike derive great benefit from becoming aware of the way they co-construct meaning through talk.

Essential Questions (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998a, 1998b)

Wiggins and McTighe advocate a strategy of backwards design (start with results) and the use of essential questions to get at meaning. Examples of “big idea” questions that encourage learners to focus on the transcendent might include: What takes the higher claim: romantic/passionate love; or duty, obligation and obedience to parents (country, position)? What will happen to (the density of) this block of wood if I cut it into two unequal pieces? (grade 8 science curriculum children, even after explanation of the concept of density, stick with their misconception that the density of the smaller piece is less than the larger piece, and the densities of both pieces are less than the whole. Simply allowing students the opportunity to interact with and experience science phenomena will not automatically develop scientific knowledge. Lab activities, therefore, are an important part of follow through).

Chunking/Working the Text (Saunders, 1999)

Teachers identify natural chunks of text and then analyze it for concept information, language, and metaphors that must be mediated. The framework below, Figure 4, adapted from Saunders, may be useful. This

Figure 4: Framework for Analyzing the Text

Chunk	Core Concepts	Essential Questions	Language	Metaphor
1.				
2.				
3.				

exercise will heighten the teacher’s sensitivity to elements that will need direct instruction and thoughtful mediation for ESL learners.

Artifact Boxes

An artifact box contains realia, photos, representations of anything that relates to the topic at hand. The class may inspect the artifacts, discussing and hypothesizing why they were placed in the box. As a pre-reading activity, this would activate background knowledge, and alert

teachers to those items that have no significance for certain learners. The artifact box for *The Game of Our Lives* (Gzowsky, 1993), for example, might contain pictures of current and past hockey heroes (perhaps from around the world), some hockey equipment (puck, stick, a skate, sweater) the carton seal for an old-style milk bottle, some hockey trading cards. Additional artifacts can include anything (preferably something universally recognized) that reflects the idea of "coming of age," fond memories of childhood.

Gallery Walk

The teacher mounts a series of pictures and other visuals that reflect some aspect of the work the students are about to begin. For example, photos of the seasons, autumn colors, landscapes, pathways (straight, turning, diverging – destination visible/invisible) can evoke an imaginative response, as well as reveal imagery the student cannot relate to or interpret. The teacher can use this feedback to structure some essential questions.

Visual Representations

The value of using visual representations such as time-lines, semantic webs, charts, maps, flow diagrams, and the like can not be overstated. In short, these do two important things for ESL learners: they unload the linguistic density of textual information and they reveal underlying knowledge structures, making the salient concepts – and their connections and relationships to the larger networks to be understood – explicit and more readily accessible, holding them steady for examination and further study. They are highly versatile and can be used in countless ways to access background knowledge, to engage in the instructional process, and to assess learning outcomes. An excellent resource for working with visual representations is *Strategic Learning in the Content Areas* (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1991).

The goal of these instructional strategies is to engage learners in "digging beneath the surface," making connections, accessing background knowledge, and focusing on the essence – the deep meaning.

Conclusion

ESL learners are fast becoming the mainstream in many urban school settings in Canada and the United States. Their presence in our

classrooms signals the need to think about teaching and learning, and most importantly, getting at meaning. Initially, communicative competence ("sounding good") was equated with full linguistic proficiency. Gradually, we have come to understand that academic proficiency must encompass the language required for engagements with cognitively complex materials in high school, but beginning as early as grade 4 or 5 where there is a sharp shift in the demands of the curriculum to include far more content information and an expectation that learners can read at a level sufficient to construct meaning, increasingly, independently. But, even the development of cognitive academic language proficiency is inadequate to compete in all of the content area disciplines (Roessingh & Kover, 2002).

Most significantly, it is in the literature-based courses that students and teachers need to become sensitive to the demands of story interpretation, and the notion of metaphoric competence, as this relates to cultural capital. While there are many universals embedded in narratives that transcend the boundaries of language and culture, often, there is a clash, either on the level of the embedded concept or idea (e.g., parents' relationships to their children) or the metaphor used to illustrate the idea. On both levels, our ESL learners need tight mediation in order to make meaning, and this is the responsibility of teachers. Language is the tool we have for reaching this destination. Like any other set of tools, learners must be taught to use it well and with precision. Language across the curriculum is also the responsibility of teachers.

Central to this is the *relationship* between the teacher and the learners. Teachers are much more than purveyors of content, facilitators, guides, or partners. They are also cultural interpreters or ambassadors. They must be willing to bring to the level of critical awareness their attitudes, beliefs, and values, and examine them truthfully and honestly.

They must "get to the essence" of the words on the page. And they must listen. To do less, is to do a serious disservice to ESL learners, who will remain forever marginalized and excluded from knowing what it is they need to know – the privileged insider information – to participate fully in every walk and on all levels of life in their adopted second home. And the stories will remain forever, words on the page, rather than meanings in the heart and soul of the new generation of Canadians.

Appendix 1
Some Cultural Common Denominators

Every culture has customs, traditions, practices, and beliefs associated with the following cultural items. Each item on the list represents an essay, if not an entire book, but it is suggested that the list be used as a guideline for an orientation to North American culture. Incidentally, the list can also serve as a checklist for a series of fascinating discussions of a cross-cultural nature.

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| • Numerals | friendship customs |
| • Calendar | joking |
| • Personal names | sexual restrictions |
| • Greetings | incest |
| • Gestures | taboos |
| • Etiquette | modesty in natural functions |
| • Mealtimes | funeral rites |
| • Kinship nomenclature | mourning |
| • Age-grading | medicine |
| • Athletic sports | education |
| • Games | law |
| • Leisure activities | land-use policies |
| • Music | attitude toward animals |
| • Dancing | community organization |
| • Feasting | residence rules |
| • Bodily adornment | property rights |
| • Folklore | status differentiation |
| • Luck superstitions | racial and ethnic groups |
| • Cooking | mobility |
| • Food and food taboos | trade |
| • Family | government |
| • Marriage | patriotism |
| • Kin-groups | religious practices |
| • Housing | |
| • Hospitality | |
| • Visiting | |
| • gift-giving | |
| • courting | |

From: *The ESL Miscellany, the New 21st Century Edition, A treasury of cultural and linguistic information*, p. 140. Brattleboro, Vermont: Pro Lingua Associates, 2001.

Appendix 2

"Paralyzed Groom has no Regrets"

The Associated Press, Karachi.

Although he remains paralyzed, a man shot for marrying a woman from a rival ethnic group says he has no regrets about his choice.

"I am prepared to sacrifice my life for Riffat," Kunwar Ahson said of his 18 year old wife, Riffat Afridi. "I am waiting for the day when we can live together."

The two have been living apart since he was shot in March by her father, brother, and several other ethnic Pathans.

Ahson said he and his wife are seeking asylum but so far no country has agreed to take them. "There is still a serious threat to our lives," he said in an interview at a home deep within a maze of alleys. "We are not safe in this country."

The couple eloped in February, prompting two days of ethnic riots in Karachi that left several people dead and seriously injured at least six policemen.

Pathans, a tribal people who inhabit Northwestern Pakistan, live by a strict Code of conduct that forbids women from choosing their husbands. Pathans in southern Karachi later called a council of elders who sentenced the couple to death.

"We never expected the reaction to be that serious," said Ahson, a member of the Mahajir community, who settled in Pakistan from India 50 years ago. They have often clashed with Pathans.

Afridi's parents had refused to allow them to marry, saying they had a husband for her, a Pathan man who later took part in the attack on Ahson.

"We just fled. They were hunting us," Ahson said.

Police joined in the search, charging Ahson with kidnaping Afridi, as her family initially claimed, and then with having extramarital sex, which is illegal in predominantly Muslim Pakistan.

After several weeks in hiding, Ahson turned himself in, bringing in his marriage certificate. He was thrown in a tiny cell.

"The police kept asking me about where was Riffat, and when I refused to tell them, they would beat me," he said.

He was shot in the chest, abdomen, and leg when he arrived at court to face the charges. One bullet damaged his spinal column, but doctors say with treatment, he may be able to walk again. The charges have since been dropped.

Police deny Ahson's accusations that they set him up.
(*Calgary Herald*, May 7, 1998, A9. Reprinted with permission.)

REFERENCES

- Bettelheim, B. (1975). *The uses of enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales*. Toronto, ON: Random House
- Bruner, J. (1964). The course of cognitive growth. *American Psychologist*, 19, 1-15.
- Chomsky, N. (1969). Language and mind. *Psychology Today*, February.
- Drysdale, P. (1995). *Collins pocket reference English dictionary*. Harper Collins.
- Cummins, J. (1981). *Bilingualism and language minority children*. Toronto, ON: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- Cummins, J. (1982). *Tests, achievement and bilingual students*. Focus No. 9, February 1982. Wheaton, MD: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
- Cummins, J. (1996). *Negotiating identities: Education for empowerment in a diverse society*. Ontario, CA: California Association for Bilingual Education.
- Delpit, L. (1988). The silence dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58(2), 280-298.
- Ferdman, B. (1990). Literacy and cultural identity. *Harvard Educational Review*, 60(2), 181-204.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder & Herder.
- Frost, R. (1976). The road not taken. In C. Gillanders (Ed.), *Theme and image book 1* (pp. 177-178). Toronto: Copp, Clark, Pitman.
- Frye, N. (1963). The educated imagination. *The Massey Lectures*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Toronto, ON: CBC.
- Genesee, F. (2000). Brain based research: Implications for second language learning. Retrieved May 8, 2002 from: <http://www.cal.org/ericcll/digest/0012brain.html>
- Gibran, K. (1923). *The prophet*. London, UK: Penguin Books.
- Goldenberg, C. (1993). Instructional conversations: Promoting comprehension through discussion. *The Reading Teacher*, 46(4), 316-326.
- Gzowski, P. (1993). The game of our Lives. In J. Oster, M. Iveson, & J. McClay (Eds.), *Literary experiences*, Vol.1 (pp. 3-7). Scarborough, ON: Prentice Hall.
- Hall, E. (1959). *The silent language*. New York: Doubleday/Fawcett.
- Hanley, J. (1999) Beyond the tip of the iceberg: Five stages toward cultural competence. *Reaching Today's Youth*, Winter, 9-12.
- Klesmer, H. (1994). Assessment and teacher perceptions of ESL student achievement. *English Quarterly*, 26(3), 8-11.
- Kovalik, S. (1994). *ITI: The model-integrated thematic instruction*. Kent, WA: Books for Educators.

- Krashen, S. (1989). We acquire vocabulary and spelling by reading: Additional evidence for the input hypothesis. *Modern Language Journal*, 73, 104-114.
- Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lazarus, R. & Lazarus, B. (1995). *Passion and reason*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Lunman, K. (1992). Triple killing blamed on family strife: Crown alleges accused shot three because of dispute over marriage. *Calgary Herald*, May 13, p. B1.
- North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL). *Vygotsky, Piaget and Bruner*. Retrieved May 8, 2002 from: www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/methods/instrctn/in51k2-4.htm
- Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing tasks for the communicative classroom*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Oxford, R. (1994). Language learning strategies: An update. Retrieved May 8, 2002 from: <http://www.cal.org/ericcll/digest/oxford01.html>
- Piaget, J. (1967). *Six psychological studies*. Toronto, ON: Random House.
- Perfetti, C. & Curtis, M. (1986). Reading. In R. Dillan & R. Sternberg (Eds.), *Cognition and instruction* (pp. 1-57). New York, NY: Academic Press Inc.
- Presseisen, B. (1995) Critical issue: Building on prior knowledge and meaningful student contexts / cultures. Retrieved May 8, 2002 from www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/learning/lr100.htm
- Reynolds, R. & Wade, S. (1986). Thinking about thinking about thinking: Reflections on metacognition. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(3) 307-317.
- Roessingh, H. & Kover, P. (2002). Working with younger arriving ESL learners in high school English: Never too late to reclaim potential. *TESL Canada Journal*, 19(2), 1-20.
- Saunders, W. (1999). Successful transition to mainstream English: Effective strategies for studying literature. Retrieved May 9, 2002 from: <http://www.cal.org/crede/pubs/edpractice/EPR2.pdf>
- Thomas, W. & Collier, V. (1997). *School effectiveness for language minority students*. NCBE Resource Collection Series, Number 9. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
- Vollmer, G. (2000). Praise and stigma: Teachers' constructions of the "typical ESL student." *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 21(1), 54-66.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (1998a). *Understanding by design*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (1998b). *Understanding by design*. Retrieved May 31, 2002 from: www.ascd.org/readingroom/books/wiggins98book.html

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (1991). *Strategic learning in the content areas*. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Hetty Roessingh worked as a teacher-practitioner in the area of English as a Second Language in the K-12 school system for many years. In 2000 she came to the University of Calgary to complete her Ph.D. and is now an Assistant Professor in the Graduate Division of Educational Research, University of Calgary, working in the Master of Education program for Teaching English as a Second Language. Her research interests include longitudinal tracking studies, curriculum, and achievement of ESL students in the mainstream.

Author's Address:

Faculty of Education
University of Calgary
2500 University Drive N.W.
Calgary, Alberta
CANADA T2N 1N4
EMAIL: hroessin@ucalgary.ca