My spiritual identity has been identified as follows,

I believe wholeheartedly in the intrinsic beauty and power of the human soul, and this I can only identify as spiritual. The capacity to which humanity is capable of love, forgiveness, magnanimity, grace, selflessness, and reconciliation is an extension of something outside of ourselves. My spiritual identity is constantly being redefined, but the one thing I will eternally believe in is the transcendence of love. In this love, I am transformed daily by an understanding and connection to the divine. (Bixby, 2013, Reflection 1).

Labeling my spiritual identity has caused me to see my spirituality cannot be separated from my life as an educator (Johnston, 2003; Pearcey, 2005), for in this spirituality, I strive for transformation, advocate for justice, am culturally and globally aware, see an infinite potential and worth of all my students, treat individuals as multifaceted beings (with spiritual capacities), and have a desire to be the most competent English educator possible (Canagarjah, 2009; Purgason, 2009; Wong, 2009; Wicking, 2012). The desire to be a competent educator stems from the belief that we are all children of God, and in this, we are designed to give glory to Him through the way in which we live. We have limitless potential, which equates to the fact that “we are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.” (Williamson, 1992, p. 190). I believe being endowed with this limitless potential gives me the confidence and even the responsibility to be as educated, effective, and engaged within this field as I can be.

This is why I have chosen to pursue a Master’s Degree, and after obtaining it I will seek out opportunities to stay educated on up-to-date research, current methodology being used in the field, and ways to engage with technology in the classroom through being a part of professional development forums online, working with a mentor teacher, maintaining a TESOL/CATESOL
membership, attending TESOL conferences, participating in presentations at conferences, subscribing to TESOL Quarterly, and focusing on publishing materials. In my own personal practice, I will employ a non-judgmental approach to observations of colleagues and myself through use of recording, task-based observations, and ethnographic transcriptions (Zeichner & Liston, 2014).

The TESOL field of education seems unique in that it incorporates much of one’s personal insights, beliefs, personalities, and experiences in the classroom. No one teacher is like another. This difference can cause a barrier or division amongst colleagues as there is a presumed ‘right’ way to do something (Edge, 2009). However, this type of mentality limits what can be gained through reflection or observation. It stops one from asking crucial questions such as why did the teacher choose to do something in this particular way? What good could come of this way? What could the students gain from this method? Suspending judgment allows one to ask the deeper questions to learn the why, how, and how come when observing their colleagues.

Reflection on one’s own practice of teaching with nonjudgmental eyes can be beneficial in that it fosters empowerment, positive thinking, and excitement. As an American, I see that my culture seems to impress upon its inhabitants that one can always be doing better, or that there is always a next best. This comes from the individualistic mentality and the focus on success to lead to a happier existence. This message is overwhelming and at times exasperating, especially when one attempts to be mindful and appreciative of each moment (Hahn, 2012). Reflecting on our colleagues’ teaching practices whilst suspending judgment allows us to find that which is positive and unique in order to widen our perspectives as educators. It allows us to genuinely encourage those we are observing and change our mentalities to perpetually look for the good.
While it is crucial to reflect on one’s teaching in a non-judgmental fashion, it is also essential to reflect on the way in which one’s personal identity affects their teaching habits. Essential portions of my identity that impact my teaching include the fact that I am an American, a woman, and a spiritual being. The U.S. can be identified as a low-context, feminine, low-power-distance, and individualistic culture (Samovar, Porter & Stefani, 2011). This has inevitably affected both my perception of the world, and furthermore, the way in which I interact with my students. I tend to approach students on a relational level, instead of as the ‘authority.’ This can be seen in the conversations I have, the way I arrange my classroom to not demonstrate the lack of a power difference, how I encourage questions, and the respect I give each of the students in my room.

As an inhabitant of a feminine culture and an individualistic culture, I value and almost expect equality amongst the sexes. I tend to be surprised by individuals (especially women) who do not voice their opinions, or think their voice does not have a right to be heard. I realize that in teaching a wide array of cultures in the multicultural ESL classroom, I need to be aware of the participation I expect my students to have. There are students from certain cultures who would never challenge a man’s opinion, and if they were in a debate setting, this could cause a lack of investment or willingness to communicate. Thus, learning more about my own personal culture and the identity that I have in that culture allows me to begin to understand the culture and perspective of my students (Bennett, 1993). I realize I need to make room in my classroom for intercultural sensitivity, valuing and respecting of a wide array of viewpoints, and lessons which focus around the ability of students to engage in respectful disagreements.

My inner beliefs and reflection on my identity affects the pedagogy I employ, for pedagogy and the choice of which “is a medium that carries its own message,” and thus should
not be chosen lightly (Bruner, 1996, p. 63). Canagarajah (2009) implores educators to have a depth of insight into not only the direct but indirect messages passed on through pedagogy. This interrogative and reflective approach to pedagogy with an aim of regeneration will assist in diminishing the chances of imperialist notions, dominating ideologies, or culturally insensitive materials (Canagarajah, 1999).

My personal pedagogy offers a personal stance, and causes me to question, am I teaching from a pedagogy of possibility or of closure (Canagarajah, 2009)? As I reflected on what could be considered a pedagogy of closure in my own practice, I saw areas in which I needed to change. I am more aware of ‘hidden curriculum’ (Canagarajah, 1999), for I could have been perceived as presumptuous because of my assumption that what was presented within the curriculum and within my materials should be considered by the learner as something important or relevant to their lives. I have shifted my mentality in regards to the communicative style of learning, and changed my views by no longer implementing an ‘English Only’ policy in which I was initially trained (Auerbach, 2000). I am more aware of the “life purposes” (Edge, 2003) of my students and thus teach to their goals, interests, and levels.

My personal pedagogy has been infinitely influenced by the way I see the students in my classroom, as multifaceted beings that deserve the humility (Canagarajah, 2009; Snow, 2009) of a teacher who will put their interests, goals, and desires at the forefront of the agenda (Edge, 2003). Through this understanding the English-Only (Auerbach, 2000) approach, communicative approach, and covert evangelistic approach all seem to neglect the “life-purposes” (Edge, 2003) of the students. Instead, I believe the classroom needs to be a place that adheres to the life purposes of the students, and the acknowledgement that each classroom situation will be different and will require the dedication on my part to perpetually take the
individuality of my students into account (Edge, 1996). My pedagogy is influenced by the respect I have of the students in my classroom as they help to define the moral standards (Johnston, 2003), rules, goals, and standard of respect in my classroom. It is through a relational and transformational (Canagarajah, 2009) pedagogy, I find my spiritual understandings to be incorporated.
References


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