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Teaching and Moral Tradition in Saudi Arabia: A Paradigm of Struggle or Pathway towards Globalization?

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Arabic/Islamic educators are educated in a moral tradition (see Jamjoom, 2010) based on clearly-defined religious and cultural mores. These mores and influences on their Primary Discourses affect their identities as educators. In this paper, we suggest that university teachers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (hereafter KSA) are required to work within three moral contexts which impact on their identities: 1) their relationship to the institution and their professional identity; 2) their traditional and societal identity; and 3) their choices in the classroom and moral outcome of their choices.

All of these arenas of professional identity become more complex when university teachers are teaching a language which is regarded by others as a vessel for Western or foreign ideologies, as is the case for English teachers in KSA (Reddy, 1979). Hence, their professional identity is played out against the backdrop of both local and foreign perspectives. These perspectives affect their knowledge base, teaching practices and individual behaviour in the classroom. KSA teachers' professional identities are constrained within a rigid hierarchy, where their practices are affected by the institution, which in turn, is controlled by the Ministries of Education (School and Higher). Their identities are also constrained by their own morals values (developed within a strictly religious society) which affect their choices and teaching practices in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom.

There is, however, no single identity promulgated by the hierarchy with Western/Modern Discourses and seemingly contradictory traditional/Islamic

Discourses appearing side by side in the same documents. For example, as we have shown elsewhere (Elyas & Picard, 2011b) in the Ministry of Education's *Tatweer* (translated into English broadly as Modernization) policy first promulgated in 2007 and updated in 2009, the Discourses in the 'Vision' contrast starkly with those in the 'Perspectives and Aspirations' sections of the document. In the 'Vision' part of the policy the Discourses emphasized are educational, technological, knowledge systems and 'global' communication, while in the later parts of the policy the Discourse starts with Islam ("stems from Islam", "basic principles that are based on Islam and its moral, ethical and cultural system") and ends with the importance of "Arabic the language of [the] *Qur'an*" and the unified nature of the Islamic religion, culture, State and "identity" along with the imperative to retain this identity "*we have* to [italics by author] maintain it" (*Tatweer*, 2009).

University teachers in KSA need to mediate between these Discourses in order to develop an effective professional identity. Otherwise, as indicated in our research on KSA university teacher and student narratives, the problem of competing Discourses and its negative impact on teaching and learning identities persists (Elyas & Picard, 2011a, Eyas & Picard, 2011b). In the KSA context, students need assistance in evolving into 'globalized' learners, yet retain their Primary Discourses. Likewise, the university teachers also need support in order to evolve into 'globalised educators' who retain an Islamic identity. However, in order for them to make 'moral'/ethical choices, they need institutional support, explicit training and ongoing support to develop their professional identities.

Policy Reform in ELT in the case of KSA

There has been a recent push in KSA to reform both school and university curriculums. The *Tatweer* reforms have been instituted in High Schools, while the *AAFAQ* (Horizon) policy relates to higher education. This document focuses almost entirely on pragmatic details such as university admission, criteria for choosing the students, facilities provided for the teachers and the students, and training requirements for university teachers, especially in regard to the ability to use digital information in the classroom. However, as noted above, there is an apparent 'clash of cultures and Discourses' evidenced even in these recent policy documents. Perhaps this is because, as argued by Sharp (2004), KSA "reforms that have been undertaken have been instituted from the top down and many Arab and Western critics believe that the process has been mostly symbolic in order to placate democracy advocates abroad" (p. 2). There is a centralised approach to policy and curriculum development within KSA, therefore, to be effective, EFL policy needs to be "reconstructed" and "redefined" (Kabel, 2007, p. 135) at a central level. There have been rapid changes in EFL policy and often a lack of clarity in policy documents. Unfortunately, no details on EFL teaching are provided in either the *Tatweer* or the *AAFAQ* and this requires attention in policy reform.

We suggest that one way of reconciling conflicting Discourses would be to acknowledge the differences and provide guidance within policy documents on how this could occur. The *Tatweer* reform at a school level has included massive teacher retraining initiatives which are another important step towards providing guidance to institutions and educators. However, the *AAFAQ* policy document (affecting universities) has not been accompanied by similar initiatives to date and the issue of university teacher training still requires attention. Specific EFL teacher training within these initiatives would be of particular value.

Despite the focus on Islamic and Arabic identities even in these modern documents and despite their omissions, it is misleading to view these language policy decisions as merely regressive or actions to safeguard ancient tongues and traditions. They provide, at the same time, strong evidence of the 'imagined nation' being selectively and perfomatively re-traditionalized in reference to international audiences and the global marketplace of ideas. Clarke's article on English language teacher education in the United Arab Emirates describes how teachers evidenced this dynamic, outward-looking perspective. In the classes he taught and observed, local cultural practices and materials are used alongside popular ELT resources, resulting in a process Lim (1991) defines as "cultural equivalencing" the "systematic promotion of the local culture in an English language teaching promotion of the local culture in an English language teaching program with the aim of putting it on the same level of significance as Western culture" (p.61). We argue that a similar re-positioning of teacher identity among KSA university EFL teachers should be supported by training and explicit unpacking and discussion of often contradictory policy instituted at a centralised level.

Traditional Pedagogy versus Contemporary Pedagogy: Toward a Global Paradigm

It has been argued that the social and political changes post 9/11 have compelled KSA to reform its educational policy and curricula in general, and specifically its English curriculum (Elyas, 2008, 2009, 2011a, 2011b). However, little has been done to address the entrenched Islamic Discourses at institutional and individual teacher level and their impact on EFL pedagogy. The researchers would argue that policy and curriculum reform need to be accompanied by teacher training and support, particularly at a university level where the future EFL teachers are being trained. It is

not sufficient to provide the 'soon to be English teachers' with a predominantly Islamic/traditional training, followed (in some cases) by an entirely Western education abroad. The training recommended by *Tatweer* will potentially assist high school teachers to some extent in their change of role from traditional 'teacher centred' pedagogue to a 'facilitator' for information acquisition. However, there is no recognition of the ideological and cultural issues they are likely to encounter in facilitating students' access to 'alien' and disconcerting Discourses through the medium of this information.

Teachers, especially university teachers, are expected to be agents of change (Price & Valli 2005). For this to happen, they need support and training, not only in the technology needed for reform, but also in the teaching theories and practices required to effectively initiate reform. English language teachers as well as policy-makers need to be "sensitized to the socio-political issues surrounding language education" (Clarke, 2009, p. 589). Clarke (2009) also points out that in a "global climate [teachers] replete with media references to a clash of civilizations, it is important that this new generation of English teachers [in KSA] reorganize their capacity to fertilize a predominantly web-based TESOL with their views about the roles and purposes, opportunities and threats, of English in the Middle East" (p. 589). Thus part of EFL teacher training could potentially involve providing teachers with an understanding of theoretical positions such as 'World Englishes', 'stronger' and 'weaker Islamization' and post-colonial theory which might assist them in reconstructing their professional identities. According to Clarke (2008) "this entails the deconstruction of the framework the students and teachers have constructed around binary oppositions between 'good' and 'bad', 'modern' and 'traditional' teaching [and learning]" (p. 197). Thus, being a teacher is matter of redefining a professional identity that is

socially and globally legitimate. The important issue is agency. University and high school EFL teachers need to be empowered to understand their own theoretical positions, demonstrate a command of English culture(s) and earn the respect of their students.

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