Empowerment Through Enquiry: ESL Teacher to Educator

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The process of globalization has strengthened the position of English as an international language of science, technology, and commerce. This has led to an exponential growth in the number of English learners, teachers, and users whose first language is not English. They are commonly known as second language speakers or nonnative speakers of English. Several researchers have discussed how these epithets—second language teacher/learner and nonnative teacher/learner—echo a sense of marginality and displacement (Braine, 2005; Cummins, 1996; Kachru, 1982; Rampton, 1990; Shondel, 2005). The role of the teacher may also be marginalized by the sociocultural context of English language education. In order for the teacher to counter such limiting influences and play a proactive role, two conditions must prevail. First, teachers have to be self-directed and committed to life-long learning. Secondly, the system should encourage them to acquire what may be considered to be a "first perspective" (their own insights) on their educational context.

This paper examines how a society may project a reductive role of the English teacher, and what helps the teacher think beyond the stereotypical image. First, it discusses the negative influence of the political and cultural framework on the teacher's beliefs, and then identifies the components of a supportive system and the strategies a proactive teacher may develop to counter the influence.

The Political Framework

Language is "value-laden" and it is an "indicator of social status and personal relationships" (Fishman, 1972, p. 4). Therefore, it is not surprising that language acquires political undertones in the educational context.

As the history of the world shows, policies of education influence the course of the development of different languages (Braine, 2005; Pennycook, 1994; Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1994; Tollefson, 2002). The promotion of English in India, for example, has led to numerous problems which have been the subject of an on-going debate in both academic and non-academic forums (Agnihotri & Khanna, 1997; Annamalai, 1992; Khubchandani, 1991). Despite the monumental efforts of the state and private agencies,

the number of people that can make full use of the opportunities to learn English and enjoy the accompanying economic and social privileges continues to be small. It cannot be denied that the gap between the English haves and English have-nots is only getting wider. Indeed, it is not easy "to break the vicious association between English and social status in India" (Ram, 1991, p. 2). And, there are many young English medium educated Indian learners of today who cannot read or write in their first language. Learning English has come to be identified with learning an essential survival skill, as Tickoo (1994) says: "English in India continues to be taught as though it were a language of social survival rather than a strong additional language whose unique contributions lie in relating scientific and technological developments to the country's socioeconomic needs, aspirations and challenges" (p. 332).

As a result, economic (and intellectual) empowerment, as the goal of English language education, has come to mean emotional and cultural disempowerment, too. This appears to be the case with English learners in many countries (Canagarajah, 2004; Ibrahim, 1999; Pennycook, 1994).

This is the political framework in which nonnative-speaker teachers of English address questions of professional identity. What appears to be political becomes personal when individuals enter the English classroom in the role of teachers. They have to face the challenging impact of various socioeconomic factors on the teaching/learning process. They have no control over the political or economic situation in the country. Rarely do they have any say in the educational initiatives launched by the state, which is most often the sole funding agency. They cannot exercise any choice regarding the composition, size, and time of their classes. A syllabus is provided and a textbook handed over. And, then, they are held accountable for the results. It appears teachers are in a powerless state. But, it is not true. As critical educators, they may develop various strategies to construct knowledge, empower themselves, and play a proactive role in education. These strategies are discussed later in the paper.

As important as the sociopolitical context is the educational culture which produces the teacher. An understanding of its influence on the teacher is essential for an appreciation of the critical teacher's strategies. The following section examines how educational culture influences the teachers' understanding of their role.

The Cultural Framework

Each ESL/EFL context includes a set of beliefs about the role of the teacher. In India, for instance, the teacher is considered to be an expert and giver of knowledge, and this encourages the student to develop teacher dependence. Teachers who are products of such academic cultures tend to be trainer-dependent and think that it is the trainer's

responsibility to tell them how to teach. Such beliefs become a part of the educational system and academic culture. In fact, these beliefs and values influence the English teachers' understanding of their own image and determine their approach to teacher training programmes, too. Studies of teachers' beliefs and assumptions show that this situation is not confined to India alone. Vieira Abrahao (2006) worked with a group of student-teachers at a public university in Brazil and examined how they construct knowledge. She found that:

> The student-teachers understood teaching as transmission of knowledge, traditional and positivist view that knowledge is something stable and finished. . . . Although the data suggested some of the students' familiarity with a cognitive view of learning . . . all of them still saw knowledge as something ready and finished. They did not seem to know clearly that knowledge is constructed and that each person, by means of his/her previous knowledge, assumptions and beliefs, constructs it in a particular way. (p. 6)

Both teacher-dependence and the product approach to knowledge seem to prevent the individual in the role of teacher (and trainer) from evaluating the value-laden nature of knowledge, and how it is transferred. When questions such as who produces knowledge, and how it is promoted do not form a part of education, teachers continue to be unaware of the need to test the relevance or usefulness of any piece of knowledge in their specific situation. They tend to consider knowledge as given. Freire's (1970) observations regarding students are equally relevant to the teacher trainer and the teacher trainee who believe in collecting and transferring knowledge. The teacher "makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat" (Freire, 1970, p. 46).

Teacher trainers, too, treat knowledge as a finished product which has to be collected and given to teachers who in turn, pass it on to their students. What is completely forgotten is the need to think critically about the sources and nature of the knowledge collected and transferred. It is possible to argue that the authority culturally vested in teachers because of the position that they occupy is wrongly identified as an authority on the subject. This may do the greatest damage to education where teachers are looked up to, and their authority cannot be questioned. In such contexts, it is important to remember that "knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (Freire, 1970, p. 46).

The idea of "learner as absorber of knowledge with teacher as transmitter of information" (Sillman & Thomas, 1999, p. 3) is further reinforced by training and refresher programmes which seem to focus only on a description of how to teach. Most

often, trainers collect information and give it to the trainees without creating opportunities for them to examine the relevance of the information to their contexts. Similarly, teacher-evaluation questionnaires which include questions on the teacher's awareness of the subject, preparation, punctuality, regularity, and the fairness of their assessment of students do not have any questions on their ability to examine the components of the teaching/learning context. In other words, critical enquiry which is central to education, does not find any mention at all.

Instead, contents of training programmes and evaluation questionnaires subscribe to and promote the banking concept of education (Freire, 1970) where the teacher is the giver or depositor and the learner an uncritical receiver. This approach to teaching and learning places the teacher and the learner both in a reductive role. This situation may be responsible for the Indian teacher's belief that only experts and university teachers do research. In sum, as students, prospective teachers are teacher-dependent; as teachers they are trainer-dependent; as trainers they are expert-dependent. Cultures which promote teacher dependence seem to promote expert dependence. For example, in Vietnam too, teachers seem to think that they cannot construct knowledge through their own research, and "the idea of undertaking a research project seems to be reserved for those considered experts or professional researchers" (Doan & Nguyen, 2005, p. 4).

This may do a great damage to the teacher's self-perception. Instead of examining the processes of teaching and learning, and allowing their own pedagogy to evolve, trainer-dependent teachers, and expert-dependent teacher trainers tend to accept "received" or "imported" practices and try to use them uncritically. In other words, the English teachers accept the supremacy of the "received" pedagogical practices and for lack of guidance, may fail to examine the relevance and usefulness of the received pedagogy. Worse still, they may become agents of cultural invasion, especially if they are in power and have no awareness of their role in their situation. The absence of a strong tradition of critical enquiry, thus, prevents teachers from realizing that pedagogy is a tool of enquiry and independence.

So far, the discussion has focused on how teachers seem to perceive their role from a political and cultural standpoint, unaware of its limiting influence on their growth. It shows that their approach to teaching is influenced by the beliefs and assumptions that they acquire through formal and non-formal education. The discussion also highlights the fact that teachers receive very little help in identifying the sources of negative influence and overcoming the obstacles to professional growth.

Teacher development, in fact, seems to be directly proportionate to the teacher's efforts to think about and improve teaching practices, as the personal narratives of teachers from various countries show (Braine, 2005). Therefore, both the system and the

teacher must consciously address the need for developing a critical perspective on pedagogy. This may not be the only way to develop conceptual clarity essential for a teacher, but it will certainly guide the teacher and the educational system in the right direction. In other words, the system must guide the teachers to address pedagogy related issues so they move away from the stereotypical image of the teacher as a giver, and develop into educators.

In this context, the following section identifies the features of a supportive educational system, and lays the foundation for a discussion of the proactive teacher's strategies for professional development.

A Supportive System

A supportive system weans teachers away from expert dependence by training them to use and develop tools of enquiry. Familiarity with the tools and procedures of critical enquiry may encourage teachers to take interest in carrying out explorations into the classroom, assess the value of their own insights, share them with others through various forums, and understand the relationship between enquiry, expertise, and intellectual independence.

In sum, a system which aims at teacher autonomy through critical enquiry may be identified by primarily three features. The system respects the teacher's experience, turns experience into learning, and moves from teaching to examining teaching.

The System Respects the Teacher's Experience

The first feature of a supportive system is that it acknowledges and respects the teacher's experience. Díaz-Maggioli (2003) identifies eight principles which should form the basis of adult education programmes in the context of teacher development in Uruguay. These include voluntary participation, mutual respect, collaboration, action and reflection (praxis), organizational setting, choice and change, motivation, and self-direction. Explaining "mutual respect," Díaz-Maggioli (2003) says:

> For adults to progress in their learning, they need to feel they are valued and respected. In this sense, moving away from a deficit model of teacher development (one based on the belief that teachers do not know how to teach and that instruction in a given method will solve all problems), and emphasizing the wisdom teachers can bring to the task, can be a powerful motivator for engagement in teacher development initiatives. (p. 1)

But, most often, programmes are designed with the focus on the methodology to be transferred with no respect for the specificity of the context in which the teacher has to function. The exclusion of the context excludes the significance of the teacher's

experience as well. If, instead, the programme guides the teacher to rethink the relationship between the components of their context in light of the initiative, they will be able to play a meaningful role. Where there is no understanding of this relationship, the initiatives are likely to fail. The introduction of communicative language teaching (CLT) methodology in Vietnam is a case in point. As Pham (2006) notes:

> The shift to the communicative approach does not seem to be successful in many contexts in Vietnam. Although a great number of teachers have been trained and encouraged to use communicative language teaching, it is widely reported that they continue to use old methods such as grammar translation once they leave their training courses. (p. 2)

In India, too, teachers tend to think that CLT is practicable only where the class size is small. Researchers from Ethiopia report a similar situation (T. Boyossa, personal communication, August 10, 2007).

However comprehensive a training programme may be, it cannot do more than introduce the theoretical bases of the educational initiative to the teacher trainees. During the implementation, the teachers have to face various challenges the programme may not have anticipated and they have only their experience to fall back upon. What they need are tools to negotiate the new relationships that develop between the various components of the context. For instance, the introduction of a new textbook may mean the teacher rethinking issues such as the school culture and the student culture to name only two.

The following example may illustrate the point. A textbook innovation project involving a great deal of pair and group work was implemented at the Osmania University College for women in Hyderabad, India. The college had autonomy at the undergraduate level and hence, the department could formulate its own syllabus and design textbooks accordingly. The intervention aimed at encouraging a learner-centred, interactive approach in the English for the General Purpose course. The department had eleven teachers who included senior professors and part-time teachers. Most importantly, only two of them had formal training in ELT.

As the first step, the existing anthology of poetry, which was just a collection of poems, was replaced by a poetry workbook with the focus on literary appreciation. The text was understood to be only a means to raise the students' awareness of various genres. For example, the selections included Evelyn Tooley Hunt's "Taught Me Purple" that sums up the movement from "white is right" to "black is beautiful" with two metaphors at its centre—upbringing, and the attitudes of two generations to colour. One of the tasks for the students was to discuss a letter from a dark-skinned Indian girl to an advice column, and in pairs, write the counsellor's response.

The change from the lecture method to the interactive method brought about a change in the attitudes and perceptions of the staff and students. It took the principal nearly a semester to accept the fact that the English classroom has to be noisy if the students have to learn to speak English. The teachers had to learn that they had to move around and facilitate learning instead of standing in front of the class and explaining everything. Instead of giving lectures, they had to learn to elicit responses from the learners, wait for their responses instead of giving them themselves, and monitor a great deal of noise in the classroom. The students learned to work in groups sitting in rows, as the furniture could not be moved. They could not continue to be passive listeners. So, they had to be trained to play an active role in the classroom interaction.

Every new teaching recruit needed a good deal of orientation. Senior teachers helped them informally, face to face and over the phone. The project was successful and the textbook continues to be used. One of the reasons for its success could be that it gave the teachers ample opportunities to examine their experience, voice their beliefs about teaching, and think about what they know in the context of their experience with the new initiative. Teachers continued to share experiences and insights and every question led to a discussion of the rationale behind the minutest detail. There was no formal training.

In sum, the experiment illustrates the first feature of a supportive system. It shows that the teacher's experience is central to any initiative and, the teacher needs a great deal of context-specific support. However, it is important to note that the teachers received no formal training essential for acquiring a theoretically supported understanding of their practices. If the system had supported the teacher-driven initiative through formal training, the teachers would have acquired a more comprehensive perspective grounded in theory. And, this is essential if the teacher has to construct knowledge in terms of language teaching theories and practices. Therefore, a system has to incorporate the second feature. It must formally train teachers in critical enquiry and the tools of critical enquiry so they convert their experience into learning.

The System Turns Experience into Learning

The second feature of a supportive system is that, as has been mentioned, it enables the teachers to turn their experience into learning. In this context, Beard and Wilson's (2007) difference between experience and learning is highly relevant:

> Educational psychologists define learning as a change in the individual caused by 'experience'. However, 20 years of experience in a job, for example, does not directly equate to 20 years of learning. How people create and manage their experience is crucial to the process of learning. In order to help people to get the most from experience it is necessary to unleash curiosity so that people actively seek learning, so that they can plan to unveil something that was previously hidden. (p. 100)

Creating opportunities for teachers to think about their experience is essential, primarily, for two reasons. First, development involves change, and change pushes the teachers out of their comfort zone. Especially when they are products of the teacher-dependent, expert-dependent culture, they may be discouraged from doing anything that does not fit the accepted teacher-dependent model. Their apprehensions may include losing face, fear of failure, and peer pressure. Therefore, it is important to raise the teachers' confidence levels by providing them with the tools necessary for a scientific observation of their own practices. This may help them to grow conscious of their own beliefs and address them; this, in turn, will enable them to acquire a perspective on their role as teachers and give them the courage to be different. Higher education and teacher education in particular must encourage self-enquiry especially where teacher-expert dependence and a product approach to knowledge seem to prevent individuals from realizing their full intellectual potential. The second reason for encouraging teachers to learn from their experience is to promote teacher autonomy.

Experience contributes to development when the individual learns from it. Therefore, the system must provide teachers with opportunities to think critically about what they do, how they do it, and why they do it. They need training in reflection (Schon, 1987) to turn their experience into learning. This may be illustrated by how a few reflective activities helped a group of teachers acquire a perspective on teacher-student interaction in class.

One of the most common practices of teachers includes asking questions of the class to check their comprehension. They have very little awareness of their role in using this interaction to make the students think and grow as learners. Therefore, their repertoire, in the context of the interaction, does not extend beyond a set of clichés like *good/ very good, only one of you, you, no, that's wrong, and that's right.* A group of twenty high school teachers acquired sharp insights into how the interaction could contribute to the learning process when they reflected on it over a period of one week.

They were trainees on a one-month contact programme at the end of a certificate course in teaching English, offered through the distance mode. The programme included a few practice teaching sessions. Each teacher had to teach, observe others' classes and discuss peer feedback against a set of criteria. When it was noticed that the group had to grow to be sensitive to the role of the teacher in the teacher-student interaction, they were asked to observe, and note down the teacher's responses to the students when they answered comprehension questions. They were also asked to identify the various types of interaction the question-answer session may lead to.

This drew their attention to the variations of the interaction—a number of students may speak together, one may answer the question right while another wrong, the answer

may be only partly right, the class may know the answer but not have the language to put it in, and so forth. During the discussion that followed each class, the group not only highlighted the need to be sensitive to these differences but also addressed how each of these situations could be turned into a learning opportunity for the class. For example, the class may discuss two responses and identify the more appropriate one. Similarly, the teacher may put the incomplete answer on the blackboard and ask the class to complete it. What is most important is that the teachers realized the need to respond positively and encouragingly to any response because it indicates the student's motivation to learn, and the willingness to take risk.

Soon, their responses to class began to reflect their conscious effort to exploit the learning/teaching opportunities the interaction provided. The teachers began to think of learning goals before they responded to the students. They began to be more perceptive and critical of their own teaching practice as a whole and the peer feedback sessions too reflected a more conscious approach to pedagogy. It was evident that they were now thinking about the impact of their responses in the class and peer feedback sessions too. It was felt, later, that the teachers could have learnt much more if they had been encouraged to read scholarly literature on teacher-student interaction.

The experiment shows that recognizing an issue as a pedagogical one and examining it leads to a conscious and in-depth understanding of teaching. However, a longitudinal study is required to learn if the teachers have grown sensitive to the need for an on-going evaluation of teaching practices. For, investigating into pedagogical issues cannot be a one off. Teachers know that teaching is incomplete without testing. But, they need to be reminded that their own teaching practices are equally incomplete unless they are recognized as subjects of on-going evaluation.

It is also important to note, here, that examining pedagogy includes familiarity with the tools of enquiry. Teachers should be trained to identify pedagogical concerns, investigate if and how other teachers have studied them, and finally, find ways to address them. They need hands-on experience with using journals, protocols, questionnaires, surveys, workshops, and with collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. In other words, the approach to teaching itself must change to accommodate a scientific and on-going evaluation of teaching practices. This is possible when the teacher education system incorporates the third feature. It has to guide teachers in testing their beliefs and assumptions about teaching. A system can be most supportive when it not only values the teachers' experience and turns it into learning but also encourages them to test their teaching practices.

The System Moves from Teaching to Examining Teaching

The third feature of a supportive system is that it guides the teacher towards autonomy by shifting the focus from teaching to examining teaching. Teaching involves an understanding of the relationship between the classroom and the world outside the classroom. It also demands an appreciation of the changing nature of the educational context and its influence on teaching. All this is in addition to a comfortable awareness of three broad areas as identified by Crandall (2000): "Language teacher education programs are likely to be housed in departments of applied linguistics, education, or languages and literature: these three disciplines provide the knowledge base and opportunities for developing skills and dispositions for both prospective and experienced teachers" (p. 34).

Given the developing nature of knowledge and the huge and growing number of teachers, it is not possible to equip any teacher with an in-depth understanding of these areas. What should be possible is to train the teacher in using the various tools available for examining these influences on the classroom. But, most often, teachers receive very little practical experience in their training programmes. This is reiterated by researchers like Previdi (1999) who says that "in teacher training classes, frequently teachers receive lectures about how to make their classes more interactive, but they do not have opportunities to experience such interaction in their training classes" (p. 1).

Her paper examines an interactive EFL methodology course in which "students were actively involved in the learning process, rather than being passive note takers" (Previdi, 1999, p. 1). Hands-on experience which includes a few small scale studies under the supervision of an informed trainer may benefit the teacher more than deposits of knowledge on applied linguistics, education, and the cultural politics of language education. The follow up could include providing the teacher with access to professional reading material and e-groups. Instead of thinking about what teaching methodology to use, teachers must begin to think about how to examine teaching methodology in their situation.

In short, a supportive teacher educational system identifies critical enquiry as the primary responsibility of the teachers and familiarizes them with the tools of enquiry. The discussion has identified three ways in which this may be done. The system acknowledges and appreciates the specificity and value of the teacher's experience, enables the teacher to learn from it, and encourages the teacher to shift the focus from teaching to examining teaching practices. But, the responsibility to develop into a professional rests with the teacher. As the first step, the teacher may adopt some of the strategies used by educators for their professional development. The following section presents three of them.

Teacher to Critical Educator: Strategies

Educators think. They place their teaching in a wide context and examine it for its relevance and purposefulness. They reflect on teaching, hold discussions on teaching-related issues, understand professional material, and most importantly, contribute to learner-friendly initiatives. In other words, they appreciate the value of critical enquiry and hence, continue to acquire and sharpen the skills essential for it. Educators understand that their responsibilities extend beyond the classroom although their institution may hold them accountable for finishing the syllabus and producing good results only. They believe learning to be a lifelong process. This belief is reflected in the three strategies that seem to mark their approach to teaching. The critical educator makes a change, however small; experiments and reframes assumptions; and reads and writes professional literature. Each one of these strategies, as the following discussion shows, highlights the proactive role the educator plays.

The Educator Makes a Change, However Small

The first strategy is born out of the educators' appreciation of the need to make a positive change, however small it may be. In this context, Pham (2001) found that there are two categories of teachers:

> The first kind of teacher always believes that the new methods and techniques introduced at a training course will not work at all in their home institutions. These teachers tend to immediately reject new ideas . . . attribute the implacability of a new technique to various socio-cultural conditions at home . . . assume that nothing can be done to improve their teaching situation, . . . are reluctant to try anything. The second kind of teacher is different . . . they are aware of the unfavorable factors at their institutions, but . . . want to try new ideas. Rather than letting themselves be totally shaped by the context in which they work, they try to change it, even though the change they can make is small. (p. 1)

The critically aware teachers may face unfavourable conditions including small salary, heavy teaching load, large classes, lack of library facilities, and an indifferent administration. But, they feel responsible for their students' growth and in this direction they try whatever seems possible. They may design a student-friendly lesson plan or test. They may try to make their assessment of students objective and transparent. They may introduce a portfolio or journal into their teaching. In other words, their practices show that they believe in negotiating the influence of socio-cultural conditions on their teaching/learning situation. They make organized and consistent efforts which lead to their constructing knowledge about the specificity of their context. Critical educators, thus, bring professional and intellectual integrity to the whole process of education

itself. The aim to improve the situation directs the critical educators towards experimentation and this is the second strategy that they use.

The Educator Experiments and Reframes Assumptions

The critical educators are constantly thinking, "What should I do in my situation?" So, they continue to explore how their beliefs about teaching influence their teaching and student learning. This is best summed up by He (2005) when she says:

> On the basis of my . . . experiences at the school, I reframed my assumptions and beliefs of ELT, and applied and tested them in my own practice. This series of actions coincided with the process of an experiential learning cycle, namely, concrete experience, observation and analysis, abstract reconceptualization, and active experimentation. Reflecting on my limited but valuable experience, I realized that the significance of the experience did not lie in the fact that I had been to the classroom, but in that I became consciously aware of the importance of teaching experience as the inspiration for ELT and teacher education. (p. 20)

Evidently, the educators are self-directed, and realize that learning from experience is more important than spending years in the classroom. They conduct small scale investigations so they can improve the situation. This, in turn, builds their self-confidence and encourages them to think critically about teaching and learning. Their scientific approach equips them with the knowledge and skills essential to counter the negative influence of the political and cultural framework discussed earlier. Their belief in life-long learning encourages them to find sources of knowledge and inspiration on their own which directs them towards academic journals. And, they develop a healthy interest in how other teachers approach teaching. This is the third strategy that the educator uses. Thus, their urge to make a change leads them first to experimentation, and then to professional networking.

The Educator Reads and Writes Professional Literature

Critical educators develop the third strategy when they realize that making a change involves not only experimentation but also learning further. So, they read scholarly literature and keep abreast of the developments in ESL/EFL theory and practice. Their awareness of the teachers' concerns elsewhere helps them grow to be sensitive to their own situation. Most importantly, they begin to feel responsible for creating and sharing knowledge and hence, write about their concerns and experiments. For, the critical educator appreciates that "publishing is a way for members of the academic community to share ideas and possibly contribute something to the world's store of knowledge. To publish is to engage in a dialogue with unseen and often unknown others" (Benson, 2000, p. 1).

The academic dialogue with "the unknown others" serves two purposes. First, it encourages the educators to adopt a process approach to knowledge. For, each dialogue brings in a fresh perspective which adds to the awareness of the interlocutors. Secondly, the academic dialogue motivates the educator to take a critical look at the teaching/learning context. This contributes enormously to the autonomy of the teacher.

The discussion has highlighted how the political and cultural framework may contribute to a reductive role of the teacher, and explored the strategies the teacher education system and the teacher may develop to promote teacher autonomy. The system can support teacher development by valuing teachers' experience, turning it into learning, and encouraging an on-going evaluation of pedagogical practices. The teacher may attempt to make a change, test assumptions through experiments, and collaborate with other educators.

Conclusion

Critical enquiry into pedagogy holds the key to the empowerment of teachers and their society. Reconceptualizing teacher development and redefining the role of the teacher in education may bring about this understanding in countries like India where teacher autonomy is yet to be recognized as essential for a qualitative improvement of English language education. Teachers have to be thinkers, not robots; the focus of training programmes must shift from transferring imported methods and materials to encouraging critical thinking and independent research. Given the strong cultural image of the teacher as a giver of fixed knowledge in India and elsewhere, it may take years for the teacher and society to develop a critical outlook and address the problems related to the reductive role of the teacher. Hence, it is time nonnative-speaker teachers began their journey towards realizing their full potential. And, it is high time they constructed relevant and purposeful knowledge based on their own critical enquiry. Given their commitment and a supportive system, nonnative English teachers can reconceptualize and redefine English language education from a socio-cultural point of view through self-directed enquiry.

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