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Every Teacher a Changemaker: Reflections on Teacher Agency and Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we explore teacher agency through the notion of teacher as changemaker by drawing upon our experiences in both school and university contexts. The purpose of this article is twofold. First, we present a personal account of our combined professional experiences of over half a century with how agency is exercised and achieved in our classroom and beyond. This consists of a series of reflections from the classes we have taught and individual students we have mentored, to our response to research and curriculum development. In these reflections, wherever relevant, we highlight what informs our decision-making and motivates our action from merely 'getting our job done' to a more humanistic engagement with teaching, mentoring and other professional activities. Second, we evaluate our earlier discussion against the backdrop of the notion of teacher as changemaker. We conclude by highlighting that teachers as changemakers are individuals concerned with personal transformation and growth, that they are committed to empowering others' lives, and that they enable others to be changemakers.

KEYWORDS: Teacher as Changemaker; teacher agency; transformation; empowering others; ecojustice; affirmation

Introduction

This article was initially inspired by a few Facebook posts the first author received in the period of 6-8 May 2020 during the first (and rather depressing) Movement Control Order period in Malaysia. These posts were from some students who the author had taught at a secondary school about 15 years ago. One of the posts is reproduced as follows, with consent given by the former student:

Figure 1: A Facebook post

The post reads: did EVERYONE have an English teacher that changed their life? (rather cheekily prefaced by 'If you didn't, I feel bad for you'). We believe that readers of this Journal would readily agree that receiving news from a former student often gives rise to pleasant feelings; the thought of being remembered is always a joy. What is much more professionally satisfying is when we receive a message of gratitude which suggests we have, apparently, 'changed their life'.

It is this notion of teacher as changemaker that we wish to explore in this article for the 50th anniversary issue of *The English Teacher* on teacher agency. This we do mainly through our reflections on over half a century of combined professional experiences to highlight how agency is exercised and achieved in the classroom and beyond, while making reference to some key works in the field. The reflections take the form of narratives from both the authors. As McAdams (2008, pp. 242-243) shares:

> Stories we construct to make sense of our lives are fundamentally about our struggle to reconcile who we imagine we were, are, and might be in our heads and bodies with who we were, are, and might be in the social contexts of family, community, the workplace, ethnicity, religion, gender, social class, and culture at large.

The stories shared here are in the social context of our workplace, that is, at school and the university. This includes the classes we have taught and individual students we have mentored, to our involvement in research and curriculum development.

This article is organized as follows. First, we briefly review the literature on teacher agency. Then we present a series of reflections, highlighting wherever relevant what informs our decision-making and motivates our action from merely 'getting our job done' to a more humanistic engagement with teaching, mentoring and other professional activities. Finally, we evaluate our earlier narratives to discuss the nature and value of the conception of teacher as changemaker.

Literature Review

The Notion of Agency and Changemaker

Agency has become a buzz word in education in recent years. To be an agent or to be agentive is, in the words of Bandura (2001, p. 1), to "intentionally make things happen by one's actions". In the field of general education, scholars have talked about teachers as agents of change or agents of curricular and pedagogical reform (e.g., Heikkinen et al., 1992, Fullan, 1993; Leander & Osborne, 2008; Priestley et al., 2012). In language education, agency has caught the attention of teacher educators and applied linguists such as Mercer (2011) and Larsen-Freeman (2019) who focus on learner agency.

In the context of *teacher* agency, Vähäsantanen (2013, p. 14) suggests that "[a]lthough the theoretical discussion surrounding agency has been extensive…, there has not been much empirical research on agency within the field of education, and particularly not on professional agency". To address this concern, she investigated the individual professional agency of 16 Finnish teachers in the context of changing work practices. In her study, professional agency was examined via three complementary manifestations, that is: (i) influencing and negotiating the conditions of one's work; (ii) taking a position towards educational reform and engaging in the reform; and (iii) transforming and sustaining one's professional identity. Based on the findings, Vähäsantanen proposes that "interactional couplings between different actors and levels in the organizations" would be the best management style to nurture meaningful work places that support an individual's well-being, commitment, sustainability and social transformation.

Teacher agency has further been discussed by Priestley et al. (2012) and Biesta et al. (2015), who remind us about the importance of an ecological understanding of this concept. Agency, for these scholars, is not something that teachers can have either as a property, capacity or competence, but

it is something that teachers do in relation to context and time. Further informed by the scholarship of Emirbayer and Mische (1998), Biesta et al. (2015, p. 627) point out that:

> … the achievement of agency is always informed by past experience, including personal and professional biographies; that it is orientated towards the future, both with regard to more short-term and more long-term perspectives; and that it is enacted in the here-and-now, where such enactment is influenced by what we refer to as cultural, material and structural resources.

In this article, we use the term 'changemaker' to denote what teachers can do and achieve, and discuss why this notion matters. It is important to note that empirical research into the notion of teacher as changemaker is still very limited. One preliminary study into this area is by Rivers et al. (2015a), who sought the feedback from 30 university staff members on how university teachers can be conceptualized as changemakers (see also Rivers et al., 2015b). The findings from this survey point to five (sometimes overlapping) conceptions which, we believe, are generalizable to other educational contexts with some adjustments:

Conception 1: Changemaker as institutional strategy, in which visionary leaders are developed and strategic organisational thinkers are nurtured;
Conception 2: Changemaker as critical thinking, perspective shifting and problem solving, in which teachers would first develop all these skills themselves before they could support the growth of students to evaluate evidence within a given context (critical thinking), to look at situations from multiple angles (perspective shifting), and to find solutions to problems (problem solving);
Conception 3: Changemaker as enhancing employability, in which helping and supporting students to align themselves with industry for the purposes of gaining employment is crucial;
Conception 4: Changemaker as social betterment, in which making a positive change to a social situation is important; and
Conception 5: Changemaker as personal transformation, in which changing one's personal trajectory, taking control of one's life and developing as an individual are emphasized.

Relating this to our earlier discussion, we see that being empowered with professional agency (Vähäsantanen, 2013) would create space for teachers to become visionary leaders and strategic organizational thinkers (Conception 1). This would be made possible by teachers upskilling themselves (Conception 2) and progressively undergoing personal transformation (Conception 5) in order to bring about social betterment (Conception 4). All these conceptions are largely supported by another exploratory study in the context of primary school education. The study was conducted by Van der Heijden et. al. (2015) who investigated what they refer to as characteristics of teachers as change agents. They interviewed a group of 20 individuals comprising teachers, principals and external experts, and identified the following personal traits of change agents: (i) life-long learning (an eagerness for gathering information and systematically reflecting on their teaching practice); (ii) mastery (possess skill and knowledge with effective teaching strategies,

believe in their students' abilities and are adept at motivating students to be inspired learners; (iii) entrepreneurship (making decisions and taking risks responsibly and motivating colleagues in the process of change); and (iv) collaboration (being collegial).

The next section will first present a personal account of our professional experiences in relation to teaching, mentoring and other professional activities before we revisit the notion of teacher as changemaker. We acknowledge the fact that our notion of changemaker is by no means comparable to that envisioned in the masterpiece of Drayton (2006), who first initiated and popularized the concept of changemaker in social entrepreneurship. We hope, however, that the discussions and reflections in this article will encourage brainstorming and inspire sharing of work, division of labour and other forms of collaboration, so that our skills and energy can be channeled into creating something more meaningful and positive together.

Reflections

Vanie (1987-2021)

I started my teaching career as a tutor in 1987. I had always aspired to be a teacher; I had taught tuition to primary and lower secondary students in my neighbourhood since I was 16. Seeing my students improve in their studies was inspiring for me as a young girl. I was always patient with slow learners and they stuck with me because I would not give up easily on them. I therefore completed a Diploma in Education (with a major in TESL and minor in Physical Education) in 1986 soon after graduating with a Bachelor in English Literature in 1985. As the two-year offer to tutor came with a requirement to do a Master in English Literature, I took up the offer without a second thought. I was very passionate about English Literature and knew that completing my Master degree would open up many avenues for advancement in my teaching profession. I took the steps to equip myself for a more productive teaching career from the start and continued these initiatives throughout my teaching years, as do most educators, by attending training workshops and other career development activities which were relevant to my teaching context. As noted earlier, Bandura (2001, p. 1) states that "to be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one's actions". In other words, an agent of change has to be an avid life-long learner, as pointed out by Van der Heijden et al. (2015) in their study on the personal characteristics of change agents.

From my tutor years (1987-1989) till 2004, I was solely involved in teaching various English proficiency courses to different faculties at the university and literary stylistics to students of the English department at my own faculty. 2005, however, brought a big change to the path I was going to take in the subsequent years of my teaching life. It was the year the expansion of my horizon from TESL and English Literature to Translation Studies began. It was really by sheer coincidence that sometime in 1997, I was asked to translate two short stories from Malay to English by a colleague for an anthology of short stories. I was almost instantly lovestruck by the art of

translating as I set to work on the stories. There were so many linguistic and cultural aspects to consider but the challenge was positively tempting that my appetite for translating grew to a point where I wanted to gather knowledge about the translation activity and be formally trained to teach translation. Another huge factor that drove me to want to be an expert in translation was the lack of staff at the faculty who had the expertise to teach translation courses. So, in 2004, I decided that if I am pursuing a PhD, it would be in Translation Studies. This was a big leap for me; I only have three languages under my belt, English, Malay and Tamil. I am proficient in written and spoken English and Malay but I can only speak fluently in informal Tamil while my reading and writing in my mother tongue is most elementary. My desire to learn more about translation however, overtook any concern for how little I had in terms of my language range. I took a risk and launched into a field I knew little about. I realize today that changemakers need to take risks because 16 years down the road, I have no regrets but only a growing love for how translation opens up new worlds of knowledge, builds bridges across cultures and helps facilitate all forms of global transactions.

The entrepreneurial attribute of a changemaker relates to the risk that must be taken responsibly (Van der Heijden et. al., 2015). From the start, I took responsible steps to establish myself well in an unfamiliar field. I took every opportunity to audit postgraduate classes in Translation Studies while at Monash University, Australia; I participated in translation seminars, workshops and conferences and networked with others working in translation. I did not pass any opportunity to find out more because I was eager to come home from Monash University to share all that I had learnt. When I returned to the faculty in 2009, I was only too happy to be asked to teach in the undergraduate Minor in Translation Programme offered by the Department of Applied Linguistics and Malaysian Languages. This is the twelfth year of my involvement with the programme and five batches of students have graduated from my classes and there are so many good stories to tell of the positive changes that took place in the students' lives and mine. One positive change was their scope for employability was broadened because they had not just improved in their linguistic knowledge and confidence in using three languages (Malay, English and Chinese/Tamil) but had the opportunity to take on translation projects and tasks as freelance work apart from their other full-time jobs. In their final year, I sent the students out to make contact with professional translators whom they had to interview to find out as much as they could about the language service industry and to make links with potential employers. The students gained a lot from this exercise and were always thankful that they were exposed to the translation market and were made aware of the expectations of working in the translation industry. This relates to Conception 3 (Rivers et. al., 2015) where teachers as changemakers help create greater opportunities for students to align themselves with the relevant industries.

The decision I had made in the direction of Translation Studies has today led to relatively more serious attention paid to this niche area which was once marginalized at the faculty. As I come close to my retirement, I have had the honour of motivating other younger colleagues to take on a PhD in Translation Studies so that the expertise in this field is made more robust at the faculty; the present team of translation lecturers is markedly small while the demand for postgraduate studies in translation is plenty. Presently, with the help of the translation team, 2 MOUs have been signed and another is underway for collaborations with a university with a vibrant translation culture, with

PPM (*Persatuan Penterjemah Malaysia*/Malaysian Translators Association) and with an industry to enhance teaching, learning and research in Translation Studies as well as employability. The journey has been slow and long one and the work to promote Translation Studies faced some very rough patches especially in the earlier years when other fields were given more priority and the lobby for Translation Studies was not adequately supported. The push factor has been supportive deans in more recent days and the collective agency of a close-knitted translation team that has worked hard not to lose heart but to persevere by building solidarity with translation scholars outside the faculty particularly by making links with PPM to host/co-host yearly translation seminars and conferences and network with established international and local scholars in the field. Today, talks are in the pipeline to offer a Master programme in Translation Studies. We have come a long way since 2005. For me, it is a deep desire come true to see Translation Studies given its rightful place. This is pertinent change that will benefit many students and staff of the language faculty in the years to come.

I have talked at length about how risk when taken responsibly can bring about lasting change in the long run and especially when it is coupled with support from top management (Vähäsantanen, 2013) perseverance, good teamwork and a desire driven by diligence to see better days. And, now, I will recount two specific stories out of countless stories that warm my heart because of the positive change I saw in some my students.

The first story goes back to the early 1990s when I was teaching a class of Arts Faculty students who could hardly utter a sentence in English. These students sometimes repeated a level up to three times before they could move on to the next level. They had to complete 3 levels of English proficiency to graduate. Armed with a few years of teaching experience by then, I would patiently motivate the students and laboriously run through the teaching points with them as they did their practice. As a young teacher, I remember being told not to teach English via another language. But, seeing how strained my students felt, I had to make my own decision as to what teaching method would solve the challenge my students were facing. This is what Rivers et.al. (2015) refer to as Conception 2 where the teacher brings about change by enacting a shift in perspective to solve a problem. On reflection, if I had not adopted a bilingual method of teaching, I would have been perpetually met with a wall of silent diffidence from the students who saw English as a completely 'alien' language and one they could never master. The decision to use the students' mother tongue to teach, in addition to English, put the students at ease over time. What at first seemed like defiant silence broke and the students began to slowly respond and participate in classroom learning.

When the last few students had finally cleared all the proficiency levels, it was a day of triumphant joy for them and most certainly, for me. As we said our farewells and took a class photo, I vividly remember the words of one of the female students, who came up quietly to me and said: "If I ever become a teacher, I want to be just like you." For me, that is the highest praise a teacher can get and it reminds me that one of our vital tasks as changemakers is to inspire our students with good qualities we have modelled to them. The best change we want to see in our students is that they become good human beings. The student was referring to my patience, kindness and perseverance with them; I had never once said anything discouraging despite seeing the same faces in my classes repeatedly over many semesters. I had become their friend and on my early morning walks around

the campus, I would see the grinning faces and waving hands of some of these students trying to catch my attention as they passed me by on their motorbikes. These are, I believe, stories that so many teachers would be able to likewise share about how their students have appreciated them for the countless moments of kindness, consideration and understanding shown. I believe that when we build a healthy camaraderie with our students through an unflinching and compassionate commitment to their learning process, we instil a trust in the education system and humanity and this is kernel of all forms of positive change.

My second and final story here involves an international student I had the opportunity to teach English Literature to in 2010. This international student whom I shall refer to as Shaun (not his real name) was an overconfident young man, who expected a lot from others but gave the bare minimum in terms of paying attention in class or completing group assignments. He was the talk of the department for missing classes or assessments and clearly seemed doomed to fail. It was easy to become irritated with his attitude but I made a conscious effort to never show any annoyance; my better judgement told me that if I rebuked him harshly, I would have completely switched off any vestige of interest left in him for my course or learning in general. I would always remind myself of the larger picture (e.g., what would come of him in the years ahead, what were the sacrifices his parents might have made to get him across the seas to provide him a good education etc.). These important questions gave me the strength to be patient with him; I wanted him to know that he was as important to me as any other student in the class so I expressed words of encouragement each time he turned up for class, even if late, and for the slightest effort he made in answering a question, however poor the answer was.

Shaun failed the literature paper twice and on the third try, he finally scraped through with the minimum C pass grade. He never stopped coming to my classes; I believe that the conscious efforts that I had made in not singling him out in class with a harsh or sarcastic remark gave him the confidence that I respected him just like I did the rest of his more conscientious classmates. I believe that "teaching is ultimately a class act of human compassion" (Vandeyar, 2017, p. 373) and human compassion is a promising currency for positive change (see also Chau & Kerry, 2008).

When Shaun knew that he had cleared his Literature examination, he came by my room with a huge box of chocolates and thanked me. It took me by complete surprise because he was not the kind to express gratitude openly but his gesture that day confirmed that I had brought a change in him. It took much patience to keep up my spirits with Shaun but, the effort to endure this difficult student paid off when he finally graduated. Today he works in a global research enterprise, an achievement that puts a smile on my face.

In the course of my more than 30 years of teaching, there have been many more instances where I have had the humble mission of championing the cause of students who were weak and struggling. As I believed in them and showed my constant support, they pushed through and eventually completed whatever they had set out to do under my supervision. Possessing mastery (Van der Heijden et. al., 2015) does not stop at having the latest knowledge and know-how in the disciplines we teach but also developing the endurance to run the race till we see personal transformation for ourselves and our students set in motion.

Meng Huat (1998-2021)

I started teaching in 1998 by giving private tuition classes to 5-15 students during weekends in a small village in Johor. It was a place where one could listen to the birds in the morning and the crickets at night. That was where I lived too. I had a short stint of six months teaching at a nearby primary school in 2001 after graduating with a degree in TESL. The decision to become a teacher took place on the final day of my SPM (the Malaysian Certificate of Education, equivalent to the *British* GCSE) examination, and my graduation in TESL therefore meant a dream come true.

My initial training and education at university taught me to use English (or to be more precise, 'proper English') as the sole language when teaching English. My secondary school experience of learning and studying English in the classroom further reinforced that belief that speaking English to teach English is the most effective (and desirable) way of promoting English language learning. With this background and experience, when I was offered the opportunity to teach as a replacement teacher at the primary school in the village (where most of the pupils were using and speaking Mandarin (Chinese) as their mother tongue in the classroom and at school), I requested that I only speak English to the pupils in the class. This was, surprisingly, granted by the understanding headmaster of the school. I used the word 'surprising' as the year was 2002, a time when Chinese-speaking primary schools were often inclined to use their mother tongue to teach all subjects, including English.

I was asked to teach English to the exam class, the Primary 6 pupils (about 12 years of age), who were to sit for the UPSR (Primary School Achievement Test) by the end of the year. In addition, I taught English to all the classes of Primary 3 and 4. In all my lessons with these primary pupils, from 9-12 years of age (most of whom spoke limited English and probably found this new, English-speaking teacher amusing), I only spoke English. This was no easy teaching, to say the least, with a great deal of patience required. Creative ways of delivering the classroom lessons were called for, too. The English-only teaching practice attracted mixed responses from the school, with one extreme case from a senior teacher of the school who commented: The kids don't even understand English. How could they possibly learn anything from him?!

I persevered, however, because that was how I was 'trained', which in turn became my belief at that time. When the results of the UPSR were announced in December that year, I was congratulated on having 20% of the Primary 6 pupils scoring an A in the English subject, an apparent record in the academic performance of the village school since its establishment a few decades ago. Opinions changed thereafter at the school about what 'worked' in English language teaching. I also believe that the faith the school headmaster had in me deserves equal credit for the results achieved.

I continued offering private tuition classes in 2002-2004, and had a short stint teaching at Universiti Sains Malaysia and working as a research officer on an ELT project at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. In 2005, I took up a full-time teaching job at MRSM (or MARA Junior Science College), where I was responsible for teaching secondary school students who were predominantly speaking Malay as their mother tongue. It was a fully residential school. Although these were 'selected'

students who were doing particularly well in science and mathematics subjects, many were in general still very weak as far as English language proficiency was concerned. Interestingly though (and perhaps unsurprisingly too), they were expected to score an A in the English subject, not just a pass.

Again, I only spoke English to the students. In 2006, I was entrusted to be the coordinator of the English language subject for all the Form 3 students. These are usually referred to as the 'exam classes', who were to sit for a public examination known as PMR or Lower Secondary Assessment by the end of the year. The pressure of teaching them was of course extremely high. There were five classes in total at this school, and I was teaching three of them, with the remaining two taught by my colleague. Needless to say, the preparation for the examination was my main focus, in addition to my teaching of other classes and coaching other students for inter-school competitions. Three months before the public examination, there were night classes for the Form 3 students in this residential school. As a teacher and the coordinator for this group of students, each time the students completed a mock test or examination and had their individual results, I would near literally experience a heart attack, with different degrees of severity. How could I possibly help them all not merely pass, but score an A for their English? Any teacher teaching in a similar context and having a similar expectation thrust on them would understand this feeling.

On reflection, the whole year was a real race, with a series of ongoing teaching and extra-curricular activities taking place one after another. But sometimes the dynamics of a race must be examined within a broader perspective. In the case of the Form 3 students, I loved the way how each of the students became increasingly motivated to study over time. They gave their best so that they could do better in the next mock test. Indeed it was a strong fight they put up, representing an admirable collective agency. When the PMR results were announced at the end of the year, this junior college ranked the second-best junior college in the English language subject performance among all the MARA junior science colleges in the country. Except for two students who scored a B for their English, the remaining 88 students in the three classes I taught all scored an A. (Full disclosure: The Facebook post was from a student in one of these classes, and she is now working as a geologist.) The following year, I was awarded a state-level Excellent Service Award.

Was everything smooth sailing in my professional journey? Not really. In 2006, for example, I was given the unnerving responsibility of coaching students for inter-school choral speaking competitions. I knew next to nothing about choral speaking and was least cut out for a creative activity of this sort. However, I had no choice but to tread this unfamiliar ground. I learned later that coaching a choral speaking team was about guiding 33-35 students to speak and perform with minimal movement, using various voice combinations and contrasts to bring out the meaning or tonal beauty of a text or script. No mentor or colleague at the school had experience sharing how to coach a choral speaking team. The school had never won a prize in this competition. It was then a trial-and-error experience. The students were enthusiastic though in taking part, thinking that the teacher was the expert and would guide them well(!). It was a long process of training and practice, to get all students to speak in a harmonious unison, with several practice sessions lasting till midnight. In the first year, the results of the inter-school competition on choral speaking were quite encouraging: we emerged second in the southern zone, one of the four zones of the nation. In the second year, we won the second prize at the national level. In the third year, we brought home the

title, champion of the national choral speaking competition, having outshined all the MARA junior science colleges. All of these, to an outsider, might have looked like easy achievements but they certainly were not. Deep down I knew I must first learn about what choral speaking involves. It was a long three-year process of self-learning and development. It was also a prized collaboration with the participating students who showed commitment in terms of time and energy. I must further add that the school management was also in full support of all our practice sessions. The African proverb '*It takes* a *village to raise a child*' probably captures the essence of this collective effort.

During my four-five years of teaching and service at this school, I also had the privilege of initiating and working on several projects. One was organizing and chairing a national conference for school teachers and university lecturers with the theme on quality education. Another was in the national MRSM committee for the PMR and SPM trial examination papers. A third one, which deserves more discussion space here, was in a three-year national committee to develop a new curriculum and relevant materials for the English language subject. This was to be adopted and implemented in stages in all the MARA junior science colleges in the country. The primary goal of this new curriculum, as envisioned by the Director of the Secondary Education Division of MARA, was to enable all the students in junior science colleges to speak English confidently. It took the committee some time to brainstorm ways on how the goal might be achieved. Eventually, through several intense meetings, the committee, guided by the Director, decided that there would be no homework for the first-year students joining the junior science college. This idea was a breakthrough at that time, as most (if not all) schools, particularly the junior colleges, were very much oriented towards giving homework, thinking that 'practice makes perfect'. Further, the new curriculum required that there be no written work during or after the English lessons and that all the lessons be based on in-house developed reading materials; there were only oral or speaking tasks in and outside the classroom. All this signified a real innovative curriculum reform. It was mentioned that this curriculum, with its eventual success, inspired the development of a similar programme by the Ministry of Education some years later.

As the only member of the curriculum committee who was into vocabulary and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research, I was entrusted with the responsibility that there was vocabulary control in the reading materials, all written and developed by the members of the committee. That is, in the first semester of their secondary school life, students would be exposed to reading materials that were within the first 500-1,000 high frequency words in English. The second semester, they would gradually be exposed to materials containing the second 1,000 high frequency words. These words are considered to be the most useful vocabulary for beginning learners of English (Nation, 2003) and would constitute or approximate what Krashen (1985) calls 'comprehensible input' that is necessary for successful language learning. What personally excited me most about this national curriculum innovation project was the opportunity to apply what I had learnt about SLA and vocabulary research in real-life meaningful practice of materials design and curriculum development. Professionally, I found it most encouraging that research efforts by committed applied linguists such as Paul Nation could be translated into practice to serve students more effectively and efficiently. This is to a large extent reflective of the ecological perspective on agency as postulated by Priestley et al. (2012) and Biesta et al. (2015).

The final story I would like to share is from my last 10 years of experience at Universiti Malaya. Working at a research university, as we all know, means one needs to do research, and write and publish. I was initially not so much into writing and publishing when I joined this university. This was a stark contrast to my time as a school teacher till 2009: I published an edited volume with Bloomsbury, then known as Continuum, with contributors such as Howard Gardner (well known for his theory of multiple intelligences), after organizing the conference on education mentioned earlier as a secondary school teacher. Before that, I also published some journal articles and book chapters. What motivated me to start actively writing and publishing again was largely due to an encounter with a PhD student, Li.

Li comes from China, from a most humble financial background. He worked really hard to save enough money before he left his country and came to Malaysia in February 2017 to begin his PhD research journey. During one of the first supervision sessions, Li shared an important piece of information with me about the current trend in higher education in China: if before graduation, a student has to his or her name a good number of articles published in high impact journals (particularly those indexed in Web of Science), the student could secure a promising academic position upon graduation.

Li's sharing brought back memories about the original intention that took hold of me on that final day of my SPM examination: to become a teacher that can serve and support others. I therefore appreciated Li's sharing of the information, and saw academic writing and publishing as an opportunity for people like Li to break free from a humble background. This motivated me to work hard alongside Li to write and publish together, first based on his PhD research and later on other research projects we initiated together. We often worked till late nights, and there was one occasion where we worked at my office from the evening till the next morning in order to complete a revised manuscript based on the reviewers' comments and suggestions. The hard work paid off eventually. Within three years of his candidature, Li had a few articles published in good journals in Web of Science and received a few job offers before his graduation. What was equally satisfying, for both Li and myself, was that Li graduated with a Distinction for his PhD. He is presently a full-time faculty member of a respectable university in language studies in his home country, also ready to transform and serve as a changemaker (see below). Needless to say, I have been most pleased about all this, and at the same time I have become increasingly involved in research, writing, mentoring and publishing.

Discussion

Every Teacher a Changemaker

In the beginning of this article, we briefly reviewed some key aspects of agency and the notion of teacher as changemaker. Do we see ourselves as having been changemakers? Yes, to some extent, however small the ripples of change we may have brought about to ourselves, our colleagues, our students and the institutions we have served. There are no doubt a few episodes narrated in this article that we truly feel proud about. Vanie, for example, openly encouraged and patiently guided the young man, who was initially "the talk of the department for missing classes or assessments"

and seemed to be "doomed to fail". This appreciative student who came bearing a gift of chocolates for his teacher eventually graduated and is now having a well-paid job. Meng Huat, on the other hand, had the opportunity to work with Li, publish articles together and see him start off his career in a good academic position. Independently, both of us have received various gestures of appreciation from our students, including such expressions as "If I ever become a teacher, I want to be just like you" and the Facebook post shown earlier in the introduction of this article. While we have these little trophies to encourage us, we would also like to acknowledge the fact that bringing about change is a continuum, a never-ending process; so, despite the years of experience behind us, we are both still learning and travelling along this road that has much more to teach us about the positive changes we can bring about to ourselves and to those who will cross our paths within and without the teaching fraternity.

The notion of teacher as changemaker tends to suggest that teachers always 'know' that what they are doing is right or best for their students. This is certainly not true, at least not with Meng Huat. For example, Meng Huat started off believing that the best way to teach English is to exclusively use English, and no other languages, in the classroom. He indeed practised what he believed in, and achieved some modest success at both the primary and secondary schools he taught, as narrated above. But on reflection, that past practice was reinforcing a monolingual native-speaker ideology, which values only monolingualism but ignores multilingual realities of students' lives. Since this realization around 2011, he has adjusted his practices and started promoting a multilingual or Global Englishes approach, which is more inclusive than the English-only practice. In the postgraduate SLA course he is currently teaching at Universiti Malaya, for example, he would often share with his students how equally guilty he was with some other teachers in championing the English-only policy in his class during his younger days as a primary or secondary school teacher. In fact, he has now devised the syllabus for the postgraduate course in such a way that there are at least five weeks of lessons devoted to challenging the dominant monolingual native-speaker ideology, with two specific weeks considering the benefits of translanguaging or languaculturing (Tham, Chau & Thang, 2020) for the classroom where multilingualism or the Global Englishes perspective is acknowledged, embraced and celebrated. This he does too in his guest lectures as a visiting professor at another university. He now encourages all his students, some of whom are already teachers or lecturers and others who are planning to join the profession, to explore language learning and language use from a multilingual or Global Englishes perspective for social justice purposes. In doing so, he hopes that students are empowered to become changemakers themselves by addressing issues of native-speakerism, linguicism and the monolingual bias in their research, classroom and society at large. In other words, teachers as changemakers might still 'fail' or make mistakes, but they are always ready and willing to change and empower themselves and others. They always aspire to a growth mindset (Dweck, 2017).

In this sense, we would argue that every teacher can become a changemaker, and we believe many already are.

It goes without saying that the path to change is not always a smooth one. The three hurdles to change that we can share here are related to time, collegial support and workload. Some changes as with Vanie's efforts to establishing the importance of Translation Studies in the faculty came to fruition only after a number of years and when the newer management gave their increased support.

We must also note that multiple simultaneous activities (like curriculum review, marking, audits, conferences, collaborative events etc.) during certain seasons of the teaching term or semester tend to increase our workload and cause a stretch on our energy. In times like these, it is not always possible to enact the changes we wish to in all quarters of our influence. The teaching fraternity is a busy beehive and we both have been completely overwhelmed at times that our best intentions for our students were not always fulfilled. There were students we would have liked to talk to on a one-to-one basis to help them through their particular learning problems or social/emotional challenges, but time did not permit these sessions and we could only motivate the class collectively from time to time.

Having said that, we believe that we are but two members of this chain of many other dedicated fellow teachers in our faculty who are also moulding the lives of our students. Lukacs (2015, p. 40) refers to this as "collaborative expertise" where teachers are able to work together for good practice in their schools. It is collective agency that supplements, complements and strengthens the changes we hope to bring in our own and our students' perspectives towards learning, personal growth and interhuman relationship.

One point which we have not really discussed in this article, but which is necessary to highlight, is the need to ask ourselves questions on the larger purpose of education when we are considering the notion of teacher as changemaker. Nieto (2010) has this to share with us: (1) to provide all students of all backgrounds the opportunity to learn through an equitable and high quality education; and (2) to help students to become critical and productive members of our society. To us, these two primary goals of education should inform all the activities we have in relation to teaching, mentoring, writing, research and other professional involvements. At the moment, we are actively engaging and collaborating with our students and colleagues to critically reflect on and collectively challenge the limitations of a monolingual native-speaker or standard language ideology that is currently dominant in our classroom and society. In tandem with this, we also champion more inclusive and just practices that affirm and celebrate multilingualism and Global Englishes (see, e.g., Man & Chau, 2019; Man et al., 2021; Smidt et al, 2021), and extend these practices in the wider world to nurture and cultivate a greater respect for our fellow animals (Chau & Jacobs, 2021). With this larger purpose of education in mind, the changemaking process, we believe, becomes particularly meaningful.

Considering all the discussions and reflections above on what makes a changemaker, we suggest that firstly changemakers are individuals concerned with personal transformation (for the benefit of personal and professional growth) and secondly they have the interests of others at heart (i.e., they are committed to empowering others' lives). Change always starts from within oneself (see also Jacobs & Chau, 2020). In our context, the teacher in the classroom, who might be considered 'the captain' of the class, is someone who takes initiatives to grow as a person and an expert in order to model positive values, beliefs and practices which, in turn, may inspire those in their circle of influence to bring collective changes. That essentially leads us to considering a third quality of teachers as changemakers: to enable others to become changemakers (cf. Drayton, 2006). The inclusive approach we have mentioned above, on collectively and collaboratively challenging a monolingual native-speaker ideology, promoting the ethical spirit of multilingualism and Global Englishes, and fostering more respect for our fellow animals for ecojustice purposes, is one

example of how we would like to see more people getting involved in transforming social and environmental practices in potentially profound ways.

Conclusion

In this article, we suggest that teachers as changemakers consider both the immediate situation and the larger context or bigger picture of education and life. Personal qualities such as patience, perseverance and affirmation with students of diverse backgrounds and practices are to be nurtured. Teachers who are changemakers believe in all students even when some of them do not believe in themselves. Teachers as changemakers constantly reflect upon what they are doing for themselves and their students' self-development and assess all their decisions and actions in relation to their environment with a purpose for growth for all concerned. It is also important to point out that changemaking is work in progress and is often complimented and activated by collaborative efforts of different individuals with different capabilities and strengths, involving students, colleagues and other people around us.

An article of this length admittedly prevents a more thorough discussion of the topic. We have not, for example, acknowledged how we have striven to emulate in our own lives the kindness, fairness, support and passion for teaching that our favourite school teachers, university lecturers and colleagues have modelled to us. Neither have we considered the indelible positive impact they leave on our lives, an impact we aspire to pass down to others, all of which signifies an ecological perspective of agency. We hope, however, that we have made clear that teachers as changemakers are individuals concerned with personal transformation and growth, that they are committed to empowering others' lives, and that they enable others to be changemakers. In a conscious effort to serve ourselves, to empower people around us, and to enable others to do the same, every teacher is a changemaker.

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