

Situated Learning: Rethinking a Ubiquitous Theory

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Situated Learning has become a ubiquitous concept in a variety of fields across academia. Commonly understood in terms of the pedagogical utility of contextualizing content knowledge, the generally accepted meaning of situated learning within applied linguistics has remained static. However, critical, post-structural, and postmodern approaches to education and applied linguistics have conflated conceptions of situated learning to include broader interpretations of the concept of situating that include the contextualization of content knowledge into multiple contexts, forms of praxis and theorizing, and a form of inquiry in itself. The purpose of this paper is to unpack how the basic theory of situated learning is related to a wide array of theories that use the basic concept of situating knowledge as a central tenet. In doing so, the author suggests that a more inclusive theory of situated learning is warranted.

Key words: situated learning, teacher education, critical pedagogy, cognition, discourse.

INTRODUCTION

There are few theoretical and pedagogical concepts in education that are as well known, and poorly understood, as situated learning. The most common understanding of situated learning, hereafter referred to as SL, is a form of pedagogy that allows students to make connections between content knowledge and their own lives, or more simply to apply knowledge to their own contexts. In doing so, SL theorizes that students not only learn more effectively but also

engage in learning at higher levels. As such, this basic understanding of SL is a theory that addresses both cognitive and affective aspects of learning. It is not surprising that in the wake of Lave and Wenger's (1991) seminal work *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, and the ever growing body of work done on the subject, SL has become a key concept in many teacher education programs. While Lave and Wenger's theory may be the most common understanding of SL, the central concept of 'situating' knowledge is related to many of the theoretical foundations of TESOL such as Hymes' (1967) sociolinguistic approaches to language learning, Vygotsky's (1978) theories of social cognition, Krashen's (1982) theory of Acquisition/Learning, Kramsch's (1993) conception of learning language as culture, as well as current conceptions of second language learning as the appropriation of secondary discourses (Canagarajah, 1999; Norton, 2000). In addition, the move towards World Englishes may be seen as an application of SL to EFL contexts as the key concept in World Englishes is the idea that ELL should be viewed in terms of localized contexts (Kachru, 1992).

Not only has SL been appropriated by many diverse fields of study, such as business (Jones & McCann, 2006), medicine (Jordan, 1989), and applied linguistics (Canagarajah, 1999; Norton, 2000), its meaning has become more expansive in terms of its use and name. Currently, one does not have to utter the complete name to invoke the theory, but may simply use the word "situate" to evoke the simple concept of putting acquired knowledge into context, connecting knowledge to personal experiences, and/or applying theory to practice (praxis). As such, SL has not only become a metaphor for the process of theorizing but may also be viewed as a mode of inquiry. This move to a more inclusive understanding of SL may be seen as a general appropriation of the term by fields of study informed by critical and post-structural/postmodern epistemologies as scholars in the fields of critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, 2004), critical literacy (Lankshear, 1997; Gee, 1998), Cultural studies (Giroux, 2005), and applied linguistics (Canagarajah, 1999; Norton, 2000) commonly use this more complex conception of SL. For the purposes of clarity, these approaches to SL will hereafter be referred to as critical views of

SL. However, this paper contends that as useful, far reaching, and well known as these varying conceptions of SL may be, they remain underutilized and poorly understood in both theory and practice as the work of sorting out these varying conceptions into a single, inclusive theory has not been done.

The underutilization of SL is easily seen in both the professional literature and the practice English education and EFL. With the increasing dominance of test-based curricula (Giroux, 1997; Apple, 2004; Kincheloe, 2004) in public school education, it is an easy exercise to find literature that documents the instrumentalization of public school curriculum and pedagogy and its fundamental lack of any reasonable conception of SL. Similarly, progressive educators in applied linguistics (Canagarajah, 1999, Norton, 2000) also decry the increasing dominance of test-based curricula that de-skills teachers into transmitters of static forms of knowledge and requires students to be passive receivers of knowledge. Such educators agree that these forms of transmission or banking education not only preclude any meaningful connection between content knowledge and student lives and aspirations, but also deny students a comprehensive understanding of what they are learning as they are not given the opportunity to discover how the knowledge works in the diverse social contexts that affect their lives (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1997). This disconnect between theory and practice resembles that of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Korea and much of Asia in that national curricula openly call for communicative practices, yet such practices are stifled by the need of local educators to produce high test scores (Shin, 2010). Similarly, while SL is commonly taught in teacher education programs, it is under utilized as test-based curricula tend to favor banking forms of pedagogy.

While SL may be most commonly understood as the process of contextualizing content knowledge that is being learned, the core concept of situating knowledge is fundamental to a wide spectrum of theories applicable to applied linguistics and education in general. As such, confining SL to this limited general definition is much the same as Gee's (1989) bifurcating conception of discourse with a small [d] and a large [D]. According to Gee, small [d] conceptions of discourse are primarily limited to the linguistic

analysis of discrete chunks of language, such as is commonly done in more traditional forms of discourse analysis, whereas large [D] conceptions are far more complex and useful as they utilize a discursive, post-structural conception of [D] discourse which allows issues of culture and power into its analytical framework. Similarly, a more inclusive large [S] theory of SL may serve not only to clarify and strengthen the diverse connections among a vast array of theories in education and applied linguistics, but also to serve as a foundation for theoretical and pedagogical innovation and application. The purpose of this paper is to explore current theories and pedagogical applications of SL within and extant to applied linguistics in order to elucidate a more cohesive and inclusive theory of SL. By unpacking the connections between basic conceptions of SL and the many theories related to SL, ELT professionals may gain a depth of theoretical understanding that enables the creation of curricula, pedagogies, and forms of evaluation that may not only fit within the institutional mandates of current high stakes testing regimes but also increase student engagement in learning by making connections between content knowledge and student's individual and social experiences.

SITUATED LEARNING

The genesis of the theoretical concept of SL is generally attributed to Lave and Wenger's (1991) seminal work *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. While Lave and Wenger may be the most commonly referenced work associated with SL, much other foundational work on SL has been done including Brown, Collins, and Duguid's (1989) and Rogoff's (1990) work on cognitive apprenticeship and Galperin's (1992) notion of object-oriented activity. According to Barton and Hamilton (1999), theories of situated cognition run from Vygotsky's (1978) foundational work on learning as a socio-cultural and interactional process through Lave & Wenger's (1991) and Scribner's (1985) work on SL. SL may also be said to have antecedents in sociology (Durkheim, 1956; Hymes, 1967), education (Dewey, 1971), and

psychology (Vygotsky, 1978; Leontiev, 1978). While this paradigm shift in learning theory from cognitivism (Piaget, 1971; Biggs, 1979) to situated cognition (Vygotsky, 1978; Leontiev, 1978) may be a matter of debate in various fields of study including health (Jordan, 1989), business (Jones & McCann, 2006), and information technology (Wolfson & Willinsky, 1998), it closely parallels current debates in applied linguistics regarding the conflicting natures of positivistic and post-structural/post-modern epistemologies (Atkinson, 2002; Kubota, 2002). Regardless of the acceptance, or lack thereof, of theories of situated cognition, it may be stated that SL is a widely known, and taught, theory of learning.

Current understandings and applications of SL are too numerous and too widely dispersed in terms of disciplines to fruitfully document within the scope of this paper. While much of the work that has been done on SL involves the concept of apprenticeship (master and student relationships) within communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Cox, 2005), analysis of applications of SL in the fields of education (Barton, et.al., 1999; Gee, 2004; Kincheloe, 2004), information technology (Wolfson & Willinsky, 1998), and psychology (Vygotsky, 1978; Leontiev, 1978) reveal two shared understandings: 1) learning is optimized when knowledge is presented in authentic socio-cultural contexts, and 2) learning is a social activity that requires interaction and collaboration. Barton and Hamilton (1999) summarize these common conceptions of SL by stating that in using SL “learning takes place in particular social contexts and part of this learning is the internalization of social processes” (p. 14). Therefore, it is clear that the importance of socio-cultural context is the key and most generally accepted concept of SL. As such, it appears that the simple, elegant, and utilitarian nature of SL accounts for its well-known status as a theory of learning and as a pedagogical practice.

Given its long and varied history it is not surprising that many connections to SL may be made between literatures in various fields and times. In the same way, it is also not surprising that the concept has been conflated into shorter forms such as “situate,” “to situate,” or “situated” and has become an academic code word for the more inclusive term of SL in the discourse of scholars and teacher educators. A good example of this phenomenon is the book *Situated*

Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context (Barton, et.al., 1999), where scant reference is made to the genealogy of situated learning, yet the truncated “code” form of the concept is invoked throughout the book. In similar ways, the code term situate has not only become widespread in professional literature but also come to permeate the discourse of many teacher educators in ways that are easily recognizable, such as advising graduate students that they need to situate their ideas within their own practices. As such, it has also become a code for the concept of praxis in academic work as it reflects the situating of theory into practice. Similarly, critical educators in education and applied linguistics have appropriated SL through its obvious connections to the concept of social positioning, which facilitates the connection between learning and issues of race, class, gender, culture, and ideology (Giroux, 1997; Canagarajah, 1999). Therefore, it is also not surprising that the connections between SL and a variety of academic literatures are not generally recognized. Simply put, while the concept of SL may be generally attributed to Lave and Wenger (1991), the breadth of its dissemination in conjunction with its elegance and utility as a theory and pedagogical concept has given SL a larger and much more inclusive understanding.

SITUATED LEARNING IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS

It may be argued that the concept of SL came from the field of Education and therefore is extant to the generally accepted theoretical corpus of applied linguistics. While this assertion may be true in terms of SL being a named theory that has specific understandings, it is not accurate if we consider the actual workings and implications of the theory itself. If the most basic articulation of SL is the contextualization of content knowledge presented in a classroom, then one does not have to look far to find corollary theories in applied linguistics such as schema theory (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983), Krashen’s (1982) acquisition/learning hypothesis, and conceptions of CLT from Hymes (1967) to Savignon (2002). In addition, scholars engaging in critical approaches to applied linguistics apply a variety of approaches taken from diverse fields such as sociology, with Lin’s (1999) use of Bourdieu’s

(1991) theory of cultural capital; feminist theory, with Norton's (2000) connection between representation and student lives; cultural studies with Sung's (2007), situating of the global within the local; and critical pedagogy with Canagarajah's (1999) connection of SL with the concept of appropriation. As such, it is clear that SL serves as a foundational concept in much applied linguistic theory and pedagogy.

1. Situated Learning and Schema Theory

Schema theory is perhaps the easiest and most obvious theory within applied linguistics that is akin to SL. Coming from cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics, schema theory addresses the cognitive aspects of L1 and L2 reading by focusing on pre-reading exercises designed to activate the background knowledge of the student (Schraw & Bruning, 1996). Such activities include asking broad questions about the topic of the text, watching video representations related to the topic, and free-writing exercises about the topic of the text (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). By activating the background knowledge of the student, schema theory theorizes that reading cognition is enhanced as connections to other texts the student has been exposed to in the past actually make use of existing neural pathways, thereby facilitating the cognition of the new reading content. It does not take much imagination to recognize that the activation of background knowledge is an act of making connections between a text (content knowledge) and the experiences of an individual student. Clearly, the background knowledge from other texts may be read as the experiences of the student, even if the term 'text' is confined to a narrow definition of printed material as opposed to more expansive understandings of textuality (Hall, 1997; Hartman, 1992). As such, schema theory is clearly linked to SL in that the activation of background knowledge is a process of situating new content knowledge within the past experiences of the student.

Interestingly, if the conception of textuality within schema theory is expanded into more inclusive understandings of textuality, where texts include

other forms of representation and social experiences (Hall, 1997; Hartman, 1992), schema theory becomes more of a metaphor for SL in that the activation of background knowledge then represents a linkage to all of the texts of an individual's life. In doing so, students not only increase their cognitive learning abilities, but also engage new course content at higher levels as the connections made to lived experiences naturally increases their interest. Hence, it then becomes a facet of the contextualization of content knowledge and not just a pre-reading exercise designed to facilitate reading cognition. In this way, it may also be said to mirror current conceptions of intertextuality (Hartman, 1992; Bloom & Egan-Robertson, 1993). In addition, as schema theory is a well-established theory within L1 and L1 reading and is primarily concerned with cognition, or learning theory, its similarities with SL support the validity and utility of SL as a cognitive/learning theory.

2. Situated Learning and Learning/Acquisition Hypothesis

Krashen's (1982) Learning/Acquisition Hypothesis is widely known and generally accepted within applied linguistics. The utility of Krashen's concept may be seen in how it has been appropriated by the field of English education, or more specifically, language and literacy education (Gee, 1989). Gee's rendering of Krashen's (1982) Learning/Acquisition Hypothesis intimates a connection to SL without directly stating this connection. The acquisition side of this hypothesis contains the rationale for SLA as well as the inference to SL:

Acquisition is a process of acquiring something subconsciously by exposure to models and a process of trial and error, without a process of formal teaching. It happens in natural settings which are meaningful and functional in the sense that the acquirer knows that he needs to acquire the thing he is exposed to in order to function and the inquirer in fact wants to function. This is how most people learn to control their first language (p. 259).

Here, the connection to SL lies in the context of acquisition, that is, in “natural settings that are meaningful and functional” (p. 259). While this aspect of the hypothesis may be generally understood to be focused on linguistic acquisition and to mean what has come to be known as contexts of “authentic” language usage in CLT (Savignon, 2002), it also infers a strong connection to the social life and experiences of the individual. If the optimal process of acquisition is to be understood as taking place within a context of events that are meaningful and functional to the individual, it may equally be understood that acquisition occurs in activities or real-life contexts that are situated within the individual’s social life and hence are an articulation of SL.

While Gee’s (1989) appropriation of Krashen’s (1982) Learning/Acquisition Hypothesis may infer a connection to SL, and thereby a connection to SLA and CLT, a more subtle and powerful connection may be found within the implications of the hypothesis itself. Simply stated, the Learning/Acquisition Hypothesis infers that people learn better through a process of normal social interactions. However, if this aspect of the hypothesis is accepted, then it may also be stated that what people are most interested in, care about, and actively engage in are things that are learned through acquisition, or social interactions. If this is true, the implications for pedagogical and curricular innovation are profound. It may then be stated that most of what our students are comes from outside the classroom. This means that classroom activities that are not connected to students’ lives will not be as effective as situated activities as acquisition will not be actively in play. It also means that students will not as actively engage in learning activities if they are not in some measure connected to their lives. Thus, teachers need to bring the outside in. In other words, if teachers want to actively engage students in classroom activities, they need to construct classroom contexts that allow students to situate the content that they are learning. Understood in this way, the Learning/Acquisition Hypothesis becomes a metaphor for SL.

3. Situated Learning and Communicative Language Teaching

The sociolinguistics of Hymes (1967) is generally thought of as the

progenitor of CLT, particularly as Hymes first coined the term communicative competence (Savignon, 1990). While the concept of SL, as we understand it today, did not exist at the time of Hymes' (1967) seminal work, *Why Linguistics Needs the Sociologist*, it is clear that the concept of SL is key to his formulation of the workings of sociolinguistics. Hymes' statement that a sociolinguistic approach "is interested in the relation of linguistic variables to group membership for its own sake" (p. 637) clearly takes the position that linguistics may not be completely understood unless it is situated within a specific social context. Hymes goes on to explain how specific linguistic structures, such as honorifics, may only be understood when connected to specific social contexts (p. 637), as in respect relationships in Japanese and Korean cultures. In addition, Hymes' makes an absolute link between the appropriateness of linguistic utterances and their social contexts. In other words, while the appropriateness of linguistic utterances may be partially determined by linguistic structures, such as grammar and syntax, they are equally determined by the specific social context of utterance. Hymes' directly illustrates the absolute connection between language and context with the three working assumptions of his theory of sociolinguistics.

- a) A social relationship entails the selection and/or the devising of communicative means considered appropriate and perhaps specific to it;
- b) The communicative means will thus be organized in ways not perhaps disclosed apart from the social relationship;
- c) The communicative means available in the relationship condition its nature and outcome (p. 638).

While Hymes expends much effort to show how sociological tools are relevant to the description of linguistic structures, he nonetheless emphasizes that it is the social context which shapes and defines the linguistic utterance. As such, he is clearly stating that linguistic utterances may not be fruitfully described or understood unless they are situated within a specific social context.

While there are many diverse forms of CLT in practice around the world, it is clear that CLT is a fundamental aspect of ELT education in many Asian nations. According to Yoon (2004), CLT theory and pedagogy were a major impetus for the development of the 7th national curriculum for English education in Korea. While there is a great diversity to the pedagogical approaches being applied to ELT, it may be said that the majority of these practices fall under the broad umbrella of CLT (Nunan, 1989). As such, CLT includes approaches that focus on communicative competence (Savignon, 2002), notional-functional syllabi (Brown, 2007), and task-based learning (Long & Crookes, 1992; Nunan, 1989), to name a few. However, all of these approaches are similar in the sense that they share a common focus on the authenticity of language being presented and the social contexts of language use. This common focus on the social and cultural contexts of language use not only emphasizes the central importance of context within theories of CLT, it also shows how CLT and SL are closely related.

A cursory examination of the theory of communicative competence clearly illustrates the connection between CLT and SL. According to Savignon (1990) and Canale and Swain (1980), communicative competence may be delineated into four separate components; grammatical competence, discourse competence, socio-cultural competence, and strategic competence. According to Savignon (1990), socio-cultural competence focuses on the appropriateness of utterances within a specific socio-cultural context. As such, not only are the social conventions of language use necessary to the negotiation of meaning, but the development of cultural understanding and awareness become a central issue to meaning and the appropriateness of the utterance. In other words, it is the socio-cultural context as much as the linguistic competence that determines meaning. Therefore, it may be stated that situating language learning activities within a specific socio-cultural context is a central tenet of CLT. More to the point is how such contexts are envisioned. Savignon (2002) and Van Ek and Trim (1984) assert that student needs, in terms of their social and institutional affiliations, actual or intended language use, age, and educational obligations (testing) must be considered for an effective application of CLT. This means

that the teacher must not only modify her classroom practice in ways that adequately connect to real student contexts and experiences, but that she also needs to create classroom activities that allow students to situate their language learning in ways that are meaningful to their lives. Moreover, scholars favoring task-based approaches (Nunan, 1989; Long & Crookes, 1992) assert that classroom tasks need to be constructed in ways that replicate, as closely as possible, the real life tasks that students are likely to encounter during their current or future lives. Thus, the primary goal of task based approaches is the construction of context driven activities that are situated within the lives of students. In addition, as the learning task is designed to occur within a simulation of a real life context, task-based learning may be said to be a form of SL.

Another obvious way in which CLT intersects with SL is its adherence to the importance of authenticity in terms of native like speech and context (Nunan, 1989; Savignon, 2002). While the emphasis of authenticity may tend to focus on the linguistic aspects of the communicative events enacted, such as pronunciation, grammar, and lexicon, CLT clearly includes the necessity of the socio-cultural aspects of language acquisition and use in terms of the importance of cultural understanding and awareness (Savignon, 2002). Thus, a key theoretical and pedagogical aspect of CLT not only revolves around the context of language acquisition, but also around the socio-cultural aspects of language use as related to specific socio-cultural contexts. In effect, this means that the primary focus of CLT is the creation of classroom activities wherein the situated learning of language and culture may occur. Given the various connections between CLT and SL discussed in this section, it is not unreasonable to state that SL is a key concept in CLT.

The discussion of the connections between existing theories and pedagogies in applied linguistics and SL illustrates its wide applicability as a theoretical concept and its utility as a pedagogical practice. As the term *situated learning* is generally not used within the literature discussed, it also illustrates that although the concept of SL may be widely used, it is often not recognized for what it is. One reason for this lack of recognition within the literature of applied

linguistics has to do with the fact that the most common conception of SL, Lave and Wenger's (1991) version, is not generally recognized as being part of the field of applied linguistics. A second reason is that the field of applied linguistics has a long history of being resistant to ideas coming from other field in the social sciences (Pennycook, 2001). Regardless of the recognition of SL in mainstream theories in applied linguistics, the past 15 years has seen a growth of critical approaches that include SL in their theoretical and pedagogical foundations (Kramsch, 1993; Canagarajah, 1999; Norton, 2000). The majority of this literature either names SL as a key concept or uses code phrases, such as appropriation (Canagarajah, 1999; Norton, 2000), that assume that the reader understands their relevance and connection to SL. As the impetus for bringing conceptions of SL into applied linguistics comes from other fields in the social sciences these theories will be discussed in the next section.

CRITICAL APPLICATIONS OF SITUATED LEARNING

Applications of SL within applied linguistics primarily come from scholars whose practice is informed by theories coming from a variety of fields such as education, sociology, cultural studies, and psychology. Some scholars, such as Pennycook (2001) and Canagarajah (1999), make open references to the connections between their approach to applied linguistics and critical pedagogy, while others, such as Kubota (2001) and Norton (2000), connect their practices to post-structural and/or post-modern epistemologies. However, even a cursory inspection of the references used by these scholars reveals that they all, to a greater or lesser extent, draw on a seeming hodge-podge of theoretical concepts from critical pedagogy, critical literacy, post-structural and/or post-modern epistemologies, cultural studies, feminist theory, and situated cognition. While all of these diverse schools of thought may be said to be different fields of study, it is clear that they share specific foundational concepts such as the subjectivity of knowledge, the political nature of teaching and learning, and

learning as a socio-cultural process that are commonly referred to as “critical.” In order to understand how and why some applied linguists are using critical approaches and how SL is a fundamental concept to these approaches, it is necessary to discuss how SL informs critical pedagogy.

Paulo Freire (2000), commonly considered to be the grandfather of critical pedagogy, did not use the term *situated learning* in his works. Nonetheless, it is clear that current conceptions of SL were a central tenet of his work. Freire’s conception of literacy, being the ability to read the ‘word and the world’, illustrates the centrality of SL to his theories of education. In reading the word and the world, Freire invites students to question knowledge by investigating how content knowledge works in diverse contexts and for differing social groups, namely, the oppressors and the oppressed. In doing so, he foreshadows the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) by insisting that knowledge may not be fruitfully understood until it has been examined (situated) within multiple social contexts, including those of the individual learner. This word/world conception of literacy also gives insight into how these pedagogies may be used in conjunction with test-based curricula as counterpoints, or extensions of the required content knowledge. Pedagogical applications that facilitate the connections between content knowledge (word) and social knowledge (world) may not only reinforce the knowledge required for testing, but do so in ways that lead to greater student understanding and ability to use the knowledge. Moreover, Freire’s (2000) concept of dialogism (the need for discussion in learning) is also similar to Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of communities of practice in that the social interaction between learners and the teacher not only fulfills the demands of situated cognition, but expands the concept of situated knowledge through multiple points of view. Thus, through the process of conscientization (situated knowledge, dialogism, and action), learners gain a critical consciousness that enables them to more thoroughly understand the social positioning of themselves and others in ways that increase their social agency (Freire, 2000; Kincheloe, 2004). As such, the situating of knowledge into multiple contexts becomes a form of inquiry. Therefore, it may be stated that SL was a critical component of early theories of critical pedagogy.

Recent applications of SL in critical pedagogy have moved beyond Freire (2000) to a discursive (post-structural) conception of SL that includes situating knowledge, experience, and education into political/ideological domains in ways that reveal and explicate the dynamics of social positioning for the purposes of social justice and social agency (Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, 2004). In other words, content knowledge needs to be examined in terms of how the knowledge works for different groups of people. In doing so, it becomes clear that specific bodies of knowledge benefit some groups more than others, which then opens the way for less privileged groups to better their lives. A good example of this is the concept of “borderlands” or “border pedagogy” (Giroux, 2005), which situates learning within the construction of identities of bicultural/bilingual students whose lives straddle dual cultures and languages. Similarly, scholars in critical literacy view literacy as being situated within specific discourses that need to be examined in terms of individual and collective social agency (Barton, et. al., 1999; Gee, 2004; Lankshear, 1997). Turning to a more pedagogical approach, Beach & Myers (2001) apply SL to inquiry-based learning where students situate content knowledge (English literature) within the various social worlds (discourses) they inhabit. Beach and Myers also mirror Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of communities of practice in that the investigations of specific social worlds take place within a classroom inquiry community that situates, discusses, and reconstructs the content knowledge they are working with. In each of these approaches, it is understood that students need to situate the content knowledge they are being exposed to in the classroom within personal, institutional, socio-cultural, and political/ideological contexts.

There are a growing number of scholars in applied linguistics engaged in critical applications of SL including Kramsch (1993), Canagarajah (1999), Pennycook, (2001), and Norton (2000), to name a few. As with the scholars within critical pedagogy, these scholars apply a discursive form of SL in their works. Regardless of how these scholars frame their approaches to applied linguistics, they all invoke SL as the necessity of situating learning within personal, institutional, socio-cultural, and political/ideological contexts. It is

interesting to note that this appropriation of critical theoretical concepts from fields outside of applied linguistics has come to be known as appropriation within applied linguistics. In effect, the term *appropriation* has come to represent how a discursive view of language may be acquired (Canagarajah, 1999; Norton, 2000; Pennycook, 2001). In other words, as language may not be separated from issues of culture and power, students need to situate their language learning within the multiple contexts of their own lives in order to understand the socio-cultural dynamics of learning a specific language and thereby make informed decisions regarding their language learning. In a larger sense, this understanding of appropriation may also be applied to language policy and planning as these issues also affect nations (Ricento, 2005; Tollefson, 2001). As such, it may be argued that pedagogical applications of this form of SL would lead to teachers having a better understanding of their students and community as well. In each case, it may be said that SL is a foundational concept within critical approaches to applied linguistics.

Canagarajah's (1999) six point schema of critical pedagogy in applied linguistics may be the best illustration of the connections between SL and the concept of appropriation. Canagarajah's schema states that CP defines learning as personal, situated, cultural, and political, and that all knowledge is ideological and negotiated. Apart from the obvious statement that learning is situated, the conceptions of knowledge as being ideological and negotiated are clearly related to SL in that negotiation infers the contestation of differing forms of knowledge between different groups or individuals and that these different forms of knowledge are inherently ideological, which means that they do not, and cannot serve the same functions for different groups of people. The same argument is relevant for his assertion that learning is political in that the value accrued through the acquisition of knowledge is dependent on the social positioning of the individual. This last aspect mirrors Bourdieu's (1991) concept of the profits of distinction where the acquisition of social, cultural, or linguistic capital accrues profits (benefits) to the individual in relation to her relationship to field, or social positioning.

Finally, Canagarajah's (1999) schema clearly delineates the two-part

dichotomy of contexts within SL: the individual and the social. Regarding learning as a personal enterprise, Canagarajah states:

Just as the personal background of the learner influences how something is learned, what is learned shapes the person: our consciousness, identity. And relationships are implicated in the educational experience. We should therefore consciously engage the influences, consequences, and implications of the personal in the learning process (p. 15).

This passage clearly indicates that knowledge must be understood and negotiated within the personal contexts of individual student lives. As such, it is implicit that the individual meanings constructed in the process of learning are diverse as individual experiences cannot be the same. Of learning being a situated activity he writes:

CP realizes that schooling is deeply influenced by the larger social and political contexts in which it is situated. The rules, curricula, pedagogies, and interactions in schooling shape, and are shaped by, socio-political realities. Schooling is so implicated in the needs, interests, and imperatives of the dominant institutions and social groups that it is often difficult to see the full effect of their influence in the classroom (p. 15).

Here, Canagarajah (1999) clearly states that situated learning involves the contextualization of knowledge within the multiple discursive frames of culture, institutional and otherwise, as well as within politics and ideology. This dichotomy between the personal and the social within SL is crucial as it not only explicates how individual students internalize and understand the knowledge they are learning, but how this knowledge may be understood and applied to other contexts that enhance their individual and group social agencies.

A REVISED MODEL OF SITUATED LEARNING

It has been shown that SL may be viewed as a much larger and more comprehensive theory than Lave & Wenger's (1991) original conception as it parallels many other theories within, and extant, to applied linguistics such as schema theory, theories of CLT, Krashen's (1982) acquisition & leaning hypothesis, intertextuality, and theories of critical pedagogy, its relation to the term *situate* as a general term expressing the need to contextualize knowledge within experience, and as a form of praxis in scholarship. In addition, it has been shown that SL may be seen as a form of inquiry as the application of knowledge to multiple contexts requires investigation into how knowledge and meaning differ according to context. It is clear that the conflation of these varying conceptions of situatedness have become much like Mills' (2004) rendering of the term discourse as being a ubiquitous term in academics while at the same time being a term that has no fixed meaning: a term that everyone understands, but that no one can completely define. Therefore, it seems reasonable to appropriate Gee's (1989) notion of the bifurcation of the term discourse into large [D] and small [d] varieties that signify a discursive (post-structural/post-modern) understanding of Discourse and the traditional linguistic view of *discourse* (positivism). This move serves to bifurcate conceptions of SL into a small [sl] version following Lave & Wenger's (1991) theory and a large [SL] version following the more inclusive and discursive understanding outlined in this paper.

The reasoning behind this move is both simple and theoretically and pedagogically utilitarian. A large [SL] conception allows situated learning to be viewed as a more fluid, discursive concept that may be creatively applied to both theoretical and pedagogical contexts according to its utility of application, while small [sl] version relates to the more common understanding of SL related to the original Lave and Wenger theory that is more akin to a specific methodology. Arguably, this large [SL] conception of SL has been in practice for many years by critical educators (Giroux, 2005; Kincheloe, 2004) as a shared conceptual understanding, although it has not been articulated in a clear,

concise manner. As with [D]iscourse, this discursive understanding of SL assumes that the audience understands the various inherent connections when the term *situated* is invoked. In terms of teacher education, imbuing teachers with a large [SL] conception of situated learning would allow them not only to consider the pedagogical utility of communities of practice and situated cognition but also to consider the socio-cultural and political contexts of the literacy practices they are enacting while also enabling their students to frame content knowledge in these various contexts.

One obvious objection to a large [SL] conception of situated learning may be that while it may be suitable for advanced EFL learners, it is too complex for the needs of beginning and intermediate students. However, it may be shown that this conception of [SL] may be easily applied to all levels of language education in a variety of ways. For example, in the widespread use of the notional-functional design of many current EFL readers, holidays are a common chapter. An EFL teacher equipped with this understanding of [SL] could construct a pedagogy that inquires into the American holiday of Halloween by first understanding the text in the traditional manner, then by asking students if there is a similar holiday in their own culture. As all cultures have myths and rituals dealing with death and spirits, through situated inquiry students may discover commonalities in their own and other cultures such as Chusok in Korea, the Obon Festival in Japan, and the El Dia de los Muertos in Hispanic cultures (Klass & Goss, 1999). In doing so, students are not only engaging in situated cognition, but are also situating the knowledge contained in the text within their own experience and multiple other contexts. At higher proficiency levels students might also situate the issues in the text within socio-cultural and political frames by investigating the economic and commercial contexts surrounding these holidays. In this way, it may be shown that a large [SL] conception of situated learning may be used at all proficiency levels, although deeper inquiry may only be fruitfully generated at higher levels.

Another issue that renders a large [SL] conception of situated learning desirable is the failure to clearly articulate that *to situate* may not only mean to put content knowledge into one's own context, but also to situate the

knowledge in multiple contexts. It has been shown that although this understanding of situating knowledge is fundamental to critical applications of [SL] (Canagarajah, 1999; Giroux, 1997; Freire, 2000), it is not generally articulated in a way that specifically states that knowledge may be best understood only when it is applied to multiple contexts. Nor is it specifically stated that the multi-contextual situating of knowledge becomes an obvious mode of inquiry in itself. This form of situated inquiry may be most fruitfully illustrated by envisioning inquiry as expanding concentric circles where the first level of inquiry/situatedness is the center of the circle, with each additional context being another ring of the concentric circles (see Figure 1). Using the previous example of Halloween like holidays, the center circle (first level of situatedness) could be Chusok for Korean Students, with the Obon and the El Dia de los Muertos festivals (Klass & Goss, 1999) being expanding rings. Or, one could take a thematic approach, as in Beach and Myer's (2001) conception of "Social Worlds," and pull themes out of the course text to form inquiry groups. For example, gender relationships, or dating, are common themes in literature and are of obvious interest to middle and high school students. In addition to teaching the text in a traditional manner, the teacher could simultaneously create inquiry groups according to themes elicited from the class and have the dating inquiry group begin to situate the knowledge in expanding contexts. Starting with their own contexts, students could then begin to investigate the social practices of other groups by interviewing or researching their peers, siblings, parents, grandparents, and moving on to social classes and other cultures (See figure 1). This visual representation of a large [SL] conception of situated learning is pedagogically useful in teacher education as it can graphically explain the nature of situated inquiry while serving as an entry to the more complex discursive understandings situated learning has come to represent.

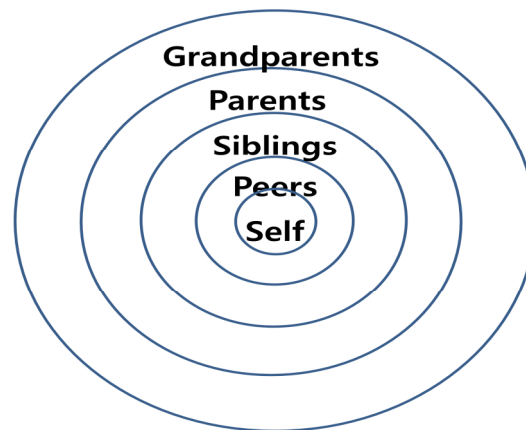


FIGURE 1
Expanding Circles of Situated Learning

It is arguable that the delineation of SL theory into large and small varieties may be primarily of interest to scholars and graduate students as the arguments made here have focused on tracing theoretical relationships among diverse theories within and extant to applied linguistics. However, the expanded pedagogical applications that a large [SL] theory enables, speaks to its utility to all levels of EFL teaching. A summary of the foremost of these applications are as follows:

1. Increased cognition through its relationship to schema theory.
2. Increased engagement as course content is linked to student's individual and social lives.
3. Supports the needs of standardized testing as situating content is derived from original curriculum.
4. Expands student's understanding of content knowledge and creativity as curricular content is situated in multiple contexts.
5. Better conforms to local social and educational needs.
6. Teachers gain a better understanding of their students and community.
7. Expands possible pedagogical applications.

As the common [sl] view of situated learning is pervasive, the formulation of a large [SL] theory is necessary in order to broaden the pedagogical boundaries available to EFL teachers. In a similar way, it may broaden the horizons of scholarly research and practice as the connections of the array of theories and pedagogies related to situated learning are more clearly theorized. Finally, a large [SL] conception is useful to curriculum and policy planners at national and local levels as it may fit within the dictates of standardized testing and support the general movement towards CLT in national curricula (Yoon, 2004), while it expands the socio-cultural understandings of students.

CONCLUSION

This paper has reviewed a wide array of literature on SL from a diversity of fields of study in ways that show how the generally accepted definition of SL, coming from Lave and Wenger's (1991) seminal work, has not only been disseminated so widely that it has become a ubiquitous term, but also been conflated into a more inclusive, discursive conception of SL that has gained wide use in critical fields of study and academia in general. It has also been shown that while SL's common definition has become widespread in education and second language education, it is not widely used because of the dominance of test-based curricula, and has, therefore, become a misunderstood term that is connected to a well known theory that few actually put into practice. However, it has also been shown that the core conception of SL, the process of situating knowledge, has a multiplicity of theoretical connections within, and extant to applied linguistics that render SL to be of great utility, if these connections are understood. Moreover, a more inclusive, discursive conception of SL creates theoretical connections to the common definition as well as to the process of theorizing, inquiry, and an expanded notion of the contextualization of knowledge that includes the wider social contexts of culture and ideology. As this more inclusive conception of SL is a shared, but not clearly articulated, theory among a diversity of critical scholars in education and applied

linguistics, it is clear that a redefinition of a theory of SL is warranted. Moreover, as these bifurcated versions of SL parallel Firth and Wagner's (1997) delineation of competing epistemologies (positivistic and social), Gee's (1998) notions of big [D] and small [d] conceptions of discourse, and Canagarajah's (1999) designation of mainstream and critical pedagogies, it is both reasonable and utilitarian to bifurcate SL into large [SL] and small [sl] varieties. As such, the bifurcation of SL into large and small varieties serves to delineate the ways in which SL is being used as well as clarifying SL into a more inclusive understanding that allows teachers and teacher educators a wider field of theoretical and pedagogical applications of the well-known theory.

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