New Materialism in Tertiary Education: 
A Posthumanistic International Education Course

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Abstract
This article outlines a new materialist pedagogy designed for an International Education course. In the first part of the article, a description of the course is presented together with its new materialist aims. In the second part of the article, the author provides examples of students’ summative projects. In these examples, student work materially situates and shows the development of their carefully constructed learning paths in becoming different teachers. The course addresses translangauging, examines language in educational settings, and discusses language ecology and citizenship side by side with intercultural awareness as innovative pedagogies. The article suggests that new directions for pedagogical practice might be advanced by new materialism.

Keywords: International Education Course, New Materialism, Tertiary Education

Introduction
This article outlines a new materialist pedagogy designed for an International Education course. The International Education course is part of the Masters, Postgraduate programme in Education at the University of Dundee, in Scotland. It has been delivered since 2013 to local and international students. Undertaken for one semester, the course aims to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and critical perspectives they need to understand issues related to international education. Topics include national policies around language, culture, and citizenship. The course aims to develop an awareness of the value of international education and broaden the students’ understanding of the central issues presented. In the second part of the article, the author includes examples of students’ professional projects. In these examples, student work materially situates and shows the development of their carefully constructed learning paths in becoming different teachers. Studying innovative pedagogies, such as translangauging, examining the future of languages in educational settings, and discussing language ecology and citizenship side by side with intercultural awareness assist in students’ personal and professional development.

The International Education Course
The International Education course is designed to facilitate learning about a globalized world. The course deals entirely with negotiated concepts, such as citizenship and identity, and with dialectic relationship-building that includes students as partners in, and co-creators of, learning. It offers students an opportunity to discuss international education-related topics, such as the role of language, intercultural awareness, and how concepts of nationality and internationality are cultivated through education. The course draws on new materialism to
foreground ways in which the material nature of humans, the languages they speak, the discourses they engage in, and the nations they live in or have lived in including the natural environments of those places, contribute to understanding international education.

The course encourages students to critically question their ideas of self in the context of conventional understandings of: the individual, the world, and education that may have been inherited from the past (Braidotti, 2020). Expanding on this, students are also encouraged to question, even challenge, national policies for international education and to consider alternatives, such as, affirmative ethics, for understanding such policies instead.¹

The course also adopts Braidotti’s (2019) conception of posthumanism with its relational approach to knowledge and life. It combines well with the critical aspects of her affirmative ethics mentioned above. The course builds on Braidotti’s (2019) theory of knowledge and life as multiple dynamic assemblages that are ever changing and becoming something else in time and space. The course also takes up Barad’s (2007) related notion of entanglement with its material implications. As Sheridan et al. (2020) put it “entangled ways of knowing and being are themselves material practices with material consequences” (p. 1279). Given this theoretical orientation, the course assumes that student identities are not fixed and that their agency is distributed and shared with teachers, students, humans, and non-humans (Lemieux, 2021). It assumes that knowing, being, becoming, and doing create entanglements in teaching and learning that are dynamic engagements (Barad, 2007; Lemieux, 2021).

The students in this course might be figured as language detectives, who are asked to practice literacies and engage in various forms of languaging within multiple cultural groups (Solnit, 2017). They do this while maintaining ties and loyalties, or acknowledging influences from multiple countries. Babino and Stewart (2020) might say they embody the dialectic nature of language. The students engage in translanguage, the way multilingual people do, by strategically and nimbly drawing from all their languages to make meaning (García & Wei, 2014). They also use all features of their language repertoires while translanguage, both linguistic and non-linguistic ones (García & Wei, 2014). For García and Wei (2014), “language is not a simple system of structures that is independent of human actions with others. The term languaging is needed to refer to the simultaneous process of continuous becomings of ourselves and of our language practices, as we interact and make meaning in the world” (p. 8). This approach to language is a critical one that facilitates power distribution among speakers thus making language-learning inclusive, socially engaged, and international in scope (Confessore et al., 2018). Examples of students’ inclusive and socially engaged language practices as language detectives are seen in the students’ projects presented in the next section.

The International Education course also aims to decolonize the curriculum in terms of its Anglo-normativity and Eurocentrism (Levisen, 2019). According to Levisen (2019), Anglo concepts dominate international discourse on language and cognition, and they need to be challenged and questioned. He suggests that Anglo-normativity and Eurocentrism are often invisible and undiscussed, and that a preference for the English language and Western European

¹ The course follows Braidotti (2019) definition as “the pursuit of affirmative values and relations” (p. 136). Affirmative ethics require “radical relationality” and involve shared knowledge among all the people to create new possibilities (Braidotti, 2019, p. 166). Affirmative ethics allow one to “create adequate understanding of ourselves, each other, and the world” (Strom & Mills, 2021, p. 191).
ways of speaking, knowing, and being is prevalent in many parts of the world (McKinney, 2017). This preference only perpetuates an Anglo interpretation of the world.

Ortega (2019) notes that second language acquisition research is also Anglocentric. It focuses on the acquisition of English and is conducted by researchers in western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic societies. Compounding this, from a decolonialization perspective, is a belief that native speakers of a language (English) are superior language practitioners than non-native speakers of a language (Ortega, 2019). This naïve native speaker bias may contribute to unfounded colonial beliefs in the superiority of English people who are native speakers of the English language. The International Education course moves away from this form of Anglocentric colonialism and notions of native speaker bias. The course conceptualises both language and learners as an assembled phenomenon and it does not seek to identify successful and unsuccessful learners or to recommend evidence-based language teaching practices (Toohey, 2019).

Instead, this course focuses on negotiated concepts. That is to say that it does not recognize that any topic discussed in class has right or wrong answers. In one module of the course, students are asked to consider viewpoints on intercultural awareness, citizenship, language policies, and international education. They investigate viewpoints of other people, then learn to argue their way to their own reasoned conclusions by considering the various assemblages, geopolitical-historical-genealogical elements, that contributed to the assemblage’s formation. To help students arrive at their own reasoned conclusions, they are asked to make cartographies of these assemblages and to map their own space and time positions within them (Braidotti, 2019). The course supports Strom and Mills’ (2021) view that “cartographical thinking, [is] a method of slowing down and clearly articulating the complexity of life” (p. 193). The act of making cartographies encourages students to talk about topics of language, inter-cultural awareness, and citizenship as negotiated and subjective concepts. This approach often leads students to an understanding that “difference” opens up new possibilities (Braidotti, 2019).

For students’ summative assignment, they are required to design a project that is relevant to the course’s themes of international education. In their project, they have to investigate, research, and critically analyze key issues associated with international education. Their projects also have to use knowledge and apply inclusive teaching methods appropriate to international education. As the final piece of their project, students are asked to devise and develop teaching approaches that are inclusive, socially engaged, and international in scope. With this in mind, the project invites students to un-thought potentialities, meaning it invites them to engage in “defamiliarization, [and] distancing themselves from rational, Eurocentric, human-centred ways of knowing and being, and practice thinking in affects and relations and multiplicities” (Strom & Mills, 2021, p. 195).

This summative project is based on new materialist approaches to learning and knowledge. Students learn about concepts and arguments around topics, such as, language, intercultural awareness, and citizenship without excluding their own narratives, cultures, and languages. Students apply their learning to their own projects by experimenting with new ideas and by combining them with their own personal narratives. In completing this project, students’ knowledge becomes embodied as new interpretations intra-act and become entangled with their memories, personal histories, emotions, and interests (Barad, 2007; Ingold, 2013). As Toohey (2019) observes *“our expressions of knowledge, our research products, cannot be seen as faithful
mirrors of the world, but are rather potentially useful assemblages for ongoing learning” (p. 943). The same can be said of these projects as they cannot be seen as faithful mirrors of the world but could be assemblages for ongoing learning by students as well as by their university lecturers.

**Student Projects**

Student work manifests a material ontology of becoming and remaking, as students carefully construct their own paths to knowledge by exploring innovative pedagogies. They remake knowledge/knowing about international education as a being/becoming that is relational, processual, and entangled, with their own histories, identities, and worlds. This type of work is important, according to Barad (2007), because “knowing does not come from standing at a distance and representing [it] but rather from a direct material engagement with the world” (p. 49).

Three examples of student projects follow. All three are international students from Asia who attended the postgraduate programme in Education at the University of Dundee. In keeping with the decolonial aims of the course, the decision was made not to edit or correct student language mistakes in English. Also, the term ‘sic’ was not used to indicate errors coming from students. Correcting errors would have blinded the heterogeneity and authenticity of students’ voices (Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2017). All the excerpts provided in italics are from students’ summative work. Ethical permission to use student work was granted by the Ethics Committee of the University of Dundee and by the students themselves.

**Example 1: “China-Thailand English training camp to promote intercultural awareness”**

This project aimed to provide teachers with knowledge about language by improving their understanding of the uniqueness and the usability of the languages, and to help “teachers and students pay more attention to the accumulation of experience and personal growth”.

*When Chinese people practice communicating with Chinese in English, some words can be understood even if they are not used or pronounced accurately. For example, in class, I found that a student described to a friend in Korean that he used sweet water in soft drinks. Another student understood that sweet water is a popular compound drink in Asia, but sweet water actually means fresh water.*

The student appears to become a language detective and pays attention to specific and salient meanings that words carry (Solnit, 2017). These meanings are always carriers of cultural elements.

*This can help educators to transfer their knowledge of multicultural second language communication from theoretical knowledge to understanding of practical phenomena. In future teaching, examples may be given to help students understand the knowledge related to intercultural awareness. At the same time, we can also think dialectically about the intercultural consciousness in teachers’ language materials, this could allow teachers to have their own beliefs in delivering the relevant concepts allowing the existence of different languages.*

From a new materialist perspective, this student creates a project that brings individuals into communication with each other in a training camp by materializing them and situating them in social networks and environmental ecologies. The distributed practice between people, social networks, and material ecologies in this training camp, treat and define word meanings and
people’s thinking as emergent. The activity of being all together in an English training camp makes participants’ cognition embodied, and objects and space become equally agentive in shaping human thinking and communication. Thinking and communication operate in material ecologies and participants have a role in negotiating their positions in a dialectic manner (Cooren & Bencherki, 2010).

The student also observes that,

we can also think dialectically about the intercultural consciousness in teachers’ language materials, this could allow teachers to have their own beliefs in delivering the relevant concepts allowing the existence of different languages.

Teachers can take note and analyse how students in the two countries deal with cultural similarities and different aspects of language as well as of culture. Since both China and Thailand belong to Asia and are adjacent to each other and have been exchanging since 1975 (China-Thailand relations, 2020), it is believed that there must be a place where the cultures of the two countries are interlinked. As Sage (2017) explains, students can interact more smoothly after a process of verbal, physical and intangible communication. This is undoubtedly convenient for teachers to manage and increase relevant experience. For example, dealing with cultural conflicts among untrained students and guiding them accordingly.

The camp would take place in a specific location that is shaped by culture, identity, history, and politics (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Fairchild (2021) argues that we cannot separate place and space and uses the term “place-spaces” (p. 7). According to Fairchild (2021), “place-spaces are always under construction and are a product of a multiplicity of connections. Place-spaces affect encounters and encounters shape place-spaces” (p. 7). With this in mind, the training camp “must be a place where the cultures of the two countries are interlinked”. This place-space affects the encounter of the participants as “students can interact more smoothly after a process of verbal, physical and intangible communication”. Their encounters also shape the place-space, as “summer camps, activities that move away from formal classes and standardized classroom procedures”.

People’s interactions and experiences in this training camp were defined by the material conditions of the activities, and the starting point for all analysis was the meanings that emerged in and through specific activities (Barad, 2007). The student seems to argue for a change in the way teaching and learning are conceptualized. The student wants to expand boundaries that exist in many education systems around language of instruction, dominant culture etc. Through entanglements of cultures and languages, the student wants to promote the formation and maintenance of healthy, educational relationships for the accumulation of experience and personal growth.

**Example 2:** “Teachers training on multilingualism and multiculturalism”

There are three different methods of responding to multilingualism in school, including raising language awareness, creating an effective language policy, and facilitating functional multilingual, literacy learning. Translanguaging needs to be introduced and explained.
The many faces of multilingualism are present in this work. This is a counterpoint to modernist sociolinguists who advocate for the separation of languages especially for purposes of teaching and learning. The student takes up a more critical post-structural and new materialist perspective of sociolinguistics that calls for the removal of language boundaries thus allowing multilingual students to use their various languages that they feel are appropriate. In this latter reframing, no one language is considered superior to others. Instead, fluid language practices, such as translanguaging, are foregrounded in pedagogical contexts (Mbirimi-Hungwe, 2020).

Racism occurs when people lack intercultural awareness. Basically, intercultural awareness refers to understanding both one’s culture and the culture of other people (Fernando, 2008). The understanding revolves around the differences and similarities between the cultures. The similarities and differences are based upon the beliefs, values, and behaviours depicted by the two varying cultures. Similarities usually are not complicated since people find that others do as themselves. Demystifying the concepts that lie under different cultures may, therefore, salvage people from racial intolerance or other vices originated from cultural differences.

This student reminds us that creating and implementing effectual educational practices cannot be done without a reflexive and critical stance. According to May (2011), “there is an obvious and ongoing tension that needs to be addressed more adequately in multicultural education theory and practice between, on the one hand, recognizing the significance of ethnicity and culture for (some) individuals and group identities, while on the other hand, avoiding essentializing them” (p. 42). The student recognizes how diverse we are, yet at the same time, how we are the same. For this student, the binary of self/other seems to be undone and seems to move towards a stance of “we-are-(all)-in-this-together-but-we-are-not-one-and-the-same” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 54). In this project, students are given the opportunity to reflect on similarities and differences between cultures and to view individuals as bodies-in-relation to other-bodies or as entangled human, non-human, or environmental beings of the world (Barad, 2003).

Through collaborative and reflective approaches to multilingualism and multiculturalism, this student proposes a teachers’ training to engage with legacies and normativities around language and culture that come from a Eurocentric and colonial perspective. The student considers that teachers’ training should incorporate affirmative ethics, so that teachers can demystify concepts that underlie different cultures. Although the student does not name their approach in their work as “affirmative ethics”, the student argues for teacher training opportunities that question conventional understandings of the world and advance education as a collective response to racial intolerance arising from cultural differences.

**Example 3: “Cultivating pupils’ intercultural awareness”**

*I will guide students to experience language and culture by creating a class cultural atmosphere. Using the classroom environment to cultivate students’ intercultural awareness, classrooms in English-speaking countries are noteworthy for holding exhibitions in pursuit of uniqueness. So I will borrow their experience and make a special arrangement of the classroom: there are handmade English cards exhibition areas, physical layout areas (like toy stores, fruit shops, clothes stores) and English manual newspaper exhibition areas. After the arrangement, I will let the students visit one another’s stations. I usually encourage students to create their own classroom*
environment. They can post English cards and English proverbs, and show their collected information about the scenic spots, national culture and customs of English-speaking countries.

Classroom environments are also entangled with student experiences and their linguistic and cultural awareness. They shape students’ physical orientations to teaching and learning within any particular space. Fairchild (2017) notes that there is an “unnoticed dynamic force of things and their capacity for confederate intra-action with human agencies” (p. 665). Classroom environments and their decoration also influence one’s awareness of language and culture. These environments and their objects become embodied and materially embedded in students (and teachers), and their meanings and values emerge through activities. Canagarajah (2021), for example, suggests “that while all objects in the material environment and spatiotemporal context,…these resources become repertoires with specific meanings and values based on how they are materialized in situated communicative activities” (p. 208). For this student, the material environment of an English classroom with English cultural artefacts is an assemblage containing a linguistic and non-linguistic repertoire of specific meanings that can materialize in communicative activities among students who want to experience English language and culture.

In this project, the student engaged a “processes of borrowing, blending, remaking and returning”, or put another way, engaged in “processes of alternative cultural production” in an effort to experience the other culture (Pennycook, 2007, p. 6). According to Pennycook (2007) culture moves across borders, and when it does it “changes and is reused to fashion new identities in diverse contexts” (p. 7). This was the case for this English and Chinese intercultural awareness project set in the classroom. In a sense, this student imagines what English culture is and how it might be perceived by Chinese students. In the work, the student demonstrates a remaking of concepts, knowledge/knowing, and being/becoming that are relational, processual, and entangled, with their own histories, identities, and worlds. The emergence of objects, spaces, times, and feelings in the everyday, ordinary, lived experiences of the pupils of that school class reveal embodied and embedded senses of belonging and empowerment. They felt a belonging to different languages and cultures, and were empowered by the new knowledge they now had about a language and a culture. In this project, one can appreciate how the student expanded the notion of intercultural awareness to an assemblage of lived experiences entangled with cultures and languages.

**Conclusion**

Cary Wolfe (2016) considers that “posthuman theory creates new, imaginative ways of understanding relations between lives” (p. 1). From a new materialist perspective, an academic course, like the International Education course, places the human in relation to entangled materialities, and the emergent relations produced can offer new possibilities for ongoing learning, being, knowing, and doing in higher education (Gravett et al., 2021). It may be time to investigate similar possibilities in other contexts. I would say that the International Education course, which take up posthuman and new materialist perspectives, might serve as a model for other courses.
References


