For What and for Whom Is Our Research? The Ethical as Transformative Lens in Instructed SLA

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In this article, I argue for adopting an ethical lens that interrogates our ends and purposes when generating research on second language learning and teaching, in light of concerns surrounding questions about the uses and users of our work. Such an ethical lens would help us transform our methodological and epistemological debates and would also strengthen the social and educational worth of the research that is generated by diverse second language acquisition (SLA) communities. I offer 3 normative principles for disciplinary discussion: The value of research is to be judged by its social utility; value-free research is impossible; and epistemological diversity is a good thing. For each principle, I present the thrust of the argument and illustrate it by reference to 1 or more selected problems central to SLA research programs. I end with a broad brush characterization of a field of instructed SLA that is epistemologically diverse and ethically involved in justifying both the methodological rigor and the value commitments of our research programs and our studies. My goal is to open a space for disciplinary dialogue that allows us to engage in the articulation of valued research goals and professional and social responsibilities for the field of instructed SLA.

IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, THE FIELD OF SECond language acquisition (SLA) has undergone a period of intense metareflection about research practices, which can be followed through position papers available for public inspection. In these publications, the generation of knowledge about second language (L2) learning and teaching has been discussed largely as a methodological and an epistemological problem, whereas the ethical dimensions of our research activities have been explored to a much lesser extent. The dearth of SLA publications in this area is particularly noticeable when it comes to reflections not only on the moral conduct of research on human subjects, the traditional focus of institutional review boards, but also on moral imperatives, values that guide action, and worthy purposes of research that give meaning to entire research programs as well as to single studies. It is this broad sense of the ethical dimensions of instructed SLA research that I would like to explore in the present article. Joining similar calls in the social sciences and education, I will argue that "to be truly ethical, educational researchers must be prepared to defend what their research is *for*" (Howe & Moses, 1999, p. 56) and that we have a responsibility to design our research programs in light of difficult questions regarding who the beneficiaries of our research are (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000).

I must warn readers that I am writing from the specific vantage point of doing research on L2 learning and teaching in education contexts, or the branch of SLA that has been called *instructed SLA* in textbooks and handbooks. I also work within a cognitive perspective that is rooted in the acquisition metaphor of learning (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; see also Paavola, Lipponen, & Hakkarainen, 2004; Sfard, 1998) and that looks for explanations of L2 learning in the interaction between learner-external and learner-internal influences. Such cognitive-interactionist theories and findings make up the

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bulk of most SLA textbooks to date (e.g., Ellis, 1994; Gass & Selinker, 2001; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). The present article stems from a willingness to engage fully with critiques that point at limitations in this approach to SLA research (e.g., Atkinson, 2002; Block, 2003; Breen, 2001; Crookes, 1997; Firth & Wagner, 1997; Harklau, 2002; Kramsch, 2000; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Rampton, 1999; Sridhar, 1994; van Lier, 2000; Watson-Gegeo, 2004). In this sense, my purpose is to develop a critique from within that opens a dialogue among a number of differing understandings of SLA as a field.

In order to be clear, however, I would not like to see SLA shed the cognitive focus, nor do I view abandoning quantitative-experimental research as a desirable response to these critiques. As such, I am in an awkward position. Some readers may be dissatisfied because I do not go far enough in supporting what they view as a much-needed overhaul of the field. Other readers may be unpleasantly surprised by my attempts to force a discussion of research values into the public realm, when they have always considered questions of value a matter of personal choice that escapes rational scrutiny. What to do? My present reflection seeks to create spaces where it might be possible to sustain dialogue and to search for agreed-upon values that may unite us as a field, rather than to pursue monologistic reiterations of differences that may keep us apart.

What I have to say is enmeshed not only in my affiliation with cognitive-interactionist SLA, the epistemological model within which I frame my own research, but also in the intellectual and material landscape of SLA and applied linguistics in the United States, the geographic location I have chosen for residence and work. Acknowledging that our insights are always both illuminated and limited by our specific contexts, I offer this ethical exploration not as a final statement, but (I hope) as a starting point, a springboard for new dialogue and new ways of exploring instructed SLA, what we value in it, and how we would like to see the field going on about its business in the future.

THE NEED FOR AN ETHICAL LENS

SLA researchers have often been concerned with methodological rigor (e.g., Bachman & Cohen, 1998). Method is an important dimension of research to be examined, and I myself have been energetically preoccupied with this topic in my collaborative work with John Norris to date (Norris & Ortega, 2000, 2003). Knowledge that is not methodologically sound cannot be useful. However, there is a danger in this methodological focus. Namely, the importance of elucidating proper means of knowledge generation may be emphasized to an extreme where ethical questions regarding worthy ends for that knowledge can be taken for granted and left unexplored. This danger has recently been noted by Holliday (2004) and Shohamy (2004), in reaction to attempts at regulating criteria for methodological rigor in applied linguistics research. A similar tension is vividly portrayed in this issue by Allwright, who writes about the constant need to negotiate his way in and out of technicism while doing practitioner research. A crucial ethical question that lurks unexplored behind much methodological reflection in SLA is: How would increased methodological rigor (however defined by particular research models and epistemologies) contribute to the usefulness of research for the communities we study and serve?

Even the prolific literature resulting from the SLA paradigm wars, which has focused on competing schools of thought within SLA and their relative value as knowledge (e.g., Firth & Wagner, 1997; Gregg, Long, Jordan, & Beretta, 1997; Lantolf, 1996; Long, 1993; see also Johnson, 2004), has fallen short of grappling explicitly with notions of moral-political goals of SLA research. It is perhaps fair to say that epistemological conflict and methodological self-examination remain theoretical topics of discussion for some scholars, while business goes on as usual for most L2 teachers and L2 teacher educators, but also for most SLA researchers, who draw on their preexisting epistemological predilections and their inherited methodological models to frame their perspectives on how best to investigate L2 learning and teaching (cf. Lazaraton, 2000).

Two themes of increasing prominence in applied linguistics point to ethical dimensions of SLA research. One theme is the perceived lack of relevance of SLA research for teachers (Clarke, 1994; Crookes, 1997; Ellis, 1997; Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 1996; Markee, 1997; Widdowson, 1990). The other theme is the crisis of the native speaker as a model and norm for L2 learning (Cook, 2002; Seidlhofer, 2001). Both themes rest on two related problematic stances for which SLA as a field has been frequently criticized: monolingual bias and decontextualization (Leung, Harris, & Rampton, 1997; Sridhar, 1994). It is telling that these criticisms have been leveled, more often than not, by applied linguistics scholars from outside SLA. By comparison to methodological and epistemological concerns, then, little published discussion of ethical dimensions can be

found in publications devoted strictly to SLA. This relative silence from SLA is in stark contrast to the many publications in applied linguistics, which have examined ethical challenges for several years now, both with regard to applied linguistics as a megafield (e.g., Corson, 1997) and across many of its branches, most notably, language testing (e.g., Kunnan, 2000; McNamara, 2003; Shohamy, 2001), language policy and planning (e.g., Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996; Ricento, 2000), language teaching (e.g., Johnston, 2003; Pennycook, 1999), and L2 writing (e.g., Casanave, 2003; Matsuda, Canagarajah, Harklau, Hyland, & Warschauer, 2003).

The invisibility of ethical dimensions in SLA meta-reflections is probably a consequence of the traditional assumption that the natures of facts and values are different and that theory and knowledge building, which many in SLA consider the goal of the field, are concerned with facts, whereas values are the territory of practical applications that happen a posteriori and independently from theory building. These assumed fact-value and basic-applied research dichotomies naturally lead researchers to embrace "the time-honored tradition of keeping ethical questions at bay while doing science" (Rajagopalan, 2004, p. 413). Unfortunately, the silence also reinforces the illusion that somehow neutrality is inherent in the concerns of the field of SLA, as opposed to the seemingly naturally moral-political challenges that face other branches of applied linguistics, such as language assessment or language policy and planning. In this article, I reject the fact-value and basic-applied research dichotomies. Furthermore, I argue that in instructed SLA, as in any other field of social and educational inquiry, all methodological and epistemological concerns could and should be reinterpreted in light of the ethical dimensions of our research. First, however, the intellectual affiliation of the present proposal with philosophical pragmatism should be acknowledged.

On Ethics and Philosophical Pragmatism

There is an extensive literature on contemporary ethics, particularly in the context of educational and social research. Howe and Moses (1999), for example, reviewed five broad ethics frameworks used since the mid-20th century. It is not my intention in this article to advocate one ethical approach over another, but to engage with large themes that guide contemporary discussions about ethics. The traditional focus of moral philosophy in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries was on individual autonomy, in either teleological utilitarian or Kantian deontological senses. By contrast, most contemporary theories of ethics have abandoned the emphasis on individual autonomy, and instead, after coming to terms with the blurring of facts and values,[1] they now grapple with the necessity of engaging in sociopolitical action (Christians, 2000; House & Howe, 1999). I embrace these contemporary themes and agree that "social and educational research is (ought to be) framed by self-consciously chosen moral-political ends" (Howe & Moses, 1999, p. 38). I also look forward to being part of future disciplinary dialogue about ethics frameworks that could fruitfully inform SLA research and applied linguistics research more generally.

The exploration of ethical dimensions in instructed SLA research that I am proposing has been influenced by *philosophical pragmatism* (Putnam, 2002; Rorty, 1999) and its application in education through *participatory liberalism* (House & Howe, 1999; Howe & Moses, 1999). Both approaches reject utilitarianism and its claims to value neutrality, and thus would meet the criteria for what Pennycook (1997), drawing on the work of Cherryholmes (1988), called "critical pragmatism" (Pennycook, 1997, p. 256; see also Cherryholmes, 1999). The position is succinctly summarized in this quotation by House and Howe (1999):

> First, subjectivities count. How people see the world and themselves is very important. Second, social arrangements are irremediably interest-laden, power-laden, and value-laden. They need to be examined ("deconstructed") in this light. Third, the goal [of social science research] should be a more just and democratic society. (pp. 86–87)

This pragmatic position thus rejects the dualism of facts and values and the possibility of value neutrality. At the same time, however, it firmly insists that values, as much as theories, are subject to rational critique by the given research communities and other affected communities (House & Howe, 1999; Putnam, 2002; Rorty, 1999; see also MacIntyre, 1984).

What I propose is also compatible with critical realism (López & Potter, 2001), a position that has been explicitly advocated in applied linguistics by Corson (1997) and most recently by Silva and Leki (2004). It also shares some ground with interpretivism and constructivism (Christians, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Fine et al., 2000; Smith & Deemer, 2000), although (like pragmatism and critical realism) it does not go so far as to

deny the possibility of rational justification for both facts and values. My exploration transcends postpositivism, which still accepts the possibility of producing value-neutral research (Phillips & Burbules, 2000).

OPENING THE DIALOGUE: THREE PRINCIPLES

I offer three normative principles for disciplinary discussion, recognizing that they are open to disagreement and contestation: The value of research is to be judged by its social utility; value-free research is impossible; and epistemological diversity is a good thing. For each principle, I present the thrust of the argument and illustrate it by reference to one or more selected problems central to SLA research. I will end the article with a tentative view of a broadened instructed SLA field, an imagined future that can be envisaged through the ethical lens crafted by these three normative principles.

The Value of Research Is to Be Judged by Its Social Utility

Any research field in the social sciences has as its ultimate goal the improvement of human life. This is a simple position that may surprise or even concern some readers, but which is held by many contemporary social and educational scientists. The goal, for instance, of pragmatists is "to demote the quest for knowledge from the status of end-in-itself to that of one more means towards greater human happiness" (Rorty, 1999, p. xiii). For those scholars who accept this principle, the value of instructed SLA research—just like the value of any other kind of social and educational research—ought to be judged not only by internal criteria of methodological rigor as understood by the particular epistemological models adopted, but also ultimately on the basis of its potential for positive impact on societal and educational problems.

Two objections come to mind. First, throughout the short history of SLA, there has been among scholars a fear of the premature application of SLA findings to language teaching (e.g., Hatch, 1978; Sharwood Smith, 1994). Even when discussing SLA research that speaks directly to questions of L2 instruction, SLA critics view any stated pragmatic goals, such as improved language teaching practices and better language educational policies, with skepticism (e.g., Crookes, 1997; Ellis, 1997; Widdowson, 1990). However, the integration of knowledge and utilization is not an impossibility. To be sure, the link between the two can be indirect and remote for some researchers and research programs, but it can also be intimate and natural for others, and the entire range from one extreme to the other has been observed in the history of scientific and technological innovation (see Stokes, 1997). The argument, at one end of the continuum, that a cross-fertilization between pure research and applied concerns can be premature and lead to counterproductive applications—or, conversely, to undue pressures that thwart basic research programs—is itself rooted in an understanding of a dichotomous, linear, and top-down relationship between knowledge and utilization as separate goals of research. Not everyone in the social sciences agrees that this is a necessary state of affairs. For example, postpositivists (Stokes, 1997), pragmatists (House & Howe, 1999; Putnam, 2002; Rorty, 1999), critical realists (López & Potter, 2001), and radical constructivists (Christians, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) do not agree with the separation of these two goals. And at least several illustrious linguists and applied linguists have felt that the fusion between knowledge and utilization is natural to and beneficial for their research programs (e.g., Ferguson, 1998; Martin, 2000; Spolsky, 1990; Tucker, 2000; see also Hudson, 2004).

More difficult to abate is the objection that what constitutes greater human happiness, improved instructional practices, or positive impact on societal and educational problems (not to mention what is to be viewed as a problem or nonproblem in a given society or a given education system) is contested terrain open to redefinition by different groups of people with shared interests at stake (see Burbules, 2004). This objection leads to a possibly unsolvable dilemma. It is here that philosophical pragmatism offers the possibility of negotiating through collective dialogue—rather than assuming by silence—what is effective, better, and so on (House & Howe, 1999). In other words, we could grapple with this objection if we were willing to discuss and justify our values, as much as our theories, in professional dialogue. We can engage in public "intelligent reflection on our valuations," as Putnam (2002) put it:

> Pragmatists in particular have always emphasized that experience *isn't* "neutral," that it comes to us screaming with values . . . Objective value arises, not from a special "sense organ," but from the criticism of our valuations. Valuations are incessant and inseparable from all of our activities, including our "scientific" ones; but it is by intelligent reflection on our valuations . . . that we conclude some of them are warranted while others are unwarranted. (p. 103)

If we were to deny the possibility of rational justification and negotiation of our valuations as researchers and as members of our field(s), we would be indulging in what moral philosopher MacIntyre (1984) has denounced as emotivism and technicism. The basis of emotivism, a moral-philosophical position that has dominated in our world since the Enlightenment and that intensified during the late 19th century, is the belief "that in moral argument the apparent assertion of principles functions as a mask for personal preference" (p. 19), that is, that "questions of ends are questions of values, and on values reason is silent" (p. 26). Technicism, however, is rooted in a Weberian attitude of bureaucratic effectiveness and managerial expertise that treats ends as given and as outside the scope of reflection (MacIntyre, pp. 30–31), thus making it possible to lay a claim to moral neutrality in expertise (p. 71). In applied linguistics, Pennycook (2004) poignantly characterized the problem. The pitfall of emotivism would be "to acknowledge the significance of political concerns (inequality, poverty, racism, and so on), but to argue . . . that there is no way to decide between competing claims to ethical or political positions." The pitfall of technicism would be to insist that inequality, poverty, racism and so on "have nothing to do with academic or applied linguistic concerns" (pp. 802–803) and to accuse other types of research of advocacy, ideological bias, and so on, while imagining one's own ways of doing research as neutral.

A good SLA example of the desirability of overcoming emotivism and technicism and instead embracing the societal dimensions of our research can be found in the discussions on critical period research between Marinova-Todd, Marshall, and Snow (2000, 2001) and Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2001), published in *TESOL Quarterly*.

The article by Marinova-Todd et al. (2000) was guided by the need to furnish SLA evidence that bolsters educational policies supportive of academic and personal growth among linguistic minority students in U.S. schools, which the authors clearly value as a desirable societal good. In essence, the reinterpretation of the critical period literature by these authors was designed to avert possible deleterious consequences of this research if it were appropriated by the public or the government, or both. (Two such consequences that come to mind are the promotion of earlier-better and sink-or-swim educational policies in public schools and the withdrawal of research funds for the investigation of adult language learning.) I hasten to add that it does not seem to be the case that Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson were oblivious or indifferent to the many harmful (and, as they remarked, "unwarranted") applications of the critical period research to social and educational policies. Indeed, it appears that they wanted to leave a record of this awareness when, in their seminal review of critical period research published 2 years after the *TESOL Quarterly* exchange, they closed with the following rather timid statement:

> The subtle differences that we have assumed to exist between near-native and native proficiency are probably highly insignificant in all aspects of the second language speaker's life and endeavors, although *very* significant for a theory of human capacity for language learning. The highly successful L2 speakers that we have characterized as having reached "only" near-native proficiency *are*, in fact, nativelike in all contexts except, perhaps, in the laboratory of the linguist with specific interest in second language learning mechanisms. (Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2003, p. 580)

Simply put, and as the above quotation also suggests, Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson's (2001) reaction to the initial publication was framed (and, in my opinion, limited) by an extreme form of the traditional "apply with caution" (Hatch, 1978) SLA dictum, squarely captured in their title: "The Hazards of Matching Practical 'Implications' with Theoretical 'Facts.'" Although in their rebuttal Marinova-Todd et al. (2001) did not explicitly criticize this dichotomization of theory and application, their title is equally telling: "Missing the Point: A Response to Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson."

It is not my intention to enter this specific debate over interpretation of the critical period findings. What I think warrants some thought in this example is the following question: Is it really true that so-called good basic research on the critical period hypothesis needs to confine itself to the study of laboratory-detected differences? Although investigating the critical period hypothesis will necessarily involve the study of subtle differences that are detected in laboratory contexts only, the research program would greatly improve if it also expanded to include much of what the real world offers us as relevant to the scientific problem at hand. That is, instead of focusing on the deficiencies of adult learners and their inability to become laboratory-proven native speakers, research on the critical period could be refocused more productively, from an ethical standpoint, and more comprehensively, from a theoretical perspective, on understanding the complex relationship among five forces that have been shown to influence ultimate L2 attainment:

age, exposure, motivation, instruction, and aptitude. This reconceptualization of the critical period research program would require the use of diverse methodologies for different parts of that program and hence would constitute an exemplary case of increased methodological rigor via what Greene and Caracelli (1997) have formally called *expansion* in the mixed methods literature.

At a minimum, every time researchers publish laboratory-only studies on critical periods for L2 learning, they should include a clear statement of how this fact limits the range of interpretations, and even more so the applications, that can be legitimately based on such data. It would be naïve to imagine that researchers can anticipate all ways in which their theories and findings will be put to use once they are public, but it would also be disingenuous to contend that researchers cannot anticipate many of those uses. Findings that associate age with ultimate L2 attainment, for example, have been misappropriated to support earlier-better language education policies across entire regions of the globe (Nunan, 2003). In the face of such concrete potential for social (mis)uses of the critical period research, indirect statements such as the one cited previously by Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2003, p. 580) are unlikely to be sufficient deterrents. Thus, a necessary part of our professional training would be to develop sophisticated strategies for reporting our research in a policy-sensitive and politically self-reflective fashion. At best, we would work hard collectively at expanding our key research programs so as to transform them into programs of inquiry that are inspired by social needs and that can have beneficial impact on "educational and national development" (Tucker, 2000, p. 246), as applied linguistics research ought to do. Certainly, not all studies can investigate all variables or be everything to everyone, but over the course of years of engagement by the same researchers and across many research teams, fuller and more coherent research programs could be deployed. Such research programs could have the potential to advance our knowledge of the human language faculty as much as they could advance our capacities to support the goals and needs for varying degrees of multilingualism among diverse (majority and minority) populations across the world.

Value-Free Research Is Impossible

Much is to be gained when good basic research is inspired by societal and educational concerns. As a natural corollary of this position, it follows that value neutrality is an illusion at best and a devastating danger for instructed SLA at worst. I will illustrate this principle by touching on two related issues: SLA's silence on the nativeness debate and the tendency in SLA to make certain learner populations invisible while naturalizing others.

The critique against the native speaker as a model and norm for L2 learning has been infiltrating every aspect of theoretical debates in applied linguistics, but it has rarely entered instructed SLA publications, thereby leaving research practices in SLA untouched. This absence of the nativeness debate is surprising, given that one of the most eloquent and productive voices inspiring the debate is that of SLA scholar Vivian Cook (2002). Above all, from an ethical perspective, the construction of nativeness is harmful because it capitalizes on notions of otherness and incompetence (e.g., Leung et al., 1997) and in so doing renders inadequate entire communities of speakers, as well as much of the language teaching force in any country. But it is also the case that the ideal of the native speaker as model and norm for adult language learning has been questioned as inaccurate from a psycholinguistic perspective (notably, Cook, 2002, and Grosjean, 1989; see also Valdés, this issue) and as misinformed from a sociolinguistic perspective (e.g., Kachru, 1992). Thus, it is not only more just to allow for a different conceptualization of L2 competence in our theories because of the moral imperative (e.g., to reject representations of nonnative speakers as defective speakers), it is also more accurate from the viewpoint of descriptions of linguistic competence, given that we have good reason to posit that the bilingual (or multilingual) speaker is indeed qualitatively different from the monolingual speaker. As with the earlier example of critical period research, the boundaries of applied and basic concerns for research blur, and ethical, epistemological, and methodological considerations meet.

The very definitions of *competence* and *ultimate attainment*, two fundamental constructs in traditional SLA thinking, are at stake if the critique of nativeness is taken seriously. Some difficult questions need to be asked from this perspective: If L2 users are not two monolinguals in one but possess a psycholinguistically distinct form of multicompetence (Cook, 2002), then does SLA evidence need to be based on the systematic study of both native language and L2 data from the same participants? If the goal of L2 learning for most L2 learner populations is not to be able to pass for monolingual native speakers but to function as users of a lingua franca (Seidlhofer, 2001), then do operationalizations of progress, level, and success need to be generated by scorers,

raters, and analysts who themselves are multicompetent bilinguals and lingua franca users? Engagement with these and other questions may eventually lead to drastic changes in SLA research practices. Similarly, the content of SLA constructs of high currency, such as *interlanguage*, *target language*, and *fossilization*, will undoubtedly need to be revised once the monolingual native speaker is no longer held as the legitimate model for L2 learning. Thus, this process of revision, if it really happens, will involve a revolution in SLA methodologies and theories of magnitude comparable to the revolution that gave way to the concept of learner grammars in the awakenings of SLA (Corder, 1967) and was further elaborated in the warning against the comparative fallacy during the formative years of the field (Bley-Vroman, 1983).

However, a cursory perusal of empirical SLA studies published in the flagship journals (e.g., *Language Learning*, *Modern Language Journal*, *Second Language Research*, *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*) shows a persistent disengagement with the nativeness debate. With this silence, many SLA researchers, and most particularly those of us who investigate cognitive and linguistic dimensions of L2 learning, are living a huge disconnect—Seidlhofer (2001), speaking of applied linguists in general, called it a *conceptual gap*. This disconnect is, on the one hand, between our increasing theoretical awareness that we may be trapped methodologically and conceptually in a false portrait of competence as monolingual par excellence, and on the other hand, our investigative inaction given that our studies continue to be designed in the established ways that hold the native speaker as the de facto target and model for L2 learning (see Seidlhofer, 2004, for a review of recent research that could help SLA researchers begin to address this disconnect).

An ethical lens on instructed SLA research would make us view research as always value-laden. It would also force us to confront a paramount question about whom we serve as a field: Why are certain populations prominent in our research while others are invisible? The majority of instructed SLA research that is conducted, published, and read in the United States involves populations of adult, literate, college-educated language students, be they domestic foreign language students and international English as a second language (ESL) students in North American universities, or English as a foreign language (EFL) students abroad. This tendency to focus on only certain populations is generally the rule, despite well-known early studies of naturalistic SLA, which focused on migrant learners (e.g., Meisel, Clahsen, & Pienemann, 1981), and other illustrious exceptions notwithstanding, including the Canadian instructed SLA research, which has always focused on school populations (see Spada, this issue), and some sustained research programs on K–12 foreign language learning in the United States (e.g., the long-term research program on Japanese Foreign Language in the Elementary School programs developed by Tucker, Donato, and colleagues; see Chinen, Donato, Igarashi, & Tucker, 2003; Donato, Antonek, & Tucker, 1996). This same tendency also prevails not only in cognitive SLA but also in more recent epistemological approaches, including sociocultural SLA (Thorne, this issue) and conversation analytical SLA (Markee, 2004). Instructed SLA as a field has tended to investigate formal L2 learning across contexts and populations where elective bilingualism and middle class privileges are the norm. The language learning problems and the experiences of oppression lived by L2 populations in such contexts are likely to be "pastoral" (Schutz, 2004), when compared to the linguicism and other forms of oppression experienced by disenfranchised linguistic minority individuals and communities.

Overall, it seems that we have convinced ourselves that our neglect of certain L2 populations is motivated exclusively by innocent logistic and methodological reasons, in other words, that it is simply a technical neglect with neither ideological roots nor ethical consequences. Reasons of convenience and accessibility, for example, can easily be invoked. Postsecondary populations tend to be investigated because many SLA researchers are housed in linguistics, English, and foreign language departments, where college-level L2 learners are within immediate reach. The boundaries of academic disciplines in universities, as well, influence our preferred contexts for research. For example, instructed SLA researchers with affiliations outside colleges of education may hesitate to become involved with English language learners in our public schools both because we may feel inadequately equipped to investigate such contexts and also because we fear intruding into settings that may be viewed as the research purview of education colleagues. Methodological reasons are also easy to understand. In many studies only "pure" foreign language learners are included in order to improve our ability to generate causal explanations by controlling as many background variables as we can.

Understanding the institutional and methodological pressures that influence what and whom we research is important (as is understanding how

similar pressures influence what and whom we teach; see Ortega, 1999). It does not, however, eliminate the problem. The practice of making certain populations invisible while naturalizing others has deleterious consequences from ethical, epistemological, and methodological standpoints. Ethically, if instructed SLA researchers do not study certain populations, we do not serve them, either. Thus, currently, the English-related research efforts of the field in the United States appear to be directed towards generating knowledge that is potentially relevant for the roughly half a million students who annually enroll in U.S. universities (*Open Doors*, 2003), but they serve only minimally, among other important populations, the approximately 4.5 million students who are known by the label of *English Language Learners* in our public school system (Kindler, 2002). This large L2 student population comprises the school-age population of potential heritage speakers of a non-English language, but little SLA research is directed towards understanding this type of L2 acquisition (Valdés, this issue).

Methodologically and epistemologically, the practice of tacitly treating college-level L2 learners as representative of all L2 learning populations creates an egregious generalizability problem for SLA research. For cognitive SLA in particular, with its roots in quantitative-experimental methodologies and postpositivist epistemologies, the formal notion of generalizability is a cornerstone that demands both a clearly bounded definition of each population investigated and systematic replications across different populations. Other approaches to SLA research may emphasize the contextual and situated nature of L2 learning, but nevertheless seem to share the aim of producing general knowledge about their objects of inquiry (e.g., Markee, 2004; Thorne, this issue). Thus, for the project of SLA to advance, it is imperative to forge theories on the basis of evidence from the many different types of contexts for L2 learning that are currently almost entirely absent from our research (for similar arguments, see Bigelow & Tarone, 2004; Chapelle, this issue; Shridar, 1994; Siegel, 2003; Valdés, this issue).

We should not be content with our choices of prototypical SLA populations, nor should we view our silence about other populations and other types of L2 learning as inevitable and of little consequence. Instead, instructed SLA researchers should acknowledge that this state of affairs, far from being neutral or natural, reinforces and perpetuates certain values and renders certain populations and communities invisible. Such recognition would be a first step in attempting to redress the situation. At a minimum, in specific empirical reports as well as in syntheses of the literature, researchers could qualify assertions about universals in SLA by explicitly acknowledging the contexts and populations that are studied as well as the ones that are not. An immediate and attainable improvement for those of us who continue to engage in research programs with college-level populations is to pursue studies where the existence of both traditional and nontraditional L2 learners, often in the very same college classrooms we investigate, is acknowledged by design and made into a strength and focus of the research (good examples of this effort are Blake & Zyzik, 2003; and Kondo-Brown, 2001). At best, the field would direct concerted efforts towards developing research programs that investigate a wider range of L2 populations and contexts for L2 learning and teaching (e.g., Bigelow & Tarone, 2004; Valdés, this issue). If it were to happen, this broadening of the material and human purview of inquiry would not be inconsequential. It would have the potential to transform our research assumptions, practices, and values. As Bigelow and Tarone (2004) put it, "when researchers move beyond the walls of academe to collect SLA data among unschooled [and other minority] populations with radically different cultural backgrounds, they must apparently question everything" (p. 698; see also Whiteside, 2004). Moreover, if our research efforts gradually turned to serve less pastoral populations and contexts than has been the norm to date, an increasing number of SLA researchers would be positioned as outsiders in the learner communities investigated. This repositioning, in turn, would eventually force us to grapple with such unsolved questions that have confronted other social and educational scientists as "whose knowledge is authentic, who can know what, and who speaks for whom" (Banks, 1998, p. 7; see also Fine et al., 2000).

Epistemological Diversity Is a Good Thing

The so-called paradigm wars in SLA have prompted much scholarly debate about important epistemological questions (e.g., Atkinson, 2002; Block, 2003; Firth & Wagner, 1997; Gregg et al., 1997; Lantolf, 1996; Long, 1993; Watson-Gegeo, 2004). Such epistemological debates are a necessary part of the maturing of SLA as a field. They also have a healthy influence on the task of articulating what the field ought to be and what we value as a research community. Yet, they have often been acrimonious and less productive than they could have been.

Similar types of epistemological tensions have played out in other social sciences, although they took place in the period spanning the 1950s through the 1980s. By the late 1980s, peacemaking or at least cease-fire pieces appeared across disciplines (e.g., Gage, 1989, in education; and Kamil, 1995, and Stanovich, 1990, in literacy). Since then, discussions about realignments have become common, and so-called mixed methods have gained ascendancy (e.g., Greene & Caracelli, 1997; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Of course, the epistemological roots and legitimacy of diverse models for research continue to be debated. Indeed, this discussion has intensified in recent years as a response to the alarming narrowing of notions of quality in research, which has been demonstrated by the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, and the publication of the National Research Council (2002) report on *Scientific Research in Education* (e.g., see the two special issues of *Qualitative Inquiry* edited by Cannella & Lincoln, 2004, and Lincoln & Cannella, 2004; see also the *Perspectives* column, edited by Byrnes, on NCLB in *MLJ, 89,* 2). Similarly, the constraints on and incentives for adopting mixed-methods epistemologies continue to be problematized in the educational and social sciences (Howe, 2004; Maxwell, 2004). But multiple perspectives on the nature of knowledge and learning are debated without "the relentless focus on the differences" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 14) that was typical of the paradigm wars of the 1980s. The current published record underscores potential interconnections among cognitive and social, computational and situative notions of learning (e.g., Paavola et al., 2004; Sfard, 1998); it points to the fluidity of boundaries between quantitative-experimental and qualitative-interpretive methods (e.g., Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003); and it reminds us that neither postpositivist nor postmodernist world views are monolithical (e.g., Banks, 1998; Burbules, 2004; Fine et al., 2000; Howe, 2004; Knight Abowitz, 2000; Maxwell, 2004; Phillips & Burbules, 2000; Schutz, 2004). In sum, the prevalent disciplinary discourse is conciliatory and seeks to enlarge the space available for constructive dialogue. For many social and educational scientists, epistemological incommensurability need not be posited; instead, rapprochement among the different models of inquiry is possible and desirable.

In SLA, as well, there are multiple signs that epistemological diversity is a gradually emerging reality, but, unfortunately, one that has entered only timidly the imaginary project of the field that textbooks, journals, conferences, graduate programs, and so on help portray. For a few years now, some researchers have felt free to combine elements from cognitive-interactionist and Vygotskian SLA approaches (e.g., studies of reformulation by Swain, Lapkin, & Smith, 2002, and of negotiation by Storch, 2002). Other researchers have successfully blended research elements from task-based language learning into conversation analytical (Mori, 2002) and sociolinguistic (Higgins, 2003; Lindemann, 2002) traditions. A good example of emerging methodological and epistemological diversity in cognitively oriented SLA research is motivation research, which, since the late 1990s, has increasingly drawn on a range of epistemologies and methodologies that converge towards a better understanding of the issues involved (e.g., the collection of studies in Dörnyei & Schmidt, 2001). Other researchers have employed quantifications of language data and qualitative analysis of interview data within single studies in order to explore more fully a given object of L2 inquiry (e.g., Ortega, 2005, on the benefits of pretask planning; and Sasaki, 2004, on the longitudinal development of L2 writing; see also Dewaele, this issue). The mixing of methodologies and epistemologies has also been suggested in conversation analytical SLA. Thus, Seedhouse (2004) envisioned ethnographic methods as a sequential complement to ethnomethodological analysis in order to address more squarely the cultural dimensions of L2 interactions within a given study. Similarly, Brouwer and Wagner (2004) explored the possibility of enlarging the scope of conversation analysis methods with theoretical constructs from community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in order to accommodate the developmental dimension of L2 conversational data. Within sociocultural SLA, plurality and divergence have recently been examined in a colloquium organized by Zuengler and Cole (2004), a clear recognition that similarities and differences can be explored usefully within and across epistemologies for SLA research (see also Thorne, this issue).

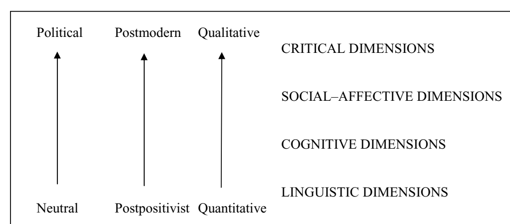
The time may have come for SLA researchers to acknowledge fully in our meta-reflections that the field is epistemologically diverse, and that it is an ethical and useful stance to embrace such diversity. To be sure, I am not envisioning a superficial translation of concepts and metaphors from one given epistemological tradition to another, something that Dunn and Lantolf (1998) and Kinginger (2001), among others, have rightly criticized. It is also clearly not the case that everyone can (or wants to) do every kind of research or embark on mixed methods explorations. Natural

predispositions as well as disciplinary socializations result in different kinds of epistemological choices being available in a porous field like SLA. However, the sheer complexity of the phenomena under investigation suggests that epistemological plurality is a necessity. When the object of inquiry is formal language learning, in particular, educational and societal forces are an inextricable part of that complexity. For these reasons, it behooves us all not only to respect but also to engage intellectually with work resulting from epistemologies different from our own. Dunn and Lantolf (1998) found a possible way to achieve this engagement in Habermas's (1981/1984) theory of communicative rationality and communicative action. Pragmatism also offers a similar platform for understanding communicative engagement with differences as a goal that is both achievable and worth pursuing (see Knight Abowitz, 2000). At a minimum, it would be beneficial if communicative engagement with epistemological differences in SLA would permeate our meta-reflections to make them more constructive and pluralistic. At best, epistemological diversity as a value would inform the methodological training of future SLA researchers (see the contributions in this special issue by Crookes, Yates, and Chapelle) and would become an explicit motivation for the design of future SLA research programs.

AN ETHICAL LENS ON INSTRUCTED SLA RESEARCH

One way to conceptualize the study of L2 learning and teaching is dualistic and dichotomous, as shown in Figure 1. In the view of research that Figure 1 schematizes, dualisms constrain the possibilities for diverse types of research to serve social and educational goals that are valued by the various communities involved in the generation and use of disciplinary knowledge. In this view, the closer SLA researchers are to studying linguistic and cognitive dimensions of L2 acquisition, the more they draw on quantitative methodologies and postpositivist epistemologies, and the more value-neutral research they claim to produce. Conversely, the more SLA researchers are inclined to investigate the social-affective and critical dimensions of L2 learning and teaching, the more they orient their work towards qualitative-interpretive approaches to knowledge generation, challenge grand narratives about human truth and progress, and engage political and transformative ends of research.

FIGURE 1
Dichotomous View of the Study of L2 Learning and Teaching



Thus, according to this dichotomous view, ethical concerns would appear to be the purview of qualitative, sociocultural, and postmodern approaches to SLA research. For researchers who value social and educational relevance and are interested in investigating linguistic and cognitive dimensions of L2 learning from cognitivist perspectives, there would seem to be little hope to generate socially useful and educationally relevant knowledge. No other solutions would seem to be available but to abandon experimental-quantitative and cognitivist ways of generating SLA knowledge, and to turn to action research, qualitative first-person narrative research, or alternative SLA paradigms that reconceptualize learning as a situative, socioculturally embedded process. This dichotomy-ridden picture of SLA and the resulting call to abandon certain research models for the sake of increased social responsiveness underlie many of the meta-reflections published to date, such as publications on the perceived lack of relevance of SLA for teachers (Clarke, 1994; Crookes, 1997; Ellis, 1997; Widdowson, 1990).

In my view, this is an unsatisfactory picture of SLA, a straightjacket that constrains our imagination of what is possible in the field. An alternative, more satisfying picture of SLA is sketched in Figure 2. In this depiction, diverse types and traditions of research are listed, but they are not arranged in a dichotomous way. Much to the contrary, an open number of options is available for investigating linguistic, cognitive, social-affective, and critical dimensions of L2 learning and teaching. The boundaries and alignments in Figure 2 are tentative, because they are more a matter of theoretical emphasis than immutable essence. For example, although both Hallidayan and conversation analytical approaches to SLA share a social view of language, the former is listed under linguistic dimensions of L2 learning and teaching, whereas the latter appears under social-affective

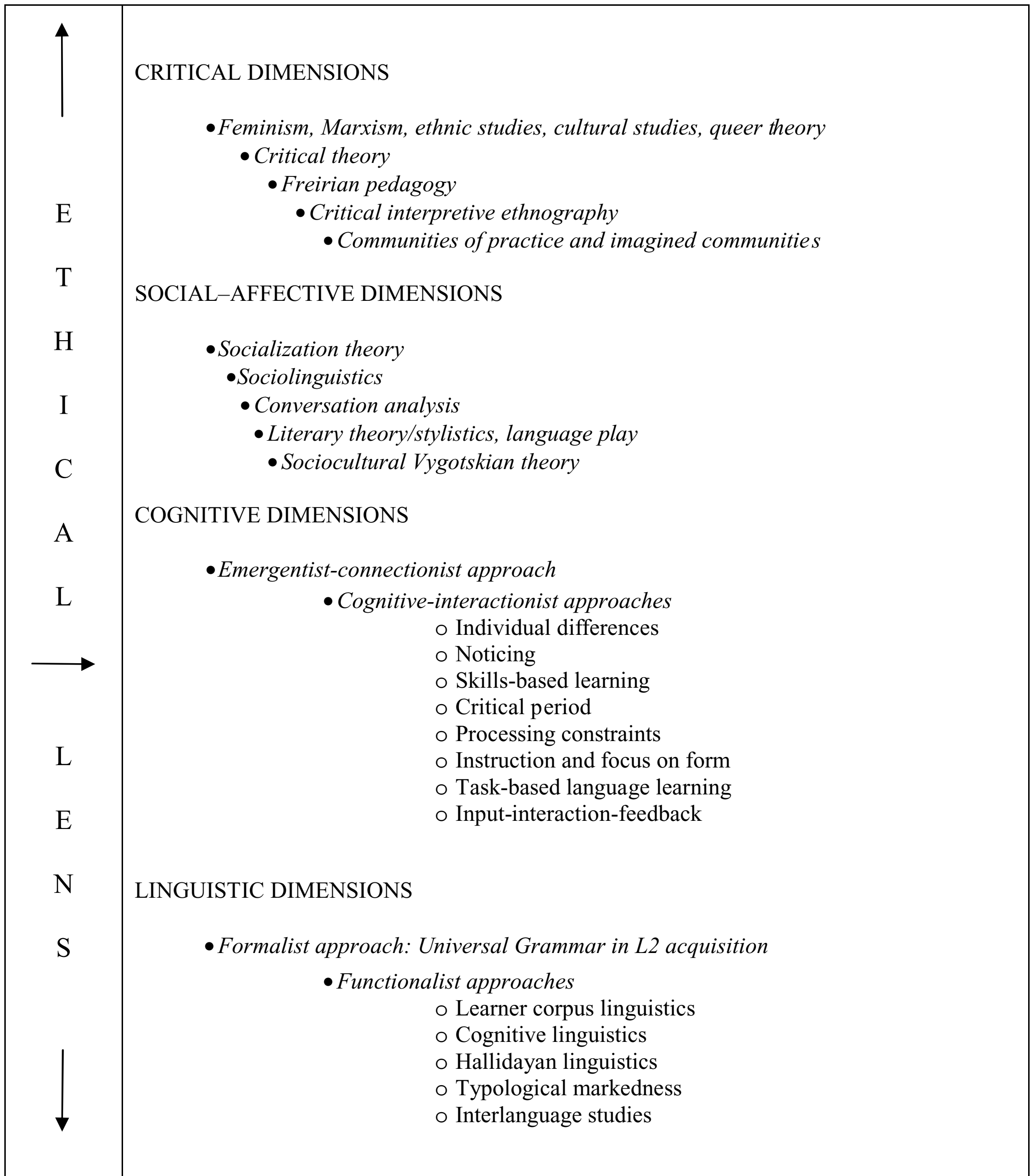


FIGURE 2
An Ethical Lens on the Study of L2 Learning and Teaching

dimensions. This listing acknowledges the epistemological genealogy of the Hallidayan framework in linguistics and that of Conversation Analysis in sociology. The same theoretically motivated boundary can be noted for the placement in Figure 2 of individual differences research, which clearly addresses social and affective influences on L2 learning, but does so from a cognitivist and psychological tradition and hence is listed accordingly. Some colleagues may even question whether certain epistemological approaches that I have listed in Figure 2 belong to the field of SLA. In my view, this matter is open to the researchers in each tradition themselves, and whether they wish to see their work as SLA or not. Finally, readers will note that in Figure 2 I have elaborated

on specific research strands within only two areas: functionalist-linguistic and cognitive-interactionist SLA approaches. This elaboration, meant to be only illustrative, is partial simply becaus I am less familiar with the full research landscape in the other areas.

What I hope Figure 2 helps depict is the suggestion that an ethical lens can be applied to all research on L2 learning and teaching, that ethical concerns should permeate each and every area of SLA research, from linguistic to critical concerns. If accepted, this move would help us reject a polarized disciplinary worldview where research on linguistic and cognitive dimensions of L2 acquisition is naturalized as always framed by value-free claims and research on social-affective and critical dimensions of the same L2 processes is naturalized as always promoting socially relevant agendas. Clearly, certain epistemologies and methodologies often associate with certain ideological values in disciplinary history. However, this association is not a necessity or a natural state of affairs. Rather, it is favored by the two-fold blind of emotivism and technicism, which locates values and social relevance beyond public justification and outside the scope of expert knowledge production (MacIntyre, 1984). It is a human and disciplinary choice subject to revision, as well-known counterexamples to this dichotomous way of thinking easily remind us. For instance, in anthropology, interpretive epistemologies and associated ethnographic methods were fraught with racism at an early point in their history, and that field had to reinvent itself as a discipline several times before the ethical implications of taken-for-granted research values were confronted by the research community (González, 2004; Vidich & Lyman, 2000). Conversely, in psychology, the same postpositivist epistemologies and quantitative methods underlie both the racist research on intelligence epitomized by Herrnstein and Murray's (1994) publication of the *Bell Curve* and the devastating critique of that research in the *Mismeasurement of Man* by Gould (1996), who had explicitly antiracist aims, as he explained in his introduction (pp. 36–39). Postpositivist epistemologies and quantitative methods also undergird Sternberg's (2003) sustained research program, which is consciously inspired by the search for an egalitarian and antiracist reconceptualization of intelligence (see also Miele, 1995). Examples in SLA research also exist that counter value-epistemology dualisms. Research addressing linguistic dimensions of L2 learning, for instance, has incorporated explicit political values in the kind of approach to interlanguage phonology developed by Jenkins (2000), the application of Hallidayan grammar to SLA explored by Schleppegrell (2004), and the type of learner corpus linguistics envisioned by Seidlhofer (2001, 2004).

In sum, so-called mainstream SLA researchers ought to be unwilling to cede the terms *ethical*, *transformative*, or *socially relevant* to other types of SLA research just as sociocultural and qualitative-interpretive SLA researchers ought to be unwilling to cede the terms *rigorous* or *scientific* to traditional postpositivist ways of doing research. Similarly, social relevance should not be assumed to be an inherent feature of knowledge generated by contextualized SLA approaches, just as scientific rigor should not be assumed to be an exclusive property of knowledge generated by traditional SLA research. Just as it is customary to explain our methodological and epistemological choices clearly (e.g., in the traditional literature review of empirical studies), we should explicitly address the value choices embedded in any given piece of research. It would serve the field well if we strove to articulate for ourselves and our audiences the value commitments and the ethical worth underpinning our research programs and our single studies, much as we strive to articulate our epistemological and methodological roots and warrants. Ideally, it would be incumbent upon SLA researchers to explicate both rigor and relevance to colleagues and to other potential research users, in the context of individual studies as well as entire research programs, regardless of epistemological or methodological affiliations.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have argued that, in the ultimate analysis, it is not the methods or the epistemologies that justify the legitimacy and quality of human research, but the moral-political purposes that guide sustained research efforts. And it is our responsibility as researchers to choose our value commitments, as it is to choose our theoretical frameworks and methodologies, and let those values inform the design, conduct, and dissemination of our studies and of the research programs they instantiate. Although stringent, the requirements I have suggested for self-reflection and open dialogue about the ethical worth of instructed SLA research would serve the field well. To be sure, there are many obstacles to achieving this ideal. A good many of them are institutional and stem from academia and its reward system (see Spada, this issue). Other obstacles are ideological and, of these, many have their

root in the deeply ingrained belief among SLA scholars that research is value-free at the stage of knowledge generation, and that it is only at a later stage of public use—often thought to be beyond researchers' control—that research is (mis)appropriated and infiltrated with ideological agendas driven by values. It is not my intention to dismiss or downplay the challenges awaiting us if we are willing to adopt the ethical lens that I suggest and let it help us transform our research. However, I am hopeful that much can be achieved. There are many illustrious cases, after all, where moral-political and critical-pragmatic aims for research have added scientific rigor, professional success and legitimacy, and social worth to individual careers and to disciplinary histories (e.g., Banks, 1998; Stokes, 1997; Vidich & Lyman, 2000).

For SLA researchers concerned with serving the pressing social and educational language learning needs of majority and minority L2 populations, the formidable but uncompromising challenge is to explore what it would take for the field to contribute knowledge that is useful for the groups we seek to serve across educational contexts. This exploration can only be possible if it is guided by moral and political values that we, as individuals and as a research community, can embrace. By examining the relationship between our current research practices and our value commitments in instructed SLA research, we make ourselves vulnerable, but much is to be gained. A genuine engagement with notions of ethical values and professional responsibilities would enlarge the space available for productive dialogue among differing understandings of the field. It has the potential to enhance the rigor and relevance of the research we generate. It might even be the catalyst for transforming our theories and our research practices. I am hopeful that collectively and individually we can work towards a socially responsible, politically self-reflective, and epistemologically diverse field of instructed SLA that generates research inspired by societal needs.

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NOTE

[1] MacIntyre (1984) offered an illuminating philosophical-historical analysis of this development. I would like to thank Meryl Siegal for leading me to his work.

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Additions and Changes for the *MLJ*

Beginning in 2007, the *MLJ* will offer a fifth issue: a monograph or a focus volume in alternating years. Barbara Lafford, Arizona State University, has been appointed Editor of the Monograph/Focus Volumes. Her initial term is for 5 years. See this issue, page 466 for a full announcement.

Beginning in 2008, Sally Magnan will step down as Editor-in-chief of the *MLJ*. The search for the new editor has begun. See this issue, page 488, for the search announcement.