

**DLLL Lecture Series in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics  
November 19, 2009**

**Ping Deters  
OISE/University of Toronto & Seneca College**

**Identity, Agency, and Second Language Acquisition:  
The Case of Internationally Educated Professionals in Ontario**

Over the past decade, social perspectives have attained prominence in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). The “social turn” in second language acquisition research (Block, 2003) gathered momentum when a number of SLA scholars drew attention to the need for a broadening of traditional research paradigms, for research that is more socially informed, and for a greater inclusion of learners’ (emic) perspectives on the SLA process (e.g., Block, 1996; Firth & Wagner, 1997; Hall, 1997; Lantolf, 1996; Norton Peirce, 1997; van Lier, 1994). In their seminal critique, Firth and Wagner (1997) called for alternative, more holistic understandings of language and language acquisition that would acknowledge the importance of social context and learners’ complex and multifaceted identities.

In this talk, I will begin with a discussion of various theoretical conceptions of identity and agency in SLA research. I will then discuss the relationships between identity, agency and SLA by presenting findings from a qualitative study<sup>1</sup> of the professional acculturation of internationally educated teachers and college professors in Ontario. The research questions focus on the affordances and constraints to successful professional acculturation and on the relationships between identity, agency, and the acquisition of professional language and culture. My analysis is informed by Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) sociocultural theory of mind and Lave and Wenger’s (1991; Wenger, 1998) concept of legitimate peripheral participation and community of practice (COP) framework. Data for this study comprise: (1) in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 33 internationally educated teachers from diverse ethnolinguistic and professional backgrounds; (2) longitudinal case studies of eight of these teachers; and (3) in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 15 educational professionals who work with these teachers, namely, administrators, mentors, and professional development facilitators. In the final part of my talk, I will discuss methodological issues as well as practical, real-world implications of the findings.

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