Language as a Field of Energy: A Critical Question for Language Pedagogy

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Abstract

This essay offers a reorientation of our views on the interrelationships of language and thought as a field of constantly reprogrammable energy, and provides an argument as to why we believe this new metaphor (i.e., language as a field of energy) matters in language pedagogy, in classrooms at all levels, as well as within teacher education and teacher professional development. We define language as a field of energy in the following way: as language operating as a "region" in which a force (in this case, words and their rhetorical functions) operates to bring about some influence resulting in an effect or having an impact on one's own behaviors, on the behaviors of others, as well as having the capacity to influence emotions, and/or the course of events. Following a brief introduction in which we state our purpose, we present the case for the above argument in the context of current language and literacy education. In doing so, we delineate language-thought-perceived reality relationships through a synthesis of a selective representation of the primary thinkers in mainstream language scholarship, as well as other fields, such as philosophy, social anthropology, linguistics, discourse analysis, and to coin a new field, "linguistic metaphysics." While we focus our discussion on language, we are mindful of its obviously intimate, symbiotic relationship with thought. We conclude with suggestions as to how this concept, "language as a field of energy," can be pursued in educational settings.

Keywords: *language as a field of energy, language pedagogy, language-thought-perceived realities, teacher education, pre-service teachers, professional development, language curriculum*

Introduction

> *Metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities. A metaphor may thus be a guide for future action. Such actions will, of course, fit the metaphor. This will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor and make experience coherent. In this sense metaphors can be self-fulfilling prophecies. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 156)*

In the opening scenes of Goethe's *Faust* (1828), we are introduced to Faust as he struggles with the meaning of the Greek word "Logos," or "Word," as it is used in "The Gospels of St. John. *Am anfang war die Tat*" ("In the beginning was the Deed"). At the literal level, the German word,

"*Tat*," means "deed" or "act;" however, its original Greek source, "*Logos*," also acknowledges its metaphoric intent, as represented in "word," "thought" and "power." Goethe seems to settle on this conflation—"thought," "act," "power," and "word"—as synonymous. *Faust* scholar and literary critic van der Lann (2007) describes this conflation as the "original and quintessential speech act[1]" (p.55). Our decision to highlight Faust's struggle to decide whether there is a relationship between thought as expressed in word and deed might appear to suggest that we are implying a degree of degree of efficacy between word and deed, which we are, though we would add the following: the degree to which word results in deed also influences outcome, whether or not it is intended, or even expected.

If one is to believe in the power of positive thinking, one might be led to accept that habitual thoughts influence deeds and actual outcomes, whether or not one is aware of that relationship. Such an example is offered by the work of scholars in the neurolinguistic programming movement launched by Bandler and Grinder (1975), who argued that "reframing" habitual patterns of language use and replacing them with new patterns can result in concurrent shifts that eliminate patterns of behavior that were either dysfunctional or inhibiting to those who suffered from their debilitating consequences. Others, such as Myss (1996), whose work as a medical intuitive might be questioned by mainstream medical professionals, but whose claims are supported by research on the relationship between mental stress[2] as manifesting in depression and its subsequent effects on the body, may raise eyebrows in disbelief that we still need to be convinced or nod in unison with such a position. That a causal relationship is implied in the word/thought/action relationship is captured in Feldman's (2006) discussion of the role that complex metaphors play in human conceptual development, which he and others, including Lakoff and Johnson (1980), see as a major influence in the shaping of our thinking through the ways in which metaphors name concepts. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors become "bounded concepts," or "containers," which influence how we think about "things" and "experiences" (p.30). Therefore, we argue, the ways in which we habitually think, which are reflected in turn in our habitual uses of language, are so entwined that unless we are made aware of just how habitual these words/thoughts are with our acts/actions, we fall into the trap of believing that what we think, do, and feel are "just the ways we are," and therefore reflect a "reality" that cannot be changed, let alone challenged.

Scholars across a diverse array of fields, including philosophy, semantics, cellular biology, psychology, sociology, and discourse analysis, along with playwrights, poets, and metaphysicists, appear to agree that the relationship between language and what happens (i.e., becomes actualized) is integrally related. Mercer (2000) provides a variety of examples, including marriage vows, as evidence that "saying something amounts to performing it" (p. 11). In the field of psychology, Vygotsky (1962) asserts that a "word is a microcosm of human consciousness" (p. 153). Both

1. According to Austin (1972), speech acts are distinguished by speakers' intentions as well as social context, and so form alone does not determine a type of speech act. Van der Laan's somewhat euphoric categorization of Faust's use of the word "Tat" to represent an amalgam of thought, word, and act, can only function in this way if we perceive it as an "explicit performative utterance" in which the illocutionary force is prominent.

2. Here we refer to mental stress as manifested in depressive thoughts (i.e., inner talk), as well as in depressive beliefs (e.g., "I can't cope"; "I'm finding this all too hard"; "It doesn't matter" and so on). Inner discourse (chunks of thought expressed in words) is notoriously difficult to document. Similarly, self-report is often notoriously unreliable. Until we can map inner talk into some system that is able to capture it as expressed, we must rely on tools such as self-report. Even talking into a personal recording system will not capture all of our thinking even the verbalized thinking that we all constantly engage in. The challenge is that each of us becomes aware of the pattern that this inner discourse takes—is it fatalistic, is it optimistic, is it guarded, is it open, embracing, and so on. Interviews (both open ended and structured) can attempt to capture such patterns if documented and carefully transcribed. Of course, participants in case studies may or may not confirm that what they actually said is what they actually think.

Dewey (1991/1910) and Vygotsky (1962) believe that "signs give humans the power to regulate and change natural forms of behavior and cognition" (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 153). Quantum physicists (Bohm, 1990, 1993), and Barad (2003, 2007, 2010) provide convincing evidence of the entanglement of all matter, arguing that everything (including thought and language) is reducible to "energy," and hence, interconnected, and, in recent years, neuroscience (Hanson & Mendius, 2009) provides evidence that our bodies and brains negatively and positively register physiological and neurological effects from habitual thoughts, the language that encodes them, and the beliefs, attitudes and emotions in which these are embedded.

These scholars have much in common with healers, mystics, and metaphysicians such as Dyer (2004), Hay (1980), and Holmes (1997/1938) who share similar beliefs about the relationships between thought, language and the lived experiences that we create. Many of us have, at one time or another, asked others not to utter words we suspect are going to be uttered out of concern that doing so might actualize that which we fear. Pinker[3] (2012) writes that "there is a way in which words are tied to reality even more directly. They are not just facts about the world stored in a person's head but are woven into the causal fabric of that world itself" (p. 9). Pennebaker et al. (2003) provide evidence that word use is an indicator of psychological and health change, and they argue that rather than studying peoples' uses of nouns, verbs, and modifiers, we should instead study their use of what they term "particles" (i.e., pronouns, articles, prepositions, conjunctives, and auxiliary verbs) as these have "tremendous social and psychological meaning" (p. 570).

Although this is both an intriguing and compelling claim, space constraints preclude a richer discussion of Pennebaker et al.'s (2003) argument. A brief discussion is, however, warranted about the semantic and pragmatic roles of certain pronouns (e.g., those that function as determiners such as "this/these/that/those"), definite and indefinite articles, prepositions, and conjunctives as subtle shapers of how concepts are perceived and which also "contain" a primary concept. Simply dealing with these "parts of speech" in the standard definitional manner that is typical of grammar instruction in schools ignores their semantic and pragmatic role and power. Prepositions, for example, are primary indicators of space, directionality, location, and duration. Conjunctives connect concepts causally either in terms of equivalence and/or in terms of subordination. They also qualify how content (nouns and verbs in particular) is to be perceived. As prepositions do, conjunctives also indicate relationships between elements, whether as equivalent, superior or subordinate. The auxiliary verbs in English also function, semantically, as full verbs which embody possession ("to have") and states of being ("to be"). Myss (1997) observed during her twenty years of experience as a medical intuitive that the possessing aspect of "having" an illness (e.g., "I have pneumonia") or naming oneself by an illness (e.g., "I am a diabetic") might appear to be commonsense. Yet she argues that in doing so, we "become" the illness, and the illness "becomes" us. She consequently

3. Pinker (2012) refutes linguistic determinism (Whorf and Sapir and their subsequent supporters) on the grounds that language can't be "too central in our mental functioning" in that "we had to learn it in the first place" (p.148). He provides extensive examples in support of his claims that "human thoughts are stored in memory in a form that is far more abstract than sentences" and that "major memory research" findings indicate that people have "poor memories for the exact sentences that gave them their knowledge" (p.149). Nevertheless, he stops short of totally debunking the culture-shaping-language-thought symbiosis of supporters of linguistic determinism. His critique, however, seems to rely on a focus on form rather than on content (semantics), and in his discussion of metaphor, necessarily focuses on how it is expressed *through* language, At any rate, we do not argue for culturally-specific articulations of thought in this paper—we obviously focus on the language English (and the standard code at that) with which we are most familiar, to articulate how thought and language are forms of energy (regardless of specific cultural variation) and embrace the possibility that other languages may well function within their own communities (large and small) in similar ways because the medium (language) seems to be at least, species specific, regardless of cultural, regional, and social variation.

recommends that people not "claim" or "become" the illness. Instead, we might state that our bodies are "experiencing" diabetes or pneumonia, as this acknowledges these illnesses as external phenomena that are not intertwined with "who" we are or "how" we are.

These may seem to be simplistic explanations, yet as those who use mantras or chants to change inner states of being firmly believe, the words we use are critical in the instantiation of the condition they call forth. If the words are not precise, the chant or utterance will not work or may even have unintended effects. The words we use, then, have the power to bring about transformation, for good as well as for ill. Nevertheless, language pedagogy (what is actually taught in the classroom) has yet to acknowledge this degree of intimacy between thought, utterance, and actualization. "Parts of speech" are generally regarded as relatively minor "structural" elements in English language instruction, but we argue that they warrant further analysis in terms of their semantic and rhetorical roles as evident in the work of mind-body-consciousness practitioners of many different persuasions, expertise, and experience (e.g. Dyer, 2009; Hay, 1984; Johnson, 1987; Myss, 1997), and because they appear to play a potentially significant role in the language/thought/perceived realities nexus. Space constraints in the present article limit the extent to which we can provide deeper discussion of these aspects of the role of grammar, but we will refer to that role in a later section focusing on a discussion of possible applications of our central concept in pedagogical contexts. In the sections that follow, we provide a rationale for considering "language as a field of energy," describe the central concept in greater depth, provide a selective overview of interdisciplinary conceptions of the language/thought/perceived realities nexus, discuss the role of metaphor in creating the realities we live, and explore the potential role of the concept "language as a field of energy" in language pedagogy and in teacher education.

A Rationale

Clarification needs to be made at this point as to whether we are distinguishing between spoken and written language and their relationship to thought, and whether we are confining our discussion to English, or acknowledging all languages as we discuss the language/thought/perceived realities nexus. First, we are concerned with delineating the language/thought/perceived realities nexus in relation to both unconscious and conscious uses of language. With respect to the unconscious uses of language, we naturally refer to spontaneously generated, internally and externally expressed oral language. However, we are also concerned with written language insofar as it has the potential to impact a population at large (e.g., advertising, newspapers, and other widely disseminated written texts). That said, examining all possible genres and considering how the language/thought/energy nexus is manifested through these is beyond the scope of this paper. Broadly speaking, the language we most commonly express and respond to in daily life is what we primarily refer to in our paper.

Second, we confine our discussion to what we know about how the English language functions. While one might consider all languages under the umbrella term "language" as a phenomenon unique to the human species, and as one example of how thought is manifested in action, we must necessarily confine ourselves to considering the language/thought/perceived realities nexus in terms of how we believe it operates in the language with which we are most familiar—namely, what we might loosely term "standard" English language. While psycholinguists (e.g., Altman, 1997; Chomsky, 2000; Hauser, Chomsky, & Fitch, 2002; Scovel, 1998) have been able to identify some commonalities (e.g., concepts such as "naming," "states of being," and "relationships") across languages with which they were familiar, and although anthropologists such as Sapir (1961)

and Whorf (1956) have investigated language as a cultural and social phenomenon, the general agreement seems to be that there are certain innate capacities that influence language production. However, we find ourselves agreeing with Pinker (2012), who argues that assuming widespread portability of words and their grammatical constructions across all languages as representative of thought in all cultures is a problematic pursuit.

In pedagogical contexts, particularly in the English/language arts classroom, educators have typically focused on teaching the structure of standard written American English. In doing so, they have analyzed it according to prescribed grammatical rules, attempted to confine it and control it, and in the process, reduced it to an academic phenomenon that becomes, unfortunately, devoid of the life of its users. Many students have brought a rich personal language to the school setting only to learn that their language or variation is inappropriate in mainstream academic contexts. Instead, the process of containing and constraining the richness of these cultural and individual linguistic heritages is still the rule rather than the exception (Delpit, 1988; Elbow, 1973; Heath, 1983; Rose, 1989). In the process, students not only lose their voice, but also lose their sense of identity as it is intricately embedded in their personal language. Schools and the systems that monitor their performance (for example, regional and national assessment agencies) steadfastly ignore the implications of acknowledging that language and its users are inextricably intertwined and that we can no longer perceive language as something disembodied and separate from individuals who acquire it.

Since the 1970s, English language education and literacy scholars in the US, including the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE, 1996), have, however, increasingly embraced liberatory approaches to writing, including "empowering students through language," "teaching grammar in context," and foregrounding the relationship between "language and identity" (e.g., Elbow, 1973; Gee, 1998; Noden, 2011; Weaver, 2008). Harmon and Wilson (2006) argue a case for moving "beyond grammar" to considering language as both a source of power as well as a source of dis-empowerment. While this trend is encouraging, it does not challenge the as-yet conventional view of language pedagogy that, although acknowledging the rhetorical role of language, refrains from usurping the status quo regarding how we teach it through continuing to emphasize adherence to standard written variation conventions that govern usage, correct grammatical forms, and mechanics (punctuation and spelling).

Two representative examples of our enduring attachment to conventional language education are Birch's (2005) *Learning and Teaching English Grammar K-12* and Leech, Deuchar and Hoogenraad's (2006) *English Grammar for Today*. Both acknowledge the relationship between language and power, but accept the impact of high stakes standardized testing. Indeed, Leech et al. (2006) argue that language educators have re-embraced the primacy of grammar in language education, following the more libertarian views of the late 1970s through the 1990s. Thus, the primary focus of the field continues to be fixed on students knowing the rules of appropriate language use, albeit in ways that can be tested in standardized ways.[4] We understand the apparent

4. What was loosely termed the "Back to Basics" movement first emerged as a concept in the late 1970s, began to gain momentum in the 1980s, gathered more steam in the 1990s and lead to Bush's 2002 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. It represented a trend in US federal government intervention at policy and funding levels in response to concerns that the US had fallen behind other leading nations in terms of high school graduation rates and perceived performance levels by graduating US high school students. Increasing government pressure for US public schools to conform to national standards was represented by mandatory standard tests that students must take to graduate (NCLB) and by tying student performance to teacher performance and perceived competence. Student-centered learning as manifested through programs such as the "Whole Language Movement" (Goodman & Goodman, 1981), was increasingly abandoned in the face of federal mandates for standardized performance measurements through standardized

value of such a focus: both of us have long been language arts educators, and both of us know the value of following conventional uses of language in educational settings. However, we find this focus narrow and suggest that it ignores the extraordinary potential in thinking about the language/thought/perceived realities nexus as an avenue for positive change in the increasingly troubled, and confused, world we inhabit.

We also believe that because we have moved into what is now called "the digital age" (Carrington & Luke, 1997; Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 2008), complete with its embracing of "multimodal" literacies (Miller, 2008, p. 441), there is an even more urgent need to understand the role of language in creating the realities we live. The ease of access to, and by, an increasingly larger population of consumers and producers of digital texts makes it all the more imperative that they are conscious of what they are consuming and creating. Miller (2008) observes that the children of the new millennium have "grown up *surrounded and shaped* [our emphasis] by practices related to computers, the Internet, and increasingly sophisticated mobile phones that have multiple functions now expanded to include computing, electronic storage, photography, web surfing, instant messaging, [and] word processing" (p. 441). Yet we have always been surrounded with and shaped by the communicative practices dominant in our communities whatever the era, whatever their media for delivery. What kind of shaping is achieved by the bombardment referred to above, and to what extent can individuals counter effects of such daily direct or indirect exposure on their individual consciousness? We leave that for readers to consider.

The Central Concept: Language as a Field of Energy

We define language as a field of energy in the following way: as language creating a "region" in which a force (in this case, words) operates to bring about some influence on one's own behaviors, on the behaviors of others, on emotions, and/or on some course of events.

As we discuss language and its impact on our personal lives, we will also refer to thought, since the relationships between language, thought, and the construction of the realities we live through our mental constructs are for the most part, although by no means exclusively, articulated through language. Obviously, thought can be manifested through physical manipulation or movement, through non-print visual representation, through aural representation, and kinesthetically. However, the focus in this article is on the thought/language/perceived realities nexus.

Our concept, "language as a field of energy," emerged from influences outside of the usual range of academic scholarship in the social sciences. Among these is the work of a relatively new field, termed "energy psychology" (Lipton, 2005, p. 172). Lipton (2005) and McTaggart (1987,

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tests. Subsequent school and district-based innovations such those that re-emerged in the Obama administration's educational initiative ("Race To the Top," 2009) appear to foster initiatives at state and even district (local) levels but when such initiatives are measured by standardized metrics, we are led to question whether the word "innovation" is not a misnomer at best, misleading at worst. This is the not the paper in which we have the room to discuss the implications of unprecedented federal intervention in public education in the US, but we can argue that unless a state or local initiative reflected the national agenda embodied in the Acts that emerged in 2002 (NCLB) and 2009 (RTT), it was (a) going to have to prove it met the standards embodied in these acts and that it could meet those standards through standardized tests that would measure the effectiveness of such embodiment. That leaves little room for going "beyond" the basics—in this case, to a more open-ended investigative approach to language study. Standardized tests focus on multiple-choice, fixed answer questions. While certain aspects of language study can be tested in this way (e.g., a part of speech is determined in large part by how it functions in any given linguistic utterance), such a minimalist approach does not get at much beyond the basics and does not embrace aspects of language use as they play out in our daily lives. [http://hechingerreport.org/report-1980s-driving-todays-education-reform/]

2007) in particular have attempted to define thought as 'energy'[5] in scientific terms. Metaphysicists such as Holmes (1997/1938), as well as psychology-based healers (e.g., Dyer, 2004, 2009), have also used the term, but in those domains the use of the term "energy" remains loose and vague. A cell biologist by training and an academic in that field for a number of years, Lipton (2005) provides us with that concrete definition, having also used the phrase "energy field" (p. 124) in his discussion of the nature of thought in quantum terms.

To our knowledge, however, no one else has used the phrase "language as a field of energy," and we do so with some trepidation because in order to define that concept, we have to accept that thought itself is a "field of energy." Lipton (2005) argues that as the mind is energy, thought too, is energy. One could conclude, therefore, that while not necessarily identical, thought and language are inextricably entwined. This view, of course, challenges one of the major influences on Western thinking, notably Descartes, who according to Lipton (2005), "dismissed the idea that the mind influences" any form that was not considered matter, and that could not be rationally tested" (p. 125). That position was not challenged until quantum physics (e.g., Barad, 2007; Bohm, 1990; Pagels, 1982) changed how we think about matter at the atomic level. In our understanding, matter is what is formed to become energy made manifest. Lipton (2005) and other quantum physicists argue that at the atomic level, matter does not appear to exist "with any certainty," and "exists only as a tendency to exist" (p. 99). McTaggart (1987) cites scientific research that supports the notion that information (of any kind) is energy materializing as information. She concludes that energy itself can be thought of electromagnetically, sub-atomically, as waves, as something physical and tangible. Lipton (2005) argues that language and thought are manifestations of the interactive nature of the universe itself, and suggests that matter is not something fixed but mutable because of its constant interaction with other energy. A simple way to think of "matter" for our purposes is that "matter" (i.e., material substance) is, according to quantum physicists, "made up of invisible energy" (Lipton, 2005, p. 100). Within a quantum physics frame, thought and language are "energy" in the same way that atoms are energy, given that atoms are non-solid, non-material "force fields" (Lipton, 2005, p. 102). We also draw from quantum physics another key principal which we propose is an essential component of the "language (and thought) as a field of energy" concept: namely, that "intercommunication" operates among all "physical parts (matter)" as well as the energy fields (waves) that make up the whole, the universe itself (Lipton, 2005, p. 102).

Thought, then, as does the language which expresses thought, not only has the capacity to act upon other matter (i.e., material substance), but also acts upon non-material substances that are manifested as waves of energy (such as other thoughts, other intentions, other words, others' words, and so forth). If we accept this line of thinking, then it follows that language, the primary

5. We agree with Pinker (2007) and others (Lakoff & Johhnson, 1980; Feldman, 2008) that all language is, essentially, metaphoric regardless of how "literal" we strive to be in seeking to define it "scientifically." Feldman (2008) captures the multi-layeredness of language in his assertion that "real language is embodied, integrated, and multimodal" (p. 9) and that "this integrated, multi-faceted nature of language is hard to express in traditional theories" (p. 9). However, he stops short of Pinker's (2007) rather bald but (we think) acceptable notion that "language is saturated with implicit metaphors like EVENTS ARE OBJECTS and TIME IS SPACE…Metaphor is so widespread in language that it's hard to find expressions for abstract ideas that are *not* metaphorical" (p. 6). This is so because, essentially, how we articulate (through language) what we conceptualize (think), is through categories that are captured in "the meanings of words in our language because they permeate the way we represent reality in our heads" (p. 3). Thus, it is a given in our paper that while attempts may be made to represent a concept (e.g., "energy") in what seems to be a purely definitional, scientifically "objective way," we are nevertheless defeated, as it were, by the inherently metaphoric nature of how we use language to articulate thought and experience.

vehicle through which thought is expressed, *is* a field of energy. We push that line of reasoning further and suggest that what we habitually, constantly think and utter ultimately brings a "wave" of energy created by those thoughts into contact with matter (i.e., a material substance), resulting in materialization.

If we entertain the possibility that this is a reasonable assertion given the line of reasoning employed, what support can be provided for it? We provide an example drawn from an informal analysis of headlines and subheadings in a major city's daily morning newspaper (below), although we point out that the phenomenon is not unique to the particular newspaper we focused on. The pervasive content of those major headings and subheadings consisted of metaphors (e.g., "Arab leaders blast Bush") that explicitly or implicitly related to violence, weaponry, and assault. In very few examples is the assault literal ("Man convicted of assaulting deputy sheriff"). In others, phenomena not generally perceived of as having intentionality appear to have acquired conscious agency (e.g., "House fire kills man") and in this sense, intentionality.

- Audiotape message seeks to split allies from US, CIA says (main news feature)
- Arab leaders blast Bush endorsement of Israeli plan (main news feature)
- Contractors working under fire (main news feature)
- Redwings put it all together in victory (sports section)
- Recruits' strengths: toughness, shooting (sports section)
- Joe delivers big hit, message to youngsters (sports section)
- Voice-mail hell (Accent—Life front page)
- Man convicted of assaulting deputy sheriff (main news section)
- House fire kills man, son-in-law near Cleveland (main news section)

In the course of identifying and analyzing these headlines and sub-headlines, we found ourselves needing to take mental and physical health breaks from the analysis. On average, 65-70% of headlines and sub-headlines are of the kind illustrated above. Over time, we believe that such language is absorbed into our thinking in ways that influence what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) term "experiential gestalts" which become the "natural dimensions for our direct experience" (p.176). We leave readers to consider how, and to what extent, such language has shaped their own thinking as well as their lived experiences over time.

While mindful that other modes of representation have been (and continue to be) available to us for communicative purposes (e.g., body "language" as well as drawing, photography, dance, sculpture, music, and visual media), we are, in this article, primarily interested in *language*—words and their structures—as the vehicle through which we convey *states of mind, intentionality, and receptivity* [our emphasis]. Again, this places language as a phenomenon that functions as one of many possible channels through which thought is expressed and which, in turn, influences further thought. It is both interactional (Dewey, 1991/1910) and transactional (Britton et al., 1975); it is both acted upon and acts upon; and it is both fluid and fixed (e.g., spoken or written, withdrawn vs. reiterated). As we proceed in this essay, we will focus on several key questions that have been identified as relationships between language and thought within our framework. These include: how are we constructed by our thoughts and language; how can we re-examine relationships between language, thought, and the realities we live; and of what relevance is this reconceptualization of language to education?

A Selective Overview of Interdisciplinary Conceptions of the Language-Thought-Perceived Realities Nexus

How have we arrived at our view of language (and thought as expressed in language) as a field of energy? What influences prompted this evolution in our own thinking about language: what it is, how it relates to thinking, and how both relate to the realities we live? To respond to these questions, we next turn to a necessarily selective discussion of the work of metaphysicians, anthropologists, philosophers, and other scholars who we will refer to in the following analysis. We have included some key constructivist and social-constructivist theorists (e.g., Dewey, 1991/1910; Gee, 1998; Vygotsky, 1962) in this discussion because of their basic argument that we are shaped by the beliefs and practices encoded in language as well as by behaviors that are dominant in our social and cultural contexts. Our discussion of scholarship related to the language, thought, and reality triad is necessarily selective. Each of the disciplines representing these phenomena have accumulated a considerable repository of scholarship and research since the mid-19th century, and in particular, since the post-World War II era. Our intention here is to demonstrate intersections across diverse fields of knowledge—whether acknowledged or not—among language, thought, perceived realities, and lived experience. We also acknowledge that we will have omitted others who would be at least equally relevant.

What came to be regarded as linguistic determinism, or linguistic relativity, concepts largely attributable to Sapir (1949) and his former student, Whorf (1956), fell out of favor in the 1960s and 1970s, and yet many socio-cultural theorists (Eckert, 2000; Gee,1998; Halliday, 1978; Luke, 2000) ascribe similar power to language as did these earlier scholars. Nevertheless, their premise that language "constructs" us through social and cultural reinforcement is remarkably similar to the views about language and its "construction" of the realities we live expressed by contemporary psychologists such as Dyer (2004, 2009) and metaphysical healers such as Hay (1984). In both *The Power of Intention* and *Excuses Be Gone*, two of his relatively recent publications, Dyer (2004, 2009) acknowledges the tenacious and often unconscious role that group thinking and language as manifested in the discourses of families, communities, and cultures play in influencing the thinking and language of individuals.

In her landmark text, *You Can Heal Your Life,* Hay (1984) documented many examples of the pervasive influence of culturally and socially derived beliefs that clients experienced as limiting and yet which exercised a vice-like grip on their perceptions about life. Beliefs about what is possible given social and economic constraints that families have experienced over time, for example, can continue to exert what become inhibiting influences on successive generations even if the social and economic constraints are no longer significant or have been removed, such as occurred after the Great Depression of the 1930s. Examples of how one generation's belief patterns become manifested and repeated in the language of subsequent generations are plentiful, but we share a few of Hay's (1984) examples here for illustrative purposes:

- Related to money: *"*Money doesn't grow on trees; money goes out faster than it comes in" (p.117); "A penny saved is a penny earned; money only comes from hard work" (p.118).
- Related to age: "It's too late to do that (e.g., dance) now" (p.6); "You can't teach an old dog new tricks" (p. 6).
- Related to worth*:* "I'm not good enough" (p.6); "I/you never do anything right" (p. 6).

We see in the above examples, language that expresses thoughts of lack, the inevitability of the effects of chronological aging and, perceptions of self that often (although not always) stem from having heard similar statements through childhood. These are instances of language patterns that many of Hay's (1984) and Dyer's (2004, 2009) clients expressed. Although the examples are related to counseling, they are, in essence, also examples of what Vygotsky (1962) describes when he explains how we are shaped by our contexts, in turn resulting in a lifetime of shaping. According to Vygotsky (1962), "during early childhood, a fusion of language and thinking occurs (i.e., verbal thinking) which…shapes the rest of our mental development for the rest of our lives" (p. 120). Granted, Vygotsky focuses on the intertwined development of language and cognition in early childhood and Dyer (2004, 2009) and Hay (1984) focus on the interplay between language and thinking in shaping the kinds of lives we lead. However, we think it worth considering whether the essential relationships these writers identify—that is, those among language, thought, and perceived realities as they are lived—are all that different despite their having been focused on different outcomes, and having been conceived of through seemingly disparate conceptual frames of reference.

Skeptics among us (and there are many) do not believe that changing one's thinking, and that changing the language through which one expresses what one is thinking, will have such seemingly astonishing effects. Those same skeptics, however, may be intrigued by the well-controlled experiments that have tested the effects of intentions upon living things (such as those conducted by the *Mind Science Foundation* in San Antonio, Texas), and which provide solid evidence of mental influence on a wide variety of living systems from yeast to gerbils[6] (McTaggart, 2007). If we accept that quantum theory has explanatory power for a wide range of otherwise seemingly inexplicable phenomena, McTaggart's (2007) example illustrates one of its basic tenets: that is, that non-materialized energy appears to affect other kinds of energy. Perhaps a more accessible example of thought (non-material energy) affecting the physical body (matter or materialized energy) is provided in Lipton's (2005) discussion of how yogis, and anyone trained in biofeedback techniques, can "learn to consciously regulate "innate" functions such as "heart rate, blood pressure, blood flow/bleeding patterns, and body temperature" through intention (p. 161).

As we indicated earlier in this essay, the notion that language constructs us as a social and cultural phenomenon is not new, but rethinking language as a field of energy is a new way of thinking about its shaping power. Its power, although not identified under the label "language as a field of energy," has already manifested, for example, in the reciprocal relationship between the gradually pervasive spread of nonsexist language in English (Howard et al., 1986; Kite et al., 2001)

6. McTaggart's work with what are called The Intention Experiments (2007) has been well-received in mind-thought healing communities. While the experiments reported on her 2014 blog post (http://www.lynnemctaggart.com/blog/269-results-of-the-first-healing-intention-experiment) were problematic given the very small sample size and prior exposure of one participant to the 'treatment' method (focused thoughts of healing sent to him by thought-healers described as "intenders") McTaggart is careful to not make wild claims in support of her arguments that thought influences states of being and that those states of being can be captured through brain imaging in both *The Intention Experiments* (2007) and *The Field* (2002). Granted, in scientific terms, rationalism is more appealing than belief. However, dismissing these kinds of experiments (including those on gerbils and yeast) as chicanery is also pre-emptive. Placebo effect cannot, for example, happen unless there is a strong belief by the person involved in such a test condition that s/he has received 'treatment' and that that "treatment" is working although no such "treatment" has actually been administered. If we go to great lengths to control experiments for just such an effect, is it such a leap of faith to believe that matter affects matter through the transmission of what we admit we are loosely naming "energy?" There is much about the assumed "invisible world" that we do not, as yet, understand but which should not be dismissed on the grounds that we don't understand it or that it's outside our individual experience.

and the changed status of women.[7] Reconceptualizing language as a field of energy is, we believe, a new articulation of the power of language. Implicit acknowledgement of that characteristic is also evident in Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) seminal work on metaphor, as well as in the earlier work of anthropologists such as Sapir (1961) and Whorf (1956), that of mystics and healers such as Hay (1984) and Dyer (2004), physicians and psychologists such as Martin (1997), neurolinguists such as Bandler and Grinder (1975), molecular biologists (Lipton, 2005), social constructivist theorists and scholars (e.g., Dewey [1991/1910]; Vygotsky (1961, 1978), and, as cited previously in the work of quantum physicists such as Barad (1993, 2007) and Bohm (1990), among others. Albeit from different disciplinary perspectives, each of these thinkers, healers, and scholars seem to accept a central underlying assumption about the language/thought/perceived realities nexus: namely, that one not only influences the other, but also that how we think (individually and/or collectively), and how we articulate what we think, creates the realities we live.

The field of alternative consciousness has long articulated the damaging effects of negative thinking and negatively laden language to reflect that thinking. Healers of various persuasions have focused on positive language and positive thinking, all leading to similar conclusions about the power of language: namely, that it affects not only consciousness about possibility (or lack of it), but also, over time, our physical and emotional bodies in ways that reflect habitual thinking and how thought is habitually articulated. Readers may be familiar with Peale's (1959) bestseller, *The Amazing Results of Positive Thinking*, and Dyer's (2004) *The Power of Intention*. Less familiar, but equally compelling, are Levine's (1991) *Your Body Believes Every Word You Say: The Language of the Body/Mind Connection*, Martin's (1997) *The Healing Mind*, Backhus's (1996) *The Healing Power of the Healthy Mind*, and more recently, Dyer's (2009) *Excuses Be Gone!*. The authors of these books are not backyard peddlers of faith healing. They are medical practitioners, biologists, psychiatrists, psychologists—in short, professionals who have undergone rigorous training in a variety of fields, and who, through extensive experience as practitioners in their fields, have carried out systematic observations of human behavior in a variety of settings.

Humans have long used language to create our own version of "magic" such as chants, spells, verbal rituals, and mantras. Ritualization, as expressed through language used to invoke power or assistance from various forms of power, is present in every culture. Some may dismiss such ritualizations as superstition. Yet *belief* in a ritual can be so powerful that outcomes can be invoked, as Mercer (2000) suggests is evident in the case of marriage vows and divorce decrees. The pronouncement of certain words in a certain context is enough to declare an act law. What makes it "real" is the *invocation of the words* used (e.g., the "letter of the law"). Such use of language is no different from that proposed in the so-called "self-help" literature that packs the shelves of general bookstores—in this case, language, through articulation, is believed by its proponents to evoke transformation (negative as well as positive). Holmes (1997/1938), as have others, cautions us to eliminate any thought (and its articulation) that we do not wish to realize (i.e., bring into physical

7. Among the resolutions of the Committee on Women in Psychology of the American Psychological Organization are included explicit directives regarding the use of nonsexist language with reference to women. However, the resolutions also address other areas of gender discrimination that had historically impeded equity in the profession including explicit language relating to the "employment, education, child and health care facilities, psychological theories and practice, conventions, and equity in decision-making, and the general status of women" (p.1). These resolutions were first formulated in 1970 following increasing activism by women psychologists during the 1960s. The current document emerged for the 30th anniversary of the formation of the Association for Women Psychologists (AWP) and also chronicles actions taken by the American Association of Psychologists (APA) Council representatives in response to the 52 resolutions over the subsequent 30 years following their initial appearance in 1970. [https://www.apa.org/pi/women/resources/reports/52-resolutions.pdf]

being). Consider, for example, what reinforcement for negative life styles, or negative impact on our physical, emotional and mental bodies, the following commonly used utterances may have:

- It's a pain in the neck!
- I've got a broken heart.
- I'm a nervous wreck.
- I'm a glutton for punishment.
- I'm sick and tired of…

According to Levine (1991),

> the power of a name (or naming) lies in its ability to evoke an image. "Utter a name and a set of feelings, thoughts, and images typically appear. Mention the name of a disease or condition like cancer or acne, and another set of images appear, accompanied by strong feelings and physical reactions, usually negative. (p. 27)

Continuing, she argues that "as we name a thing, we are also in a sense, causing, creating" (or even prolonging) it (p. 28). Levine proposes a relationship between what she terms a "seed-thought" (i.e., a catalyst for a physical or emotional response) and core beliefs, which again, are manifested through the words we use. "Core beliefs," states Levine, are those "basic assumptions and ideas upon which our everyday thoughts and actions are based" (p. 50). We are not arguing that we should avoid expressing what we fear for fear of instantiating it. Nor should we avoid sharing painful experiences with others because we want to avoid the possibility of extending them. The point of bringing forth Levine's examples is to explore the extent to which limiting, fear-based beliefs manifest themselves again and again through our verbalized thinking and speech, and then, to raise the question as to what underlying beliefs may be at work in ways that undermine our capacity to believe in alternatives. We turn now to a brief analysis of the extent to which philosophers and theorists whose work has significantly impacted the field of education reflects that of the metaphysical healers and psychologists referred to in the foregoing paragraphs.

Although Dewey (1991/1910) viewed language as distinct from thought, and as an essential tool for the delivery of thought, an "intentional sign" (p. 172), he does not appear to have considered language as having a significant role in the construction(s) of reality. We speculate that this omission reflects Dewey's view of language and thought as *inextricably linked phenomena* [our emphasis], and that his argument concerning the need for reflective thinking is related to the role that language plays in the language/thought/perceived realities nexus. Dewey (1964) acceded that language may be regarded as the shaper of inchoate thought into something logical and intelligible. We see intersections between Dewey (1964) and Vygotsky (1962) in their contention that language shapes thinking. Vygotsky (1962), for example, argued that "not only do words play a central part…in the development of thought, but [also] in the historical development of consciousness as a whole" (p. 153). Furthermore, "a word," asserts Vygotsky (1962), "is a microcosm of human consciousness" (p. 153). Both Dewey and Vygotsky believed that "signs do give humans the power to regulate and change natural forms of behavior and cognition" (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 153).

From this perspective, language is conceived of as a medium that regulates human thinking (and hence, behavior), and this "regulation" is understood to be socially and culturally constructed. This commences at birth, and over time we ingest, as it were, the messages conveyed through this

medium so that they modify our perceptions of experience, and hence, what we define as "reality." By the time we are conscious of what we generally term "reality," we perceive it as it has been constructed and reconstructed for us. It is therefore capable of being deconstructed and freshly reconstructed, much as thinkers such as Holmes (1997/1938), Dyer (2004), Myss (1997) and others in spiritual, metaphysical and self-help fields have argued. It is important to note, however, that this understanding of the relationship between thought and language is not solely attributable to New Age spiritualists, but to highly respected icons of social constructivist literacy research. Pinker (2007) suggests that we have some power over language (if we so choose to exert it) insofar as "the human mind comes equipped with an ability to penetrate the cladding of sensory experience and discern the abstract construction underneath…often enough and insightfully enough to shape the human condition" (p. 276). He attributes this ability to our "powers of analogy," which, he argues, "allow us to apply ancient neural structures to newfound subject matter, to discover hidden laws and systems in nature, and…[to] amplify the expressive power of language itself" (p. 276).

Echoing previous arguments that identity is discursively as well as socially constructed, Gee (1998) suggests in a discussion about code-switching that a switch in style "may amount to a change in social identity" (p. 297), both in terms of how individuals perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others. Likewise, he argues that narrative style is "associated with one's cultural identity and presentation of self," and he suggests that by teaching children to "use, understand, and appreciate alternative modes of making sense beyond the ones that they acquire" we can empower students who don't understand or value "their own modes of expression" (p. 306). Mercer (1995) argues that we "use language for thinking together, for collectively making sense of experience and for solving problems" (p. 1). The latter claim may seem innocuous enough, but its application to the lives we lead, to the issues that are pervasive in the world today, and to the ways in which we describe collective realities, enables us to understand how useful, if not critical, it is to bring to awareness the potential impact that habitual uses of language (both individually and collectively) have over time. We are at a point in our history as a species where we have the means to understand how language is not only used to *describe* a particular reality, but also how it shapes us in the process of that construction so that we ultimately believe that what we perceive as reality is, in fact, "reality."

Metaphor and the Creation of the Realities We Live

We have referred to the role of metaphor in constructing our perceptions of experience and, ultimately, of reality, and proceed now to a more detailed discussion of this very significant rhetorical and semantic phenomenon: namely, the phenomenon of metaphor in our daily lives. Bridging the thinking of social constructivism and the world of metaphysics is Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) analysis of the metaphoric power of language. Specifically, they argue that metaphors, in addition to encoding beliefs that already exist and which shape our thinking in particular ways (p. 67), also shape the lives we live. In this sense, they appear to function as guides for future actions (causation). This, in turn, reinforces the power of metaphors to make experience concrete and coherent. In this sense, then, metaphors become self-fulfilling prophecies (p. 156).

In their now classic text, *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explore and analyze how metaphors function as constructs of "concepts we live by" (p. 3). Through metaphor, they argue, we highlight and hide thought, orient ourselves and others, create a cohesive society, provide a mechanism for "the coherent structure of experience," "cement current meaning," and create new meaning (p. 174). Metaphor, according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), is "pervasive"

in daily life, not only in language, but in "thought and action and our ordinary conceptual system in terms of which we both think and act" (p. 3). That is, our "ordinary conceptual system" is "fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (p. 3). Similarly, Bartel (1983) describes the role of metaphor in daily life as a manifestation of the "interrelatedness of all things" (p. 83), arguing that since everything is related in some way to everything else, "anything can be compared to anything else" (p. 83).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Bartel (1983), and Feldman (2006) argue that the significance of metaphor, symbol, and language in our lives comes from their power to *call into being* [our wording and emphasis] what we imagine. Each is in agreement that language is not some inert object. Rather, they regard language as what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe as a "dynamic force," one that operates to create a reciprocal relationship between language and life" (p. 75). The significance of this proposition is evident in our earlier discussion of Myss's (1997, p. 75) concern that people define themselves according to their chronic physical conditions. In her experience, their illnesses develop metaphoric force in the course of naming oneself according to that illness. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) would likely argue that such self-definitions function as metaphors of identity (p. 193), and also reflect Johnson's (1987) concern that they become woven into a matrix that "establishes a range of possible patterns of understanding and reasoning" for individuals who so describe themselves (p. 137). Similarly, we have noted that Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) example of the "war metaphor" utilized by former President Carter's administration when faced with an energy crisis is chillingly familiar and often applied not only to the current *war against terror,* but also to the many other occasions in life when we encounter adversity—we *fight* cancer, *battle* illness, *struggle with* an issue, *combat* poverty, *grapple* with environmental pollution, and *campaign against* ignorance. In short, the "war" metaphor is pervasive in dominant culture and in our times.

Geary (2011) notes that one metaphor frequently, if not inevitably, entails another, and provides examples of spin-offs that emerge from the "war" metaphor in non-war contexts: for example, workplace environments. A person might describe herself as "defending her staff," having to "hold the line" on bullying behavior, or feeling "shell-shocked" (p. 218). When "work" is conceptualized using the language of "war," those who work in such an environment become "combatants," suffer "collateral damage," and become "victims" or "victors." The "war" metaphor does not entertain the possibility of compromise, nor does it allow for collaboration to find a mutually satisfactory resolution to a problem. We cannot obviously control all of the possible effects of thought and language, whether on oneself or on others. Nevertheless, a lack of awareness of the effects of our habitual use of "war" language as reported in Grove and Panzer's (1989) work utilizing metaphoric reframing for the purposes of healing traumatic memories, and Lawley and Tompkins' (2000) work with symbolic modeling for coaching and therapeutic purposes, suggests that a rich and grounded knowledge base for promoting awareness of the impact of habitual uses of language that leave patterns of negative consequences in their trail would be productive. If we agree with Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) argument that "no metaphor can ever be comprehended or even adequately represented independently of its experiential basis" (p. 19), then it is indeed time to take the study of metaphor out of the poetry lesson where it has almost exclusively resided in schools and bring it into the language-as-energy-focused classroom.

Language as a Field of Energy and Language Pedagogy

In the past decade, major medical centers situated in research universities such as The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, The Yale Medical School, Harvard Medical School, and a plethora of others throughout the U.S. have embraced a role for the Humanities, requiring that medical students choose electives that include creative writing, poetry, and narrative in an effort to reconnect hearts and heads in the training of future physicians. Such centers are also adding to significant research on the role of expressive writing, various kinds of narrative writing, and poetry and their role in the healing process (Lumley & Provenzano, 2003; Niles et al., 2013) as well as in stress and anxiety reduction. The M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston includes a class entitled *Journaling: The Healing Power of Story*. The first author of this paper serves as an advising editor for a literary magazine produced by the medical students in such a university medical center program. It would appear that the field of medicine has come to accept the relationship between what we think, how we express thought, and how we experience what we term "reality." Yet expressive/creative writing has yet to find a legitimate place in schools and in teacher education programs, other than being offered as electives for advanced placement students, if at all.

We suggest that there is no separation between language and the user, and that such a distinction is not only artificial and often unproductive, but also potentially harmful. It is harmful because when we focus primarily on the *structures of language* [our emphasis], as is typically the case in traditional grammar instruction, we focus on these as though the latter are disembodied from their users, regardless of whether they generate language or are on the receiving end of someone else's linguistic utterances. In traditional grammar instruction, the rules of use focus on language primarily within the context of standard, formal written language, and emphasize language as an artifact. As is increasingly acknowledged, classrooms both in the United States and other countries are comprised of increasingly diverse student populations. Grounding language study in students' home dialects and/or first languages, as one of our reviewers suggested, can provide a platform for a language-as-a-field-of-energy focused pedagogy. We are not suggesting abandoning a standard variant, but if that variant is initially at odds with the dominant variants and the home language of many of our students, then exploring the role and power of language in ways we have argued for in this paper would embrace not only the standard variant but those variants which have constructed our students and which they bring with them to school. How, then, can we invite students in our classrooms to become aware of these powers inherent in the language they use, in the language others use, and, in becoming aware of such power, to engage in it as Rose (1989) asks, "in some fuller way" (p. 163)?

In addressing this question, we provide a range of possible directions through four broad avenues. First, language pedagogy, when approached from a language-as-a-field-of-energy perspective, would entail a radical shift from the primary traditional focus on form and structure in the study of language in educational settings to a focus on the *creative power of language* [our emphasis] as it is manifested in its bringing into being that which is conceptualized. Second, such a view of language would include a focus on its metaphoric qualities, but not in the restricted, limited way in which metaphor has been dealt with in the context of teaching poetry: namely, the labeling of metaphor as a figure of speech, and asking students to "find" metaphors in selected poems. Instead, a language-as-a-field-of-energy focus would embrace the multi-layered nature of metaphor, its inherent slant in making the abstract concrete, and its connecting language to the experiencing of related phenomena. We can certainly draw on how this is manifested in poetry since poets intuitively experience language as energy in their metaphoric rendering of the world

and our experience of it. It is a power that lifts the reader, for example, to a new perception of a thing (e.g., a bale of hay) that, in its literal sense may appear mundane, but which, when highlighted through metaphoric language, assumes new metaphorical potential.

Third, actualizing language-as-a-field-of-energy through embracing metaphor as a primary focus in language study also embraces the agentive quality of language (Barad, 2007), a quality that has always been intuitively known by poets, shamans, and healers of all beliefs. Both Hay (2004) and Cayce (2009), for example, urge that in healing, we name not the illness, but the perfect health of the individual undergoing healing. We can choose to teach language in ways that develop students' awareness of how it can perpetuate conflict, judgment, misunderstanding, and intolerance by modeling and having students produce language that reflects harmony, neutrality, empathy, and tolerance. For example, group work might entail the creation of scripts that reflect both conflict-generating language and tolerance-generating language. In a language-as-energy-focused pedagogy, language is a visible medium for transforming unproductive self-and-other-debilitating thinking and behavior. Fourth, a language-as-a field-of-energy pedagogy would also automatically generate a meta-linguistic orientation toward language—we would be constantly evaluating what we say and what we write from the perspective not only of how it is appropriate for our purposes and audiences, but also with sensitivity to what we say and how we say it in terms of its energy quotient. We would already have in place the necessary linguistic meta-awareness to foster reflection about how the language we use has "outcomes" in any interaction.

Enacting a Language-as-a-field-of-Energy Pedagogy

Through a pedagogy that considers all language as a manifestation of intention, as a means by which we create, as well as destroy, and as embedded in individuals as well as in the social and cultural collective, we would enact the study and uses of language in the following ways: as a positive and/or negative force in our lives; the interrelatedness of language and our experiences; and the possibility that we can challenge how collective uses of language (e.g., through media, institutions, collective practices) reinforce beliefs and values that keep us firmly where we have been. We would also embrace the relationship between language and states of being (e.g., through mantras, through poetry, through making linguistic choices in our interpersonal relationships, and so on). In the process of unpacking beliefs, values, and attitudes embedded in the language they use, students can also discover how the language they use, and the language(s) of their social and cultural contexts, serves as both positive and negative forces in their lives. Similarly, through experimenting with alternative utterances, students can be provided with concrete opportunities to develop an understanding that language reflects unexamined beliefs, values, and attitudes, and that the latter can be challenged by using language that reflects different beliefs, values, and attitudes. To a limited extent, such practices are already in use, the most obvious and longstanding one in English written language being to use nonsexist language where possible.

To enact language-as-a-field-of-energy at the practical level, we would encourage language users to listen not only to others, but also to themselves, to the language uttered as well as to the language that runs ticker-tape like in our thinking throughout every waking moment. Doing so would promote the development of a double-consciousness that is essential if we are to reconstruct not only our habitual thinking and our habitual expressions of thought, but also to influence their habitual outcomes through having students develop replacement inner scripts. Studies of athletes and others who have achieved remarkable milestones, and/or overcome enormous obstacles in order to materialize dreams (McTaggart, 2007), report the common finding that the strength of

intentions are the common factor in such accomplishments. The study of inner scripts, of internal directives and internal linguistic monologues, could, therefore, be complemented with the creation of alternative scripts with the goal of having these practiced consciously until they become internalized, an approach that neurolinguistics introduced in the 1970s when neurolinguistic programming (NLP) became prominent through Bandler and Grinder's (1975) work. We'd like to note here that a simplistic adoption of the templated and rigid format of the NLP approach is not what we propose. Rather, the basic principle of language users creating alternative inner scripts is applicable. We are not promoting a simplistic positive-thinking-positive language study approach—that is, a templated, formulaic system. Granted, poets may not become poets given such a system, wild language, as one of our reviewers reminded us, being core to poetic expression. What we are urging is an instructional focus on student's metalinguistic development which would ultimately foster a kind of double-consciousness that enables the production of language while simultaneously being aware of what is being produced and its potential significance.

What we propose then, in adopting a language-as-a-field-of-energy approach to the study of language, is a focus on the relationship between language, thought, and the perceived reality(ies) we live through encouraging students to unpack the language they use in their daily lives. Such a curriculum would begin with the language of the student. The study of individual students' language would focus on students' perceptions of self, their social and cultural contexts, their perceived experiences, their perceptions of their limitations as well as possibilities, and a study of how these perceptions and beliefs are encoded in their language. Such work would:

- embrace a study of language that examines how language is a positive and/or negative force in our lives;
- involve the study of how language has been used to manipulate through various media, and the implications of language utilized in advertising and marketing;
- embrace the study of language that separates the "ordinary" person from the "expert" (pervasive in contemporary culture);
- entail the study of how both individual language use as well as collective language use within both the culture and language of instruction as well as the cultures and languages known to students in our classrooms (where possible) reinforces beliefs and values that keep us where we have been and question the merit of such power;
- involve the study of "language as a form of energy" through its use in mantras, and its use in the lives of people who have overcome significant obstacles, as well as those who have achieved remarkable manifestations of their dreams, goals, and ambitions; and
- promote, through a focus on understanding the relationship between language, the self and the life that the self experiences, the development of an understanding of how language is a powerful force in the creation of the lives we lead.

The radical nature of the language-as-a-field-of-energy concept in educational settings lies in its orientation to language. Pedagogically, such an approach can be pursued through reframing language study to emphasize how language affects us as individuals as well as collectively. For example, we might have students document typical words and phrases they, their families, their local social and ethnic communities, and the media use in order to analyze these usages and what they represent energetically. We might have them focus on the connotations of these familiarly used words and phrases and interpret these in terms of attitudes and beliefs reflected in them. Students might also experiment by replacing them with alternatives, including any habitual fatalistic and

self-limiting phrases that they and their families and communities use. Students could also document the language used by institutions, media outlets, and communities at large, and analyze what messages are being implicitly as well as explicitly conveyed. Literary theory could, in this way, also be employed in studying the language of common experience and use. Each critical perspective calls forth a different and selective view of the text. Students can move from an analysis that assumes objectivity in the text to an analysis that assumes subjectivity in literary texts. The more fine-grained the analysis, the more attention will be paid to specific words and their semantic weighting within various contexts.

Analyses of these kinds raise questions about authorial intention, the nature of the production of information, and, from our experience, opens students to thinking about the possibility that little is what it appears to be. That realization, in turn, can lead students to understand that we, too, *construct* [our emphasis] meaning as well as consume it, and in that sense, experience language as an embedded phenomenon, one that cannot be separated from how and why it is used (Hymes, 1972). The foregoing discussion offers avenues for a pedagogy of language-as-a-field-of-energy that accepts a view of language as a shaping force which can be explored in terms of its impact on individual consciousness. Such a pedagogy then becomes the intersection where social science, neuroscience, quantum physics, and linguistics meet metaphysics. Sensitizing students to language from this perspective provides them with personal as well as communal reasons for the study of language, and therefore, reasons which generate authentic goals for such study.

Language-as-a-field-of-energy Pedagogy and Teacher Professional Development

What are the implications of a language-as-a-field-of-energy pedagogy for the education of teachers, whether pre-licensure or post-licensure? To date, the training of teachers with respect to mother-tongue English language education has been one of the most neglected areas of teacher education pedagogy for a variety of reasons, although space constraints preclude our delineating that history in the present paper. However, some discussion of the issue is warranted. Based on the extensive knowledge both of us have of English teacher preparation programs in the US, we can state that the primary focus of that education is anything but uniform; more often than not, English teacher preparation is skewed toward literature instruction, and it is broadly focused on informational writing instruction. Teachers' knowledge about theoretical and applied linguistics appears to be random and if they experience it at all, is embedded in other topics in general English Language Arts methods courses for secondary teachers. In post-graduate professional development courses with K-12 reading and language arts teachers we have similarly found that there is anything but consistency in teachers' knowledge of pragmatics, of semantic structures as reflected in use, of grammar as a rhetorical system, and of the semantic roles of what Pennebaker et al. (2003) term "particles" (articles, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and auxiliary verbs). Influenced and pressured by state and national mandates, teachers' language-focused feedback on student writing is often skewed toward identifying grammatical, punctuation and spelling errors. The rhetorical roles of grammatical structures are, for the most part, rarely addressed in feedback or in writing instruction.

We did not, in this essay, focus on grammatical instruction as a key area for consideration in the development of our conceptualizing of language-as-a-field-of-energy-pedagogy, although the role of grammar from a rhetorical perspective could be considered one of the proverbial elephants in the room in our articulating the concept. It is certainly an area that we continue to explore

as we build our case for a language-as-field-of-energy pedagogy given its important role in metalinguistic development. That said, as educators, we are concerned that the study of grammar, as it has traditionally been taught, marks the limits of language instruction in school settings. The question, for us, is not whether educators should teach conventional grammar or invite students to study and explore language-as-a-field-of energy. Rather, we argue that attention should be paid to both domains of language study, something that has heretofore not been the case.

We cannot teach students to become proficient, metalinguistically aware language users if their teachers have a limited understanding of how language works at the grammatical and rhetorical level since we utilize the grammar of our language(s) for rhetorical purposes. That said, since language is the primary means by which we communicate our intentions, our thoughts, our attitudes and our values, teachers will also benefit from experiencing language-as-a-field-of-energy in their own lives, in order to reconceptualize what they mean by "language" and "language teaching." Such a graduate level course has been developed by the first author. Feedback from participants has been enthusiastic and indicates a commitment to pursuing their continued self-study of language use in ways proposed throughout this paper. Teachers we have worked with have often expressed frustration that their own limited knowledge about linguistics, about traditional grammar, and certainly about the relationships between grammar and rhetorical purposes is inadequate at best, and woefully hindering in practice. We realize that teacher education programs juggle many competing requirements with respect to licensure. At the same time, we call for a deep and thoughtful overhaul of what is (and is not) required with respect to a solid foundation in language study, both for entry into licensure programs as well as for professional development programs.

Concluding Thoughts

We applaud the emergence of language teaching texts that address relationships between language and power (e.g., Harmon & Wilson, 2006), language as a tool for stylistic variation (e.g., Noden, 1999) and texts that stress the relationship between language and contexts of use (e.g., Weaver, 1998, 2008). The propositions about how we make meaning through written language as expressed in these books are sound and well-grounded in theory and in empirical research. Harmon and Wilson (2006) note in their introductory chapter the now widely accepted argument in scholarship of critical literacy that:

> It is a commonplace to discuss the obvious influences of thought and culture on language—how what we say and how we say it are largely a result of our cultural influences and experiences—but it is equally important to consider the reciprocity involved in language and culture—how language influences thought, reinforces it, and shapes it…linguistic patterns (according to linguists) have the potential to constrain one's thinking and shape it in culturally significant ways. (pp. 27-28)

Even so, language pedagogy has continued to primarily focus on how the language we produce is received by others in terms of its appropriateness, and its adherence to conventions of use—not on how it affects ourselves, and the relationship between the language we habitually use and the kinds of lives we lead. Unless our automatic ability to produce our habitual streams of language has been compromised in a significant way, we take such ability for granted, as neuroanatomist Jill Taylor (2009) discovered when she lost access to her left-brain (which houses the language center) following a massive brain stroke. Taylor recounts that through her attempts to regain access to her

left brain, she discovered that her scientific orientation had excluded right-brain thinking—that is, thinking which is holistic, related to feeling, and related to qualities of language normally dealt with primarily in the context of poetic uses of language. Her eight-year long journey to recovery led, among other things, to her discovering that when she fell into negative states of being, using language that affirmed the positive enabled her to shift her emotional state correspondingly. Moving from despair, fear, defeatism, and helplessness to hope, strength, and belief in her ability to regain her left-brain faculties also led Taylor to discover that we are indeed in charge of how we perceive external as well as internal states and conditions. Furthermore, she found that we can not only transform how we feel about these states and conditions, but also transform those that we perceive as defeating, limiting, and overwhelming. Critical to her recovery was the forced acquisition of new vocabulary because she realized that the words previously possessed in her linguistic repertoire, and which she could again retrieve, were now perceived by her to have negative effects on her ability to heal as they inhibited her ability to take charge of her healing process. In essence, Taylor had to become aware of the nature of her habitual linguistic palette in order to choose to change it—to become a new person, an integrated person, and a person who embraced choice as central to her journey toward reclaiming a mind that had been severely compromised by the stroke. According to Taylor (2009), central to her recovery was her understanding that how we think, and the words we use to think with, determines how we live and what we live.

We believe that embracing the concept, "language-as-a-field-of-energy*,"* is now more urgent than ever as contemporary media and technology, which are much more immediately accessible than print media has ever been, have become the primary forms of communication for many who have access to them. These media make language visible and readily amenable to examination. These media also enable people to easily transcend regional and national borders. How we think is, therefore, also more visible through these media. In essence, contemporary forms of technology enable mass communication in ways that have both positive and negative implications. Fear, intolerance, and other forms of negativity can literally spread wildfire-like through these media. Conversely, so could positive attitudes toward change, the embracing of solutions to enduring problems, and the acceptance of unfamiliar beliefs and behaviors. We suggest that it is time to embrace a concept that has significant implications for all of us, collectively as well as individually.

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