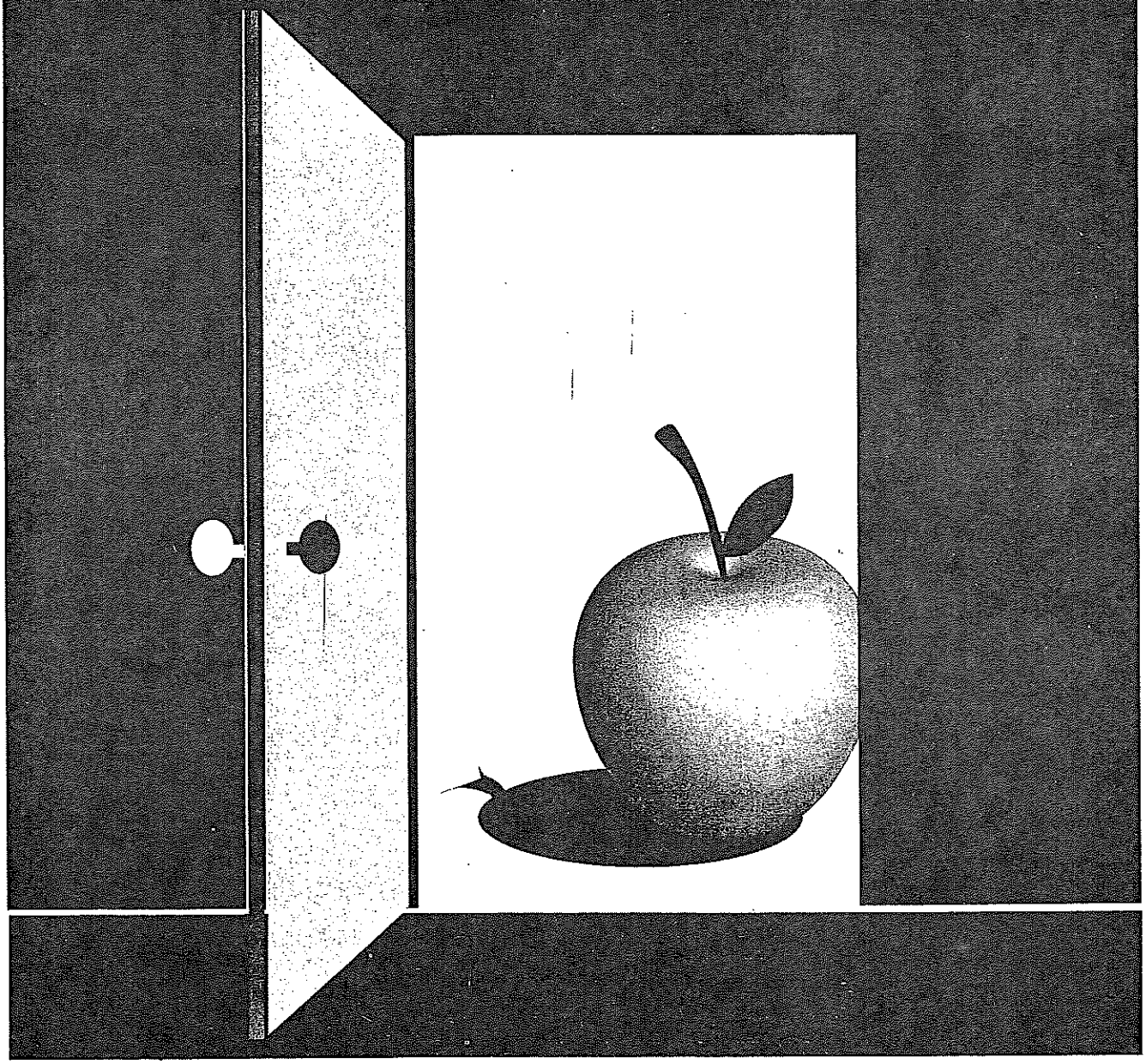
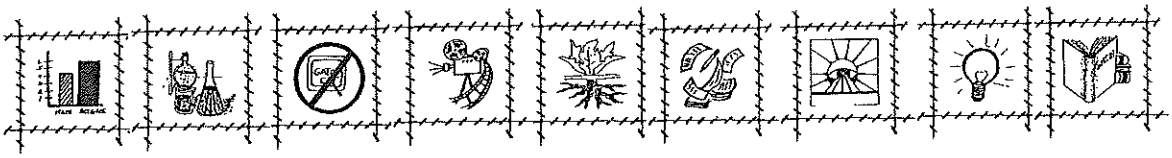
DISCOVERING OUR EXPERIENCES:

Studies in Bilingual/ESL Education

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

SPRING 1995



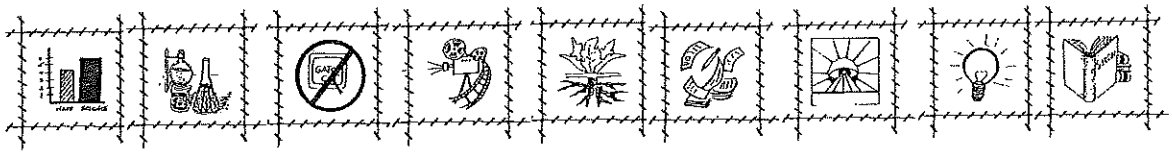


Discovering Our Experiences: Studies in Bilingual/ESL Education

Volume 2

Spring 1995

"Reflective Practice for Teacher Change"



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Discovering Our Experiences: Studies in Bilingual/ESL Education
Spring 1995

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We reserve the right to protect the identity of individuals whose narratives we present herein. We leave the disclosure of identity to the discretion of the interviewees.

We wish to express our appreciation to the fine teachers interviewed and the school districts of Fort Worth and Dallas for their valuable contributions to this project.

We also express our thanks to the very talented artist, Déborah Vásquez, who created the beautiful inside art featured in this and the previous volume, as well as the Media Services staff for their support.

Quotations taken from Hall, C. A. & R. G. Kretsinger. (1935). *The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt*. New York: Bonanza Books.

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Lockie Kirksey is grant coordinator and editor of various publications, including a quarterly newsletter, the *Mentor Teacher Network*, in the Department of Reading and Bilingual Education at TWU. She is also co-editor of *Bilingual Basics*, newsletter for the bilingual education interest section of TESOL, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.

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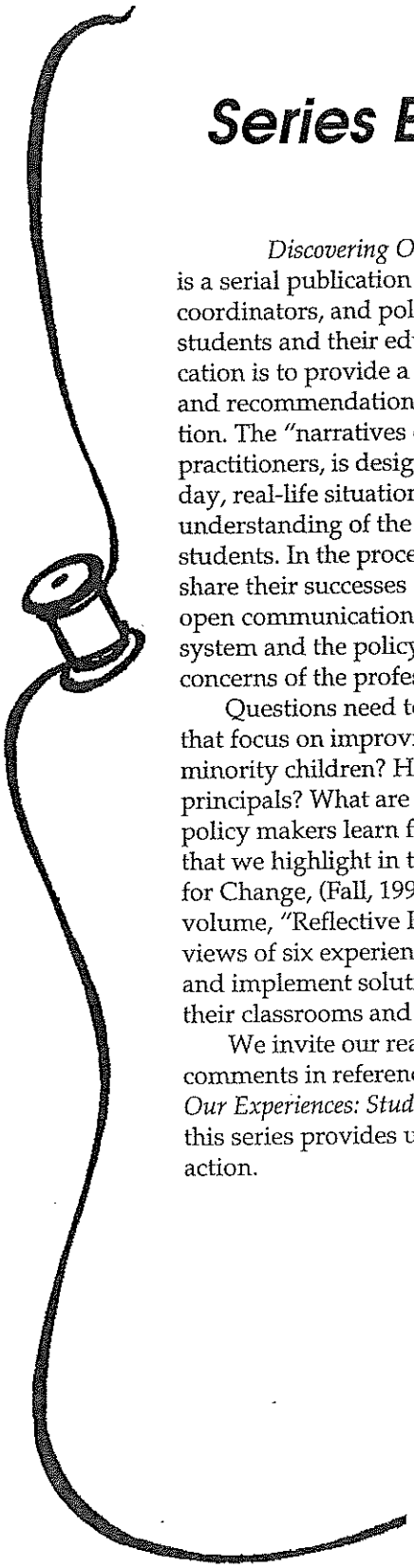
The second volume of Discovering Our Experiences is dedicated to the practitioners who, in their many diverse roles and relationships, become a warm, comforting quilt as they unite to provide learner-centered instruction for language diverse children.



Series Editor's Preface

Discovering Our Experiences: Studies in Bilingual/ESL Education is a serial publication for teachers, principals, program directors, coordinators, and policy makers who work with language minority students and their educational programs. The purpose of the publication is to provide a forum for presenting innovations, concerns, and recommendations related to the schooling of this unique population. The "narratives of experience" format, using interviews of practitioners, is designed to provide the reader access to their day-to-day, real-life situations and, thus, hopefully, contribute to a better understanding of the educational process for language minority students. In the process of providing a platform for practitioners to share their successes and struggles with each other, we also hope to open communication between the stakeholders in our educational system and the policy makers who at times seem unaware of the concerns of the professionals in the field.

Questions need to be asked: What are the successful practices that focus on improving the educational process for the language minority children? How are these implemented by teachers and principals? What are the concerns of the practitioners and what can policy makers learn from them? These are only a few basic questions that we highlight in these issues. In our premiere issue, "Leadership for Change, (Fall, 1993)" we focused on leadership. The second volume, "Reflective Practice for Teacher Change," contains interviews of six experienced teacher researchers who describe, analyze, and implement solutions to unique needs and problems they face in their classrooms and schools.

We invite our readers to contribute ideas, personal accounts, or comments in reference to this and subsequent volumes of *Discovering Our Experiences: Studies in Bilingual/ESL Education*, and we hope that this series provides useful and interesting food for thought and action.

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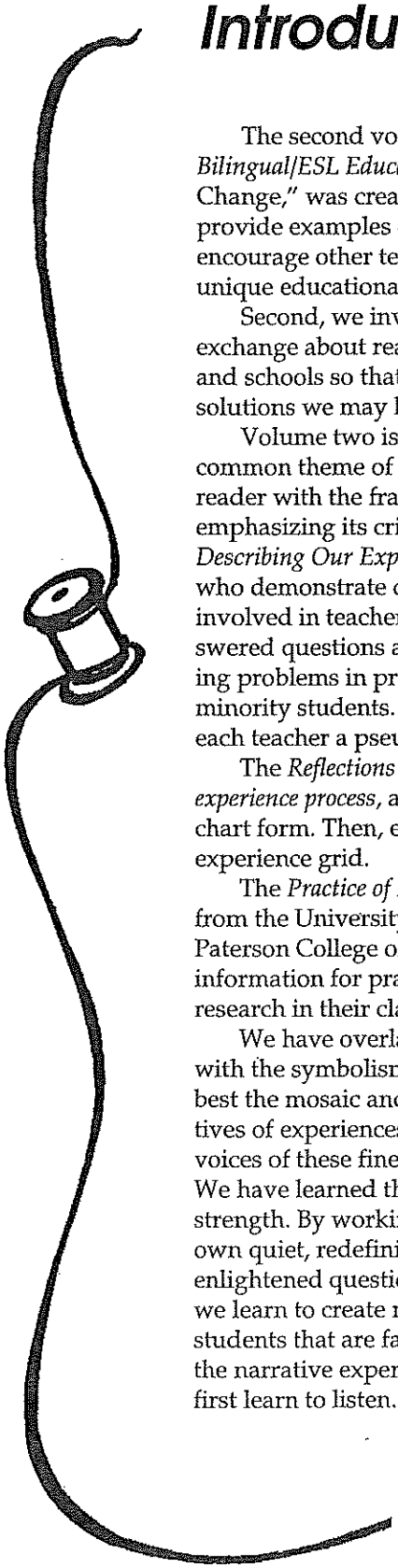
Introduction



The second volume of *Discovering our Experiences: Studies in Bilingual/ESL Education*, titled, "Reflective Practice for Teacher Change," was created with two purposes in mind. First, we want to provide examples of teachers' reflections on their experiences to encourage other teachers to engage in reflective practice in their unique educational settings.

Second, we invite our readers to become a part of a collegial exchange about real challenges and problems in actual classrooms and schools so that, in the process of sharing our problems and solutions we may learn from one another.

Volume two is divided into several sections united by the common theme of teacher as researcher. The first article presents the reader with the framework for talking about teacher research, emphasizing its critical importance and describing its various forms. *Describing Our Experiences* contains five interviews of six teachers who demonstrate qualities of leadership and exemplify the process involved in teacher research in their own unique ways. They answered questions about their schools and their approaches to resolving problems in providing for the educational needs of language minority students. In an attempt to preserve anonymity, we assigned each teacher a pseudonym except for the final interview.

The *Reflections* section contains a description of the *narrative of experience process*, and the insights gained from it are delineated in chart form. Then, each interview is analyzed using the narrative of experience grid.

The *Practice of Research* section features articles by Dr. Kip Téllez from the University of Houston and Dr. Beti Leone of William Paterson College of New Jersey. These authors present helpful information for practitioners interested in conducting teacher research in their classrooms.

We have overlapped the volume's reflective practitioner theme with the symbolism of quilt making. That image seems to describe best the mosaic and harmonious construction of the teachers' narratives of experiences. It is our hope that you enjoy and profit from the voices of these fine leaders as much as we enjoyed listening to them. We have learned that teachers' voices are rich with wisdom and strength. By working together, we may engage in the weaving of our own quiet, redefining contexts of our work, seeking the truth, asking enlightened questions and creating a new language. In the process, we learn to create new and challenging learning opportunities for students that are far beyond our reach today. The power gained by the narrative experience process is within our reach, but we must first learn to listen...to our teachers.

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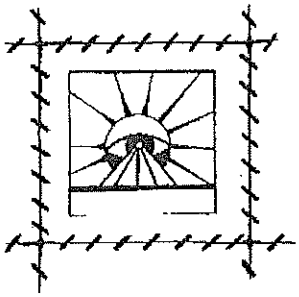


Even when you stand perfectly still, the earth shakes violently under your feet and celestial objects tremble with incessant energy.

Leading with an Eye on the Horizon: Teacher-Leaders in Reflective Practice

What does it mean to be a teacher in today's multicultural–multilingual society? The current demands confronting our schools are markedly different from the past, and seem to continually change in ways in which schools are unprepared to address. Take for instance the list of concerns that students, parents, and teachers have today compared to twenty or thirty years ago. Who would have imagined back then that such things as gun control or drug trafficking would even be in a remote sense connected to our schools? The sacred institutions upon which our society has relied to engender our most valued ideals in our children seem to perplex even the most loyal observer.

The changing demography of our country provides an instant index for determining how rapidly the curriculum must be revamped to make it more responsive and inclusive. Urban schools in large metropolitan areas are enrolling more minority students than non-minority. Many of these schools already have the so-called "minority" students as the majority. This contrasts with the low numbers of teachers who are members of the minority groups represented by the students, and whose numbers are increasing very slowly. There are currently at least 9.9 million children in the nation that are considered native speakers of another language other than English, and by the year 2020 that number is expected to reach 20 million (D. Waggoner in *NABE News*, September 1994). It's clear that students' needs extend well beyond what schools have traditionally addressed. Indeed, the paths toward teaching and learning have expanded in depth and breadth to include more socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic factors. The most dramatic change, however, lies in the way teachers' roles have evolved and continue to do so. What are these roles, where are they leading? What implications exist for schools and teacher training institutions in facilitating this change?

These are important questions that we must address in our research. We must determine how to support teachers as they lead the way to reshaping the teaching profession through effective educational reform.

Ethnographic studies have allowed us to peer through classroom windows in a variety of contexts, providing a first-hand learning laboratory.

Teacher Research Methods

Leading teacher researchers have used qualitative methods that have both served to close the gap between research and practice, and to yield new knowledge about teaching in general and in specific contexts. Ethnographic studies have allowed us to peer through classroom windows in a variety of contexts, providing a first-hand learning laboratory. Because of these studies, we have a better understanding and appreciation of the roles and work of teachers. Most importantly, the acceptance of qualitative methods by leading researchers has encouraged more teachers to pursue research activity, even to the point that it has become a natural part of their teaching responsibilities. There are several kinds of research studies that follow qualitative methodology worth mentioning that can be used as models of current teacher research.

Reflective practice. John Dewey's focus on student-centeredness in education spawned the idea of teacher training being accomplished through staff development. In specific, Dewey's concept of deliberative reflection points to reflection that is directed to practice. Schön's (1983) work underscores the importance of solving problems within a practical context, using a systematic process. The reflective practitioner is the teacher as researcher, so-called because of the nature of the methods and the specificity of the problem.

Researchers are focusing on collaborative efforts between researchers, teacher educators, and teachers to facilitate teacher change (Hannay, Bissegger, Haston, & Mahony, 1994). Collaboration is often defined in specific terms, such as "shared inquiry" as chronicled in *Students Teaching, Teachers Learning* (Branscombe, Goswami, & Schwartz, 1992). The success of collaboration observed, thus far, is evidence of the need to nurture working relationships, and that the change process must involve teachers in an active role, that first and foremost, leads to their empowerment. Reflective practice is an integral part of the process of teacher empowerment, and meaningful collaboration is one of the most successful means by which to facilitate this process.

Narrative structures. The procedure of transforming teachers' experiences into narrative structures is evident in several studies. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) turn teachers' insightful reflections on their teaching practices into relevant story forms. *Teacher Lore,* (Ayers & Schubert, 1992), an honest and inspiring book about teacher experiences, describes a journey of reflection and retrospection and is a noteworthy model of the use of narrative structures. A powerful but subtle message belies the storytelling style and serves to invite the reader to explore, examine, and reflect upon the personal, social, and political ramifications of teaching.

The success of collaboration observed, thusfar, is evidence of the need to nurture working relationships, and that the change process must involve teachers in an active role, that first and foremost, leads to their empowerment.

Collaborative conversational method. One study that uniquely exemplifies this method was reported by Hollingsworth (1992). The focus of her study of teachers and researchers was clearly based on a feminist perspective, yet the implications she draws can be applied to a wider audience. She writes, "Instead of simply validating or uncovering 'scientific truths' about mainstream cultures, feminist research asks questions that lead to social changes in oppressed conditions, usually those of women, but that can also apply to men and children in underpowered life roles." (p.376)

The power of dialogue in the empowering process as described by Hollingsworth, then, leads to action that reflects a deepening of one's perspective of the social reality. It is important to note that Hollingsworth emphasizes that empowerment is a two-way street by which the researcher and the teacher are mutually transformed in this collaborative conversational process.

Practical inquiry. Richardson (1994) describes several approaches to teacher research categorized as practical inquiry. These include three conceptions of teacher research: a) that teaching *is* research because the teacher works like a researcher, from conceptualizing the problem, collecting the data and using it, to resolving the problem; b) that the teacher is a reflective practitioner; and c) that the teacher is an action researcher. Teachers, alone or in collaborative relationships, engage in practical inquiry to answer or address local questions that demand immediate attention and for which they are in the best position to respond. The results are not always general enough for all teachers outside the specific context to use; however, regardless of the outcome, the results always

satisfy the knowledge-hungry or curious. Practical inquiry is appropriately used on a daily basis using informal techniques, yet producing results that serve immediate purposes.

Practical inquiry can be formalized by comparing similarities and differences among several studies and incorporating structured, empirical techniques. The assumption that research can adequately yield sound and useful results using comparisons within a structured empirical framework has been discussed for decades under the topic of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). But formal research cannot replace the immediate and relevant research initiated by teacher researchers in practical inquiry. Both forms of research are obviously appropriate for different reasons.

Evolving Roles

The qualitative research methods which we used in the *Discovering Our Experiences* project resulted in the identification of key roles that are assumed by bilingual/ESL teachers in a variety of classrooms. The following are three roles which we feature in this volume:

1. Teacher as critical thinker. Teachers who work with students that are second language learners have classrooms that are essentially microcosms reflecting social, political and economic realities that exist in the larger society. According to Freirean education (Shor, 1993), the teacher as critical thinker is committed to challenging the inequality and injustices that persist in the larger society. As such, teachers facilitate reflection on life experiences, ask thought-provoking questions, pose problems, and help determine solutions.

Teaching critically places the teacher and students on a two-way street. Through dialogue, the teacher helps students to think carefully about problems, issues, and concerns, acquiring deeper understandings of them. It is a transformative process that takes students from acquiring new knowledge to determining a plan that will transform knowledge into action. The teacher is also transformed in this process as a result of learning more about students and the way they perceive reality. Both teacher and students strive toward "critical consciousness" which is, according to Freire, the "highest development of thought and action." (p. 32)

At another level, the teacher as critical thinker recognizes the flaws in using the standard curriculum for her/his students. A curriculum that consciously overlooks and ignores the cultural/linguistic diversity of the students is, in effect, imposing a set of dominant standards and values that serve to drive students to perceive their differences as deficiencies, and to blame only themselves when they fail. The role of teacher as critical thinker is inherent in the Freirean concept of education as politics. Ira Shor (1993) summarizes Freire's ideas: "Education is politics because it is one place where individuals and society are constructed. Because human beings and their society are developed in one direction or another through education, the learning process cannot avoid being politics." (p. 28)

The four qualities of "critical consciousness" interpreted by Shor (1993) appropriately describe the role of teacher as critical thinker as we have identified and described:

Power awareness. The teacher is aware of the distribution of power, how it is exercised and to what ends. This is particularly important in assessing the curriculum and determining the means by which to engage in the transformative process with the students.

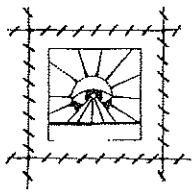
Critical literacy. The teacher is capable of analyzing beneath surface impressions, understanding social contexts and their consequences, discovering deep meanings of any events, especially to one's own context.

Desocialization. The teacher as critical thinker recognizes and challenges that which is learned in mass culture (myths, values, behaviors, etc.), particularly regressive values such as racism, sexism, class bias, etc.

Self-organization/self-education. The teacher takes initiative to transform school and society, distancing him/herself from the authoritarian impositions of standards and the unequal distribution of power.

The ideas and words of Paulo Freire are more relevant today than ever before as we continue our work with language minority students. Indeed, the role of teacher as critical

The experience may be stressful, and overwhelming in some cases, but clearly the teachers that emerge as leaders in the midst of change are those that are well-equipped with the knowledge, understanding, and commitment needed to participate successfully in the transformative process.



thinker is important in transforming the educational system to one that is more responsive to the needs of our students.

2. Teacher as innovation leader. Teachers who work with language minority students often deal with programmatic changes as a result of reform efforts. The experience may be stressful, and overwhelming in some cases, but clearly the teachers that emerge as leaders in the midst of change are those that are well-equipped with the knowledge, understanding, and commitment needed to participate successfully in the transformative process.

Risk-taking is essential in transcending borders difficult to cross. Also important is vision, especially in visualizing change in the roles that teachers play. Without vision and risk-taking, teachers may not be able to create new roles nor program models of change that support the educational reform efforts.

3. Teacher as action researcher. Teachers of language minority students, especially in bilingual education, face many unanswered questions related to classroom management, curricular materials and use of various instructional techniques. The answers are not always immediately available, or not available at all. Even if there are answers, the response may not be appropriate for every classroom.

Teachers are in the best position to do research because they understand the problems well, and they have a natural setting, the classroom, to pursue their inquiry. However, collaborative efforts will yield the most productive results, particularly when teachers work as a team in the research endeavor. Collaborative research is especially important if teachers are to incorporate research as part of their teaching responsibilities, as proposed by advocates of the teacher as researcher model.

The roles which we have identified as evolving within the context of educational reform are by no means exhaustive. The important element inherent in these roles is teacher change, and how this change corresponds with contextual issues. In the process of identifying these roles, and as we continue to facilitate teacher change, the following principles guide our efforts:

1) The role of teacher researcher is crucial to accomplishing the necessary changes to improve educational programs for language minority students. Recognizing this need, and then facilitating teacher change, should be a priority in the agendas of staff developers.

2) Teacher educators at the university level must provide the leadership needed to revamp teacher training programs and in the process adhere to changes required for their new roles.

3) Teaching is a transformative process. Teachers are most successful when they engage in the two-way process whereby learning is shared, and impacts both teacher and students in deep and profound ways.

4) There exists a need to educate all stakeholders, especially policy-makers so removed from the specific needs of students and teachers, on how rules and policies impact on the daily lives of those affected the most.

5) Current research in education

lacks the voices of teachers and other practitioners that work with language minority students. Reform efforts proposed at the national level have been criticized as being shortsighted because of lack of input by all constituencies involved (Borman and Greenman, 1994). It's important, then, to focus our efforts on facilitating the integration of teacher research specific to the education of language minority students to mainstream teacher education research.

Implications

The changing roles of teachers who work with language minority students must be facilitated by professional development components at the school district and university levels. Accordingly, structural changes must be proposed and implemented to provide the needed support and services to accomplish training goals. Among the proposed changes are the following:

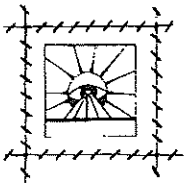
Training program structures. Training designs and activities must correspond with the evolving roles of teachers and their students' needs. Thus, schools, colleges, and universities, as well as mentors, peer coaches, resource consultants etc., must form collaborative relationships that utilize resources effectively, and provide training that is focused, relevant, and immediate. Training or staff development must be perceived as an integral part of the whole school program with an ongoing system of identifying training needs, determining activities and field experiences, including mentorships, and evaluating these activities.

University training at the pre-service level can offer the most substantial contribution to teacher change, provided the programs follow a strict adherence to a balance of research *and* practice. This can only be accomplished through collaborative relationships with schools. In addition, performance-based designs that use portfolio systems aid in maintaining high-quality, comprehensive programs.

Training content. Both university and school district training programs must provide training that is not only site-based but contextual, or specific to the individual needs of the students. The goals of the training program should be aligned with the school culture, and, in fact, should serve to nurture that culture.

Current research studies have provided staff development practitioners with insights into effective strategies and techniques for designing and implementing teacher change. Among the major points discussed in the literature are: 1) the need to change teachers' fundamental beliefs and ideas about curriculum content and strategies for teaching; 2) the need to consider how the change will affect teachers on a personal level; and 3) the need for individual and group opportunities for teachers to engage in reflective dialogue, particularly about the change process (Briscoe & Peters, 1994). Unless we consider these important factors, we may not target the training program effectively.

Teacher leaders are teacher researchers. The need for elevating the professional status of teachers has been historically an arduous struggle (see Apple,



University training at the pre-service level can offer the most substantial contribution to teacher change, provided the programs follow a strict adherence to a balance of research and practice. This can only be accomplished through collaborative relationships with schools.

1994). Professionalism in education requires teachers to be knowledgeable and expert leaders in their field. By incorporating research activity as part of their teaching, teachers can fulfill an important goal as professional educators. The need for support systems to facilitate teachers in this activity cannot be overly emphasized, however.

Teacher leaders that strive for change in their work places face a multitude of challenges. If the rewards in terms of collegiality and respect were as plentiful as the challenges, perhaps they wouldn't feel so alone. Indeed, the need to build networks to help teachers in their efforts as teacher leaders should be an important item on everyone's agenda. We need to persist in our efforts to pave the way for present and future teacher leaders, whose vision is, perhaps, the greatest hope we have for our children.

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El currículo y la tortilla

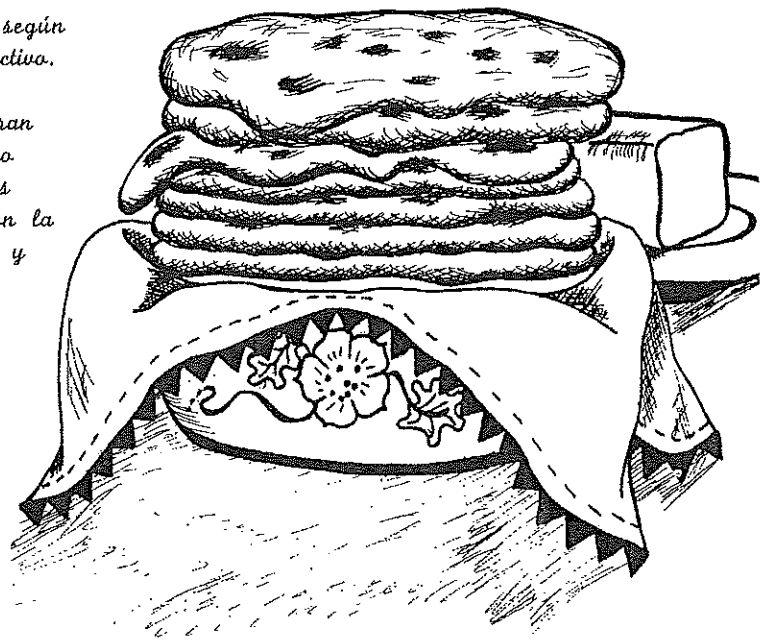
Me acuerdo de las tortillas que hacíamos en casa de Mamá. Cada una tenía su propia personalidad. Todas las mujeres se ponían a palotear, inclusive los bebés formaban sus tortillitas tierrosas. A veces salían gorditas, suavecitas o delgaditas y duritas. A veces tenían una forma redonda, otras veces podrías imaginarte un mapa de Tejas. La persona que hacía una tortilla redonda, suavecita, con textura de veras como tortilla (que se podría hacer un taco con los más jugosos guisados), era la que tenía una posición alta social, y una reputación de mayor importancia.

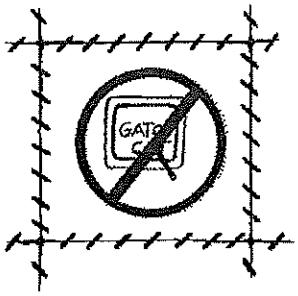
Hoy en día, muchas familias cuyos miembros acostumbraban hacer las tortillas, las compran hechas por una máquina y envueltas en una bolsa de plástica. Cada tortilla es casi igual, en tamaño, textura y sabor. Lo que le pasó a las tortillas es semejante a lo que le pasó al currículo de la educación bilingüe.

No hace mucho tiempo que antes, cuando era maestra, las lecciones en el salón del programa bilingüe eran individualmente prescritas según el niño y el objetivo instructivo. Consequentemente, los materiales de instrucción eran hechos a la orden, porque no habían suficientes materiales comerciales. Por ejemplo, con la ayuda de todos los alumnos y padres, producimos una obra en la cuál creamos una lección de historia cuyo objetivo era el de promover el significado de la Independencia de México, que se observa el 16 de septiembre. En otras ocasiones, escribimos cuentos en español para cualquier otra lección.

En muchas maneras, la educación bilingüe, como la educación en general, ha perdido las características únicas como las tortillas hechas a mano. Los libros llegan a los salones tan completos que los maestros pueden seguir las lecciones con los ojos cerrados. Los manuales sugieren un método mecánico, asumiendo que todos los niños son iguales, que tienen las mismas habilidades, intereses, etc. Hay que reflexionar en esta ocasión para determinar qué el papel de un maestro no es el de un seguidor, sino el de un líder, que puede tomar decisiones propias, y más que nada que desarrolle un currículo que enfoque completamente a cada niño por individual.

— Irma Guadarrama





Day after day the pattern grew; each block was deftly set in place, a tale that time cannot efface. —From The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt.

Creative Professionalism

Laura teaches kindergarten in an area school. She prefaces her remarks about the challenges she faces as the only bilingual education teacher at her school with some information on her background and experience growing up as a language minority child.

Spanish is my first language. I was born in Mexico, and I came to the United States at the age of four and entered school at the age of six. I was always one of the youngest children in class because I was born in May so that had its problems. But I was a LEP* child—very much so in first grade. I experienced quite difficult first, second and third years. I think that's what has always made me more sensitive to the situations of bilingual children. I can relate so much to their experiences.

I began school during the time when Spanish was not allowed to be spoken. In fact, I remember being punished for using Spanish. You definitely weren't encouraged to be proud of your heritage back then. I don't remember feeling good about knowing a second language until fourth grade when I had a supportive teacher. I was very impressed because this teacher was Anglo, and my first grade teacher, the one who discouraged me from using Spanish, was Hispanic.

**Limited English Proficient*

At the time, there was a law that said if principals or teachers allowed children in the public schools to speak another language besides English, they could lose their certification. It was probably a very big threat.

I've been very angry all these years, not really understanding why that Hispanic teacher had been so vicious. She reprimanded me in Spanish for speaking Spanish! She would do horrendous things like put me in the corner, make me raise my hands, or draw a circle on the board and put my nose to it. But now that I'm in my master's classes and studying the history of supervision, I'm having second thoughts about my anger toward this teacher. At the time, there was a law that said if principals or teachers allowed children in the public schools to speak another language besides English, they could lose their certification. It was probably a very big threat.

I became a teacher because my mother had always been involved with the schools and aware of the need to work with Hispanic children. My parents made sure that we did not forget our native language because they knew that it would be an advantage in the future. They sent us to Mexico every year for summer school and for two months to visit our grandmother. They forced us to write to our grandmother, and my father and mother would to teach us how to read in Spanish. At first, we were planning to go back to Mexico. My father had this dream of his daughters picking up a second language and going back to Mexico to be super successful people. But the first child graduated from middle school, then the second...consequently we're still here. We have maintained a relatively high fluency–oral and written–not through formal education, but the summer courses with teachers in Mexico.

After receiving my teaching degree, I taught second grade for four years and first grade for one year. Then, I taught one summer in a special language program in the bilingual education department for children that were entering kindergarten or who had been "unsuccessful" in PreK. It was very interesting to see how these children started, knowing what they achieve by second grade. I was hooked after that. I wanted to teach kindergarten.

The School

Everton Elementary is in a middle-income neighborhood. I'm sure that it was an all-Anglo school not too long ago, but now the population has changed. Another school closed down "across the tracks," so the children had nowhere to go but here. Consequently, the population has shifted so that it's about 47 percent Hispanic, two to three percent black, and five percent Asian.

I am the only bilingually certified teacher in the school although one is needed at every grade level based on the number of LEP children. There are three other Hispanic teachers, but they do not want to teach bilingual education because, in their words, they would get all the "low ones." The LEP students are being placed in their classrooms anyway because they are Hispanic even though they are not trained in bilingual education and in spite of whether or not they speak Spanish.

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Last year, in my kindergarten classroom of 18 students, I had 15 Hispanic children who were considered LEP. Out of those 15 I probably had 12 monolingual Spanish speakers.

The Challenge

When the year began, I was told that I was going to be a bilingual kindergarten teacher, and so I set up my classroom like I had all the previous years. I had the Spanish alphabet and I had the labels and everything else we do. The principal came in—she walked through all the classrooms before school started—and said nothing at the time. Maybe she just didn't notice. The kids came and I started teaching. The other teachers use letters of the week and are heavily into phonics, but I thought maybe I could improvise in some way. I thought about it a little bit and I discovered a way that I could live with myself. So I started teaching, of course, the alphabet in Spanish and did so for maybe a couple of weeks.

The problem surfaced when I requested some Spanish language materials in a school-wide writing-reading lab. Because of this request and other incidents, the principal became bothered by my use of native language with the children. So I was called into her office. I think she had been silently concerned about my use of native language with these monolingual kindergartners. She told me that we were not going to do bilingual education because she had not been able to find a first grade bilingual teacher, so there wasn't going to be that continuity for the children. Therefore, I would have to take the Spanish language classroom down and put it up as an ESL classroom. Then she went as far as to say she didn't believe in bilingual education, and until she did, ESL was going to be done in her school. According to her, ESL had worked, but I didn't see any evidence of it working; there was not one Hispanic, LEP or non-LEP, that passed the three parts of the TAAS (Texas Assessment for Academic Skills). That's 47 percent of the school population! To me what this signifies is that someone's needs are not being met. How can there not be one child that passed—not one?

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But, I could see from a professional standpoint what she meant about there not being a bilingual teacher in the first grade to carry on what I would be doing for these children. I did tell her that it was unfortunate that she felt that way about bilingual education because I had had so much success as a bilingual teacher.

There is a lot of pressure at this school in kindergarten—more than there should be—to obtain the sound system. The principal and staff expected a lot even though they believed that these children would not live up to their expectations.

But of course, that wasn't enough. I began to think about how I was going to change.

From what I had observed, ESL as it was practiced in this school was more of an English immersion program* and I knew that I could not work that way. I just felt that it was a little unfair both for me and the children to just do ESL when I am bilingually certified. So at that point, I made a decision that I was going to re-think and re-focus. I already had my focus as to what my goals were going to be for my bilingual classroom, and I had to find ways to retain some of the things I felt my children needed such as content area instruction and "scaffolding," if we want to call it that, in native language. But I also needed to integrate ESL methodology and have a separate 45 minute period for ESL instruction. It was very important for my focus to be really strong in ESL because of what was coming to my children next year. I struggled with it—trying one thing and then trying another to see how I could best help these children.

There is a lot of pressure at this school in kindergarten—more than there should be—for obtaining the sound system. The principal and staff expected a lot, even though they believed that these children would not live up to their expectations. I decided that I was going to show them that it was going to be different because of the intervention of a certified teacher that met the needs of the children. I was still committed to helping to maintain native language because I know it in no way interferes with academics, cognitive development, or even English language development. In fact, I think it's a natural resource that you have—that you are bilingual.

Adaptation Process

One of the things I did to convert my classroom was, of course, take down the Spanish alphabet and put the English alphabet up. I decided to go along with the letter of the week like the other teachers, but not so much the way they were structuring it. For example, if we were studying the "a," I would work books into my curriculum, be it in math and whatever else I was going to do for the week. I made sure that my focus was always ESL, but at the same time I worked on maintaining native language. I would start with webbing of the "a" and at the same time teaching them how to write it as I put it on my chart. We'd talk in Spanish—*'Se hace la línea asi, atravesadita' (You make a line like this, across)*—but then in order to get to know my children and how much they knew, I would ask them, 'Does anyone know something that begins with the "a" sound in English?' They were very limited at first, but eventually a child would come up with an object and I would draw a picture of it and write the word under the "a." And then focusing on ESL, I would tell them words and then translate in Spanish "a" is for apple; *manzana* is apple...we would do repetitive exercises like that, and then I would draw the object and write the word. The letters were left up the whole year so we could go back

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**immersion program: instruction is completely in English without any adaptations to the curriculum.*

and learn more vocabulary. As they became more fluent, the children would refer to previous letters we studied and say, 'Now I know a word,' and we'd add it on. As they became writers, they used those words that were up there with the letter.

Of course, it got a little more complicated because I'm also very strong in the writing process, and that's where my problems really started. When I began to think about developing their fluency, that's where I had to decide *which* fluency—English or Spanish? I knew that in order for them to reach higher levels of English it was important to help them establish more fluency in native language. The way we do writing process in kindergarten is to teach the children to draw, and that's their writing in the beginning. All of the interaction about their drawings at first was in Spanish and I was bothered by that. But then I decided that because they couldn't read it didn't matter. They were just seeing me model what writing could be.

I could see that my students' oral proficiency in native language was growing because after two or three months they began to give me long detailed stories. What they were doing, in fact, if we look at language arts, was adding details, elaborating; they were doing exactly what was supposed to happen in writing process. The only problem was that this was happening in Spanish. What kept bothering me was what was coming next year.

We'd go to language arts lab daily, and I'd sit at a table and work with a small group while the other kids went to computers, listening centers, etc. The lab work was based on phonics, which can be very stressful for language minority kids because they are expected to learn the sounds at the same pace as the other children.

So suddenly, by accident, I came up with a way to help. I noticed that when we were doing the letter of the week, the children would always bring in their names, like "m" for María. I would draw María and put the word María along with all the other "m"s. That is when I realized I could use native language to teach the English sound system because there are so many similarities in the sounds—lamp, *lámpara;* pancakes, *pescado.* So, before I knew it, I was teaching the letters like that. I would say, "Tell me what you want to write." For example, a child would say, 'The man's nose is big.' I would teach some sight words such as "the." When we would come to "n," I would use both English and Spanish words to teach it—November, night, *nariz, noche.* I kept on doing this, and found using native language to teach English to be very successful. And, just like in any other grade level that I have taught, they became little maniac writers. Of course, they were writing in English and using inventive spelling.

Eres bilingüe, Gisela

I continued to read Spanish literature and sing songs in Spanish, and in English of course—the ESL focus never left me. I worked hard because I wanted to make a difference for the kids, and for the principal and staff, because I knew they were bothered by my use of native language. I wanted to prove that it does not hurt them; it enhances their learning. And, in fact, that's what I proved. As the children became writers, I continued using native language to help them learn the sound system in English.

It took one child to make the difference. Gisela wrote a full-page story about ten girls that found a cat, and they took it home. The mother was unhappy, but then she was

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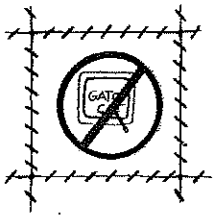
happy. At the end, the cat acted like a ghost with a...and I couldn't make out the word...it was *sábana* (bed sheet). I thought it was inventive spelling in English. Gisela became very frustrated, and put her little hands on her waist, stamped her foot, and said *'¡Maestra! ¡Sábana!'* And so I said, *'Me vas hacer que escriba en español.'* (You are going to make me write in Spanish.) And she was amazed too—she didn't know. She wanted to say yes, but she wasn't sure herself whether she really did or not. And so I said, *'A ver, escríbeme esta oración...'* Let's see, write this sentence for me.) *'El gato es malo..'* 'And I'll be darned but she wrote it. And then I said, *'A ver, el perro es bueno.'* And she wrote it, and then I said, *'Eres bilingüe.* You are bilingual. You write English and Spanish.' And then the other kids saw it too.

These students were in effect transitioning themselves. I was glad that they felt proud of being able to write in Spanish and English. I was a little afraid that they were going to start mixing the language, but that didn't turn out to be the case. On days that they wanted to write in Spanish, they would ask me *'¿Puedo escribir en español?'* (Can I write in Spanish?). Then, without asking, they would write naturally in English. I began to ask myself how I could use this to help those children that aren't ready to transition from Spanish to English. Liliana, for example, who is very smart, but she isn't ready to transition. Her comprehension is there but perhaps she's in a silent period—she's not ready to risk.



The problems that exist at my school are not unique, but are results of the system for training and certifying teachers for bilingual and ESL education.

I didn't try this approach long enough, so I'm not even sure it works. But this could be a way to help children in schools like this one where there is no bilingual program even though there are monolingual Spanish-speaking children, and the stress is on getting these children reading and writing in English quickly.

In reflecting on my goals for the children, I know I place a high priority on learning in all the content areas—social studies, science, math, and language arts. I wanted them to learn the English sound system because of the pressure to know it in this school. Unfortunately, the principal and staff push it to the point where it is not developmentally appropriate.

Standing Firm

The problems that exist at my school are not unique, but are results of the system for training and certifying teachers for bilingual and ESL education. Grandfathering ESL teachers for example, even with the requirement that they have 18 hours of ESL workshops, is very risky because there is no follow-up to determine if the ESL programs are actually modifying instruction. I would guess, going by what I have seen at this school, that most ESL programs are really English immersion.

It is a very tough environment for bilingual and ESL teachers. If I were to give advice to a new teacher, it would be to stay committed to what you know about what language minority children need in spite of the policies that exist in your school which many times work against you. I think we have to do what we know to do in our own classrooms. But, I think we need to be very visible so that everyone will be able to see and share in the success of our children. I was convinced that the principal and the rest of the

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school had to know what my children were producing because of the negative attitudes and the uncertainty they showed about what I was doing. At one point, I told the vice principal she was going to have to trust me as a professional in my field. I said, 'At the moment, I'm the only bilingual/ESL teacher here and I'm working with LEP children; that makes me the expert. You are just going to have to trust my professionalism.' I sent the children to the principal to show their successes and displayed their work in the hall. I made my program visible so that everyone could see that my children were not staying behind; they were probably going faster than the regular kindergarten children, which is, in effect, what they were doing.

But in spite of everything we may do to try to change people's perceptions of bilingual and ESL education, resistance is still there because of prejudices and fear of change. In the case of my school, the staff and principal are uncomfortable with the changes they see happening as the population shifts. It is a very traditional school. It's much easier for them to ignore the problems and ignore these children—to have the attitude of 'It's not our fault these kids don't know the language.'

The new population has a different culture and socioeconomic status than the previous middle- to upper-class Anglo population. As there are more and more disadvantaged children, the comfort zone is changing; the principal and staff need to realize that what used to work no longer works. They're still hoping to coast, and that they won't have to change anything.

The process of change has begun though, simply by what I have done in my classroom. One person can make a change. You just have to be willing to risk a lot. Now, the principal is trying to find a strong bilingual teacher for first grade. I used to hear statements like, 'We need bilingual people...but not necessarily bilingual certified people.' At the end of the school year, she was asking me how fluent in Spanish prospective teachers were. I think she has realized that native language instruction doesn't hurt students—that it probably helps them to have this kind of intervention.

I see my purpose is to focus not only on my own children, but on the 47 percent of the school population that is Hispanic who, in my opinion, have not had their needs met.

The Principal

In my opinion, the principal plays the most important role in the process of change. She needs to build her knowledge base about these children and about bilingual education so she can make others understand. In a school like this one where Hispanics are becoming the majority, the principal must take steps to understand these issues.

I've tried to help by sending a few articles for her information, but I've received no response. I was hoping that she would read them and find them interesting enough to copy them for the whole staff so they could get a better understanding of LEP children, because most of them have LEP children in their classrooms.

Role at Everton

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As an example, a student of mine brought me a test taken by her third-grade sister who also has been here for only two years. Of course, it had a failing grade, 60, and it was covered with red ink marking all the wrong answers. It was a science test with ten questions, and the child had very intelligently answered six questions correctly. The words she had gotten wrong were *sedimentary* and *metamorphic*, two pretty difficult scientific terms. I could tell the child knew more than what she didn't know, and wondered whether this was more of an indication that the teacher had not modified instruction than of the student's success or failure. There seems to be a lack of knowledge and under-

standing. People compare language minority kids to the regular students and think that because they don't know English, they're less intelligent.

I can only hope that by being here as a bilingual teacher I have helped bring change. I'm hoping that the knowledge base of these teachers has been broadened by being exposed to this new program, and that they understand education for language minority kids has to be different. You have to look at the socioeconomic class of the student population; you have to look at the cultural components; you have to look at the language aspect; you have to look at everything. Modification of curriculum, altering attitudes and a continuous search to meet the needs of students are crucial components of any educational design for language minority students.

Of course, all bilingual and ESL programs should not be identical because all children are not identical, and all school cultures are not identical; you have to look at the whole school environment. What we should do is find the best methods—whether they're ESL, bilingual, regular, or special education—to meet the needs of all students.

Even though I believe I did what was best for my kindergarten children by maintaining and using native language as much as possible, I couldn't only think of my students' achievement in my room because they would not be in my room forever. Eventually, they were going to venture out into the non-Spanish speaking environment of the next grade level. They were going to have teachers who may not be sympathetic to their needs or understand their language or culture. I had to prepare them for what was coming so they would not be shocked; they wouldn't be torn down.

If we could just free ourselves from wondering if bilingual education really is the way to go! If we could just work in our program as we have been trained and believe in it and demonstrate it to others! It should be a program where people are knocking down our doors to be bilingual. Many times, our own bilingual staff doesn't believe that our program is special because of the influence of principals and state and national officials. There is a lack of unity, and until we are unified and sell what we do, then we'll continue to stumble and struggle. Sadly, the children are hurt the most.

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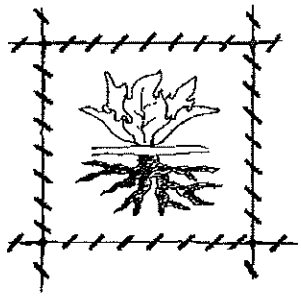

The stitches in this quilt-patch rare, were patiently made with loving care; if each thought put forth were as perfect and true, it would make a grand world for me and you.—Ida H. Frederick, from The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt

A Family of Learners

Before receiving her teaching certificate, Maryann taught English as a Second Language to adults in programs sponsored by church groups and recreational centers. She assisted participants in the U.S. Department of Justice's Amnesty Program. Maryann has been teaching in the public schools for three years, two of which have been in mixed-age classrooms as part of a pilot program.

I began to learn Spanish in the fifth grade. Through this exposure, I developed a love for the culture and language to the extent that I went on to get my bachelor's degree in Spanish from Memphis State University, graduating in 1980. After that, I traveled in Mexico and Europe and developed an even greater interest in Spanish and Latin cultures. I came to the alternative certification program* in 1991 through a local school district. I was accepted because of my Spanish ability and because they were looking for bilingual education teachers. I had worked with children in a variety of ways and I had enjoyed it very much. I wanted to have an impact on children. Because of my love for the society, culture, and roots of Hispanic people, I wanted to be a help in their education. I have taught for three years, and I am really active within the community. I go to birthday parties and do apartment visits. I try to become a part of the community and have seen a lot of growth in the children.

**alternative certification program: An intensive training program sponsored by districts to recruit teachers who do not have education backgrounds.*

Mixed-Aged Grouping

After my first year of teaching, I came into the mixed-age pilot program. I saw an obvious change in the language minority children that I taught. Mixed-age grouping allowed them to foster independent skills in an interdisciplinary, theme teaching environment. They were able to learn at their own developmental pace. Students were able to learn in English and Spanish the things that are necessary for development.

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I think that one of the primary arguments in favor of the mixed-age program is that the corporate world is changing. The job world is no longer a place where someone can work alone in a cubicle. Mixed-age programs respond to the need by producing students who are able to work in cooperative groups. Also, multi-age programs are centered around the perception of the teacher not as a lecturer, but as a facilitator. As a result, the children are able to "own" their learning. They become masters of their learning in the sense that they decide what they want to learn and, as a result, they get excited about it. They have improved self-esteem. Instead of school being somewhere where they're going to be put down because they're not able to measure up to someone else's standard, they can be successful.

Students learn to read and learn about science and social studies concepts through centers and manipulatives. They're working with peers, using critical thinking skills and learning how to make decisions. For a long time, the educational system has not encouraged independent thinkers, and when they get in the market place they can't make decisions. Children choose a topic or problem in science, social science, or language arts to investigate in their native language and in English.

Getting Started

The first year I taught in the

multi-age class, I had first and second grades. The district provided us with a lot of training. Besides that, I started working on my master's degree, so I was exposed to current educational issues and new techniques. Otherwise, it would have been too much of a challenge, not only for a new teacher, but even for someone with a lot of teaching experience. I had to develop a curriculum for two different age groups incorporating the essential elements from the district, and identify what kind of skills they were supposed to acquire—all this without having textbooks or any other help in correlating curriculum! So, for a second year teacher it was a big challenge and I spent many, many nights and many, many Saturdays trying to develop curriculum.

Next, I taught kindergarten and first grade. In this multi-age classroom, there were some first graders who worked on second and third grade levels, and some first graders who needed basic reading strategies. In a classroom of this type, the children work in cooperative groups and in centers. They have contracts with the teacher that specify when they are to complete projects or assignments. One student may be able to meet five or six goals in one week, and another may still be working on one or two and need some extra guidance. The children are self-paced, and the teacher is the guiding hand and facilitator. The grading in a multi-age classroom is different from the traditional grading system. Students have profile sheets that show the concepts they are learning and the benchmarks achieved. They use student profiles to show progress.

Any teacher coming into mixed-age setting will need to have some background on why developmentally appropriate programs are important. Instead of stuffing something down a child's throat when she is not ready for it, mixed-age classrooms enable the child to decide when she is ready for a concept, and just blossom on her own.

One of the most exciting things about mixed-age classrooms is that you're helping students to develop the ability to be in charge of their learning. You ask what the children want to study because you can get language arts and math skills out of any kind of theme. If they want to study dinosaurs, states, or holidays, for example, they help develop those themes. Those are the kinds of activities that build critical thinking skills. They have leadership roles and responsibilities and it becomes their classroom.

And the kids don't want to leave school! I had kids crying if they were sick and had to stay home; at the end of the year, instead of kids running out the door because they were glad it was summer, they didn't want to leave. The mixed-age classroom created a real camaraderie amongst us—a real family atmosphere. And, research has shown that traditional family learning has a stronger effect. It sticks with children longer because the stress level is down. Also, the children develop respect for one another because they realize that people have different learning needs and learning styles. So, they're learning things at first and second grade levels that a lot of adults still don't understand—people are individuals and learn in different ways.

Problem Solving

Unfortunately, most school districts don't use the thematic approach with language minority children. One of the things that multi-age classrooms are able to do is to introduce children to language skills in Spanish that they perhaps wouldn't be exposed to because of their grade level. Therefore, they have cognitive development in their first language before receiving English instruction.

Mixed-age classrooms can also be one solution for the lack of bilingual teachers because the children could be grouped by language proficiency instead of age. Schools can combine two or three grade levels of language minority children to make enough students for a multi-aged classroom, and students can receive instruction in their native

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language and ESL rather than being mainstreamed.

One of the problems that many language minority children have is poor self-esteem related to being mainstreamed and not being able to understand what was going on. They weren't taught to achieve. And, as a result, we have children who are in middle and high school getting into gangs because they never had academic success. The mixed-age design also addresses the problem of retention, in that children can remain in the same class for more than a year without feeling like they are failures, and acquire the concepts that they missed the first year. If we can get these children in classrooms with more of a family atmosphere, then they can have academic success.

History of Multi-Age

The Dallas ISD mixed-age project was piloted in the 1992-93 school year. There were 880 children in 44 classrooms on 10 elementary school campuses.

My school, which serves the Hispanic population with a bilingual program, started out with two mainstream mixed-age classes, one ESL class, and one bilingual class. Now, all of the bilingual students in our school are in the mixed-age program. We have two classes combining kindergarten and first grade and third-fourth and second-third mixed-age bilingual classes. They receive native language and ESL instruction.

The School

We have about 600 students at our school, 150 of which are language minority Hispanic students. They come from Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and other parts of Latin America. The kindergarten-first graders are being serviced in their native language. The fifth-sixth graders have a pullout program for ESL.

Parental Permission

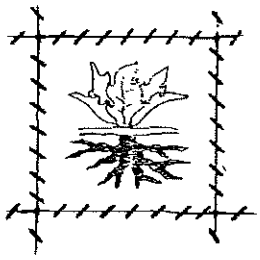
We get permission from the parents before any changes are made. We spent several nights at the school giving an introduction to the project. We did one for the bilingual parents in Spanish and one for the mainstream children's parents in English. The parents were informed of the attributes of the program and the ways it would benefit their children. All of the parents accepted the project with very positive attitudes.

Parent Participation

Our community is a little different in that our students are bused in from other areas. Our families live about three miles away, so a lot of times we don't have as much parental involvement as we'd like. But we have meetings at a Burger King by the apartments where many of our families live to answer questions and let the parents know what's happening. We also had offered some ESL classes at one of the apartment complexes that donated a room for our use. We send buses to pick up parents when we have special meetings. We had an ice cream social towards the end of the school year and had buses go to the apartments to pick up the families.

Resistance

The teachers have not been as supportive of the program as the principal and the other mixed-age teachers thought they might be. The teachers of the language minority children are all in the mixed-age program, so there was no problem there. Part of the problem seems to be that



We get permission from the parents before any changes are made. We spent several nights at the school giving an introduction to the project. We did one for the bilingual parents in Spanish and one for the mainstream children's parents in English.

the more traditional teachers think that the children in the mixed-age classrooms are playing a lot because they hear talking and see a lot of activity in our rooms. They don't seem to understand the program even though we have invited them to visit to see that learning is going on. So many teachers don't have time in their busy days to do that. Another problem is that teachers who have students that are not performing well immediately want to put them in a mixed-age class because they know it helps with retention.

The mixed-age project started with a heterogeneous group, including low-, medium-, and high-performing students. We sent out surveys for the mainstream classrooms, and asked the teachers which students were independent workers, and which students would work well in centers and in groups. Later, a lot of the teachers started sending all of their lower students, so it created an imbalance. The bilingual classrooms, however, are not maintained in this way because every bilingual student that enters our school is placed in a mixed-age classroom.

The mainstream students are nominated from kindergarten, and their parents come to a meeting. The staff tries to select low, medium, and high academic achievers who can work independently, and who don't need a lot of structure. Mixed-age grouping is not for every student or for every teacher. A child with attention deficit disorder or some other kind of learning disability, for example, may not be able to concentrate in this type of learning environment. Most of the schools in the pilot program offer both so that if parents do not want their children in mixed-age groups, they don't have to be there. As far as learning achievement is concerned, mixed-age is the answer for many children.

With any kind of new program, or any kind of new methodology, you are always going to have resistance from some people who have been around a long time and are not willing to learn new approaches. I don't know of any school who has been part of the pilot program that has had hundred percent support. The people that are involved with the project realize that the children are being successful. In the long term, others will probably see the evidence that mixed-age is a very profitable program for the children.

Classroom Management

Once in a while, I have a little problem with discipline, but it is like any kind of classroom management system—you get on top of it at the beginning. Children that come from our population a lot of times don't have structure at home; most of my kindergartners and first graders go home alone and let themselves in after school. They might even be by themselves until ten o'clock. There may be a second or third grader tucking his kindergarten sister in bed because his parents aren't there. So, these kids need to have a certain amount of structure in school. But you can build a schedule into a mixed-age setting. Students know that there are certain rules and regulations, and they are proud of their classrooms. They develop their own sense of structure.

Research

There are several studies being conducted throughout the United States on mixed-age instruction. The district conducted observations in classrooms using an assessment profile for early childhood programs. The first year I was part of the pilot program, we filled out surveys on each of our students on how they interacted with other children. The results were published in the waiver requests that the district sent to parents, and it showed that the children were a lot more advanced socially than children would usually be at those ages. It also showed that academically they were achieving. At this point, final conclusions can't be drawn, but the initial impressions were quite positive.

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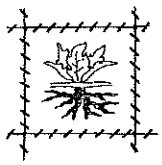

Training

I created a training guide in conjunction with completing my master's degree because it is important for a teacher coming into a mixed-age situation to know some of the basic differences. To start with, the floor plan needs to be different because the teacher is not lecturing and the children are doing different center activities and moving freely around the room. I included sample floor plans and information from various reading, writing and math workshops I attended because those activities are good for bringing different grades together. I provided schedule and lesson plans because they also tend to be different for a mixed-age classroom, as well as sample thematic plans and activities. Profile assessment is described, and examples show how children put things in their profile folders and write contracts defining what they will accomplish in a certain time frame. I also provide a list of resources and the portions of the waiver proposal from the district.

The program director for this project has been extremely helpful. She has had staff development in the summer and has gotten us together for four focus groups once every other month so that we can talk about what's happening. The teachers share problems and ideas, and each focus group is at a different school so that we are able to visit the classrooms of our fellow mixed-age teachers.

Persuading Others

I try to convince other teachers of the benefits of mixed-age groups, and that children are learning and achieving with a positive self image and acquiring the ability to interact positively with other children. Mixed-age is a trend of the future. This type of program is popping up all around the nation because people see the need for change in education.

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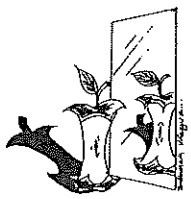

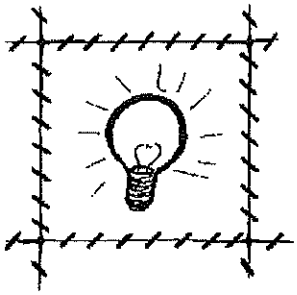

If studied as an applied art, and properly understood, it is not only capable of a high development, but is in itself a vast field for the display of individual taste and self-expression. Rose G. Kretsinger, The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt

Actions with Purpose

At the time of this writing, Diana was teaching in a self-contained bilingual second grade classroom. She is now in a doctoral program pursuing a Ph.D. in Bilingual Education. Besides second grade, she has taught kindergarten and fifth grade. She grew up in west Texas and her parents are originally from south Texas. She describes her early educational experiences below.

I did not speak a word of English when I entered first grade at the age of seven. I remember sitting in the classroom, and the teacher was taking a count because we were going to have a milk break. She asked every child if she or he had milk money. She called on me and I didn't understand, and she held up her fingers, "one" or "two." I shook my head no, but she put me down for two cartons anyway. I guess she liked me and paid for my milk. What I remember is that I did not understand, and she would have to use hand gestures.

I was quiet, but I learned fast. I don't know why; I guess because my mom and dad spoke English, even though at home we always spoke Spanish. But looking back, I didn't have any problems in elementary school. I was an "A" student, and I learned how to read in the first grade.

In my first year of teaching, I had a student that was fluent in Spanish, and he came from a great family. It was large with about eight or nine kids, and they were all dominant Spanish speakers. He spoke only Spanish in my kindergarten class. One thing that I noticed about him was how verbal and outgoing he was. But when we were required to give an English test, I saw what happened to him in that situation. He was very uncomfortable. He wanted to look at other people's tests; whereas when he worked in his own language, he worked independently. And then, I thought about myself in the elementary grades. I was not outspoken, and I think it was because I didn't know the language. I was a quiet listener all the time because I didn't have the competency to be more verbal. I compare myself to that student, and I wonder if I had been in a bilingual class whether I would have been more verbal. Maybe my language as far as writing and speaking would have been better. I saw that he had that opportunity to continue to *desarrollarse*—to develop. If he had been in an English classroom, I believe he would have had to be quiet.

The Classroom Problem

In the 1991 to 1992 school year, I had a class of 20 LEP students with a wide range of language abilities. I had monolingual Spanish-speaking newcomers to the United States, and then I had students that had been here longer, maybe several months to a year. Then, I had the advanced LEP students that had been here even longer. I had to teach in a self-contained classroom with all these language levels because the students shared the native language of Spanish. The majority of the students were so limited that they needed more Spanish instruction; at least seven of them were monolingual Spanish. I had to use more Spanish with all of the students, and as a result, the more advanced students were not getting enough exposure to English. I

I had monolingual Spanish-speaking newcomers to the United States, and then I had students that had been here longer, maybe several months to a year. Then, I had the advanced LEP students that had been here even longer.

tried working with another bilingual/ESL teacher that had more English-speaking students, but she also had a large class; the additional children would make it difficult for her. I eventually mainstreamed two students and tried to provide enough ESL or English instruction for the remaining students. It was a very difficult year.

In the spring, I attended a conference where the keynote speaker discussed classroom situations that were effective for language minority students. One thing that she mentioned was that LEP students are not the best models for each other.

Even though I believe students need native language instruction, I believe they also need to experience speaking English so they can continue to develop their fluency.

In my class, when students were working independently, they were talking to each other in Spanish. Even the advanced students were using Spanish. The only time English was being modeled was when I was speaking in English to them in a whole-class teaching situation. Even though I believe students need native language instruction, I believe they also need to experience speaking English so they can continue to develop their fluency. So this year, the other bilingual teacher and I divided the students so that I had all the students that had some degree of English language ability, and she had all the newcomers. Despite the fact that my students were at different levels, they could all communicate, write, and read in English. Therefore, I assumed that they would use English more. But that wasn't the case; they used Spanish with each other because that was their strongest language, the one they were comfortable with. And they could detect that I also spoke Spanish, because even though I used English with them, I'd say *mi hija* or something like that and they could tell; they could sense that they could communicate with me in Spanish. I don't like to force students to speak English for fear that it might seem like I am saying English is better. I believe choosing when to speak English should come from the child. I found that the times that I asked children to speak English, they would struggle with it, but when they chose to do it, they spoke more fluently.

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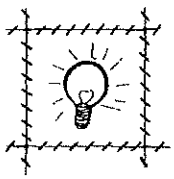

Research Question

I decided to try various groupings and just look at what language the kids use and why. My assumption was that when students are with someone that understands their native language, that is what they will use, and when they are with someone that does not, and they have enough English ability, then they will use English in a natural way. I collaborated with two regular classroom teachers. We exchanged students so that I had a combination of LEP students, English only, and exited* bilingual students.

My assumption was verified. When the students were with English speakers, they would speak English, and when they were with other LEP students they would use Spanish most of the time. When they were with the exited bilingual students, they would use Spanish even though the exited bilingual

**exited: students are moved out of bilingual classrooms where instruction is in the children's native language and English to a regular classroom where English is the only language of instruction.*

students would respond to them in English.

It also was dependent on the composition of the group. I learned that if I wanted more English spoken, I needed to balance the group of English speakers and LEP speakers. I did not want the LEP students dominated by English speakers all the time because I found that some LEP students would not be as verbal. They were more verbal when they were with other LEP students or students that they knew. With some students it didn't matter who they were with; they were very verbal. I realized that the teacher needs to consider the language abilities of the students and also their personalities—their comfort zones.

Lessons Learned

The exchange of students I planned was very successful, partly because I had the resources and had planned everything ahead of time. I had talked to the other two teachers, and we decided on which students would be exchanged. I realized afterward that I really needed more collaboration with the other teachers instead of planning and initiating it on my own, because when it came to acquiring all the materials, I was the only teacher doing it, and it was a big job. I had about 20 activities for a four-week period. Another problem was the scheduling. I had planned ahead of time what I wanted, but when I actually implemented it, I had to modify and that messed up the scheduling.

I used a hands-on math and science kit, so that the kids could be involved in spite of the language they used. Also, the material was something they enjoyed and it would elicit language. It was math and science subject matter and encouraged problem solving. The activities were explained on activity cards with the steps for the students to follow. Once the students were exchanged, I used some introductory activities to get the kids open to the concept of cooperating and getting along. I used books like *The Butter Battle,* by Dr. Zeuss, to help the kids learn to respect another person's point of view.

The kids quickly took to the idea of getting to know others and changing cooperative groups. The groups were different all the time, but I tried to have a balance in the group of English-speaking, exited students, and bilingual students. It was an excellent opportunity for different cultures to interact; I think this is very important because a lot of times bilingual students are isolated or segregated from the rest of the school. By interacting with regular classroom students, I think they felt like they belonged.

Not only was it a good learning experience for the children, it also provided me with an opportunity to assess what language the students used in the different situations and group settings.

If I do it again, I'd like to start the student exchange early in the year, and use it as an alternative to mainstreaming. I'd work with another mainstream teacher, forming cooperative groups with her students, so that the LEP students are exposed to English for a limited period of time. The majority of the time, I would maintain my bilingual classroom, so I could address their specific needs.

Sensitivity to Needs

I did not exit any of my second graders into regular third grade classrooms even though I had some very advanced students who were reading and doing all their work at grade level in English. I kept them in a bilingual classroom because in the third grade and beyond, there is a lot of new vocabulary presented, and even though the students have learned how to speak and read in English, it is still difficult for them. In a regular classroom, the teacher may explain a concept in a way that English speakers understand, but she may not be aware of the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of her LEP students that would help her explain it to

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them. As a bilingual teacher, I can do that. I can detect problems because I know the children. Even though these students appear to be able to function in a regular classroom, their needs may be overlooked; I think that they need to continue in the bilingual program and gradually be phased out. Also, it is better to remain in a bilingual program and maintain the native language because, as research shows, it is such a strong support for acquiring a new language.

Some people learn language really fast and a second language just as quickly, but some people don't. I'll use one student as an example. Elsa can read at grade level and comprehend, and her spelling and writing are virtually perfect; but I can't get her to speak English. I know she can because I see it in her writing, and she reads in English. I ask her questions in English and, although she responds to me in Spanish, she's understanding. She was one of the students that I exchanged with the regular classroom teacher, and the teacher would comment, "Even Elsa is speaking English to me." Elsa was in a situation where she had the opportunity to use English. In my classroom, she just felt more comfortable speaking Spanish; but she needed the opportunity to use English more in order to gain confidence. She wasn't getting the opportunity in my classroom because everybody could understand her when she spoke Spanish. In the other classroom, she had occasions to use English, but it was only for a short time so it wasn't intimidating. With some students, I discovered that I had to do short-term mainstreaming. Collaborating with another teacher is a way to do this because the kids don't feel singled out or that they are missing out on anything. Both classes were working together.

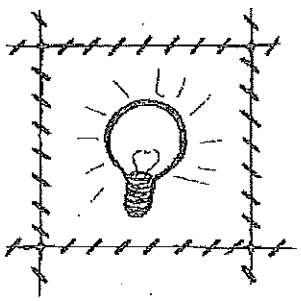
Homogeneity vs. Heterogeneity

As far as having different language ability levels in one classroom, it's almost impossible in the time that you have to meet the needs of all the students. For example, pattern books are too easy for the advanced students, but they are appropriate for the lower level students because of their repetitive nature. The advanced students need to be writing more descriptively, and they need more emphasis on spelling in their writing. In the classroom, I would introduce a story and the pattern, and then I'd pull out the advanced group and encourage them to write and elaborate more. And then I'd assist the low group with following the structure of the pattern, reading it, and talking about it. But it's very hard to balance it all. Therefore, I believe some homogeneity is necessary. But heterogeneous groups are good because the kids learn to cooperate and assist each other, and that makes it possible for the teacher to work individually with more students.

So, with some students, I discovered that I had to do short-term mainstreaming.

Collaboration Important

I think collaboration among teachers gives us a way to have larger blocks of time. If teachers are working by themselves, there is only so much time to be divided among the various levels. Despite the fact that it is hard to work with another teacher because of the time needed for planning, it is worth it because we can encourage, support, and learn from each other.



Within the bilingual program, there is more opportunity to do innovative things because others consider bilingual teachers to be the experts. The only problem is getting all teachers, bilingual and regular, to work together, because many times there is a difference in teaching philosophy and opinions on the value of bilingual education. The responsibility for our children does not only rest on our shoulders.

I think regular classroom teachers need to be sensitive and knowledgeable about language minority students because that affects how they perceive their academic abilities. I think the principal can play a major role in facilitating cooperation and understanding. For example, during inservice or staff meetings, she could describe the needs and characteristics of language minority kids in order to prepare regular classroom teachers for the time when the children will be mainstreamed. She should also be open-minded and encourage ideas or projects that help those teachers collaborate more with the bilingual teachers.

I believe this type of advocacy by the principal is reasonable because LEP children are just as much a part of the school population as anyone else. Because of these children there is more diversity; along with that, however, comes unique educational needs of different cultures.

Understanding Learning Differences

The strength of a language minority child is his native language. He has only begun to acquire English, whereas English-speaking children have been learning English since birth.

Teachers and the rest of the staff need to be open to ideas from those who are trying to remedy a situation instead of deciding to duplicate the problem. A lot of times that's what we do. We just say, 'Well, let's just face it. There's a 22 maximum of students for each class. That's what we've got to deal with.'

In addition, many LEP children have not had what are considered "typical" life experiences in English, or the same quantity of experiences. They may be able to use "school language," but they have not used English in other situations. For example, when it comes to writing, the native English speaker can be more descriptive when writing about going to the lake or the beach. The ESL student may not be as descriptive in English because she may not have been to the beach, or, if she has, she may not have learned the English description of the experience because she was speaking Spanish the whole time.

Sometimes bilingual educators put too much emphasis on language and not enough emphasis on concept development. It takes longer for an ESL student to learn a concept than it does an English student because the ESL student is learning the language as well as the concept. That's why I think collaborating with other teachers might help; time is such a factor.

The Challenge

When it was time to place students for the following year, we realized second grade was going to be bulging with at least 20 LEP students per class. That is especially difficult because LEP students need a lot of small group teaching and extra guidance. We decided to create a second-third grade classroom that would take the overflow of the second graders. That helped a little, but we still had large classes. At first we said, 'Well, that's the way it is.' Then, another teacher and I decided we shouldn't just accept this; we needed to do something. So, we created a class for newcomers only. One teacher volunteered to take on all the newcomers until they had enough English to function in a bilingual class where English and Spanish were used.

Teachers and the rest of the staff need to be open to ideas from those who are trying to remedy a situation instead of deciding to duplicate the problem. A lot of times that's what we do. We just say, 'Well, let's just face it. These are the students that we've got. There's a 22 maximum of students for each

class. That's what we've got to deal with.'

But the policy makers don't think about the variety of students that a teacher has in her class of 22, and what she or he can realistically deal with effectively. I think we need to address the issue of how the teacher is going to take care of all the different academic levels and learning needs in the class of 22 students.

Another problem is that bilingual teachers are pretty isolated—that is, I take care of my classroom, the other teachers take care of their classrooms. I think that there are times that we must work together. Not only do bilingual teachers need to work together, but we also need to work with the regular teachers. I don't think it's intentional to exclude the bilingual teachers, but communication lines need to be open.

Regular teachers need to understand students better, so they can do a more effective job in helping them. For example, in second grade, when a bilingual student is ready to be mainstreamed, we approach the regular teacher and we ask that she take on the student for language or for math or for both. But if her class size is too large, it is not possible for her to do so. The student exchange program that I described would be an alternative. I think there should be more ways to familiarize regular classroom teachers with the needs of our students. Otherwise, they don't know what we're doing, and vice versa.

Teacher Research

I see how a teacher researcher approach has helped me because even though I have always had my assumptions how to solve the problems in my classroom, it wasn't until I decided to do this study, set it up, and followed the procedures that the "aha!" came. It's similar to when you're doing a science project in the classroom, and you know what's going to happen. But when you actually do the experiment, there is the excitement of actually seeing the results. In doing this experiment, this study in my classroom, it confirmed what I believed to be true.

I have become more excited about being a teacher researcher as I see other teachers at conferences talking about their research in their classrooms. And, my experiences encouraged me to do more reading. Through the process of looking, making observations, and documenting, I have become more focused.

There are areas that need to be researched—What helps students in acquiring a second language? Why do approaches work for some students but not for others? What are the factors that affect second language acquisition? Another question I have is in regard to the use of basals as opposed to literature. Does children's literature, because it usually has richer descriptions and more interesting stories, encourage higher literacy levels? I would like to compare the reading level progression of students reading from basals to students who are reading literature that has more interest and meaning.

I believe there has to be a purpose for learning, but also the teacher needs a purpose for teaching. She needs opportunities to experiment and make changes that may alleviate some of the problems she is having instead of continuing to use methods and strategies that don't work. If I did not get a chance to improve my experience in the classroom, I would feel like it was futile to continue to teach. There has to be a purpose for what we're doing.

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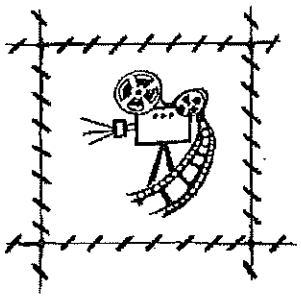

Light pieces and dark—that's what makes patchwork so interesting...and so like life. —*From The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt*

Committed to Making a Difference

Mark is an elementary school teacher in the Dallas–Fort Worth area. He describes his experiences implementing a newcomer's class at his school.

I live with my wife and children in the same house I grew up in. We know all our neighbors, and I have seen a great deal of changes in my community. When I was growing up, it was a predominantly Anglo community. My parents were very protective of me, especially when busing started. Today, it is predominantly African American. I remember being shocked by the differences in economic status at my school. Some students who did not have as much as I did would try to take my money. Once, walking down the hall, I got hit in the face for no reason. Maybe because of my faith in God, I wanted to endure that treatment and not allow fear to control me. My parents discussed "white flight" with me, and taught that God is not "a respecter of persons." My parents saw the worth in people of other races.

After graduating from high school, I went to Baylor University and received a B.A. in general business. I took 12 hours of Spanish, but the instructors used only drilling, memorizing, and reading. I learned Spanish from reading it, not really listening to it, and it was the only class I ever failed. Learning a language is tough, but I am determined, and I am still working on it. I know firsthand how difficult it is to learn a language, but with the experience of teaching in a bilingual classroom, I am getting closer to living the language.

In 1990, after several different work experiences in sales, I started substitute teaching, and began the long application process for the alternative certification program. There were 800 applicants for 80 positions, so I knew it was going to be tough. I applied as a bilingual teacher because I thought it would be challenging and interesting. I started to practice my Spanish, and in February, I took the Spanish skills test that is required by the district.

In April, I was called for a second interview. Principals, staff, and teachers asked about my goals and dreams—it was a very thorough interview—quite impressive. Thankfully, I passed.

In May, 30 people applied for 17 to 20 teaching positions, and there was more tough competition. The other applicants were fluent in Spanish, and I had to convince the panel that with my substitute experience and other things, being fluent could be overridden. I guess my sales experience came in handy! I got accepted in May and began alternative certification courses at Texas Woman's University.

Those were the hardest six to seven weeks of my life! The instructors cram in so much, but they did a good job, and I would recommend the program to anyone.

The School

One week after training, I started at Juniper Elementary whose student population is about 90 percent Hispanic, five percent African American, and five percent Anglo, all of whom are in the upper-lower socioeconomic class. Most of the children have both parents living with them and most mothers stay

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In fifth and sixth grades there are no bilingual teachers, and ESL instruction occurs only some of the time. The children who need additional language instruction are left alone, with no structure, maybe to watch films. They were getting a second-rate education and little attention.

home. There are many large families and that is why our school is bursting at the seams.

The school is PreK through sixth grade. PreK is only for Spanish dominant kids who need to learn English. Kindergarten children are introduced to the Spanish alphabet and literature in Spanish. Kinder has lots of verbal instruction in Spanish, but they also hear English. In first grade, children begin the alphabet in English. The second grade is mostly English. In third grade, there is 45 minutes to one hour of instruction in Spanish. Fourth through sixth grades have ESL with some activities in Spanish.

Newcomer Program

In fourth grade, many kids are ready to transition, but there are some who are not. As a result, the teacher has to give them different assignments. The whole thing becomes a major juggling act; it is overwhelming at times because there is such a great distance between transitional students and the newcomers.

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It was frustrating to teach at so many different levels of English in the same grade. That's when I suggested we form a newcomer's class for the third through sixth grades. Now I have 20 kids, third grade through sixth grade. The other teachers appreciate having the class available to their students. And it is miraculous how kids work together!

Challenges

In terms of any instructional problems I have had, I think overall it went well, although I had to be really flexible. Classroom size is frustrating. I need more room. Sometimes we go outside or move to the auditorium. Also, there is no curriculum for my class. I wish there was a newcomer curriculum network of some kind, but at least I have exchanged phone numbers at conferences with other teachers who have newcomer programs. I worry about making instruction comprehensible and challenging. I try to be creative, but I am not able to take as much time as I need.

I have eight- to 12-year-olds and some kids that are 13, but this has not proved to be a problem. I would rather have the same level of English than the same grade level. They help each other. We have cooperative learning; we have teams.

Juniper has about 900 students, and my students are not singled out at all. If anything, the other kids are envious because we have more fun. We get two to three field trips a month. We are not the "dummy class." The attitude, 'You just came to the U.S.; you have special needs,' surrounds us. I want my kids to succeed, and I test their limits. Teachers cooperate with me because they are relieved to get my help, and they help me in return. Students come to my class and realize they really aren't dummies because in my class, they excel. Some students just have more trouble learning language. The social aspects are positive. The students cooperate and work in a family fashion. Our coach did not know any English when he moved to the U. S. and it took him two years before he even knew what was going on. I hope my kids

That's when I suggested we form a newcomer's class for the third through sixth grades.

In order to have a successful newcomer program, you need a supportive principal...Next, you should be willing to invest more time and energy.

feel comfortable from day one.

Prerequisites

In order to have a successful newcomer program, you need a supportive principal. In my case, my principal, Mr. Williams, never tells me what to do. I have full rein, but at the same time I can bounce ideas off of him. He tells me that my ideas are good, and what a great job I am doing—he is an encourager. I could not have had my newcomer's class if he hadn't approved it. If he thinks you have a good idea and he sees you are willing to invest in the students, then he will go for it.

Next, you should be willing to invest more time and energy. This type of classroom takes self-motivation and perseverance in order to find out what the students need. I don't care what fourth grade students are doing; my kids aren't ready for that. I have to go to first-grade learner standards. I have to be creative—get away from worksheets and texts unless they are comprehensible. I had to get a first-grade reader and a lot of literature-based material from the library.

Support from Others

Every teacher at the school, including myself, is focused on what she or he is doing. Any time I ask for materials, the other teachers are supportive. We go to first grade classrooms for shared reading, and the teachers have ideas on how to help.

I try to create audiences for what we do. There is nothing worse than to work something up and then not do anything with it. So, I want more audiences such as members of a retirement home or students from other classes. If there is a sense and purpose to it, students get more motivated—their work isn't only being placed in their cumulative folders for their parents to see. If the students are using English in a meaningful way, they are motivated to use the language.

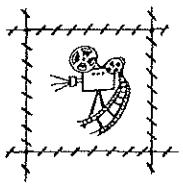
Many of them are reading English books, but some are brand new to reading and are reading Spanish books. The students are rewarded for their efforts when they read to the first graders because the little kids like it. They get to read simpler books too; they have to have books the first graders can understand.

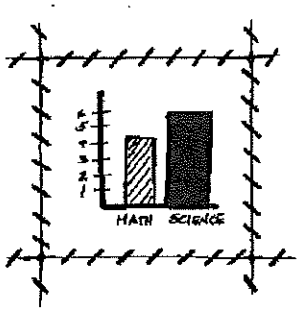
The Future

This is my principal's last year. I certainly hope the new principal will be supportive—see the usefulness of the newcomers class. I want to write a paper about this class and see it implemented in other schools. It's very demanding, but I enjoy it.

In order to improve the education for students at Juniper, we have to involve the parents more. The single greatest factor that successful kids have in common is that their parents are involved in their education. But some of our parents here feel inadequate and are afraid to get involved because they don't speak English. There has to be a way to involve more parents, especially the mothers who are not working. Many of them have little children and think of that as a barrier; but it doesn't have to be. I wouldn't mind if parents come to my classroom with their little kids. I want parents to know that they are important and they are needed.

Update: Mark gave us the following information on the current status of the newcomer's program at his school: "Unfortunately, the new principal decided to cut the newcomer's program. Again, all the third through sixth grade teachers are overwhelmed with meeting the challenges of the newcomers in their classrooms. At this point, there is little chance there will ever be another newcomer's class at Juniper. However, I hope to use the information I gathered and presented in my professional paper (written upon completion of his master's degree) to help the district see its obligation to provide quality education programs for newcomers. Because there is so much at stake, I am committed to making a positive difference for these, often forgotten, members of the school community."





How much piecin' a quilt is like livin' a life! You can give the same kind of pieces to two persons and one will make a "nine-patch" and one'll make a "wild goose chase"... —Eliza Calvert Hall in Aunt Jane of Kentucky, from The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt.

Creating a Risk-Free Community

Suzanne Barton and Richard Lay, experienced teaching professionals and members of the faculty of International Newcomer Academy in Fort Worth, provide the following information about the school and their experiences as they guided its creation and participate in its on-going development.

Background

Suzanne: The bilingual department and the secondary division of the district had a vision to bring all beginning level students together from the district to consolidate our resources. We submitted a proposal to the Superintendent in the spring of 1993, and it was shaped and reshaped until it was approved in July. It was decided, after a number of revisions, that we would start a pilot. We pulled about 130 students from the areas that had large immigrant student populations and opened our doors September 8, 1994.

In one month, we hired all of our teachers. They had to want to be at the school—there were no surplus teachers placed here. A new teacher not only had to go through the district's process, but also had to complete a resume, write a letter of application, and then interview with a panel of teachers. So it was a very selective process. For the co-directors the same process was used.

The last few weeks before school began were very hectic, but we made it. The staff brought the school alive. The district was so cooperative; people were working 24 hours a day on this building.

Getting Started

Suzanne: Prior to this position I worked as an ESL Specialist with the secondary division of the Bilingual Education Department, which has a very good reputation in the city. The proposal we put together was quality. It answered the questions. It had the numbers. We did the charts. It was also a proposal that was very grandiose—beyond the norm, but I felt that it was something that we should do. We wanted to focus especially on our over-aged student population to prepare them for the work environment; many do not stay to get a diploma. Many aspects were addressed in this proposal to deal with the variety of needs that language minority students present. We have students who come in with little or no education at all. They don't read or write in their own languages. That was one component.

We want education to be available to everyone regardless of how much time they spend with us.

We have other kids who come to the U.S. when they are 19 years old. Some schools are reluctant to enroll them because they believe they won't graduate. We want education to be available to everyone regardless of how much time they spend with us. We're also looking at the parents of our students because we discovered that the better educated the parents, the more emphasis they will place on education in the home. We're still very interested in adult education. We're still interested in putting the world of work into our curriculum and preparing our students for the future, but it will take time to add additional components.

The Administration and the School Board have been very supportive of bilingual education. When our school asked for additional ESL teachers, almost 100 percent of the time the Board allowed those teachers to come aboard. Another factor, of course, is that the Administration was faced with the reality of the great number of language minority kids that they had at these schools.

Richard: I interviewed for a position here, and I was given a description of the school and some of the details of the proposal. We discussed how I might fit into this kind of situation. I really liked the school for several reasons. First, I had been very acquainted with the refugee and immigrant population, and I had seen the problems that they go through in trying to adjust to our culture and our system; I have witnessed many, many failures.

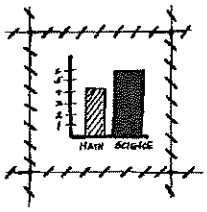
I knew that most students who were over a certain age didn't succeed, and that for the most part, they were being recruited to participate in criminal activities and gangs. Culture or race had nothing to do with it. I saw some of my own students being recruited, and there was very little that I could do about it which was frustrating. I wanted them to be able to succeed in school and go on to do something with their lives, but they just weren't being equipped within the traditional high school setting. Many of them were dropping out because of work or they just could not catch up. They were being thrown into classrooms where there were students who already had one or two years of experience in learning English, and they just couldn't catch up. They could not learn the material or the language fast enough.

I knew the potential was there because I had seen others succeed. For instance, I have a friend who spent the first five years of his life running through jungles because people were trying to shoot him and his family. He was totally illiterate when he came to the United States when he was 11 or 12. He couldn't read or write anything. His own language was not even a written language at the time. But today he is an aerospace engineer working in Salt Lake City. I've seen many young men and women succeed. But the system was causing many students to fail just because they didn't get the time and the personal attention that they needed. I wanted to work in this school to help those kinds of students.

Goals

Suzanne: From the very beginning, the school has been a cooperative venture in the sense that we had input from everyone concerned. We worked very hard to get parental input. One of the problems is that we get new parents every year, and we have to teach site-based management responsibilities and decision making to parents who have never been asked to be involved in a student's education before. They see it as the teacher's area of expertise.

However, we have an advisory council that is made up of parents, teachers, and community members. Our focus teams evaluate the areas that we're emphasizing such as the areas of instruction, communication, and parent involvement among others. When the teachers first came together, we had brainstorming sessions. We asked, what do we want the school to look like? What kinds of things do we want to be offered? We generated ideas. Then we took the ideas that were the most important to us and began to draft a mission statement which was revised by the parents at our first parent meeting. We sent the revised mission statement back to the parents, and asked them to sign it if they agreed with it. Our mission statement has been through an extensive evolution, but the time we took to get everyone involved shows that we want the students to be in an environment that is conducive to learning. We want students to be eager learners of English, so we have to have an environment that is risk-free. We want the school to acknowledge different cultures and diversities and to celebrate them. We want to challenge our students academically so that they are not less, but they are more, because of their use of two languages. The mission statement says that we want kids to be creative thinkers; we want them to be community members who are able to productively make decisions in our community. We want them to be able to use resources to help them make decisions. We also want them to be accepting of



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differences and able to work cooperatively together.

Academic Program

Suzanne: We have separate high school and middle school programs because we have students as young as 11 and 12...

Richard: And as old as 20...

Suzanne: Therefore, our sixth, seventh and eighth graders have courses together. They are assigned by target language and math ability, not age. Our high school is the same way. Of course, at the beginning of the year it's different. We know the kids that score the highest on native language assessments are going to move the most easily into English. We use that as the basis for placement, but there is a lot of flexibility. We move students continually. We also have our students work together regardless of grade level during a non-graded activity period. It's not what we want it to be at this point, but we have high hopes for it. As it is now, all students are off during that time so that we can do school productions. We're planning culture week, and the students are preparing for it during the activity period.

Culture week will include dances, songs, and art work. We see it as an opportunity for the kids to talk to each other and to build community spirit. We eventually would like to see the students going out and doing community projects during the non-graded activity period, or we would like to have people from the community come in.

Richard: At a school like ours, we are able to get to know students. For instance, the student placement center is not able at this time to tell us if someone is pre-literate in the Vietnamese language. But just by getting to know students, we can tell very quickly if they have come from a situation in Vietnam where they went to school, or if they have come from a more rural area where there are no schools. We can get to know the Chinese who also speak Vietnamese. We get to know students, and we can change things very quickly to fit the needs of the students.

Suzanne: We also have the luxury of having native language support for most students. We have teachers and teacher assistants on staff who speak Vietnamese and Spanish. They have been our lifelines, especially in the beginning. Even though we focus on English as the target language, we still can't ask a student who speaks no English to fill out emergency cards. You have to have native language support at that point. There is no way we can command someone to perform in a language that she or he has never encountered before. Our teaching assistants are very important in this school.

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Paraprofessionals

Suzanne: Teaching assistants may be in the office one period a day, and the rest of the time they are in the classrooms assisting the teachers. We have been fortunate in the second semester, in that we have some students who are working as teaching assistants because their language skills have progressed to that point. We have money for tutors, and we're trying to recruit college students or other people in the community to be tutors. They do not have to be in college; they could be people who just have the facility in English and in another language represented at our school. We want to do as much as we can to make the teacher-student ratio as small as possible.

Program Evaluation

Suzanne: There are a number of areas that we're working on in the school. One of the things that we've all felt uncomfortable about is that we throw around terms like "beginning-level student" and "intermediate-level student" as if they have some concrete basis. If you go to anyone across the country and you ask them what a beginning level student is, some people will tell you, "She can write her name, he can count to ten"...very

We're going to be working on describing what we think a beginning-level student should achieve in science and math.

concrete kinds of things. But what does that tell you about a student? Most activities with checklist evaluations tend to lack process; it's all memorization; it's all production. I think you need to look at process skills as well as production skills. That's what we're going to be doing more of next year.

Next year, we're going to have twelve half-days of inservice and five collaborative staff development days—three of them before school starts. We're going to be working on describing what we think a beginning-level student should achieve in science and math. We have a wealth of expertise in this building, but we have to come together on what we think the terms mean. We have to look at the district curriculum for content area and our own ESL scope and sequence; we have to try to mesh the two with guiding questions: What does the student have to do in order to succeed as a second language learner? As to the content, what does the student have to know in order to be ready for the next course? But that's not necessarily going to make him a successful language learner. It all depends on how he arrived at the content. We will analyze what we expect students to know in the content areas, and also what kind of performances will show us that they know the content. In other words, we are looking at how they construct the information and make meaning out of it as opposed to how they produce or regurgitate a list of facts. That's where the process skills come in. We are looking at both process and product.

Assessment

Suzanne: I've gone to meetings on national standards and we've read a lot of alternative assessments. Many contend that our students should be compared with everybody else. I agree that when a second language student graduates from high school, she had better have the competencies to go out and compete in the job market. We don't want a second class education for our students. But what we're opposed to is comparing a student that is brand new to this country, or one who has only been here for six months, to everyone else in some kind of national standard. I think there is something not only inherently unfair but unsound pedagogically in doing that. So we're working on a way of describing what students have done in the time spent here comparing where they began to what they have achieved now.

Richard: The difficult question is, how do you decide what content is most important? For example, which is more important, that they learn that the Mojave Desert is so many square miles in size, or where and how to access that information in a second language?

Suzanne: Plus, how do the students show that they've done what you wanted them to do? If they're studying eco-systems such as the desert and the rainforest, what can they produce from the information to show that they understand those different environments?

Richard: If we can teach children how to acquire information, they can use that skill in the real world. I was in business before I got back into teaching. I was able to work as a buyer for eight years without having any courses in business because I learned how to learn—how to acquire the information I needed to succeed.

Suzanne: There needs to be an emphasis on both ends. I know for a while we've emphasized the process because it wasn't emphasized for a long time, but we all know that there has to be emphasis on the product as well. In other words,

In other words, we are looking at how they construct the information and make meaning out of it as opposed to how they produce or regurgitate a list of facts. That's where the process skills come in.

it is not enough that a child knows the process of writing, the child has to be able to produce writing that is going to get noticed.

Richard: That's the way the book publishing business is. My wife is a writer, and what sells is not the process. She goes through the process in order to produce a final product that is salable. For example, for a project that my students are currently working on, they're learning some map and atlas skills. Before this, we had learned a lot about cultures. At the end, they're going to produce mini-books that describe their own cultures and countries, including a map and a small atlas of their parts of the world.

Suzanne: They're going to be using the information that they're pulling together. Another example is a unit I put together on variables. I wanted the students to amass some process skills and some knowledge about variables. Then, they are placed in a testing situation that is very similar but with different materials. They have to do the experiments and draw conclusions. They acquire the knowledge they need through interacting with variables and doing experiments, and then they have a hands-on assessment that tells us whether they can use the information or not. I try to give the students the opportunity to show what they know in ways other than through language.

We are working on developing some indicators that will help us know when to move our students on to their home schools. We consider such things as: "Student uses strategies to make meaning by using titles in pictures, background knowledge, getting help when comprehension is difficult, and extending comprehension through writing." The goal for listening is: "Student retells what is heard, contributes ideas, asks questions." These parameters and others like them require teachers to observe and determine the student's language learning ability and what strategies the student is using to be successful. What we're going to do is use some of these, add others to them, and then combine that with content knowledge.

Teacher Assessment

Suzanne: We are also piloting an alternative teacher assessment. The areas of study include *teacher as learner* and *student performance.* Those were the two areas that teachers selected and documented. Others, such as *leadership, collegiality,* and *parent and community involvement,* are areas that we all worked on, but we did not necessarily provide documentation. The area of *teacher as learner* included subjects such as alternative assessment, alternative reporting methods, cooperative learning, and project-oriented or applied learning tasks. Many of the teachers chose to track three students by means of a portfolio approach. Then, they asked, what kinds of strategies do we need to incorporate? What did the work of these students tell us about our teaching? Who was getting it and who wasn't? What did we do to help the students be more successful?

Another emphasis we are incorporating is the area of technology. We're very fortunate that we have computers in our rooms. We want to make the best use of them, but we have teachers with varying levels of expertise. So, we're offering workshops that will move teachers from beginning knowledge all the way to using databases and programs like Pagemaker and Hypercard, so that they will be able to help their students use the programs and produce. We're also spending some time with what we're calling a student review. We select one student and analyze his performance in all his classes with the hope that, by knowing about one student, we will be able to gain some insights that can be generalized.

Many of the teachers chose to track three students by means of a portfolio approach. Then, they asked, what kinds of strategies do we need to incorporate? What did the work of these students tell us about our teaching?

We have each of the teachers present what they know about the student, and we put our heads together to see what we can do to help the student have a more successful experience here. We also have ongoing peer coaching where teacher triads observe each other and have pre-conferences and post-conferences about three times per semester. We've had people train us in peer coaching, and we're using it as a way to better ourselves and build a sense of community—a community of learners.

Accountability

Suzanne: One of the great things is that we are considered an alternative school and that gives us a lot of leeway—not as much as we would like, but it gives us some. We're able to hire teachers based on their desire to be here, not so much based on their teacher educational background. In other words, we have people who are teaching math with college degrees and with a great deal of expertise, but they may not have math certification. We are also very fortunate in that our students are all exempt from the TAAS (Texas Assessment for Academic Skills) because they are beginning students. We know that it is becoming more performance-based, so we're preparing our students for performance-based tests in the classroom. So yes, we're addressing TAAS, but we're doing it within our academic areas without having to pull kids together for six months and say, 'Let's do TAAS.' We do what is sound academically and educationally because if we prepare the kids, they're going to do well on any test that anybody puts in front of them.

We firmly believe that you need the basis of your first language in order to transfer into a second language.

Richard: As long as we're doing what's best for the students and they are learning the process and putting together a product, they'll do okay.

Time Frame

Richard: Most of the students spend at least a year here, but a few leave earlier than that. We had a brother and sister from Peru who had spent several years in private schools, and they grasped English very quickly. Within three or four months, they didn't need to be here anymore. Most students, though, are here for a year or more before they go on. Students that are classified as pre-literate will not be leaving after one year. They simply can't.

High School

Richard: High school students are very different than middle school students. The middle school program tends to be uniform for the most part. High school students, because they have such a wide range of experience, have three different programs.

Preliterate. We have a pre-literate program in which students stay together all day long. Typically, in social studies, for example, we use pictures for identifying words, letters, and names of things at the beginning of the year. Later in the year, they are able to work with simple paragraphs and the pictures that go along with them. It's a very long process because we're talking about 15-, 16-, or 17-year-olds who before they came here couldn't read or write. They also receive training in their native languages. At first, it is two hours a day; later in the year it's down to one hour a day. We firmly believe that you need the basis of your first language in order to transfer into a second language.

Late arrivals. We have native language instruction for the pre-literates and also for students in what we call a late-arrivals class, the second group of high schoolers. One of the characteristics of teaching language minority students is that they do not begin in August or September and stay in the same class for the rest of the year. They are coming in all year long, and they will continue to do so. We have a great number who come in the fall; nobody comes in around the holiday season, and winter is kind of slack. But then spring enrollment is hot and heavy, and then we get a bunch in the summer. That's just the way refugee workers and immigrant cycles are. In the middle of the year, we realized that this was going to continue, so we established a special program specifically for late arrivals. We begin this group with the same materials we used for the other students at the beginning of the year.

Regular. The third group is

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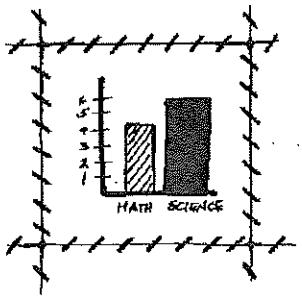


made up of students who have been here from the beginning of the year, or who began with more English ability or who have acquired English more rapidly than the rest. We place them in regular classrooms based on math and language ability.

Teaching Responsibilities

Richard: Most teachers are responsible for teaching different levels in their subject areas. For example, I teach regular social studies classes, a pre-literate social studies class, and a late-arrival social studies class. Another teacher teaches three classes of regular social studies. Of the regular social studies classes, he has one class that is very advanced and two classes that are a little bit slower. But he also teaches two English lab classes, one of which is for late arrivals.

There is a fourth stream of students whose needs we have not been able to address and that is represented by a young lady here who is 18 or 19. When she comes to school she does a good job; she is learning English. She does quite well in her work, but because of her background and her life situation, she can't come all the time. She is the mother of a special needs child. We have a number of students in that situation. It may not be because they have children, but because of work or other responsibilities with their families that they're not able to be here. We are not to the point yet where we're really helping them. We don't have a program set up for them yet; our program is not really succeeding for them at this time.

Suzanne: We'd like to offer night school. In other words, we would like to offer a more flexible program where we incorporate work experience as well as classroom experience.

Staff Qualities

Suzanne: Teachers are involved in the interview process. Not all 12 of us; we don't want to scare anybody away! People are very reticent today to ask prospective teachers questions such as: 'Are you going to work after school? Are you going to donate some time on the weekends?' We tell people in the interview that teaching here is going to require a lot of work. It's not going to be a traditional situation where you come in the morning, you teach, and then you go home. We say if you want the rewards of beginning a school and having a say in what it's going to look like and how it's going to operate, then you're going to have to put in the time to make it happen. We can't sit back and say, 'Well, I want this, and I think this school ought to be like this.' We're the ones responsible for making it the way we want it, but it will require our time.

We have a professional reading group that meets once a month to discuss books, not only in education, but in areas such as politics and philosophy. In our discussions of these and other topics, we have had vigorous debates; but we discovered that part of what unites us is that we're different. We do share a commitment to being here for kids, and the belief that we can make a difference for kids who don't always have the opportunity to be heard.

We also share a core philosophy about education; our belief is that our students are underestimated in traditional forms of education and we're here to show what our kids know, not to

show what they don't know. It is very important for a school to have a common philosophical base. We may not be the same, but our common educational belief is that our students are capable, and that we must find ways of bringing out that capability. We have to find ways of assessing them to show others and themselves that they have it.

Regardless of age, we have a young faculty here—they're young in the sense that they're not stale, they're not confined. In fact, the qualifications for this job are first, be willing to work hard in order to reap the reward, and second, be willing to be open to change. Change shouldn't be a scary thing; we go through change all the time and we embrace it. Sometimes, we bite off more than we can chew and we have to focus on fewer things at once, but the goal is that this school be different now than it was at the beginning of the year. It is not going to be the same next year as it is today.

Future Goals

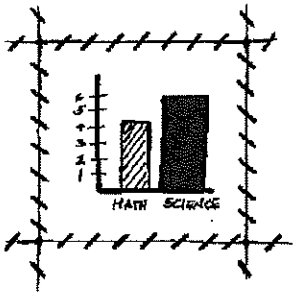
Richard: I have very personal reasons for wanting to teach here. I have been working with immigrant refugees since I got out of the Navy—Gerald Ford had just lost the presidency when I got out of the Navy, so I've been at this for a long time. One of the things that I envision this school being is a refuge and a source of advocacy for the immigrant community.

Suzanne: We have expanded our mission statement to state the commitment to making the school environment risk free. One of these days, we hope our kids will be able to walk in here and get medical needs met. They're not going to have to spend an entire day sitting at the community hospital just to get shots. They're going to have the doctors, nurses, and social workers that they need at school. The parents are going to have a place to come and be educated right alongside their children. They will be able to come during the day or at night. In other words, we want the school to meet the needs of our clients, not the other way around.

We would like our kids to be able to run a newspaper or a card shop; they could produce products, sell them, and run their own banking system so they get hands-on experience. We envision having an integrated curriculum where the child leaves science class where he is learning about, for example, parachutes. (We made them today and we stood in the stairwells and threw them down to learn about air resistance.) He would leave a class like that and walk into the ESL class where they'll be talking about modes of transportation, and in history class they'll be learning about the space race and how that is related to flight. Then he'll walk into math class and learn how to compute distances and find out the speed of sound. We know kids learn the best thematically, especially our students. That's another area that we want to work on—integrating the curriculum.

Richard: Next year we are planning a two-week curriculum on baseball, and we hope the players still aren't on strike!

Suzanne: Students are going to be reading stories like *The Bear and Jackie Robinson.* They'll be going out to the stadium. We hope to have them meet some of the players. They'll be computing batting averages in math; in science they will be studying concepts such as force and velocity.



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Background

Richard: While I was going to college, I became good friends with a lot of immigrant students from various places in the world and began teaching them. I discovered they had a lot of problems with English, so I took the time to read with them one on one throughout my college career. I got my teaching certificate, but because of a disappointing teaching experience, I stopped teaching and worked in the business world for eight years. However, I continued to work with immigrants. For three

My mother used to give me old workbooks, and I'd get all the kids rounded up from the neighborhood, put them in the garage in the summer time and give them assignments.

years, my wife and I were the godparents, if you want to call us that, to a group of Hmong living in a nearby city. We did everything for them. We counseled them; we helped them bury their dead; we helped their businesses get off the ground; we helped them when people were trying to take advantage of them. We taught them.

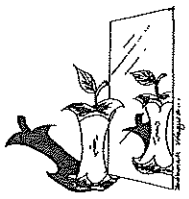
In late 1989, I began teaching again, and later I was invited to come to this school.

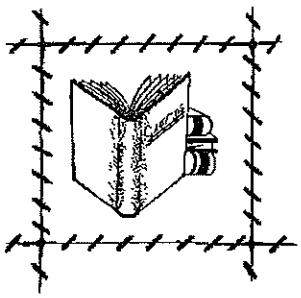
Suzanne: I knew I was always going to be a teacher. My mother used to give me old workbooks, and I'd get all the kids rounded up from the neighborhood, put them in the garage in the summer time, and give them assignments. I have good memories of those times.

When I left college, I had a degree in history and English and a teaching certificate. When I put in my application to teach, there happened to be an overabundance of history people. Then, a girlfriend told me about a teaching job opening in an area school district, and I interviewed the next day and they hired me. School was going to start on the following Monday and they had a drawer with over 200 applicants, but they didn't have the time to call the 200 applicants on the phone. I was sitting there saying, 'Me, me, me, I'll do whatever you want.'

My first year of teaching, I grew a great deal personally, but probably not as much professionally. I say this because about three months into my first year, a little girl in the first row looked at me and said, 'What are you talking about?' I realized I needed to change my style and my vocabulary. The children had been there for three months and had been very patient and kind but they hadn't understood a word I said.

Then, I taught math for the Department of Labor in a local vocational program for Hispanics. I realized those were the students I wanted to work with. It was a challenge and I felt good about what I did, and I knew the students needed someone who could work with them. I applied for ESL Specialist and other positions in a local district. Of course, I had no ESL courses. All I could say was that I worked with kids. Eventually, I wound up helping to create a school.





Round each piece a memory lingers like a sweet story often told.—Sylvia Summers Pierce, from The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt.

Using the Narrative Structure to Discover Our Experiences

by Irma Guadarrama, Texas Woman's University

The narrative approach as a research method has received considerable attention in the reflective practice movement. Understanding teachers, and helping them reflect on their actions, seems to be an important step in developing action plans toward educational improvement. The narrative process is a method of practical inquiry that allows teachers to become actively engaged in implementing their own research agenda, which strengthens their roles as professionals (Richardson, 1994). It provides opportunities to work in collaboration with other teachers, a strategy that often leads to empowerment of teachers as they establish their own community of inquirers (Miller, 1990).

Since the narrative process consists of "whole" experiences, they often reveal insights of past, present, and future events. Indeed, teacher narratives that describe various and numerous experiences often produce biographies, some of which can be of considerable length. Research that analyzes teacher narratives may also yield data in which values, feelings, and aesthetic content are implied (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Schubert & Ayers, 1992; Hollingsworth, 1992). The most effective research technique in the narrative process, however, is not the accumulation of data, but the crafty pruning and shaping of selected, important data. For teachers, the narrative process, or "storytelling," is an excellent tool for reflection, especially when it is purposely focused on deep-seeded views of teaching and the educational process.

For teachers, the narrative process, or "storytelling," is an excellent tool for reflection, especially when it is purposely focused on deep-seeded views of teaching and the educational process.

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) refer to the narrative process as "the reconstruction of curriculum meaning from a study of personal experience" (p.81). In essence, the narrative process allows teachers the opportunity to reconstruct or rebuild an experience with the result of clarification of existing knowledge or new understandings. The authors explain it this way: "It is when we ask ourselves the meaning of a story, and tell it in a narrative, that we reconstruct the meaning recovered in the story" (p. 81).

Research studies on teachers as researchers conducted in the last fifteen years have produced valuable lessons for using teacher narratives (Schön, 1983; Richardson, 1994). Connelly and Clandinin (1988) have identified several elements of a narrative structure that serve to examine, interpret, and analyze the data. Table 1 (opposite) briefly describes these elements.

As in all qualitative research, the value of the research project relies on careful attention to the procedure for implementation as well as collecting the data and interpreting the results. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) provide guidance on this part of the process as well, suggesting that the interview process should focus on the past, present, and future and the "recovery of meaning tools" should include a focus on the subject matter, the milieu, the learner and the teacher, and the relationships thereof. It is also important, according to the authors, to determine how teachers interpret theoretical constructs, and how they translate theory into practice.

The research guidance provided by Connelly and Clandinin and others has been instrumental in facilitating the implementation of our project, *Discovering Our Experiences*.

Table 1
The Language for Narrative Structures (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988)

1. *Personal Philosophy*	Explanations and interpretations of one's beliefs and values as related to teaching
2. *Image*	Manifestation of one's past that is significantly expressed and enacted in the teaching behavior or role (We also used "images" to describe current patterns of behavior.)
3. *Metaphor*	The all- encompassing experience which the teacher most closely relates to the teaching event and is reflective of a teacher's conceptual system
4. *Rule*	Clear statement derived from practice and used to drive the curriculum at certain strategic points
5. *Practical principle*	A rule of thumb at a higher and broader level than a rule, that can be interpreted as a teacher's purposes for teaching within a curricular context
6. *Narrative unity*	The overriding sum of all of our experiences through time and space, expressed in narrative form as thematic threads
7. *Rhythm*	Teachers' ways of making curricular decisions based on time or cyclical factors

Guiding Research Questions

In our efforts to capture teachers' narratives, we posed several questions in our research that we viewed as guiding lights:
1) What are the roles of teachers of language minority students in schools and their relationships to each other in the midst of educational reform? How are the teachers' roles similar and different from the roles of other teachers? Have these roles changed over time?
2) How are trained teachers of language minority students influencing decision-making at the school curriculum level, if at all, thereby impacting the schooling process?
3) How do teachers of language minority students best collaborate with one another, thereby nurturing communities of inquirers in the quest for improving the professionalism of the teachers as a group?

Of course, there are many other important questions that we could have posed. Questions related to curricular decisions such as when and how to transfer the students from their native languages to English, which strategies to use to develop language and content, and how to incorporate culture are but a few of the many concerns of teachers and curriculum developers.

The narrative approach allows us to explore thematic questions that revolve around the most pressing problems in the current educational process. It also provides the opportunity to look beyond schooling factors to analyze the broader scope of societal impact, and determine the nature and extent of relationships between school, home, and society. Unlike other research methods that narrow our view of the total educational process, the narrative approach offers us the flexibility to explore a number of related issues, as well as to establish on-going research agendas. The narrative approach, then, offers an opportunity to analyze certain programmatic areas in ways that may not be possible or feasible when using quantitative research methodology.

Narrative Approach as Reflective Tool

Perhaps the most relevant aspect of the narrative approach

is its usefulness as a reflective tool for teachers. Even though we used interviewing as a means to develop teacher narratives, teachers may develop their own narratives, and use similar recovery of meaning tools to systematically self-reflect. The purpose of the narrative process is not to define failures, or even successes, but as Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (1993) explain, it is to help us see the "potential which is implicit in a situation" (p.175). The exploratory nature of the narrative process helps teachers determine how well their practice is aligned with theory or even their proposed goals and objectives.

But it would be far too altruistic to imagine teachers using the narrative or any other practical inquiry approach in a natural, unassisted setting. This is particularly poignant in light of the unreflective nature of the professional lives of teachers. A major goal in teacher change, then, is to establish the means to facilitate teachers in their efforts to practice practical inquiry. Without the efforts by teachers, many questions will remain unanswered, or the attempted responses will lack the important teacher voice that is crucial to the success of any educational program. By far the most important potential contribution to the field of education in general, the education of language minority students in specific, and to the teaching profession in the context of educational reform, lies in the research efforts by teachers.

Narratives of Six Teachers

The six teachers selected to present their narratives were chosen based on our knowledge of their work in research and teaching. Two teachers were interviewed simultaneously, thus five narratives were generated. Each narrative has a distinct focus based on the circumstances of each teacher's work. Four of the narratives are by teachers in elementary education and one, by the two teachers interviewed simultaneously, focuses on a secondary school. The following procedure was used for each narrative:

1) Taped interview. Each interview varied in length; the longest interview was 90 minutes, the least was 50 minutes.
2) Transcription made of each interview.
3) Edited for narrative smoothness.
4) Transcript was sent to each teacher for feedback.
5) Final draft edited for publication.

The narrative process is an appropriate and useful tool in our efforts to learn more about the complexity and sometimes chaotic nature inherent in the schooling of language minority students. The teacher narratives presented in this volume represent essential steps in the process of addressing critical issues and problems in teaching and with the curriculum so we may, at the very least, ensure that a coherent plan for resolving problems and strengthening our programs is targeted correctly. On the following pages, each teacher interview is analyzed using the narrative structure approach described herein.

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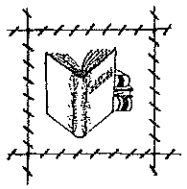


Reflections

Laura
Creative Professionalism
p. 14

Personal Philosophy

It is apparent that Laura's understanding of the process of becoming bilingual and her concern over the linguistic and cultural needs of her students stem partially from her own experiences growing up bilingually, with Spanish playing a dominant role at home, and English playing the dominant role at school. Her personal philosophy is focused on the development of a balanced curriculum that considers the short-term and long-term effects of schooling on her bilingual students. She draws a great deal from her personal experiences, as well as from her professionalism as a practicing teacher and teacher researcher, to make critical decisions about the curriculum and about her relationships with her colleagues and principal.

Metaphor

Laura is aware of the political climate of the school. She uses the metaphor of a society to describe the function of the school, and the inevitable consequence that the students face as a result of the perceived negative views of the majority members. She clearly recognizes the role of the school as a total entity that impacts on her students, as it does on all students: "Of course, all bilingual and ESL programs should not be identical because all children are not identical, and all school cultures are not identical; you have to look at the whole school environment. What we should do is find the best methods—whether they're ESL, bilingual, regular, or special education—to meet the needs of all students."

Practical Principle

A practical principle that Laura clearly follows is incorporated in her bilingual education program, i.e., that children whose dominant language is Spanish should be provided with adequate native language instruction. The fact that her principal objected to her strong native language instruction caused Laura to rethink her ideas and beliefs. However, she remained convinced of the integrity of her convictions, and agreed to modify her curriculum so it would appear as if she was implementing an ESL program rather than a bilingual education program. It seems, then, that Laura is assertive in her willingness to be active within this political context.

Laura is aware of the political climate of the school. She uses the metaphor of a society to describe the function of the school, and the inevitable consequence that the students face as a result of the perceived negative views of the majority members.

Rhythm

Rhythm plays a big role in Laura's decision-making process. Her students are in her charge for one academic year, and she must prepare them within that time frame to function successfully in subsequent years.

A role that Laura plays is one of critical teacher, a Freirean term referring to her function as a problem-poser who asks thought-provoking questions. She poses questions on two levels: to determine the curriculum, i.e., how to tailor it to meet the needs of her students; and, secondly, how to help her students become more conscious of their roles as language learners within a specific cultural, social, and educational milieu. Laura also deals with the whole school aspect, particularly in consideration of the bilingual students in other classrooms.

The definition of "knowing," as described in Freirean terms, is also appropriate for the knowledge Laura possesses. Knowing is associated with learning that is active, a process that enlightens all who are meaningfully involved. Laura's quest for knowledge, and dedication to resolving the problems, led her to a transformational process that resulted in, among other things, the development of a special "teaching" strategy, and ways to influence her colleagues and principal.

The advice Laura has for

teachers underscores her role as critical thinker: "If I were to give advice to a new teacher, it would be to stay committed to what you know about what language minority children need in spite of the policies that exist in your school, which many times work against them."

Discussion Question

What would you do in a high-resistance school to a) convince your principal and colleagues of the principles behind bilingual education; and b) change hostile policies and make them more sensitive with the needs of the second language learner?

Maryann

A Family of Learners

p. 21

Several striking features are found in Maryann's narrative. One is the recurring images of children, her students, which she describes in many positive ways. She visualizes her students as "being proud of themselves, have improved self-esteem; are able to own their learning; are decision-makers and problem-solvers; have leadership roles and responsibilities; love to come to school; develop respect for one another; are proud of their culture; have positive self-image and good interaction with other children."

Maryann would probably have such positive views toward her students, most of whom are Hispanic and second language learners, regardless of the educational program. However, she provides a cogent argument in favor of multi-age grouping by describing its benefits for her students in the areas of cognitive, affective, and linguistic developments. Her points of argument are convincing because of her knowledge and understanding of the issues involved in educating language minority students.

Her involvement in the development of curriculum for use in a multi-age classroom has provided her with the opportunity to examine the educational program in unique ways, and explore alternative means to achieve academic goals. Thus, her curricular model is comprehensive in scope and she approaches problem-solving by learning as much as possible about her students, in and outside of school. She obviously values the involvement of parents in the schools, and makes a concerted effort to meet her parents regularly, even in unusual circumstances. Multi-age grouping allows Maryann to use flexibility and a tailor-made curriculum that is unavailable in a more traditional structure.

Metaphor

She discusses freely her enthusiasm and love for Hispanic culture, language and society. These feelings may explain perhaps, in part, why she uses the metaphor of a family to describe her educational program. The extended family concept, so prevalent among Hispanic families, is one that focuses on love, respect, and team work. These attributes are similar to the ones that Maryann incorporates in her program.

Personal Philosophy

Maryann doesn't reflect on her personal philosophy explicitly. However, one can determine that her philosophy focuses on the need to significantly improve our educational programs, to build on the strengths of her students, to prepare them for the future, and above all, to provide successful experiences. It's difficult to discern her professional philosophy from her personal philosophy since she seems to have one in the other.

She is a doer, an innovation leader, who assumes her teaching responsibility by being well-informed, well-prepared, and dedicated to her profession.

Image

She visualizes herself as both leader and teacher. She describes herself as facilitator, providing genuine, carefully planned activities in a nurturing environment, allowing students to learn on their own as much as possible. She is interested in helping her colleagues see for themselves the value of multi-age grouping, providing assistance in various ways, as she did in developing the curriculum training guide. She is a doer, an innovation leader, who assumes her teaching responsibility by being well-informed, well-prepared, and dedicated to her profession. The teaching profession is extremely fortunate to have such a caring, hard-working professional as Maryann.

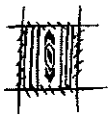
Discussion Question

If multi-age grouping is appropriate and beneficial for language minority students, why hasn't it been more widely implemented? What would you do if given the opportunity to implement multi-age grouping?

Diana

Actions with Purpose

p. 26



Personal Philosophy

Diana's personal philosophy of teaching is anchored in a holistic view of education: Teachers must be skillful, knowledgeable, and empowered, and they must plan, design, and assess effective programs especially tailored to the needs of the second language learner. And most importantly, the entire school must play a crucial role in the education of all students.

Image

Her philosophy derives from her extensive knowledge of education, bilingual education in specific, as well as her practical and personal experiences. Thus, she is able to draw from images of her childhood and recent, first-hand experiences to observe, analyze, and make critical decisions.

Diana's natural inclinations toward inquisitiveness and her interest in solving problems led to her eventual role of teacher as researcher. Diana takes her role as researcher very seriously. She likens her classroom to a laboratory in the sense that she often poses research questions and attempts to investigate them without, of course, jeopardizing the education of her students. Ultimately, the outcomes of her research affect her instruction in very positive ways, and both teacher and students alike benefit from the experience. Like a true investigator, she studies her subjects from many different angles and seeks the truth. Her natural abilities as a researcher and her expertise as a teacher have produced information that serves the practitioner in two ways. First, the information provides lessons learned. It is the result of careful analysis and observation from actual experiences in a classroom setting. Secondly, the information is teacher-directed, thus applicable and relevant to other bilingual education and ESL teachers.

Practical Principles

The following is a list of some of the practical principles that Diana has given us:

Practical principle 1: Collaboration with mainstream teachers is necessary to achieve important second language learning and academic goals inherent in bilingual education and ESL programs. Through the means of collaborative planning, scheduling, and team teaching, participating students in mainstream and bilingual education benefit in unprecedented ways that, according to Diana's research, cannot be accomplished adequately in a self-contained classroom. This principle has far reaching implications for all stakeholders, inclusive of practitioners and policy-makers. Diana's research has enlightened us all, a testimony of the importance of her research and the role of teacher as researcher in general.

Diana's natural inclinations toward inquisitiveness and her interest in solving problems led to her eventual role of teacher as researcher.

Rule 1: Teachers need to incorporate cooperative learning techniques to promote authentic uses of language and to provide a linguistic balance within groups of students. In addition, teachers must make provisions to ensure that second language learners have equal or comparable opportunities to use language optimally within the group structure, taking into consideration personality factors and the like to create "comfort zones."

Practical principle 2: Students in bilingual education programs need to continue in the program as long as they benefit from instruction in both languages and enter mainstreamed programs gradually.

Rule 2: "Choosing when to speak English should come from the child."

Rule 3: "The strength of a language minority child is his native language."

Rule 4: By striking a balance in the mixing of students through collaborative partnerships with regular teachers, the mainstreaming of bilingual education students can be effectively delayed, virtually allowing students to intrinsically mainstream into regular programs.

Practical principle 3: The entire school must take full responsibility to educate second language learners, and not overly burden bilingual education teachers with the sole responsibility.

Rule 5: "Regular classroom teachers need to be sensitive and knowledgeable about language minority students because that affects how they perceive their academic abilities."

Rule 6: Principals are key to ensuring that all teachers have the knowledge and the skills to work with language minority students, and in facilitating teachers to collaborate with each other, disallowing the isolation that many bilingual education teachers experience.

The role of teacher researcher has provided Diana, an intelligent, caring, and dedicated teacher, with an opportunity to use all of her resources to solve very complex problems, and in the process has become empowered with a sense of profound understanding and confidence. The role of researcher has served as a professional development experience: "Through the process of looking, making observations, and documenting, I have become more focused." From her experience we learn of the value of a teacher's voice, and most importantly, we learn that if we listen to that voice we also know more about the complex process of educating linguistically diverse children.

Discussion Question

Do you agree with Diana's contention that a quality bilingual education program is dependent upon involvement of the entire school? Why or why not?

Mark

Committed to Making a Difference

p. 32

Personal Philosophy

A personal philosophy rooted in strong convictions of positive thinking, perseverance, and acceptance of people is the basis for this teacher's courageous drive to create, develop, and implement new venues for educating language minority students. Mark closely aligns his curricular decisions to the individual needs of the student. His learner-centered ideas led him to the implementation of his school's first and only newcomer's program that provided a more individualized program for his students, and also provided a way to collaborate with other teachers. His leadership qualities include being creative and resourceful in solving problems, and innovative in his determination to implement a well-tailored, learner-based program.

Image

The images that emerge in his narrative are those of students who are successful, and who, as a result, have self-confidence and self-worth. He is aware of how students are frequently perceived as academically unsuccessful, and addresses this by providing numerous strategies and activities that help the students feel empowered and autonomous.

Practical Principles

He believes in the relevance of a purposeful, meaningful curriculum for second language learners, and the fact that his students are successful confirms that belief. A practical principle, then, that he adheres to is to provide meaningful experiences that help students achieve success.

Metaphor

Mark envisions his classroom without walls. He recognizes that the educational needs of his second language learners are more extensive than what can be accomplished by a traditional curriculum. Thus, he

Mark envisions his classroom without walls. He recognizes that the educational needs of his second language learners are more extensive than what can be accomplished by a traditional curriculum.

considers the value of the larger community in a curriculum designed primarily to help students develop understandings, find purpose, and identify themselves as individual members of the community.

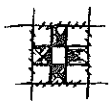
Mark found his way into a teaching profession by an indirect route. However, his determination to provide equal educational opportunities for his students, and his solid understanding of educational theory and practice, along with his personal and moral beliefs as an educator and member of his school's community, point to a deliberate path toward a professional educator career. Mark upholds high standards and ideals for his students and himself. He's a model teacher who demonstrates creativity, understanding, self-initiative, and excellence.

Discussion Question

Discuss the pro's and con's of a newcomer's program.

Suzanne & Richard

Creating a Risk-Free Community



p. 35

Personal Philosophy

A missionary spirit is evident in Suzanne and Richard's determination to provide the very best educational programs for language minority students in their alternative school. They each bring to the school their personal philosophies, stemming from personal experiences and professional goals.

Richard was influenced by his involvement with immigrant families shortly after completing a stint with the Navy. Even his early teaching experiences, which were not impressive enough to maintain his interest, impact on his present philosophy. Suzanne's love for teaching developed very early in life, yet the challenge of working with the target population allows her to stretch her intellect in every way possible and stay motivated.

Metaphor

Their worlds converge in a common vision of their school, one that focuses on building a learning community where success must prevail in the face of imminent failure. Suzanne states it this way: "Our students are underestimated in traditional forms of education, and we're here to show what our kids know, not what they don't know." Richard views the school as a "refuge of support and advocacy for the immigrant community." They're well-equipped with knowledge of traditional and non-traditional educational practices, recent research on teaching language minority students, and a willingness to take risks. But they recognize that building a community of learners is a team effort, and perhaps their greatest challenge is engendering confidence in others to develop very different venues for meeting the needs of a unique student population.

Image

The images that repeatedly emerge in their narrative reflect their most fervent desire to create meaningful ways in which students can succeed on a short-term and long-term basis. Their ideas are firmly rooted in a learner-centered philosophy for teaching. Indeed, one of the strengths of their curriculum is that they make deliberate efforts to know their students well and to involve the school community, most decisively their parents, in the decision-making process. This "whole school" concept impacts on the roles of parents and teachers, effectively engaging them in virtually unprecedented ways. Suzanne and Richard use the strategy of empowering stakeholders as a proactive mechanism to ensure that students have optimal opportunities for success.

Practical Principles

Several practical principles and rules are noted in the curriculum described by Suzanne and Richard. The six principles described here underscore the emphasis on the whole-school concept and building a community of learners.

Practical principle 1: Establish a collaborative school community environment.

This principle is based on the idea that when stakeholders have a direct hand in the planning and implementation of an educational program, a spirit of cooperation will ensue. Everyone shares in the development of a school mission, and decision-making is a unilateral process. The use of focus groups and the advisory council are ways to accomplish this goal. Also, another important factor is the role of the teacher as curriculum planner, in which teachers have extraordinary flexibility (and responsibility) to shape the curriculum.

Practical principle 2: Align instruction and assessment with the curriculum and tailor it to the specific needs of the student.

As part of determining instruction and assessment, three groups of students are identified based on, but not restricted to, their language proficiency and academic record. Pre-literate and regular classroom assignments are based on student math and language ability. Students who enroll at non-standard times of the year are placed in the late-arrivals classroom. As curriculum planners, teachers ask questions such as, what should the school look like? How do we decide what content is more important than other content? What should students be able to do according to their language proficiency? What does the student have to do in order to succeed as a second language learner? How do we build on what the student brings? For assessment purposes, a teacher may ask, what opportunities can we provide students to demonstrate what they know in ways other than through language? Addressing such difficult questions and closely aligning instruction with assessment are two of the main principles underlying the school's philosophy. In this school, innovation seems to be the norm rather than the exception.

Practical principle 3: Provide native language instruction where appropriate.

This principle is clearly pronounced in Richard's statement: "We firmly believe that if you cannot read and write in your first language, there is no way that you're going to learn material in a second language. You need the basis of your first language in order to make transference into a second language."

Practical principle 4: Develop a supportive learning environment for students.

Throughout their narrative, Suzanne and Richard describe a variety of activities or strategies that serve to help students embrace the school as their own. Examples include culture week, designed to acknowledge, value, and celebrate students' cultures; non-graded curricular activities; the involvement of parents in substantive ways; and tutors for helping students individually. In addition, every classroom focuses on providing a risk-free environment so students are motivated to participate actively in the learning process. Helping students feel good about themselves as learners and as new members of our society is an integral part of the school's goals and philosophy.

Practical principle 5: Create meaningful experiences that promote lifelong learning.

As a learner-centered school, the learning activities are based on relevance and building on what students already know. Suzanne states it this way: "We are looking at how they construct the information and make meaning out of it as opposed to how they produce or regurgitate a list of facts. We are looking at both process and product." A meaningful curriculum is dependent on the extent to which the curriculum matches the students' self-perceived and actual needs. Another statement from Suzanne stresses this point: "We want the school to meet the needs of our clients, not the other way around. We want to have a setup where kids come in and run a newspaper or a card shop; they produce products, sell them, run their own banking system, and have a community within the school so they get hands-on experience." As part of their plan, the development of an integrated curriculum can facilitate student learning in meaningful, constructive, and relevant ways.

As a learner-centered school, the learning activities are based on relevance and building on what students already know.

Practical principle 6: Create opportunities for on-going staff-development for teachers.

Two important roles in which teachers function, i.e., teacher as learner and teacher as curriculum planner, serve to facilitate teachers in their work and in their professional development. The alternative teacher assessment project which the school is piloting involves teachers in learner roles. Teachers select a small, manageable number of students, and use innovative techniques and activities to explore their usefulness and effectiveness. Two of these include monitoring and assessing students using the portfolio approach, and the student review, which involves teachers closely examining and analyzing one student at a time with the idea of learning how to better help students in general.

The results benefit both teacher and students, and as Suzanne puts it, "We want more time to focus on kids. We have each of the teachers present what they know about the student and we put our heads together to see what we can do to help the student have a more successful experience here."

By playing a key role in developing curriculum, teachers gain insights on how best to help students achieve objectives which they have carefully planned. Planning curriculum and conducting student reviews are part of a learning process as long as the teachers are guided and supported well. This guidance and support is evident in the fact that teachers are provided with release time for these and other staff-development activities such as peer coaching opportunities.

Teachers are cognizant of the challenges they will face at the outset of their teaching assignments. The screening and hiring practices are designed to allow teacher candidates to self-select. Careful selection of the teaching staff is perhaps one of the best advantages of starting a new program. Unfortunately, it is one of the few advantages. Suzanne and Richard are well aware of the long road ahead of them. Suzanne stresses this point in her statement, "We can't sit back and say, 'Well, I want this, and I think the school ought to be like this.' We're the ones responsible for making it the way we want, but it will require time.' Considering their commitment, determination, and a solid, genuine philosophy, time is definitely on their side.

Discussion Question

Respond to the criticism that a newcomer's school serves to segregate students and subsequently contribute to their educational failure.

Practical Principles — Summary

Teacher as Critical Thinker

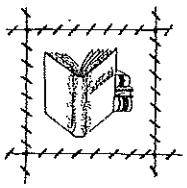
Laura:

1. A school's governance that is unresponsive to the needs of language minority students must be challenged.
2. We must recognize that teaching children whose dominant language is Spanish in their native language is a sound educational practice.

Teacher as Action Researcher

Diana:

1. Collaboration with mainstream teachers is necessary to achieve important second language learning and academic goals.
2. Students need to continue in the program as long as they benefit from instruction in both languages, and enter mainstreamed programs gradually.
3. The entire school must take full responsibility to educate second language learners, and not overly burden bilingual education teachers.



Teacher as Innovation Leader

Maryann:

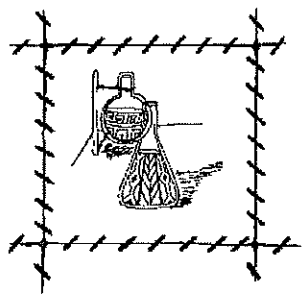
1. Creative, innovative curriculum planning should consider the whole student—his culture, language, home and family experiences, prior knowledge, etc.
2. Learning occurs in an environment that is non-threatening and in which learning tasks are adapted to the individual needs of the child.

Mark:

1. A program must be adapted to fit the needs of the student, not the other way around.
2. It is necessary to provide meaningful experiences that help students achieve success.

Suzanne & Richard:

1. Establish a collaborative school community environment.
2. Align instruction and assessment with the curriculum and tailor it to the specific needs of the student.
3. Provide native language instruction where appropriate.
4. Develop a supportive learning environment for students.
5. Create meaningful experiences that promote lifelong learning.
6. Create opportunities for ongoing staff development.



Variety is truly unlimited and one of the secrets of quilt fascination which charms from generation to generation; it afforded a means of expression of individuality and originality... —Rose G. Kretsinger, from The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt

Teacher Researchers in Bilingual/ESL Classrooms

Kip Téllez, University of Houston

The shift in teachers' roles from consumers of research to researchers in their own right is known widely as the "teacher as researcher" movement. The novelty of the movement, however, should not encourage educators to think that teacher research is something altogether new. Teacher research can be seen as an extension of what teachers already do in their classrooms: continuous experimentation in an effort to better meet the needs of students. However, the formalization of classroom research by teachers through documentation can elevate teacher research to a status level with traditional, university-based research. The redefinition in the teacher's role as researcher can meet the twin goals of improving instruction and empowering teachers.

Bilingual/ESL teachers, in particular, should have great interest in teacher research because university research, while worthwhile in its own place, cannot capture the subtleties of each particular classroom environment. Those who work daily in bilingual and ESL education recognize that while there are many commonalties in their tasks (e.g., children learn language in complex but common ways), many more dimensions of their professional lives have not or cannot be routinized or described by what we typically call "research." In particular, the social aspects of each unique classroom cannot be informed by research conducted by outsiders. In the immediate context of the classroom bilingual/ESL teachers alone can find problems and solutions regarding sociologic variables such as the effect of race, class, and gender on the schooling process. These situation-specific variables are best studied at the classroom level. When teachers are focused on their own practice while conducting focused investigation, teacher research helps teachers become better educators.

Bilingual/ESL teachers have had to withstand descriptions by others, a dangerous business. For when the ability to describe ourselves is taken away, we are taken away. It is through the constellation of our public presentations to one another that we "make" ourselves.

In addition to the research intentions embedded in teacher inquiry, teacher research is empowering. For too long teachers have settled on having others describe what they do and why they do it. Bilingual education, in particular, has been misunderstood and maligned. Venomous letters to newspaper editors about the evils of bilingual education are commonplace. Of course, the angry citizens who write such letters have never visited a bilingual classroom, nor do they understand the rationale behind bilingual education. Sadly, our colleagues in education often share the same distortions. But this misunderstanding is partly the responsibility of bilingual and ESL educators. As a group of professionals, we have failed to explain what we do. And school leaders are not always willing to correct misinterpretations. Schools with large bilin-

gual/ESL programs are often not on the visitation list when the senator, member of congress, or other dignitary arrives to visit the district.

Bilingual/ESL teachers have had to withstand descriptions by others, a dangerous business. For when the ability to describe ourselves is taken away, we are taken away. It is through the constellation of our public presentations to one another that we "make" ourselves. Traditional educational research has attempted to describe both teachers and what they do. It is to teachers' credit that they have consistently refused such description. The lament that teachers do not read educational research is not a "problem" but a rallying cry, calling for a better documentation of our profession by people who work on the inside. It is unfortunate that teachers have not been able to advance their own self-descriptions. Teacher researchers begin the process of self re-description, reclaiming who we are, what we do, and what we hope to become.

In spite of much recent attention given to teacher research, advocates for bilingual/ESL teacher researchers are few. Indeed, most teacher research so far is by language arts teachers in the northeastern United States. Not to diminish the importance of their research or the challenges their students face, the task confronted by most bilingual and ESL teachers in the ever-shifting educational landscape of the southwest United States is often more perplexing. It is here that we need a fleet of teacher researchers engaging in their own research, defining what works and what does not. And if empowered bilingual/ESL teachers is our goal, then we must begin the process of self-description of our work.

How might bilingual/ESL teachers get started in teacher research? Most teacher researchers have little difficulty arriving at a topic for study, but they quickly become snared in the trap of a specific research question. Unable to eschew formal hypothesis-like thinking—often drilled into them in an educational research course—they find it difficult to "just look." However, this approach is precisely what teacher researchers are proposing. Happily, the research designs that propose emerging hypotheses also strongly support qualitative research.

Teacher researchers may begin a research project with little more than an interesting problem. They need not attempt to study vast numbers of students. Their own classrooms will serve as laboratories. They can research using words only. Respected research in the social sciences now includes qualitative inquiry. The categories and concepts teacher researchers discover do not need to be verified by other researchers. Threats to the validity of teacher research fade. Readers of teacher research do not apply the same criteria to teacher research projects because the audience is other teachers and those university researchers who are interested in practitioner research. Scientific rigor is not the primary gauge of teacher research; rather, the focus is on the *meaning* of what is discovered for the classroom context.

The traditional attention to reliability—whether the findings can be duplicated by another experimenter—is not of great concern because teacher researchers are honest about their own involvement in the research. Finally, teacher research can be written in a style that is personal and candid. Indeed, the teacher researcher who tries to write in the detached manner of many social scientists will fail. How can teachers write about their students as if they were impartial observers? Teacher researcher are participants and observers in their research, and their written reports should reflect their stories. Teacher researchers tell a story based on educational practice.

In spite of the critical importance of teacher research, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) contend that teacher research ought not to occupy a privileged position in relation to university-type research on teaching, but

Teacher researchers may begin a research project with little more than an interesting problem. They need not attempt to study vast numbers of students. Their own classrooms will serve as laboratories.

that each has a place in enhancing our understanding, thereby resulting in more complete knowledge of the teaching/learning process.

Perhaps most important for a teacher researcher is the understanding that teacher research is a human endeavor that waits for its own time. It cannot be forced. What follows is advice for getting started.

Find a classroom topic that truly interests you. Ask meaningful questions about your teaching. No topic is too big or too small.

Get an assistant. University teacher preparation in Texas (and most other states) requires that preservice teacher education students spend a minimum of 45 hours observing in classrooms. Unfortunately, many find that their observations a dreary couple of weeks sitting in the back of the classroom with nothing to do. Our work at the University of Houston suggests that preservice teachers very much enjoy assisting a teacher researcher (Nath & Téllez, in press).

They feel part of a process and miss little if anything they would have gained by simply observing. They can help you by interviewing students, finding research articles, or analyzing student learning. Contact your local university about setting up a preservice teacher researcher assistant program. Teacher educators will be placing their preservice teachers in classrooms where experienced teachers demonstrate reflective teaching at its finest.

Get credit for your work. If you are considering an advanced degree in education, find out if the university that you are considering has a course in teacher research. If there is no course, propose that one be taught. Also inquire about the status of teacher research in the program. For example, can you do a master's thesis using your classroom research? Or is teacher research thought of as second class? Does anyone even know what you are talking about? Are there other requirements that teacher research can fulfill?

Find a sympathetic ear at the central office. Check to see if there are any administrators in your district who are sympathetic to teacher research. You might be pleasantly surprised. Can your teacher research be incorporated into an existing inservice program? At least two school districts in Texas offer teacher researchers a $200 stipend for their efforts. Perhaps you can strike a similar deal with your district. You cannot be sure of a response until you ask.

Give yourself plenty of time. Formalizing a research agenda takes time. Perhaps one year you simply experiment, waiting until the following year to make a more systematic attempt.

When you have written it down, send it everywhere. The bilingual/ESL community needs to hear about teachers doing their own work. There are dozens of venues for your work (e.g., local association conferences, community groups, opinion/editorial pages of newspapers). Do not be limited to an audience of bilingual/ESL educators. Let other educators know of your efforts.

Try to choose a topic that is central to your work with language minority students. Of course, if you are set on examining another topic, then do so. But we are in desperate need of teachers who conduct classroom-level research with the type of students you teach. We must begin to define the direction of our profession or else someone will define it for us.

In conclusion, the thoughts of Tomás Rivera, who invested himself in helping people redescribe themselves, are relevant here. In his poem, "Searching at Leal Middle School," he describes what he experienced in his days of teaching: "We talked of thinking, of inventing ourselves, of love for others, of love to be, of searching for ourselves" (1983, p. 67). As teacher-researchers in the bilingual/ESL classroom, we can begin the search, now long overdue.

Portions of this paper previously appeared in a chapter of the *Compendium of Readings in Bilingual Education: Issues and Practice.* (1994).

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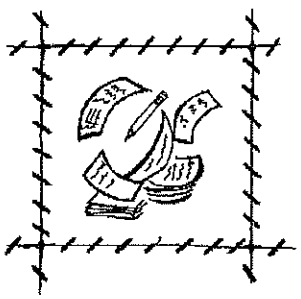

Piecing a quilt is not so hard a task. A knowledge of plain sewing, accuracy, and neatness are all that is required. —Rose G. Kretsinger, The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt

The Teacher as Researcher: Resources for Getting Started

Beti Leone, William Paterson College of New Jersey

As both a teacher and a researcher, I am always interested in the questions other teachers and teacher-researchers are asking about students, teachers, and classrooms. Not coincidentally, my outlook on research has changed over the years, as a result of the conversations I have had with teacher researchers. These teacher-researchers, who have done research in their own and colleagues' classrooms, schools, and communities have given me new ideas for research and teaching, and especially, hope for more effective teaching and greater participation of bilingual students and their families in these schools.

Brief reviews of a few sources that have been useful and inspiring for me are included here. Although there certainly are many more sources available each day, these four are specifically focused on bilingual and ESL teaching contexts and have been very helpful for me. The Duckworth piece is a "must-read" classic that no teacher educator or teacher researcher can do without.

Rationale

Several reasons for teacher research are succinctly laid out in Handscombe's two-part article from the TESOL *Elementary Education Newsletter*. She says that research can enable teachers to "check out the validity of our current practices, and, in many cases, push us to extend our repertoire as we generate theories and models about how learning takes place." She also makes it clear that the type of research she refers to is research in which teachers are an integral part, not just studies others do, which may also be useful. The terms "action research" and "teacher research" are often used to refer to this type of research, which, in a nutshell, involves "looking systematically at what is happening in our classrooms." This can increase our understanding of our teaching context and also our sense of control in it.

She also mentions three reasons for becoming a teacher-researcher, quoting Amanda Miller of Vancouver, B.C.: "Teacher-researchers can be better decision-makers when informed by their own research, acting rather than just reacting; they can come out of isolation by participating in a teacher-research network which entails cooperation and critical thinking; and they can become less product-oriented and more process-oriented, thus helping their students to do likewise."

Quality Classroom Research

Because, as teachers, we depend so much on research in our daily work, from school policies to testing practices and teaching methods, Handscombe continues, we need to be sure that this research is done well.

That is, we have a large stake in the application of this research, and it has far-reaching effects on our teaching. To support her point, she describes several common characteristics of quality classroom research. It

Resources...

Handscombe, Jean. 1993 and 1994. Part I: Why we need research and Part II: Why research needs us, in The TESOL Elementary Education Interest Section Newsletter, Winter, 1993 and Summer, 1993. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Moll, Luis; Amanti, Cathy; Neff, Deborah; and González, Norma. 1992. Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms., in *Theory Into Practice* XXXI: 2, Spring, 1992.

Heath, Shirley Brice and Mangiola, Leslie. 1991. Children of Promise: Literate activity in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association.

Duckworth, Eleanor. Teaching as Research. 1986. *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 56, No. 4.

often
a) "provides insight into how ESOL children can best learn within school settings,"
b) "gives advice as to how teacher and/or students should act to ensure effective learning,"
c) "uses research designs that accommodate the realities of school environments where the advice is focused."

With these characteristics in mind, Handscombe says that teachers must enter into the research arena, not just as consumers of research but also as doers of research. It is important that teachers be researchers because schools have important aspects that must be understood by researchers, aspects that teachers will be most sensitive to, such as the concept of time. The days, weeks, and months in the K-12 school setting have special significance, a special rhythm, and special meanings in the "big picture," a picture which teachers are particularly aware of. An "outside" researcher who comes in only a few half days a week cannot know these realities known to teachers and students, and without this "big picture," teachers and students are often simply "subjects" in a study.

Research from the Teacher's Perspective

Handscombe suggests that teachers find researchers who understand the "big picture" of the school setting from the teacher's perspective, fill in ones who don't have this big picture, or decide not to provide access to them, if students and teachers find they are simply research "subjects."

However, those researchers interested in teachers' perspectives and teachers' realities often engage in open-ended, naturalistic, inquiry-based approaches. Questions bilingual/ESL teachers might ask as part of such research projects, might be

- how and why do teachers make the many decisions they make throughout each day;
- how do students perceive the daily goings-on in their own classrooms;
- how do linguistically and culturally diverse students perceive students of other language and cultural backgrounds, especially in their first year in American schools;
- how do teachers assess the language and cognitive development of linguistically and culturally diverse students; and
- how can teachers make the curriculum and daily content of their lessons more connected to the culture and prior experiences of their linguistically and culturally diverse students?

It is important that teachers be researchers because schools have important aspects that must be understood by researchers, aspects that teachers will be most sensitive to, such as the concept of time.

Teacher–Researcher Collaboration

Referring to an article by Patricia Broadfoot, Handscombe suggests that the kind of research which teachers may be interested in doing with other teachers and researchers, in a true collaborative spirit, is the kind "that is more likely to draw on a teacher's expertise rather than [present] an opportunity [for the researcher] to instruct." To further exemplify this type of research, Luis Moll et al.'s study of families' "funds of knowledge," is reviewed here.

Funds of Knowledge

Moll's study grew out of three needs: 1) the need to develop innovative classroom instruction which builds on knowledge children bring with them to school, 2) the need for better connections between schools and families, and, 3) the need for schools to establish more equitable relationships with parents, especially with linguistically and culturally diverse parents. These needs were perceived by both researchers and teachers.

To carry out the study, Moll and several teachers interviewed linguistically and culturally diverse families in the school community and came to know the parents of the children in their classes as "experts" in areas of "household" knowledge, ranging from specialized knowledge and skills in occupational areas to in-depth understandings of the neighborhood and "home" cultures they shared with their children. Many significant findings were listed in the study related to these important connections which were

made with families. Furthermore, both university researchers and teachers learned a lot from the collaboration.

Teachers realized that they had made an invaluable contribution to the study, especially in the interview process which took place on the home visits. As teachers, they had had special "privileges" not held by others in the group, with respect to the trust and rapport with the parents. They had developed a "participatory pedagogy," including students and parents, rather than determined by the teacher, the textbooks, or the school program without the learners and their families. The home visits, which were not "casual visits nor school-business visits," depended to a great deal on the teachers' background knowledge of their students. On the other hand, teachers learned a great deal about how to conduct research, especially ethnographic research, and how to be field researchers responsible for carrying out a large part of the actual interviewing in their students' homes.

In learning about these "funds of knowledge," teachers discovered a wealth of resources and information which they could tap when creating themes, units, and lessons of study for their classrooms.

Children of Promise

Also concerned with more effective classroom practice, specifically aimed at improving the future of linguistically and culturally diverse students, Heath and Mangiola engaged in a long-term research project looking at the benefits of cross-age tutoring in an elementary school in California. At that time, the two authors were invited by the National Education Association (NEA) to write about their research and *Children of Promise* is the result. An example of school-university collaboration, this little book also serves as a guide or model for teacher research in general and for various kinds of classroom-based research as well.

Heath and Mangiola begin their research "story" by explaining that in different cultures there are different notions of child development, not all similar to the notion underlying American education. This is an important premise, as it sets the tone for their work, which does not attempt to make assumptions about "best" ways of learning, but rather explores the "natural events" which take place in the everyday lives of linguistically and culturally diverse children. Being extremely cautious about overgeneralization, they note that "in many classrooms, the spirit of group involvement and responsibility for others that Mexican-American, Black, Laotian, or Cambodian students show in their lives outside the school cannot reveal itself in positive ways," due often to the fact that "teaching methods and programs that stress basic literacy skills and display knowledge in small bits or scope and in specific sequence may also reward the competition of individual against individual, rather than the sharing of group knowledge and resources."

Teachers realized that they had made an invaluable contribution to the study, especially in the interview process which took place on the home visits.

Because linguistically and culturally diverse students come to school with different "ways of seeing, knowing, and telling," not deficient as is often assumed by educators, Heath and Mangiola ask the all-important question, paraphrased here: How can we tap into students' socialization to promote collaborative work in the classroom so that greater learning can take place and so that younger students can benefit, too, when presented with older "role models?" Further, children not of such diverse backgrounds and not socialized in collaborative ways would also benefit. So, in California, Texas, and Massachusetts, linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms involved with interactive tutoring across age levels were observed. Tutor and tutee talk about what they were doing was recorded.

The resulting booklet, *Children of Promise*, offers descriptions about the various stages of learning activities used successfully with linguistically and culturally diverse students, including

- reasons for teachers to try interactive reading and writing activities,
- tutors' lists of their responsi-

bilities, tutors' observations and suggestions for work with younger children
- questions asked by tutors working with younger students
- descriptions of the ways two languages were used by the tutors and tutees
- narratives of the assessments made by older tutors about the reading of the younger students, excerpted from a booklet they made with helpful hints for parents
- coding sheets for "think talk," written by tutors to assess the successful literacy conversations they had with younger tutees
- descriptions of student–teacher co-evaluation endeavors and discussion of the benefits of student involvement in their assessment.

In sum, the actual classroom work reported in *Children of Promise* could be easily adapted to a variety of classroom situations, and the research questions and paradigms would also fit an array of teaching/learning settings. I have used the book as a teacher educator, as a researcher, and as a teacher and each time I open it I continue to be inspired.

Constructing Knowledge

The fourth and final resource reviewed here is Eleanor Duckworth's article on teaching as research. In this article, Duckworth begins by telling of her love for teaching teachers because, she says, she loves "to stir up their thoughts about how they learn; about how on earth anyone can help anyone else learn; and about what it means to know something." From this opening statement, she proceeds to explain that her view of learning is that it is a construction of knowledge; that is, it is an assimilation of new experiences in a way that makes sense to the learner.

But, if learners need to make sense of things for themselves, then what role does teaching have, she asks. In response to her own query, she tells us that there are two aspects to teaching; first, "to put students in contact with phenomena related to the area to be studied—the real thing, not books or lectures about it—and to help them notice what is interesting; to engage them so they will continue to think and wonder about it. The second is to have the students try to explain the sense they are making, instead of explaining things to students, to try to understand their sense." Of course, these two things are interdependent: "When people are engaged in the matter, they try to explain it and in order to explain it they seek out more phenomena that will shed light on it."

I have used the book as a teacher educator, as a researcher, and as a teacher and each time I open it I continue to be inspired.

Because her article is concerned with engaging teachers in conversations about teaching and learning, she guides the reader through the steps she has taken with a particular experiment about the moon, which enables her students (who are teachers) to rediscover what it is to learn about something first-hand. One of the most difficult aspects of her experiment, she admits, is that teachers are usually used to and more practiced at explaining than in eliciting, listening, and understanding someone else's explanation. However, she says that, whether the subject being studied is the moon, a foreign language, or poetry, she has found the following results:

1. students make things clearer to themselves as they attempt to explain things to others;
2. students themselves determine what it is that they need or want to understand;
3. students end up depending more on themselves;
4. students realize the "powerful experience of having their ideas taken seriously;"
5. students learn a lot from each other;
6. students begin to see that knowledge is "human construction," that is, something they themselves have put together.

Duckworth's piece offers much more than the short synopsis given here. It opens many new doors for teachers, researchers of teaching and learning, and teacher educators, at a variety of different levels. It is the hope of this teacher researcher that Duckworth's article and the other resources reviewed here will be interesting reading, useful catalysts for thinking anew about learning and teaching, and most of all, help teachers begin or continue with their so very important and exciting teacher research.

Storyteller

Patch by patch, I'll tell my tale,
Woven to the rhythm of magic pipes,
And steady heartbeats of lives untold.

Here is my story, my lifeline,
Buried deep in my memory,
Sewn beneath hues of silver and gold.

I'll tell of lacy winter gardens, and
Rays of golden light that stretch beyond
The smiling faces of a thousand smiles.

Through multitudes of uprooted trees,
And endless clouds of fog and rain,
Connected by threads of warm embraces.

These are the voices of my village,
From whence the warmth begins and ends,
Touching the heart of every gentle spirit
Along the way.

I. Guadarrama

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