

THREE STORIES FROM THE CITY: INTREPRETATIONS AND ANALYSIS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

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INTRODUCTION

In the last three decades, the number of school-age children whose home languages are not English has increased significantly in the United States (from 3.8 million in 1979 to 10.9 million in 2008, U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Although immigrant students attend schools throughout the U.S., linguistic and cultural diversity is far more present in urban schools where students are also more likely to be economically disadvantaged (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

Teachers are not only important in aiding their students to achieve academic success, they also play a significant role in supporting learners to make meaning out of new learning and to connect new ideas to prior experiences (Good & Brophy, 1986). As a teacher educator in a large urban university, I work hard to provide my students with the necessary tools to become effective teachers. Future teachers need proper support in order to reflect and put emphasis upon the importance of giving both academic as well as emotional support to their immigrant students.

The following three cases represent the efforts of young teachers-in-training who worked with English language learners from vastly different

cultural and linguistic backgrounds. They provide us with the opportunity to see how they attempted to build a relationship with their students and how that effort impacts the teaching and learning process. The cases also demonstrate the importance of a support system that enables teachers-in-training to learn about instructional models and strategies that most effectively respond to the social and academic needs of students.

San Francisco Students

Socio-economic status and ethnicity play important roles in the education of San Francisco's children as most schools are not socioeconomically or ethnically diverse. Although many ethnicities and languages are represented in San Francisco public schools, students mostly attend schools where one or two ethnicities represent the majority of the student population. In addition, almost two-thirds of students (64 percent) attending public elementary schools in San Francisco are considered economically disadvantaged as they qualify for the free or reduced priced lunch program (San Francisco Unified School District, 2007). Of all the students attending schools across this city, 25 percent are categorized as Latinos and another 29 percent are of Chinese ancestry. African-Americans (12 percent) and Whites (10 percent) represent the next two largest groups. Koreans, Japanese, Filipinos, and Arabs comprise less than 2 percent of students attending public schools in San Francisco. According to the school district (2007), 36 percent of San Francisco's elementary school students are designated as English language learners.

The following three cases represent a larger collection of case studies that focus on immigrant students attending public schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. They are designed as teaching tools for the professional development of teachers. These cases represent the realities of students and provide guidance as to what teachers need to do in order to better meet the needs of their students. All names of students, teachers, and schools in these cases are pseudonyms.

Case One

Background Information

Gabriela, a six year-old first grader attends Sunshine Elementary, a K-5 English-only. The school is not ethnically diverse, with the majority of students being Asian and Caucasian.

As one of the very few Latino students attending Sunshine Elementary School, Gabriela lives with her mother and her older sister but on many occasions she stays with her grandfather. Gabriela's grandfather is a native Spanish speaker who speaks very little English. Gabriela usually speaks Spanish when she is with her grandfather but speaks English when she is with her mother. Little communication takes place between school and home. Parent-teacher conferences were scheduled twice with Gabriela's mother but she canceled both times. The mentor teacher has not been able to communicate with Gabriela's grandfather about her progress in school and her family may not be aware of Gabriela's daily struggles at school and her incomplete homework assignments.

Gabriela is a proficient speaker of English but she often has difficulty in reading comprehension and spelling. Gabriela rarely turns in her homework and often misplaces books that are sent home as part of the homework assignments. As a result, the mentor teacher does not allow her to take books home from school and the school library has also banned her from checking out books.

Nancy, the teacher-in-training, speaks highly of her mentor teacher and reports that she has extremely high expectations for all her students. Yet, although she prepares additional work for students who need a more challenging curriculum, she does not modify the curriculum to meet the needs of English learners.

Needs and Instructional Strategies

Gabriela started the school year struggling academically. Nancy reports that based on her observations and in working with this student, Gabriela seems

to have little interest. This is in part due to the fact that the curriculum is too confusing for her. When students are brought together in a corner of the classroom for group instruction or to read aloud, Gabriela is usually not paying attention. She often picks at her shoes, fidgets with an item of her clothing or asks to use the restroom. During group discussions, she usually raises her hand, but when called upon, she loses her train of thought, does not respond or says, "Uh... I forgot." Her attention span is short and she frequently loses her concentration after a few minutes.

During class, Gabriela socially interacts with all the students. However, she has not found another child with whom to bond. Gabriela does gravitate toward books about dance, ballet, and animals, but since she cannot take any books home from school, she does not have the opportunity to read. She is an active and social child who enjoys playing. During recess, she plays with different groups of children, either jumping roping or playing ball. However, academically, her self-confidence is low. Nancy believes that students in the classroom are aware of their academic standing. There are a few high level students to whom all the children turn for correct answers. These students often finish their work early and walk around to assist other students. Gabriela never gets this opportunity. Although students wish to help each other, much of the helping is done by a few students who are seen as more academically capable.

When time allows, the teacher gives Gabriela extra support. However, often times this task is the responsibility of the teacher-in-training who works with Gabriela or in a small group setting with students who also need to complete their unfinished work.

Reading comprehension and writing can be difficult for Gabriela during independent work. The teacher in training recommends Spanish/English bilingual books to be available for Gabriela. In addition, she maintains the need to set up the classroom graphically and visually with English learners in mind. This would not only support their needs but also the needs of all diverse learners. Nancy notes that to keep Gabriela motivated and engaged, she needs to provide a lot of encouragement. Gabriela needs

affirmation and consistent validation more than other students. Unlike some students, Gabriela does not know when her given answers are correct. On one occasion during group work Gabriela spelled a word correctly and instead of giving a simple acknowledgement, Nancy got the attention of the whole group and had Gabriela tell the other students what she had spelled. Nancy noticed how much Gabriela glowed when given the opportunity to show her classmates that she too could answer correctly.

Recommendations

Nancy emphasizes the importance of letting Gabriela know that teachers care about her and want to help her do well in school. This teacher-in-training encourages all teachers to meet individually with their students and praise them on specific accomplishments, or give them the extra encouragement they need to further apply themselves. She further notes that it is important to consistently give positive feedback to all students and maintains that the extra few minutes will give students the chance to express their feelings. Nancy maintains that giving individual attention provides the teacher with the opportunity to reflect, check-in and let the students know how much their teacher cares.

Nancy concludes that planning and preparing in advance is one way to assist Gabriela when she is struggling. She expresses that it is important to find the topics that interest Gabriela and recommends that teachers should motivate students and connect them with topics that they are about to learn. In the case of Gabriela, her love for dance should be turned into an opportunity to enhance her literacy skills. Gabriela should be allowed to write more freely during journal writing and be given books about dance. More importantly, Gabriela should not be penalized for not returning library books. Efforts must be made to better understand Gabriela's home situation and the school should make it clear to her family that they are working together to promote her schooling.

More Thoughts

Gabriela seems to be in the Speech Emergence Stage of language development. This stage occurs between the first and third year of learning a second language. Students in the speech emergence stage use simple sentences and phrases. They may have a vocabulary (both receptive and active) of about 3000 words. Students can ask simple questions and can participate in conversations that are simple in nature. Teachers should engage students in modified content area activities, buddy reading, journal writing, and vocabulary-building activities. Such strategies provide English learners with opportunities for more exposure to academic language but these must be presented in a way that students are given ample time to practice as well as with a model of what the final product should look like (Schmoker, 2001).

Case Two

Background Information

Jay is a 7-year-old Limited English Proficiency (LEP) student in second grade at West Knoll Elementary School in San Francisco where 550 kindergarten through fifth grade students are enrolled. The school also has a dual-immersion program (English/Cantonese) with about 25 percent of the classrooms participating. 36 percent of the students qualify for the free or reduced cost lunch program. Approximately 60 percent of the student population is ethnically Chinese and 31 percent are classified as English Language Learners (ELL).

Helen, a teacher-in-training who has been working with Jay for three months, notes that his mainstream classroom represents the population of the school. Of the 20 students, 12 are Asian and 8 students in the class are classified as Limited English Proficient with a majority listing Chinese as their primary language but Arabic and Vietnamese are also represented. Helen further explains that Jay's teacher has been teaching in this school for 15 years.

Jay has been in the United States for about two years and lives with his parents and a baby brother who was born a year ago. His father only speaks Chinese but his mother has limited skills in English and periodically visits her son's classroom.

At school, Jay is consistently friendly and smiles easily. Helen reports that he engages with his peers and in return is well-liked. He responds enthusiastically when he is partnered with students in the class and is often chosen by other students when they pick partners. In the playground, he is always part of a handball game and displays good sportsmanship. He has a sense of humor that allows him to laugh at himself. If he has forgotten to put a period at the end of a sentence or indent a paragraph, he will slap his forehead and giggle as he is making the correction. Helen describes Jay as a great artist who enjoys illustrating his writing. She notes that overall, his work is very neat and he seems to take pride in it. He always completes his homework and persists through difficulties in most activities. According to Helen, math seems to be very easy for this young man although he tells Helen that writing is his favorite subject.

Jay is very interested in and engages most readily with non-fiction texts about animals. The classroom has a program that enables students to select several books weekly from the extensive in-class library to read during a special reading time each day. They also have the opportunity to take books home each night for their reading homework. Jay's special reading log reveals that he consistently has non-fiction books (mostly about animals) in his collection.

Jay uses a variety of strategies to learn in the classroom. Whether he is with the class gathered on the rug or in a small group working in a center, he seats himself as close to the teacher as possible. This gives him the proximity to clearly see the book or work that is referred to when the teacher is speaking. Helen notes that she currently uses this strategy to help Jay follow along and maintain his focus. This strategy also enables the student to get the teacher's attention with less effort when he needs help or needs to be engaged in the group activities.

While working independently, Jay discretely checks what others around him are doing. Based on Helen's observations, this behavior is perhaps due to Jay's attempt to confirm what he already has on his worksheet, although occasionally he makes changes when he finds variations in others' responses. In a language arts lesson taught by Helen, Jay sat near her and the young teacher noticed that he was spelling all of the words easily and correctly as they progressed through the word cards she held in her lap. Once he began to spell words before she had presented them to the group and Helen noticed that Jay was peeking and copying the words from the cards. This was acceptable to Helen and she notes that the objectives of her lesson were still achieved and Jay was able to see the patterns in the words. The young teacher explains that peeking and working ahead lowered Jay's anxiety and enabled him to be on task.

Helen reports that in responding to verbal questions, Jay sometimes acts out what he is trying to communicate but either cannot produce the right words or is too excited to wait for the appropriate words to come out. For example, in a reading group using *The Day the Dinosaurs Died* by Charlotte Lewis Brown (2006), Jay physically illustrated what the dinosaurs did when the asteroid hit the Earth in response to a question.

In Jay's writing, he focuses on familiar topics and writes predominantly about such things as going to the park, his brother, and Pokemon. Helen notes that this is one area where Jay's progress is visible. Since the beginning of the school year, the quantity of his writing has increased. Early in the year he wrote about playing "hide-and-peek", with his brother and going to the park. More recently, he has added details about playing in the playground and enjoying the slide with his brother. Helen explains that Jay's latest and longest journal entry yet was about an entirely new topic: a toy train and a pet cricket.

Helen comments that Jay does not use his first language in communicating with his peers and notes that the use of native language in order to seek clarification is an effective learning strategy. Helen mentions that several of the students in the class speak Chinese at home and some go to

Chinese schools on the weekends. However, students did not use this language at all in school until the teacher requested that several students sing *Happy Birthday* in Chinese. In speaking afterwards with two teachers about why they think students do not use Cantonese in the classroom, they explained to Helen that the parents insist that their children only use English at school.

Needs and Instructional Strategies

Helen worked with Jay in several small reading groups. The first group contained only two other boys, both of whom were also limited proficient English speakers but had more advanced English language skills. Students took turns reading a chapter book. Jay was initially eager to read and frequently answered questions with observant but unrelated information he remembered from the story. By the end of the first meeting he stopped following along and put his head on the table. He commented several times that he was tired and that he did not understand. After meeting individually with Helen to review the story and talk about the illustrations, he seemed somewhat encouraged, but the book in general was too difficult for him.

Helen emphasizes the importance of group work in reading and suggests that Jay should be grouped with two or three other students. She also recommends careful selection of texts to allow Jay to continue to build his vocabulary development but not overwhelm him with more complicated storylines. While fictional stories are valuable, Jay seems to be most interested in and eager for non-fiction texts about animals. Helen explains that this not only supports his comprehension but also appeals to his artistic capabilities.

Helen enthusiastically reports that Jay's exposure to non-fiction texts about animals and science is building up his content knowledge and English language development. Helen recommends that Jay be given ample opportunities to write about the topics that interest him. She further notes that a thematic unit on sea life, along with a field trip to the aquarium would allow him to build on prior knowledge and gain more motivation for writing.

Early in the school year, Helen had a chance to observe Jay's language assessments and learned that one clear area of struggle for this student was directional terms. For example, in describing a picture of a horse jumping over a fence, he wrote, "The horse jump in the fence". In the speaking and listening portion of the test, he was able to identify which pictures on the page he should draw a line "from", and "to", but instead drew a line between the pictures.

Total Physical Response was an effective strategy to develop an understanding of directional terms. Helen took photos of Jay and he later wrote sentences to describe his actions in the photos. By that point, he was able to look at a list of the terms and select which one he had demonstrated in the photo.

It is clear that as Jay's vocabulary is developed, his comprehension will improve as he begins to read leveled fictional stories. To build on this positive experience, Helen recommends using Total Physical Response and Reader's Theater so he can act out simple storylines. Reader's Theater, a reading strategy which allows students to present written work in a dramatic format, can be very useful as students will respond authentically and enthusiastically when reading and performing scenes.

More Thoughts

Jay also seems to be in the Speech Emergence Stage of language development. As indicated earlier, students are able to engage in simple conversations and can ask simple questions. Buddy reading, journal writing, and vocabulary-building activities are most useful for students in this stage of English language development. Blachnowicz and Fisher (2000) remind us that teachers should provide multiple opportunities to students to actively develop their understanding of words and ways to learn them. They further express that students should see and hear new words on different occasions and should be exposed to multiple sources of information.

Case Three

Background Information

This case study chronicles the work of Nick, a teacher-in-training. Over the span of three months he worked one-on-one with an English language learner whose home language is Arabic. Nahla is a fifth grader who began her schooling in Lebanon but since first grade has been living in San Francisco. Nahla is described by Nick as a lovely student who is friendly, a fairly good athlete, inquisitive and with an ever present smile. She is interested in her classmates and always asks them about their lives.

The elementary school that Nahla attends is very diverse and has very high academic standards. Nahla's classroom is English only and over fifty percent of the thirty-two students in her class come from Asian backgrounds. The remaining students are from various ethnicities. There are six students in her class who are classified as English language learners.

Nick describes Nahla's teacher as one who cares deeply for his students. He is described as a very experienced teacher with a traditional teaching style that entails explanation of the subject matter followed by asking students to work individually on the given tasks. In his classroom students are mostly writing at their desks and do a great deal of bookwork and worksheets. The teacher attempts to support ELLs by providing extra time to complete the given tasks and by using visuals to enhance their understanding of concepts. Yet, observations indicate little difference in the way this teacher approaches teaching ELL's versus native speakers of English.

Nick notes that Nahla enjoys helping her mother prepare food for the family. Nahla's family consists of her parents and two sisters. Her mother is in her forties with limited ability to speak English. She works as a cook in a Middle Eastern restaurant. She communicates with Nahla primarily in Arabic, although at times she uses English. Nahla's father is a baker and speaks to Nahla mostly in English. Nahla's older sister is a freshman in high school and attends a fairly prestigious school in the city. Her younger sister is a third grader at the same school as Nahla. The three sisters use English to commu-

nicate with each other. According to Nahla's mother, the two younger sisters prefer to speak in English. They have lost their literacy skills in Arabic but can speak Arabic with limited fluency.

Nick describes Nahla as a student who struggles academically. She is in the bottom quarter of the class in all academic areas and often cannot complete work in the allotted time. Nahla is further described as having particular problems following directions. She often forgets to bring books home and forgets to complete or turn in her homework. Nahla is fairly proficient in conversational English but she struggles in academic reading and writing. In particular she has a limited vocabulary and poor mastery of syntax.

Nahla is interested in sports and loves to play basketball. She also likes to play videogames at home with her sisters. Although Nahla is friendly and kind, she only has one friend from her class and struggles socially. She is often left out when the class is choosing partners in physical education. Nevertheless, Nahla maintains a fairly good spirit and high self-esteem. She smiles often and has a positive attitude.

Nick reports that in attempting to limit academic errors, Nahla very regularly uses avoidance as a strategy. In her written work, she often provides as short as possible responses and she avoids answering oral questions. Nahla is a visual learner. She needs to see things to understand them best. She also relies on her desk partner to explain things to her when she cannot understand the concepts herself. This student is helpful, but can get frustrated.

Nahla reads at the fourth grade level and has made progress over the semester building her vocabulary and listening skills. Nick notes that she is slightly below average in her oral production in English and is considered average in listening comprehension. Nick further describes this young learner as one who is below average in writing and reading and has particular problems with comprehension and understanding of new vocabulary. She can write fairly complex sentences, but often makes grammatical mistakes; her writing is unclear and lacks cohesiveness. Although Nahla's writing skills have helped her become more academically successful, overall, she is still far below the academic standards of her class.

Needs and Instructional Strategies

For a period of three months Nick and Nahla met after school one or two times a week for one hour sessions. To support her academic and social development in the class, Nick identified areas in which Nahla needed special attention or extra work. The first of these areas was Nahla's need to improve her listening skills and her ability to comprehend instructions. She struggled when listening to the teacher and often needed repeated clarifications on various tasks. Consequently, she often made mistakes which led to her frustration as well as that of her teacher and fellow classmates.

One of the strategies used with Nahla involved getting her to write the instructions as she listened to them. Nick and Nahla both wrote key words from the directions given by the cooperating teacher. They then compared notes and Nick asked Nahla comprehension questions to check that she understood the given task. These questions were important in not only letting the teacher-in-training know what his student understood, but also what concepts and instructions needed additional clarification.

Seeing the need for making instructions understandable, Nick decided to write them out for Nahla and made them available to her. This strategy proved to greatly help this student. Knowing what was expected of her, Nahla was then able to follow instructions. While going over instructions, Nick focused on academic English and covered many words with which his student was unfamiliar. This process helped Nahla develop her lexicon and made her more successful in the classroom. By working regularly with Nahla, Nick learned that modeling new concepts and procedures was particularly effective. Modeling helped her understand instructions and was effective in making learning more meaningful.

At the beginning of this case Nahla was struggling with completing homework. She regularly forgot to do her homework or did not understand what she needed to do to complete her assignments. This was a problem throughout the first part of the semester and as a consequence Nahla was not allowed to go out to recess on numerous occasions. The teacher-in-

training came to the realization that this issue was partly due to Nahla's inability to fully understand what needed to be completed in her homework assignments. Additionally, she consistently had problems remembering the assignments once she got home. Nick to some extent resolved this problem by using a homework log. He gave a small notebook to Nahla and made columns and helped her fill it out for the first few days. He also asked Nahla's mother to check the log on a daily basis.

Although Nahla still occasionally comes to school without her homework, the problem is far less extensive and subsequently she has more chances to enjoy recess. Although this teacher intervention seems quite routine on the surface, it had a significantly positive effect on the daily life of this student. Previously, Nahla missed a considerable amount of recess time and was not allowed to go out and play. This was not only emotionally difficult for this child but also impacted her opportunities to socially interact with her peers.

Developing academic English and general vocabulary building were important components of this educator's strategic teaching. During their regular reading times, Nick provided specific reading strategies that helped this English language learner in comprehension and vocabulary development. When Nahla encountered a vocabulary word that was new to her, the teacher-student team stopped and Nick encouraged Nahla to grasp the word's meaning through thinking about word roots or the context of the sentence and paragraph. If it was not possible for her to decipher the meaning of the word, the teacher asked her to look it up in the glossary of the book or a dictionary. On many occasions Nick described the meaning of the new word to Nahla so that she could focus on the broader aspect of reading for meaning and analysis. The teacher-in-training also provided a notebook to Nahla so that new words could be documented and practiced. This enabled Nahla to write simple understandable definitions of each word and to practice them regularly. After a few months she was able to build an extensive personal dictionary.

Another area in which Nahla struggled greatly was in her academic writing. Her writing was mired with confusing sentences and paragraphs

that had little focus. She regularly made grammatical errors and used incorrect verb tenses. The teacher-in-training used several strategies to help Nahla improve her writing. The first of these strategies was to give her sufficient time to talk about and reflect upon what she was going to write in her journal. By giving her this opportunity, she was able to organize her thoughts and develop clear ideas. Another useful strategy was the use of graphic organizers including venn and spider diagrams. In addition to developing her meta-cognitive strategies, helping Nahla in self-correction proved to be particularly useful. On several occasions, Nick helped Nahla in finding errors in her writing and explained to her that writers should frequently check their own work for possible errors. By reading her writing to her aloud Nick helped Nahla identify potential errors. Subsequently, she became more capable of self-correction. The teacher helped her with errors she was not able to identify alone. Nick also used Nahla's writing as an opportunity to teach new grammar concepts or components that were the cause of frequent errors in her writing. These strategies were helpful to Nahla as she was able to organize her thoughts and understand new grammatical rules. Furthermore, she was able to think about possible words that she wanted to use in her essays.

The final, perhaps the most important strategy that this young teacher emphasized was getting to know Nahla. Nick talked about his own experiences and at the same time encouraged Nahla to share hers. In the process he also learned a great deal about this student's family. The teacher worked on getting to know the family and knowing a few words in Arabic became a major asset in this process. A greeting (*Marhaba* - hello in Arabic) provided the teacher with an opportunity to build a cultural bridge which became an extremely useful tool to connect school and family. Upon hearing the teacher use some Arabic, Nahla's mother was pleasantly surprised and became less anxious about talking to this teacher. In the subsequent weeks they spoke about Nahla's academic performance and on several occasions the mother brought Arabic food to school, which Nick found delicious. These exchanges also made Nahla very proud. She told many of her class-

mates about it, which impressed them. By getting to know Nahla's mother and making the effort to honor her native language, the teacher-in-training found another way to help his student. Nahla felt more connected with school when she realized that her teacher and her mother were working together to help her.

Nick concludes that in order for Nahla to be more successful in school she needs more scaffolding strategies in class, more opportunities to speak, and a greater connection between the school and her family. Nahla is a visual learner and needs learning tools including realia and graphic organizers which will help her understand concepts and improve her ability to follow directions. Further effort is also needed to build more connections between home and school. Using strategies such as continuing the homework log and bringing Nahla's home culture into the class are appropriate ways in which this objective can be achieved.

More Thoughts

Nahla seems to be at the Intermediate Fluency Stage of second language acquisition. Students enter this stage during their third to fifth year of studying the language. They will have about 6000 active vocabulary words and will attempt to use more complex sentence structures. They will ask comprehension questions and will share answers in the classroom. Language production increases rapidly and elements of language transfer (direct translation) are more apparent. Teachers should use students' errors as tools for learning. They should give suggestions and provide appropriate modeling. Helpful learning strategies in and out of the classroom should be given to students (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008).

Teachers should help students like Nahla to develop concrete skills for decoding language materials. They should be taught to listen (or read) for the gist of a passage instead of searching for the meaning of individual words. Reading and listening (and re-reading and re-listening) are highly effective means of increasing second language acquisition. Each time stu-

dents encounter a specific passage, they have more information to use to understand it; therefore, their language acquisition is facilitated. They also learn not to get anxious when their first comprehension attempts are not successful.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The experiences of Gabriela, Jay, and Nahla remind us that immigrant students (as all students) need teachers who provide them with cognitively and linguistically stimulating learning environments. The above cases support earlier work that show how a child's confidence is boosted when she has the opportunity to explain a learning task to another (Convington, 2000). When children's self-esteem is higher, they are more willing to explore new concepts (Hollins & Oliver, 1999). This is particularly important for immigrant students who as a whole are generally viewed as at risk or low-achieving (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

The above cases also emphasize that although many factors influence both the rate of learning and eventual success in learning a second language, opportunities for interactions and learners' motivation play significant roles in the acquisition of a second language (Borjian, 2001). English language learners are often linguistically isolated with little contact with mainstream English speaking peers (Carhill, Suarez-Orozco, & Paez, 2008; Valdes, 1998). An important component of English language development is regular interaction with fluent speakers of English. Language interaction, whether in the primary language or the second language, also plays an important role in the development of a learner's identity as it is essential in communicating with others as well as in forming bonds. Furthermore, language learning is a nonlinear and dynamic process and is best developed through contextual, meaningful interaction with native speakers or those who are more knowledgeable in the language than the learner. When schools are linguistically isolated, English language proficiency cannot be fully achieved by English learners.

In addition to creating learning opportunities that promote interaction, students need to read and write about culturally relevant concepts and should be given the chance to talk about issues that are important to them and their communities. Ogbu (1992) calls for a drastic reform in the school curriculum and urges schools to support positive interdependence among students. Children like Gabriela, Jay, and Nahla need to have positive and mutually beneficial academic interactions with their peers so that they can see that they are capable learners. Such interactions also lead to language development. We also know that language proficiency impacts learning since students depend on language for transmission of information (Baker, 2001).

Academic language cannot be fully developed without consideration of the psychological needs of learners. Valenzuela (1999) and Valdes (1996) emphasize the influence of affective factors on learning. They argue that students must feel that their teachers and classmates care about them and are willing to learn about and from them. Schools must provide rigorous academic curricula that not only prepare students to be highly literate and analytic, but are also meaningful and take into account students' cultural backgrounds and prior knowledge. The limited success of many immigrant students in acquiring academic proficiency in English is due to a large extent to a school system that views the English language only as a skill. Teachers play a crucial role in supporting the educational development of immigrant students. This support should not only be focused on English language development. Without cultural understanding and respect, teachers will severely limit their capabilities in fostering the growth and academic enhancement of their students. Teachers not only have to be knowledgeable about their students' language, literacy, and academic needs, but also should be well informed about second language learning and teaching (Padilla, 2006). Freire and Macedo (1987) remind us that language acquisition is highly influenced by attitudes toward self, language, and culture. When students are valued for what they bring to the classroom and when their native languages and cultures are honored and promoted in schools, they will achieve much more academic success.

Nancy, Helen, and Nick remind teachers to respect their students' languages and cultures. They emphasize that language teaching is much more than manipulation and presentation of rules and symbols. These educators urge their colleagues to view languages other than English as assets rather than liabilities for their students and note that teachers should be sensitive to issues of cultural and linguistic differences. The above cases also demonstrate that dedicated teachers who truly want to see their students succeed can dramatically impact the academic development of their students. By having knowledge of their students' languages and cultural backgrounds teachers can more effectively motivate students to excel. The next step is to share this knowledge with other members of the community who are involved in supporting English language learners.

Although the effectiveness of teachers highly impacts student learning, language considerations also largely influence academic development. The above cases emphasize the importance of bilingual academic development. It is not necessary to deny immigrant students' heritage languages in order to develop their English proficiency. Research repeatedly indicates that instructional usage of the primary language not only does not impede English language acquisition but rather provides cognitive advantages for learners. Incorporating the primary language can facilitate the teaching of academic subjects and the development of the English language. Garcia (1997) points out that ultimately, academic success in English depends upon the development of the native language. Hakuta (1986) emphasizes that cognitive and academic development in the first language has important and positive effects on second language acquisition. Additionally, limited literacy skills in the first language hinder literacy progress in the second language (Cummins, 1986). Teachers, as well as parents, should be reminded of the advantages of bilingual academic development. Conversational skills are merely a fraction of the language skills needed to be successful in school. Full proficiency in oral production of English is not a prerequisite to reading and writing instruction. Learning is accelerated when all language skills are developed simultaneously.

We also learned that literacy development is to a large part dependent upon the efforts of teachers. Not only do they teach the elements of reading and writing but they also play a critical role in supporting the learning of aspects of language associated with the academic discourse of various subject matters (Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000). Teachers who are proficient in the primary language of their students have an opportunity to use this important tool to enhance subject matter understanding as well as to promote a safe learning environment for their English learning students. These educators need to be keenly aware that immigrant students need substantial support in building strong foundations in their native languages as they develop their academic English.

The above cases also articulate that teachers should make every opportunity to individually work with their students, and get to know them well. Educators who work with language minority students not only should be knowledgeable about their students' language and cultural backgrounds, but also should be aware of their personal circumstances and strengths, and their language, literacy, and academic needs. By focusing on students' strengths rather than their shortcomings, teachers are more likely to create long lasting, positive effects.

The effectiveness of classroom instruction for English language learners, to a large extent, depends upon the quality of teachers and the curricula being used. As demonstrated in the above cases, teachers who are not familiar with the mother tongue of their students can also be quite effective in enhancing the English language development of their students if they use appropriate language teaching strategies and are aware of the systematic obstacles that their students face. Project-based learning, small group activities, and peer as well as cross age tutoring are ideal for promoting language interaction. These three cases also emphasize the importance of professional development activities for teachers. The three teachers-in-training had the opportunity to learn specific strategies that supported the academic development of their students. More guidance and training should be provided to new teachers, including designing thematically-based teaching objectives

and lesson plans. By teaching literacy and content courses thematically, teachers promote the transfer of learning across content areas. Thematic instruction requires close collaboration between teachers of various disciplines and more developed planning for teachers who teach various subject matters which in turn makes content more comprehensible to students.

Another important theme of these cases is the urgency for team building between home and school. Schools must make every effort to establish effective communication lines with parents. Unfamiliarity with the American educational system and language barriers can get in the way of school-parents communication and collaboration. Parents have invaluable knowledge of their children and schools can use that knowledge to better serve students.

Final Words

For English learners to be successful in U.S. schools, they need teachers who integrate their students' knowledge. These teachers need to be keenly aware of their students' abilities and understand that home and community cultures have an impact on students' academic skills. I echo the voices of Garcia and his colleagues (2010) who remind teachers to be sensitive to cultural and linguistic differences, as well as to students' life experiences and living conditions.

In an earlier study, Garcia (1997) describes the establishment of trust among students for their teachers and how that trust can lead to increased student achievement. Garcia emphasizes that key to building trust is providing cultural and linguistic validation to students. He notes that teachers in the study encouraged their students to be engaged in their own learning and further emphasizes that monitoring students' progress and providing regular feedback was instrumental in trust building.

The educational success of English language learners in the United States is highly dependent upon how we as a society view new comers and their languages and cultures. Immigrant students' opportunities for achiev-

ing high levels of education can be enhanced when our society as a whole respects their languages, cultures, and experiences. K-12 educators, parents, and community members must work together to provide emotional and educational support to encourage students to stay in school, complete their education, and pursue post-secondary education. These efforts require a fundamental restructuring of how schools have been serving immigrant populations. The given recommendations are not achievable without the support of school leaders and policy makers. Teachers must be given ample time, resources, and ongoing professional developmental opportunities to be able to successfully achieve their goals; quality learning for all. Strong bonds made between students, teachers, and teacher educators can enhance the quality of instruction as well as improve our understanding of ways to improve teacher training.

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