

Addressing the Learning Needs of English Learners

By Bonnie Ericson, Ph.D.

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The focus of this issue of T-CARE is English Language Learners, certainly a topic of great interest and importance in teacher preparation and in teaching. We see evidence of this at just about every turn here in southern California. Teachers examine CST results, and note that their English learners score too frequently in 'Below Basic' and 'Far Below Basic' categories. Newspaper columns feature articles that address these same test results, the challenges of urban schools, and the success – or lack thereof – of teachers working with English learners. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing is preparing to release updated standards for credential programs that will include additional direction for how programs must better prepare new teachers for working effectively with English learners in multiple and single subject programs. The PACT Teaching Event completed by elementary and secondary student teachers and interns during their final field experience and seminar calls for clear knowledge of developing academic language. And,

the CSU Exit Survey and CSU Follow-Up Surveys for employers and multiple and single subject program completers ask how well prepared the candidates are in "Instruction in the teaching of English language learners" and "Instruction in cultural diversity and multicultural education." In teaching English learners, we know both that the teaching challenges are complex and that the rewards for success are great – and that the achievement of English learners is key to the social, economic, and cultural future of the area.

The pieces on these pages address a range of issues related to English learners. Veronica Gonzalez discusses the significance of parent modeling and involvement, and speaks specifically to family literacy programs for promoting achievement by students whose home language is a language other than Eng-



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lish. Gabriel Flores values the varied cultural backgrounds of pupils and provides suggestions for multicultural teaching. Ron Sima and David Moguel speak to the issue of creating a safe and comfortable classroom environment for students' oral language – in both the first language and in English – in order to engage students in learning. And finally, Stan Leandro powerfully describes his experiences in schools after coming to the U. S. from Costa Rica at the age of six; as with many such narratives, his story has important teaching implications. It's my hope that you will find helpful ideas in these articles, that you'll be inspired to discuss these and related ideas with your peers and colleagues, and that the needs of English learners will be evident in your planning and teaching and parent interaction for the entire school year.

Multicultural Education: *Practical Tips*

Dr. Gabriel Flores, Ed.D.

3rd grade teacher at Chase Elementary

33% of the student population in America consists of minority students. By 2020, the U.S. will have a student minority population of 48%

A new school year is approaching. As good teachers, we will need to accommodate the needs of a diverse student population. Many of the nation's schools are reflecting diversity in the student population: 33% of the student population in America consists of minority students. By 2020, the United States will have a student minority population of 48% (Milner, 2003, p. 197). Good teaching requires cultural responsiveness to students from various ethnic, cultural, racial, sexual, and language groups (Banks et al, 2001; Nieto, 2004; Sherwin & Jennings, 2006; Sogunro, 2001).

In order to provide an adequate education, teachers today will need to provide a well-balanced multicultural education. "School curriculum must directly address issues of racism, sexism, classism, linguisticism, ablism, ageism, heterosexism, religious intolerance, and xenopho-

bia" (NAME, 2005, para. 3). Multiculturalism is a social and political construct that promotes interconnectedness and respect among diverse populations. Multicultural education is a framework designed to serve all students regardless of their cultural affiliation; it provides a means to achieve multiculturalism (Nieto, 2004; Sogunro, 2001). A teacher with good multicultural skills and knowledge about other cultures will have a more effective teaching setting that may be conducive to healthy learning (Nieto, 2004; Sogunro, 2001).

The following are 10 suggestions by Sogunro (2001) required for implementing and teaching multicultural education in schools: (a) Study different cultures or groups through literature and oral presentations by real people of various cultures; (b) encourage parents to tell their children about their culture; (c) ask students to discuss their cultures in class; (d) examine and develop

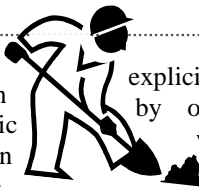
appreciation for differences and similarities in cultures; (e) encourage students to reflect on their own experiences, based on the cultures they have studied; (f) encourage reinforcement of ethical values; (g) model and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to contribute to the success of all people regardless of their culture; (h) have students work in groups to work on projects related to other cultures; (i) involve students in role-plays of the different cultures; and (j) have class activities and class projects that involve field trips, tours, and visitors.

During the implementation of your multicultural education program and when bias surface during class discussions or during incidents outside the classroom, the incident should become a multicultural learning opportunity and teachable moment (Michaelson, 2008, Sogunro, 2001). Teachers

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From the trenches...

Many studies have shown that there is a correlation between parent involvement and academic achievement (Epstein, 1996; Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995). In addition, family literacy programs are rapidly growing in the United States. There are many factors that have influenced the development of family literacy programs including concerns about children's reading difficulties in schools and the need to involve parents and families in the home-school literacy activities. Therefore, educators and researchers should continue to investigate opportunities to expose Latino families to literacy programs that are geared and structured toward Latino families which generate improvement in the quantity of reading and quality of parent-child interactions. In order for such changes to occur and become habits the participants must receive



explicit instruction and learn by observing trained models who can teach literacy strategies.

In his famous Bobo doll study, Bandura et al. (1961) showed how children were able to learn and imitate the behavior they observed. In this experiment children observed adults interacting with a doll, Bandura found that the children tended to imitate the behaviors of the adults they observed. This study helps one to understand that anyone can learn observationally through modeling. As a result, the parents participating in family literacy programs will observe the trainer while modeling reading strategies, and learn explicitly how to initiate reading routines at home and serve as reading models to their children.

The Importance of Parent Involvement

with Veronica Gonzalez, 1st grade teacher

Alarming, achievement scores indicate that there is still a lot of work to do in order to close the achievement gap among Latino students and their counter parts. Many studies have shown that parent attitudes towards reading and parent involvement may change when they participate in a family literacy program.

Parents will feel empowered and more informed about the educational system that is not foreign to them. The opportunity to offer structured parent involvement classes is only a taste of the multiple opportunities that exist for searching and exploring curriculum and literacy programs culturally appropriate for our Latino parents in our urban schools.



Dear Docs,
I am very concerned with my students doing their homework and coming to school prepared. I believe my students are not getting the support and time at home to complete their assignments. I have tried speaking to the parents but there is a language barrier and mostly they believe that their child's education is up to me. Realistically, I only have their children for a few hours a day and the parents have more influence than I do. What can I do? --- *Concerned*

Dear Concerned:

Thank you for raising the issue. It probably will not surprise you to know that other teachers have expressed concern and frustration with this problem. The recent pressure to evaluate teachers' performances based on students' performances also adds to the frustration that teachers feel when their students' parents do not seem to be putting forth much effort to help their children learn. Considering the difficult demands placed on you, we certainly can understand and respect your sense of frustration. Therefore, we do not want to dismiss your frustration or tell you that you should never feel it, but perhaps we can help you minimize the intensity so that it doesn't interfere with your being an effective teacher.

Try to examine the source of the frustration. Are you concerned that

your students will perform poorly and you will be penalized for that? If that is your concern, ask yourself how likely it is that your students' performances will reflect badly on you. In any difficult situation you can help yourself cope with unpleasant thoughts by trying to become more accurate in your perceptions. Is it possible that administrators would understand your situation and not judge you so harshly? Might you get reassurance from your principal or from other teachers in this regard? If it is, indeed, possible that you could be held responsible for poor student performance, how would that impact you? How would you cope with that? It's generally helpful to be clear that even if the feared event happened that you will have ways of coping. Allow yourself to **realistically** run through the entire scenario about the worst that could happen – would you truthfully not survive that?

It may also be helpful to take a few moments to consider the parent's experience and perspective – not as a way of dismissing yours, but to facilitate more patience and better communication. For example, when you interact with some parents who are dealing with an unfamiliar language or culture, it is important to keep in mind that these factors may be creating barriers beyond the obvious ones. Difficulties with language, for example, clearly make communication difficult, but they may also serve as a "protective" screen. For some parents, dealing with professionals that speak a different language in a culture that is foreign or unfamiliar in an atmosphere of learning may evoke feelings of inadequacy or even shame (not based on reality, but simply the internal process of the parent). These feelings may motivate a parent to displace responsibilities onto people they feel can better serve the children they love. To the outsider it may appear that they are shirking their responsibilities, but it may, in fact, be quite the reverse. Certainly your students' par-

ents care deeply about the welfare of their children, but interacting and meeting the demands of "authority figures" who speak a "foreign language" would likely be intimidating to many of us. (This is not specific to any one group or culture – it could apply to any of us in that situation.)

Allowing the parent to feel that you wish to work **with** them as a respected team member may facilitate this process (and ease your burden). The parent may even appreciate the opportunity to share their own feelings of frustration (e.g. regarding students' assignments), and you may benefit from this type of collaboration and mutual support. Finally, providing parents with specific concrete suggestions and instructions may help to decrease anxiety and increase their sense of having been helpful and meaningful.



Working with Parents

Consider these ideas to help foster a working relationship with parents.

- ☺ Explain your teaching style & expectations at the beginning of the year.
- ☺ Consistently & genuinely invite parents to help in the classroom (or from home by preparing materials for lessons).
- ☺ Regularly send home updates on learning activities, needs, volunteer opportunities, etc..in both languages.
- ☺ Guide your class to share stories and information about their school day while at home.
- ☺ Thank parents for their wonderful children.

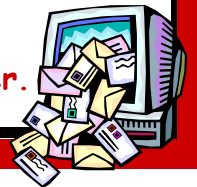
Teaching requires so much skill and patience on so many levels it is not surprising that a range of feelings emerge in the process.

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Submit your questions for
The Doctors to: T-CARE@csun.edu



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Practical Tips (Flores) continued from page 2

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should approach the issues and discuss the issues openly and honestly. True and factual information assists in displacing myths and misconceptions.

The teaching of multicultural education is usually limited to activities during Black History month or *Cinco de Mayo* celebrations (Sogunro, 2001; Swartz, 2003); such activities may involve heritage festivals, food fairs, fashion parades, cultural arts displays, dances, and music (Sogunro, 2001). Real multicultural education goes far beyond such activities (Swartz, 2003; Sogunro, 2001). Multiculturalism should be an ongoing school activity and be included in everything done, said, or practiced in the diverse school setting (McCray et al., 2004; Sogunro, 2001).

If you provide a well-balanced multicultural education and curriculum, then

the benefits in the classroom may be less bullying, name-calling, and more tolerance towards all cultures and peoples. In addition, you may see an improvement in class management. However, most importantly, if you provide your class a well-balanced multicultural education, you will provide your students the tools to be productive and good contributors to the society that will exist in their adulthood.

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TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

by Ron Sima & David Moguel

How should you address the challenges you face in teaching ELL students, most of them recent immigrants?

You don't need to be the "English police" – a negative, punitive approach that shames and shuts student down. There is an enormous difference between telling students not to speak in their native language, and encouraging them to speak English. If you provide an open, comfortable environment in which students feel safe to occasionally use another language "in private," they are then more likely to feel safe to produce English "in public."

If you impose a hostile, restricted environment in which students are not allowed to use whatever language they want "in private," they are more likely to "shut down" out of embarrassment, fear

and resentment "in public."

Students do not have to reduce or eliminate the time they spend speaking their native language in order to spend more time speaking English. Think of it this way. Is there a limit to the amount of off-task chatter and gossip that students can produce? In fact, isn't it true that this kind of talk tends to produce more of the same in other students? Consider the possibility that the more students speak in their native language, the more they will attempt to speak English.

But Isn't Total Immersion the Best Way?

Sure, if each ELL was completely surrounded by English-speaking peers. But chances are they are not. It is more likely that the teacher is the only one speaking English in the class, the teacher is doing

most of the talking, and there are not enough opportunities for students to communicate with each other. Even if that ELL student is one of very few ELLs in the class, chances are the person is just hearing a lot of English and has little opportunity to attempt to produce it.

Many ELLs seem to learn more English out on the playground than in your class. That is not because they are lazy people who won't work hard to learn English in your class. *The reason is that the playground is the only time they are actually "immersed" in English, in a comfortable environment in which they have multiple opportunities to speak to others.* Consider the possibility of replicating some of that environment in your classroom.

This article is adapted from a chapter in a forthcoming textbook for social studies teachers to be published by the Social Studies School Service in Fall 2010.

About the Authors

Ron Sima is a 40-year veteran social studies in the LAUSD, and a long-time instructor and university supervisor for CSUN. David L. Moguel is an associate professor in the Secondary Education Department at CSUN's Eisner College of Education, and a former ELL student and bilingual teacher in the LAUSD



PRINCIPAL'S CORNER

with Stan Leandro

Although many of us in education today would agree that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation is somewhat shortsighted and has done nothing more than to add so much more stress to the myriad of problems we face every day, there are some aspects of it that I see as positive. For instance, few of us would argue that our public schools should be held accountable and that all of our children should have “highly qualified” teachers. These two aspects of NCLB ring true for those of us who believe in public schools. Another positive feature of NCLB is the much needed attention to the subgroups such as children with special needs and the subject of this article; English Language Learners (ELL).

My twenty-nine years in education have been dedicated to working in communities with high concentrations of ELL students. I am currently in my sixth year as the Director of Instruction at Vaughn International Studies Academy (VISA); the high school campus of the Vaughn Next Century Learning Center. VISA is located in Pacoima which is a high poverty area with many ELL students.

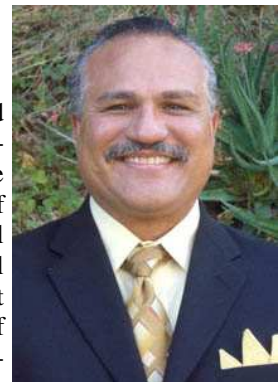
My commitment and passion to working with ELL students is easily traced back to my personal experience as an immigrant to the United States at the age of six. My family migrated from Costa Rica to Paterson, New Jersey in 1966. Wanting her children to have the best education possible, my mother enrolled me and my brother in a paro-

chial school. There were no special programs for students who did not speak English; and before long, the initial culture shock, lack of support and utter frustration resulted in us getting into trouble which eventually led to our expulsion from the school. We then entered the New Jersey public school system which was even more ill prepared to address the needs of ELL students than the Catholic school had been. The strategy seemed to have been “sink or swim”. Upon entering our third public school and having picked up some English, my brother and I apparently learned to be “good swimmers” and somehow made it through school and college.

Our eventual academic success, however, is not typical of how ELL students fair in our public school systems today. To begin with, I had completed at least one full year of school in Costa Rica before moving to the United States. In fact, in Costa Rica I learned how to multiply in the first grade. I was taught the rudimentary skills for reading in Spanish and was taught some basic English.

Today’s ELL children come from an array of backgrounds and experiences. The middle school children I’ve worked with were classified as “pre-lit” having had a limited amount of education, if any. I had to literarily teach some of them how to hold a pencil. It is impossible to teach a student how to write “cat” if he does not first posses the concept of how to write “gato”. The lack of preparation for

school paled in comparison to the plethora of emotional and social issues that some of these students brought to the classroom. In



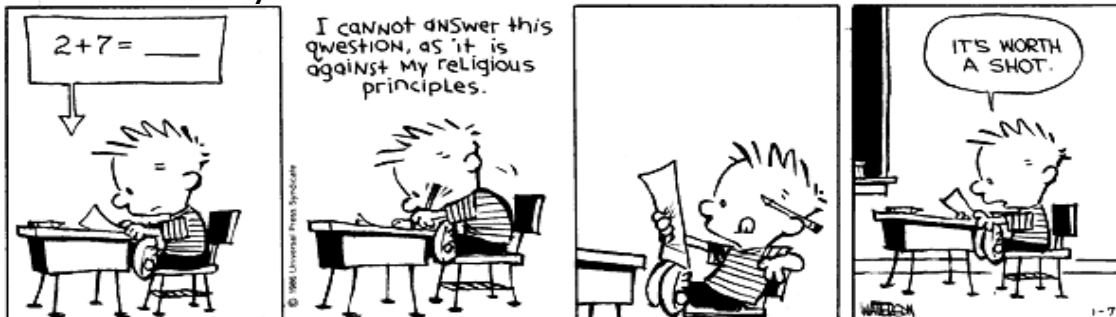
Stan Leandro is High School Director at Vaughn Next Century Learning Center

fact, my experience in working with these children motivated my seeking a Master’s degree in counseling.

The English Language Learner student population continues to grow at a fast pace. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, the number of ELL students entering schools grew by 65% as compared to students in the general population from 1993 to 2003 (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). ELL students comprise 10% of all students. NCLB has forced schools to address the special needs of these students, placing many schools in Program Improvement (PI) when they fail to show growth in their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

In closing, as I mentioned at the outset, NCLB is shortsighted and whereas I am happy to see that it has shined a spot light on this neglected population, it has failed in providing the necessary resources to educators facing the challenge of teaching these children.

Calvin and Hobbes by Bill Watterson



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