Fostering Multiliteracy in a Linguistically Diverse Environment

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Summary:
The goal of this article is to encourage monolingual teachers to leave the misconceptions that a monolingual teacher cannot promote multilingualism in the classroom. This article helps prove the misconceptions wrong. With a community of parents, teachers and students, multiliteracy can be encouraged in the classroom and this article demonstrates how a teacher went about doing this. A monolingual teacher, Alexia, wants to encourage her students to be linguistically diverse and learn that their native language is valuable. She was encouraged to take this route when she switched schools and was now in an environment that she was not used to. She came from a classroom that was only literate in two languages, English and Spanish. Now she was in a school where more than 17 languages were spoken and in her classroom 4 languages were spoken, Korean, Chinese, Spanish, Turkish, and English. She collaborated with Charla and David, who had the same goals, to foster multiliteracy in the classrooms. They acted on their ideas by implementing them in Alexia’s classroom.

They started small. Having parents translate the students’ names in each of the four languages and placing them on their cubbies. Alexia then went about in “enlisting parents to help her acquire posters of all the different alphabets represented by students in the classroom” (p. 457) and hanging the posters around the classroom. Then, Alexia went out of her way to get special funds to buy books in Korean and Chinese. Then Alexia and her peers came up with more ideas on “how to incorporate the native language of the children to a greater degree?” (p. 457). Through these and various other activities, Alexia was able to teach her students about other languages. The students gained greater appreciation for the languages of others, as well as there own native language. They were not only able to learn English effectively, but their own language as well.

The activities that Alexia implemented in her classroom to foster multiliteracy proved that monolingual teachers could create multiliterate classrooms. Several things that monolingual teachers can do to foster multiliteracy in the classroom are: to put up posters with the alphabet in
other languages other than English, give students the opportunity to share stories in their native language, and have students write words in their own language and then translate their meanings in English. In doing these and other activities in the classroom then the teacher will get students to strengthen their native language, and to value other languages.

Overall, this essay helps support Goal C in Grammar Alive!

Quotes:
“We believe that fostering multiliteracy can be the domain of any teacher interested in developing the languages represented in his/her classroom.” (p. 454) Multiliteracy is not only for ESL or bilingual students’, it helps all students to understand that other languages and dialects have the same rich grammatical structure and expressive power as SAE and that we should show respect for all languages.

“...cross-cultural literacy awareness benefits both students and teachers in building a community of learners since their native literacy and native cultural backgrounds are considered rich resources instead of obstacles.” (p. 456) Supports part C of the goals Grammar Alive!

“By forbidding native language literacy, however, they are often denying children the opportunity to acquire their home language as an important gift and inheritance and as an integral aspect of their identities.” (Pg. 454)

“The reality of many mainstream classrooms is that teachers are already making efforts to include multicultural literature in their language arts curriculum while providing culturally relevant themes.” (Norton & Tway 455)

-This quote helps support Goal C. Different cultures are coming into our classrooms, which tends to bring different languages. Children need to be aware of the many languages that exist in the world and can easily learn this through literature in the classroom. If we can study it in language arts curriculum, children can learn that there are many languages and each has its own writing system also.
Many students in her classroom were children of international graduate students of the nearby
college. “For this reason, those involved with the children’s education were highly invested in
helping children to both learn English (to function in the United States) and maintain their
language (because of the prospect of returning to the home country).” (456)

-This quote demonstrates the importance of knowing two languages for these kinds of
students. Knowing these language varieties [very well], they are able to use them in their life.
They are able to communicate better in their home language and English because they are both
being used while the child is in school. Keeping their native language present helps preserve it
for later use in their life.

“The class began the school day by saying, ‘Good morning’ and ‘How are you?’ in all five
languages [which existed in the classroom]….Each phrase in each language was repeated three
times with pauses in between so that everyone could practice.” (457)

- The teacher had her students learn how to say some important phrases of the native
languages that were present in the classroom. The students got to speak the language of the
native speakers in the classroom and pretend they were having conversations. They stepped foot
in another classmates shoes to speak another language.

“[They] translated the song into their respective languages. The songs were written ahead of
time on large pieces of chart paper.” (457)

- New versions of “The Itsy Bitsy Spider” were translated and written because the song in
the languages of Turkish and Chinese did not exist. These native speakers had the opportunity to
take the song in English and make it in their native language. After, the class was able to look at
these two language varieties and see how they were written and how they sounded. The teacher
was sure to cover all the languages in the classroom to build a comfort zone for the students and
to show that each language is equal but different.

“The adults [each who spoke a different language] discussed the four concepts of the lesson with
the children in their native language….The children attempted to write the word in their native
language and to draw a picture of an insect incorporating the characteristics they had discussed
using their native tongue….After singing the song in their native tongue, the children switched
-The students learned other languages that existed in the classroom. The languages were given equal opportunities in the classroom for the students to learn.

“…that students asked each other more frequently than in previous years how to say words in each other’s native language.” (458)

“…it became common to see children writing both in English and in their native languages in her class throughout the school day.” (458)

**Misconceptions about Multiliteracy:**

“Teachers who do not know how to write in languages other than English cannot foster writing in the students’ home languages.” (p. 455)

-Teachers can go about and ask for parents help and have them bring items to class that have the students native language printed on them; for example bottles, magazines, coupons. Schools usually seem to discourage students from developing their home language because it may get in the way of them developing their English. However an activity as this helps students to see how their home language is used the community, encouraging them to develop their native language.