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A SELF-CONTAINED FIRST AND SECOND GRADE BILINGUAL CLASSROOM IN THE MIDWEST

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Abstract

This is a descriptive account of a self-contained first and second grade bilingual classroom in an urban school district in the Midwest, and the sociocultural context in which it is located. The description includes information about students, teachers, and administrators; the bilingual curriculum; ESL goals; entry and exit assessment; Spanish and English reading and writing activities, and home-school connections. The article concludes with critical comments and recommendations which focus on the need for greater parent involvement; training of teachers, administrators, and parents; clearer procedures for language and content area assessment; more effective bilingual teacher meetings; and material resources for bilingual teachers.

The City And School District

This city of 100,000 is divided into two districts: East side and West side. The East side has a majority of Spanish-speaking students, primarily of Mexican ancestry, and a large bilingual program. The West side has a pull-out bilingual program in one school, which seems to be more of an ESL program. There are economic contrasts, too: the East side is poorer (denser housing, few industrial areas, and a weak tax base) and the West side is doing well financially (newer, more expensive housing, many light industrial areas, ongoing construction, and a stronger tax base).

The Hispanic community, predominantly on the East side, is an older community dating back to the 1950s, with new families settling in at a growing rate. The influx began in the 1950s, then grew again in the 1980s, after the Amnesty Act, when many individuals and families "settled out" of a more migratory lifestyle because they were able to arrange immigration papers for permanent resident status. There are some parents who attended elementary school in the same district in the 1960s, went back to Mexico or Puerto Rico, and returned in the 1980s to raise their own families and remain.

The school described here, to be called "Peterson," is in an unincorporated, un-taxed, semi-rural "pocket," where housing is cheaper, public works (street lights, storm sewers) fewer, and zoning less strict. In this "township," there are small wood-frame houses and some public housing areas, and despite the large Spanish-speaking population, sometimes parents must send their children outside the area for bilingual or special education services. There are no school buses and this lack of transportation is a serious issue for parents at Peterson, who often hire "rides" to pick up their children before and after school. Students walk home on a high-speed road and many must cross another highway, neither of which has a sidewalk or traffic light near the school.

The School

Peterson is a small K-S school and the bilingual classroom is "self-contained;" i.e., all students are in the room all day, except for 25 minutes per day in either physical education or music classes, four days a week. The bilingual program district-wide is primarily "self-contained," though some schools still have pull-out teachers. Peterson has two bilingual teachers, one in a self-contained classroom (the first year the school has had a bilingual self-contained classroom) and one in a pull-out classroom.

The principal

The principal was perceived as "traditional," that is, he had a teacher-centered philosophy of teaching and believed in "direct" instruction, which follows a set curriculum and uses basal readers. The climate and physical space also reflected this philosophy: the walls did

not display as much student work as other buildings, supposedly due to a security system which was set off easily. He seemed to be effective in school discipline; however, he did not appear to be a leader in curriculum or teacher development and didn't seem to be aware of bilingual research regarding social and academic language and the time needed to acquire each (Cummins, 1989).

The teacher

The bilingual teacher had taught ESL for many years in a variety of settings, grew up in Mexico and the US, and done university TESOL and bilingual education teacher preparation prior to her return to K- 12 bilingual classrooms. Her teaching was influenced by research into social and academic language (Cummins, 1989) and by her own research (Garcia & Leone, in press; Leone, 1979; Leone & Cisneros, 1985).

School climate

In 1992, Peterson was seen as a "difficult" school for bilingual teachers, because of the lack of support by the principal and a few senior" teachers. This opposition had been consistent for several years and included complaints to the school board about placement of specific children, negative comments by some teachers about bilingual education, problems with textbook orders, infrequent translation of communication to parents, lack of a bilingual school secretary, and the use of the pull-out bilingual teacher as a "substitute" when the school could not find one. Although these are also problems in other places, they made Peterson a stressful place to work for the bilingual teachers.

Many teachers at Peterson had worked in the district for many years, though the bilingual teacher often wondered if these mainstream teachers had received any training in bilingual/ESL education, language assessment, or cultural sensitivity, in order to be better prepared to more effectively serve the increasing number of language minority students.

A Transitional Bilingual Program

The unofficial goal of the transitional bilingual education (TBE) program was for the bilingual children to move as quickly as possible into English language instruction. If children began the program in

kindergarten, they often were "transitioned" by the end of the third grade, though they could stay in the program past third grade or leave it at the beginning of second grade. Bilingual instruction was available at every grade level in the district, from pre-school to twelfth grade, but often depended upon the number of students in a given school. Although bilingual program administrators officially supported the use of bilingual instruction for as long as it took children to achieve grade level (Cummins, 1989), which was the state law, on many campuses there was strong pressure for teachers to use as much English as possible and to minimize the use of the native language. State requirements were interpreted variably and native language support often wasn't enough to meet students' needs (e.g., parents of children in the program and of those no longer in the program needed written communication in Spanish).

Entry into the bilingual program

Placement of students in and out of the TBE program included use of a home-language survey filled out by parents; a quick, informal, "in-take" interview at registration or during the first week of classes, to quickly identify "zero English" students; and the *LAS* (Language Assessment Scales) in English and Spanish. All students took both Fall and Spring *LAS* tests. Finally, a letter informing the parents of the placement was sent home in two languages. If parents did not want their children in the TBE program, they needed to write a note or speak to the teacher, principal, or The Program Director. This ensured that parents were informed of the consequences of a decision not to enroll their child in the TBE program (i.e., no tutoring services would be available in mainstream classes).

Exit from the bilingual program

To exit the bilingual program, a number of measures were used. Fall and Spring *LAS* scores were compared; grade-level district tests in reading, writing, math, and other subjects were consulted. Also, if the students were performing on grade level (often defined in relation to a school or district "low"), or if teachers recommended exiting, they could be exited, with parental consent. Any decision to exit a child before three years or to keep a child in the TBE Program beyond three years

had to be documented by test data and approved in writing by the child's parents or legal guardian.

According to district policy, if a student scored more than 2 years below grade level in English reading, he or she was given the native language tests in reading and the content areas. In addition, reading tests and content area tests were administered in English only if a student scored a *LAS* fluency of 4 and was within two years of grade level in English reading.

Teacher recommendations also counted a good deal. For example, in the first/second grade class described here, the principal had the six second graders attend mainstream classes for math every day the second half of the year. So, teacher recommendations were influential in the students' TBE exit in June, even though the bilingual teacher did not recommend that all these students be exited.

The Bilingual Curriculum

The bilingual curriculum in this district is said to be the same as the non-bilingual or mainstream curriculum, with the addition of ESL, and this is reflected not only in the bilingual program philosophy, but also with respect to materials, testing, staff development, and staff evaluation expectations. For example, in reading and language arts, the Spanish version of the same basal and end-of-the-book tests was used. Bilingual administrators would say that the "regular" curriculum was copied by the TBE program "for better or for worse," resulting in high scores for bilingual students in the same areas as for non-bilingual students and low scores in the same areas as well.

However, there were two obvious gaps: the "home" culture did not seem to be a part of TBE program goals, except for an occasional "fiesta" or holiday inclusion, and materials in Spanish were often not available. For example, in some cases, an older edition was used in Spanish or supplementary materials were in English. Also, teacher and student science materials, designed and written in the district, were not yet available in Spanish for all grades.

As for teaching approaches, there was excitement among mainstream teachers about whole language, though the large amount of testing connected with basals and "transitional" basals discouraged most

bilingual teachers from straying far from these. In mathematics, district-wide curriculum committees and grade-level staff development meetings were working toward national math goals. But, bilingual teachers were not always given the same ready-made classroom materials in Spanish which extended math concepts and skills to whole language contexts or included examples of bilingual implementation of national math goals. However, one of the best aspects of the elementary bilingual curriculum was the new social studies texts (in English and Spanish), which utilized a whole language philosophy and included a thematically-organized literature anthology and critical thinking supplementary materials.

The Classroom Setting

The self-contained first-second grade bilingual classroom at Peterson was made up of sixteen first graders and five second graders. It was the classroom closest to the office and was connected by an adjoining door to a second grade with one of the most powerful teachers in the school; she was also perhaps the strongest opponent of bilingual education at Peterson, although she was helpful, interested in seeing the new classroom take shape, and always willing to share.

Setting up the bilingual classroom involved ordering student materials and beginning collections of classroom books and manipulatives "from scratch." Although some budget was available, much was left to the ingenuity of the new bilingual teacher. Regular trips to the city library proved a good solution for Spanish books, which the school library had in very short supply.

The physical arrangement of the room was important, since the teacher wanted it to reflect a student-centered philosophy. She arranged students in five groups of four, each "team" choosing a name to help with group work and classroom management (*leones* "lions", *toros* "bulls", *conejos* "rabbits", *osos* "bears", and *changos* "monkeys"). In the Fall, the second graders were spread out, but in the Spring they made up their own team, so they didn't need to regroup for their transitional English reading. However, they often joined first grade teams to help with Spanish reading and other activities.

The classroom also had activity areas, places where children could work with "word banks," measure and explore numerical concepts with manipulative objects, observe science projects, read or write together, and play with games and puzzles, all intended to encourage interactive learning and collaboration, themes the teacher valued highly and integrated across the curriculum.

The classroom environment was bilingual, with names of colors, numbers, days of the week, songs, poems, object labels and such in both languages around the room, though mostly in Spanish. In the class library, there were books in English and Spanish, though the teacher tried to have more books in Spanish, so students would see the importance and value of Spanish, given the lack of Spanish materials in the school.

The ESL Component

ESL Goals

A district-wide committee had recently been formed to revise the ESL curriculum, but, nevertheless, teachers varied in their goals and teaching of ESL. The Peterson bilingual teacher's ESL goals were to teach social and academic English orally (Cummins, 1989), and, in the spring, transitional English reading (and writing) for second graders.

She was concerned that her students not sacrifice learning (i.e. cognitive development and literacy across the curriculum) for the sake of learning English. She had been told that second graders had not had much native language reading, so didn't want to rush them into English reading without a solid foundation in Spanish literacy. Most had had only ESL pull-out and had not developed a linguistic or cognitive/academic foundation in Spanish, their stronger language. Some had begun to learn to "sound out" or decode in English, but had not really developed more than a surface, "social" English. She wanted to promote an additive bilingualism for all students.

Social and academic English

Because of her many years experience teaching ESL, this teacher was truly eclectic, drawing on a variety of approaches. With regard to "social" English (Cummins, 1989), her goal was to teach the oral language children needed in school, for interaction in a variety of settings. In daily classroom operations, the teacher attempted to model as much English as possible, especially for routines, classroom management, and students' school needs in the office, the cafeteria, the nurse's office, and the hallways. She would often send two children on a task outside the classroom, after an enjoyable practice of the probable interaction. For example, if a student arrived late and needed a slip from the office, the teacher would call the student, have the student pick a "buddy" to help, ask them what they needed to say, and then model and practice with the pair until they felt they were ready to talk to the secretary. This student-centered method was similar to a "community language learning" approach (Larsen-Freeman, 1986).

She also used TPR (total physical response) approaches, to teach both social and academic language. She continuously took advantage of actual situations to teach object names ("where's the stapler?"), to accomplish specific tasks ("ask Mrs. Smith to call your mom"), and to build academic language (pointing to a map: "The blue color shows the water; show me some more water!"). She often paired up children for these activities into heterogeneous English language and learning style groupings.

In more structured ESL lessons, the teacher would make a conscious attempt to connect content from the ESL book with themes from science, social studies, reading, or math. For example, when talking about community workers, she would employ a "natural approach" and show visuals related to occupations to begin a conversation: "Do you know who these people are?" or "What does she do?" She counted on students' background knowledge and experiences with mailmen, doctors, or other workers. By focusing on objects, visuals, and conversation starters, she could bring in topics and new vocabulary related to students' lives and interests. Or she might ask, "What do you want to be (or do) when you grow up?" to expand on the occupations, to personalize, and to have the children guide her into areas of their interest. Then, the conversation would be connected to a story

or a social studies activity about community workers and helpers. When reviewing the same lesson, a communicative approach, such as role play, would be used. Words and structures would be added, based on what those students were naturally attempting on their own, connecting with other content, if possible. This interdisciplinary, content-based approach, building on common themes, was more natural and motivating. Although these expressions were usually taught and read in Spanish first, depending on availability of materials, the teacher's use of English for many social and academic purposes in diverse contexts each day provided practice and comprehensible input, essential ingredients for the natural acquisition of a second language.

She also relied a lot on the children themselves to find out what they needed to know, since they brought with them their own family and kids' culture, interests, topics, and language in both English and Spanish that peers could draw from. The variety of English and Spanish proficiencies helped create an interactive, low-risk environment where kids could try out new social and academic language with each other. The bilingual teacher also wanted her students to have contact with other students. So, for about half an hour daily, about 7 or 8 bilingual fifth graders joined the class to read together, an informal "buddy" system the bilingual teacher initiated with a supportive fifth grade teacher. This daily help from older students not only provided important role models but also significant, natural input in English. Although first graders usually read in Spanish, all students loved to be read to in either language. Other input in English were read-aloud stories, games such as "Simon Says," Jazz Chants (Graham, 1988), classes with music and physical education teachers, talk with other kids at recess, and interactions with staff, teachers, and the principal, who all wanted to hear the bilingual students speak English.

The ESL materials purchased by the district for elementary bilingual classrooms consisted of ESL texts, student books, songs, posters, and pictures which accompanied *Hooray for English*. Also used occasionally were pages from The ESL teacher's activity kit (Claire, 1988) and other sources, provided by the bilingual program. Because the bilingual teacher had been teaching ESL for many years, she had many ideas for supplementing and adapting the district ESL materials to meet individual needs and interests. She found the district ESL texts useful to

a degree, but believed they were limited since they didn't connect language and content. However, she used the ESL activities book, songs, and visuals that accompanied the text to create her own lessons, and used her own content area materials and storybooks for a more integrated, content-based approach to ESL.

Using Two Languages For Instruction

In her classroom, the bilingual teacher used Spanish and English for many purposes (e.g., requests, courtesies, reprimands, naming, explaining, quizzing, etc.), but tried to gauge how much and when to use each based on the difficulty of the lesson activity, time constraints, the child's (and class's) needs, and the goals of the lesson itself. She generally used three "rules of thumb" to guide her:

1) "The kids will let me know, if I watch and listen carefully, what they understand and what they don't."

2) "Because the kids know that our class philosophy is to work together and help one another, they will also be watching to see who understands or needs help."

3) She also listened to parents and used the language variety of the community, which was very similar to that of the community in which she had grown up.

By validating the Spanish and English of the children and being a "kid watcher," using two languages in class was very natural. Yet, with these guiding rules, the teacher used more English as the year went on, sometimes turning the comprehension of the directions for an activity into a lesson (or game) in itself. In this way, a lesson in "English" (as subject) was added to a science or math lesson, thus incorporating important language inquiry and metalinguistic concepts. If she saw that some students did not understand instructions, she would ask others to explain, in English or Spanish, to be sure all were following. Then the activity would continue in English, though Spanish was also used for entire activities, with the teacher sometimes switching to English. However, students always knew that when a question was asked in English, that an answer in English should at least be attempted. She hoped that they would become more aware of their use of two languages, and proud of it, without becoming self-conscious.

To avoid an uncomfortable self-consciousness, this switching by teacher and students was not often talked about at the moment, but it was clear that there were attempts by all students to improve orally in both languages and students would sometimes remark that so-and-so was good in Spanish or in English. The teacher made it a point, frequently, to say how important it was to be *listos*/"smart" in both languages, not just one, in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and this also added to students' "meta-talk," their thinking about being bilingual and using two languages.

With improvement in both languages, students also showed improvements in self-concept and confidence, perhaps because errors in speaking were not spotlighted in class. If they asked for help, it was always given by the teacher or other students. When students corrected each other, as they would often do, this would be turned into an opportunity to analyze and share what they knew, to talk about play, choice, and creativity in language, rather than be a "lesson" in "good" and "bad" language. Nevertheless, appropriateness was discussed, in terms of sociolinguistic norms students already used in Spanish. Although only six or seven years old, they had well-developed ideas about choices in speaking. Now, with a budding literacy, they would also comment that knowing how to read in Spanish, for example, helped them read with their parents and they enjoyed doing this homework.

Both students and teacher were more aware and explicit about choices when it came time to read or write. In reality, all of us knew that language choices were often dictated by many external variables, as when choosing a book to read. What was available or attractive, what was easier or more favored by peers, these often affected choice of printed materials. But, for students to realize the implications of their choices, the teacher might ask, "Why is it good to know two languages?" or "Why is it fun to read in Spanish at home?" or "Who do you like to talk to in Spanish?" The children would listen to their peers talk about what they did at home in Spanish: tell stories, read letters from relatives, and collaborate with *mamá*, *papá*, or siblings on homework. She also would add "school value" to Spanish by bringing in lots of books in Spanish, starting a morning routine of singing and reading a "De Colores" poster, and requesting that children bring

containers and newspapers in Spanish for the classroom store and library.

Reading And Writing In Spanish

Reading in Spanish

In the fall, both first and second grade students were reading in Spanish. But, abilities varied from one first grader at an early stage of letter recognition to a second grader at or above grade level in Spanish reading. Reading and writing instruction was often done with the whole class, with follow-up in groups of students with varying literacy abilities and learning styles. But, because the basals were the "main menu" at this time, students were expected to take regular tests as they moved from one book to the next.

The teacher did not find the first grade basals interesting or authentic; however, she used a type of "scaffolding" with the basals to support the students' early literacy and she believed it proved effective. She would tell the children she didn't remember the stories and ask them to retell them to her. She questioned them in myriad ways, asking about plot, characters, alternative outcomes, special words, and the pictures that they all liked, encouraging them to ask questions and helping them extend the "story talk" to their own lives. She also used other books, not relying exclusively on the basals: books to read aloud, city library books in Spanish, books related to social studies and science, and some of the Children's Book Press books in Spanish, such as *Family Pictures* and *Tío Nacho's Hat*. She also used many readings from Alma Flor Ada's *Días y Días de Poesía* (1991) for short, daily readings which were often patterned and predictable. All these, plus class language experience stories and kids' own writing formed a more "tasty" reading menu.

Although most second graders read from a first grade Spanish basal in the fall, because of the pressure to "transition" by the beginning of third grade (a year earlier than most schools in the district), both students and teacher worked hard to prepare for the basal reading test in January. Some second graders would tell the teacher that they were learning to read and write in Spanish for the first time: the previous year they had had pull-out instruction and spent most of the time in

mainstream classrooms. By the end of the fall, they wanted to read and write in Spanish even more, since they knew that they were getting better at it and could share it with their families, a top priority in this class. However by May, all but one of the second graders still needed at least another year to achieve grade level in reading and other content areas in Spanish and several years to achieve grade level in content areas in English.

As second graders enjoyed Spanish reading more and more, this had a positive effect on the first graders, one or two of whom only wanted to read in English at first and lacked confidence in Spanish. The teacher tried to meet the needs of these children by doing exciting, kinesthetically active (TPR) reading aloud in both English and Spanish. She also would ask second graders to do choral reading in Spanish for the class. First graders enjoyed listening and watching, and second graders enjoyed rehearsing together and having an audience, which added to their zeal to perform and improve the performance. So, stimulated by reading at home with parents, reading aloud in Spanish in class, and the contagious animo from teachers and peers, everyone was soon reading enthusiastically in Spanish.

Writing in Spanish

All students wrote in Spanish, whether they were still working on letter formation, or using mostly consonants, or beginning to approximate conventional spelling. Daily journal writing, as well as other types of writing helped students to understand the nature and purpose of writing, since none of the children had had any exposure to process writing (Peregoy & Boyle, 1993). Traditional spelling (*ortografía*) books were also used in Spanish, and the children enjoyed this more structured work too (Legorburu, 1983).

Because one of the teacher's favorite activities was writing, she found multiple ways to integrate it across the curriculum on a daily basis. The children had journals, in which they wrote daily about many different topics, from *cuentos de dinero* (money stories) to mealworms. She would encourage them to reflect on class activities and then write about it in their journals (Mathematical Association, 1987). They would read their entries to the teacher and share journals with classmates. Also, she would comment in the journals, to keep up a conversation with her

students. The journals were also used for "free time," so children could write on topics of their own choosing. The idea of a journal was that you could later read it, for pleasure, for a source of ideas, to remember things, and for other purposes. The teacher modeled this notebook writing, by carrying around her own notebook everywhere she went throughout the day.

A big event for the class was the arrival of the monthly magazine, *Mi Globo*, which included a regular writing "contest." After reading and talking about the cover story and related items, the class used a process approach to drafts and drawings on the monthly question about the cover story or theme - from chile peppers, to community helpers, to Columbus Day. Although it took a lot of work and time to get it all done by the deadline each month, this *Mi Globo* writing became a routine all children looked forward to and excelled in. The reading, discussion, prewriting, and drafts usually spanned a week or more, but several times during the year student contributions appeared in *Mi Globo* among those selected to be published. This spurred the young writers on even more. Finally, when the district issued its annual call for participation in the state's "Young Authors" contest, the entire class participated. As a result, a first grader from Peterson's bilingual classroom won first place in the district's first grade competition. With encouragement and assistance, the child and her family were able to attend the award ceremony and reception in the state capitol later in the spring.

Reading And Writing In English

Reading in English

Transitional English reading for the second graders began around the mid-point of the school year, although they were surrounded by books in English throughout the year: library books, RIF books ("Reading is Fun"), old textbooks, coloring books, comic books, and other material they brought in, borrowed, or purchased from discount or religious stores. Because the teacher encouraged children to bring in their own reading materials, sparking an enthusiasm for print in both languages, the room was filled with authentic materials, including cereal boxes, tortilla packages, phone books, bilingual "junk mail," and the like. This fun with books and print philosophy was a very important goal

for this teacher, as she was aware that the children did not all feel very secure about their reading in either language. She wanted all children to feel more positive and more confident about reading by the end of the year, about any topic in any language.

As part of the transitional English reading program, students read a basal reader and did worksheets which accompanied it, focusing on the "non-transferable" skills of English phonics, spelling, capitalization, and the like. The five second graders worked on these daily as a group with the teacher's assistance. They were also encouraged to keep "word banks" of the new words they could read, and then they could consult their word banks when they wrote. The word cards had an English word on one side and a sentence with the word in it and/or a definition, on the other. The goal was that students write something to help them remember the meaning of the word in context. And, they could add words from any source, not just from their reading texts.

As they progressed through the transitional program, students often took book tests to "measure" progress. On these tests, required by the bilingual program, students usually did not do so well, probably because the tests measured discrete skills and the students were going through the transition too fast. The second graders who did the best were those who had the strongest reading abilities in Spanish. Nevertheless, the teacher felt students were making some progress in English reading, referring to informal criteria, such as enthusiasm, confidence, independence, and "language talk."

Writing in English

Once students could read and write in Spanish with some degree of confidence, they almost always wanted to do some writing in English too. First graders wrote almost exclusively in Spanish, though in the spring, second graders were encouraged to try to write more in English, to coincide and assist with reading development which began first in Spanish and then moved to English. They worked especially hard on their writing in English the second half of the year, after beginning English transitional reading lessons.

At first, because second graders were clearly not ready to transition into English, without strong reading or writing abilities in Spanish, the teacher decided not to push writing in English. She usually gave them a

choice, though at times asked them to write in one language or another, depending on the purpose of the activity. Little by little, they would attempt to write in English more, because they had developed a confidence in writing in general, and, because their reading lessons were in English.

However, the teacher wanted students to enjoy and discover many purposes for writing and she encouraged them to draw on their resources in both languages to do creative, well-developed, and purposeful writing in many genres and on many topics. Besides spontaneous writing topics and regular journal writing, topics were connected with activities from math, social studies, or science, which often took place in Spanish.

The teacher worked with students on purpose, audience, topic, and organization (global concerns) in both languages as well as on more "local concerns" (spelling and grammar). Sometimes a "writing workshop" was used, and students read to each other for feedback or conferenced with the teacher one-on-one. When students commented on each other's drafts, they often had to be reminded that the spelling was not the first thing they should notice, but rather the ideas and the organization of ideas. To guide the sessions, they were given a few questions such as "what did you like?" "what didn't you understand?" and "what do you still want to know?"

Spelling and grammar were dealt with later, when students actually read each other's drafts. When dealing with errors, students were told not to erase but to write the correct word or spelling above or next to the error. In this way, they were provided with guidance as needed, but also were expected to spot patterns in their errors, to help them grow in their self-editing abilities. Besides spelling, they would also work on word choice, which was another area in which they sought and gave each other feedback, in their pair or group revising and editing. They could consult their word banks for old words and add new words they learned. In these discussions about errors, a more descriptive, rather than prescriptive, approach was taken. So, for example, questions such as "How would you say it better?", "How would you say it in Spanish/English?" or "What did he mean?" would be posed to encourage a language thoughtfulness focused on content and expression, not on the inability of the speaker or writer.

Classroom Assessment

Although at the time the bilingual teacher had not had much experience with portfolios, she (in consultation with students) kept samples of their work to show parents and others who wanted to see their progress. Even though they were not yet an official part of the school district's practices, portfolios were recommended in the district language arts teacher manual. The primary samples for the portfolios were the varied pieces of student writing, and in this class, there was never a lack of writing samples. This included writing which was integrated with social studies and science instruction. Other assessment included basal tests in reading and chapter tests in math.

Home-School Connections

The involvement of parents played an important part in the planning and goals of the bilingual teacher, for she knew that the success of her classroom depended to a great degree on the involvement of the parents in their children's learning at home and on her communication with them. During the year, she consciously worked to increase parental involvement through a variety of means, especially by incorporating the "home culture" into daily literacy and content class activities and the homework assigned. For example, she would assign a question for students to answer with the help of mom and dad, related to a class theme but also a topic she knew parents would want to respond to, such as "*¿Cómo celebran el Día de la Raza?*" (How do you celebrate October 12?) or "*¿Quiénes son sus vecinos; cómo se conocen; y que hacen los unos para los otros?*" (Who are your neighbors, how do you know each other, and what do you do for each other?). The almost daily questions sent home were aimed to spark discussion between parents and children and to help children to see that through talk and writing, their own meanings would emerge for sharing with classmates the next day. This also proved a valuable way to get acquainted with many parents. She also encouraged children to take home books in Spanish and to get a library card for checking out their own books downtown. All children would remark that they enjoyed reading with their parents.

She also attended the Bilingual PTA meetings regularly and encouraged parents to involve their children as much as possible in after-school extra-curricular activities such as the bilingual Girl Scout troop just getting started. Also, she occasionally would visit parents, to be sure they had information about class work or school policy, to chat about how their child was doing, or to get their permission to take their child to the city library nearby. It seemed that she had more contact with parents than most teachers, outside of parent-teacher conferences and open house, except for pre-school teachers who devoted one day a week to visiting parents. The bilingual teacher visited after school when parents were likely to be home and felt that the time and energy she spent communicating with parents was well worth it. These visits only strengthened her belief that all parents cared deeply about their children's education (Torres-Guzmán, 1995).

Critical Comments And Recommendations

The bilingual self-contained class at Peterson was in its first year, though most children had been served by a pull-out teacher the previous year. However, despite the positive step of adding a self-contained classroom to better meet the bilingual students' needs, there were still implementation problems, including both "micro" level (related to the classroom) and "macro" level problems (related to the school, district, and community context). Both criticisms and recommendations follow.

Criticisms

1. *School climate.* The school climate and staff attitudes included complaints about bilingual testing procedures, negative remarks about bilingual education and the Spanish-speaking community, an unsupportive principal, and constant reminders that more English was to be heard. This devaluing of the language and culture of the students and their families discouraged both bilingual teachers and made it a difficult school to work in.

2. *Lack of materials.* The lack of Spanish materials in the classroom, school library, and PTA book fairs also devalued the language and culture of the students, though in a more subtle way. It was also difficult to teach without bilingual materials.

3. *Misconceptions.* Staff; teachers, and principal lacked basic information about bilingual/ESL education related to assessment, instructional methods, home-school collaboration, and other areas. These key players needed to know why and when students used Spanish and English and how second languages were acquired, to understand and assist the children in their linguistic and cognitive/academic development.

4. *Pull-out teacher's role.* The fact that the bilingual pull-out teacher was often used as a substitute teacher or an "on-call" translator made consistent, effective instruction for kindergarten and third, fourth, and fifth grade students more difficult.

5. *Bilingual parents.* Poor communication with parents included infrequent written translations sent home to parents, the lack of a full-time bilingual secretary, and little support for the bilingual parent/ teacher association (PTA) at Peterson.

6. *Early exit and low definitions of "grade level."* The transitional English reading program was going too fast, with students moving from one basal to the next without being ready to do so. And, although the bilingual teacher did not recommend that the second graders be exited yet, the principal urged her to prioritize them according to their English, for purposes of exiting. Also, criteria used to define "grade-level" (in reference to low district [or school] norms), pushed for early exit as well (Cummins, 1989).

7. *Bilingual teacher meetings.* District-wide bilingual meetings usually did not focus on teachers' classroom and curriculum concerns, but on other matters: state policies, testing procedures, ordering materials, planning for the year-end *fiesta*.

Recommendations

1. *Parent involvement.* More school communication with bilingual parents, school-wide support of the bilingual PTA, supportive school policies and structures, and collaboration among all parents are needed. Without this support, schools perpetrate the same isolation of bilingual children and parents from the school community that they already experience with other institutions in the larger community.

2. *Training of teachers, administrators, and parents.* Training of teachers, administrators, and parents in how to work together to achieve

a greater sense of school community and foster effective education for all children is needed. Training also needs to include bilingual/ESL basics: second language learning, native language instruction, alternative assessment, bilingual~mainstream collaboration, sheltering in mainstream classes, and inclusion of the "home culture" in the daily curriculum school-wide (Banks, 1989; Cummins, 1989; Moll, et al., 1992).

3. *Clearer procedures for language and content area assessment.* To avoid early exit of students when there is evidence that they are not yet ready, clearer procedures need to be available to all teachers. With informed teachers, the transition of students into mainstream instruction will be more effective and appropriate for students still developing their CALP (Cummins, 1989). With the integration of language and content comes the need for fair, appropriate, performance-based, portfolio assessment of language minority students (French, 1992, Short, 1993).

4. *Meetings for bilingual teachers.* Research shows that teachers learn a lot from other teachers, but that they seldom have the chance to meet at school to share ideas and solutions (Calderón, 1994). Meetings need to be scheduled for this teacher-to-teacher collaboration, especially in areas of curriculum development and effective teaching and assessment strategies, for bilingual teachers and for all teachers.

5. *Materials.* Related to the curriculum, material resources need to be equally accessible to all students, especially those which promote higher level thinking and new technologies. All teachers need to incorporate students' experiences into daily lessons, support language development across the curriculum, and value students' native languages and cultures to promote inclusion of all students in the school community (Moll et al., 1992).

Conclusion

The goal of this classroom description was to share one teacher's experience and her critique of the classroom in its school and community sociocultural context. If other bilingual teachers in the same district were to write descriptions of their classrooms and contexts, they would be different in some ways but perhaps similar in the contextual description. In fact, this bilingual classroom has much in common with

bilingual classrooms in Texas, California, New York, and elsewhere, because of its macro or larger sociocultural context.

Looking at Skutnabb-Kangas' data on successful and non-successful bilingual education programs (1988) and Cummins' "empowering framework" (1989), it is precisely this context that needs to be examined very carefully, to understand what is working and what is wrong with language minority education, in many contexts and in many places. These "structural problems" of educational institutions that Skutnabb-Kangas and Cummins refer to, sometimes referred to in school restructuring discussions, need to be identified and addressed, so that school reform planning and implementation will include bilingual parents and educators as equally active participants.

So, though this district continues to make progress to improve its bilingual program and gain support for it in the city and state, there are still many needs and concerns which have not been addressed. This program still experiences high teacher turnover rates, as teachers seek positions with better salaries and working conditions. Perhaps, it is the educating of educators and gaining of community support for bilingual education which are still the major challenges facing this district, this city, and this state.

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