

Applied Linguistics Research and Reflection

Brandi Barnett

Loyola University

“Advocacy is about visualizing change for a better society...consisting of organized efforts and actions based on the reality of ‘what is’ so that visions of ‘what should be’ in a just, decent society become a reality,” (de Jong, 2011, p.2). I am an advocate for my students, not just in my classroom but all the students in my school and school district. Great linguistic diversity exists in my school district. Unfortunately, the staff diversity does not reflect our students. I will be addressing a problem that I face in my classroom every day, review literature that relates to my specific problem, use the literature to make recommendations for my teaching practice and articulate next steps for my classroom practice, my school’s practice and my district’s practice.

Problem

The problem I have selected is how do I, as a monolingual teacher, be an effective teacher for my students who speak a variety of languages? Wright (2010) state “students learn best in the language they understand best. Thus, providing ELLs with content-area instruction in their native or first language (L1) while they are learning English...helps to ensure that they will learn complex academic content and master grade-level content standards,” (p. 83). If my ELL students all spoke the same native language, I would simply learn and immerse myself in that language so that I could provide them with the instruction they need while learning a new language, English. Regrettably, it is not that simple. Prior to my employment with Skokie School District 68, the community was predominately Jewish with most of the community members being middle to upper-middle class. The demographics over the past ten years have shifted dramatically. The current student demographics consist of thirty-six per cent Asian, thirty-three per cent white, sixteen per cent Hispanic, eleven percent African-American and four percent two or more

races (Great Schools, 2013). Accompanying the diverse demographics of the school is an even more diverse linguistically. There are over fifty languages represented throughout the district. On average, each school year, my classroom students speak about eight different languages. Because of this, I cannot learn each student's native language to provide instruction in their L1 while they learn English. Yet I still have a responsibility to provide each student with the education they deserve.

Policy regarding the education of ELL students is ever evolving and changing. The newer policy of the No Child Left Behind Act, implemented in 2002, "will discourage schools from continuing native-language instruction, because failure to show academic progress in English will lead to the loss of funds," (Santa Ana, 2004, p. 104). Even though research has proven, time and again, that learning a new language while utilizing the person's L1 is best practice, the US government is pushing for English fluency quicker than possible. "ELLs who receive more native-language instruction in well-implemented bilingual programs typically learn more academic English than those in all-English programs," (Crawford & Krashen, 2007, p. 18). The students in my school district receive thirty minutes of pullout ELL instruction every day. This does not mean that I do not have to worry about my ELL students. It means that I have a difficult task ahead of me on how I can create that link between their L1 and L2. "NCLB makes it clear that ELL students are held to the same language arts, math, science, and other content-area standards as their native English-speaking peers," (Wright, 2010, p. 65).

The diversity in my classroom, school and district is an asset. "In socially just classrooms guided by sociocultural theory, dimensions of difference can exist in their own right and should serve as the source of rich learning interactions," (Oakes, Lipton,

Anderson, & Stillman, 2013, p. 171). Often times, teachers in my school district complain and/or see the diversity as an obstacle that they have to deal with. "The schooling of linguistically and culturally diverse learners should build on their strengths," (de Jong, 2011, p. 33). I enjoy the diversity my students bring to our classroom and I want to know more about how I can provide them with a quality education without learning multiple languages and suggestions I can give to teachers who see their students as a complication. In the next section, I will review related literature on the problem to better inform my proposed recommendations.

Literature Review

There is a plethora of information regarding my problem, as there are countless teachers in my same position. In the first article, Edwards and Newcombe (2006) discuss how to market the benefits of bilingualism to parents. The media is mostly responsible for prolonging myths of how bilingualism can confuse children. Therefore, parents will generally encourage the adoption of the dominant language while neglecting their native tongue. The Wales government is making a valiant effort to promote bilingualism of the English and Welsh languages using several tactics: midwives and health visitors ask parents at birth and at the eight month screening what language intentions they have for their child, new parents receive a brochure highlighting the benefits of bilingualism, and have created a logo to promote and market bilingualism (Edwards & Newcombe, 2006).

Many of the marketing strategies in Wales can easily be adopted here in the United States if the government truly does want bilingual and multilingual citizens. I saw first hand with a parent this previous school year that parents are misinformed on bilingualism. My student's parents did not want her to learn to read or write in Spanish and they

increasingly encouraged her to use more and more English at home. I was easily able to convince the parent of the benefits of being literate in both languages and how it would help, not hinder, their daughter's ability to improve her English. "Dozens of studies attest to the positive impact of parent involvement on children's school achievements and outcomes," (Oakes et. al., 2013, p. 324). Since students are so used to seeing and feeling that learning English, the dominant language, is important, getting parents on board with an investment in their native language can help students become bilingual. Also, sharing with parents that "academic language takes at least five to seven years to develop, and it can take even longer for a student who was not literate in her primary language," (Hill & Flynn, 2006, p. 18) will hopefully ease the minds of many eager parents and students.

The next article, Van Sluys and Rao (2012) explain theoretical practices that monolingual teachers can utilize in order to teach multilingual students in schools. The first focus school, an urban elementary school that is comprised of students who's L1 is Spanish, participate in a school wide dual-language program. Due to mathematics and social studies being taught only in Spanish and student participation only in Spanish and literacy and science being taught in English with student participation only in English, the students at this school did not feel they had language, power or identity due to the strict separation of the two languages. The second focus school, a small urban elementary school containing working-class and multilingual families, mainly had monolingual teachers. Students in this school were encouraged to write in the language students were most comfortable with and drove the curriculum through inquiry.

Not only can I address my students' variety of languages spoken, I can be supportive and "allow" them to use their L1 in order to continue their learning. This past school year I

read aloud many books with different languages, although most were Spanish. I noticed one of my students began counting, during a math lesson, in Spanish. This is a step in the right direction for my students and me as a teacher. I know I can continue my students' pride in their language by encouraging them to speak, read and write in any language they feel most comfortable before trying to use English.

The chapter, *Using Multilingual Strategies in Monolingual Early Childhood Classrooms*, reconfirms that research shows a student's solid foundation in their L1 will encourage L2 language acquisition (Sullivan, 2011). It is simply not enough that we, as teachers, tell parents the importance of the continued use of their native language and developing their child's L1 literacy at home. A list of strategies monolingual teachers can use to create inclusive classrooms and support emerging multilingual student identities is provided, as well as explanations of how each are beneficial. Some examples include speaking in positive terms about languages and cultures, learning as much about your students' languages and cultures as possible, having signs and labels reflect the linguistic diversity of your students, encouraging students and parents to find books, songs, poems and rhymes in their native language that connects to classroom themes, and much more.

This chapter gives a multitude of ways that I, as a monolingual teacher, can use on a daily basis to promote the use of my students' variety of languages. One strategy that is obvious but I had not thought of is simply me making an effort to learn how to say basic phrases in each of my students' languages. Most crucially, though, is that I get through to parents and offer them suggestions on how to keep their child's native language literacy active and well developed. Wright (2010) contends "...teachers who respect their students'

home languages and cultures can be most effective in helping students make the necessary transitions,” (p. 25).

The next chapter, *The Importance of Maintaining Mother Tongue and Culture in the Classroom*, focuses on the significance of children continuing to use their L1 in order to learn an additional language, as well as respecting each child’s culture (Hayim-Bamberger, 2011). By having students write on a topic in their L1 and translate it into English, they can compare and contrast both languages in order to help them learn the structure of English – teaching grammar in English alone is not meaningful. This is more formally known as additive bilingualism, which means learning a second language without neglecting the maintenance and development of the first. Teachers can do a variety of units of inquiry to include learning and/or sharing each student’s home country.

I can teach my students how to speak, read and write English using their L1 and respecting the culture in which they originate. While I do have a strict curriculum to follow, the incorporation of using the compare and contrast method in writing, schools and celebrations, reading stories, discussing food, looking at forms of currency, the weather, sharing songs, what to do when someone sneezes between students’ culture and America will be beneficial for every child. Through tapping into what is familiar and comfortable to a child is how they will better learn English while still maintaining their culture and language.

The next chapter, *Learning a Nonalphabetic Script and Its Impact on the Later Development of English as a Second Language*, focuses on the linguistic transfer of students who speak Chinese and Korean Hangeul as their L1 and English as their L2 (Cheung, McBride-Chang, & Tong, 2011). First, the authors investigate how different levels of

phonological awareness in a child's L1 affects their reading performance in English. Second, they examine the nature of each L1's orthography (spelling) and how it affects their reading performance in English. Third, they explore how reading instruction affects their reading performance in English. Finally, suggestions are offered to practitioners on the best approach to use based on each child's L1 when teaching them how to read English.

The idea of drawing upon what students already know to teach them something new dates back to the late eighteenth century. "Dewey's curriculum began with experiences immediately familiar to the children, then moved students to more distant and abstract ideas," (Oakes et. al., 2013 p. 72). While this chapter only focused on two languages, Chinese and Korean Hangul, it has given me insight on languages that do not have an alphabet and are not based on phonological awareness. Students who read Chinese use a "look-and-say" method that simply does not work when reading English. Therefore, instead of teaching Chinese students phonemic awareness for reading English, I need to focus on teaching them to read in syllables. Since there are a variety of languages spoken by the students in my classroom, I can use Culture Grams or some other online resource to see how each child's L1 reading methods can be transferred to helping them read English. According to Crawford and Krashen (2007) "the process of reading is similar in different languages; readers of different languages use the same strategies while reading," (p. 20).

Finally, the chapter, Heritage Language Communities and Schools: Challenges and Recommendations, first looks at the difficulties with communities establishing and maintaining heritage language schools, then offers recommendations for addressing those difficulties (Compton, 2001). The challenges to establishing and maintaining heritage language schools consist of raising public awareness, cultivating broad-based support,

improving articulation with groups and institutions, improving curriculum and materials, developing teachers and fostering support among parents and elders. The most critical aspect of strengthening an existing heritage school is raising public awareness because often times great programs exist but the community is not aware. Some recommendations include examining immigration trends, heritage settlement patterns, the location of heritage language schools, spread information on heritage language offerings and make connections between heritage language schools and schools in the community including higher education.

One of the greatest things I can do, as a teacher, is to help my students create and/or maintain a positive self-identity by encouraging the uniqueness that each student brings to my classroom. Language and culture play an essential role in a child's self-identity (de Jong, 2001, p. 185). Even though I am a monolingual teacher, I can encourage my students to be proud of and maintain their cultural heritage. The challenge in getting students (and adults) involved in heritage language classes is the awareness in the community (Compton, 2001). In the next section, I will make recommendations for practice to provide better instruction for my ELL students and to make my students feel welcomed and valued in our classroom.

Recommendations for Practice

Each article gave several recommendations teachers can use in their practice. Some are not feasible or particularly useful for my situation but many I can easily implement right away. First, I would like to focus on the parents. My first formal interaction with parents is on Curriculum Night at the end of August. During this time I will give parents a brochure on the benefits of bilingualism. The brochure I will create will include facts on the

benefits of their child learning English while maintaining/enhancing their native language, as well as citations for validation purposes directly from texts such as “developing native-language literacy speeds up English literacy development,” (Crawford & Krashen, 2007, p. 41). Along with the distribution of the brochure I will be sure to encourage parents to use their native language at home in all four domains, listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The first time I formally speak with parents individually is during conferences in early October. At this time I will take the Wales approach and ask each parent their linguistic intentions for their child (Edwards & Newcombe, 2006). To parents who do want to continue their child’s native language development I will offer suggestions in ways to do so. To parents who are resistant I will reiterate the importance of bilingualism and ask what I can do to help.

Finally, I would like to compile a list of institutions that offer heritage language classes. Each school year I have a couple of students who tell me they have school on Saturday where they practice their language. I will reach out to parents of students I have had to ask them what language and where the classes are offered. On the list I will include the Swedish American Museum that offers Swedish heritage language classes. Once I have compiled the list, I will share it with parents. I will continue adding to the list as I am informed of more offerings.

Next, my recommendations will focus on my practice as a teacher in my classroom. There is a poster in the library at my school that says hello in about twenty different languages. I will purchase or make one to put on the door of my classroom. If we come across any languages that are not representative of the students in my classroom, we will add their language to the poster. Building off the poster saying hello, I want to learn how to

say hello in each of my students' languages and greet them that way each morning. Once I have mastered hello in each language, I will branch out to good-bye, how are you and hopefully more. I will be cognizant of speaking positively about all languages and cultures because "schools play an important role in legitimizing what is valued and important," (de Jong, 2011, p. 197). I will also continue to read and have available in my classroom library culturally relevant literature since "books validate for children that their lives are normal and that they are part of the culture," (Gopalakrishnan, 2011, p. 112).

Finally, my recommendations will focus on the instruction aspect of my teaching. I will encourage my students to use their native language when speaking and writing to make sense of the skill(s) or material being learned. When learning a new skill, I will strategically place my students in cooperative learning groups with a mixture of native English speakers and students who speak the same native language. "...sharing, talking, and working with others should be central to the learning process," (Oakes et. al., 2013, p. 181). This will allow my students to speak to each other in their native language, listen to native English speakers and allow my students to practice speaking English in a smaller group setting. I will also encourage my students to compare and contrast how sentences are spoken and written in their native language compared to English. Building on comparing and contrasting a student's L1 to L2, I will investigate each student's native language for alphabetic or nonalphabetic languages. If my students' native language is alphabetic or they have not yet learned to read or write in their native language, "...teaching children the most straightforward rules, or 'basic phonics,' can be useful. This is especially true for ELLs who have not learned to read in the native language," (Crawford & Krashen, 2007, p. 21). However, if a student's native language is nonalphabetic and they are literate in their native

language, I will need to understand how they were taught to read in that language so that I can create transfer for them to reading English. While the chapter I read pertaining to this only focused on Chinese, I can use the Culture Grams website to get specific information on how any language's reading is taught (Culture Grams, 2013).

Reflection

As I reflect on the process of this assignment, the recommendations listed above are attainable. My next steps are to put each of them into action. Some, like the hello poster in different languages and the bilingual brochure, I will start on next week when I get back into my classroom. The rest will slowly be integrated into my teaching practice throughout the school year. As I was typing this paper I used an outline for my recommendations. I will keep the outline that is very easy to read next to my computer at school so that I am constantly aware of my aspirations. I also intend to involve my school so that the students, not just in my classroom, will benefit. I can easily make copies of the bilingual brochure I put together for parents and the heritage language schools list, as well as encourage other teachers to help me any way they can.

Even though I am completing this Applied Linguistics Research and Reflection paper does not mean I have completely solved my problem and the recommendations I put in place will make me the perfect teacher and advocate for my students. My problem is vast and there will always be more that I can do. There are numerous strategies I want to try in my classroom regarding sheltered instruction from the SIOP text (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2013). I will be bringing and housing the SIOP book in my classroom so that this will be possible. I will also continue to read literature as it pertains to this problem to help even further.

The ESL endorsement program has opened my eyes to the complexity of second language acquisition. Since I am monolingual and have not traveled to countries where the majority of the people do not know English, I did not know how difficult learning English was or how I may have made my students feel about their own language and identity. “Through their daily decisions about language and language use, teachers help shape students’ linguistic and cultural identities as well as their academic and language and literacy development,” (de Jong, 2011, p. 239). I strongly believe that every child has the right to a socially just and equitable education. Through my daily teaching decisions, utilizing the recommendations listed above, I hope to make each of my students feel like a welcomed, valued and unique individual with a desire to learn.

Reference List

- (2013). *Culture Grams*. Retrieved from <http://online.culturegrams.com/>
- (2013). *Great schools: Involved parents. Successful kids*. Retrieved from <http://www.greatschools.org/illinois/skokie/3739-Highland-Elementary-School/?tab=demographics>
- Cheung, H., McBride-Chang, C., & Tong, X. (2011). Learning nonalphabetic script and its impact on the later development of English as a second language. In A.Y. Durgunoglu & C. Goldenberg (eds.), *Language and literacy development in bilingual settings*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Compton, C.J., (2001). Heritage language communities and schools: Challenges and recommendations. In J.K. Peyton, D.A. Ranard, & S. McGinnis (eds.), *Heritage language in America: Preserving a national resource* (pp.145-165). McHenry, IL: Delta System Company Inc.
- Crawford, J., & Krashen, S. (2007). *English learners in American classrooms: 101 questions, 101 answers*. New York: Scholastic.
- de Jong, E.J. (2011). *Foundations for multilingualism in education: From principles to practice*. Philadelphia, PA: Calson.
- Echevarria, J., Vogt, M., & Short, D.J. (2013). *Making content comprehensible for English language learners: The SIOP model* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Edwards, V., & Newcombe, L.P. (2006). Back to basics: Marketing the benefits of bilingualism to parents. In O. Garcia, T. Skutnabb-Kangas, & M. E. Torres-Guzman, *Imagining multilingual schools: Languages in education and glocalization*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Gopalakrishnan, A. (2011). *Multicultural children's literature*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hayim-Bamberger, A. (2011). The importance of maintaining mother tongue and culture in the classroom. In E. Murphy (ed.), *Welcoming linguistic diversity in early childhood classrooms: Learning from international schools* (pp. 91-99). Tonowanda, NY: Multilingual Matters.

Hill, J., & Flynn, K. (2006). *Classroom instruction that works with English language learners*. mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL).

Oakes, J., Lipton, M., Anderson, L., & Stillman, J. (2013). *Teaching to change the world* (4th ed.). Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Santa Ana, O. (Ed.) (2004). *Tongue-tied: The lives of multilingual children in public education*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc.

Sullivan, D. (2011). Using multilingual strategies in monolingual early childhood classrooms. In E. Murphy (ed.), *Welcoming linguistic diversity in early childhood classrooms: Learning from international schools* (pp. 16-27). Tonowanda, NY: Multilingual Matters.

Van Sluys, K., & Rao, A. (2012, November 2). Supporting multilingual learners: Practical theory and theoretical practices. *Theory into practice*, 51, 281-289.

Wright, W.E. (2010). *Foundations for teaching English language learners: Research, theory, and practice*. Philadelphia: Caslon.