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Meeting the Challenge of Teaching in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Settings Reflections on a Center's Progress

by Deborah Short and Anna Whitcher

The National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning will be completing its fifth year of research and dissemination in December 1995. Over the last five years, the Center has conducted research that has revealed innovative practices and approaches for teaching linguistically and culturally diverse students. Much of the research has focused on instructional approaches that capitalize on the way children learn; the knowledge, expectations, language, and cultural resources children bring to school; and the kinds of learning situations that facilitate second language acquisition and engage students actively in academic subjects. Center researchers have also investigated school reform efforts with special attention to their impact on school organization and teaching and learning in the classroom.

The Center's contributions to the field of education have been extensive and instrumental in advancing the most recent and innovative educational theo-

ries and effective practices for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. We have taken the lead in refocusing the debate from the "pros and cons" of bilingual education to the identification and implementation of comprehensive educational programs of excellence for diverse students tailored to local school conditions and needs. Through our research projects and outreach and dissemination activities, substantial information about new ways of thinking and teaching has spread to a broad audience of educators, researchers, and policy makers.

ABOUT THE CENTER

Housed on the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) campus, the Center works in collaboration with the Linguistic Minority Research Institute (a multi-campus institution of the University of California), the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) in Washington, DC, and the Technical Education Research Center (TERC) in Cambridge, MA. The Center has also collaborated with various technical centers and teacher training institutes to facilitate study tasks and dissemination practices.

Center research projects have been clustered around five themes related to the education of culturally and linguistically diverse children, namely, (1) the

acquisition of literacy, (2) the influence of home and community, (3) instructional approaches, (4) content area instruction, and (5) alternative assessment. The studies have focused on the interconnection of language development, academic achievement, and cultural background. Much of the research has been founded on sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the social and cultural aspects of learning and calls for a constructivist approach to meaning-making. Through the work conducted by the researchers, language learning principles and teaching techniques have been extracted for educators to use in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms.

Acquisition of Literacy

Several Center studies have examined the acquisition of literacy in young children. Particular focus has been placed on the efforts of caretakers to socialize students into an educational process through activities such as learning to read, investigating scientific phenomena, completing homework assignments, and problem solving (Duranti & Ochs, 1995; Scarcella & Chin, 1993). Research indicates that many young children receive assistance from "capable others," often family members

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who guide the children in their cognitive growth.

For schools, this research implies that learning is a socially negotiated process, and teachers need to be aware that children from linguistically and culturally diverse homes may approach learning in ways that are not concurrent with traditional curricula and teaching methods.

Influence of Home and Community

The importance of understanding the home and cultural backgrounds of students is a major Center concern. As students enter schools in the United States, they must adjust to different cultural contexts; yet, they benefit from having their cultures and values respected by their teachers. In our studies, we have tried to determine ways to mediate the differences between home and school cultures, drawing from the strengths of both to create active learning environments for the students.

In one study, teachers visited their students' homes as ethnographers and anthropologists to collect information about the accumulated knowledge base, or "funds of knowledge," present in each household. By incorporating the knowledge they gathered, teachers were able to develop curriculum units on *household-related topics*, such as animal husbandry, candy-making and marketing, and building construction (González et al., 1993). In another study, researchers compared Mexican-American and European-American households, looking specifically at parental aspirations for their children, chore assignments, and homework assistance. Out of this study came the recommendation that to promote home-school partnerships, teachers and parents should interact more regularly and collaborate to set expectations for student behavior and learning activities. This

will enable students to transfer skills learned in the household context to the classroom setting (Azmitia et al., 1994).

Instructional Approaches

Several Center studies have been conducted to identify exemplary practices and approaches for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. One innovative and promising program model is two-way (or developmental) bilingual education. Researchers have defined, illustrated, and analyzed how students develop dual language proficiency and acquire a deeper appreciation of two cultures by being in a classroom—usually comprised of half native speakers of English and half native speakers of another language—that follows the regular academic curriculum (Cazabon, Lambert, & Hall, 1993; Christian, 1994; Lambert & Cazabon, 1994).

In another project, an "untracking" program was studied that provides social and academic support to minority secondary school students who follow a college preparation course of study. Students take a special class that provides academic guidance in areas such as study skills, and coaches them through the college application process. They are also taught explicitly about the implicit culture of the classroom and the hidden curriculum of the school. Nearly 88% of students who graduate from this program enroll in college (Mehan et al., 1992; Mehan, et al., 1994).

Several instructional approaches, including the instructional conversation and cooperative learning, have been the focus of Center research. The instructional conversation (IC) is a dialogue—focused on a topic that has meaning and relevance for the learners—in which "teachers and students are responsive to what others say, so that each state-

ment or contribution builds upon, challenges, or extends a previous one" (Goldenberg, 1991, p.3). The teacher guides the dialogue to meet the emerging understanding of the learners. This approach mirrors natural teaching found in homes and communities and contrasts with the recitation model, where the teacher typically initiates an interaction by asking a question, the student responds, and the teacher evaluates the response. Studies have been conducted in elementary and middle school language arts and mathematics classes with native English-speaking, Spanish-speaking, and Zuni-speaking students (Dalton & Sison, 1995; Echevarria & McDonough, 1993; Goldenberg, 1991; Rueda, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 1992; Tharp & Gallimore, 1991; Tharp & Yamauchi, 1994).

In cooperative learning, students work collaboratively in small groups on tasks that require both the cooperation and interdependence of all members of the group. One study looked at the role of conversation in cooperative learning groups, and how the children's control of two languages enters into the group processes. The study illustrates how students in group work "use two different conversational strategies to achieve a working collaboration in the production of shared answers and in which their bilingual ability serves as a special communicative resource" (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1994).

Education in the Content Areas

The integration of language and content instruction has also been an important focus of Center research. Studies have illustrated various designs and implementation procedures for programs that encourage development of discourse-rich classrooms that involve

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the systematic planning of language skill development with content area objectives. One example includes scientific "sense-making" seventh and eighth grade Haitian bilingual classrooms. This project explored ways teachers could promote scientific discourse among students, including developing the students' argumentation skills, and used a collaborative inquiry approach so students would participate in scientific investigations to construct meaning (Rosebery, Warren, & Conant, 1992; Warren & Rosebery, 1995).

Center studies also examined two other areas of the curriculum: mathematics and social studies. In these projects, thematic instruction was viewed as a means for promoting student language growth and conceptual knowledge. Use of thematic instruction was coupled with hands-on activities to increase student motivation and to address different learning styles. In both studies, project teachers participated with researchers to co-develop curricular units that reflected effective instructional techniques (Henderson & Landesman, 1992; Short, 1994).

Alternative Assessment

Center studies have looked at non-traditional ways of assessing student progress. One study examined the use of portfolios—samples of student work that are used to show student progress—with emergent literacy students, demonstrating how portfolios are effective tools for measuring student literacy growth in English and Spanish (Rueda & Garcia, 1995). Another study looked at the relationship between teachers' professional backgrounds and their beliefs and practices for assessing language minority students, specifically the reading assessment practices used by a bilingual credentialed teacher, a special

education teacher, and a bilingual waived teacher (Rueda & García, 1994). A third study focused on informal ways of assessing students' knowledge of academic language (Solomon & Rhodes, in press), and a fourth looked at reading comprehension and reasoning skills of secondary students who plan to enroll in college (Durán, Revlin, & Havill, 1995). These studies revolve around the search to identify promising approaches for assessing students who are learning English but must demonstrate their content knowledge through English-medium assessments.

EMERGING THEMES

Over the past five years, the Center's work has given direction to emerging themes in the education of linguistically and culturally diverse students. Several of these have been addressed above: the use of instructional conversation to foster student involvement and critical thinking in classroom discussion and language learning; the integration of language and content instruction, especially for secondary school students who must master the content areas in time to graduate from high school; and the implementation of instructional programs of excellence that facilitate not only learning a second language, but also promote the social and academic achievement of diverse students.

One theme that has come to the forefront during the five years of Center investigation is the effect of school change on linguistically and culturally diverse students. In one study, the Center found a number of exemplary elementary and middle schools that are trying to enact reform. These schools have successfully implemented innovative approaches to teaching students with limited proficiency in English, while respecting their cultural back-

grounds (Berman et al., 1995). At a more local level, researchers have documented the progress of a southern California elementary school through its change process. The study found that involving teachers in the decision-making process is the first step to ensuring that meaningful change will take place. Even if teachers support recommendations for change, they must ultimately feel connected to the goals that are being set and must be kept involved for several years as school reorganization and changes to teaching practices occur (Goldenberg & Sullivan, 1994).

Another theme is the home-school connection. As an outgrowth of several individual projects, recommendations for creating home-school partnerships emerged so parents and teachers could learn to work together in ways that would be most beneficial to the children. These studies revealed that the education of linguistically and culturally diverse children can be improved by increasing communication between parents and teachers and by capitalizing on resources that already exist in the home. The research also indicated how schools can help parents identify resources that are already available to them for developing knowledge in their children. Such resources include family members who may possess knowledge they can impart to the children; books, magazines, recipes, and other literature in English or the native language that can support reading in the home; and quiet areas of the house with a functional workspace for studying.

THE CENTER'S IMPACT

The impact of the Center has stretched across many fields, including education, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, foreign language, English as a second language, and more. Re-

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flecting a sociocultural approach, researchers have approached their work from these multiple perspectives and have demonstrated their dedication to investigating, developing, and evaluating practices related to home and school cultures, teacher-student interaction, and systematic reform.

Dissemination Efforts

One of the more prominent goals of the Center has been to provide teachers, researchers, and other educators with information and materials that will enable them to better serve their language minority students. Through the dissemination of its research reports, educational practice reports, conference proceedings, newsletters, curriculum units, *ERIC Digests*, and other materials, the Center has attempted to reach various sectors of American society.

Center researchers have met with practitioners, researchers, and policy makers in several face-to-face venues to discuss findings from the studies. Presentations about the research have occurred at national, regional, and state professional conferences, and researchers have participated in professional development activities sponsored by local school systems and universities. Moreover, the Center sponsored one invitational conference on the special concerns of secondary immigrant students (see Olsen & Minicucci, 1993) and a summer institute that showcased Center research projects (see Montone, 1995).

Finally, the Center has prepared a teacher training video series, *Meeting the Challenge of Linguistically Diverse Students*, that uses a documentary style to highlight real, effective programs and instructional practices for teaching bilingual and multicultural students.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

While the Center has been able to make some insightful recommendations for improving the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students, it has opened many more lines of inquiry. Further research is needed in several areas, three of which will be mentioned briefly.

First, the area of professional development needs close examination. We have learned much about what works for language minority students in the classroom, but we have not yet learned the best means for training teachers to implement and maintain these practices. Nor have we uncovered the best ways to ensure that teachers are able to familiarize themselves with the various cultural and linguistic backgrounds of their students, so they will be more effective in conducting their classes and interacting with parents. One model worth pursuing, however, is found in the funds of knowledge project, where teachers are trained to be ethnographers with an anthropological perspective.

Second, additional research is needed in the area of home-school collaboration. Strategies need to be developed that will enable teachers and administrators to approach the parents of culturally and linguistically diverse students in a way that facilitates their involvement in the learning process, yet respects the cultural values and ways of learning found in the households. At the same time, research needs to discover ways parents can gain access to more information about school culture, so they can use this knowledge to meet the needs of their children.

A third area is the development of district-based comprehensive school plans for students. One aspect of this involves articulation across grade lev-

els, particularly the transitions from elementary to middle school, middle to high school, and high school to postsecondary opportunities. Two-way bilingual programs found at the elementary level, for instance, need guarantees that joint language and academic content learning opportunities will be available at the secondary level in both languages. Additional research is needed on how this type of articulation can best be accomplished. Another aspect concerns assessment. Standardized tests alone are not sufficient to determine the growth and achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Standardized test scores should not act as the sole gatekeepers for these students, isolating them from academically rigorous courses or gifted and talented programs. However, what measurement tools districts should endorse is a question that needs to be answered.

And so, as the five years of the Center come to a close, much has been learned, yet much remains to be investigated before we can ensure that linguistically and culturally diverse students can participate in equitable and effective educational programs and achieve success in school and beyond. The diversity of languages and cultures studied, along with the varieties of instructional settings examined, have proven beneficial to the overall picture of schooling for these students. Now, however, we must find ways to implement effective practices more widely across the United States.

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William B Fischer
PSU-FL
PO 751
Portland OR 97207

