

ELL Capstone Portfolio

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### **Philosophy of Teaching**

When discussing the education of English language learners in the United States, García (2005) states that, “Policy makers understand that American education is not a successful experience for these students. One-third of Hispanics and two-thirds of immigrant students drop out of school”. As part of a new generation of teachers, I recognize that inequities are not being adequately addressed in the classroom for this group of students as they should be. English language learners are increasingly labeled as “at risk” of failure, drop out rates have multiplied, and these students are commonly filtered inappropriately into special education programs instead of being effectively taught. My reasoning for pursuing a career in teaching this demographic of learners lies in the fact that simply because these culturally and linguistically diverse students may present educators with more of a challenge, it certainly does not mean they are less deserving of a quality education. I plan to argue that injustice exists in schools partly because many educators simply need to be more equipped to educationally handle the growing demands of this population of students. My point of view concerning the importance of ELL education in the United States continually expands with significantly more knowledge about these culturally and linguistically disempowered students, and our obligation to serve them, motivate them, and give them the education they are worthy of in order to succeed more in schools.

The above quote, along with all the associated implications it represents, inspired me to follow my passion to have a profound impact on the lives of students from all over the world, leading me to become a more effective teacher of English language learners. Such reflections have led me to create a nuanced theoretical framework through the lens

of my personal experiences, by addressing the importance of the following areas in teaching English language learners: the demographic imperative, valuing cultural identities, and effective instruction.

### **The Demographic Imperative**

Although I received my degree in teaching Spanish, my love of the language is surpassed by my desire to work with individuals who speak this language that has impacted me so much. My passion for educating youth wasn't ignited until working in an orphanage in El Salvador in 2007. Here, my heart daily broke for the lives of Spanish-speaking orphans who had no family, no education, no support, and little hope in any kind of future. I would hear stories about the life aspirations of adolescents and just how much they wanted to learn and be a part of the outside world. I decided then that I wanted to teach students like these. I wanted to make a difference in the lives of students from cultures I loved and learned to understand extremely well. These children didn't feel worthy of love, let alone an education, and they had convinced themselves that they didn't deserve teachers pouring their lives and knowledge into them.

It has become one of my deepest convictions in this world to avoid the creation of this mentality in youth today, as I have recognized an increasing need nationally for teachers who can motivate and inspire Hispanic youth who may have less of an opportunity to learn because of stereotypes and language differences that are often perceived as unfortunate barriers. Regrettably, these children often face significant challenges when they are placed into programs where educators fail to instill hope in their minds and give this particular population of ELL students equitable learning opportunities. According to García (2005) "In a mere 35 years, white students will be a

minority in every category of public education as we know it today”. By the year 2001, in over 9 cities in the United States, over 80% of children in schools were Black or Hispanic (Kozol, 2005), and these numbers grow exponentially each day. As far as the educational toll of these statistics is concerned, studies show that the educational achievement of Hispanic students in U.S. schools is dragging behind those of non-Hispanic White, Black and Asian students; and compared to White and Black children, Hispanic children have lower levels of school readiness at the start of kindergarten, as well as lower high school completion rates (Reardon and Galindo, 2009).

These statistics, while somewhat shocking, are less and less surprising every day. With a growing nation of diverse cultures and people groups, the need for highly qualified teachers grows as well, in order for there to exist a well-educated group of citizens to address issues of inequity in the classroom. There needs to be a commitment in schools to narrowing this achievement gap, while simultaneously gaining more knowledge of the critical nature of how these facts, along with a child’s background, play a role in their development of language (Ellis, 2008). As I will later address the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy, the need for it increases as we find that schools lacking awareness of the demographic imperative for culturally and linguistically diverse learners in the classroom is contributing to their failure to succeed.

### **Valuing Cultural Identities**

I was fortunate in my college experiences to be exposed to the reality of this demographic imperative in other countries, in addition to learning that where a person comes from truly impacts their education. I was awoken through my overseas trip to El Salvador, and also my experience in Spain, to the reality of the grandness of the world

and how unique and amazing cultures were, developing a passion for world languages and societies. There was such beauty and simplicity to the way people centered and carried out their lives in these parts of the world, and I became increasingly aware that how the United States defines life and success was something that was very foreign and unimportant elsewhere.

Here in the U.S., quality of life seems to be attributed to a system of meritocracy and independent gain that is many times improperly emphasized in education. The classroom should be a place of universal acceptance and collective growth, when in reality; students are not exposed to this level of accommodation. Sharkey and Layzer (2000) found that often U.S teachers' "...attitudes reflect core values in U.S. society; attributing individual success to personal effort and hard work". The unfortunate result is that teachers lack knowledge and attitudes regarding how the rest of the world operates, many times causing unnecessary turbulence in daily learning experiences for culturally and linguistically diverse students. For many who newly enter the United States, teachers often unfairly expect them to assimilate to the cultural values of our dominant nation, and this is typically the manner in which this demographic becomes educationally disempowered. This notion of Americanization in schools has slowly been recognized as more futile than beneficial, as many see the repression of language and culture as having a dismantling affect (Crawford, 1995). While there is benefit in having these diverse learners gain an understanding of how life works in this country, it comes as a detriment when schools and societies place more value and affirmation on certain cultures over others, causing poor development of students' sense of self among other negative results (Nieto and Bode, 2007).

My experience in Spain gave me much needed current perspective concerning how other cultures differ in their understanding of success. I began realizing that students perform and act differently in class because of this reason, bringing with them to school unique understandings and pasts concerning the importance of education. Concerning students from all over the world who enter ELL classrooms, teachers need to be deeply aware of cultural differences, to cater instructional objectives to the unique cultural needs of the diverse learner, because already formed cultural identities can work with the student and teacher to create a productive learning environment which positively affects student learning and academic achievement. (Nieto & Bode, 2007; Echevarra, Vogt & Short, 2004). I believe that this understanding greatly impacts both how a teacher chooses to guide his or her students, as well as how the student responds and gains a critical comprehension of material.

### **The Importance of Effective Instruction**

After experiencing life in Spain, I began seeing the world in such a new and unique way, really beginning to value cultures and languages; however, I was later able to teach in a bilingual school in Mexico and really gain a thorough understanding of bridging my knowledge of culture and effective multicultural instruction. There I acquired the awareness of how teaching should be seen as a mission to provide every child with an appropriate “opportunity to learn”: an equitable learning environment that promotes learning for all students enabling students to achieve higher standards. For me, fostering this environment of higher standards calls teachers to extend instruction into the cultural and social needs of students, connecting language-learning strategies with the imperative of helping students become lifelong learners in an academically demanding

society (Yoon, 2008). This can be accomplished through a commitment to contextualizing content in such a way that connects to students' backgrounds, leading them to self-discovery and more ownership of English.

Students have been shown to perform in ways that teachers expect and their performance is typically based on messages from teachers about students' worth, intelligence, and capability (Nieto & Bode, 2007; Díaz-Rico & Weed, 2010). This being said, it seems somewhat obvious that students learning English are best served when they are both receiving the contextualized instructional input and encouragement they need from teachers to succeed (Echevarria et al., 2004). A critical understanding of students' backgrounds will help them desire to participate and engage in language-building activities more, and I desire to give students an abundance of opportunities to engage in "real world" learning that takes their content knowledge in school and connects it to what they're encountering in their communities on a daily basis. The SIOP model of instruction drives teachers to offer English learners comprehensible input in a way that activates their background knowledge explicitly and provides adequate connections from those experiences to concepts (Echevarria et al., 2004). Others have similarly found that connecting home cultures and languages with the classroom experience and instruction benefit the student greatly, by creating a context that develops self-efficacy, selecting effective reading materials, and making use of full linguistic knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 2001; Jiménez & Gámez, 1996; Allen, 1994; Chamot, 1998).

This authenticity in instruction should also be greatly linked to assessment, as cohesion of these aspects carries much value in meeting goals for higher achievement. Performance assessments, for example, are widely used to track the progress of English



language through contextualized instruction. They are primarily rooted in real-life experiences, where the nature of language is geared to the students' levels of language proficiency (Gottlieb, 2006), providing students opportunities to demonstrate knowledge in unique ways.

For teachers to contribute to the success of English language learners, they need to be better equipped to adopt these culturally responsive instructional efforts and link them to adequately planned and reflective assessments. In my mind, this will greatly help to ameliorate inequities in the classroom that exist because of cultural biases or differences. When cultures are not validated through curriculum or represented in schools, the academic achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse learners is negatively affected, and academic challenges in school often create negative feelings of inadequacy if not properly supported (Schriedewind and Davidson, 2000; Echevarría & Graves, 2010). When teachers believe in their students, however, and help impart knowledge and understanding that empowers them as a part of this society, it is less likely that students will drop out of school, grow to detest learning, and give up on reading, for example. If we, as future teachers, can learn how to meet each and every student where his or her individual needs lie, contextualize learning based upon students' unique identities, effectively surround them with a community of encouragement, and track their progress in personally beneficial and authentic ways, it is my belief that change can and will happen throughout school systems to benefit these minds more.

### **Conclusion**

My depth of experiences have helped to develop a passion for teaching that is rooted in something deep within me, where I envision a different future for culturally

diverse youth in this country. English language learners are surrounded by the pressures of becoming a part of a new culture, while struggling to learn English to survive, and simultaneously experiencing the hardships of adolescence. My heart deeply longs for these students to see a bright future for themselves, to love to learn, and to discover intrinsic motivation within them to spur them into further years of schooling.

I desire to build a home for my students in my future classroom; where they don't feel trapped by a closed-minded culture, where their thoughts can grow and be challenged, and where they can learn to live in a world that's accepting of the person they are and the pasts that have formed their lives thus far. My life has been shaped by my desire to work with culturally-diverse learners, and I highly believe in the following with regard to the teaching of English language learners: the importance of understanding the cultural identities and values of these students and how those shape their learning of English, the significance of serving ELL students by teaching beyond their linguistic needs in order to empower and motivate them to be contributing members of society, as well as offering them equitable learning opportunities through instruction to accomplish that. It is my hope that other teachers will begin to adopt these values and strategies as well, in order to become more effective educators of a very important and widely growing population of English language learners in the United States.

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## Artifacts

### Artifact #1: Educational Linguistics Case Study

The first artifact being used to support my knowledge of the TESOL standards includes in-depth research and analysis of spoken and written language in the form of a linguistic case study. The case study was carried out over a 3-month period with two different students, and collections of oral and written English were gathered for the purposes of analyzing language patterns, as well as learning how to appropriately accommodate learning for the linguistic strengths and weaknesses of each student.

The case study begins with an introduction of the two learners, including learning characteristics that would potentially help to explain their strengths and weaknesses in oral and written language. Next, the case study moves into a thorough description of student #1's oral and written language abilities. Through speech samples, the phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics of the learner is analyzed in terms of what the learner succeeds in, as well as patterns of errors in speech and writing.

The second portion of the case study analyzes the stages of second language acquisition of the second student. The Sociocultural Theory of second language acquisition was used as a framework for my analysis, as the learner's thoughts about language, including their speech and written abilities are thought of in terms of linguistic, cognitive and socio-cultural factors.

Finally, an instructional plan was created for learner #2, where practical curricular strategies were applied using the socio-cultural framework in order to address the needs of the student in terms of their linguistic abilities, and the best way for them to uniquely grow as an English language learner.

**Artifact #2: Code switching Presentation**

This artifact analyzes the phenomenon of code switching as a language system, and how it influences the learning of students who are learning English as a second language. The presentation dives into the aspects of switching languages specifically from Spanish to English and visa-versa, discussing its prevalence in the United States, and social and economic factors that contribute to the use of one language, the other, or a crossover of both. It also demonstrates understanding of the reasons certain second language learners code switch in conversation, as well as where in a phrase or structure of a sentence one language is preferred over the other. This presentation represents comprehension of language adaptability, and how both in and out of a classroom setting, students use and acquire language.

**Artifact #3: Foundations Fieldwork Experiences**

This collection of fieldwork experiences takes the knowledge gained in my foundations course to ELL education, and draws theories, laws, pieces of the community, and work with local teachers together to help prove my understanding of material in this course.

The first fieldwork experience was carried out in the form of observing a middle school classroom to gain knowledge of the classroom culture surrounding the education of English language learners. The write-up includes my detailed observation of activities and conversations during two different class periods, and I later reflect on the school's environment, as well as the classroom culture and how or how not it seemed conducive to the teaching of ELLs.

The second fieldwork experience takes the legal implications of teaching English language learners into account, applying state and national laws and standards to the effective teaching of this diverse population of students in the United States. This information helps to prove knowledge of the rights of various cultures in this country and how it contributes to language development.

The third fieldwork experience looks at the surrounding community of diverse people groups around the middle school, broadening my horizons of how different cultures live and interact. As it relates to teaching English language learners, pictures were taken of billboards, signs, postings, flyers, etc., to gain understanding of the language that students are exposed to on a daily basis.

The fourth fieldwork experience outlines an interview done with an ELL teacher that helps to reveal her knowledge of teaching a culturally diverse population of students through her experiences. In the interview, we discuss aspects of teaching such as her professional background, her motivation to work in the field with this particular group of students, best practices in teaching, her views concerning the ELL program implemented at the school, how her instruction values the students' unique cultural identities, and issues of parental involvement.

#### **Artifact #4: Methods and Materials Curriculum Project**

This artifact, my methods and materials curriculum project, draws together all of the work completed during my practicum at Wright Middle School over the course of a semester. In order to practically apply our understanding of effective and appropriate instruction of English Language Learners, we were required to create multiple small

group and whole group lessons for the purpose of engaging the class in culturally relevant English language instruction.

The curriculum compiles a unit of lessons for beginning and intermediate students, using language and content objectives to best teach material to the specific group of students we were interacting with on a weekly basis. The purpose of the project was to implement teaching strategies and techniques to aid to the students' development of reading, speaking, writing and listening skills in the target language. For example, the SIOP model for instruction was used as a guide for multiple lessons, as most of the lessons focused on linking to students' background knowledge, offering them comprehensible input for effective delivery, scaffolding techniques, and guided application of material learned. Many of my lessons were catered to the needs of the classroom and demands of the teacher, and therefore are greatly linked to standards and English language content.

#### **Artifact #5: Novel Lesson Plan**

As a future teacher of English language learners, there is great importance placed on teaching students with the guiding help of culturally relevant texts. This artifact takes a very well used text in multicultural curriculum models, *The House on Mango Street*, to teach various literary elements through a lens diverse students at an adolescent age would be able to relate to. In order to help students gain a perspective of the novel and the language, this text was used because personal experiences would help link the students' background knowledge to the occurrences found in the book.

The learning goals of the plan include an understanding of theme, characterization, and symbolism in the text, acquiring more English fluency, and the



development of an ownership in the student's own culture as well as an appreciation for others. The plan includes three different lessons on the literary elements mentioned above, and begins with a pre-reading lesson in order to help the students gain an understanding of the book for the purpose of building background knowledge and connecting to personal experiences. Interactive activities, as well as a various implementation of other texts and images really help to create a well rounded and effective lesson that really differentiates for the needs of the English language learner population.

#### **Artifact #6: Effectiveness of Formative Assessments**

This artifact, a paper on the importance of using formative assessments in the classroom, explores the various uses and implementation of such assessment for English language learning students. Formative assessments exist in order to ensure that learners are being assessed immediately and frequently, in ways that benefit the unique learner and his or her strengths and weaknesses. Through the paper, an overview of the empirically based formative practices is given, along with reasons for why multiple formative measures are both necessary and useful, as well as how Metro Nashville Public Schools desire to implement formative assessments district-wide.

The research conducted for this paper helped me to gain insight on the importance of various forms of assessment in the classroom, and also helped me to gain an understanding of the fact that students need to be actively involved in the assessment process. Performance-based assessment informs instruction continually because informal classroom observation, oral assessment in both the first and second language, as well as creative demonstrations of knowledge really help students and teachers alike to track

progress and comprehension in ways that are often more suitable than typical standardized exams.

### **Artifact #7: Language Assessment Midterm**

This midterm asked us to analyze various areas of assessment for the purposes of demonstrating understanding in reliability, validity, and English language proficiency. The first question provided an analysis of the BVAT (Bilingual Verbal Ability Test) through a review of its consistency and effectiveness in rating the verbal skills of learners. Through a lens of reviews, technical supplement information, normative samples, and the actual test, I came to conclusions concerning its fair measurement of the language.

In the second question, I analyzed the English language proficiency of a fourth-grade student through a language sample provided. With the use of observational protocols, my knowledge of the Tennessee standards of English language proficiency, and a thorough look at the learners basic strengths and errors, I was able to come to a conclusion about her level of intermediate language use.

### **Artifact #8: Assessment Observational Protocol**

The purpose of this artifact is to reveal my understanding of the importance of informal observations in the classroom for the purpose of assessment. I created this observational protocol using my comprehension of the Tennessee standards of English language proficiency in productive and receptive English language skills (reading, listening, writing and speaking). Through simple observation, this protocol allows me to analyze the language of a student based on basic checks for understanding.

The protocol also includes an area to anecdote social language proficiency, any evidence of code switching, and growth and progress seen over time in the language of the student.

### **Artifact #9: Assessment Student Analysis Project**

Through a case study of an individual student at a beginning or intermediate English proficiency level, I was able to analyze the strengths and needs of the learner, as well as recommend instructional strategies according to the student's content-area abilities in reading.

The student I analyzed was an 8<sup>th</sup>-grade female from Mexico, who entered the United States in 2006. With regard to assessment, I used my observational protocol to place her at the advanced level (level 4) of English proficiency in reading, writing and listening. With regard to speaking, I placed her at a level 5. I used an assortment of criteria for measurement, including her understanding of intonation patterns, complex directions, rapid speech, and the language of her peers. Anecdotal evidence also showed that she understands almost all spoken English, yet lacks some expression and tone in reading. She also uses a lot of Spanish in social conversation, and her writing lacks some maturity in sentence formation compared to her English-speaking peers. Her ELDA scores confirmed my analysis in listening, speaking and writing; however, she was analyzed as a beginner in reading according to this standardized assessment.

In reading, I was able to analyze her content-area ability with the use of the DRA (Dynamic Reading Assessment). This is a classroom-based assessment designed for on-level and struggling readers, and this particular student was reading at a level 50. She

scored a 3 out of 8 in reading engagement, a 9 out of 16 on oral reading fluency, and a 15 out of 24 in comprehension.

Since the learner's needs in reading exceed her needs in other areas of English proficiency, I was able to come to a conclusion about some instructional recommendations. These included: developing and monitoring expectations for independent reading, having the student practice appropriate expression with texts, modeling how to pronounce difficult words, modeling how to distinguish between important and less important information in texts, and giving the student opportunities to respond to and construct inference questions orally and in writing.

#### **Artifact #10: ELL Programming Efforts and Parental Involvement**

This project was conducted in my Parents, School and the Community course, in which we were asked to explore an area of involvement in one of those three areas. I chose to focus on my largest area of interest: the education of English language learners, and how that's affected by parental involvement. The project focuses on the school-family connection through following a literacy project Vanderbilt University was implementing at a local elementary school. The goal of this project was to analyze the effectiveness of this literacy project with the ELL population, and it was found that the work being done really did achieve its goal of connecting home and school literacy.

This project attests to the importance of maintaining connections between schools and families as it relates to the growth of English language learners in the United States.

### **Domain #1: Language**

This domain explores the nature of the role of language, specifically the English language, as it concerns the development and teaching of ELL students in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing for social and academic purposes.

#### **Learners and Learning**

The first artifact being used to support this domain, *ARTIFACT #1*, includes in-depth research and analysis of spoken and written language in the form of a linguistic case study. Through this case study, learner characteristics of two English language learners were analyzed with much detail, interpreting their understanding of the English language as a system, as I looked at their oral and written language abilities in the areas of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. In doing so, I became aware that the characteristics these learners portrayed greatly affect their comprehension of the language. According to Ligthbown & Spada (2006) language learning is both tied to their cognitive development, as well as their experiences in learning about the relationships among people, events, and objects around them. For this reason, it was important to take an in-depth look at the learner himself, and the strengths and weaknesses he brought alongside his background and experiences, in order to begin an analysis of his competence of the language.

Another artifact used in this area was *ARTIFACT #2*, a presentation done on the use of code switching in the United States. Here, a specific group of language learners was the focus of the research, and the idea of language variation from English to Spanish both in and out of the classroom helped me to be able to analyze the strengths and needs of this particular group of diverse learners. It was found that language mixing is an

inherent strength of these learners, as they express a range of social and rhetorical meanings through language. More prevalent in areas of mass bilingualism, younger generations of learners are more apt to code switch within sentences, between sentences, and between utterances to express themselves. The content being uttered, as well the function of the language act influence the activation of language for these particular English language learners.

### **The Learning Environment**

*ARTIFACT #2*, the code switching presentation, reveals also that the environment, or social context of language greatly affects which language a student chooses to use in any given situation. This fact that language is both socially and culturally derived is a belief established by the Sociocultural Theory of second language acquisition. Here, language is seen as something that occurs not solely inside the head of the learner; but also in the world the learner inhabits, thus enabling individuals to participate in a variety of communicative activities (Ellis, 2008). This theory empowers students to truly grasp the language dynamics of the world around them, as their environment teaches them how to construct meaning from what they hear. Teachers are able to foster this learning environment through creative support of the language context, use of realia and authentic language, as well as giving students an opportunity to participate actively in dialogue in order to expand cognitive understanding of linguistic concepts.

This theory was also referenced in *ARTIFACT #1* (the case study), where I discovered the importance of the learning environment in creating an instructional plan for learner #2. I found that since the student seemed to gain the most meaning from language through his comprehension of social language, in order to become even more

proficient in his speaking and receptive skills, and also gain more confidence and ability in his writing, I believe that he needs more socially-constructed learning opportunities.

### **Curriculum**

All of the aforementioned areas call for a very specific instructional plan around this theory of second language acquisition. In *ARTIFACT #1*, I created an instructional plan based on the unique needs of the learner. Here, I used the sociocultural framework and the “teach what is teachable” model for instruction (Lightbown & Spada, 2006) in order to portray the student’s need for a curriculum guided within his Zone of Proximal development, where language can be implicitly taught in socially constructed ways. The student would benefit from opportunities to work with peers, and receive scaffolded attention in a more self-directed and natural approach, similar to the way language is developed and evaluated in a social setting. This idea of socially constructed language in the classroom through effective instruction is also represented through *ARTIFACT #2*, where the code switching student may benefit from more natural language use in the classroom and potentially receive native language instruction if appropriate and realistic.

*ARTIFACT #4* (methods and materials curriculum project) includes evidence of language objectives in forming lessons. This reveals an understanding of practical implications of applying listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in a classroom.

### **Assessment**

This area is well represented through the case study instructional plan as well (*ARTIFACT #1*), since the student would be evaluated individually within his personal developmental sequence, revealing to the teacher his mastery in a certain area of language before moving on to the next. Lightbown & Spada (2006) discuss these

developmental sequences through the language areas of grammatical morphemes, negation, questions, possessive determiners, relative clauses, and reference to past, and argue that while movement through these sequences is somewhat predictable, it will vary greatly from learner to learner (p. 92).

*ARTIFACT #8*, my observational protocol, is also represented in this area, as the language skills are measured through an observational assessment of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

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## **Domain #2: Culture**

This domain explores my understanding of culture as it relates to the education of English language learners through *ARTIFACT #3* (foundations fieldwork experiences), and *ARTIFACT #6* (paper on formative assessments), evidences of my knowledge of the cultural identities of this group of students and how it affects their language learning and success in the classroom.

### **Learners and Learning**

While my philosophy of teaching explicitly discussed the importance of valuing the cultural identities of each unique English language learner in the classroom, this is something that is also represented in the work done in the fieldwork experiences done for my Foundations coursework (*ARTIFACT #3*). With fieldwork #1 specifically, I conducted observation at the middle school level with classes and a teacher I did much work with in the past. This experience showed me the diverse needs of each student individually, and additionally showed me how, as a teacher, one is supposed to appropriately cater language and content to individual cultures, individual learning styles, and individual levels of development. The classroom culture consisted of all Spanish-speaking individuals with the exception of one, and therefore the dynamic of the learning in the classroom was carried out in a very natural, socially constructed way for the benefit of these beginning and intermediate learners. For them, meaning was gained through exposure to natural language and practice guided through their background knowledge and experiences. The teacher made specific cultural references in order to reveal her understanding of societal values for each student, and never undermined the unique thoughts and opinions of her students. It has been proven that this establishment of

relevance that connects and associates the lives of students to the lesson improves student learning (Echevarría and Graves, 2010).

A home language survey would also be an excellent way for a teacher to use his or her resources to gain an understanding of a student's cultural background. Here questions are presented about the language history of the student's family, his or her country of origin, the length of time spent in the United States, etc. This provides the teacher with valuable information concerning what a student personally brings with them to the classroom, and should be used as a basis for instruction.

### **The Learning Environment**

As noted above, the learning environment in this one fieldwork experience created a classroom culture conducive to learning in the sense that there was equal importance placed on what the individual student brought with him or her to the classroom.

Within this same artifact, my third fieldwork experience required me to really get to know the community around the middle school, showing how the environment of a social community truly affects learning. Through a greater understanding of the surrounding city, one is able to better cater learning to the language students are exposed to on a daily basis, as well bring real life examples of text into the classroom. This idea of transnational literacies gives way to a learning atmosphere that accomplishes the following goals: teachers are able to build more meaningful relationships with their students, students can learn about the diverse composition of their communities, students have an opportunity to build on prior knowledge and become more engaged in literacy (Jiménez, Smith and Teague, 2009).

**Curriculum**

The importance of establishing cultural relevance through instruction is something that is revealed through the individual lessons created in *ARTIFACT #4* (curriculum project). With this curriculum project, the SIOP model was used as a guide to help the structuring of my instruction. This model establishes the importance of building strong background knowledge that is connected to the learner's cultural and personal experiences, and so each lesson began with a strong introduction that did exactly that. For example, one lesson on teaching foreign words used in the English language required students to make assumptions about the origins of words based on their understanding of their first language. Multiple word origins and languages are discussed and represented in this lesson as well in order to connect to students' various cultures.

**Assessment**

*ARTIFACT #6*, my paper on the effectiveness of formative assessments, is representative of this area of the domain, where research was compiled on the importance of formative assessments as it relates to having students reveal knowledge about language in ways that suit their cultural backgrounds and comprehension in a beneficial way. Through this paper, I discussed how student achievement really needs to be represented in the classroom in multiple ways, and students should have exposure to various forms of assessment in order to better value their learning styles and strengths. While standardized assessments reveal a certain level of knowledge of material, students' cultural identities are better served through performance activities and informal checks for understanding.

**References**

Echevarría, J. J., & Graves, A. (2010). *Sheltered content instruction: Teaching english language learners with diverse abilities*. Allyn and Bacon.

Jiménez, R. T., Smith, P. H., & Teague, B. L. (2009). *Transnational and community literacies for teachers*. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 53(1), 16-26.

### **Domain #3: Planning, Implementing, and Managing Instruction**

The importance of this domain lies in the careful planning and ability on the part of the ELL teacher to effectively and practically apply theories and research done in the field. Through appropriate methods and materials, I have become well equipped to plan lessons and manage instruction in ways that most benefit the English language learner.

#### **Learners and Learning**

While this entire domain focuses on curriculum and instruction, it is impossible to create any kind of instructional plan without first taking into account the unique needs of the English language learner. Brantley (2007) discusses the need to develop an intercultural orientation to the lives of students that views their identities through a multicultural lens (p. 5). Only after a deep understanding of one's own culture and that of the learner can a teacher progress into a structure for curriculum. *ARTIFACT #4*, the curriculum project, addresses English language learners' needs in creating lessons, as each lesson created is not only catered to the individual needs of the students in the classroom; but also includes a section for explaining any challenges the ELL student might face with material, in addition to ensuring the lessons link to the backgrounds of the diverse learners in the classroom.

#### **The Learning Environment**

Equal importance is also placed through the curriculum project (*ARTIFACT #4*) on the need for a learning context best suitable for the learner. Creating a classroom environment that is supportive of the identities and needs of the learner is represented through enriching activities and demonstrations of learning that would enhance understanding. Authentic language was constantly encouraged through language-building

activities, and small group work encouraged rich discussion and natural language use. This setting was very conducive to learning, and the results of student comprehension proved this to be true.

### **Curriculum**

Since the purpose of the project was to create a set of multiple lessons for a curriculum, *ARTIFACT #4* represents this section well. The individual lessons were standards based, and created with the instructional needs of the cooperating teacher in mind. Most of the lessons address basic language and grammar needs of the students, and language and content objectives prove the adherence to beginning and intermediate ELL standards. The rationale for the curriculum was to give this particular group of students an understanding of content that is rooted in their language needs. For example, one lesson was centered on the development of their understanding of particular literary elements, a lesson that allows for the bridging of language and content in an effective manner.

*ARTIFACT #5*, my novel lesson plan, also addresses the importance of creating lessons for a content-based curriculum (in this case reading), and using specific techniques and strategies to help students relate to material and gain more critical thinking skills through the text, *The House on Mango Street*. With this group of lessons, students are expected to develop richer English fluency through discussion of and activities centered on theme, characterization, and symbolism. ELL students' needs are differentiated for through these adapted English language arts lessons, as they are explicitly taught material through the lens of their cultural background.

Lastly, *ARTIFACT #9* (assessment student analysis project) reveals the practical implications of teaching reading content ability with the DRA (Dynamic Reading Assessment). These implications have to do with implementing instruction in ways that are suitable to the learner's needs. For example, this particular student struggles in developing reading engagement, and would benefit from the following with regard to instruction: teach student strategies to select appropriately leveled texts for independent reading, and develop and monitor clear expectations for amount of independent reading. In order to gain more oral reading fluency, the student should be given more opportunities to read appropriate-level texts at a slower rate, and the teacher should model appropriate expression of texts. Finally, to grow in her level of comprehension of a text, the student might benefit from being taught how to use and construct graphic organizers to keep track of story information.

### **Assessment**

With the curriculum project (*ARTIFACT #4*), evaluation was embedded into individual lessons for the purpose of checking for understanding. Student participation and group activities were given grades as I informally observed comprehension of material. The lessons were also created to help students prepare for standardized exams and my cooperating teacher's evaluations, and therefore were often set up in ways similar to those assessments. For example, a lesson on listening comprehension included much guided practice that students would commonly see on a standardized exam in that area.

*ARTIFACT #6* (paper on formative assessments) also provides research in this area on how a curriculum can be guided by formative assessments to gauge student

learning. Instruction is greatly enhanced when performance assessments track the language progress of students in personal ways.

### **References**

Brantley, D. K. (2007). *Instructional assessment of English language learners in the K-8 classroom*.



### **Domain #4: Assessment**

The purpose of this domain is to prove knowledge in the area of various kinds of assessments as it relates to English language learners. Through both numerous standards-based instruments and comprehension of formative assessments, evidence is provided of my ability to use these instruments to guide and inform instructional practices, in an effort to track student progress and demonstration of language growth.

#### **Learners and Learning**

In order to provide a thorough analysis of the language progress of a learner, one must be equipped with an understanding of the variety of tools necessary to prove a student has acquired mastery in the areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Through *ARTIFACT #7*, my language assessment midterm, proof is given concerning my understanding of how certain assessments adequately evaluate individual learners through measures of reliability and validity. One of the purposes behind my analysis was to reveal that equity in assessment is crucial to the second language building process. In order for ELL students to receive equitable treatment in testing, there needs to exist a lack of bias in the formation of tests, equality in outcome of testing, and equal opportunities to learn and show understanding. In the specific assessment analyzed for this artifact, fairness of testing was established through administration in multiple languages. This allows for students to demonstrate knowledge in their first language, revealing more about their strengths and educational needs. English language learners are greatly benefited when they are provided with opportunities to exhibit a more comprehensive understanding of their abilities through validation of their unique cultural and linguistic needs.

The second part of the language assessment midterm (*ARTIFACT #7*) establishes the need in any classroom for the continual and specific language assessment of a learner's oral and written language abilities. Through both informal and formal observation of student behavior and language use, a teacher can become more equipped to gear instruction toward the student's individual needs. While standardized measures provide educators with needed information concerning levels of language proficiency on a more global scale, only through a thorough analysis of language gains and struggles can a teacher really direct a more effective differentiated curriculum. The student analyzed in this artifact, for example, revealed errors in speaking and writing in the areas of disregarding punctuation, subject-verb agreement, and syntax, for example, helping to not only classify her language abilities as intermediate, but also learn that she would benefit from more explicit instruction of specific material.

*ARTIFACT #9*, my assessment student analysis project, also reveals the importance of individual proficiency assessment in order to help guide ELL instruction more. The learner in this artifact was in need of specific content-level instruction in reading, and I was only able to determine her unique needs after using both an observational protocol and the DRA (Dynamic Reading Assessment). The observational protocol served a purpose for identification and placement, while the DRA was helpful in revealing progress of language ability in reading.

### **The Learning Environment**

It is evident that creating an environment of success and effective development in the classroom through assessment greatly contributes to the positive learning of the student. According to the Sociocultural Theory of second language acquisition, students

should be carefully assessed within their Zone of Proximal Development, focusing on what learners can do with assistance at the present moment instead of what they're capable of independently (Ellis, 2008). This truth reveals the need for creating an academic environment that best suits the demands of the learner, placing a much-needed focus on the role of the teacher in this setting. I used the sociocultural framework in my linguistic's case study (*ARTIFACT #1*) as well to prove the need in classrooms for assessing students where they are, in a way that naturally reflects how they engage in social activities that influence language production and growth. In order for many English language learners to acquire language more fluently, and demonstrate this knowledge, they need to be exposed to a more authentic language environment in the areas of instruction and assessment.

One way to establish this authentic environment is to track natural progress through the use of an observational protocol. The one I have created (*ARTIFACT #8*) establishes the growth and environment of the classroom in a way that informally collects data for the unique needs of each learner in a classroom. While it helps to inform the teacher of student language development, it also sets up an environment of self-discovery and ownership of language proficiency, as each student has individual language strengths and weaknesses.

### **Curriculum**

*ARTIFACT #9*, my assessment student analysis project, provides not only different usages of assessment catered to the learner; but also provides instructional strategies based upon the results of my findings. Here, I was able to analyze the needs of the students in language ability in addition to content knowledge in reading. Some of my

instructional strategies or recommendations in the area of reading, for example, include developing and monitoring expectations for independent reading, since the learner struggled to take ownership of this area of language proficiency compared to others. In order to advance her oral reading fluency skills, it was also recommended that she practice appropriate expression of texts and teacher modeling and support is provided, since the student struggled with reading with tone and expression. These findings reveal that assessment and instruction should go hand in hand, allowing teachers to learn from observation and standardized tests in a way that spurs more effective curriculum decisions.

Another artifact used to prove the need for designing lessons around assessing standards was *ARTIFACT #4*, my methods and materials curriculum project. Each lesson was designed around specific content and language objectives, and instruction was planned to meet how students would eventually meet those standards and thus be evaluated.

### **Assessment**

My language assessment midterm (*ARTIFACT #7*) is used to establish the necessity of assessing English language learners through standardized protocols. The Tennessee standards of English language proficiency were used to assess the language strengths, errors and oral communication of the learner. The student's tendencies in language formation were evaluated against standards-based instruments, and this information was then taken to identify instructional recommendations for the student.

**References**

Ellis, R. (2008). Sociocultural theory and second language acquisition. In R. Ellis, *The study of second language acquisition*, 2nd ed (pp517-554). New York: Oxford University Press.

### **Domain #5: Professionalism**

There is great importance in the field of teaching ELLs on not only demonstrating knowledge of the best practices in teaching, but also understanding the role of the teacher for students, parents, and fellow educators. Teachers of English language learners are required to serve as professional resources for all of these groups of people, collaborate with others, and be prepared to continually pursue opportunities to grow in the field of teaching English as a second language.

#### **Learners and Learning**

Culturally and linguistically diverse students have a need to be appropriately taught in the classroom. There is significant historical and research-based rationale that helps to prove this fact. *ARTIFACT #3*, my collection of fieldwork experiences, demonstrates my knowledge of foundational information concerning the English language learner as a unique individual with unique needs in the classroom. Legal obligations require teachers to cater instructional needs for these learners in very specific and equitable ways. *Lau v. Nichols* was a landmark case for the rights of language minority students, determining that English language learners must be provided with language support in schools, and *Castañeda v. Pickard* upheld that appropriate action must be taken (García, 2005), emphasizing the need for designing effective curriculums for these students. The implications of these laws require appropriate action in the classroom based upon the fact that all students, specifically culturally and linguistically diverse learners, are entitled to an education.

Another important aspect concerning professionalism and the English language learner deals with the building of partnerships with the families of individual students,

who need constant support and guidance through the education process. As difficult as it is to accommodate to a new country, it is extremely important that parents of students be continually informed and given knowledge about the schooling of their children.

*ARTIFACT #10* outlines the necessity of ELL programming efforts and parental involvement, recognizing that the English language learner as a student requires the teacher to pursue more targeted and intentional relationships with families for the benefit of understanding unique cultures and customs. My third fieldwork experience in *ARTIFACT #3* similarly proves that diverse people groups are greatly affected by their surrounding communities, and that this should be recognized in a school environment.

### **The Learning Environment**

Continued collaboration with parents, families, and other teachers in a school setting gives way for providing the English language learner with an appropriate and effective learning environment. I was fortunate enough to interview a teacher in my fourth fieldwork experience in *ARTIFACT #3*, and maintain an established relationship with this teacher to this day. Through this interview I was encouraged by the mutual support and collaboration carried out in her school setting not only between other ELL teachers, but also mainstream educators that desire to offer appropriate education to English language learners. Learning effective ways to carry out professional collaboration is definitely preparing me to create a more effective learning environment for my students in the future. This environment will include support, guidance, and consistency in multiple areas, allowing for better retention of material and acceptance into a community of learning. Through my gained knowledge, I hope to be able to offer guidance and wisdom of effective learning environments to other teachers as well, fully

equipped and prepared to create workshops specifically for approaching challenges of teaching ELLs. If all teachers can understand that learners achieve more when they create an atmosphere of high expectations, perceive their students as able and interested, and have a positive attitude toward learning, academic achievement will increase (Chamot, 1998).

### **Curriculum**

Established curriculums in an ELL classroom will help grow a group of learners toward better understanding of both language and content and spur them toward motivation for future learning. With growing research on the importance of comprehensible input for the English-learning student, it is now known that these learners would succeed more in environments that not only promote his or her culture and passions, but also incite a language transfer that aids to the student's unique cultural perspective of the material. Many program models offer opportunities for students to succeed in these areas, and suit the needs of certain schools differently than others.

Program evaluation research for teaching ELLs suggests that there are four different types of programs available for a school district to adopt: Bilingual education programs, structured immersion programs, sheltered English or content-based ESL programs, and submersion programs. All of these programs reflect varying needs of students within a school. Bilingual programs differ from structured immersion in that while bilingual teachers teach immersion classes and the first language of the student is understood and accepted, instruction is generally taught in the target language instead of both languages. Sheltered English classes tend to parallel content classes found in general curriculum, and submersion programs, better known as "sink or swim" programs, place



students in the mainstream classroom for most of the school day (Samway & McKeon, 2007).

There is considerable evidence that students achieve significantly better in programs that teach language through cognitively complex academic content through problem solving and discovery learning in highly interactive classroom activities (Thomas and Collier, 1996). *ARTIFACT #4*, my curriculum project, practically applies these facts in engaging and content-accessible lessons. I believe that knowledge of best practices such as these should spur school districts to continuing education about curricular decisions that suit the needs of majority of their learners, where sheltered English instruction, for example, could easily include an environment of cooperative discourse learning. Continued collaboration and gaining of knowledge will hopefully set the tone for instruction that meets the demanding needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

### **Assessment**

As stated in previous sections, assessment and instruction should be deeply connected in the ELL classroom, and students should continually be aware of these associations. As far as professional development is concerned, this area should include heavy continuing education about effective assessment tools specific for the English language learner. *ARTIFACT #6*, my graduate paper on the effectiveness of formative assessments, not only reveals my knowledge of the growing need for authentic assessments in the classroom, but also proves my desire to continually move toward a better learning and understanding of how English language learners should best be evaluated. When these students can demonstrate knowledge in a variety of ways and

show that they are actively involved in the assessment process, greater achievement will be gained in language and content.

### References

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## **Reflection and Implications for the Profession**

### **Artifact Reflection**

Artifact #1 was a culminating project in my educational linguistics class, drawing together a wealth of knowledge gained in the course. I enjoyed the practical implications of studying linguistic behavior and language patterns, and the case study offered me an opportunity to dive deeper into ways in which my teaching will benefit in the future because of my acquired knowledge. The drawback to my case study had to do with consistency of students. The first learner I analyzed in terms of written and oral language unfortunately moved, leaving me with another student to work with in analyzing second language acquisition. While it would have been beneficial to draw up an instructional plan for my first learner, I benefited in this process by having multiple students to work with, compare and learn from on the basis of language.

Artifact #2, my code-switching presentation, while in the form of a presentation, required much outside research; however, I would have benefited in doing a more in-depth study of the language phenomenon itself. I am very much interested in the language patterns of Spanish speakers, and hope to understand this language occurrence more for the purpose of guiding educational practices more. From this presentation, I learned the importance of teaching students that various discourse patterns can offer strength in language building and communication, and an understanding of these differences will hopefully lead to later success in a student's growing comprehension of English.

For artifact #3, my foundations fieldwork experiences, I believe that the collection of these experiences really offers a cohesive look at many of the foundational aspects of

learning how to appropriately and successfully teach English language learners. I would have loved, however, to be able to spend more time in the schools seeing more of the practice we discuss in class. I was given a very wonderful overview of cultural identities as it relates to education, and foundations for teaching English language learners; however, in order to improve on these experiences, I would have enjoyed an even more hands on look and approach to the community in which I desire to teach in the future.

Artifact #4, my methods and materials curriculum project, provided me with an opportunity to put theory into practice through the creation of lessons for both small and whole groups. This project was extremely beneficial in allowing me to explore the nature of effective instruction, gear lessons toward the cultural needs of my students, and guide and evaluate them in authentic ways for their growth in language and content. Overall, the experience gave me much needed insight about how the English language learner is not only best served, but best learns; and since I was able to actually teach these lessons, I was able to come away with a reflection on educational demands and instruction that will spur me into further development as an educator.

Artifact #5, my novel lesson plan, was beneficial in offering me guidance in teaching specific content to English language learners in effective ways. I was able to gear culturally responsive instruction with the help of reading strategies and a multicultural text, and I learned a lot through the implementation of various teaching methods. I loved having an opportunity to embed background knowledge and experiences into content instruction, and I'm excited to hopefully implement this lesson into my future classroom's curriculum.

Artifact #6, my graduate student paper on formative assessments, gave me much insight concerning students are best evaluated in the English language learning classroom. I was spurred by the research done to continue looking into appropriate and effective assessment tools, and I believe I came away from this research with needed understanding about the importance of assessment in the classroom. Especially for the ELL student, it is necessary to have students comprehend why evaluation is occurring, and I believe that this artifact will greatly impact my future teaching.

My language assessment midterm, artifact #7, was purposeful because it allowed me to analyze specific assessments in the area of reliability and validity. As a future teacher of English language learners, I need to know if the assessments I'm giving to my students are fair, equitable, and good determiners of their language production. This midterm helped me to see the necessity of these aspects in the classroom. I would love to be able to do further analysis of other norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessments for use of results in my classroom.

Artifact #8, my observational protocol, was one of my favorite assignments, because I was required to use my knowledge of Tennessee language standards and language proficiency skills to create my own assessment tool. Through this, I was able to see how something like this could be used in the classroom for the teacher's knowledge, as well as helping to spur students toward more ownership of content and language. I learned that I would love to implement this informal assessment in the classroom multiple times a month, and that it's a very important tool for increasing effectiveness of instruction.

Artifact #9 was my assessment student analysis project, and this project was one that allowed me to practically apply my knowledge in assessing and observing student language and behavior in a way that increased comprehension of effective and differentiated instruction. I liked this project because I was able to analyze language proficiency with the help of different assessments, getting to know how well they work in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the learner.

Artifact #10, my presentation of ELL programming efforts and parental involvement, gave me an opportunity to focus on how much a community and parents affect the education of English language learners. I learned the most from this artifact concerning my desire to really involve parents in unique and beneficial ways when I eventually teach in an ELL classroom. When support and encouragement are being given and received within a learning context, achievement will hopefully increase, and I learned that I will have to be extremely intentional in helping parents to become more of a part of the educational process.

### **Questions and Implications for the Profession**

Reflecting upon my experience in the ELL program, as well as all that I have learned and taken away from my study and practice of theory, I am able to confidently say that I feel extremely equipped to enter a classroom in the future and teach effective instructional methods in a manner that validates cultural identities of students, helps them take ownership of content material and language, and assesses them in authentic ways. I become increasingly excited to take my knowledge of how to best teach English language learners and make an impact in schools where my expertise and passions can be used most successfully.

As far as my knowledge of bridging theory and practice is concerned in relation to the learner, the learning context, curriculum and strategies, and assessment, I believe that the variety of my experiences and tools created in my artifacts demonstrate my ability to educate effectively. My philosophy of teaching reveals my passion for teaching this specific group of learners and the increasing need in schools for well-informed teachers. This philosophy, along with many of my research-based artifacts, also prove my knowledge of theory and create necessary evidence for being proactive in the field of teaching English language learners. Artifacts such as my curriculum project, my analysis projects, and observational protocol demonstrate understanding of my ability to apply my comprehension of theory in a way that best serves the demographic of students I hope to teach. Specific considerations and accommodations were made for students to help them grow successfully as a learner of another language, where they feel confident in their environment, and receive comprehensible input that is directly linked to instruction.

My questions for continued professional development include ways to better inform teachers in schools who are becoming more affected by populations of English language learners in the classroom and aren't necessarily equipped to handle the educational demands of the students. How will these teachers find appropriate support and encouragement? And how will they become informed enough to effectively make well-rounded curricular decisions that differentiate for ELLs? As I experience time in schools in this area, I become concerned because there doesn't seem to be enough continued education about effective practices in a way that changes how these students are achieving. I believe that if workshops were held every few months, discussing ways to implement the SIOP model of instruction, for example, teachers would feel more

confident in giving English language learners an equitable education experience. I plan to continually pursue ways in which to help my future school and district work toward a growing understanding of this group of students, and hopefully, in both small and large ways, give these students the education they deserve to become lifelong learners in English.