

**LEARNING FROM LIVED EXPERIENCES: STRENGTHS AND INSIGHTS OF
BILINGUAL IMMIGRANT TEACHERS**

By

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of CATHERINE L. CARRISON find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

Chair

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LEARNING FROM LIVED EXPERIENCES: STRENGTHS AND INSIGHTS OF BILINGUAL IMMIGRANT TEACHERS

Abstract

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The primary purpose of this study was to closely examine the lived-experiences of a group of seven bilingual and bicultural ELL paraeducators as they transition from support positions in schools and classrooms to certified teaching positions. The emphasis was to gain understanding about the ways in which the participants' own experiences as immigrants and English language learners specially equip them to be classroom teachers. A second purpose was to inform educational practice with regard to teacher preparation and at the classroom level. This was accomplished through exploration of insights gleaned from the participants' lived-experiences and examination of the qualities and strengths they bring with them to their work as teachers.

A hermeneutic phenomenological research perspective served as the conceptual approach for considering a variety of data on each of the participants. Life story interviews, reflective contributions from participants, photographic portraits, and observations of their teaching provided the substance for written

portraits of the participants. Analysis during the portraiture process and through a comparison of the portraits served to inform the findings of the study.

Four general conclusions were generated. First, based on their personal experiences, bilingual immigrant teachers approach the profession from a culturally responsive perspective that not only influences their instructional practices but also their advocacy for students. Second, because of their vast experiences as immigrants, second language learners and paraeducators, educators such as the ones in this study have the potential to become leaders who can guide others – including preservice and inservice educators – in issues relating to the education and welfare of culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families. Third, as they transition into their new roles as teachers, certain sociocultural factors can present challenges for bilingual immigrant paraeducators that have the potential to hinder their inclusion into the staff or faculty. Finally, linguistically and culturally diverse teacher candidates benefit from having additional support systems such as a cohort model and mentors who have experienced similar challenges, not only during their teacher preparation programs but also throughout their first years of teaching.

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Dedication

I am honored to dedicate this work to two of the many dream nurturers

I am blessed to have in my life:

To my grandfather,

who first planted the seed of this dream over fourteen years ago;

Grandpa Don, I wish you were here to see what the seed has become.

To my husband,

who has faithfully and tenaciously guarded my dream

making possible that which I doubted ever could be.

Finally, this project is dedicated to the Dream Giver

who has graciously entrusted this dream to me.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background for the Study

In the last fifteen years the English Language Learner (ELL) population in U.S. schools has more than doubled; in fact, it has increased at almost seven times the rate of total student enrollment, bringing the estimated current enrollment to about 5.5 million (NCELA, 2005). Overall, about 41% of teachers have ELLs in their classrooms. Furthermore, there are 460 different languages reportedly being spoken by ELLs in the United States (Kindler, 2002).

The burgeoning numbers of ELL students clearly broaden the cultural and linguistic diversity in our nation's schools and classrooms. This growth highlights the increasing need for teachers who are well-prepared to understand the process of language acquisition and the challenges and possibilities of cultural and linguistic diversity related to teaching and learning. Nationally, less than 3% of teachers working with ELL students have certification in ESL or bilingual education (NCES, 2002). The heightened need for teachers specifically equipped to provide effective instruction to the culturally and linguistically diverse students in our nation's schools is reflective of the general disparity between the numbers of students from diverse cultural backgrounds in our schools and certified teachers from those same backgrounds.

Clearly, with regard to teacher preparation and recruitment, our educational system faces at least two challenges concerning the education of

culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. First, as the report by the U.S. Department of Education (NCES, 2002) indicates, there are simply not enough teachers prepared in ESL instruction; and second, in order to alleviate the disparity of the minority teacher to minority student ratio, it is critical that the number of teachers of color in U.S. schools increase.

In addition, it is predicted that U.S. schools will require over 2 million teachers in the next decade, with staffing needs being most significant in urban and rural areas (NCES, 2002; RNT, 2005). Furthermore, along with math and science, the curricular areas of special education and bilingual and English as a second language are among those named to be in greatest need of teachers (RNT, 2005). In consideration of these predictions, school districts and higher education institutions have found it imperative to search for creative and effective ways not only to increase the teacher pool in this country but also to focus on increasing the cultural and linguistic diversity among the new teachers hired to work with the growing multicultural and multilingual student population.

Efforts to effectively meet these growing needs have resulted in a variety of teacher preparation programs developed by private as well as public organizations. Apart from the traditionally structured programs such as 4-year undergraduate or combined advanced degree and certificate programs there are several non-traditional or alternative routes for teacher preparation which have been developed as well. Many of these alternative programs such as the U.S. Department of Defense's "Troops to Teachers" program look to non-traditional

applicant pools to increase the cultural diversity of the participants in the program.

Another group of non-traditional applicants increasingly being targeted for its potential to diversify the teaching profession includes bilingual paraeducators (also referred to as paraprofessionals) and teacher or instructional assistants. Haselkorn and Fideler (1996) argue that, compared to traditional teacher pool candidates, paraeducators “are more representative of and more rooted in the communities in which they serve” (p.3). They bring valuable cultural understanding; they are often connected personally with the community, neighborhoods and families. This community and student knowledge equips paraeducators with invaluable perspective that contributes to their effectiveness as certified classroom teachers. Not only do these individuals possess important cultural understanding, but Haselkorn and Fideler point out they also have classroom experience “and bring substantial craft-based knowledge with them as ‘working capital’ for their development of professional practice” (p. 3). The cultural capital and insights these individuals possess can not only be of special support to culturally and linguistically diverse students – especially in the cases of bilingual and bicultural ELL paraeducators – it can also enrich the learning environment in the classroom in general.

The program in which the participants in this study obtained their teaching certification is the Bilingual/ESL Teacher Advancement Program (BETAP), a non-traditional career-ladder program funded by the former Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA), U.S. Department of

Education, focused on the preparation, certification, and endorsement of bilingual and ESL paraeducators. This grant program was developed through a cooperative effort among a local university, two community colleges, an educational service district, and five local school districts. The program served paraeducators who met the following criteria: each worked in bilingual/ESL settings in one of the participating school districts, came highly recommended by building or district administrators, was from or had experience in bilingual/bicultural or multicultural settings, did not hold a teaching certificate, and was in need of financial assistance.

The present study examined the lived-experiences of a group of seven BETAP scholarship recipients. Through life story interviews, classroom observations, and their personal reflective contributions, a written portrait of each of the selected teachers was created. The objective of this study was not merely to provide an intimate and first-person account of the teachers' experiences as they relate their personal and professional journeys into teaching but also to more closely examine the special gifts and strengths they bring with them to their work with students and to the classrooms in which they serve.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to closely examine the lived-experiences of a group of bilingual and bicultural ELL paraeducators as they transition from support positions in schools and classrooms to certified teaching positions. The emphasis of the study was to gain understanding about the ways

in which the participants' own experiences as immigrants and English language learners specially equip them to be classroom teachers by informing and influencing their perspectives and roles. It was intended that this study inform educational practice with regard to teacher preparation and at the classroom level by exploring insights gleaned from the participants' lived-experiences and examining the qualities and strengths they bring with them to their work as teachers.

The experiences of these teachers, including their immigration to the United States, their introduction into American schools as paraeducators, participation and completion of a certification program, and finally, their transition into classrooms as certified teachers was examined through phenomenological interviews and reflective pieces submitted by the participants as well as observations of their teaching and examination of archived data. Documentation of their personal stories was important for three reasons. First, it provided a unique first-person insight into the personal and professional experiences of bilingual and bicultural paraeducators making the transition to teaching. Second, it highlighted these individuals as a valuable and critical resource to increase the pool of potential teachers from minority language and cultural groups. Finally, the telling of life stories served to increase our understanding for how we see our own lives, experiences and interactions with those around us (Atkinson, 1998). Documenting the lived experiences of these women provided an important opportunity for the voices of those traditionally marginalized to be heard – to build knowledge and inform educational practice.

Significance of the Study

The general significance of this study was three-fold. First, in an area where there is a dearth of research on paraeducators transitioning into certified teaching positions, the understanding gleaned from the phenomenological components of this study provided a first-person perspective of the experiences of language and cultural minority paraeducators as they become certified teachers. Second, analysis of the observational and interview data provided a unique insight into how personal, cultural, and professional experiences contribute to the qualities these individuals bring into classrooms as certified teachers. Third, this study has contributed to the recognition of bilingual and bicultural paraeducators as viable candidates for teacher recruitment, not only in an effort to increase the number of teachers specializing in ESL instructional practices but also to increase the number of teachers of linguistic and cultural diversity in the nation's classrooms.

Torres, Santos, Peck, and Cortes, (2004), authors of a report by The Education Alliance at Brown University, *Minority Teacher Recruitment, Development and Retention*, indicate that more insight is needed about what, in terms of cultural understanding and knowledge, minority teachers bring to the classroom. This need for greater understanding encompasses social and linguistic discourse patterns with students as well as sociocultural connections to the communities and families of the students. The authors go on to recommend further research in the form of case study analysis of the personal narratives of minority teachers to identify among other areas a) standards of behavior as

individuals or in groups; b) valued cultural knowledge; c) knowledge of children's communities; and d) goals for children's learning (p.21). They further suggest that a closer examination of these areas in combination with analysis of actual classroom interaction with students could be used in further developing a contextual understanding of the cultural knowledge and key behaviors of minority teachers. The authors submit that not only would such research provide much needed insight into what Milner (2003) refers to as the "cultural comprehensive knowledge" (p. 176) of teachers from non-dominant groups, it would also "make a meaningful contribution to the content of pre- and inservice education for all teachers" (Torres et al., 2004, p. 21). I would also add that the meaningful contribution be extended to the planning and development of future and existing partnerships designed to support cultural and linguistically diverse pre- and inservice teachers especially among higher education institutions and local school districts.

The overarching research question for this study was as follows: What insights can be gained from the examination of the participants that can inform: 1) effective teaching practices, 2) language and cultural minority teacher recruitment and retention, and 3) preparation of teachers to work with linguistically and culturally diverse students? In the most general sense, this study addressed the need for a more diversified teaching force as well as the notion that many potential teachers are already working in our nation's classrooms as ESL paraeducators. More specific attention was given to further contributing to the existing body of knowledge related to the recruitment and

preparation of paraeducators as teachers through an examination of the lived-experiences of a selected group of bilingual and bicultural paraeducators as they transitioned into certified teachers.

Definition of Terms

For clarity, the following key terms are used in this dissertation as follows:

Bicultural: Possessing or combining two cultures.

Bilingual: The ability to speak, read and write two languages fluently.

Cluster Teacher: A mainstream classroom teacher with experience or training in second language acquisition and instruction and who has a group of second language learners in her classroom.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Teaching that uses the learning styles, background, cultural knowledge, and frames of reference of “ethnically diverse students” to increase the relevance of their learning; also called culturally relevant teaching (Gay, 2000, p. 29).

English Language Learner (ELL): Non-native English-speaking students learning English as an additional language.

English Second Language (ESL): A broad term describing an instructional approach for non-native speakers of English.

ESOL: English Speakers of Other Languages – a term referring to English language learners often used interchangeably with ELL.

Marginality: A social phenomenon related to individuals who transverse social groups without fully adjusting to the new group. Persons possessing marginality

can also be seen as “stockbrokers of the cross-cultural market” who with the use of special knowledge have the potential to be catalyst for change (Weiss, 1994, p. 337).

Minority Teacher: A teacher who is not a member of the dominant ethnic and linguistic group in the United States; a teacher who is ethnically, culturally, and/or linguistically diverse.

Newcomers Classroom: A classroom designated for newly arrived immigrant students in which they learn enough basic English to be mainstreamed.

Paraeducator: School employees who provide instructional and other district support services to students and their parents or guardians; also known as paraprofessionals, instructional aide/assistants, teacher’s aides/assistants (Pickett, 1997, p. 4).

Push-in Model: Instructional support provided by ESL/ELL paraeducators is delivered in the students’ mainstream classroom rather than removing (or *pulling out*) students from the classroom.

Delimitations of the Study

Glatthorn and Joyner (2005) suggest that the term *delimitations* should be interpreted as “the boundaries of the study, and ways in which the findings may lack generalizability” (p. 168). The two main potential delimitations or boundaries of the present study are both related to the participants and could have a bearing on the overall generalizability of the findings of the study. First, all of the participants were female. While this may reflect the general gender trend in the

teaching profession, it does limit the perspectives and insights gained to those specifically related to the female experience. Second, the small number of participants in the study from only three school districts, two of which were in the same area of the same state, may limit breadth of discovery in terms of findings.

Summary

This chapter opened by providing a background of the heightened need for teachers specifically equipped to provide effective instruction to the growing culturally and linguistically student population in the United States. After identifying paraeducators as a potential pool for a more diverse teaching force, the purpose and the significance of the study were discussed. The chapter closed with a description of relevant terms and a brief statement concerning the delimitations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Need for ESL-Prepared Teachers

Today in our nation, the demand for teachers is great. This need is particularly critical in meeting the challenges of increasing numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Since the 1990-91 school year the ELL enrollment in the nation has grown approximately 105 percent while general enrollment has grown only 12 percent (Kindler, 2002). Sixty-seven percent of the total ELL enrollment is concentrated at the elementary level with over 44 percent in the primary grades Pre-K through Grade 3 (Kindler, 2002). Seventy-three percent of urban schools report having immediate need for ESL bilingual teachers (RNT, 2005). As an example, school districts in Texas were unable to fill 2,906 elementary bilingual/ESL positions for the 2001-2002 school year (NCELA, 2002).

Furthermore, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reports that only about 13% of the teachers who have ELLs in their classrooms have participated in eight or more hours of professional development related to the instruction of English Language Learners within the past three years (2002). A report by the U.S. Department of Education found that training to meet the needs of ELL students was the development area in which teachers are least likely to participate (NCES, 2001). The survey data collected for the above report also indicated that only about 27% of teachers working with ELLs felt "Very well

prepared” to teach them. Sixty percent of the surveyed teachers felt only “somewhat” prepared to teach English Language Learners (NCES, 2001).

The Need for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Teachers

In addition to the shortage of bilingual or ELL certified teachers, there is a critical need to increase the number of minority teachers in our classrooms. Nationally, teachers of African American, Hispanic and Latino, Asian, and Native American descent make up about 16% of K-12 teachers (NCES, 2006a, p. 47), while students from these cultural backgrounds make up about 43% of the student population in our schools (NCES, 2006b). These numbers are higher in larger urban schools where students of color make up 69% of the student population, almost two times the percentage of teachers of color in those same schools (RNT, 2000).

Current literature on teacher education confirms the need for teachers of diverse backgrounds. Not only do minority teachers serve as important role models, mentors and advocates, they have “cultural comprehensive knowledge,” or the “accumulation” of a myriad of experiences that shape how the world is perceived (Milner, 2003, p. 176) and they use these funds of knowledge to provide more effective instruction for students (Moll et al., 1992; Monzó and Rueda, 2001; Torres et al., 2004). As Maria Estela Brisk, a board member of the *American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education*, stated (AACTE, 2004):

If our nation truly desires to close the achievement gap for all students we must increase cultural competence and diversity in the teaching

workforce... Research shows that teachers of color have a positive impact on student achievement and set higher expectations for their students.

While every student benefits from having teachers from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds (Millar & Endo, 2005), Sonia Nieto (2000) points out that teachers who share the cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds of their students can also enrich the school environment and the curriculum (p. 330). She further asserts that students will better perceive the importance of their own educational journey when they see teachers who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Irvine (1989) submits however, that minority teachers are much more than role models for students. These teachers are “cultural translators” (p. 51) and are better able to understand the special needs of minority students because of the cultural and linguistic backgrounds they have in common with them. They are able to support them in navigating the differences in the varying sociocultural settings in which they live and function. This is evident even at the college level where there are higher matriculation rates for students in urban areas when there are more minority faculty members (Torres et al., 2005). In addition, Nieto (2002) points out that because research indicates that using the languages and experiences of diverse students in their instruction leads to academic success, it is important for educators to have a greater understanding of the relevance and influence potential of cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom.

Recruitment of Minority Teachers

As evidenced by previously mentioned data (NCELA 2001 & 2002), teachers in the U.S. are largely unprepared to effectively instruct ELL students. This situation, combined with the disparity in the minority teacher to student ratios and lack of teachers equipped with knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogies, indicates that minority students in this nation's schools are at risk. There is clearly a need to recruit, prepare and retain increased numbers of teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The Education Alliance at Brown University released a comprehensive report titled: *Minority Teacher Recruitment, Development and Retention* (Torres, Santos, Peck and Cortes, 2004) that gives a thorough overview of the history of minority teachers in the U.S. and ramifications for teachers of color, predominantly African American teachers, resulting from the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954). The report also outlines the need for teachers from diverse backgrounds, the reasons they are scarce in our educational system, and the characteristics of effective programs designed to recruit and certify minorities as teachers.

The report indicates a variety of reasons for the underrepresentation of minority teachers in U.S. schools. In an in-depth discussion of the reasons related to the absence of teachers of color in schools, the authors present several possible contributors to the scarcity (pp. 14 & 15):

- Students in high-poverty and urban schools, which have the most difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers, are less likely to move on to higher education.
- Minority students who are entering college are more attracted to degrees that will lead to higher paying professions.
- Poor working conditions of teachers such as limited influence over pedagogical and curricular decisions, low pay, overcrowded classrooms, and discipline problems discourage potential teachers from the profession.
- A lack of cultural and/or social support in teacher preparation programs as well as in the communities in which new teachers will be teaching.
- Higher standards and standardized competency testing for teachers rather than performance-based testing.
- High attrition rates likely due in part to a general lack of support for new teachers.

The explanations presented in this report regarding the reduced number of minorities entering the teaching profession center on the perceived prestige of the profession, which is largely rooted in its earning potential. Acculturation and status are also factors in decisions not to teach. For example, in some cases acculturation of minorities into mainstream American culture and opinion can lead to a shared negative perception of teachers. In other cases the effort to assimilate might drive minorities to pursue higher prestige professions in an attempt to establish themselves in the dominant society.

Conversely, the Education Alliance report describes the attraction of social justice and service as reasons why minorities have chosen to pursue careers in teaching. The report goes on to explain that whereas inequities in the education system motivate some minorities to combat the “existing imbalances” (p. 28), others are drawn by the service component inherent in the position (p. 27).

Alternative Routes to Teacher Certification

High attrition, aging teachers, and growing student populations are some of the reasons many states have begun looking toward non-traditional routes for teacher certification (U.S. DOE, 2004). Alternative route programs began taking shape in the 1980s as a means of addressing the growing teacher shortage in U.S. schools. In fact, in 1983 just eight states reported having alternative routes for teacher certification whereas in 2004 forty-three states and the District of Columbia reported offering alternative routes. Also noteworthy is the fact that several states with highly diverse populations report that more than 20% of new teachers become certified through non-traditional routes (U.S. DOE, 2004, p. 4; Feistritzer, 2005). Many of these programs are developed through local partnerships to specifically meet the staffing needs of local school districts. The development of the alternative route program is seen as a way to provide greater numbers of teacher candidates from outside the traditional teaching pool greater access to the profession (U.S. DOE, 2004).

These alternative programs are attractive to many candidates that might not otherwise consider making a career move. Such candidates might include

“mid-career individuals and middle-aged retirees from other professions” (p. 1) as well as classroom paraeducators, all of whom are often attracted to these programs for financial reasons that might preclude them from a longer, more traditional route to teaching. In fact, about 54% of those transitioning to teaching from other professions through alternative routes report they would not have done so had the alternative route not been an option. Furthermore, there are more males and more minorities among those who have obtained certification through alternative routes than those in more traditional programs. More specifically, non-whites make up about one-third of those becoming teachers through alternative programs compared to only 11% of those currently teaching (Feistritzer, 2005).

It should also be noted that in their study of 149 paraeducator-to-teacher programs nationwide, Haselkorn and Fideler (1996) found that 79% of the programs they surveyed in their study focused on the future of teaching in America, reported that: *expanding the pool of potential teachers of color* was most frequently cited as one of the “Principle Program Objectives” (p. 24). Another reason cited by several program survey respondents was *fostering community empowerment*. Both paraeducators and directors of programs related that professional advancement of the paraeducator not only affected their own financial security it extended beyond their own immediate situation to add to the “social capital of low-income and minority communities” (p. 27).

Alternative programs designed to recruit minority teachers originate from federal and state initiatives as well as school-to-college and privately funded

partnerships. While assessing the effectiveness of these programs is somewhat problematic due to factors such as programs not having adequate resources to support a rigorous evaluation or mixed findings resulting from program variations, it has been possible to determine essential characteristics of effective minority recruitment programs. Such characteristics include commitment to multiculturalism, student support services, financial incentives, and a cohort group structure (Clewell & Villegas 1998; Torres et al., 2004).

Programs such as the previously mentioned federally funded Troops to Teachers program or the Pathways to Teaching Careers program, privately funded by the DeWitt-Wallace Foundation, have been notably effective in recruiting minority teachers. For instance, in 1997 a NCES evaluation of the Troops to Teachers program reported that minorities made up 29% of all participants compared to other programs nationally in which minority participants totaled 13% (Torres et al., 2005, p. 68). The Pathways to Teaching Careers program also reports high minority involvement with 75% of the participants enrolled being minorities. Because the main focus of the alternative route program is to tap into the non-traditional applicant pool, there is a wide array of sources for program recruitment. For instance, the Troops to Teachers program recruits from those leaving military service, whereas the Pathways program seeks former Peace Corps workers as well as educational paraeducators. The paraeducator and non-certified teacher strand made up of 26 programs is the program's most comprehensive strand and is aimed predominantly at support staff in schools. An evaluation of the Pathways program indicates that

paraeducators are “a rich source for potential teachers” (Clewell & Villegas, 2001, p. 8). In fact, in terms of retention, over 80% of the paraprofessionals completing the Pathways program remained in teaching for at least three years. And overall, by the year 2000, more than 90% of Pathways graduates were still teaching three years after graduation (Torres et al., 2004, p. 72).

A high level of retention has also been noted in other programs such as the Los Angeles Unified School District paraeducator career-ladder program where the five-year retention rate was 92%. Brandick (2001), attributes these high levels to three main factors. First, the paraeducators have extensive classroom experience going into teacher preparation programs, which later helps them with some of the more challenging aspects of teaching such as classroom management. Second, the paraeducators possess a deeper understanding of children and their families. They are often members of the community, sharing the cultures and languages of their students. Third, after becoming teachers, many of the paraeducators return to their neighborhood schools. They see the schools as “their schools” (p. 32) and are highly motivated and committed to improving the education of the students.

Researchers on the topic of alternative route programs (AACTE, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Dilworth, 1997; Eubanks, 2001; Genzuk, 1997; Torres et al., 2004) summarize the characteristics of successful programs to include:

- Financial support in the form of forgivable loans, fellowships and scholarships.

- Social support that would include the family and members of the different communities in which the teachers will interact.
- A collaborative or cohort component.
- Academic support in the form of tutoring, mentoring and test preparation including adaptations for testing and flexible criteria in the admissions process.

Paraeducators as a Resource

Paraeducators in the United States, also known as paraprofessionals, staff assistants, instructional assistants, and teacher aides, generally serve in a variety of roles in schools. While many work alongside teachers in the classroom to provide instructional support to students and services and support to families, there is a wide variety of other duties ranging from library support to playground and lunchroom supervision which they are likely to perform. For instance, Pickett (1997), in her description of the types of roles held by these individuals, includes paratherapists, transition trainers, speech-language pathology assistants, and home visitors as just a few of the job responsibilities that might fall under the term *paraeducator*. She also points out that at increasing rates and higher levels of independence, paraeducators are expected to participate in all phases of the instruction of students. Overseen by certified teachers or administrators, they often instruct individual students as well as small groups and assist with the administration of various forms of standardized and formative assessments. Currently, demand is greatest for paraeducators who have at least two years of

formal post-secondary education and who speak a foreign language (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006).

Paraeducators are currently estimated to number between 500,000 and 1 million. The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals (2006) reports that defining exact numbers is complicated due to variations in data collection at the federal and state levels, as well as the differentiation of job titles and descriptions across the nation. In addition, states often track paraeducators assigned to programs that are federally funded and do not combine the information in a central data base with the numbers of the many other paraeducators assigned to different positions within schools. While there is no federal agency that collects and maintains specific data on paraeducators, there are a variety of other agencies that do collect different kinds of data on paraeducators and their roles in schools and communities. For instance, NCES has published data collected about teachers' aides who serve in programs such as Chapter I and as library and media specialists. The USDOE Planning and Evaluation Service produced data on the numbers of fulltime Title I paraeducators but not those assigned to special education or multi-lingual programs. The Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Handbook (2006) reports nearly 1.3 million teacher aides and assistants serving in public, private and early childhood settings. The publication also indicates that while many of the new positions opening over the next eight years will be a result of individuals leaving because of job openings resulting from general employment growth, many unfortunately will leave due to low pay. The median annual earnings for teaching assistants as of May of 2004 was about

\$19,410, with the highest paid assistants earning about \$29,200 and the lowest earning less than \$13,000 (BLS, 2006).

Historically, the earliest mention of paraprofessionals was in the context of their use as auxiliary workers in the settlement house movement of the early 1900s (Pickett, 1997). Interestingly, one of the main functions of workers in many of these houses was to advocate for new immigrants in the neighborhoods and assist in their transition to the U.S. (Hirsch et al., 2002). In the 30s several programs associated with the New Deal employed *nonprofessional* workers to provide services (Pickett, 1997). Later, in the mid 1950s, to alleviate post-World War II teacher shortages, the move by local school boards to hire teachers' aides was aimed at finding ways to enable teachers to focus more of their time on instructional activities (Morrisette, Morrisette, & Julien, 2002; NRCPARA, 2006; Pickett, 1997). In the late 50s and early 60s two studies were conducted to evaluate the use of paraeducators or teachers' aides to support teachers. The first, conducted at Syracuse University, focused on the appropriateness of using teachers' aides in the increasing number of special education programs. The second study, sponsored by the Ford Foundation, resulted in one of the "most significant" (Pickett, 1997, p. 4) programs of the time. The program, in Michigan, involved the recruitment and training of college educated but unlicensed females who were prepared to perform routine classroom tasks and clerical duties (Bowman & Klopf, 1968 and Gartner, 1971 as cited in Pickett, 1997; Pickett, Likens, & Wallace, 2003).

These studies and other documents began to frame paraeducators as what Kaplan (1977) referred to as “cheap labor” or “secretaries for teachers” (Turney, 1962 as cited in Haselkorn and Fideler, 1996). The term “paraprofessional” was used in 1971 in a general survey of support personal in a variety of service organizations (Gartner, 1971). Some changes began to occur in the roles and responsibilities of the paraeducators as they were recruited into a variety of programs initiated with the 1965 passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). In fact, the original version of Title I advocated using teacher aides in low-income areas and by 1968 there were a reported 64,000 on salary (Pickett, 1994).

With the large number of community action programs resulting from the *Great Society* initiatives of the 60s and 70s, funds were specifically designated for the employment of paraprofessionals (Pickett, 1997). Then, with the passage of PL 94-142 (Education for all Handicapped Children Act) in 1975 – later amended to become the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) – and a greater emphasis on meeting individual needs of students, paraprofessionals became more involved with the reviewing and reinforcing of learning activities. This was not only the case with special education students. In the mid 70s and into the 80s, children learning English as a second language also began benefiting as federal legislation required proportionate numbers of bilingual aides to district bilingual student enrollment numbers (Pickett, 1994). It was during this time that the term “paraeducator,” indicating a specialization in teaching, was

recommended for use by the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996).

The idea of teacher preparation programs for paraeducators can be traced back to the 60s and 70s. In 1967 the federal government, through the Education Professions Development Act (EPDA), initiated a variety of teacher preparation programs. By the early 70s the federal government was a major proponent of the New Careers movement. In fact, the Career Opportunities Program (COP), which inspired the first career-ladder style program, is still the model for current paraeducator-to-teacher programs (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1997). Pickett, (1997) describes COP as one of the “most creative comprehensive programs undertaken during the era” (p. 7). The focus of COP was to ultimately improve the learning of the children in low-income urban and rural area schools by providing opportunities for the community residents who were working as paraprofessionals in these schools to move forward in different educational disciplines (Pickett, 1997). The educational programs of COP were developed in cooperation between school districts and teacher education programs with the specific purpose of supporting qualified paraprofessionals in becoming teachers. *From Aide to Teacher: The Story of The Career Opportunities Program* written by George Kaplan (1977) analyzed and reported on the seven year program and the 20,000 individuals enrolled. He concluded that the COP structure was an effective alternative route to teacher certification for paraprofessionals (Pickett, 1997).

During the same time frame other alternative and flexible degree programs were being developed by higher education institutions and to some degree local school districts. The 1980s, however, brought a decline of federal support for educational programs in general, leaving the development of career opportunities to fall quietly to the wayside and resulting in less attention given to the supervision and preparation of paraeducators (Pickett, 1997).

In the last decade various factors have come together to once again draw attention to the paraeducators working in our schools. New legislation requiring highly skilled personnel in combination with the exiting mandates included in IDEA and Titles I, II and VII of ESEA provide in a variety of ways for the preparation, training and professional development of paraeducators who work in programs supporting student learning (Pickett, 1997). Haselkorn and Fideler (1996) reported that the most effective of the paraeducator-to-teacher programs they reviewed in their study shared similar qualities in terms of the kind of learning being modeled. Promoting the ideal of life-long learning, these programs encouraged critical thinking, innovative and non-traditional forms of assessment, reflective practice and parent and community involvement components. Referring to paraeducators they surveyed, but arguably reflective of this group in general, the researchers state:

...the individual paraprofessionals these programs invest in will repay that investment manyfold: via the impact on the children they they'll teach for years to come; with enhanced contributions to their own families and

communities; and through their enrichment of America's human capital base overall. (p. 4)

Haselkorn and Fideler (1996), in their study that surveyed 149 programs across the nation, profiled paraeducators entering teacher preparation programs as having "considerable classroom experience" – between 4 and 15 years according to program survey respondents (p. 32). Moreover, some of the paraeducators who were immigrants had actually been teachers in their country of origin. Two-thirds of the teacher preparation program participants were between the ages of 31 and 40, although the range of ages spanned from 18 to 55 years. Of the programs that tracked gender and ethnicity, the majority of the paraeducators were female and members of ethnic minority groups. Seventy-seven percent were persons of color, with the largest percentages being of Latino/Hispanic (33%) and African-American (29%) ethnicity (p. 35).

Some of the demographic data gathered from these results differ slightly from findings by the National Center for Education Information (NCEI) alternative route program profile in which surveys targeted participants rather than programs (Feistritzer, 2005). One of the most notable differences in this report, which compiled demographic information from over 2,600 graduates from a variety of programs across the country, revealed that most program graduates were white (68%), with Latino/Hispanic being the second largest ethnic group (14%), followed by African Americans (12%) (p. 4). This variation can possibly be explained by the fact that for most of the programs surveyed by Haselkorn and Fideler (1997) one of the main program goals was to increase teacher diversity.

With the inclusion of data from a much wider array of program graduates, as is the case with the NCEI survey (Feistritzer, 2005), it makes sense that findings would be impacted by graduates from programs not necessarily focusing on recruitment of minority teachers. In addition, the type of definition being used by researchers for “alternative route program” might have an effect on the results as well. Feistritzer cites “confusion” (p. 1) regarding the definitions of “alternative route” and “alternative route program” depending upon the administering body of program implementation. For instance, alternative *route* is used to describe the provisions or guidelines for teacher certification, whereas, alternative route *program* describes the actual implemented program. In summary of her discussion she notes that, “Whatever they are called, alternative routes to teacher certification in the states and alternate route programs within the states are proliferating at a rapid rate in the United States and are now a major source for new teachers” (p. 2). Feistritzer reports that 47 states as well as the District of Columbia are currently implementing 538 alternative route programs. In 2004 alone, these programs reportedly prepared and produced about 35,000 certified teachers. Since 1983, NCEI estimates that over 250,000 individuals have obtained teacher certification through alternative route programs, “with most of the growth occurring in the last decade” (p. 2).

Attributes and Insights of Paraeducators

Although the paraeducator to teacher career-ladder approach is clearly not new, there is a paucity of research regarding the experiences of

paraeducators in general and more specifically involving those who have or are transitioning into the role of certified classroom teachers. Recently however, there has been a small but growing group of researchers examining different aspects of the experiences of paraeducators in general and of those entering the teaching force. These studies provide much needed insight into this transition and establish a framework upon which greater understanding and further research of the contributions these individuals make to the teaching profession can be built.

The current body of research (Chopra et al., 2004; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Genzuk, 1997; Genzuk & French, 2004; Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996; Monzó & Rueda, 2001; NTRC, 2005; Osterling & Buchanan, 2003; White, 2004) on the potential of paraeducators as a pool for prospective new teachers indicates their strengths represented by the following attributes:

- They expand the teaching pool from underrepresented groups. Many are persons of color or native speakers of languages other than English.
- They are familiar with their students and communities. They usually live in the same communities and are often native speakers of the students' languages. They are able to act as language and cultural translators to become a bridge between home and school.
- They use their own experiences to foster an understanding of how children learn.

- They have extensive and valuable classroom experience, an understanding of the school functions and a willingness to work with all students.
- Many have a strong desire to be classroom teachers and are also willing to serve in targeted communities.
- They have much lower attrition rates than graduates from most traditional teacher preparation programs and are “resilient” to teaching conditions that contribute to high attrition rates (White, 2004, p. 217).

Studies by, Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero, Aragon, Bernal, Berg de Balderas, & Carroll (2004); Ernst-Slavit and Wenger (2006); Lewis (2005); Monzó and Rueda (2001a, 2001b, 2003); Rueda and DeNeve (1999); and Wenger, Lubbes, Lazo, Azcarraga, Sharp, & Ernst-Slavit (2004) have highlighted the many strengths bilingual and bicultural paraeducators bring to the classroom as well as the struggles they encounter. Genzok (1997, 2002) has looked specifically at paraeducators as a remedy for the teacher shortage and as ambassadors of diversity in the classroom. Clewell and Villegas (1998, 2001, 2005) address the possibility of language and ethnic minority paraeducators serving to increase the diversity in the teaching workforce as do Sandoval-Lucero (2006) and Valenciana et al. (2006).

Through a series of focus group interviews with a variety of paraeducators from different schools districts and grade levels, Chopra et al. (2004), identified several themes with regard to the paraeducators' perception of themselves and their responsibilities. Paraeducators felt their accessibility and role as a

connector or bridge between the school and the students and parents led to effective relationships within and outside of the school community. The paraeducators also provided valuable insight on work environment issues such as issues of respect and trust with teachers and administrators, role definitions, and training opportunities or the lack thereof. As other researchers have found (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Lewis, 2005), Chopra et al. (2004) report that the paraeducators were conflicted by the ambiguity of the boundaries of their roles. The perception that either their work was not valued or that they constantly had to prove themselves to teachers and administrators as well as a general lack of formal training in dealing with difficult instructional or behavior situations were other sources of frustration reported by the paraeducators.

In their attempt to gain a first-person account of the roles of paraeducators, Ernst-Slavit and Wenger (2006) collaborated with bilingual paraeducators to examine their experiences in a variety of school settings. In doing so they were able to document tangible examples of how the paraeducators' own experiences enable them to advocate for students and validate student discourses. These researchers noted that the paraeducators' advocacy for their students went beyond instructional support to areas such as garnering financial aid and tax preparation. Paraeducators sharing a common language with the students or at least the experience of being in a language minority group were able to act as a connector to school for the students. Ernst-Slavit and Wenger found that, "Language minority students relied on paraeducators because of linguistic and cultural familiarity, school system

knowledge, and similarities in values and beliefs” (p. 74). This study also found that the bonds between students and paraeducators extended beyond the common language experience. Knowledge based on education and/or personal experiences led paraeducators to employ a variety of culturally responsive teaching strategies in their work with students. By validating and affirming the strengths of the cultural attributes their students bring to school, the paraeducators were able to provide a necessary balance to the mainstream dominant cultural educational perspective.

Wenger et al. (2004) also collaborated with bilingual paraeducators at the secondary level to explore ways in which they worked against a system that not only placed overwhelming demands on their time and imposed fragmented work schedules but also provided minimal pay. The study found that in the face of these daunting challenges, the paraeducators still managed to make their ELL students, a traditionally invisible population, “visible” in their school settings (p. 90). In addition, the researchers revealed that the paraeducators employed culturally responsive pedagogical practices as they worked against the negative impact of the prevailing “ideological colonialism” (p. 92) upon students. Practices used by the paraeducators included using students’ background knowledge and interests, adaptation of teaching styles, and integrating multicultural materials are some of the ways in which they supported students in experiencing success both socially and culturally. They held high expectations for the students, not allowing them to refrain from participation in classroom discussion and their support extended beyond the walls and schedules of the schools. The paraeducators

worked toward student and parent empowerment by finding ways for teachers to build relationships with families, supporting students and families in gaining a critical understanding of the assignments and learning expectations, and helping students to make sense of content area curriculum.

Other researchers report similar findings. They describe the paraeducators working with linguistically and culturally diverse students in a variety of instructional settings. Paraeducators see themselves as “connectors or bridges among parents, students, and other members of the school and community” (Chopra et al., 2004, p. 221). Paraeducators report a variety of reasons for the special relationships they form with students and families. For instance, many live in the same communities as their students, which allows them to be more accessible to students and families. They also often share the students’ cultures, giving them an intimate understanding of the funds of knowledge the students bring with them to school (Moll et al., 1992).

This cultural connection is illustrated by Monzó and Rueda (2001a; 2001b) in their discussions of *confianza*, a close trust relationship, which Latino paraeducators reported was an important factor in the successful working relationships they had with students (2001a, p. 450), and *cariño*, “an observable demonstration of affection” (2001b, p. 5). This *confianza* or trust relationship with students also allows them to bridge the barriers that can exist with teachers who come from a dominant cultural perspective. *Cariño* is used to invite participation and to soften the correction of academic or behavioral errors as well as to build confidence levels in students. Further contributing to the establishment of these

relationships is the fact that paraeducators often act as mediators and translators between school and the community and individual families and teachers (Chopra et al., 2004; Lewis, 2005; Monzó & Rueda, 2001a; Rueda & DeNeve, 2006).

Monzó and Rueda (2001a) suggest that the subordinate relationship paraeducators have with teachers may be another reason students relate so strongly with them, “as students are more likely to become aware that their own subordinate role...is more closely aligned with that of the paraeducator than that of the teacher” (p. 444). Interestingly, Chopra et al., (2004) found that some paraeducators felt that this rapport actually caused some teachers to feel “threatened” (p. 227), especially when students or parents preferred to deal with the paraeducator rather than the teacher.

The strong connections they establish with students seem logical when the roles paraeducators hold are more closely examined. Paraeducators often support students in a more individualized instructional setting than many teachers do, which may further serve them in building strong and personal relationships with the students they support (Chopra et al., 2004; Pickett, 1999). They work with smaller groups or one on one and usually in a much less formal way than in the traditional classroom setting, and often they are working in an alternative setting with students who have special needs (Lewis, 2005). In addition, the role of many paraeducators has them acting in other than traditional instructional capacities. Lewis (2005) found that paraeducators reported often taking on other roles or responsibilities in order to ensure that their students received necessary services. Although taking on these “multiple

responsibilities... [that extended beyond] the scope of the job description” prompted them to feel a lack of “boundaries on their responsibilities” (p. 138), most paraeducators accepted the roles with what Lewis refers to as their “ethic of caring” (p. 138). In addition to stepping in to advocate for student rights or services, many paraeducators work on the playground at recess or in the cafeteria during lunch, affording them many more informal opportunities to build relationships with students (Chopra et al., 2004; Monzó & Rueda, 2001). All of this combined with the ways that paraeducators intentionally employ their own “funds of knowledge...resonate[s] with students, to promote student learning” (Rueda & DeNeve, 1999, p. 55).

Transition into Certified Teachers

As previously mentioned, current research about paraeducators who have become certified teachers is somewhat limited. A small collection of recent studies have specifically examined the experiences of paraeducators who were either enrolled in teacher preparation programs (Bernal & Aragon, 2004; Valenciana, Weisman & Flores, 2006) or who had recently completed the process of becoming certified (Monzó & Rueda, 2001a, 2001b; Sandoval-Lucero, 2006).

Consistent with previously mentioned research on paraeducator-to-teacher programs (Clewel & Villegas, 2001; Genzok, 1997; Genzok & French, 2002; Torres et al., 2004), research by Bernal and Aragon (2004) and Valenciana et al. (2006) also identify a key factor in the successful experience for students in

these programs as social support, including support from family members as well as from a cohort group of other students in the program. Assistance and support in financial form was also found to be instrumental in the success of the paraeducators becoming teachers. Teacher candidates in both studies emphasized the importance of financial support as evidenced in the following comment of a program participant cited by Valenciana et al. (2006), “Financial aid really made a difference for me, that’s what brought me here” (p. 90). Bernal and Aragon (2004) also shared feedback from participants of their study indicating that they would not have been able to attend school without the financial support from the program.

Finally, institutional support from the program director and program instructors – especially those sharing ethnicity with participants - was also indicated to have a significant impact on the success of the students in attaining their goal of teacher certification (Bernal & Aragon, 2004; Valenciana et al., 2006). The level of caring and encouragement from program directors was seen by participants not only as characteristic of a “role model” but also of someone who “had their best interest at heart” (Bernal & Aragon, 2004, p.211). In addition, participants felt that a greater sense of collaboration and trust was established when faculty members were of the same ethnicity as the teacher candidates. Some participants also cited the encouragement and guidance offered by classroom teachers with whom they worked while attending classes for their certification as being a key to their success (Valenciana et al., 2006).

Researchers have also taken a closer look at some of the differences between paraeducators who have remained working in the classrooms and those who have become certified teachers. The research emphases can be summarized into two distinct categories. Research conducted by Sandoval-Lucero (2006) examines contributing factors or underlying reasons paraeducators have chosen or not to pursue teacher certification. Whereas research findings by Monzó and Rueda (2001a & 2001b) focus on the comparison of differing practices and perspectives of current paraeducators and those who have become certified teachers with regard to how they relate with students and handle instructional activities.

Sandoval-Lucero's (2006) sample consisted of a group of bilingual paraeducators who were recent career-ladder program graduates and a group of predominantly bilingual paraeducators enrolled in an Associates degree program to meet NCLB requirements. Through the use of surveys and in-depth interviews, Sandoval-Lucero found that previous educational experiences and self-efficacy had a significant impact on those paraeducators who went on to pursue careers as certified teachers. Unique to those who had become teachers was the fact that all of them reported having previous opportunities and limited experiences with higher education. This same group also expressed the belief that their own schooling experiences, especially those related to being second language learners, had direct bearing on their desire to assist students.

In terms of self-efficacy, the main difference between the two groups was that the paraeducators who became teachers shared many more "mastery

experiences” in their previous role (p. 203) than the current paraeducators. Sandoval-Lucero describes mastery experiences as “opportunities to plan and deliver instruction to students, collaboratively with teachers” (p. 203). While the paraeducators had opportunities to work in an instructional capacity with students, the activities were more routine and much less collaboratively planned and implemented than the instructional activities conducted by the paraeducators who became teachers. Another self-efficacy theme in responses from the paraeducators who became teachers related to the presence of teacher role models and both teachers and administrators who encouraged them to pursue a teaching career. Participants in both groups indicated that “emotional control” (p. 205), which Sandoval-Lucero defines as “patience, perseverance, and sacrifice,” (p. 205) might have been a source of efficacy. In essence, participants shared incidents in which they responded positively to potentially negative experiences, thereby allowing them to overcome the challenges and persevere toward their goals.

Members of the group choosing to remain as paraeducators reported their decisions to do so were based on three main factors: age (the median age was 51, which most felt was too old to tackle the challenges required to become teachers), the demands of teaching, and the fact that they enjoyed the position. Most of these participants felt comfortable with and liked their job but also felt they would not be able to “handle the demands of teaching” (p. 208). Conversely, the group who became teachers was motivated by the limitations they faced as

paraeducators as well as their belief that they would fulfill a need for teachers who could work effectively with linguistically and culturally diverse students.

A final difference between the two groups that should be noted is the fact that most of the paraeducators who became teachers were native Spanish-speakers. Most of the paraeducators choosing to remain so were native English-speakers, although most were bilingual. The researcher attributes this dissimilarity to the difference in recruitment goals of the programs in which they participated.

Monzó and Rueda (2001a) conducted a two-year study in which they examined a group of Latino paraeducators and Latino teachers who had previously worked as paraeducators prior to becoming certified bilingual teachers. Through interviews and observations the researchers explored how the instructional roles each of these groups affected how they interacted with students in terms of applying their knowledge of the students' cultural backgrounds. Monzó and Rueda found that paraeducators and teachers shared the belief that the lived experiences and cultural and linguistic diversity they shared with many of their students were assets to them as teachers. Teachers referred to the importance of connecting with students to foster strong relationships, as did the paraeducators, but were observed to do this in different ways than the paraeducators. Researchers noted that teachers spoke less of the importance of building *confianza* with students and referred to their roles in more professional terms than did the paraeducators. The paraeducators, on the other hand, preferred to think of themselves as "friends" of the students (Monzó &

Rueda, 2001b, p. 10) whereas most of the teachers used more formal terms such as “counselor” or “disciplinarian” (Monzó & Rueda, 2001a, p. 458).

Overall, researchers believed that due to the differences in their instructional and classroom management responsibilities, the teachers interacted with students in much more formal ways than did the paraeducators. In fact, strategies in the area of “interactional scaffolding” (p. 459), which includes extended wait time, peer interaction opportunities, informal talk, playfulness and personal disclosure, were much more prevalent with the paraeducators than the teachers. Presumably because of greater demands on time and classroom management issues faced by teachers, they exhibited fewer incidents of these outward demonstrations of *cariño* toward students. Teachers did, on the other hand, focus on helping the students to value themselves and the cultural and linguistic diversity they possessed especially related to the sociocultural factors that impacted their academic development.

Both groups attempted to use students’ backgrounds and prior knowledge in their instructional practices with students. Both, however, did not do so to the extent that researchers felt was possible to extend students’ critical thought and analytical skills. Teachers and paraeducators also used their shared cultures to relate with students and to address “...factors which often remain invisible in the classrooms where teachers lack knowledge about their students’ lives” (p. 465) And finally, as a result of the differences in responsibility and demands on each of the roles, teachers appeared to be more intent on meeting the “cognitive and

educational” needs of students, while the paraeducators were more focused on meeting the “emotional and social” needs of students (p. 467).

Although the developing body of research begins to shed light on the area of paraeducators transitioning into certified teaching positions, additional research is clearly needed to offer a more substantial perspective. Insights gained from the examination of their lived-experiences could serve to inform and support efforts to recruit and retain cultural and linguistic minority teachers. Additionally, more information is needed on the ways in which the diverse experiences of these individuals manifest in their teaching philosophies and practices, specifically with regard to whether or not they are reflective of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Theoretical Framework

Two main theoretical perspectives provided a framework for the analysis of this study: Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproduction and the essential elements of culturally responsive pedagogy. This study was nestled in the intricacies of the relationships among language, culture and power. The strengths and qualities the participants bring to teaching are viewed through the lens of culturally responsive pedagogy. Similar studies on paraeducators (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Valenciana, Weisman, & Flores, 2006; Wenger, Lubbes, Lazo, Azcarraga, Sharp, & Ernst-Slavit, 2004) have drawn upon Bourdieu’s theory to examine the relationship between student educational success and the cultural capital they either possess or lack. Further, these researchers and others

(Irvine, 1989; Monzó & Rueda, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Rueda & DeNeve, 1999; Villegas & Clewell, 1998) who have examined the contributions of bilingual/bicultural paraeducators and teachers have pointed out the important abilities of these individuals to draw on students' "funds of knowledge," that is, the historical and culturally related and developed knowledge and skills instrumental in the functioning and well-being of the students' households (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzales, 1992, p. 133).

Cultural and Linguistic Capital

Bourdieu (1986) defines three forms of capital: economic, social, and cultural. The two forms most directly relevant to this study are social and cultural capital, however, Bourdieu suggests that all forms of capital should be considered to "account for the structure and functioning of the social world" (p. 242). Social capital is defined by Bourdieu as the equivalent to membership in a group – the combination of real and potential resources a person has, based upon relationships. According to Bourdieu, the amount of social capital is directly related to the "size of the network of connections" (p. 249) a person can put into action and upon the amount of capital possessed by that person. Cultural capital, as he describes, can be found in three forms: the "embodied state" relating to the disposition of the mind and body; the "objectified state" representing cultural products such as pictures, dictionaries, and books (p. 243); and the "institutionalized state" defined as cultural capital that is expressed in the form of academic qualifications (p. 247). It is this expression or "objectification" (p.247) of cultural capital that sets apart that which is academically sanctioned within the

larger culture as academically qualified. The academic qualification is in essence academic recognition or “a certificate of cultural competence” (p. 248).

An additional concept of capital Bourdieu references in *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) that has direct bearing on certain aspects of this research is linguistic capital. He not only points out that the further from “scholarly language” one’s linguistic competence is, the greater chance there is of academic failure (p. 73), he also makes connections between a person’s social position and his or her mastery of the academic language.

According to Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), all pedagogic action amounts to “symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power” (p. 5). He further asserts that the cultural arbitrary of the dominant or dominated classes is reproduced by pedagogic action. In terms of cultural reproduction, schools reproduce and maintain the attitudes and beliefs of their larger communities. The cultural capital of diverse groups is displayed through values, beliefs and language and connected with the perceived prestige of that group (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu 1984; Wenger et al., 2004).

Bourdieu’s theoretical perspectives bear relevance for the present study specifically in relation to social, cultural, and linguistic forms of capital. The participants in this study, in the process of attaining teacher certification, have in essence, begun to build upon their previous social network. Not only is this network expanding, it also transverses minority cultural group affiliations, thereby increasing their social capital and potentially allowing them to experience moving

from positions of marginality into the mainstream. In addition to expanding social and professional networks, the participants have garnered institutionalized cultural capital, the objectification of this being their degrees, certification, and perhaps even the positions within the educational system each now holds. Finally, the possession or lack of linguistic capital may also have relevance in the experiences of these teachers, especially in terms of the overall capital they are perceived to hold and how that holding affects their transition into teaching.

Due to the phenomenological nature of this study, it may be possible to gain a deeper insight as to ways in which these types of capital might impact how the cultural arbitrary being produced through their pedagogic actions manifests with teachers of non-dominant linguistic and cultural groups. It is in the demonstration of this pedagogic action that insights may be gained regarding the presence or absence of culturally responsive pedagogy in the participants' teaching philosophies and practices.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy can be described as an instructional pedagogy that builds upon the students' cultural perspectives and knowledge to help them create meaning and understanding. In her description of culturally responsive pedagogy, Gay (2000) offers a variety of other terms used to refer to this pedagogy such as *culturally relevant*, *sensitive*, *centered*, *congruent*, *reflective*, *contextualized*, and *responsive*. She defines culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning

encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 29). Teaching in a culturally responsive manner means to incorporate the strengths of these students with affirmation and validation of their cultures. Gay (2002) describes five essential elements of culturally responsive teaching as 1) developing a knowledge base of cultural diversity; 2) including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum; 3) demonstrating caring and building learning communities; 4) communicating with ethnically diverse students; and 5) responding to ethnic diversity in delivery of instruction (p. 106). Ladson-Billings (1995) further posits that the pedagogy is grounded in three criteria: 1) students experiencing academic success, 2) students developing and/or maintaining cultural competence, and 3) students developing a critical consciousness that enables them to “challenge the status quo of the current social order” (p. 160).

The focus is on social and academic success in multicultural settings in schools and communities through the acknowledgement of “the legitimacy of the cultural heritages” (Gay, 2000, p. 29) of the students through the incorporation of multicultural resources. In essence, it emphasizes embracing the students’ own “funds of knowledge” or their “cultural and cognitive resources” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 134). Culturally responsive pedagogy also promotes empowerment of students to think critically and develop a “sociopolitical consciousness” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 262), as well as to actively examine education and their roles in creating a more democratic society. Teachers are “cultural translators and intercessors” (Irvine, 1989, p. 51) and intentional role models for this responsive and democratic education and must teach in ways that enable learning of this nature

by their students (Gay, 2000, 2001& 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1998; Freire, 1998; Nieto, 2002).

Gay (2000) describes culturally responsive teaching as comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory. It is comprehensive in that teachers attend to the whole child – the social, intellectual and emotional child. Teachers honor the dignity and self-images of students by creating an “academic community of learners” (p. 31). Culturally responsive teaching is multidimensional in the sense that it integrates all facets of the instructional environment including student-teacher relationships, curriculum content, the learning context, classroom climate, instructional practices, and assessments. The incorporation of cultural knowledge with a focus on the elements of socialization that affect learning allows students to be held accountable for being actively involved emotionally and intellectually through critical thinking, reflecting and acting. Culturally responsive teaching is empowering as it moves students toward academic competence increasing student self-confidence and the motivation to continue toward further educational and or professional accomplishments. Teachers must create supportive environments which enable students to strive for even higher levels of education. Culturally responsive pedagogy has a transformative construct. It is rooted in the respect and integration of the cultures and experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. Teachers reject the notion of supporting “learned helplessness” (p. 34) of minority students. Instead, teachers work to simultaneously foster academic strengths and cultural consciousness – making overall academic

success “non-negotiable” (p. 34). And finally, it is emancipatory in that it validates the diversity and cultural resources of minority students through the incorporation of curriculum teaching about those cultures as critical components of our society. Teachers must work to instill pride in students whose cultures deviate from the mainstream dominant cultural group, that is Anglo, native English-speakers, and teach students to use new understanding gained from non-mainstream scholars and from the diversity of their peers to their repertoire of resources.

As previously stated, one of the purposes of this study is to examine the ways in which the participants’ experiences have equipped them to be effective classroom teachers. Exploring their perspectives and teaching through a culturally responsive pedagogical framework provides a relevant lens through which to consider their practices and the influence their own cultural diversity has upon their teaching and interactions with students.

Summary

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to providing a background and justification for this study. The chapter opened with an overview of the need for teachers trained in ESL instructional strategies followed by a discussion of the recruitment and retention issues related to minority teachers. Also discussed was a variety of alternative route or non-traditional teacher preparation programs.

In addition to examining the special qualifications paraeducators bring to the teaching field, an historical perspective of the role paraeducators have held in

the American educational system was outlined. This included a description of different career-ladder programs that have been designed to facilitate their transition into certified teaching positions.

The chapter also included a review of recent studies that examine the strengths of bilingual paraeducators and the challenges they face in their complex roles in schools. The final section of the chapter presented two theoretical perspectives that make up the lens for analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived-experiences of bilingual/bicultural ESL paraeducators who have obtained their teacher certification and to identify how the qualities resulting from those experiences affect their instructional practices. A hermeneutic phenomenological research perspective served as the conceptual approach for considering the data collected on each of the participants. Life story interviews, reflective contributions from the participants, photographic portraits, and observations of their teaching provided the substance for the portraiture. The portraits offered insights about the nature of the experiences and special qualities these individuals bring to the teaching profession. This chapter is divided into five sections that explain the methods that were used in this study: a) general perspective; b) research context & participants; c) data collection; d) data analysis, e) researcher as instrument.

The General Perspective

Qualitative research is used in a variety of disciplines and has no distinct set of methods; rather it draws upon a wide variety of techniques, approaches, and methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Reflective of this, Denzin and Lincoln (1998) refer to the qualitative researcher as the *bricoleur* and the practices woven together to constitute the researcher's methodology is the *bricolage* or tapestry of "solutions to a problem in a concrete situation" (p. 3). Van Maanen

(1983) describes the qualitative method label as an “umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning...of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (p. 9). He further likens qualitative methods to the interpretive processes we employ in our daily lives in the sense that the “symbolic, contextually embedded, cryptic, and reflexive” data we process in the act of living of our lives are similar to data the qualitative researcher intentionally collects and records (p.10). Along these lines, Bogdan and Biklen (2003) remind us that to some extent all forms of qualitative research attempt to gain understanding of the subjects being studied from their own perspectives (p. 23).

Hermeneutic phenomenology, or the interpretive study of the “internal meaning structures of lived experience” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 10), attempts to gain understanding with its focus upon the retrospective reflection of the experiences of a person. It is a descriptive (phenomenological) methodology in its sensitivity to how things appear – allowing the data to tell the story. It is also interpretive (hermeneutical). In other words, the “facts” of these lived experiences are documented in language or “human science text” which can then be interpreted (Van Manen, 2002, Hermeneutic Phenomenology section, para. 1).

In his book, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (1990), Van Manen describes phenomenology, what he refers to as a human science, as “a philosophy or theory of the unique” more interested in what is not replaceable rather than what can be replicated or

replaced (p. 7). He goes on to stipulate that hermeneutic phenomenology “is a philosophy of the personal, the individual, which we pursue against the background of an understanding of the evasive character of the logos of other, the whole, the communal, or the social” (p. 7); an attempt to enter the “conceptual world of [the subject]” (Geertz as cited by Bogdan and Biklin, 2003, p.23). Anchored in philosophy and displayed in text, hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to maintain the integrity of the whole in its attempt to gain understanding of a given phenomena (Van Manen 1990) or, to interpret a text in order to gain an understanding of the possibilities “revealed” by it (Van Manen, 2002, Hermeneutics section, para. 2). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) more simply describe it as “the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations” (p. 23).

In general, the research methods used in the present study attempted to integrate, under the umbrella of a phenomenological perspective, the most appropriate data collection techniques with complimentary analytical procedures to present a *big picture* perspective on how the personal and professional experiences of the participants contribute to their qualities as certified teachers.

Research Context and Participants

Participants for this study were chosen based on three criteria: 1) their status as BETAP graduates, 2) bilingual with their native language being other than English, and 3) bicultural in that they have immigrated to the United States from another country. Of the eight BETAP graduates meeting these criteria,

seven agreed to participate in the study. All seven of the participants were female; six were working in one of two districts in Southwest Washington State, the seventh was employed in a school district in Atlanta, Georgia.

The context of this study cannot be defined in a traditional manner. Since the foci of the research were individual stories, the context for each participant was different from the others. The following tables provide brief contextual overviews. Table 3.1 displays selected personal information for each of the participants. Table 3.2 presents a relevant professional overview of each.

Table 3.1 Participants' Personal Information

Teacher	Age	Native Country Native Language	Languages other than English	Years in the United States
Isabel	58	Cuba Spanish		19
Oksana	29	Ukraine Ukrainian	Russian	15
Olga	31	Kyrgyzstan Russian	Ukrainian	18
Luda	39	Ukraine Ukrainian	Russian	14
Mae	47	Estonia Estonian	Russian Ukrainian	15
Eva	53	Czech Republic Slovak	Russian	27
Yelena	35	Russia Russian	Ukrainian	16

Table 3.2 Participants' Professional Information

Teacher	Years as Paraeducator	Years as Teacher	Current Teaching Assignment
Isabel	16	3	High School AP Spanish ELL
Oksana	6	3	Third Grade Self Contained
Olga	5	3	Intermediate (3-5) Newcomers Center
Luda	6	Certified but not working as teacher	K-5 ELL Instructional Assistant
Mae	9	3	K-5 ESOL
Eva	6	3	Middle School ELL Language Arts and Social Studies
Yelena	7	3	High School AP Russian ELL

In the spirit of the phenomenological perspective and portraiture approach to inquiry, the actual first names of the participants were used. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) states that the use of real names “marks a significant departure from the classic traditions of social science” (p. 21) where pseudonyms are usually given in lieu of the actual names of people and places. As opposed to more traditional studies, the participants were intricately involved in this research on a variety of levels. This completely voluntary collaborative relationship deliberately dissolves the walls between the researcher and the subjects along with the need for confidentiality in the traditional sense (Denzin, 2003, p. 249). In consideration of their privacy however, each of the participants was given the

option of using a pseudonym but all have elected to use their actual first names instead.

Data Collection

Data for this research were collected in a variety of forms over a period of one year. Each of the forms contributed to the portraiture process as well as guiding the analysis and informing the findings. In summary, the data were collected from: 1) conversational interviews, 2) photography, 3) participant reflective narratives, 4) observations of participants, and 5) archived data.

Participant Interviews

The participants of this study shared their stories and provided their insights through phenomenological life story interviews as well as reflective contributions. In phenomenology the “long interview” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114) or “conversational interview” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 63) is informal and interactive. It allows the participant to be more of a “collaborator” in the research (p. 63). Open-ended questions and comments are the substance driving the interaction. Although guiding questions may be developed, they may also be altered or deviated from as the participant shares her story (Moustakas, 1994). In support of narrative-style interviews, Wolcott (1994) points to the importance of story telling for qualitative researchers, in fact, he argues that “it ought to be one of their distinguishing attributes” (p. 17). Researchers are expected to “build their cases, or at least draw their illustrative examples, from stories” but also to “ground their reflections in observed science” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 17). Finally, Van

Manen (1990) reminds us that “anecdote can be understood as a methodological device in human science to make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us” (p. 116).

Rubin and Rubin (1995, p. 5) define the life history or life story interview as a study of major life events. Response to the interview designed to elicit a person’s life story forms a narrative that includes the facets of the person’s lived experiences that have become the essence of what she wants to share about her life as a whole (Atkinson, 1998, p. 7). Bearing in mind that the role of a life story interviewer is “as a guide for the journey” (Atkinson, 1998, p.33), the questions developed for the initial interviews in this study were designed to establish a framework for obtaining a general life history overview, but were flexible enough to allow varying degrees of reflection and disclosure by the participants as they felt led. The following guiding questions were included in initial interviews with participants (for complete interview guide, see Appendix A):

- 1) What career aspirations did you have growing up?
- 2) What led to your immigration to the US?
- 3) What experiences or personal reasons led you to become an ELL paraeducator?
 - a) During this time, how did you see yourself?
 - b) How were you treated by others?
- 4) What experiences or personal reasons led you to become a certified teacher?

- 5) Describe some of the personal and professional challenges you have encountered as a paraprofessional transitioning to a certified teacher.
 - a) What were the biggest sources of support?
 - b) What were the hurdles? Biggest challenges?
 - c) What would you do differently?
- 6) Describe your self-perception as a teacher.
 - a) What drives you in this quest?
 - b) Was/is it what you expected? Disappointments? Celebrations?

While the same guiding questions were used in all initial interviews, participants spent varying amounts of time and focus on the different areas. The amount of time spent conversing with participants in the initial interview ranged from one to two hours. The interviews took place in all cases except one in the participants' classrooms after school hours. The exception was the interview conducted with Mae, who is teaching out of state. This interview took place in a library study room at the university. All interviews were digitally recorded and later copied to a CD for storage and further analysis.

Questions for the second interviews were based upon questions generated or clarifications needed as a result of the analysis of the initial interviews, reflective pieces, and observations of the participants. Once again, a loose guideline for these questions emphasized a phenomenological perspective. Prior to responding to the guiding questions for the second interview, participants were given a copy of their videotaped observation, and were asked to view the tape before responding to the questions. After they had done so, I met with each

participant and we discussed the guiding questions. Some of the participants were prepared with well-written responses (which were collected as data), and some responded verbally from brief notes made on the guiding questions form. The following guiding questions were asked of the participants in the second interview (for the complete set of guiding questions see Appendix B):

- 1) Aside from pay and position, what are the major differences between your work as an ELL staff assistant and the work you are doing now?
- 2) How is your own classroom different from the ones you were in as a student in your native country?
- 3) What do you think and or believe you represent to your students?
- 4) What, if any, effect do you feel your accent has had in how students, teachers & other staff, and parents have perceived you?
- 5) How do feel other teachers perceive you as a teacher now compared to when you were a staff assistant?

Photographic Portraits

While the use of photography in qualitative research is not without complications, some researchers have used it as a means of “enriching relations” with the subjects (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 107). Taking photos and sharing them with participants can not only initiate and deepen conversation; it can serve to enhance the researcher-participant relationship.

Furthermore, Collier and Collier (1986) point out that the camera has no selective process of its own. The photographer, on the other hand, can often project her own point of view about what is important in the content of what is

photographed. While this may arouse concerns about subjectivity, it can also offer insights about what people value and how they see others (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Photography as a documentation tool can aid in revealing the subject in greater detail and specificity than what can be accomplished through written documentation. It is an “abstracting process of observation” that offers greater contextualization than written notes (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 10). The camera has “whole vision” it is an extension of our senses (p. 7).

To gain a more holistic perspective of the participants in this study, I chose to use portrait-style photography. Digital and 35 millimeter black and white photographic portraits were taken of each participant after completing the initial interview. Participants were invited to choose their poses and the background for the portraits in an attempt to dilute my own perspective and influence over the data. The photos were used 1) to help the participants see themselves from a different perspective, 2) to provide them with a source of visual inspiration for their reflective contributions and 3) as one more tool in providing an overall view of these teachers for the development of the portraits. In addition, participant comments during the “photo shoot” provided an even deeper insight about participant perspectives through their comments regarding why they chose to pose in certain locations or near particular student work.

Proof sheets along with a CD containing copies of the photos were given to participants within a week of the first interview. Ultimately, once participants were satisfied with the written portion of their reflective piece, the mutually agreed upon photos were integrated into their reflective contributions.

Reflective Contributions

Atkinson (1998) refers to work by Jerome Bruner in pointing out that personal meaning and even reality is constructed in the telling of one's narrative or story. He adds that autobiographical work also provides the researcher with a great deal of information about how lives and events are experienced and interpreted by the subjects of the study. From a phenomenological perspective, stories and even poetry "serve as a fountain of experiences" that serve to "increase practical insights" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 70). Van Manen defines poetry as a "literary form that transforms lived experience into poetic language" and argues that it "allows the expression of the most intense feelings in the most intense form" (p. 70) permitting the experience to be expressed in "vivid truthfulness" (p. 71). Autobiographical poetry can be not only powerful but also affirming in that it has the potential to reflect the personal growth and development as well as the individual diversity of the creator (Ada & Campoy, 2004).

At the initial interview, participants were invited to contribute a reflective piece in some type of a narrative or poetic format. Along with this invitation, each teacher was given several examples of reflective works as well as a format designed to guide them in the creation of their own pieces (Ada & Campoy, 2004). Reflective examples included two of my own pieces as well as several others, many from *Authors in the Classroom: A Transformative Education Process* (Ada & Campoy, 2004). These examples and guidelines served merely as samples and participants were encouraged to create whatever type of piece

they preferred and were in no way asked to replicate the examples. Participants were given broad guidelines for the focus of their reflections, ranging from where they came from to who they are as teachers. In an attempt to reduce any anxiety they might have about submitting a written piece, participants were also given the option of having my assistance in editing their work. It should be noted that my editing was limited to conventions and grammatical structure. To preserve the voice of the participant, I made only the corrections necessary for clarity. All of the corrections I made were approved by the participants.

Teacher Observations

Moustakas (1994, p. 13) cites Patton (1990) in his summary of the values of observing participants for data collection in research. He provides six reasons for this type of observation:

1. Direct observation allows the researcher to better understand the context in which the participants live and work.
2. First-hand experience allows the researcher to more clearly determine what is significant.
3. The researcher can directly observe activities and infer meanings outside the awareness of the participants.
4. Direct observation enables the researcher to learn or see things the participants may not consciously disclose.
5. The researcher is able to include her own perceptions regarding what is essential in understanding the setting and participants.
6. First-hand observations enable the researcher to gain a more complete

understanding of the collected data thus allowing a deeper interpretation of that which is being observed.

Van Manen (1997) refers to the researcher observer as a “gatherer of anecdotes” (p. 69) and points out the importance of remembering that in collecting anecdotes, in this case through observation, the researcher is looking for emerging themes *while* she is observing rather than *after* the data has been collected as is the case with written texts or interview transcripts.

Teachers participating in this study were each observed at least once in their own classrooms while instructing students. The observations ranged from 30 minutes to 3 hours. All of the observations were recorded by me on videotape for later analysis. The three exceptions to this process were Mae, who videotaped herself and sent the tape to me for review, Yelena, who was not observed teaching because she was on maternity leave during most of the data collection phase of the research, and Luda, whose teaching was audiotaped rather than videotaped due to logistical constraints.

Observations were conducted for several reasons. First, the observations allowed me to identify if and in what ways the participants used culturally responsive instructional strategies. Second, the observations provided me with a means to gather additional data to include in the portraiture process. Finally, these additional data served to broaden my understanding of the qualities the participants bring to teaching by actually observing them interacting in their role as a teacher. The framework for “Effective Culturally Responsive Practices” developed by Wenger et al. (2004) served as a preliminary guide for

documenting observations. The three categories forming the observational framework include: 1) using students' cultural knowledge to create meaning, 2) promoting academic, social and cultural success, and 3) empowering students and families (p. 98). The data collected from the videotaped observations were later compiled in matrix form for further analysis (see Data Analysis, p. 73).

Archived Data

Archived data were integrated into the analysis and in the development of the individual portraits. The data included work product of the participants while enrolled in BETAP, video tapes of the participants' teaching, and data collected from earlier studies in which they may have participated.

Portraiture

In her book with Jessica Davis, *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (1997), Lawrence-Lightfoot broadly defines portraiture as a "method of inquiry and documentation in the social sciences" (p. 3). More specifically, portraiture is the combination of "systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities and scientific rigor" (p. 3).

Portraits are formed as a result of dialogue between the researcher, or portraitist, and the subject and are designed to "capture the richness, complexity and dimensionality of human experience...conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences" (p. 3). Lawrence-Lightfoot describes the goal of the portraitist as the recording and interpretation of the experiences and perspectives of the subjects through the documentation of "their voices and their visions" (p. xv). The portraitist utilizes a combination of creativity

and analytic posture to explore and describe the perspectives of those studied and to draw connections to other phenomena all the while determining how the “story line” will be displayed (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983, p. 15.)

Framed in the tradition of phenomenology, the written portrait is a narrative that contextually documents human behavior and experience and reveals themes universally relevant (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). The following elements are essential in the development of portraiture (Hoffman Davis, 1997):

- Sure intention – the capturing an insider’s perspective
- Aesthetic features – attitudes, feelings and general ambiance
- Relationship – conversations resulting co-construction of meaning
- Contextual importance – historical, personal, and internal
- Aesthetic balance – ongoing reconciliation between observation and interview and the final portrayal in narrative form.
- Transformation – research portrait subjects’ actions and selves are seen through the eye of the portraitist which can influence an altered perspective of their lives with regard to themes emerging through the “aesthetic whole” (p. 35).

Mindful of these essential elements in the development of portraiture, the data collected for each participant were compiled and analyzed for emergent themes. The themes were then woven together in a narrative style to tell the story of each participant through a written portrait.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

In the process of developing the portraits a variety of instruments and

recording processes were used in the collection of data for this study. The following table is inclusive of methods used for data collection.

Table 3.3 Data Collection Summary

Instrument	Documentation	Description
Interviews	Digitally recorded and copied to CD	#1 Open-ended phenomenological interviews based on guiding questions #2 Open-ended reflective interviews based on videotape observation guided questions Informal telephone and e-mail communications
Photography	Digital and 35 millimeter film developed and copied to CD	Portrait-style photography of each participant in her classroom integrated into reflective contributions
Participant Contributions	Submitted by participants in electronic form	Biographical reflections in poetic or narrative form with integrated photographic portraits
Observations of Participants	Recorded on videotape and in one case, on digital voice recorder	From 1 to 3 observations of each participant teaching lasting from 30 to 180 minutes
Archived Data	Work product Video tapes	Written reflections and personal narratives. Previously videotaped lessons
Portraiture	Written narrative	Written narrative or <i>portrait</i> comprised of an integration of collected data.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data in this study was predominantly grounded in a process of constant comparison. The constant comparison method blends the practice of explicit coding procedures with ongoing theory development, the purpose being the “joint coding and analysis...to generate theory more

systematically” (Glaser, 1969, p. 218). The ultimate goal of this method is to assist the researcher in generating an integrated, plausible and consistent theory that is still closely tied to the data. Glaser explains that constant comparison differs from analytic induction in that it is predominantly concerned with creating and suggesting a variety of “properties and hypotheses about general phenomenon” (p. 219). He describes the four stages of the method as illustrated in the table below. Additionally, he points out that the method is a “continuous growth process” (p. 220) with each stage transforming itself into the next while previous stages continue to develop until the analysis has ended.

Table 3.4 Stages of the Constant Comparison Method

Stage I	Stage II	Stage III	Stage IV
Comparing incidents applicable to each category	Integrating categories and their properties	Delimiting the theory	Writing the theory
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each incident is coded in as many categories as possible then each incident is compared with others in the same category prior to further coding to identify properties of each incident 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diverse properties within categories begin to integrate as incidents within categories are compared to accumulated knowledge. Theory is developed as categories and their properties are integrated through comparison 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constant comparisons are used to reduce the data into smaller interrelated categories which are used to further define the developing theory. Theoretical saturation serves to further delimit the theory. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The coded data and notes make up the content behind the categories or major themes of the theory. Coded data is the source for validation of a suggested point.

Rather than to develop a particular theory, the goal of the analysis in this study was to uncover the predominant themes emerging from the lived-experiences and perspectives of the participants. While constant comparison was used to draw out the predominant themes, analysis structures were used with the data to further highlight relevant commonalities. LeCompte (2000), points out that “researchers must then create a structure and impose it on the data” (p. 147). She goes on describe how the structure, which is developed in stages, forms the foundation for organizing the data into an explanation.

In this case, the data were constantly compared on a variety of levels. Beginning with the transcriptions and analyses of the initial interviews, emergent themes apparent in professional and personal perspectives and poignant quotes of participants were noted. These themes, which included: *relationships*, *culturally responsive pedagogy*, *accent*, and *differences as a teacher*, were then organized into a table to assist in the portraiture process for each participant (see Appendix C: Portrait Emergent Themes). Upon the completion of the emergent theme table for each participant, and to avoid redundancy in the chapters, the data were then divided into groups for use in either the individual portrait or the analysis chapter.

Throughout the portraiture process predominant themes were further developed and compared against themes emerging from the other sources of data for each of the participants. This comparison resulted in the identification of several common threads among the data. Further comparison of these threads among the participants was facilitated by recording the data for each person that

supported the individual threads (see Appendix D: Participant Comparison Grid). Continued comparative analysis served to reveal or define the supporting strands, or “repetitive refrains and resonant metaphors” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 193) among collected data. To facilitate analysis these supporting strands were organized under three main themes: culturally responsive pedagogy, sociocultural challenges, and teacher education. The themes and the strands were then aligned with supporting research literature and theory (see Appendix E: Emergent Themes and Strands with Supporting Literature).

Researcher as Instrument

In portraiture, “the voice of the researcher is everywhere” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 85). From assumptions to the framework for inquiry; from the questions chosen to ask to the data collected, the voice of the portraitist is present (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; 1997). In addition, Creswell and Miller (2000) point out that as researchers our perspective about narratives is influenced by “our historical situatedness of inquiry, a situatedness based on social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender antecedents of the studied situations” (p. 126). Because of this, some discussion of my own situatedness is warranted.

I first became familiar with all nineteen BETAP cohort members as an instructor for one of the courses early in their program. Over the duration of BETAP I instructed two other classes, which enabled me to build academic and personal relationships with many of the cohort members. My growing relationships with the women began to shape my understanding of the

significance their personal journeys held for them as teachers and the unique strengths and knowledge they brought to teaching.

Also influencing the lens through which I have conducted my analysis is my professional position in the educational community. As an ELL Specialist with one of the school districts represented in the study, I have the opportunity to instruct and work with over fifty ELL paraeducators, many of whom are also bilingual immigrants. This position provides me with a vantage point from which to view the many positive attributes these individuals bring to education. Admittedly, observing firsthand the positive impact bilingual immigrants have on students – whether as paraeducators or as certified teachers – has influenced my analysis of the data in this study.

Bias

With regard to analytical biases, Denzin and Lincoln (1998) point out that the researcher approaches and analyzes the data from a “particular class, racial, cultural and ethnic community perspective” (p. 23). Because I have never been an immigrant or lived for extended periods of time in a cultural setting in which I lacked cultural capital or did not speak the dominant language, my perspective is in a sense, that of a novice. As a native English-speaking, European American woman, I do not have an insider’s understanding with regard to many of the issues emerging in the data.

In addition, having a pre-existing professional and educational relationship with the participants of this study might arouse concerns about my ability to remain objective in the process of data analysis and interpretation. As Bogdan

and Biklen (2003) acknowledge, the notion of researchers overcoming their own biases can be difficult to accept. They point out that there is a general concern about subjectivity in qualitative research simply because the data filters through the mind of the researcher before it is recorded, but they also remind us that the “researcher’s primary goal is to add to knowledge, not to pass judgment on a setting” (p. 33). This is supported by reiterating that researchers spend a great deal of time collecting and reviewing data. These data offer “a much more detailed rendering of events than even the most creatively prejudiced mind might have imagined prior to the study” (p. 33).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the human instrument – the interviewer – as “a marvelously smart, adaptable, flexible instrument who can respond with skill, tact and understanding” (p. 107). Pointing out that human research is “inherently dialectical” (p. 105), they provide several reasons for including interactions between the interviewer and the participants, arguing that these interactions should be used rather than eliminated from the research. Not only are these human exchanges essential for supporting sound interpretation and gaining a deeper understanding of the situation, they allow the researcher to move beyond simple objectivity to a more mature level of judgment. From this perspective, my existing relationships with the participants might be viewed as an investigative asset rather than a detriment to the study. This point of view embraces the pre-existing knowledge and relationships as a means of adding depth of perspective and understanding. Regardless, the importance of being mindful of potential biases in my analysis and interpretation of the data was

paramount. Eisner (1998) points out that it is possible to be “so committed to a preconceived conclusion or a particular way of seeing things” (p. 54) that the researcher may unintentionally focus only those elements or perspectives that support preconceptions.

Credibility of the portraits and in turn, the findings has been established in two main ways. Creswell and Miller (2000), describe member checking as “taking data and interpretations back to the participants...so they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account” (p. 127). In an effort ensure validity of the portraits, the participants were asked to review their portraits and make any corrections or clarifications they felt necessary. In addition to member checking, credibility was provided through the rich description inherent in the process of portraiture. Creswell and Miller note that thick description not only creates “verisimilitude,” it “enables readers to make decisions about the applicability or the findings” (p. 129).

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methods used to collect and analyze the data in the study. The chapter is divided into five main sections: a) general perspective; b) research context & participants; c) data collection; d) data analysis, e) researcher as instrument.

The discussion of methods began with an overview of the general research perspective followed by a description of the participants, including their personal and professional information. Data collection procedures were

discussed under the following categories: 1) conversational interviews, 2) photography, 3) participant reflective narratives, 4) observations of participants, and 5) archived data. Each section provided a detailed description of individual sources and documentation of data. The chapter then described the processes used for data analysis and the role the researcher plays as an instrument of collection and analysis, concluding with a brief discussion of researcher bias.

CHAPTER FOUR

PORTRAITS

Introduction

Portraiture as a method of inquiry steers away from one dimensional and stereotypical description of the experiences of people and seeks to give “voice” to those who are not often invited to express themselves in the public arena. Chapman, in her article *Expressions of “Voice” in Portraiture* (2005), posits that the development of portraiture “is a response to the marginalization and sterilization of the experiences of teachers, administrators, and students” (p. 28).

In *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (1997), Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot describes the written portrait as a narrative that is “at once complex, provocative, and living, that attempts to be holistic, revealing the dynamic interaction of values, personality, structure, and history” (p. 11). The completed portrait is an integrated work resulting from the blending of observations and conversations designed to provide the reader with a greater understanding of the subject. The portraitist works to weave together the relevant elements or data “to capture the insider’s views of what is important” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983, p. 14). At once creative and analytic, the goal of portraiture is to explore perspectives while at the same time “searching for their connections to other phenomena” (p. 15).

This chapter offers the reader a unique and personal glimpse into the lives of the seven participants of the present study. Each portrait seeks to capture the essence of the individual, her story and her experiences. The portraits were created by methodically weaving together various elements of data including:

interviews, conversations, observations, and in some cases archived data. The final integrated piece is designed to present the physical and historical contexts of the teachers as well as the experiences, perspectives and philosophies that shape the characters and define the contributions of these women. It is intended to inform and inspire the reader to “think more deeply about issues that concern them” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 10).

While each portrait is devoted to illuminating the voice of the participant, the reader will undoubtedly be aware of the researcher’s voice as well. Inherently integrated into the portraits is the lens through which I see each woman. Although my own voice may be apparent in the portraits, Lawrence-Lightfoot points out that: “Voice is the research instrument...of the portraitist – her eyes, her ears, her insights, her style, her aesthetic. Voice is omnipresent...But her voice is also a premeditated one, restrained, disciplined, and carefully controlled” (p. 85). The job of the portraitist is to take position on the peripheral and “systematically gather details...” (p. 87). She is a witness, “framing the scene and selecting the story, through her language and narrative style” (p. 88).

Finally, seeking individual and more intimate perspectives, apart from those revealed in the portraits, I invited each participant to create her own narrative. As a means of introducing the reader to these bilingual educators, their powerful and moving pieces precede the portraits of each woman.

Who Am I?
By Isabel

I am a point of encounter between two social classes, the poor and the rich. I am the happy ending of a romantic novel where a poor girl finds her aristocratic prince with whom she elopes for love. I am Latin and as so, I am *mezcla*. I am the product of a proud one hundred percent Basque descent born in Cuba, and an exotic combination from Andalucia and Lebanon. I am the daughter of my father who taught me to stand tall and strong to weather the stormy times in our lives, and the daughter of my mother who offered refuge every time I needed comfort during those rainy days.

As the first born, I was expected to go to school, do well, and learn the manners of the *señoritas*. Thus, I spent a great time of my life being raised by nuns in boarding schools. I also lived



with my grandfather during my first years of elementary in Cuba. I still remember his backyard, which opened a whole new world for me. There, he had golden fish, birds, butterflies, and all kinds of exotic fruit trees. He taught me to observe and be inquisitive—he was my first science teacher.

Being away from my parents and siblings for such a long time, I learned to be resilient and self-sufficient. I learned to make my struggles and hurdles a learning experience from which I grew stronger.



I am a life-long immigrant. I have lived in five different countries and more often than not, I was the “new face” in the classroom. I am the result of different

Educational systems, which taught me that character and spirit is the road to success. Moving so many times, and attending so many different boarding schools, I learned that teachers could be the key to the door of opportunities for their students. I still remember one teacher who encouraged me to write just by writing back a simple comment on my journal, “I love to read what you write. Keep writing because you are my favorite local author.” These positive remarks, made me want to read and write more.

Thus, I became a teacher.



In short, I am a daughter, a mother, and a proud grandmother of five. I am the lucky wife of a loving husband who took charge of our home when I went back to school full time while working full time. I am a teacher of immigrants, just like me. The force that drives me is a burning desire to teach my students character, spirit, and a love for learning rooted deep into their hearts.

That's me!



ISABEL

“I THINK IT WAS MY CALL”

The school day has ended for students at the Southwest Washington high school but as I walk into Isabel’s classroom, I find her surrounded by several Latina teens, all excitedly chattering away in Spanish with occasional English words sprinkled in. The girls and Isabel are discussing arrangements regarding an upcoming *Ballet Folklórico* event. Isabel, who is the advisor for the high school’s group of Mexican cultural dancers, speaks to the students in the native language they all share, introducing me as her *profesora* from the university and excusing herself from the girls. With looks of curiosity and giggles, the teens gather their things and quickly head out the door. Now, several months after this encounter, I realize that during each of my visits with Isabel, students have been in her classroom – working on the computer, getting advice, or simply visiting with her. Clearly, her room is a safe place for students. This opinion is not mine alone; recently, a supervisor wrote on Isabel’s evaluation: “When you are in Isabel’s class, it feels like there is no other place you would rather be.”

It would not be a stretch to suggest that Isabel’s desire to create a safe environment for her students evolves, in part, out of the displacement she experienced prior to immigrating to the United States in 1988 with her husband of 36 years. With the onset of Castro’s communist regime and ensuing political persecution which included the burning of their ranch in Cuba, Isabel’s family was forced to flee the country. This exposed Isabel, at only ten years of age, to a world with which at least a few of her students and their families may be able to

identify. Perhaps for this reason, Isabel considers herself an advocate for her immigrant students and their families: “I want so much to help immigrants here because when I came, I lost a lot of opportunities just because I didn’t know the system.”

Her advocacy, which began long before she had a classroom of her own – when she worked as a paraprofessional – has won her life-long relationships with some of her students. Today, photographs of many of them comprise a collage on the wall behind Isabel’s desk. Two girls in particular, now in their 30’s and raising their own children, still send letters and pictures to this special woman who took the time to make a difference for their family. Isabel reminisces about her earliest connections with the family – a situation in which she rallied resources to help the parents to work through first, a sub-standard housing issue and later, the process of purchasing their own home. Isabel reflects passionately:

I was able to make a *difference* in their lives...I didn’t just limit my help to school. I went and visited them and made friends with [them]...it wasn’t just letting [the students] know they were able to graduate...the whole family was able to get ahead...finding out they had rights. It wasn’t just me; I had to rely on American people to help me help them.

In terms of how Isabel supports her students, the word *advocate* seems to describe *who* she is rather than a thing she does. She doesn’t usually think about it or consciously plan it – she would likely tell you that she simply acts instinctively in the best interest of her students. Whether it is sending an e-mail to the principal about an immigrant student who would love to play soccer but lacks

the funds and transportation, or phoning to discourage a father from removing his son from school for the remainder of the school year to make a visit to Mexico, Isabel is relentless in her efforts to speak for her students. In fact, advocacy for ELL students is the thing Isabel most misses since she has become a certified classroom teacher with her own classes:

I miss most being connected to all of the ESL population....As a staff assistant I could help all students and know more about them – especially in registration – you get to know more about a student...I miss that contact. I still try with the students I don't have. To tell you the truth, a lot of our ESL students, they miss out so much...because they don't know where the resources are. I miss that opportunity to guide them – I don't have that opportunity now...As a teacher I am limited to a group of kids.

Although Isabel misses certain aspects of her work as a paraprofessional, she does not regret becoming a teacher: "I wouldn't trade, and I am going to tell you why I wouldn't trade. My beliefs are so firm...about the way I should teach." As a paraprofessional, Isabel was fortunate to work with some "very good teachers" who used a "constructivist approach" and showed her, "to be vulnerable in front of the kids...to be honest...to use their own knowledge." Her professors at the university also confirmed the views and opinions already "ingrained in [her] heart." Now that she is a teacher she feels like she can do what she believes – the way she thinks it should be done. Isabel is passionate about her profession: "I am loving it. I am loving every part of it...Really, teaching – I think it was my call – I love teaching!"

“I CAN IDENTIFY WITH THEM”

Isabel has long felt that teaching was her vocation. Nineteen years ago she first stepped into an ESL classroom - at the high school where she now teaches – as a parent, “volunteering [her] services” in her daughter’s ESL classes. This incidental introduction into the American school system eventually led Isabel into the world of teaching. After volunteering for a year, a grant opened the door for her to be hired as an ESL staff assistant and later a vocational specialist working with ELL students in technology classes.

Isabel’s role as a paraprofessional put her in perfect position to take advantage of the BETAP scholarship when it became available in 1999, “This was my dream to go back to school...since I came...the very first year, I always wanted to go back to school...when BETAP came, it was just my dream come true.” Throughout her coursework at the university, Isabel’s goal reached beyond simply earning her teacher certification:

I dreamt about what I am doing now...teaching the immigrant students – teaching ESL...and it’s now complimented with the AP Spanish....It’s just like a dream come true to be able to teach these kids...and you know I love my Russian students – my Moldavians...

Isabel relates deeply to her immigrant students: “I am here for them; I can identify with them and how they have to adapt.” Adapting is something Isabel has had to do often. Adjusting to life as a young girl in Venezuela after leaving Cuba was only the beginning. She attended boarding school and later, two years at a private Catholic college in Boston, Massachusetts. Upon returning home from the

United States, her family again moved, “due to another dictator,” this time to Costa Rica. When she was 22, Isabel married her “prince” and moved to Panama – the only move, she jokes, not politically motivated. Her final move was to the United States because of yet, one more dictator. Each of these transitions have given Isabel ample opportunity to develop a unique first-hand understanding of the upheaval and uncertainty that many of the immigrant students she teaches experience, making it easy for her to relate to her students and for them to relate to her.

When they say something, I say ‘Oh yes, I went through the same situation in Cuba...’ so we can have a conversation about the same things, and I do - every time I have the opportunity....It is amazing to see how my students who are not Hispanic can also connect to my experiences...and to my life as an immigrant, not only in the United States, but also in the other countries I have lived.

While certainly, the experiences that have shaped Isabel often help her to relate with her students she makes the point that any teacher can make connections with students and their lives:

Feelings are feelings and even if you have not gone through the same situations, I think you can relate to people...you have to put yourself in their shoes for a minute, even if it’s in your mind, and think about it...because not all the situations I have lived, but I have been able to...place myself for a second in that situation and think about it.

“WITHOUT RELATIONSHIP, YOU HAVE NOTHING”

Transitioning from working with large numbers of ELL students to her teaching her own classes has only strengthened Isabel’s resolve to foster relationships with her students. Among the students in her ESL and AP Spanish classes, there is an obvious sense of “camaraderie” and respect. In her ESL class, Russian, Korean, and Spanish-speakers, along students speaking a wide array of other languages, work together in cooperative table groups to complete their assigned projects. The students in her AP Spanish classes, the majority of whom are themselves native Spanish-speakers, listen carefully to one another as they share heart-felt poetry about their lives.

For Isabel, that students show respect to each other and to her is paramount. Since she favors a “democratic” approach to classroom management she involves the students in the process: “We created the rules together; the only rule I wrote was *respect*, they wrote everything else.” Isabel clearly and consistently asserts her expectations that students will treat one another with respect and she is not shy about addressing transgressions.

They know, no disrespect toward anyone will be tolerated in this room...I tell them, ‘you don’t’ show disrespect here.’ At the same time I have their respect. Some teachers think they have to be with a bulldog face all day long to get respect and I don’t agree with that. [Here] we joke with each other and don’t take things personally.

Isabel nurtures her relationships through a culturally responsive approach to teaching. She values the characteristics of her students and uses them to

create enthusiasm for learning. A student in her AP Spanish class earned the nickname “the Lawyer” from Isabel because “he’s *awesome* in the debates” they have over political issues in Latin America. Isabel laughs; the student is surprised at the things he has learned in her classes, “He told me, ‘to think when I signed up for this class I thought I was going to learn about *door* and *window*...’ I said, ‘are you disappointed?’ he says, ‘No! Heck no, I *love* this class!’”

“The Philosopher,” is another of Isabel’s many success stories. “He hates to write and he didn’t want to write poetry...‘The girly stuff.’” It is the “little notes” Isabel writes to him asking his opinions on current events that have ignited his desire to write:

Hey, Philosopher I’m interested – oye filósofo, estoy ineteresada...¿Que opinas tu...?’ and then something...so one day he came with a page answering [the question] and I said, ‘Wow, see how you can write? You can write so well,’ so now we communicate like this...Sometimes he comes in and says, ‘Do you have something else you would like to discuss?’ It’s unbelievable.

“WE SHARE OUR WORDS”

The opportunities Isabel provides for students to share their languages and cultures undoubtedly serve to foster respect. Isabel makes no secret of her love for diversity and her interest in the students’ languages. She attributes this love to having had the opportunity, since moving to the United States, to learn about many different cultures. She regularly attempts to connect the languages and cultures of her students to her teaching:

I try to use, as much as possible, the students' own knowledge....I use their languages, nationalities, and prior knowledge to [plan] my lessons. It's a wonderful experience for me and my students to realize how much they already know and to see a twinkle in their eyes when *they* are the center of knowledge.

In pre-teaching key vocabulary for reading or brainstorming a writing exercise, Isabel is always looking for ways to integrate the native languages of her students. She laughs, "Oh, they think I speak all of those languages because we exchange words." Isabel is expert in helping the students feel multilingual. One of her Moldavian students was especially disappointed to learn that even though he had "exchanged" words with Isabel, he still did not have the necessary prerequisites to enroll in her AP Spanish class for the following year.

On a daily basis, Isabel simply invites students to share in their native tongues, vocabulary words and key phrases she is teaching. Clearly enjoying the exchange and modeling an acceptance of each of the languages of her students, she invites them all to learn and practice the potpourri of new vocabulary right along with her as she moves about the tables during lessons. Embracing the collage of cultures and languages in her classes is a staple for Isabel's teaching. "I just love it...when we share our languages...our cultures...having so many different languages and cultures for me is an asset and I use it...." In her classes, students share their own background knowledge of events in places they are familiar with. Eastern European students help students from Mexico to

understand the intricacies of WWII, while Latino students share their expertise on topics such as tropical rain forests, iguanas and other exotic creatures.

Isabel's enthusiasm and love for language is contagious; her students clearly also enjoy experimenting with each other's languages. In a discussion of correct punctuation during a Daily Oral Language exercise one morning, Russian students called out "punto," the Spanish word for "period" while the Spanish students responded with, "точка," Russian for the same word. On a different morning, a friendly debate between Russian and Romanian students over the correct pronunciation in Russian for the word "deliver" seems to engage even the Spanish-speakers in the class as students listen with smiles of interest to the exchange. Isabel laughs, "In the ELL classes, we are always sharing words."

"EVERYONE HAS A STORY TO TELL."

Since first meeting Isabel the semester I began teaching courses for the BETAP cohort in 2001, her love for writing and the telling of one's story have been evident. It was Isabel, in fact, who first introduced me to the writings of one of my favorite authors, Alma Flor Ada. Isabel gave me the privilege, about six years ago, of reading an autobiographical piece written for her own children – an account of her life including many precious memories of her own childhood in Cuba, inspired by Ada's *Under the Royal Palms: A Childhood in Cuba* (1998).

Sitting at one of the table groupings one afternoon after school, it occurs to me that the sharing of words is just the beginning of the foundation for learning in Isabel's classes. The emphasis she places on the importance of the telling of one's own story is obvious. The work on the walls, arranged there by students, is

an eclectic blend of colorful biographical student projects and written pieces. “We teach each other...I learn from their experiences,” she explains with her characteristic warm and affirming smile. “I think that there is one language – that is the most important language – that is the language of the heart.” Setting the example, Isabel is first to share her “memoirs” with her students before asking them to write about themselves, “You have to model...poems and model stories...you have to model a lot. You don’t have to go through the *same* experiences as the kids but you can write about experiences.” She inspires students to use their background experiences and knowledge by sharing her own writing and using books such as *The Circuit* (Jimenez, 1997) and *Parrot in the Oven* (Martinez, 1996).

During each encounter I have with Isabel she enthusiastically shares with me the work of her students. On one occasion she opens a binder containing a collection of student poetry and letters they have written. She shares two or three. With a broad smile and eyes gleaming, she holds a stack of student papers as though they are precious documents and gently sighs, “These letters are just so fabulous.” On a different afternoon, she has biographical stories to share. Singling one out with obvious pride in her voice, she scoots a bit closer to me with her chair and begins to share, “Let me show you! Look at this girl!” Isabel leans a bit closer to me and lowers her voice, “One of the other teachers asked me, ‘Why do they write for you? They don’t write for me!’ You’ve *got* to touch their hearts first – so they can write...I was crying when I was reading this story...”

Isabel tells me that her husband describes her as “transfixed” while she reads and grades her students’ stories at home. With a slight grin, she hypothesizes that he might be a “little jealous.” I am sure she is transfixed. That she considers each experience her students share a precious treasure is almost an understatement. Her passion for the stories of her students is undeniable. It’s really no surprise that students write for Isabel, and I doubt it is simply because she takes the time to interact with them through the written comments on their pieces. Her students surely must sense the important role their stories play in learning from one another, “what you learn in a storytelling way....and just teaching each other in community, is something you won’t forget easily....We teach each other here.”

“WE LEARN BY OBSERVING”

As I watch this petite and energetic teacher move from student to student during a writing activity I cannot help but reflect on the events of her life that have brought her to this point – to this classroom and to these students. Isabel has come a long way from the new immigrant wandering the campus of the local community college repeating to herself, “One day I will be back here, one day...” She is no longer the mother waiting for her children to finish school so she could once again become a student. She has become a teacher who goes far beyond simply delivering instruction. Isabel’s journey has been long, yet very gratifying. With the unwavering support of her husband and the fellowship of the university cohort, she met the challenges of working fulltime and attending courses to achieve her dream.

With Isabel, the lines between quality relationships, respect, advocacy, and teaching melt together like the strokes in a watercolor painting. They blend together to paint a portrait of a “good role model...an immigrant that did not want to be a statistic for lack of success, but just the opposite.” They reveal “a person that cares...listens carefully...that is really honest with students and lets [them] know she can make mistakes and we can learn from our mistakes.”

As a teacher, Isabel is far more than simply a teacher of content area subjects. She chooses to be transparent before her students:

I compare their lives to mine most of the time. They know about my life as much as I know about theirs – believe me...when they see that a teacher has gone through similar situations and that we make mistakes...well, we teach each other here...It’s not like I am the teacher – no – we teach each other here.

The opportunities Isabel has had in this country to learn about many different cultures aside from her own has “enriched” her and made her “a better person.” They have made her a “life-long learner” and that is what she expects from her students. “Wanting to learn and wanting to know about other cultures, that is what I would love to leave; to instill in them – the desire for learning.” Isabel’s “multiculturalism...diversity...listening skills...humor” and knowledge about the world and the topics she teaches are the gifts she has to offer her students. As we conclude one of our chats, I mention to Isabel that all of the questions I ask her about who she is and the kind of teacher she is, she answers

with stories of the successes of her students, she laughs, “Really? I guess, I am not separate from them....My heart is with these immigrant kids – it is here.”

Where I Come From
By Oksana

I come from a hardworking
family of ten so poor in things of comfort.
But so rich in stories of faith that survived
tribulations of communist attacks.

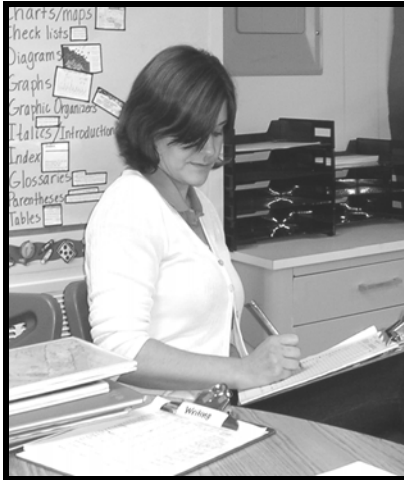
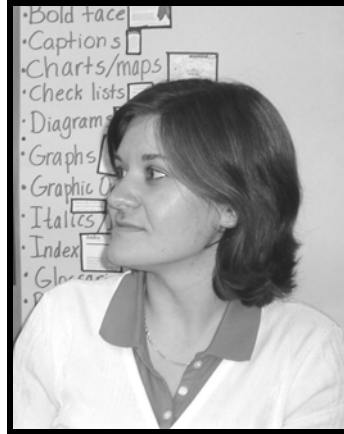
I come from those simple and powerful
stories that taught me to pray and believe.
I come from chores and responsibilities
And little time to play.



I come from wild imagination and daring to dream.
I come from hiding in books on a search
to find myself.



I come from a simple love of Ivan and Galina.
 I come from their words of love
 and guidance to seek
 God first and foremost.



I come from listening, watching
 and wanting more...

I come from needing and seeking
 my own purpose in life.

I come from praying for energy, strength and will power
 To honor God with my abilities wherever I might be!



OXSANA

“THEY ARE SO INTERESTED IN ANYTHING THAT IS DIFFERENT”

Upon walking into Oksana’s classroom in one of the portables of a Southwest Washington area elementary school, I have to remind myself that I am visiting a 3rd grade classroom. It feels more like 5th grade. Oksana is at her desk in the far corner of the room taking attendance on her computer as the students follow directions displayed on the pull down screen for the document projector. Several students are eating their school-provided breakfasts as they complete the math “morning work” they know they will soon review. Other students quietly move about the room, turning in lunch money, hanging coats, or digging in backpacks as they prepare for their day at school.

The walls of this potentially drab portable are clothed in colorful reminders and supports – without question, a print-rich environment. In one corner the district-endorsed character traits expected in students are displayed; further along, hand-written chart posters outline classroom jobs and responsibilities reminding the 3rd graders to “be independent and solve your own problems.” A variety of other chart papers detailing the writing process and outlining various examples of “descriptive” and “comparison” writing hang neatly on the walls - ready references for the students. In another corner, a giant “Compliment Tree” sprouts leaves in various shades of green on which the students have documented one another’s admired qualities, confirming the caring aura in the room.

Lessons begin on this day with a review of the “morning work” – four math problems. Oksana asks for volunteers to bring their work up to the document projector. “I’m seeing three hands. I am waiting for more hands because it looks like some of these people answered yesterday.” She knows this because she carries a clipboard to track student participation and progress. “After the first time I did report cards, I realized I really needed to keep track of these things.” She leads a review of the assignment by guiding each volunteer through an explanation for the rest of the class. Each student volunteer is made to feel successful. One student who doesn’t have the correct answer is not embarrassed, “Why don’t you take a closer look at your answer, would someone like to help out with this one?”

Learning without embarrassment is a goal for her students that Oksana models for them through her own learning. A native speaker of Ukrainian, Oksana sometimes struggles with pronunciation of English words.

They are aware that I am not somebody that was not born here....There are times when I cannot say something. We had this discussion in the beginning of the year and we periodically go back to that....Sometimes I just ask them for help...‘How do you really pronounce that word? This is a really hard word.’ They just *love* that - there’s just all kinds of suggestions to try. I love those moments when they can be a help for me and I really appreciate that....I think it’s kind of nice because we can both learn from each other and help each other along the way.

As an ELL cluster teacher – she currently has seven students in the program who receive additional language support – Oksana uses her own experiences of being bilingual and bicultural as a way to interest students in learning about their own heritages and those of others.

I've done units on cultural similarities and differences where we explore their cultures and they get to teach kids about the traditions and languages that are common in their family... the kids usually love it and it's a blast to go through and really research it.

Oksana has written a self-published book about her own story of growing up in Ukraine and immigrating to the US as a teenager, which captivates her students, "My kids just love to read about it and figure out why I came here. I think it's important to share it." Another book she's written about different languages is also of great interest to her students:

They are so interested in anything that is different and just soak everything up....That's one of the other goals that I have – not just being a good teacher but also talking about cultural similarities and differences and encouraging being open to trying something different.

On a couple of occasions, her linguistic diversity has presented some challenges beyond pronunciation. "Sometimes it's positive and sometimes it's negative." She has never received any official complaint, but is aware that at least "some" parents have expressed concerns about her accent. "I have had parents who have heard my accent on the first night and went to complain to the principal....Sometimes I like meeting parents...sometimes I dread them if [they]

have that kind of negative reaction.” Oksana, now in her third year of teaching in her own classroom, feels much more comfortable than she did as a first year teacher. She doesn’t let herself “feel intimidated” by skeptical parents, “I just do my job and that’s what I need to do. ‘Like it or not, I am your child’s teacher and this is what we need to do.’”

“I AM GRATEFUL FOR THIS COUNTRY
AND THE THINGS THAT ARE POSSIBLE HERE”

During an early morning visit, the students are gathered around Oksana and her chart paper easel at the front of the classroom. Some are seated on the floor and others just behind them on benches she has placed just for this type of lesson. As I watch her skillfully drawing her students into a vocabulary brainstorming activity, I am challenged to imagine her as a 15 year old girl new to America and just learning English.

Immigrating to the United States with their children in 1992, Oksana’s parents sought to escape religious persecution and gain greater opportunities for their children. Being the youngest of 9 children and growing up in Первомайськ, or Pervomaysk, Ukraine, are not the only things that help Oksana to relate, in very real ways, to many of the her Eastern European immigrant students. She is a teacher at heart. Since the time she was a very young girl she dreamed she would be some kind of caregiver for children. Even then, Oksana was a gifted and imaginative storyteller. At church and in the neighborhood, “there would always be a crowd of little kids hanging around.” She knew then she loved

children but because of her negative experiences with teachers, never wanted to be one herself:

Some of my experience in Ukraine did not really open my heart [to liking teachers]. It's a very different role of the teacher... a very formal role - somebody that just gives the information that you have to learn....Another thing...I grew up in a Christian family and there were some painful times when teachers would be making jokes about God or about us – our family.

Once in the United States, the years of negative impressions left by teachers began to fade into history when Oksana started attending high school in the same school district where she has worked for the last six years.

I had really good teachers here when I came to the United States. The message they sent is...'you can do anything you want, this is America. You can go higher than working at the same thing that your parents did or... just getting married.' And at the time I had some dreams but when I was in high school I never really shared those dreams with my teachers... at the time, I kind of smiled and just made jokes about it – I told them that I wanted ten kidsI was just afraid.

Perhaps Oksana's reluctance to share her dreams was fueled by growing up with the knowledge that she "would never have been able to go to college in Ukraine." It was understood that she would work as her mother did, as a seamstress. Without the financial resources or critical reference letters that were required to gain entrance, there were really no other options. The family's Christian beliefs garnered "really negative" letters of recommendation for

Oksana's older sisters when they tried to enter college. Learning from this experience, her parents refrained from "getting [their children's] hopes up" by encouraging the children to go to college.

Ironically, going to college is exactly what Oksana has done. Currently working on her professional certification and her Master's degree in Education, Oksana's days are filled with teaching students and her nights and weekends are filled with university courses and homework. This isn't new. Six years ago, Oksana worked fulltime as an ESL paraprofessional in the same school in which she now teaches while she was enrolled in her teacher certification coursework. Like many young adults, it "took a long time" for Oksana to get her bearing after graduating from high school in 1996. She narrowly escaped the fulfillment of the assumption she would be a seamstress. Oksana called her father to pick her up after working less than 2 full days in a local clothing factory where her mother was employed. "I called my dad and I said, 'Dad, can you come pick me up – I just can't stand it here...I asked him to take me to [the community] college and got information about going to college...'" She laughs, "My mom is probably still upset with me."

Once at the community college, her path began to unfold. Hearing about opportunities with both the school district and the BETAP scholarship shortly after completing a year with AmeriCorps as a tutor, Oksana applied for the paraprofessional opening and the scholarship. Receiving the BETAP scholarship was a "good opportunity" and actually came just before she was hired as an ELL paraprofessional, "I was pretty fortunate...all these doors just started to open up.

It was amazing to me – being able to receive all these things.” Reflecting on her experience in BETAP, Oksana expresses deep gratitude.

I will always feel grateful for it, being a part of BETAP. I think it was a tremendous gift for all of us. Here, we are coming from a different county and that is given to us. I know my government would never do that. I am just grateful for this county and the things that are possible here.

“OKSANA CAN DO ANY THING YOU ASK HER”

Observing Oksana in the classroom it is not difficult to imagine her working so diligently to keep work and school in balance. She circulates easily about the classroom, clipboard in hand during a writing activity. The students are equipped, thanks to a minilesson on “descriptive” words, to produce “a higher level of writing” that they practice in their writer’s notebooks. She answers student questions, addresses potential student transgressions quickly and quietly, all the while supporting several students who require extra assistance with one-on-one attention. Certainly her experience as an ELL staff assistant, “pushing in” or providing in class support for several classrooms each day, helped to prepare her for the responsibilities of teaching in her own classroom. However, she finds her new responsibilities are “overwhelming” at times. “I have to balance all of my responsibilities...there is just so much more pressure.”

The pressure was especially intense during her first year as a certified teacher. Teaching overflow 3rd grade language arts half time in her own classroom and serving, in the role of paraeducator, ELL students the other half of

her day helped Oksana become more assertive in her transition from staff assistant to classroom teacher:

I used to be a staff assistant so they [thought of me] as ‘Oksana can do anything you ask her.’...Now I was the classroom teacher and I had to make sure the kids had the skills and I needed them there so I could teach them. Most of the teachers got where they could respect that....That was probably the hardest thing I had to do because I still respected them and I still wanted to be perceived as a team player.

Now, in her third year, she still finds herself setting boundaries with teachers who ask her to phone Russian families regarding the children in their classes. Oksana has learned to suggest that teachers ask the two Russian-speaking paraprofessionals working in the school first, but is willing to help if necessary, “I don’t mind calling but I am still carrying a teacher’s load. I have a lot of things on my plate....That’s something I don’t know how to explain to the people I work with.” She smiles slightly, “I am kind of thankful for being in a portable; I think if I was in the building I would have to have that conversation with them.”

As we discuss her role as a classroom teacher, Oksana admits she misses some of the benefits of her position as an ELL paraprofessional such as the individual time to build relationships and teach – concentrating solely on supporting second language learners. Regardless, she does not regret becoming a classroom teacher:

I *did* get tired of wasting my time...sometimes I would come into the classroom as the staff assistant and just sit there... [other times] I wanted to help a student where I thought they needed help but the teachers didn't think that way....I feel there are certain strengths I have that [allow me to] help the kids in that place a little more....And I worked really hard for it.

Oksana's previous experience as a paraprofessional allows her to serve as a bridge between the current ELL paraprofessionals and ELL cluster teachers in her building. This year, with the encouragement of her principal, Oksana is accomplishing a goal she has had "forever." She facilitates informal monthly meetings at which teachers who have ELLs in their classrooms gather with the ELL staff to talk about and plan effective instructional strategies and develop resources. With all that she has going on, I wonder how she manages one more commitment. As I listen to her explain her motivation becomes clear. Not being able to use her skills as a as a paraprofessional left her feeling ineffective while pushing in support for ELL students. "I wanted those teachers to know that staff assistants are well trained and they can do a lot more than sometimes what they give them credit for."

"YOU HAVE TO BE CHALLENGING YOURSELF"

While she misses being able to "concentrate just on the ESL kids," and having the time to "build relationships with those kids," Oksana points out that "it's still a passion" for her because of her own background. Her passion for building relationships with of all of her students is apparent as I watch her interact with them. Oksana refers to her students as "Friends" when she addresses them

and intentionally teaches and models the respect she expects from her students, “I want to compliment [names 2 students] because they are not blurting out and this shows respect to me and to other students.”

Oksana’s passion is not just for building relationships but also building responsible learners. She is present with her students – she moves continuously about the table groups connecting with students. Her students know they are expected to be engaged in the assigned activity but also that she is there to assist them if they need it. As students are writing in their notebooks she finds one boy folding a small piece of paper. She bends down to quietly speak with him, “Is this a good use of your time?” When he shyly shakes his head that it is not, she questions him further, “Why not? How does this help you learn?” Finally, he tells her that it doesn’t help him learn and returns to his assignment.

Her own early experiences in school have likely influenced the emphasis Oksana places on the importance of her own interaction with her students.

When I was a child in Ukraine you had to sit like this (she sits up very straight and stiff) and raise your hand...there was very little one-to-one interaction – The teacher lectured and children just listened – if you had a question...barely there was ever a question...if a question had to be asked out loud sometimes the teachers made fun of you, so it was kind of a different approach – very formal and very strict...I can’t even imagine myself teaching over there.

In her own classroom the focus is very different, “I’m trying to balance my teaching with structure and freedom....I want to have a good working relationship

with my students that gives them a voice.” She strives to instill a drive for success in her students and hopes they see her “as an encourager.” She offers them encouragement in the things they struggle with while celebrating their strengths. As evidenced in her own educational journey, the message Oksana sends her students is clear:

Even though you have something that’s difficult, or even if it’s easy, you don’t stop there; you have to be challenging yourself – you have to keep working on other things. So, I hope that is something that they see in me as a teacher. No matter where they are I don’t want them to just to take life in an easy way, but...keep working at it – I think there is just more fun that way.

“WHEN I GROW UP, I WANT TO BE LIKE YOU”

As we sit together after school one day at the kidney-shaped reading table that serves as Oksana’s desk and talk about the events of her life that led her to teach, Oksana reflects on what she represents to her students:

My hope is that I represent to them hard work and perseverance. America is a wonderful country that offers so many great opportunities and I can only hope that my teaching or personal experience can inspire my students to reach their dreams.

For Oksana, it is imperative that her students dare to reach their dreams and their goals. She believes that even in the third grade, students need to learn that setting and achieving goals is “what is really going to help you in life.” While they may now be setting goals in subjects and content areas, Oksana reminds

them they are practicing for bigger things; they are building “life skills.” She tells them, “If you will set a goal, no matter how big or how little, and complete it or achieve it – that is what is really going to help you in life.”

Her students are listening. With tenderness in her eyes, Oksana shares the story of an immigrant student she had in her class last year. This shy girl struggled with below grade level reading but working “very hard to be a good student” she never gave up. Mid-way through the year she came to Oksana and said, “Mrs. R, when I grow up, I want to be like you, I want to be a teacher.” The significance of this comment did not escape Oksana. “That’s just a story that’s going to be with me for ever and ever and I am probably *never* going to forget it!”

The significance here, Oksana points out to me, is that this comment comes from an immigrant child rather than an American student.

It’s different for this student than American students saying this to you because you know that they have been saying that since they were three...but for this little girl to come over...she was so serious and I don’t know if that’s going to happen but I think it took something for her to say that and it’s going to be with me.

I suspect this is only the first of many such stories in Oksana’s career as a teacher. She is dedicated to being the absolute best teacher she can. While she admits that teaching in her own classroom is not exactly what she expected, “it’s so hard,” she also calls it “rewarding” and “exciting.” Her initial goals being met, she sets new ones and moves toward those, “This is my passion and now it’s just the beginning of it. I don’t see it as the end, like I’ve accomplished something.

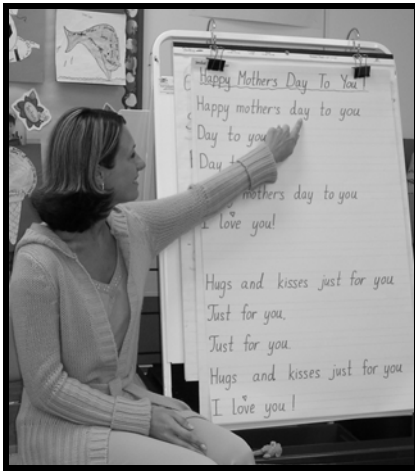
Now I am looking at myself as a new teacher and thinking about becoming a *good teacher*...using the things that I've learned and applying them...figuring out my own teaching style....There is so much learning still ahead of me. I am excited about this.”

I am a Teacher
By Olga

I am a Russian girl who was
born in Kirgizstan.

I come from a family of one sister
and two brothers.

My mother and father have always taught us to
be the best at everything that we wanted to be.



I am a musician.

I went to music school for seven years
and learned how to sing
and play the piano.

Music was my passion and I endlessly
dreamt of becoming a music teacher.

I am an immigrant.

When I was twelve years old my family
moved to the United States.

I struggled learning a new language and adjusting to
a different life style.

I am a teacher.
 When I graduated from high school
 I did not know who I wanted to be.
 After teaching Sunday school
 For a few months
 I knew that I wanted to be a teacher.



I teach a newcomers class to students that
 come from all over the world.
 I tell them that I was once in their shoes and
 I know how it feels to struggle
 and learn a new language.

I enjoy coming to work every day and seeing the learning that
 takes place in these students' lives.
 I always tell my students that they can be the best at everything
 that they want to be.



OLGA

“BOYS AND GIRLS, YOU ARE REALLY SMART!”

As I walk through the elementary school building and out to the portables where the Newcomers' classrooms are housed I anticipate the warm welcome I will receive. The seventeen students – 3rd through 5th grade – that Olga shares with her teaching partner are from all over the world. They are newcomers to the United States, most having arrived within the last 9 months. Their classroom is made up of two adjoining portables. Outside, the rooms border the playground at the far rear corner of the school. Inside, they are warm and inviting. The rooms offer a language-rich environment. There are books everywhere – on shelves that line the walls and in baskets. Colorful posters provide students with bus schedules, calendars, clues about understanding fractions, sentence starters and story topics. There are alphabet posters in English, Spanish and Russian. On one wall there is a large map of the world with each of their names, students and teachers, written on cards and attached to their native countries with yarn. These students, from so many different countries, are in this classroom learning English and how to “do” school in their new home.

Fashionably and neatly dressed and with a formal but warm demeanor, Olga stands, with the posture of a ballet dancer, near the door of the portable individually greeting students as they enter the classroom to begin their day. The girls and boys return her greeting and most smile as they scurry in to hang coats and backpacks on the pegs along the back wall. They begin to follow the morning agenda that Olga has written on the whiteboard. Some students work with

puzzles on the floor in the back corner of the room; others are seated at one of the five, four-person table groups writing in journals or reading silently. Olga moves among the tables and the groups on the floor quietly conversing with students, occasionally in Russian, but usually in English. When necessary, she directs student behavior with questions like, “What are you supposed to be doing right now?” rather than simply directing them. She answers questions or clarifies directions for students; sometimes she simply chats with them about what they are working on.

Undoubtedly, Olga’s own experience as a young girl immigrating to the United States influences her interactions with these students. She intimately understands the uprooting and changes that many of her students have gone through before arriving here:

They sent me to Grandma’s for the summer and I come back and everything’s packed and gone and [they said], ‘okay, we’re moving to America!’ So there really wasn’t any preparation. I had a couple of days...to say good bye to friends....I didn’t want to leave my best friend and my dog.

Although she had learned some British English in 4th grade in Kyrgyzstan, she remembered only a few letters by the time she arrived in America and enrolled in middle school in Los Angeles, California. Olga vividly remembers the discomfort of what it felt like to “be thrown into a classroom where there is nobody that speaks your language and you just have to sit there and learn and

there is nobody to help you,” so she works hard to equip her students with enough English to make the successful transition into the mainstream classroom.

On this morning Olga uses the books by Rosemarie Wells, *Yoko* (1998), which they have previously read and a new book, *Yoko and the Paper Cranes* (2001) to support students in building academic vocabulary and strengthening literacy skills. As Olga calls the students from their tables they enthusiastically seat themselves on the floor around her chair. Using a large graphic organizer on her chart paper easel, she reviews the term “character” and asks students, “Who are the characters from the story?” Students respond with varying levels of English, and share what they remember from the story. With smiles and affirmations Olga draws more students in to the discussion. With genuine enthusiasm she encourages them, “Very good,” “Yes!” and “Boys and girls, you are really smart!” She is just as excited about their progress as they are.

Olga affirms her students’ efforts and shows respect for their comfort levels with regard to participating. She asks permission from two of the students to share their reading journals and they readily agree. She asks students from Japan what they know about locations on a map she displays. Using solid ELL instructional strategies, she draws again on their background knowledge as she begins to preview the new book they will read today, “Who visits Grandpa and Grandma? Do you write letters home?” She repeats and completes their responses, modeling Standard English. While several of the students are Asian and can clearly relate personally to the *Yoko* stories, the students from other cultural groups are able to participate equally in the discussion of the characters

of the story and about their experiences of visiting grandparents. Under Olga's guidance, the students are learning to use their voices and make personal connections to learning.

“I DON'T THINK I EVER LOOKED AT MY TEACHER AND
WANTED TO BE A TEACHER”

As I learn more about Olga's life, and watch her teach, I sometimes try to place her back in Kyrgyzstan, living in the same town, in the same house for the first 12 years of her life. I am stretched to imagine the young girl who, in a sea of students wearing “the star of the dead president” and Lenin's face on their school uniform shirts, wore nothing on her shirt and was singled out and ridiculed for her religious beliefs.

When you are in primary grades, you wear a star and when you move up into intermediate grades you wear a red scarf and get sworn in [in a] ceremony...a little bit older and you join the communist party and get a different star...People who were Christian were not allowed to do that, so I was the only one in the whole school who was not wearing anything and people saw that and they called [me] names.

It is not too difficult, however to imagine that girl seeking justice for the mistreatment. With a bit of a smirk and a twinkle in her eye, Olga confesses,

I was kind of bad with that. After school I would wait. I had a few friends that liked and respected me and didn't really care whatever my religion was and so we would wait for some boys that were calling me names and they would beat them up.

As a teacher, Olga manages an organized and disciplined classroom and she fosters respect among her students. Each time I have observed Olga teach, I am impressed at the ease with which she manages the students. Although she has been in the classroom for ten years, eight of those years were spent as an ESL paraprofessional, not responsible for managing student behavior in a whole-group setting. Olga, however, appears to be a veteran teacher as she guides students in their work or quickly extinguishes inappropriate behavior. She glides from table to table while groups are working, assisting students, refocusing their attention, and reminding them of the expectations she has for them. In one of our conversations I mention my observation, and in a matter-of-fact way, she explains, “I think it makes it hard for the teacher to teach and the kids to learn when the discipline’s not there.”

Olga attributes her management skills to the strong discipline background of her own upbringing and education in Kyrgyzstan. Being the eldest of three siblings and instilled early with a strong school work ethic have defined her perspective, “I focus a lot on discipline and perfection because that’s how I was brought up and that’s what is taught in schools in my own country.” While she would not demand, as her teachers did, that children sit up straight without moving during lessons, she does expect her students to strive for quality in their work – whether it’s writing or drawing a picture – she wants students “to always try to do their best work.”

One thing she does not attribute to schools in her native country is her desire to become a school teacher, “I don’t think I ever looked at my teacher and

wanted to be a teacher.” During a conversation with Olga after school one day, she explains some of the differences she sees between the schools she attended in the former Soviet Union and the schools here:

It was pretty much just focused on discipline, memorization and getting your stuff done...just being afraid to be called to the board. The teacher was something like a dictator. ‘You do this, this, this and that.’ I don’t think I would have wanted to be a teacher in Russia...It would have been just a job. Here, every day is filled with learning and experiences...it’s also fun.

While teaching in a school classroom never really appealed to Olga when she was younger, she did have dreams of teaching – teaching music. With a father deeply involved in choir directing, singing and writing music, there was an expectation that his children would be musically inclined as well. So Olga went to music school, walking directly across the street from her home early in the morning. She would have lessons for a couple of hours before she went to regular school and her evenings were spent on homework. She didn’t mind the added work, “I loved playing the piano and singing. Singing was my passion...I’ve always wanted to be a music teacher...I just loved music and I had really good teachers – how they worked with me and the impression they left.”

Although her students now benefit from her love of music – she sometimes uses songs to teach new vocabulary and content – it is far different from being the music teacher she had hoped to be. It did not take Olga long to realize that in the United States, it would be extremely difficult to realize her

dream of teaching music. She did however, began to see teaching school as a viable career direction.

Over here it's really hard to go to a music school...it's very different from what it is in Russia. Over there it was such easier; there were music schools everywhere and you got paid really good. So, over here, I figured, 'I can't really do that but I can still teach.'

"MY DREAMS WERE SHATTERED"

Olga's journey to the classroom mirrors, in a sense, the journey her family took that ultimately led them to Southwest Washington. She left the only home she had ever known to move, first to Moscow, then to Austria, and finally to Italy before arriving in the United States almost a year later, in the middle of her 8th grade year. Olga's first year of college also took her away from her home, this time without her family. "I found it just so hard for me, being away from my family and friends...American people are different...I couldn't really find too many friends...I was just being lonely. It was really hard."

During this first year in college, Olga's work ethic and discipline served her well. Carrying a full load at the university and taking music lessons, she also worked outside of school to pay for her expenses, "Every weekend, I'd drive home because I had a job here and then I had two jobs there...because it was expensive and my parents couldn't afford it. I got grants but I still had to pay." After an exhausting year, Olga decided to take some time to get her bearings, "It was so crazy that after that one year I said, 'I do not want to do that anymore'...I didn't even know what I wanted to be."

It didn't take long for her to figure out what she wanted to be. During her year off, she worked as an interpreter and discovered a love for working with people and the fulfillment of using her "language skills." Her future came into focus. As she volunteered in her church, her enjoyment working with kids in the AWANA program helped to further clarify her path, "I just decided I wanted to teach....It was just something I just came to realize."

After attending another out of state university, and with only a few classes and student teaching standing in the way of her teacher certification, Olga faced a tremendous hurdle – the state certification test. Not passing this test would keep her from completing her goal to become a teacher. As she relates the story to me she pronounces "test" with clear disdain, "I took that *test* four times and came [very close] to passing it. So my adviser tells me, 'Well, you cannot be a teacher.' I was just so devastated...my dreams were shattered."

Fortunately, for the school district in which she now works, Olga's advisor's advice brought her back to Southwest Washington and into elementary school classrooms. "She said, 'go out there and get a job working with kids. You need to build up the language the teachers use.'" And that is just what Olga did. "My uncle... was already working in the district...and he said, 'Why don't you apply? You have the skills and you want to be a teacher, so apply.'" Within no time Olga was hired as a paraprofessional in the same district where she now works as a teacher. It was the ELL Department Manager who told her about the BETAP scholarship – the same manager who later hired her as a Newcomers teacher.

“A LOT OF WHAT HELPED ME...
WAS THAT I WAS A PARAPROFESIONAL”

Not only did the BETAP scholarship help Olga to finally realize her dream of teaching and move her from assistant to teacher, she also credits the program with giving her voice wings; it made all the difference for her “...just having people that understand you and being able to freely speak your mind without being afraid that somebody’s going to laugh at you for saying something wrong.” Before her BETAP experience, Olga, as so often ELL students do, chose to remain silent.

All the way though high school and college, I would never speak in class...I didn’t want them to hear my accent... they might think, ‘Oh, you don’t know how to talk.’ I’ve always been quiet and always been shy...I was afraid of my accent and that people might not understand me or...they’d make fun of me.

In nonchalant fashion, Olga tells me that her accent is no longer a main focus for her, “It doesn’t bother me at all right now...I think that part of it is going through the BETAP experience and working with kids.” But she is often reminded of it, “A lot of people at school say ‘Oh your accent is so cute.’ What’s so cute about it? It’s not cute!” She admits to me that at times she does listen for her accent in her speech when she teaches, “I think it never ends.”

Sitting at a table in the back of her classroom after the kids have gone for the day, Olga credits working in a school as an ELL paraprofessional before and

during the completion of her certification coursework with providing her with a valuable environment in which to practice her teaching:

A lot of what helped me [with] being prepared was that I was a paraprofessional for a lot of years before I started. Just working with kids with different languages and backgrounds, working with teachers, and principals and parents – I think that’s very important....Just having that experience while going through school and trying to apply some strategies and ideas...helped a lot.

When I ask her to talk about the differences between her work as a paraprofessional and as a classroom teacher in the Newcomers’ program, Olga doesn’t pause long before responding with a confidence in her voice, “[There’s] not a lot of difference. I still see myself as just working with kids and helping them learn the language...it’s just having more responsibility and being in charge more... I like teaching.” She tells me, “It’s been a positive experience...” but also admits, “There is more pressure...being in charge of the whole classroom instead of just a few kids...I need to get to, and help everyone and it takes a lot of work and it’s very busy...it’s a lot harder.”

When the ELL department manager initially suggested she move to the overflow position in the Newcomers’ program, Olga admits that she was “scared” but that her choice to move on from the role of paraprofessional was the right one, “I was kind of tired and getting bored, [the manager] would tell me to try things...I didn’t have that freedom to do what I was taught and trained to do...so being able to do that is amazing for me.” She feels a certain confidence as a

teacher when she reflects upon what she has experienced in her short time at Newcomers, “half time, fulltime, a split class – a lot of different things,” and still she sees that, “most of the kids are able to exit, either early or on time, with a reasonable amount of language.”

In a reflective manner, Olga notes her own growth since completing BETAP and finally realizing her dream of becoming a classroom teacher, “I see how I went from shy and quiet to more confident and social and outspoken and...It’s just different – totally different from what I used to be and what I’ve become as far as confidence and self esteem.”

“SEEING THE CHANGE IS SO AMAZING”

Olga is an open book with her students – literally. She shares an autobiography she has written, “...so they get to see my baby pictures and all that fun stuff.” Her students know that she too, is an immigrant, “I refer to it a lot, like when I was in school or where I lived...I offer my own life experiences to my students...” Although she teaches students from a wide array of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, she believes she can be a model for all of them:

I was in the same place once where they are right now. I also struggled to learn English and get used to a new country...I think I also represent hope for the future – that one day they will grow up and know English very well and may teach others as well.

Olga’s eyes light up as she shares with me what she enjoys most about her current position, “To see the progress in these kids from month to month, it’s just, all of the sudden, ‘Oh look at that! You went from that group to this group!’

It's just unbelievable...and just seeing their writing... seeing the change.”

Especially inspiring for her are the students who make the greatest gains. It's the successes with students like the 3rd grade Russian girl with no native language literacy who one day begins to write in English or the Korean boy who sits, sullen and withdrawn, plugging his ears for almost a month but now tells jokes and writes funny stories that remind her how important her role is in the lives of her students. She is driven by “trying to make a difference in the students' lives and seeing them [grow]...being able to give the skills to the kids that they need to go from being quiet ...to starting to speak.” Olga leans forward in her chair, her voice almost bubbles over with excitement, “I am just amazed at how things change with these kids...seeing the change is so exciting – it motivates you to keep going.”

I Come From

By Luda

I come from a house full of children and songs
 where one and all wanted to sing.
 From dolls made of paper or plastic,
 from poems and prose read and cited.



I come from a street
 covered with a cold crystal snow
 that wouldn't melt for ages.

From the smell of the thunder and lightning in late,
 lazy spring that bloomed when it wanted.



I come from my grandma's
 pirogyies and bread rolls
 frosted with melting sweet syrup and nuts,
 from homemade meatballs and potatoes
 concealed in the thick brown gravy.

I come from

Victor and Hope ~ compassionate couple
 that love one another with care and respect.

From parents who tend to be role-models,
 wanting the best for their kids.

I come from a land faraway
 a red country controlled by dictators
 whose slogan claims "All men are brothers"...
 as long as everyone is obeying the rules.



I come from prayers loud and silent,
 a desire for "freedom that is stronger than laws."
 From "It's hard not to be like all the others, but
 you really need to trust your Heavenly Father."

I come from glossy pictures in black and white,
 stacked in bluish-greenish boxes.
 From colorful wooden dolls
 brought from Russia to keep past memories
 in the future.



I come from a place of
 Dreams and love,
 that made me who I am.
 I come from a way that
 leads to a bright gate
 and a new journey
 to happen another day.

LUDA

“GIVE ME FIVE!”

It's just after lunch time when I enter the portable classroom Luda shares with the other ELL paraeducator at this Southwest Washington elementary school. Today I am accompanying her to a classroom where she will work with three students. As I walk up the ramp and into the room, I find Luda busily preparing her materials for the lesson. She cheerfully greets me and moves from her desk to a large round table in the corner of the room where there is a variety of instructional tools. Flashcards, math manipulatives, money sets and book sets are ready for use.

Around the rest of the room, which looks like it might also serve as storage for computer tables, there are supply cabinets of teaching materials and bookcases filled with children's literature. Searching library and garage sales, Luda takes every opportunity to gather books in a variety of languages to make available to her students. A colorful collection of posters attending to a variety of grade levels adorn the walls. A few very large posters show world distributions of wealth, food and other resources. There are other posters displaying poetry as well as color and counting charts and one with the steps of writer's workshop. On the whiteboard I notice a word bank and other indications of writing instruction.

Luda collects what she will be using and neatly organizes the materials in a stylish lace and bead trimmed purple shoulder bag – this is Luda's mobile classroom. Although she does have an actual classroom, it is not used regularly for instructing ELL students. Per the district expectations, Luda provides a “push-

in” model of support for second language learners *in program* at her school. In many cases she collaborates with the classroom teachers to provide instructional support for the ELL students consistent with their classroom curriculum. Not all teachers however, feel equipped to support their ELL students and depend on Luda to know what to do. Sometimes she pulls students with limited English out of the classroom, “The teachers don’t know what to do with them... They say ‘Take them, Take them!’ I see the panic that they have with those kids.” Other times teachers seek her expertise as was the case just this week when a kindergarten teacher asked Luda for recommendations on teaching with a new ELL student.

This afternoon, the three kindergarten boys she will support are all smiles when they see Luda enter the room; they are eager to join her at the reading table in the back corner of the room. I can see why. Luda immediately assigns roles for their first activity. After a quick round of *rock-paper-scissors*, the *pointer* is decided and Luda and the students begin singing the sounds of the alphabet from their individual alphabet charts. She is full of praise and encouragement for the students, “Good job! You remembered the letter!” They continue to the end of the alphabet – Luda singing right along with the boys, “...jelly, jelly, jelly, j-j-j.” As she often does working with her students, she gives high-fives to each boy, “Good job, give me five! You guys did a wonderful job!” Charged with enthusiasm, the boys next take turns reading single words from her hand-written flashcard set. Luda holds the cards for them to read. Each child appears highly

motivated to garner enough word cards to create a sentence, “Okay! You get the card!” And they quickly add to their collections

Luda teaches the students to work as a team, “Who can help J? You guys can help him.” With each student victory, she is equally delighted. Her smiles tell the boys, “I believe you can do this – you are reading!” and the students respond. Each is so excited to read and then write the sentence he’s created on his own mini-whiteboard. For these kindergartners and the thirty-three other students she works with each day, Luda is a cheerleader. Her goal is to “plant confidence” in her ELL students:

I’ve done it a lot – when they compare themselves with regular students....Especially when they get to the older grades, they understand they are way behind the rest of the students; they know they are not there and they need that confidence....To my students I am not only a mentor, coach or a tutor who helps them to [develop] their academic skills, but I am also an adult with similar...background experiences who they can trust with their emotions and feelings.

I would describe Luda as an intuitive teacher. She seems to know what her students need, not only academically but also emotionally: “I offer them a safe learning environment with various purposeful [teaching strategies] and assignments that will keep each student actively engaged in learning.” Since the days of babysitting her younger brothers, she’s enjoyed working with children. Luda loves kids – it is apparent in her expression and her voice when she shares about the learning of her students. She is wholly engaged when she is working

with them. For students who so often lack a voice in their mainstream classrooms, Luda affirms their “good ideas” and invites them to tell the personal stories that connect to their learning. On one occasion, she jokes with a student about the difference between *cirrus* clouds and *serious* clouds. Another student who dislikes writing is given a mini whiteboard for writer’s workshop “because it motivates him to write.”

Luda’s style of teaching now is very different from the style of instruction she received in schools in the former Soviet Union. Although, admittedly, she would like to see the math curriculum here “reinforced” with a change of instructional approaches, she feels her freedom as a teacher in the United States benefits students:

I don’t believe anymore that...structured teaching is the only [way] to learn. ...My teacher preparation in the USA has changed my educational philosophy. I’ve learned that there are many teaching and learning styles and I can use my teaching creativity to adjust my curriculum to my student learning needs.

“YOU WILL MAKE IT; YOU GOTTA GO...

YOU GOTTA APPLY FOR THE...SCHOLARSHIP!”

Luda has traveled a long way – literally and figuratively – to get to the place she is now. As a little girl growing up in Ukraine, she loved listening to stories read or told to her by her mother and grandmother. Early on, she loved to explore and discover new places and new ideas. This sense of adventure would serve her well in her life-altering move to the United States.

During the “Soviet time” it was her family’s dream to come to America, “My dad would listen to *The Voice of Freedom*.” Even though the “Soviet media” portrayed a far different view of the United States, Luda’s family chose to believe what they “heard on Freedom; it was more realistic.” Under Gorbachev’s leadership the political climate appeared to be changing in the late 80s. However, they couldn’t be certain the freedom would last; her parents “wanted to go to a country where they would not be persecuted for what they believe.” Finally, after waiting seven long years to get approval from their own government to leave, Luda, her husband, their 18 month old baby, and her parents, immigrated to America – a move that would renew old dreams and summon new courage and confidence.

One afternoon, in her ELL classroom, Luda tells me about her first career dream. It was of course, to teach. Until intermediate school in Ukraine, Luda’s educational experience was quite disheartening. In her 4th grade year however, a very special teacher inspired her and did much to erase the negative impression left by Luda’s primary teacher:

I had the same teacher from 1st to 3rd grade. She didn’t like me because I was a Christian. She would point me out...she would pick on me....My 4th grade teacher was the opposite. I don’t know what motivated her but she never mentioned me being different from other students. Basically, she treated me as every other kid...I appreciated it a lot. My grades went up because she provided a safe learning environment for me...She was a

nice person. She would not separate me as a bad child. She treated me with respect.

As Luda grew older and attended middle school, she came to understand that in her native country, the political perspective at the time would likely prevent her teaching dream from ever being realized.

I was a Christian and in Soviet Union people were not allowed to practice any religion. That's why I had lots of pressure from teachers. And that's why I believed... 'I cannot be a teacher here; it's not possible to be a teacher if you are not a communist and if you believe in God.'

With her characteristic sense of humor, she laughs as she tells me, "So basically, I had to think about a different career." After about five years of considering geology she finally decided on fashion designing in college. Luda earned what would be the equivalent of an Associate of Arts degree in Clothing Design and began working as an outerwear technical designer. When the move to America came, Luda's plans changed yet again. Understandably, learning English became Luda's main focus, "In the former Soviet Union not many people spoke English, there was no purpose to learn another language; we couldn't go outside the borders of the Soviet Union...we were not motivated."

As might be expected, it was all about survival, "When I first came here I wanted to learn English and get a job...just to survive...I didn't really have a big picture..." She hoped that she could continue with her fashion designing career once living in America but was discouraged from further pursuing that direction once she arrived, "I was told that to do that you have to live in the big city, like

New York and that it would take years to move up.” She admits she never really thought about getting a “cool job” here because “in Russia, when you are...thirty years old you are too old to go to school...so I thought, ‘my career is over; I cannot do much here.’”

That doubt washed away once Luda began learning English; she knew then she could move forward and find a career. Her first job here was as an assistant in day care, “I *enjoyed* working with the kids although I didn’t know much English – I learned lots of basic English there.” She laughs and tells me how she learned the word *thirsty*. A little fellow came to her and told her he was thirsty:

I didn’t know the meaning of the word ‘thirsty’. I thought, ‘maybe he wants to play a game,’ so I said, ‘Okay, go play.’ He approached me again... ‘teacher, I am very thirsty!’ I said, ‘Okay, good job! Go and play.’...I didn’t have my dictionary with me.

On his third visit she finally asked the boy to show her what he wanted and he pointed to the water fountain. She laughs harder and leans back in her chair, “That’s how I learned the word thirsty!”

Ultimately it was through her son’s ELL kindergarten class that Luda finally found her way back to her first dream of teaching, “When I would take him there I really liked what they were doing.” She could see herself working there; she believed she could teach children. At the time, Luda was attending a local community college working toward her Associate of Arts degree, but admits her main goal was “to learn English.” During this same period she was hired as an

ELL paraprofessional in the same district she where now works. It was through this position she learned of the BETAP scholarship. Luda was encouraged by her college counselor to apply for the scholarship but had doubts, “I didn’t think I would become a teacher because of my language...with my accent and everything – I thought it wouldn’t be a good choice.” Finally, convinced by the counselor and with her husband’s encouragement and a courageous spirit, Luda accepted the challenge and joined the BETAP cohort. She is now a certified teacher and though she is teaching, her dream remains partially unfulfilled. Although she has indeed come far, she would tell you that she is not yet where she wants to be – in her own classroom with her own students, every day.

“NOT EVERYBODY GETS THE GOLD MEDAL”

After three years and several interviews, Luda is unquestionably ready to attain the goal of teaching in her own classroom, “Although I love my work, my skills and competence make me feel that I’m not challenged enough.” She suspects her accent and language skill and the anxiety she has about them might hinder her from performing well in interviews.

There are some jobs that English wouldn’t be a big issue....I believe that my problem is English, not that I am not a good teacher or that I don’t know...how to work with students. And I understand principals; they don’t want to hire someone...who speaks broken English.

She elaborates, “I had several interviews and I see that they hire teachers – people that speak better English...who are native speakers. And I understand; I would probably do the same in their place.” Although I suspect this is

disheartening for Luda, her sense of humor persists. She smiles as she remarks, "...it's probably like in sports, not everybody gets the gold medal."

Rather than giving up, the teacher who so skillfully gives students the gift of confidence looks for ways to gain more herself. Luda has been assertive in preparing for future interviews. She has interviewed simply for the practice, asked one principal for a mock interview and contacted panel members after an interview to learn about how she might improve. Her experiences have led her to consider how the system might be improved:

They only see you during the interview and they don't go to the classroom. I think it would be a good thing if they would come to your classroom or have some time to observe you in the classroom so they would have a different picture.

However frustrating, her own experience is one of the reasons Luda is effective in building confidence and courage in her students. She personally understands the challenges of learning a second language in a way that many native English-speaking teachers might not be able to.

Sometimes when I am anxious, I make lots of mistakes and sometimes I forget a simple word that I might use every single day but it's just when I am anxious...I cannot express myself so basically, I don't show who I am.

Luda's self confidence and the confidence others have in her skill are not an issue, "I do see myself as a teacher...I have great strategies to work with students...Since my education provided me with the professional knowledge and teaching skills, I feel confident when I work with students and teachers." She tells

me that teachers often ask her advice and opinions on ELL topics and students. When she goes into their classrooms to support students, “They don’t go over every detail on the assignment...they are assuming I’m competent.”

Since completing her certification coursework, Luda feels she has become “better and much more professional” than when she had to guess at how to best support learners. For now, Luda remains in the role of a paraprofessional, hungry for more and savoring the moments when she feels she is really able to teach as she has been trained to do:

I love teaching in the 1st grade classroom. Whenever I go there I just feel that I am a teacher. And the teacher lets me...she always tells me ‘I like what you are doing’ and she says that she is watching me and tells me she is learning from me. Other kids, regular kids, can join me too when I have the little circle time...I teach there.

“THERE ARE A LOT OF THINGS I CAN OFFER”

Sitting at the round table in her room late one afternoon Luda and I talk about her role with students. She may not have her own classroom but she takes every opportunity to teach, “There are lots of things I can offer. Anything that is positive about learning – positive learning attitude.” Her goal is to “influence their attitudes towards learning.” And it is not only with ELL students she feels this calling. When once her accent came into question with a student, Luda used the opportunity to increase the young man’s understanding about the bigger world around him and to perhaps, plant a few seeds of compassion:

I told him that I speak another language, that English is my second language – that I am learning another language, ‘It’s a long process and I might be learning English ‘till I am 100 Years old.’ I told him that I am not dumb; I am a smart person and I know what I am doing and that I might express myself differently than he is used to hearing...”If you go to a different country...you would make the same mistakes...that’s okay, people travel around the world and they go to different countries so you might end up in different country too. You will be that same smart boy and maybe you will not be able to express yourself the way you want to...you will appreciate it if people [are] patient with you.’

This teacher who left her homeland fourteen years ago without English language skills and an uncertain future strives to improve the futures of her ELL students. She hopes not only to help them “successfully adjust in the new culture” she hopes they learn “not to be ashamed of who they are.” Luda’s convictions are strong:

I can teach students and my students will succeed and I will do whatever it takes to have them succeed. I know lots of strategies and I can use lots of approaches. I can just put myself into it and I can reach a goal that I have for the students.

Almost every question I ask Luda about her teaching philosophy or what she wants to help students accomplish is answered with an illustration of a success she has had with a given student. She practically glows when she tells me about a 4th grade student she noticed was having low self-esteem due to his

challenges with math. He is told at home and at school that he is “not good at numbers.” He doubts his own ability, “He has that tape going on in his head that he’s not good at it...When I was tutoring him, I inspired him, praising his ability to speak two languages and saying, ‘If you’re fluent in two languages, you are a smart boy – you can do your numbers.’” Because he is a kinesthetic learner, Luda uses a variety of manipulatives to teach the concepts – and it’s helping, “He told me yesterday that he understood how division works. He had been struggling with his multiplication and division since third grade.”

It is with students like this boy, that Luda feels she is most able to contribute:

When a student doesn’t believe that he can achieve his learning goal, I help him to gain self-confidence. I make him believe that he is capable of achieving his goal...Maybe when he grows up he will remember me for helping him – not to give up – to be motivated – to believe in himself. Maybe one day he will say, ‘You know what? I am good at math.’

Where I Come From

By Mae

I come from a gray two-story house on a quiet street with tall pine trees in the front and back.

I come from Heli and Edgar
I am the middle sister
of four other siblings.



I come from classical music,
violin, piano and choir practices and performances
in schools, churches and concert halls.

I come from a childhood of heaven outdoors –
summers on the beach,
walks in the forest, blueberry and mushroom picking,
and beautiful sunsets.



I come from basic needs,
practical birthday and Christmas gifts,
wearing hand-me-downs
and still being happy.

I come from speaking quietly,
respecting the elderly,
listening to them and obeying...
even when I didn't like it.



I come from dark bread,
potatoes and sauerkraut,
red and black currant jelly
and very few exotic fruits.

I come from Soviet occupation,
forced language and political brainwashing,
only whispering, "Merry Christmas,"
being close to expulsion from school because
I believed and I told them so.

I come from starting all over, raising my
children and taking the chances for a
better life here in America.

I come from working hard,
not quitting,
instilling my values in my children,
and seeing results
on the NFL Network on Sunday mornings.



I come from very few pictures but rich
memories –
all the way from Grandpa's
farm and smoke-sauna
to eight-lane highways
in Georgia.



Where I come from I learned
To have an open heart and mind,
not to be afraid of anything
and allow God to be in charge, not me!



MAE**“I WANT THE PROCESS, NOT THE RESULT”**

It's wintertime and even in this southern state talk of snow is in the air – at least during the ESOL lesson for one group of primary students. The kidney-shaped reading table is crowded with students, their books and worksheets. Mae leans in and raises her voice to be heard over the other teacher who is also teaching in the room. The background noise is distracting to the point that I wonder how the students can concentrate, but they do. Their attention is firmly on Mae. “What else do you wear outside when it's cold?” In unison the students excitedly answer, “Jacket!” They go on to read about sledding, “The girl is pulling the sled, say pulling.” Mae steps outside her mandated curriculum guidelines and supplements with strategies she knows will help students. She uses one little girl to gently demonstrate pushing versus pulling, “The girl is *pulling* the sled.” Moments later she invites the students to form and throw imaginary snow balls. They giggle with delight.

There is not a lot of time for students to share their background knowledge or personal experiences with sledding and snow; there is a curriculum to follow and a schedule to keep. This method of direct instruction, recently adopted by the large school district in the Deep South frustrates Mae and reminds her of instructional methods in a different country on the other side of the world, “The worst thing is that I am feeling like I am back in the Soviet Union...ignorant people are telling me what to do and you know that it is not working – you *know* it's not working!”

For this teacher who intimately understands the language acquisition process from a first-hand perspective, the idea of exclusively using direct instruction is concerning. In her view this instructional approach does not provide language learners with enough authentic opportunity to speak and learn to use language naturally. She believes this method is counter-productive and is not reluctant to say so, “How can it work when you tell a kindergartener – direct instruction: 25 minutes – ‘what is this? A cat. Say the whole thing. This is a cat. Yes, this is a cat. What is this? A book. Say the whole thing. This is a book...’ you don’t speak English on a command!”

I recall watching Mae teach a lesson before she moved from Southwest Washington. In this lesson her focus was on challenging students to think critically and debate with one another whether the character Tyya in the *Enchanted Caribou* (Cleaver, 1985) was making the right decision. Reflecting on the lesson, I understand why direct instruction would conflict with her teaching philosophy. Additionally, perhaps, the present situation is too close to her own Soviet-influenced education.

Do what you are told – don’t ask questions – there is no collaboration...At the end, if anybody had any questions, nobody ever asked. ‘You have your book, that’s what you read. These are the questions you need to answer. This is the test we are doing’ and that’s very cut and dry.

This is obviously an emotional issue for Mae. She is visibly charged as she likens the current pedagogical direction of her school district to what she left in Estonia, “...this is what I escaped from – I don’t like that mentality – control –

ignorance and you're telling me that I have to do what I know is absolutely wrong!" She admits she may be less tolerant of the current situation because of her experiences in the former Soviet Union but emphasizes her main concern is for students. Over three hundred of the seven-hundred students at her school are non-native English-speakers and almost two hundred of those students, about 29% of the student body, are currently "in program." The responsibility for their ESOL instruction is divided among four teachers.

Seeing a critical need for effective strategies, Mae takes every opportunity to implement solid second language instruction. She uses high level literature to increase student vocabulary, but doubting that students can benefit, mainstream teachers and administrators complain that the material is "too hard." Mae wants desperately to write with her students but is only allowed to support their reading while she works with them in the classroom. Of her fourth grade students, she laments: "I should be writing like crazy with them!... [But] "What do you say when your principal says to you 'what writing are you talking about? They can't read.' What's that? You don't wait until you can read in a foreign language before you start writing!"

Mae's personal teaching philosophy is shaped by her own experiences and training. She has high expectations for her students and wants to expose them to as many learning opportunities as possible. While she acknowledges that for some teachers results are paramount, her opinion differs slightly, "I want the process, not the result...the end is not as important as how you go through the process to get there." Mae is willing to speak up for what she believes in –

especially when it comes to her students. Although she gets along with the other staff she laughs, “I think they know that I am going to say what I think – they don’t want to talk to me directly” about ESOL instructional issues.

“ME – WORKING IN A SCHOOL IN AMERICA? NO WAY!”

“Catch the seven o’clock train to St. Petersburg Square and in the morning you will meet in the park (third seat from the left) a man. You visit for 10 minutes and then you come back...” This might sound like a Russian spy movie, but for Mae, it was reality. When she tells me these stories I marvel that this woman, the mother of three adult children, newly remarried and living in suburbia USA, has lived such intriguing international adventures.

As a teenager in Estonia – a country linking many of the republics of the former Soviet Union to Europe – Mae was often involved in moving religious and political literature, even microfilm, in and out of Soviet dominated Eastern Europe. Her father’s role as a preacher in a Baptist church, which just happened to be located directly across from the KGB building, afforded Mae and her friends numerous opportunities to become involved in subversive politics, “Some of it was dangerous stuff and we really didn’t realize how dangerous it was...that is a good thing I guess...” Once Mae did realize the potential consequences of her “underground church” work she left the daring escapades to others and soon took on the new challenges of marriage and motherhood.

In fact, it was not because of some compelling desire, but her own children, that first led Mae to teaching. As with so many decisions Mae has made in her life – it was for practical reasons. As a means of earning some money and

to receive a reduced enrollment fee for her own children, Mae worked first as an assistant in the kindergarten class of day care center and later as a music teacher. Interestingly, in a way, the music teacher position fulfilled a prediction Mae made in second grade. As a young girl, the middle child of five, she never really had a certain profession in mind, “they asked that in elementary school...I was in a special music school...I couldn’t figure out anything else...I just wanted to be a musician...play the violin...I figured that was a good answer.” Being in the music field from the age of six, “it was kind of a given that was the field...but it didn’t work out like that.”

A decade later, Mae’s marriage ended and she found herself contemplating how to care for her three children on her own. Because one of her sisters was in America, Mae considered immigrating but thought it would be too difficult. On her way to the United States, Mae’s sister had stayed in several refugee camps in Europe and Israel. Mae would not put her children through this and thankfully, she didn’t have to. By the time she was ready to leave Estonia in 1992 as a religious refugee, the “middle camps” no longer existed and Mae and her children were able to move directly to Southwest Washington to join her sister.

As a result of years of correspondence with English-speaking pen pals combined with the instruction she received in school, Mae had adequate communication skills in English to quickly find employment when she arrived in America. Although she began her work here as a receptionist for a refugee agency and later a Russian-speaking case manager, it wasn’t long before Mae

once again found herself in a school. Occasional interpreting assignments took Mae to the local school district. After once such occasion, someone casually mentioned that perhaps Mae could get a job at the school district. Mae recalls that her reaction was almost visceral, “Me – Working at a school in America? NO WAY!” Her response had nothing to do with a lack of self-confidence, rather it stemmed from her aversion to what she described as “American school classroom mentality” and the “terrifying experience” of taking her second grade daughter to school here.

However, once again practicality won out and Mae ended up working for the school district after all. At the time, the appeal for her to work as a paraprofessional in the district’s Newcomers program was limited to the simple fact that it was “a better job” than the one she had. The benefit of a work schedule aligned with her children’s school calendar eliminated having to leave them alone, especially in the summer. Her income was less but she was in the same district with her children and that was her priority. In retrospect, Mae tells me that her time working in the Newcomers Center turned out to be invaluable:

Those years in Newcomers really showed me how they come and what...stages they go through in the first year. People really don’t know it until they work with it right there. Because Newcomers was such a special setting – we got them the whole day, so you really get to see them through all the different subjects and how they act and react and learn and can’t learn...the good and the bad.

While in the Newcomers Center, Mae also valued the “very close connection with the parents.” Having experienced the turmoil of leaving her own children in a new school setting so different from the one she knew, gave Mae a special empathy for the newcomer parents:

I knew how scared I was when I sent my kids to school; it was like, ‘oh, my goodness.” I would go and stay there myself any time if I could...So, just to put them at ease [I’d] say ‘come in here, you can sit here,’ and ‘welcome’ and ‘that’s where they are going to be sitting,’...You need to do that! Because it’s scary for them. So, I was able to walk them through and say ‘you can come in here anytime’ because nobody told me that.

By the time Mae became aware of the BETAP scholarship for bilingual ESL paraprofessionals, she had two days to decide whether or not to participate. She told herself, “I’m not a quitter – at least I am going to try.” It made good sense to her to take advantage of the program even though she knew it would be difficult to be a parent, work full-time and take courses. For Mae, “free education” was hard to refuse.

I would have never dared to think about that but they said that they were going to pay for my schooling and I knew that I wanted to improve my economical situation. You don’t stay on that staff assistant’s income the rest of your life, you need to do something else and that was the opportunity. ...I just did what needed to be done.

Mae tells me the cohort was a source of stability for her: “It was a good support system...sharing the same stuff...the problems...the good and the bad

and sharing the stress.” From her cohort experiences, Mae takes years of precious memories and lasting friendships, but the “best thing was to be in the school and really see how things are done and then go to the next level.”

“THAT’S WHAT I LEARNED AND THAT’S WHAT I WANT TO PASS ON”

To say that Mae is passionate about helping ELL parents to better support their children’s learning would certainly be an understatement. As a paraprofessional, first in the Newcomers Center then in a mainstream school, she was able to be the link between home and school. Whether it was phoning a parent about a discipline issue, translating at a conference, or helping parents register students, she made sure to inform and educate parents as best she could. Now as a teacher of ESOL students, she feels in an even better position to help parents and students.

As a result of her own traumatic experiences with her daughter just after arriving in the United States, Mae maintains special focus on teaching parents how to help their children. She tells me about a recent conference, one similar to the several a year she attends for her students. The well-meaning classroom teacher asked the parent to “work on” content area skills at home, “What does that mean? What exactly does that mean?” Mae has powerful memories of being in a similar situation. Sent away once from a parent conference for her daughter with a packet of math exercises, she had no idea what to do with the materials – *how* to help her daughter, “That’s what I needed and nobody gave it to me.” This experience motivates her, “I’ve been in that ESOL parent’s shoes. I tell everybody, ‘ask the teacher specific questions.’...You can’t help your child if they

say ‘work on the vocabulary,’ well, what do you mean? How?...It makes me mad because nobody told me how to help my child! I *could* help – I *wanted* to, I was able...”

Remembering the depth of her own frustration, with tears in her eyes, Mae emphasizes the importance of giving parents practical and tangible “things they can go and *do*...That’s what I do, because I can see that Spanish-speaking woman sitting there – it’s *me* because nobody told me what to do.” So Mae shows parents how to help – how to make flashcards or use coins for math practice. She knows the feeling of powerlessness of the parents, “Of course you want to help your child...Every time I see these people I know what goes on in their mind...‘what in the world am I going to do when I go home?’...That’s what I’ve learned and that’s what I want to pass on.”

Mae’s support is not limited to the parents. She considers herself an advocate for her ESOL students as well, “There are plenty of teachers who are ignorant towards ESOL kids and you just have to...make the information available and explain what’s happening...they just don’t...see so you have to be there to advocate for your ESOL kids.” Mae believes that her background and the experiences with her own children give her the ability to “understand those kids versus anybody else...” She enjoys being in the position to help,

“I like it...they come to you because they trust you. For the higher grade kids you are their buffer between school and home very often and you’re the one they can talk to. They don’t talk to the other teachers sometimes but they share stuff with you. I’ve had ESOL kids telling me things and I go

to the teacher later and say, 'by the way, what about this? And she said, 'I never heard that.' So I go with that information and maybe we need to take some steps or I am telling the teacher to be aware of whatever happened at home."

Mae feels that what she can do best is "help these kids." She has been there, "I guess that's the reason I am teaching [ESOL], I know how it was...the emotions and the knowledge...I know the path."

"THAT'S MY FIRST LOVE...AND I THINK I AM GOOD AT IT"

Knowing, first hand, the path traveled by immigrant families is just one component in Mae's smooth transition into a certified teaching position. Her confidence, experiences as a paraeducator and her teacher preparation have served to create a strong foundation for teaching ESOL in a public school. As we sit in a study room in the university library on one of Mae's visits back to Southwest Washington, she reflects on her decision to pursue teaching through the BETAP scholarship while she worked as a paraeducator "...that was a really good avenue to go with. Because I was doing it, I was told that I was good; I knew I could have things I could offer because of the background and it was just the logical step to keep going."

The education and training she received at the university transformed her understanding of what teaching truly entails and the breadth of factors teachers must consider. Mae shakes her head, "I had no idea that you had to deal with the parents, and all the extra stuff you have; the meetings, you have to take extra classes...these things they were new to me. I did not know that that's part of the

package.” The system she knew was quite different from the one she was learning about. Mae now embraces what teaching in the United States represents. She reflects about how she might be a different teacher here than in her native country: “I think I am more child or student friendly and centered than I would be in my country...teaching there was only teacher-centered. I am looking for student feedback, opinions, guesses – I need them to speak English so anything they say is better than silence.”

Mae clearly has confidence in the combination of her experience and education, “I know there is nothing new they can throw at me...I’ve seen it all...pretty much...you have your degree, you have your experience, you have your practice...it’s all those steps together.” There have however, been some new demands to get used to. One of the biggest challenges for Mae in her new position has been the planning. It was quite challenging to plan for every group – using new materials and being in a new place, “When you’re a parapro you really don’t do much planning. You do some here or there, find the book or find the story. But most of the time it is set up...you go with the teacher’s flow, not with your own agenda...” Mae recalls spending a great deal of time on planning, “There’s tons of stuff to teach so where do I go, where do I want to end up?”

Her teacher preparation helped to refine Mae’s instructional skill, “I have a lot better - clearer picture about my students’ ability levels...now because I can see the gaps and I am able to fill them in as I teach.” The courses she took, “...opened up the whole new ways of thinking and seeing the learner in a different light. Especially when we studied about different learning

styles...knowing the cultural background helps to teach better and be a better teacher.” She hopes that her students see her not only as their teacher but as “someone whom they can trust, someone who takes time to find out what they are trying to say, what they need to learn and [who is] there to help them achieve and be successful whatever they do or learn.”

Believing without a doubt that her “whole life experience” points to teaching ESOL, Mae smiles but speaks with a serious tone, “My background and my confidence...that was my biggest strength because I knew I could do it. Because I’ve done it here...And the truth is ESOL kids are exactly the same no matter what – just little variations but pretty much, that’s the field, it doesn’t change. I want [to teach] ESOL because that’s my specialty and I know that I can be the best in that area...That’s my first love, that’s what I want to do and I think that I am good at it.”

Where I Come From

By Eva



I come from my mother's love
for reading and learning,
Encouragement and unwavering support.
I come from my father's drive for success,
Also broken promises, and values –
I come from such a union.

I come from being a piano player with "godly long fingers"
But, at age twelve, not enough desire
to practice long hours
I suppose my fingers weren't
long enough.



I come from concrete-built
company housing,
Playing guitar in park with friends,
And discussing new songs from America -
The land that only a few of us dared to dream about.



I come from a land
with self-determination ideals
Where Soviet tanks crossed the borders
in the dark and took over the reigns in 1968.
I come from the generation of
"We won't take it anymore!"
A generation that was crushed too soon.

I come from my brothers' adventuresome trips
To our grand-parents' dusty trunks in the attic



Where old books helped us
dream--dream of other
lands and lumberjacks'
lives that must have been
more interesting than ours.

I come from "Study so you have a better life than
mine in a factory."

I come from, "If you'll have a better life there –
then stay,"

With eyes full of tears still today –
twenty eight years later

Six years it took before we met again.



I come from a home my husband, our three
children and I created

After moving around three continents.



I come from thriving on the joy
in my children's eyes
When they share their successes
and happiness.

I come from courage, determination,
and love for my family.

EVA

“CHALLENGE DOESN’T BUILD CHARACTER, IT REVEALS IT”

The move from her classroom inside the building to one of the portable classrooms in the back field of this Southwest Washington middle school was actually not a bad idea since the portable affords Eva a bit more room – when teaching 6th, 7th and 8th graders in a cooperative group format, space definitely helps. The classroom has a cozy feel when I walk in. There are five tables suited for groups of four and another two-person work area near the back of the room. One wall is covered with colorful student-created biographical posters. I remember that Eva’s previous room also had a wide array of student-generated work on the walls. A variety of maps and other posters around the room support student learning and provide them with reminders of reading strategies, tips on metacognition and admirable character traits.

On this day, her nine 7th grade Social Studies ELL students, whom she addresses as “gentlemen” and “ladies,” are working on their daily journals. Nine 8th grade students will be joining the class in about twenty minutes. On the screen for the document projector Eva displays a prompt for them to consider: “Challenge doesn’t build character, it reveals it.” She walks among the tables, “How do you understand this? We can talk about it. Are there any words you don’t understand?” The students think. “Challenge is a hard word to understand sometimes...when you challenge yourself, what are you doing?” As the whole class discussion unfolds, Eva and the students talk about what it means to personally challenge one’s self and what makes up the character of an individual.

Eva is casual and relaxed in her conversation style with the students but she clearly expects them to think critically. She seriously considers their responses and opinions and expertly makes connections to the things she knows her students are interested in. She asks how basketball players challenge themselves and how students have seen character revealed in the participants of reality shows like *Survivor*. Eva invites students to share their own personal stories related to challenges and character. After several minutes of discussing the quote, she directs students to write their interpretations of the quote in their daily journals. As they write, Eva circulates around the room assisting students who ask. She encourages one student, "You're a smart guy," then quickly manages a couple of student behavior issues that arise all the while keeping students focused on their journals.

Eva is steadfast in her efforts to encourage students to think about topics like character, motivation, setting personal goals, and striving to succeed.

I want to empower the kids not only in English and social studies; I want to...give them something out of the life that's out there and bring it [closer] to them...they are not realistic right now and I know they have no way of knowing. I know they will not understand or grasp everything but I think if we can do something, they can participate...maybe they will be more open to it when it comes along next time.

This year has been a challenging one for Eva in the area of student behavior. She has worked diligently with students, parents and administrators to find ways for students to be successful. She has created individual behavior

contracts and takes the time to conference one-on-one with students. Eva invests long hours and a great deal of energy into her lesson planning and instruction, “Intentionally, I try to develop interesting lessons and work on having a good relationship with all my students...I show my students that they are responsible for their own learning and that this can be fun too.”

“IF YOU THINK YOU CAN HAVE A BETTER LIFE – STAY”

As a very young girl growing up in Nový Jičín, Czechoslovakia, Eva admired some neighbors whose grandmother lived in France and would often send presents. She remembers thinking, “Wouldn’t it be great if someone somewhere, from another country would send me a present or something?” What she really wanted was to see the world. She wasn’t interested in a vacation or a brief stay in another country, her dream was to “experience how people lived, thought, how they dealt with issues.” Since traveling around the world was not a realistic option for a girl growing up in a communist controlled country, Eva turned to correspondence with people in other countries to learn more about the world. She exchanged letters with many pen pals including residents of Russia, Germany, and Italy. In one case Eva corresponded for over ten years with a girl, whose address Eva’s father brought home from a business trip.

During her high school years, the correspondence did indeed open the door to the world outside of Czechoslovakia for Eva. Responding to a magazine article about an American boy who wanted to correspond eventually led Eva to a new pen pal relationship with a woman in the United States. Since English was not a language Eva spoke, letters sometimes took her three weeks to compose,

“...I stuck with it because I could see the value in that I would become better in writing. I kept writing because I wanted to have that relationship. And of course I was dreaming that one of these days somehow I will be able to visit.”

Eva’s dream did come true. A year after her pen pal visited Eva while on a European tour the woman sent her a ticket and invited her for an “all paid” five-week visit to the United States. “Do you know what that was? That was *more* than a dream come true....It was such a big deal for me because it was what I always wanted. It was huge.” A communist government that did not favor its citizens leaving the country and excessive political red tape presented obstacles at every turn – permission from the bank, permission from the school director, unrealistic deadlines...the list went on and on but Eva persisted. Finally, on the very last day to obtain approval, she was successful. She laughs as she tells me how, with her broken leg in a cast, she walked all over town to get the required paperwork turned in to the proper authorities, “This was a huge moment in my life...because we were not allowed...It was a lifetime break!”

At the end of her adventure in America and much to the surprise of many people she knew in Czechoslovakia, Eva returned home to complete high school. She tells me most people who left her country never returned. With two years of college completed and while working for Czech Airline, she took advantage of a reciprocal airline ticket with Lufthansa. With \$80.00 allowed her by the bank and another \$80.00 from the black market exchange, Eva returned to the United States – this time to stay. Eva weeps as she tells me that leaving her mother behind in Czechoslovakia was one of the most difficult things she has ever done:

When I was leaving, my mom told me, 'If you think you can have a better life – stay.' I know that was so hard for a mother to say...Later she told me how hard she cried when she was cleaning out my apartment. It's still so much when I think of her.

Six years after Eva's departure, her mother was able to join her in the United States. Although she now lives in the Czech Republic, for many years she moved back and forth between the two countries. In spite of the twenty seven years that have passed since first moving away from her mother, the scar of that difficult departure still weighs heavily on Eva's heart.

Upon her arrival in America the family of her pen pal invited her to stay with them, drove her to ESL classes twice a week and eventually helped her get her first job. She tells me the generosity of this woman and her family made all the difference for her, "Wow, what a dream, how did that happen? It was such a break in life...that really encouraged me...to do it for other people – because it's just a selflessness." With a tremendous amount of courage and the support of her friends, Eva was on her way to the American dream.

"THE HARD WORKING LADY FROM CZECHOSLOVAKIA"

Hard work is something Eva is very familiar with. She has an incredibly strong work ethic and hopes for the same in her students, "The expectations in my classroom are higher than the students like but not as high and consistent as I would like them to be." Her intention is to prepare them for the world that awaits them after they graduate from high school, "I ask them what they hope to do once they finish high school." She knows, from first hand experience, the

challenges her ELL students will face. At the age of 25, as a new English-speaker and new to the country, Eva's first job was at a local Pizza Hut, "The manager liked me...she was very open-minded and gave me a chance and she liked me because she said I was a good worker." Eva took a second job at a ski shop. Her dedication to making the most of her employment opportunities made an impression on the owner. Years later when she ran into him he greeted her as "The hard working lady from Czechoslovakia."

Eva understands how important it is to motivate her students to work hard for their goals. As she began to build her life in America, she held two jobs and attended the community college part time – the number of credits she was able to afford.

I was so much more motivated than ever in my life...I saw the potential...I didn't want to be stuck – especially since I had tasted better...I think that's part of it with a lot of people, if they taste better they have more motivation, if they don't, they don't know what else they could have.

Eva hopes to give her students a taste of what they could have. Through activities spotlighting various professional opportunities, Eva tries to expose her students to the many options they have for college and careers. She shares the limitations she faced when first arriving in the United States, not knowing what was available in terms of jobs, college assistance and other resources to help her succeed. She informs students about what different professions earn and what students would be able to afford – how they might live with the different levels of income, "When I came...I didn't know what jobs were out there...just little

information pieces...It took me a long time to get there.” Eva tells me she would love to devote an entire day on a weekly basis teaching students about the technical aspects of completing employment applications and other important forms they will encounter as they go out into the world.

Eva’s own rich and varied experiences finding challenging and rewarding employment provide her with real examples she hopes can motivate her students. As a result of marrying a Japanese man, whom she originally met in ESL classes at the community college, Eva worked a variety of jobs in two other states and in Japan before finally settling in Southwest Washington. One employment opportunity opened the door to another and after a great deal of hard work, the girl who always dreamt of seeing the world started her own travel agency. This kept Eva busy for almost fifteen years as she raised her three children. Ultimately however, the desire for new challenges led her to something very different.

“IT’S SO REWARDING WHEN YOU SEE THEM
REALLY FINALLY GETTING IT.”

Eva first began working with students as a volunteer in the elementary school her own three children attended, “I couldn’t imagine what they were doing there.” She wanted to know more and be a part of their day. For nine years, while also working, Eva volunteered and learned the inner workings of schools in America. She joined the PTO and was soon coordinating the other parent volunteers, “I really liked the learning...about school and being able to grow with it and so I started to look into options...” She was hired to help with ELL students

but had a difficult time understanding the teachers, “The teachers talking among themselves – I could not understand *any* of it. It was not the English; it was the lingo.”

Working as an ELL paraprofessional definitely provided new challenges for Eva as well as opportunities to learn some valuable lessons, “I felt distressed and...underestimated...but I found that the more personal relationships I built with [the teachers], the more they were willing to do for my students....I always tried to do that first.” Eva built these relationships and learned to work effectively with and for the ELL students; she made herself available to the school secretaries as well, “I was always willing to translate for a new student coming so the secretaries loved me...that made their job much easier.” She began to grow as a teacher and she began to advocate for her students.

Eva used her own experiences as an ESL student to encourage a middle school counselor in the building where she was working, to reconsider a course schedule he designed for a newcomer student. She shared with him, “In the beginning it all sounds like a big blur, you cannot even distinguish words – [you] don’t know! I know – I went through it!” The counselor, skeptical of Eva’s argument at the time, later went through language acquisition training. She shrugs her shoulders, “I don’t know what happened there...because he was not even interested.” Eva recalls him telling her after the training, “It is just what you said!” She smiles, “He turned, he started to call himself the advocate for ESL students – completely turned over.” In fact, Eva made such an impact on the man

that when she was transferred to a different middle school, he called her supervisor and complained, “You cannot take Eva away from us!”

Not long after Eva began working as an ELL paraprofessional she learned of the BETAP scholarship. Although she knew it would be demanding, she had no reservations, “I was too excited about getting more education.” The cohort provided a support system for her and was also a great source of motivation, “If I saw that somebody had already done something it gave me more courage to do it.” Shortly after graduating she was hired for the middle school ELL teaching position she still holds.

Eva credits her university experience with helping shape her as a teacher:

My college work influenced my view, opinions, and teaching to a great extent. I believe that I have the potential to be a good teacher thanks to the teacher preparation program and the practice in classrooms that I had during that time...I was well-trained and do not hesitate to reflect on my teaching in the light of what a good teaching practice is. I also learned to continually look for ways to improve it.

While she admits that more stress comes from the greater work demands as a teacher than when she was a paraprofessional, she confesses, “I like the job...it’s so rewarding when you see them really finally getting it.”

“I STRIVE TO HELP THEM SEE THE VALUE OF EDUCATION”

The question that drives much of Eva’s instructional planning is, “How am I going to motivate these kids to get something out of the short time they have here?” Eva knows that trying to inspire middle school students to “think ahead

and not live in the moment” is a formidable task, but she is relentless. She wants them to learn to participate in their lives.

I know it’s a really big thing...I think it will take [the students] another year or two to see what I am teaching and why. Whatever I am teaching I always try to motivate them – and I do it a lot – to always look beyond...how it concerns them....Even though they might not remember, they might get something to be more ready for life after school.

Eva’s perspective on teaching to some small degree reflects the influence of her own school experience in her native country. Although in Czechoslovakia students studied from lecture notes and textbooks and “most of the staff was strict,” teachers held high expectations and wanted students to “work on learning” while they were at school – just as Eva does in her own classroom. However, she predicts that if she taught in the school she attended, her lessons would likely include “...more rote memorization and textbook work.” She adds that she would be required to follow “rigidly predetermined curriculum lessons to every point.” Eva clearly prefers teaching in the United States:

The school system there seems to offer teacher less flexibility and freedom of personal choices in instruction than the educational system in the United States...Being a teacher here, in the United States, I try to be a different teacher. I work hard on getting my students engaged in learning, avoid mindless activities and memorization, and design activities that are hands-on while offering students some choices and supporting diverse learners.

By actively engaging her students Eva seeks not only to motivate them but also to empower them. Her own immigration experience influences her desire to equip her students to be successful members of the community so they can become involved as citizens:

I really feel that I want to empower them with stuff that I really should have known a long time ago....It took me too long, not only to be a...better citizen – but [to realize] I could do more with my life.

Having come herself to America for greater opportunity, Eva hopes to encourage her ELL students to take advantage of all this country has to offer. She encourages them to take hold of the “opportunity their parents came for,” and to gain as much knowledge as they can to make this country “their own land of opportunity,” rather than just waiting for whatever the “land of opportunity gives them for free.”

A lover of learning and someone who has taken the valuable opportunities afforded to her, Eva continually impresses upon her students the importance of attending college, “I encourage them to look up and strive to get to college and accomplish more than their parents ever hoped for.” Some of her students recognize her real life-examples. They describe her as “hard working,” wanting them to get good grades, and believing in them – that they can “do anything.” One remarks that Eva symbolizes the notion that, “If you put your mind to it you can finish anything.”

Eva reflects on the events in her life that have brought her to this point and contemplates how she can use what she has learned on her own journey to help the students whose lives she touches:

I have many experiences in addition to being a student, a second language learner, an immigrant, and...a socially-minded American. I offer my students the depth of my life experiences and the knowledge I gained from living in diverse social systems on three continents. I offer them all that I can share, while asking them to wonder about their values and goals.

Who I Am

By Yelena

I am a Russian girl with a naïve dream of building a perfect school, during a time in the former USSR, when it is not possible even to dream about it. I am one student in a class of forty-five, going to school in two different shifts, with about eighteen classes of each grade level in the same building - grade levels from 1A to 1N.

My dream is to teach and make schools better by decreasing class size, providing students with a variety of choices, supporting diversity, keeping courses vigorous and strong, and teaching with high quality. When I was dreaming, I knew it was only a dream and there were no ways for it to come true at that time and in that place.



But ...four years after my graduation from high school, I move to the USA - the land of opportunities! Growing up with a father who moved from place to place, I am ready for challenges. I am used to changes and I am excited to learn a new language. Knowing two Slavic languages helps in learning English.

In my new homeland, I am an American-Russian woman with a new dream – a dream of becoming a bilingual teacher but finding no bilingual schools and no universities where I can get my schooling. I am an immigrant and a second language learner, facing a wall of education costs in America and unfamiliar with the system of getting affordable education. In the USSR education was free for everyone who wanted to get an education.

But ...five years after coming to America, I find a job, where I meet a woman who is like me – bilingual - and knows the ways of making my dream come true. With a group of classmates that



we called “BETAPers” I glide through the teaching program. In three years I see my dream come true – I am a bilingual teacher!!!



I am a free-spirited person, loving God and His creation; loving diversity and enjoying differences and changes. I love people and understand the value of our future generation. I hope to make a difference here, while I am still here!

YELENA

“WE INTRODUCE THEM INTO THE WORLD HERE”

As I walk past the main building on my way to the portable classrooms, students are scurrying to busses and the student parking lot leaving the high school campus for the day. Many teachers, on the other hand, are still hard at work in their classrooms, which is exactly where I find Yelena on the afternoon I visit for one of our conversations. As I enter her portable classroom near the west parking lot of the Southwest Washington area high school, Yelena and her assistant are discussing students and lesson planning. The paraeducator, a native Spanish speaker, says good bye and leaves us in the room to chat.

The décor in the classroom is multicultural. As Yelena and I make ourselves comfortable at one of the table groups near her desk at the back of the room, I notice several very colorful student-generated posters. The pieces written completely in Russian are character analyses based on Aleksandr Pushkin’s classic novel, *Евгений Онегин* or *Yevgeniy Onegin* (1833). The lettering and illustrations show meticulous detail – they are works of art. Scenic posters of Russia and Moscow, a world map and posters depicting famous works of fine art framed by words like *Respect* and *Faith* adorn the other walls. Near the overhead projector at the front of the room is a large chart paper stand. Two columns of English words beginning with the letter n are neatly written on the top sheet. On the opposite wall are several shelves displaying a variety of reference, literature, and text books accented by an ornate black velvet sombrero with silver sequins and trim. A narrow poster, near the door, with portraits of people from all over the

world reads, “Around the World” hinting at the diversity of the students who daily enter this classroom.

Yelena’s classroom is a busy place during the school day. Not only does she teach a combined group of 37 students for Advanced Prep and PreAP Russian, she instructs four other periods a day of newcomer ELL classes. With the ELL students she has a two-period block of Language Arts, a period of Social Studies during which she covers Northwest History followed by U.S. History, and a period of American Culture. She describes the culture class to me with a great deal of enthusiasm:

This is a cool class...we teach them everything about American holidays, the American system of education, about [this] high school – how it works, what [they] need to graduate...When they leave this class they are not afraid...we show them [the opportunities]... ‘You can go to [the community college] when you graduate.’ We’re trying to help them build their career goals as well...we introduce them into the world here, through this culture class.

As I listen to her ardent description of the course, I get the impression it is her favorite subject to teach. When I ask her, she smiles broadly and admits that actually, “grammar” is her favorite, “...I keep them so busy; they are always on task...at the end I see them being *really* good at it so it makes me very satisfied.”

The overall success of her students is paramount for Yelena, “I want kids to attend colleges and move on with their lives.” She has a real understanding of the many challenges her immigrant students will face as they move toward

graduation from high school. Being a Russian immigrant herself, she has intimate insight regarding the cultural factors as well as the linguistic challenges her students will face as they become adults, “Right now, I know that most of my boys are going to drop out or barely finish graduating and most of my girls are going to be moms...this is how the communities work.” This awareness compels her to expose her students to the potential opportunities available to them, “...if we get them inspired...or... [plant] the seed of an idea, a dream of education – that there is...something, and they can...go there, I am hoping that they will.”

“THIS IS NOT GOING TO HAPPEN BUT IT’S A REALLY GREAT DREAM”

Striving after dreams seems to be an essential element of life for Yelena. In each of our conversations she speaks about the importance of creating and following one’s dreams. Her own life models this process and as an ELL teacher she seeks to not only inspire dreams in her students but also to help them pursue those dreams. For this woman, who grew up in the “USSR,” the dream of becoming a teacher has long been a driving force in her professional and personal life. The journey, however has presented some interesting challenges.

Yelena displays a boldness – an adventurer’s spirit that I imagine evolves from her formative years being filled with change and adaptation. As we talk about her childhood she tells me it’s difficult to identify a singular place as *home*. Her father’s work as an athletic coach led the family to live in at least five different republics of the former Soviet Union including Ukraine, central Russia, Uzbekistan, and Northern Siberia, “above the Arctic Circle.” The frequent moving

fostered an appreciation for diversity and a love of culture still evident in Yelena's life.

While it is clear that Yelena deeply enjoys her role as teacher and guide for her students, she remembers when teaching was the last profession she thought she would ever consider. When many of her peers wanted to be, Yelena thought being a teacher, "...was the worst job in the world." As a first grader and newcomer to Ukraine, Yelena was "immersed" in the language with no support, "...they dropped me into the language I didn't speak and the teacher, in my [opinion] was rough. She was asking me to say everything in Ukrainian and I didn't know a word...I *never* wanted to be a teacher."

In the tenth grade however, Yelena's perspective changed – literally overnight – after an actual dream, "...I had a dream, a real dream...and when I woke up I wanted to be a teacher...a teacher of a private school." Even in her youth she understood that in Russia, her dream would likely never come into fruition since only public education was permitted, "...so I said, 'This is not going to happen but it's a really great dream.'" The dream, although unlikely at the time, took hold, "It really started to fire me up and I started to take notes of everything I liked in teaching. I made a big journal. I actually planned the whole school from A to Z." Yelena thought about whom she would hire and about the types of subjects she would teach. She saw herself as a teacher and a principal.

Because of the unlikelihood of her dream ever being realized in Russia, Yelena sought a career path she hoped would enable her to work with people in a cultural context. Combining her music schooling and her studies at the Art

Institute she began preparing for work in the entertainment field. However, her plans changed once again when she married. Realizing her career direction might not be conducive to raising a family – something very important to her – Yelena decided to find a way to take her dream of teaching as far as she could in her native country. She accepted a position as a kindergarten teacher. Since kindergarten in Russia encompassed children six months old to pre-school age, Yelena's emphasis was on early childhood education. Not quite nineteen and still in courses at the university, she worked in an experimental program with forty-seven four and five year-olds. Without being "fully educated" her role of teaching and leveling the students "was a bit overwhelming but interesting."

Yelena never completed her university education in Russia. Due to political and religious conflicts he experienced in Russia, Yelena's father prepared the family to leave their country. In 1990, "when it was legally possible," he began the immigration process for the entire family, including Yelena's husband. Yelena remembers her father always wanting to leave Russia in spite of his love for the country, "...he couldn't live there." In late 1991 Yelena's family, including her husband and young daughter, immigrated to the United States, joining her grandmother who had come a year earlier.

After arriving in America, it didn't take Yelena long to re-focus on her dream. She became a day care provider and translator and attended English as a Non-Native Language (ELN) and Early Childhood classes at the local community college. The combination of her coursework at the college and the process for day care certification enabled Yelena to learn a great deal about the

requirements and laws pertaining to the field of early childhood education. As she progressed in her classes, Yelena began to learn that the system of early childhood education in the United States differed greatly from the system in her native country – it was not as regulated or “professional.” Because of this she decided to re-direct her focus to K-8 education where she could become a “professional teacher.” Yelena’s work as a translator provided even more insight about her new country, “Through [translating] I learned a lot more about the school system, the medical system, and the social systems here.”

Yelena found her school translation jobs particularly interesting. So much so that when her second baby was eleven months old, she decided to apply for the job of ELL assistant in two of the local school districts. Yelena laughs as she tells the story of how she was first hired in the school district where she now works as a teacher. Accompanying a friend who was applying, “I applied just joking with her. I said, ‘Okay, I will teach you how to do this.’ I showed her everything.” Much to Yelena’s surprise she was called for an interview. After the interview she was contacted and offered the position, “I didn’t know what ‘offer’ meant so I was quiet on the phone...they asked, ‘Are you taking it or not?’ I thought, what are they asking me?” After asking a few clarifying questions she finally understood that she was being offered a position as an ELL and vocational staff assistant at one of the high schools and she happily accepted.

Yelena describes her first position as, “...a great experience – the greatest. It equipped me with a lot of knowledge because I was in the mainstream in ESL and in all of the vocational classes, plus Skills Center...” In

order for Yelena to assist students in vocational fields beyond the scope of her own experience, she recalls that she “had to do a lot of reading and studying.” She tells me, “Every day I learned something...during [vacation] time I would feel that my brain was dead because I was not learning anything...I got used to learning a lot, a lot of new information...it was fun.”

“HERE, I KNEW I WOULD BE HEARD”

Participating in the Bilingual ESL Teacher Advancement Program moved Yelena even closer to her dream of teaching. Her own bilingual experience made the ESL emphasis of BETAP a perfect fit and her work as a tutor and the coursework she had already completed at the community college helped her make a smooth transition into the university program. The cohort experience provided rich opportunities for Yelena to learn from her peers: “It was the perfect way of doing it. It would be a different experience without a cohort – I wouldn’t learn as much as I learned...I learned so much from my classmates...in different ways.”

Now as a classroom teacher, Yelena describes the differences of being a paraeducator as both “bad and good.” While her current position comes with a great deal more responsibility and demands on her time, it also enables her to do what she set out to accomplish: “...you are responsible for these young adults and *you* can actually make a difference. You can make a difference in your classroom; you can [create] an atmosphere of acceptance and friendship and...cease discrimination, right in the classroom.”

What Yelena misses most about her position as a paraeducator is learning from “all the other teachers in the school.” Working in a support capacity with a variety of other teachers, Yelena was able to glean from each of them in some way, “I’ve been able to see different ideas – that’s something I miss. You also see bad stuff...so it’s kind of like you are getting a free lesson...the dos and don’ts.” Her experience as a paraeducator also helps her to effectively provide guidance to students – something she feels is a very important part of her job:

It’s important they are really at the place that they need to get...in two years they are gone to the real world – it’s not middle school...I’m responsible to give them that. They really need to survive here. They came as immigrants and I want them to be successful and to be happy.

For Yelena, being hired to teach at the same school she worked as a paraeducator was advantageous. She laughs as she tells me the change in her position was barely noticed: “They always [thought] I was a teacher...the teams were always asking me questions.” She also had the benefit of working with administrators as a translator before even being hired as a paraeducator, “I knew all the administrators. [They] always respected me; they had suggestions and they were very fair. They cared about bilingual kids and their issues...I see them as colleagues...” Yelena values the opportunity to speak candidly with other teachers and administrators on behalf of her students: “I was always able to say what I thought and I was not afraid. I was never afraid in Russia and I got in trouble for it but here, I knew I would be heard.”

“WE’RE GOING TO WORK TOGETHER”

Yelena thinks quite a lot about how the education of ELL students in this country could be improved. During a visit with her while she is on maternity leave, she reflects on how her original dream of the private school has changed as a result of her American teaching experiences:

My original dream was just for a different kind of school. I never thought about bilingual. But being here in the United States, seeing bilingual people, seeing their needs, going through the bilingual [certification] program, learning all of the cases where the bilingual [programs]... worked, where they failed, everything. Looking at the programs we have now...I am continuing to fight because it’s not working the way it should; but we’re doing it; we’re putting money toward it...

In her quest for bilingual education, Yelena spends whatever time she can researching types of bilingual programs available in other states. She contacted a state official to ask for more funding for public bilingual education but was dismissed by his “You need to speak English” attitude. Looking for a way to develop bilingual education opportunities on her own, she considers the possibility of starting a school but laments the complexity of the issue, “You cannot [create] a school as good as a public school because public school is financed. You could hire great teachers. You could [develop] a very good program but who is going to pay for that? Would it be a private school?” She worries that the only students able to attend would be “the privileged ones that have the money.” The students really in need could not afford the tuition:

I don't want privileged – I want some of the children that need it, like the bilingual population here. They really need it and they wouldn't be able to. They have three or four kids, they couldn't even send one. I don't believe in that kind of school.

Yelena is driven to support her students in any way she can. Never really experiencing a “close personal connection with her teachers” as a student in Russian schools, she feels that building a strong relationships with her own students is foundational not only in supporting them but also in their motivation to learn: “I think when they know you as a person...they really *want* to learn something more – there's more interest...the trust level is higher...I know them better and...I teach them better.”

To foster relationships with and among her students, Yelena structures her curriculum to provide opportunities for her students to learn from one another. Throughout the year students are involved in projects about their lives and their native countries into which Yelena integrates a variety of content areas such as political science, geography, economics and sociology. They also choose and research a country other than their own, “These projects help them to work better together, understand better and learn English better...It's helped them understand each other a lot better – to learn to study and appreciate and enjoy the research...there is a lot of learning.” Yelena adds that the students actually begin to “really want to know about others; they show interest.” She is diligent to provide a safe learning environment to ensure students are not disrespectfully critical of one another's cultures. Yelena explains that she has

clear expectations that students are accepting and respectful, "...there are no critics."

Yelena's culturally responsive instructional style aimed at broadening her students' perspectives stems from her own appreciation of diversity. She treasures the equal rights and freedom she has living in the United States and enjoys the diversity of her friends here, "I have learned a lot from different [friends]...this is exciting. I like it a lot!" The diversity in the classes Yelena teaches is very different from her own high school experience where only one language was spoken. She appreciates that in America teachers often incorporate the lives of their students, "In Russia it wasn't necessary because everybody was the same."

While Yelena places strong emphasis on relationships, she is also clear that students in her classes are expected to work. She has a strong work ethic and wants her students to as well, "...this is my statement, 'You are working in my class. We have fun, sometimes we joke, everything [has] a place but this is your work place and this is my workplace and we're going to work together. Do you want to or not?' I am...very straight forward – they are here to work."

"I REPRESENT NEW OPPORTUNITIES

BECAUSE I, MYSELF, AM AN IMMIGRANT"

Not only does Yelena incorporate her students' lives into teaching, she gets involved in their lives. She actively directs them toward the courses and opportunities that will support them and move them forward academically.

At my level I can actually inform them about the choices they have: if they want to go to the Skills Center, if they want to do Running Start [at the community college] later on, or if they want to do pre-AP classes... we have different classes with different programs that could help prepare them for one or the other – we have choices.

Yelena believes her own experiences as a bilingual immigrant support the work she does with her students:

I represent new opportunities because I, myself am an immigrant. I came to America. I have my own experience of learning English and I am a teacher now so that's one of the real examples they have that they could get to their dreams. It was my dream...and it was possible.

Yelena encourages her students to pursue their own dreams:

I tell them 'if you want to be an engineer, nobody's going to stop you, here is the place you go to the programs...get to your dream.' There are a lot of them that want to be pilots, not just a worker on a construction site.

She smiles widely as she tells me about a former student she continually encouraged to apply to the community college. No one else in his family had ever gone to college. Coming to visit her after he had graduated from high school, he informed her he was indeed working on his Associate of Arts degree. The next time Yelena saw the young man was at the university while she was in BETAP. She laughs telling me of how he graduated a semester before she did: "I was so excited!"

Seeing the results thrills Yelena: “When you see changes in the life – that’s the amazing thing...to see results...progress.” She reflects on a student with learning disabilities, “...when I see her rate of growth...I am so excited – I am ready to clap. I think this is the most exciting thing for any teacher – when you see the progress...that’s the best part.” With a sense of respect for the positions she holds, she describes the critical impact ELL teachers have,

You not only change how they know English, you change how they think and nobody else in the world can do that....When you are teaching kids, you’re really changing their thinking and their hearts and [encouraging them to] believe in life...It’s hard to describe – you’re just putting the best of you into them.

The dream, conceived so long ago – the dream Yelena thought would never come to pass – is closer than ever before to becoming a reality. In addition to teaching at the high school, she is the administrator for a Russian school affiliated with her church. She actively looks for ways to bring her “special kind of school” into existence. Seventeen years after immigrating to America, with a sparkle in her eye, Yelena tells me, “...I am fully satisfied. I am doing what I was dreaming about. I am a principal, I have a class – I am doing both things I wanted to do and I am using all of the knowledge I’ve learned and I am still gaining knowledge in both fields.”

Summary

This chapter opened with a description of some of the elements of portraiture as a method of inquiry and a brief discussion on the researcher's "voice" in creating the portraits.

Within the structure of the portraits, this chapter presents the essence of the data collected on the participants. The main body of this chapter consists of two components: an individual reflective contribution from each of the participants focused on her identity as an immigrant and a teacher followed by the written portrait.

CHAPTER FIVE

EMERGENT THEMES

Introduction

To create opportunities for dialogue about relevant issues in education we must engage in social transformation and pursue the voices in the margins (Chapman, 2005; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). The voices of the participants of this study offered a unique opportunity to learn about the experience of moving from the margins of education into the mainstream from an insider's perspective. Reading the stories of these women also affords an extraordinary vantage point from which to ponder the qualities each brings to the teaching profession.

Six of the seven participants were immigrants from Eastern European countries – former republics of the Soviet Union. Because of this, these portraits are especially unexampled in that they represent the voices of a group from which we have heard very little. There has been very little published on Eastern European immigrant teachers or, for that matter, students from the same cultural group. Although there has been some examination of the movement of certain immigrant groups in the field of education, much of the current research centers on the experiences of Latinos (Monzó & Rueda, 2001a & 2001b; Sandoval-Lucero, 2006; Valenciana et al., 2006).

The phenomenological nature of portraiture provided an excellent avenue for exploring potentially relevant issues from a first-person perspective. In this case, we were presented with invaluable opportunity to gain greater understanding about this specific population from both a sociocultural standpoint

as well as with regard to their changing roles in American education. As communities all over the country note increased Eastern European immigrant populations, the numbers of students from these groups also increases. Therefore, it behooves us to more closely examine factors that might have bearing on the success of students and teachers from this group.

One way to gain valuable insight about the lives and experiences of individuals is through written portraits. Portraiture is developed through dialogue and requires the personal stories and insights of the subject to be revealed and examined. Through the presentation of individual portraits and reflective narratives in the previous chapter, the reader was given an intimate glimpse of the personal experiences and perspectives of seven bilingual immigrant teachers. These portraits were created attending to the “dual motivations guiding portraiture: to inform and inspire, to document and transform, to speak to the head and to the heart” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 243).

This chapter explores some of the convergent themes emerging from the iterative process of developing each portrait. Embedded within the individual pieces are “resonant and universal themes” (p. 14) which the reader may be able to relate to on some level. The power of the portrait is two-fold. The revelatory nature draws us in emotionally as we seek to make a personal connection; the experiential element captivates us intellectually as we seek to glean professional insight and direction.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) explains that in portraiture, the goal of the portraitist is to extrapolate and create emergent themes through “synthesis,

convergence, and contrast” (p. 193). Listening for “repetitive refrains” and “resonant metaphors” (p. 193) the portraitist constructs themes and draws out patterns from the perspectives revealed in the portraits. Repetitive refrains are the frequent and persistent elements given voice (audibly or visually) by the participant. Resonant metaphors are “poetic and symbolic expressions” (p. 193) that give indications of how participants experience their realities.

Through the repetitive refrains and resonant metaphors, the data have given shape to three emergent themes: *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*, *Sociocultural Challenges*, and *Teacher Education*. In this chapter the emergent themes are examined separately through a discussion of the particular strands that contributed to the form of each (See Table 5.1). Although the data revealed three distinct themes, these themes are certainly not independent of each other and cannot be separated. Like strands of thread in a weaving, the emergent themes intertwine and overlap to create a tapestry depicting how the experiences and insights of these bilingual immigrant teachers impact their instructional practice and their professional relationships.

Table 5.1 Emergent Themes and Contributing Strands

Emergent Themes		
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	Sociocultural Challenges	Teacher Education
Advocacy	Accent & Language	Teacher Preparation
Instructional Practice	Educational Paradigms	Transition into Teaching
Leadership	Collegial Relationships	Motivators
Strands		

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

One of the elements of the theoretical framework for the analysis of this study was to consider bilingual immigrant teachers' practices with regard to their integration of culturally responsive pedagogy. Gay (2000) points out that "culturally responsive pedagogy is multidimensional" (p. 31), encompassing more than instructional techniques. Culturally responsive pedagogy incorporates the relationships between teachers and students, the climate in the classroom, and the learning context.

In this case, culturally responsive pedagogy was a broad theme that emerged from an examination of the instructional strategies and the sociocultural and educational practices these teachers used directly or indirectly with their students. As an emergent theme, it became visible in the overt actions of the teachers as well as through their attitudes and philosophical perspectives. The repetitive refrains and resonant metaphors brought to light three main elements or strands of culturally responsive pedagogy: advocacy, instructional practice, and leadership.

Advocacy

Mae's observation that, "Most ESL teachers are advocates...they are the voices for their students" was exemplified in the work of the teachers in this study in subtle and overt ways. Participants advocated for their students as teachers, in many of the same ways they did as paraeducators; in some cases they have found an even stronger voice as certified teachers. Through their advocacy, these teachers have often been role models for students. Each woman pointed

out that she is, in some way, representative of certain characteristics to her students. Some of the teachers believe they represent the result of challenging one's self, hard work, self confidence and perseverance. Others feel they represent the hope of success for immigrant students – the hope they will learn English and attain their career goals and dreams. Irvine (1989) asserts, however, that minority teachers are more than role models for minority students. She refers to them as “cultural brokers” (p. 57) as well as “cultural translators and intercessors” (p. 51). Acting in these roles naturally places teachers in a position of advocacy for their students.

Much of the reviewed research on paraeducators revealed that advocacy for students and their families was often a trait displayed by these individuals (Chopra et al., 2004; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Lewis, 2005; Monzó & Rueda, 2001a; Rueda & DeNeve, 1999). What was not clear from the existing research is whether paraeducators who become certified teachers continue to advocate for students and their families. The present study revealed several ways in which the teachers were involved in advocacy for their students. Predictably, their heightened awareness stems from their own struggles as new immigrants trying to locate resources and support in an unfamiliar country. This advocacy manifested in three main ways: direct advocacy, support for parents, and activism on behalf of the students in general.

Direct Advocacy

What I have classified as direct advocacy for students involves direct support as well as stepping in or speaking on behalf of the student in a given

situation. Many of the teachers identified a variety of ways they support students and direct them in finding information or resources. For instance, Isabel gave examples of assisting students directly with school related activities as well as personal situations outside of school, “I represent a source of help even for their personal lives.” She lamented over not being as involved in this type of advocacy since she has become a certified teacher, “As a staff assistant I could help all students...I miss that contact...that opportunity to guide them.” While she may not have contact with as many students now, she is still supporting the ones she can. Helping students locate and take advantage of resources they might not otherwise be aware of, such as funds and transportation to participate in extracurricular sports activities, is also a way that Isabel has directly advocated for her students. In another instance, she learned that one of her former students ran away from home and was contemplating dropping out of school because of problems with her mother. Isabel telephoned and spoke with the girl, helping her determine a specific plan of action. She counseled the student concerning a direct conversation she would need to have with her mother in order to establish a home environment conducive to the student completing high school. Taking Isabel’s advice, the student spoke with her mother, returned home and is now back in school and once again on track to graduate next year.

Similar to Isabel, but based on her own experience as an immigrant, Eva has often acted as a cultural translator for her students while at the same time using the opportunity to strengthen their English skills. Eva is currently planning to teach her ELL students how to “understand the fine print” on forms such as car

loan and other credit applications, even forms presented by military recruiters in high school. “I want my students to understand very well what they might consider signing in the future.” Her hope is to engage her students in learning English by connecting it to their need for survival “in the world outside of school.”

In another example of direct advocacy, Luda wrote a letter to a special education referral team that was considering the placement of an ELL student into the Special Education program. Aware that language acquisition issues are sometimes confused with learning disabilities, Luda was careful to research the student’s academic history and home situation. Determined to ensure the information she shared was clearly articulated, she took the extra step and asked a native English-speaker to proofread and edit her letter before she submitted it to the committee. In her letter, after providing an overview of the student’s academic and relevant family history, Luda pointed out that many of the issues about which the team had concerns were likely related to language acquisition and the transitory nature of the boy’s life rather than a learning disability. In addition, she outlined some specific instructional strategies that would be supportive to the student in the mainstream classroom. With Luda’s letter now a part of their data, the referral team continues to assess the learning support needs of the student. Although Luda does not have a classroom of her own, her act is one she could very well have done as a classroom teacher and an example of her commitment to being an advocate for her students.

Support for Parents

Advocacy in the form of support for parents was mentioned more by the

teachers working exclusively with ELL students and, in general, more often at the elementary level. Support for parents was demonstrated in the organization of parent information or curriculum nights, assistance with school related meetings, and by inviting them into the school community by providing translation (written and verbal) to ensure parents were informed of important school information and events.

In one of the most powerful examples of parental support, Mae, who teaches K-5 ESOL in a predominantly *push-in* model, spoke adamantly about advocating for parents to help them to more effectively support their children. Arising from her own frustrating experiences as a new immigrant parent, Mae makes a point at parent conferences to give parents specific strategies to help their children with homework: “I’ve been in that ESOL parent’s shoes. I tell everybody, ‘ask the teacher specific questions because you can’t help your child if they tell you to work on vocabulary.” Mae provided an example from a situation the previous year when she worked with a kindergarten student who was struggling with basic elements of numbers and counting. She and the classroom teacher called the parent in for a conference “to show her what to do to help her child.” Mae remembers that the mainstream teacher simply told the parent “to work on numbers” with her daughter. Questioning how the parent could know what the directive actually involved, Mae showed the mother some simple ways to practice basic counting with her daughter using linking cubes and a bucket. “Two and a half months later, she was out of the hole when mom started doing what we wanted, but we had to tell her.” In modeling helping parents in this way,

Mae also supports other teachers by demonstrating how they too, can better provide assistance to parents.

Activism on Behalf of the Students

As previously mentioned, advocacy as activism was more prevalent at the secondary level. Eva told me, “I hope that I represent their...advocate who stands up on their behalf to ensure their needs are considered and met.” Modeling this role, Eva has indeed taken action on behalf of her students. Last year some changes were made to the assembly schedule at the middle school that precluded the ELL students from attending the event. In addition, students discovered that no seating area had been designated for them. She recalled one of the students asking her, “Why aren’t they including us?” Eva admitted that as a teacher she has “started being a little bit bolder.” She took the students’ concerns to administrators and the classes were finally included in the assembly. In addition, changes were made to prevent a similar situation from occurring in the future.

Yelena took her activism to an even higher level than school administration. She is concerned that the ELL program in the elementary grades is ineffective in preparing students for school at the secondary level. In her opinion, bilingual instruction for elementary students would alleviate many of the problems she sees in high school among ELL students and would help all students, ELL and native English-speakers, to be more successful. After researching a variety of bilingual and voucher programs in different states, Yelena contacted a local state representative to ask for bilingual school support

at the “public level.” The conversation was not as productive as she had hoped. During the course of a thirty minute discussion, the state representative asked Yelena “Why do you need bilingual schools? What do you need it for, you came to America, you need to speak English.” Yelena responded by pointing out, “It’s very beneficial when you’re bilingual.” The representative told her to call back in a week – she doubts she will. While she acknowledged that her “vocabulary at the political level is low,” she plans on contacting someone different, “I hit a wall there. They’re called ‘representatives’ but what do they represent?”

Instructional Practice

“As much as possible, I try to provide one on one instruction and differentiate my teaching to fit all students’ needs, learning styles, and interests.” Oksana’s remark reflected the perspectives and practices of many of the teachers in this study. As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, culturally responsive pedagogy builds upon the students’ cultural perspectives and knowledge to help them create meaning and understanding. Teachers using language minority students’ culture, experiences, and perspectives as avenues for more meaningful instruction are able to tap into student expertise and validate the strengths they bring to the classroom (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1992).

During observations of the teachers and conversations with them, there were tangible examples of their tenacious and sustained efforts to draw upon their students’ funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) to promote engagement and learning. In her high school ESL classes, Isabel takes every opportunity to use her students’ native languages to increase their comprehension and enhance

learning. She sets an important example for her students and doesn't hesitate to learn along with them. Reflecting on how powerful it is for students to make connections through their languages, Isabel explained, "When I first started here, I didn't know a word in Russian – nothing – now I know a lot." Isabel uses what she is learning about the language to get students engaged. For example, knowing the Latin root similarities of the Russian and Spanish words for *library*, Isabel asks the Spanish-speakers how to say the word. As they respond with "biblioteca" the Russian-speakers excitedly respond, "That's how we say it in Russian, библиотека! (bibliotech)." Isabel smiles and tells me how she makes the connection with students: "See, they're so much the same...' I always try to emphasize the similarities instead of the differences – because we all have differences, what's the point of emphasizing them? They're obvious."

For Isabel, the fact that students in her classes speak a variety of languages is "an asset." She knows that drawing upon the primary language of her students can increase comprehension and strengthen literacy skills (Collier, 1995). Although she knows teachers who do, Isabel does not mind when students use their native languages to connect to their learning in English: "I feel like if they can explain to each other better in their own language, why not? Take advantage of that." In doing so Isabel also validates the linguistic capital students already possess in their native languages. This elevates the importance of the linguistic competence they already have and allows them to use it as a framework for building competence thereby increasing their linguistic capital in English (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Isabel values the cultural heritages of her students as well. While she doesn't dwell too much on student differences, she does find ways to honor them. In teaching students to "know and praise their own and each others' cultural heritages" (Gay, 2000, p. 29), Isabel validates and affirms her students in addition to helping to foster intercultural respect among her students. One of her favorite projects this year was having students from different cultural groups interview one another about holidays unique to their cultures:

For instance, the Moldovan [student] interviewed the Mexican [student] about the Day of the Dead. So then the Moldovan [student] had to do the presentation about the Day of the Dead. It was so much fun to see all the things they found out about a celebration that is foreign to them...you could see the interviewee helping the interviewer...they loved it!

One of the characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy is its simultaneous development of academic and cultural awareness. Gay (2000) explains, "Students are taught to be proud of their ethnic identities and cultural backgrounds instead of being apologetic or ashamed of them" (p. 34). While engaging her newcomer students in a discussion of the books *Yoko* (1998) and *Yoko and the Paper Cranes* (2001), Olga apprehended opportunities to integrate the personal knowledge of Japanese and Korean students in her intermediate grade level class. Olga invited a Korean student to share his knowledge about the migration patterns of Japanese cranes and a Japanese boy to show where certain cities are located on a map of Japan. These acts enabled students to draw upon their own frames of reference and existing knowledge while practicing

English for an authentic purpose. Learning that a different Japanese student brought chopsticks to school to eat her cold lunch, and in spite of the student's limited English, Olga enthusiastically invited the girl to show the chopsticks and demonstrate their use for the class, "Do you want to get them and show us?" The student, smiling broadly, scurried to her lunch sack, retrieved the chopsticks and proudly presented them to Olga. "Oh, these are so beautiful...can you show us how you hold them?" As the class watched the demonstration, Olga modeled her own willingness to take risks and asks the students: "Who has tried eating with them?" Seeing several hands raise she laughed and admitted, "For me they are so hard to use!" While these efforts by Olga to integrate the cultural frames of reference of her students may seem commonplace, it is important to remember that rather than simply doing this as the opportunity arises, Olga intentionally and consistently creates opportunities for her students to draw on their cultural expertise. Her instructional approach allows students to build linguistic capital in their new language by sharing the cultural capital they already possess (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Along with the teachers already mentioned, Yelena and Oksana also found ways to teach students through assignments specially designed to infuse their cultures into the curriculum. Both teachers used biographical projects that provided opportunities for students to use available research resource materials to learn about and report on a variety of aspects of their cultures. In Yelena's case other content areas such as economics and social science were woven into the project requirements to broaden the content areas covered by her high

school students. She pointed out that “through language classes you teach them all about culture and [political and economic] systems and it helps them to be well-rounded.” Oksana modeled, by sharing her own biographical project, what the 3rd graders would be expected to do. Additionally, she included an interactive family component by requiring students to interview a parent or other relative to complete their project, creating an even greater self-awareness for students and the capital they already possess.

In other cases, culturally responsive strategies were used to increase comprehensibility for students by creating opportunities for them to connect new learning to background knowledge. In a lesson on penguins, Luda invited third grade students to share personal stories that related to the lesson. One girl was able to better understand and illustrate the concept of familiarity and recognition by sharing her own experience of once mistaking her aunt for her mother. Mae explained that in helping her students grasp content and concepts, she often has to “take side streets to fill in the basic information that is not present” before she can proceed with a planned lesson. With a group of primary students Mae looks for ways to directly involve them in building background by asking them to draw upon their daily lives. For instance, in one activity Mae asked students to reflect on the winter clothing they wore to school. She also invited students to show each other the shoes they were wearing to clarify winter clothing vocabulary.

Ladson-Billings (1998) points out that in order to support academic and cultural competence, teachers should develop a “sociopolitical consciousness” (p. 262) in their students. This notion was evident in some of the practices used

by these teachers to inspire awareness in students of a bigger sociopolitical picture. In one case Eva used quotes from prominent individuals from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and asked her 7th and 8th grade students to work in teams to analyze the meaning of the quotes then determine if they agreed or not with the individual and why or why not. In this way, Eva “lifted the veil” as Gay puts it (2000, p. 35) to enable students to think critically about the concept of truth and authority. Through a role-playing activity and group discussion based on a multicultural book, Mae encouraged fourth grade students to challenge their stereotypes and biases of others based on appearance or circumstances. In a group discussion format students were asked to practice putting themselves in another person’s position to understand why certain actions were or were not taken. The following day when they concluded the activity, students were asked to reassess their initial positions and evaluate why they made the original assumptions they did and whether or not they were accurate. Mae was able to use quality literature together with the varied perspectives of the students to address social issues of stereotyping and acceptance.

Leadership

Paraeducators often share the cultures and languages of the students with whom they work (Genzuk & French, 2004; Monzó & Rueda, 2001a). Because of this they are specially equipped to act as cultural translators connecting the students and their families with the school (Chopra et al., 2004; Weiss, 1994). As teachers, former paraeducators certainly do not lose their ability to act as “cultural bridges” (Monzó & Rueda 2001a). On the contrary, it is possible that

because of their “cultural comprehensive knowledge” (Milner, 2003, p. 176) they may be effective in an even wider arena. Gordon, in her book, *Color of Teaching* (2000) suggests that the diverse cultural perspectives of minority teachers allow for them not only to foster greater communication with students, teachers are also positioned to educate colleagues on issues regarding the diversity of the students.

While Monzó & Rueda (2001a) examined the differences in interactions between students and teachers who were previously paraeducators, they did not address the differences in the relationships these teachers had with other teachers. The present study revealed several incidences in which participants assumed leadership roles by informing fellow educators regarding effective instructional strategies for ELL students. The interactions centered predominantly on increasing cultural awareness and highlighting the learning needs of ELL students. Moving from the traditionally marginalized role of the paraeducator to the central role of educating fellow teachers reflects the increased cultural and social capital of these teachers (Bourdieu, 1986). Whether this capital is a result of their self perception or a result of the perceptions of other teachers, they are nonetheless empowered by it and are using it to make their voices heard.

The leadership roles revealed in this study ranged from the teachers sharing their expertise on ELL instruction in casual conversation and through informal modeling to formal instruction of their colleagues. For instance, while Isabel regularly shares her instructional strategies with other teachers in her building, she has also formally spoken to a class in the ESL certification program

at the university. Luda has also presented to university classes. She has developed a lesson based on the Russian folk tale, *Кауа уз Топора* (1996), or *Axe Porridge*, in which she delivers instruction entirely in Russian to provide participants a first-hand glimpse of being a second language learner. To illustrate the importance of using a variety of instructional strategies to increase comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985), Luda teaches first without offering such supports and then a second time using some basic strategies. She has presented her lesson to preservice teachers in an introduction to ESL course and to a new teacher cohort in coordination with the ELL Department in the district where she works. In addition, Luda has spoken to veteran teachers in a different university course about how to effectively connect with immigrant parents. In all of these settings, Luda has used the blending of her own cultural insights and professional expertise to broaden the cultural perspectives and instructional practices of other educators; in turn, this impacts the quality of instruction for all students.

In an effort to better inform teachers about making instructional accommodations for second language learners, Mae worked with the county office of education to create an instructional DVD to be used for teacher training. Like Luda's lesson in Russian, Mae's presentation was made completely in Estonian to provide educators with a clear picture of what many of their students experience in English-speaking classrooms. Additionally, the presentation illustrated the powerful difference some basic accommodations can make in increasing comprehensibility for ELL students. Mae also works informally with

many of the teachers in her building to help them more effectively support ELL students. In one instance, after noticing several immigrant students flummoxed during a lesson based on the Tooth Fairy, Mae, discretely informed the teacher that in the cultures of many of the students, tooth fairies don't exist. As Mae put it: "There is no money, there is no Tooth Fairy."

Oksana uses her unique understanding of the roles of both teacher and paraeducator to act as a bridge between the two groups at her school. This year Oksana began an informal support group for ELL cluster teachers in her building and included the school's three ELL paraeducators as well. One of her goals in creating the group was to increase teacher awareness of how to use paraeducators to support student learning. The group meets once a month to discuss and plan instruction and create shared resources. Oksana was quick to point out that she merely facilitates the group, allowing for the focus topics to be identified by teacher need.

Whether it is in the form of culturally relevant instructional support, advocacy, or through their leadership, participants are making a positive impact for the ultimate good of the students. In so many ways the actions of these teachers serve to broaden perspectives of students, parents, teachers and administrators. Because of the valuable insights and experiences these teachers have, they are acutely aware of the need for systems and support to ensure the success of language minority students in our schools. These teachers are steadfast and consistent in their message of commitment and support for the students who desperately need it.

Sociocultural Challenges

Sociocultural challenges as a theme encompasses some of the less visible factors related to the change in positions of these teachers from paraeducators. These factors involve the subtleties that lie beneath the surface of actions, dispositions and relationships. In terms of the sociocultural challenges faced, the most conspicuous repetitive refrains and resonant metaphors materializing from conversations with participants illuminate three main topic areas: *Accent and Language*, *Educational Paradigms*, and *Collegial Relationships*. While at first glance the three areas may appear dissimilar, each shares some commonalities beyond presenting participants with challenges as they acclimate to their roles as classroom teachers. The common threads linking these areas are tied to the attainment and possession of various forms of capital.

In the discussion of individuals from traditionally marginalized groups, topics such as those identified as strands of this theme logically lead to a mention of linguistic, cultural, and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In this case, the concept of linguistic capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) permeated many of the anecdotal stories of the participants relating to challenges in their transitions and their linguistic insecurities. Elements of cultural capital, particularly in the form of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), were notable in the perspectives of the teachers as they shared experiences relating to their own educational backgrounds and as teachers, their interactions with others.

In *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1990), Bourdieu and Passeron discuss the concept of linguistic capital largely in relation to scholastic achievement. Arguing that language is more than an “instrument of communication” (p. 73), they point out that the level of language acquired from one’s family, in tandem with the quality of one’s vocabulary, provides a “complex system of categories” (p. 73) by which a person is able to negotiate a variety of structures. Based in part on this idea, the authors contend that the relationship between social class or social origin and the distribution of linguistic capital can have direct bearing on scholastic success. Simply put, students lacking important linguistic capital are less likely to succeed academically. Since, in the opinion of the authors, “the school” (p. 116) imposes the norms defining linguistic competence, the value of a person’s linguistic capital is established by the difference between her own linguistic competence and the norm determined by the educational system.

With regard to linguistic capital, analysis of this study focused on two main areas. The first, addressed in the previous section on *Instructional Practices*, related more to the linguistic capital of the students and provided insight on ways participants valued and elevated the existing linguistic capital of their students while also working to increase the learners’ linguistic competence. This section focuses on issues highlighted in the portraiture process surrounding the linguistic capital and competence of the teachers.

Accent and Language

In her book, *English with an Accent* (1997) Lippi-Green describes accent as “the breakthrough of native language phonology into the target language” (p. 43). She goes on to explain that the degree to which one’s native language influences pronunciation of English varies from person to person but in many ways conveys “social, stylistic, and geographic meaning” (p. 44). While Lippi-Green also submits that variations in language function “below the level of consciousness” (p. 44), it is clear from the present study that the participants are very aware of the variations in their English from the standard spoken form. Not only are their accents often on their minds, the teachers are also sensitive about how they are perceived by others because of their language differences.

Olga’s comment: “Being concerned about [the accent]...listening for it...never ends,” was echoed in conversations I had with three of the participants after each viewed the tape of her teaching. In fact, accent was one of the first things they mentioned. Olga and Oksana both admitted that while viewing their own video tapes, each listened for how apparent their accents were while they taught. Olga pointed out that her speech is very deliberate and sometimes overemphasized, “I think...I’m trying to make sure they understand and hear the correct [pronunciation].” Olga laughed and remarked that for her, the biggest challenge in terms of accent is being able to understand her newcomer students. “You should hear the accents in my class! The kids ask me something and I [say], ‘Would you say that again slower?’ I have no idea what they are trying to say so it’s really hard.” On a more serious note, Olga credited her BETAP

experience and teaching children with helping her overcome insecurities about her accent. Being with other non-native English speakers has given her a safe place to begin to use her voice.

As reflected in Oksana's portrait, she has created a safe, risk-taking environment in her classroom, where she candidly discusses her accent with students. Oksana has invited the help of the students in pronouncing "the hard words" and openly reflects with them on her own learning experiences. Her approach fosters an atmosphere of respect and acceptance in her classroom in addition to presenting herself as a role-model to all of her students as an assertive language learner. As a teacher, Oksana has had a few isolated instances in which she was aware of parent concerns about her accent. After her first Back to School Night as a classroom teacher, Oksana "indirectly" learned that some parents had approached the principal concerned that their child's teacher had an accent. This concern, however, was never directly addressed with Oksana by the principal or parents. In a few of instances, there have been issues with parents telling Oksana they were not able to understand her. To alleviate any opportunity for confusion, Oksana invited another teacher to sit in on the next conference or meeting with the parent. Interestingly, none of the parents who have expressed concerns about her accent have removed or even requested that their children be moved from Oksana's class. Conveying a sense of non-judgmental understanding, she attributed their concerns to "the fear of the unknown and wanting the best possible teacher for their children."

After viewing her video tape, Isabel told me she found great value in watching her own teaching and planned on continuing the practice in the future. She appreciated being able to see herself from her students' perspective and noted, "...of course I am going to work on my accent...I noticed...I have to work on that...really make the sound of the word." She pointed out, "If I can get better, I think it will be beneficial for the kids...For me, I would like to be as close as possible to Standard English – it's just for me....When I make myself do it, I can." Isabel has rarely encountered a problem with staff or parents because of her Spanish accent, but it has been an issue from time to time. She mentioned that when people hear a Spanish accent "they think of very poor, completely uneducated people" and often underestimate the speaker. Isabel also shared a story from her days as a paraeducator when one teacher who was perplexed by Isabel's effectiveness with students in spite of her accent. Reminiscent of researchers who found that teachers were sometimes threatened by the relationship paraeducators had with students (Chopra et al., 2004), this teacher was "mad" that Isabel, with her "Spanish-English," was better able to connect with and support Russian-speaking students in her class than she was. Isabel points out that she simply used more ESL strategies and avoided raising the socio-affective filter of the students (Krashen, 1982). Her overall response to the incident can be paraphrased as follows: *relationship and respect override differences in language.*

Other participants also highlighted the constant underlying concern about their accents and language use in stories they shared about parent feedback on

their teaching. For instance, Yelena remembered a time during her student teaching assignment when a parent came to see her in response to a math lesson she taught. Seeking to illustrate that “if you know math, you can do it anywhere,” Yelena delivered, with scaffolding in English, a math lesson in Russian. Later, when the father of one of the middle school students in her class came to the school asking, “Where’s that Russian teacher?” Yelena was “so scared.” Convinced he was there to complain about her speaking in Russian with the students, she was completely taken aback when the father thanked her for teaching the lesson the way she did.

Luda shared a similar story, also from her student teaching experience. After delivering a third grade lesson on rocks during a parent science day she was approached by some of the parents: “I thought they were coming to say, ‘We didn’t understand what you were saying.’” Instead she was asked if she had a science degree. “They thought I knew a lot about science...I thought it was nothing special but the parents were impressed.” Additionally, Luda related two other situations in which she felt students, who were native English-speakers, used her accent as means of mocking her. In each of the instances she described, Luda turned the situation into a teachable moment not only for the students who mocked her, but also for the others who were present, encouraging the students to put themselves in the place of others before making harsh or hurtful comments. Luda explained to me that in some cases she believes that negative response to an accent has more to do with politics and prejudices than not being able to understand the speaker: “Some people are very patriotic about

their country and they don't want people from different countries to take over their jobs...kids hear that message at home.”

As illustrated by participants through their portraits and reflective pieces, the presence of an accent does not indicate a lack of communicative competence (Lippi-Green, 1997). As Lippi-Green points out there are numerous well known non-native English speakers such as Henry Kissinger and Butros Butros Gahali whose accents in no way reflect their ability to proficiently use the English language. Unfortunately, there are just as many incidents where accents are a stumbling block for non-native speakers of English to move from the margins into the mainstream. In their study on racial discrimination in hiring practices, Henry and Ginzberg (1998) found that “minority-accented callers” (p. 359) underwent less screening and received less information about available positions than (non-accented) whites did. Also noted was that in general, employers discriminated against all immigrants to some degree in their hiring practices.

There is clearly a need in the field of education for speakers of other languages to support students in acquiring English. As previously mentioned, these individuals, traditionally hired as paraeducators or ESL teachers, are able to act as cultural translators and support students in more ways than simply teaching them English. A goal of this study was to support the position that bilingual and bicultural teachers need not be limited to their traditional roles in education.

Although the term Non-native English-Speaking Teachers (non-NESTs) may come with some degree of controversy (Maum, 2002), I will use it here to further illustrate the above point. Non-NESTs have a great deal to offer students that monolingual monocultural English-speakers do not. In his chapter *Native or Non-Native: Who's Worth More?*, Medgyes (1996) outlines a variety of qualities that non-NESTs bring to the classroom. While native English speaking teachers may provide a model for the English language, they are not qualified as “learner models” (p. 39) as non-NESTs are. Along these same lines, non-NESTs are also better informants for students on English learning strategies and can be more empathetic about the needs of their students. In addition, because of their own English learning experience – even if they do not share the native language of their students – non-NESTs are able to anticipate the language learning needs of their students. Mae illustrated this in commenting on her ability to anticipate what support her students will need:

[It's] a strength I have that you can't teach to someone. Second language learners have it. Reading something to students, it is easier to identify what vocabulary will be difficult for them. You can't really teach anybody that – I just know it – it's inside of me.

Medgyes is careful to make the point that “In an ideal school, there should be a good balance of NESTS and non-NESTs who compliment each other in their strengths and weaknesses” (p. 42).

Bourdieu (1990) suggests that the ability to use words to express feelings and judgments is greater at higher levels of the social and “educational

hierarchy” (p. 117). In the case of second language learners this position takes on another dimension. Like many of their students, participants in this study do not lack communicative or linguistic competence in general. They possess it in their native language but, to some degree, may still be developing it in English.

Luda provided an example of this when she described the formidable process she has encountered in trying to obtain a teaching position: “I have failed...to persuade people in an interview that I am the best candidate...” She believes that her English language skill and accent have precluded her from being hired as a teacher. “I believe that my problem is English, not that I am not a good teacher or that I don’t know...how to work with students.” Just as Gordon (2000) documented in her study of minority language teachers, there is often a great deal of angst for accented speakers associated with working in fields that require face-to face communication. Lacking the linguistic competence in English for Luda has been very frustrating: “I think if it was in my native language...I would have gotten a job a long time ago...I can express myself...in Russian. I can organize my thoughts pretty well.” The anxiety over her language compounds the challenge. “It’s like a cycle...the more anxiety, the more difficulty with language. When you feel free and relaxed...there is just a flow of language.” Compounding the language issue, Luda also cited cultural differences that have added to her difficulty in attaining a teaching position. For her, the “Soviet philosophy” of “showing their cards to you” in terms of availability and opportunity for employment is very different from the highly competitive interviewing process she has found in the United States. Additionally, growing up in “a culture where

perfectionism is a high incentive” adds to the overall anxiety of the interview process for Luda.

Educational Paradigms

Apart from issues related to accent and language, differences in cultural perspectives and backgrounds have also had a bearing on the transitions of the participants from paraeducators to teachers. The term *Educational Paradigms* is used to describe the participants’ educational perspectives and ideals. More specifically, this section addresses how the differences between educational systems in their native countries and the United States have affected their transition into teaching.

Once again the notion of capital, this time cultural, becomes relevant. In his discussion of cultural capital, Bourdieu (1986, 1998) points to the role educational systems play in the reproduction of larger social systems. This idea takes on interesting implications for the present study. What happens when one transfers capital attained from one educational system to a different educational system in which that capital holds a different value? In the case of the participants, each earned certain capital from their previous schooling experiences that does not carry the same value in America as it did in their native countries. Consequently, though participants possess educationally related cultural capital, it does not necessarily transfer into valuable capital in American schools. The task then becomes to somehow use the capital they already possess to inform new learning - what they have gleaned from their experiences as paraeducators and through teacher preparation.

Gaining insight about the previous schooling experiences of participants has provided a valuable opportunity to consider how their experiences shape the way they relate to students and how they teach. This becomes especially relevant when we consider the contradistinctive educational systems involved. As previously mentioned, six of the seven participants of the study were immigrants from republics of the former Soviet Union. During the time of all participants' elementary and in some cases, secondary and university schooling experiences, their native countries were still under Soviet rule. Luda, Mae, Eva, and Yelena immigrated after completing secondary school in their native countries. In addition, each attended an institution of higher education before moving to the United States. Oksana and Olga both immigrated as teenagers attending and graduating from high school in this country. Isabel's schooling experience encompassed studying under three different educational systems (Cuba, Venezuela, and Costa Rica). While the countries were different, the school experiences were very similar. Participants commonly used descriptors such as *rote memorization*, *repetition*, *lectures*, *textbook work*, *regurgitation*, and *strict* in describing their native country schooling experiences.

The recurring themes in the participants' previous schooling experiences highlight two clear differences between those experiences and the educational experiences they are now providing for their own students. The elements of choice and discipline emerged as the most distinctive areas of difference in how participants were taught in their native countries and how they teach now.

Participants most often mentioned that choice, which they also linked to freedom, was lacking for their teachers and for them as students.

Choice

From the portraits and reflective contributions of participants, it is clear that the absence of choice and freedom they had as students helps them to value it highly as teachers. Each of the teachers spoke about how their current students have more choice in assignments and the freedom to learn in ways that are more effective for them than they did when they were students. Additionally, they lauded the choice and freedom they have as teachers in instructional planning and delivery. One of the things valued most by Isabel are the choices and different ways students have to demonstrate their learning. She has also appreciated being able to use strategies that are responsive to her students' lives: "I use storytelling because I feel that my students can make connections to their lives easier when I make connections to my own life."

Luda also extolled the value of choice, pointing out that the opportunity for her to choose which instructional strategies to use allows her to be more student-centered in her instruction:

I have a different educational philosophy than my teachers had. I try to adjust to my students' learning styles by using various teaching tactics. In my native country I was exposed to a structured learning style that included a strict grading system, lots of strict rules, high (sometimes unobtainable) standards and religiously followed textbook

instructions...[Here] / *choose* different strategies and assignments that will help my students to comprehend the topic and retain information.

Olga shared a similar perspective and appreciates her ability to be creative with her teaching. Not only is every day “filled with new learning and experiences” for her, her students also “...get to have fun while they learn.”

On the subject of student learning, Yelena mentioned one positive aspect of the Soviet school curriculum. Although this curriculum was uniform and offered no choice for teachers or students, Yelena pointed out that the uniformity provided students with a breadth of learning – students were well-rounded in all content areas, “maybe not proficient in everything, but knowledgeable.” Yelena considered both sides of the choice coin:

The good thing in America is that we do give them choices but it’s not good because we don’t teach them everything...I wish we could combine what I had there and what we have here – but that’s ideal...this is my next dream! I hope it’s going to come true in my life.

Discipline

As mentioned above, participants most commonly described their previous school experiences as “strict.” This description encompasses highly structured classroom routines such as straight, upright seated posture and using the proper method for raising one’s hand, lecture format instruction, the absence of an environment that allowed questioning, and an overall lack of personal relationship between students and teachers. In conversations about the topic and in observing their teaching, it was clear participants place a high value on

classroom management and control. In discussing their appreciation for the organized structure they have created in their classrooms, the teachers stipulated that structure and discipline are important in their classrooms but rather than use these tools for the sake of total control, they are foundational in fostering respect and building relationships with their students.

Reflecting on the structure in her current classroom, Oksana noted that the presence of structure does not signify the lack of freedom or interaction between students and teacher, but rather that they are interrelated. On the topic of discipline, she mentioned that a benefit of the “very strict” approach was that discipline issues were handled quickly and quite effectively: “If you called home, the problem was handled.” Parents in Ukraine were not involved in school the way American parents are. She noted that while American parents participate more in their children’s schools, they sometimes miss the bigger picture: “Parents have a lot of say in the program and they are not always fair to ALL of the students.”

In terms of discipline, Olga’s former school influence is apparent in her perspective of classroom management. She remarked, as many of the others did, that discipline is not as strict in American schools. With a chuckle she added, “Even though I would like it to be.” Her particular challenge with discipline is that in her intermediate grade level classroom she has students from all over the world. The students enter and exit the newcomers program sporadically throughout the school year, creating a transitory setting for learners. In addition, they bring with them a potpourri of previous classroom experiences, and in some

cases, no school experience at all. To ensure that students are engaged in their learning and that she can attend to their varying learning needs, her routines are highly structured and her expectations are clear. Olga's insight about the school experiences of many of her students helps her recognize the reasons behind why some of her students "go nuts" without their familiar structures. While discipline and structure are priorities for Olga, she won't too closely emulate her teachers back in Russia. "I enjoy teaching and working with students...if I was a teacher in my country, I would have been more of a dictator – not a teacher."

Mae framed the differences in schooling by explaining the essential contributing factor: procreation of citizenry: "Each country schools its own citizens...these are two very different things – being a future citizen for a Soviet country and of the United States of America." Eva demonstrates this same perspective as she invests great efforts in her teaching to get her students to take an active interest in their roles as citizens. She expressed frustration in the lack of involvement of parents and students. Her position clearly stems from her own experience in Czechoslovakia:

While I was going to school, not only teachers but also all parents and the whole community expected students to do their work at school, be responsible, and respect school staff. Then, students were not considered the school's customers – they were expected to be learners...students did not expect to be entertained and did not feel justified stating that the class was boring.

Investing the earned capital from their previous schooling experiences these teachers have effectively transformed that capital by reconfiguring it, in a sense, into a commodity of greater social value in the United States. The lack of choice and flexibility in their previous educational systems has fostered a deep appreciation and desire to integrate and use elements of choice and freedom in their own instructional practices. Their experiences with extreme structure and discipline has clearly shaped the style of their instructional practice but is balanced with flexibility and relationships with their students built on respect.

Collegial Relationships

While the blending of cultural backgrounds and perceptions adds depth and breadth of perspective, it can also be fertile ground for misunderstanding and miscommunication. As previously mentioned the participants in this study came from five different countries bringing with them diverse cultural dispositions, communication styles and expectations. Inherent in what they bring from their previous experiences is an awareness, perhaps subconscious, perhaps not, of the need for developing social capital.

Bourdieu (1986) describes social capital as the “aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 248). This group membership, he explains, affords members with support of the “collectively-owned capital” (p. 249). These relationships are evident in a variety of states, practical or symbolic. They are sometimes defined by common names such as a family name or the name of a school and a set of material or symbolic

exchanges. Basically, Bourdieu maintains that the amount of social capital held by a person is dependent upon the size of the “network of connections” from which a person can draw upon. Furthermore this capital is intricately intertwined among its members (p. 249).

For immigrants, while certain social capital maintains intact through family and other social networks such as their church or other cultural affiliations, the professional social capital they possessed before immigrating is often left behind. One of the challenges for participants in this study has been to rebuild their professional social capital networks in this country. More on this topic will be discussed in relation to their transition into teaching in a later section (See *Transition into Teaching*, p. 220). This section considers situations and insights shared by participants resulting from cultural differences in communication styles. It also examines how these differences have affected the interactions between participants and their American colleagues as they seek to establish larger networks of connections.

In terms of differences in communication styles between Americans and Russians, Oksana pointed out that relationship issues are “only natural – culturally we are just different.” Although she feels she is “a bit more Americanized” and has learned to “deal with different people in different cultures,” she still consciously makes adjustments when communicating with the American teachers with whom she works. “I tell myself, ‘Okay, this is an American person, you have to treat that person that way.’ If it’s a Russian person you have to treat that person differently.” A particular communication trait she

initially struggled with was the difficulty of knowing whether Americans really meant certain things they said:

Sometimes they [give me] a compliment...and I would wonder if they really meant it. A person smiles but sometimes you have the feeling that this is really not what the person is saying – they are just saying it because they want to be nice....Right now, sometimes when I feel that way I will just straight out ask, 'Here's what you are saying but I see that you are acting that way, so help me understand this.' Usually, that...helps those issues.

Oksana summarized the main communication style differences between the two cultures as direct and indirect. She remarked that her culture tends to be more direct “especially if it is an issue that is uncomfortable for us,” and described differences in how she sees Americans dealing with difficult issues:

Americans tend to be a little more indirect and sandwich it...with lots of compliments if it's a negative. They tend to hide it in a lot of positive things versus [in] my culture it would be, 'Okay, this is the thing you need to work on.'"

Often, Oksana finds that she has to simply ask, "What is your point? What are you saying?" to clarify what other teachers are telling her. In spite of her direct approach style, Oksana notes she has never received any complaints from staff about how she communicates.

Yelena can also be described as a direct communicator. She is not at all reluctant to broach issues relating to her ELL students. One of the challenges

Yelena has encountered in enlisting support for her students has been the attitudes of other teachers. She feels that because she is Russian and speaks with an accent some teachers have to get past personal biases. “There are always people who...feel that you don’t belong here or that you are not supposed to teach.” Yelena believes she has made some headway in her relationships with her colleagues but admits her work is not yet finished:

[There were] some rough guys, later on they got used to me – they dealt with [the accent]....People still have a [way] of thinking that if you are in America you have to be an American...the accent is something that is not American...‘Why do you really need another language?’ There are some people that still believe [this]...those are the ones you have to break into and make them re-think...I continue working with them even if they want to be this way...and actually, we have turned out to be friends.

Although Yelena has worked diligently to forge relationships with other teachers, not everyone has felt comfortable with her style. Soon after she began teaching, a supervisor at the district level cautioned Yelena, “You need to be careful because some people might not understand the ways you express yourself...they might accept it [better] in a different way.” While Yelena admitted she might not have used the “right language” she believes the teachers understood what she meant:

I always try to be professional and prove my professionalism but if there’s something that is truth and somebody is not following that or not [being] fair I would...help. I do not care about losing my job...I will always go for

what is fair. I've always found support...because I never would stand up for something that was not right...They've seen that I am there – our goals were the same – they were teaching and I was teaching...So it was possible to change [views]. At the educational level you can break stereotypes.

In describing a recent situation in which a new Russian-speaking ESOL teacher was hired to work in her school, Mae provided another illustration about the impact a direct communication style can have on building professional networks with other teachers: "I see how much she is struggling because she is new to this country. Although she has done some substituting in Texas, she does not see [how the schools work]." The problems began when the teacher, within the first few days of joining the staff, went into a fifth grade classroom and very assertively gave the teacher some teaching advice. "You don't go to anybody and tell them how to teach! Especially if you are on the job less than a week...She's thinking she's doing a favor since she [is familiar with] ESOL and she's trying to help the teacher." Mae has found ways to avoid offending other teachers with her suggestions about instruction: "I go to people and give them very gentle suggestions...very carefully....But you can't barge in and start telling [them what to do]. That's what she did and she ended up in the principal's office because that teacher had enough."

Mae attributed her ability to establish positive relationships with teachers to having worked as a paraeducator so long before becoming a teacher. And while her ideas are received by some, she is aware that not everyone is open to

her instructional insight and educational perspectives. As indicated in her portrait, Mae is not in favor of the direct instruction approach recently adopted by her school. In the best interest of her students, Mae speaks out against the effectiveness of the strategy. As a result she has noticed she is invited to fewer meetings and conferences: “I think they know that I am going to say what I think – they don’t want to talk to me directly.”

The above anecdotes illustrate how complex a task attempting to increase one’s social capital or network of connections can be when varying cultural perspectives and communication styles are involved. The critical piece that these teachers have grasped is that they must have access to the “collectively-owned capital” (Bourdieu, p. 249) within the school network in order to provide the most effective support for their students. As they negotiate the intricacies of cross-cultural relationships with colleagues they are learning how to create new social and professional capital.

Teacher Education

Moving from the margins into the mainstream of education was for many of the participants, a step that required faith and courage. The challenges standing between their dreams and becoming teachers were, at best, difficult to overcome. For some it was the lack of confidence in their English skills or the barriers they feared their accents would present. For others, it was the concern over balancing family, work and school or the inability to acquire the necessary

financial resources. Whatever the case, the opportunity to obtain teaching certification at first glance seemed out of reach for these paraeducators.

With its non-traditional program design and scholarship element, the Bilingual/ESL Teacher Advancement Program (BETAP) brought the goal of becoming a teacher much closer for participants. The program enabled the women, many of whom had been considering or already begun pursuing careers as teachers, to have access to the added social and financial support the program provided.

This section presents participants' insights into three main areas of their journeys into teaching. First, they reflect on their BETAP experience in terms of strengths and benefits of the program, and then on areas they see have a need for improvement. Second, participants describe some of the most notable challenges they faced in the transition from the role of paraeducator to the role of a classroom teacher. Finally, participants share about the important role others have had in encouraging and motivating them in their quest to become teachers.

Teacher Preparation

Supporting research findings on effective alternative route programs (AACTE, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Dilworth, 1997; Eubanks, 2001; Genzuk, 1997; Torres et al., 2004; Valenciana et al., 2006), financial assistance and the cohort element proved to be of tremendous assistance to participants of BETAP. Participants overwhelmingly cited the financial assistance or scholarship component of the program as being one of its main benefits. Isabel acknowledged that she would have eventually become a teacher but that without

BETAP it would have taken a much longer time and imposed a financial burden: “It would have been very difficult because it was very expensive.” As a single parent raising three children, Mae reflected on the “free education” as the “main draw” for her: “I would have never dared to think about [going to school.]”

Also consistent with research findings (Bernal & Aragon, 2004; Sandoval-Lucero, 2006), another major benefit of BETAP for participants was its cohort design. While one teacher likened them to siblings, “...they annoyed you but you loved them,” she admitted she “really liked having the same group...they are the people who definitely helped me get through.” Several others mentioned that having the same group with whom they were all familiar was a valuable source of support – personally, and academically through study groups. Facing the inherent challenges of raising children, working during the day and attending classes at night gave the members of the cohort common ground for forming lasting bonds. Mae noted that “sharing the same stuff and problems, the good and the bad...sharing the stress,” created a strong support system for participants of BETAP. Oksana pointed out that their mutual understanding and support served to strengthen one another. In a sense they were empowered by “...being able to share the same challenges...and just root for each other...cheer each other on...growing together and sticking together.” Olga also pointed to empowerment resulting from the cohort relationships. The experience of “...having people that understand you and being able to freely speak your mind without being afraid that somebody’s going to laugh at you for saying something wrong,” gave Olga the confidence to begin using her voice. In Yelena’s opinion,

she would not have learned as much without the cohort: “I learned so much from my classmates...in all different ways.” Because members were also paraeducators working in classrooms, there were “...twenty bodies experimenting and they all had different outcomes...all of us got to hear the results...it was the perfect way to learn.”

A final element of BETAP noted by many of the teachers as especially effective was the integration of real-life experience. This component manifested itself in two ways. First, many of the instructors were actual practitioners. Yelena noted the importance of having “real teachers” in that it moved their learning beyond the theoretical into the practical. Several teachers remarked that being able to transfer what they were learning in courses into the classrooms in which they worked as paraeducators was very beneficial. Yelena shared that, “The...practice was awesome...we were actually prepared to implement lessons at any [grade level].” On a more personal level, Olga noted that incorporating experiential and application aspects into many of the assignments enabled her to see herself as a teacher.

In addition to facets of the program participants felt were particularly effective, there were also areas in which they thought the program could be improved. The specific areas for improvement mentioned by participants have become apparent as they have begun gaining classroom experience; these areas relate predominantly to preparing teacher candidates for aspects of their profession beyond the actual instruction of students. Several participants thought including a component preparing them for “school politics” or “how the system

works” would have helped equip them to deal with aspects of their new positions as teachers that they were not exposed to as paraeducators.

Along these same lines, several of the participants noted that learning more about the technical aspects of lesson planning, time management and balancing the increased responsibilities of a classroom teacher would have helped to ease the transition into teaching. Other ideas participants shared included 1) adding classroom observation components in which candidates could observe a wider variety of classrooms and grade levels, 2) increasing opportunities to observe practicing BETAP instructors and cohort members teach, and 3) providing opportunities to practice interviewing skills. Related to the last idea and stemming from her attempt to negotiate the cultural differences between seeking a position in her native country and doing so in the United States, Luda illustrated why differing cultural perspectives have been a challenge for her:

I think it would be a good idea to have a class where they would train people from different countries, to teach them those cultural things, for instance interviews...the way they want you to dress, it's a part of American culture. In Russia you didn't have to have those interviews. You would graduate from school and they would send you to a place where you would work...Here, it is a competition. They have to provide some classes where they would teach people how to survive this competition or what challenges they might meet.

While the cohort was clearly a positive program element for the members, some participants did mention that it was limiting in the sense that members were bound to complete program requirements at the same pace. Suggestions for improvement in this area involved ideas for parallel cohorts proceeding at different rates allowing for members who previously completed coursework to proceed at a faster pace.

Finally, participants mentioned challenges related to linguistic and cultural factors. For instance, being a non-native English-speaker for some required long hours to complete course assignments. In addition, and reflective of findings by Bernal and Aragon (2004), the potential tensions arising from spouses not understanding what is required of the candidates was highlighted when one participant mentioned the challenge of having a “traditional...husband.” His expectations for her to maintain her responsibilities in the home on top of balancing school and work put additional strain on her.

Transition into Teaching

Because of the general lack of research in the area of paraeducators transitioning into certified teaching positions, one of the objectives of the present study was to gain greater insight on this process. Through the phenomenological interviews participants shared about how different aspects of their transitions have affected them both personally and professionally. Although all of the participants worked as paraeducators during their certification coursework, their circumstances after obtaining certification varied. While some were immediately hired, others remained in their previous roles for varying lengths of time. A few of

the participants were hired as teachers at the same schools in which they had worked as paraeducators while others moved to different schools, and in one case, to a different state. In addition to examining the social dynamics related to their change in position, this section also discusses some the specific challenges participants faced as new teachers.

In spite of the differences in their transition experiences, participants shared at least one common circumstance – transversing the “networks of connections” (Bourdieu, 1986) that often define the roles held in the social structure of an organization, in this case the school. As mentioned in the discussion of relationships with their colleagues, one of the challenges for participants as immigrants to a new country has been to rebuild professional social capital networks. As paraeducators, they began to build this social capital as they forged professional relationships with teachers and administrators and learned how the American educational system functioned. However, because this social capital was garnered from a traditionally marginalized position (Weiss, 1994) within the school structure, participants accrued certain social capital as members of the school network but not as mainstream members. As certified teachers they are equipped with the necessary institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The participants are now presented with the challenge of moving from the margins, in the perception of other staff, and perhaps also in their own minds, as they continue to acquire cultural and social capital required for them to be effective in their new roles.

Perceptions

A central element infused in the transition from paraeducator to certified teacher for all the participants was self-confidence. Through the certification process participants have invested time and personal sacrifice in acquiring cultural capital in what Bourdieu (1986) calls the “embodied state” (p. 244). Embodied cultural capital is acquired through “the work on oneself” (p. 244) and is not necessarily done consciously. In addition, it is not recognized specifically as capital, rather as “legitimate competence, as authority exerting an effect...” (p. 245).

All of the participants expressed, either directly or indirectly, empowerment resulting from their increased levels of personal and professional confidence. Having their instructional instincts affirmed as they learned theoretical foundations for practical instructional strategies, has led them to feel legitimately competent. Some of the participants believe their confidence rather than their change in position has most impacted how they are perceived by teachers. For instance, Luda, who is a paraeducator at a different school from where she worked when she was in BETAP, has noticed that teachers at the new school do seem to perceive her differently than at the previous school. Luda, however, doubts this is because she is certified: “I don’t tell people I am a certified teacher. I think it’s about confidence. What I know now and what I knew before...helps me...teachers should see that...I know some do.”

Mae knows her confidence is obvious to teachers with whom she works. As a paraeducator she felt like she was “...treated like everybody else.” She

mused that perhaps this equal treatment was because of their need for her bilingual skills: "...all the teachers needed me because I was doing translations...I never felt that I was a staff assistant...but that could just be because I didn't care...I was always with the teachers I worked with. I never felt I [was] less." Because Mae moved to Georgia after obtaining her certification she entered her new school as an ESOL teacher. Still, she ventured to guess that her new colleagues had no idea she was a first year teacher: "I come across very confident. I didn't really tell them...people didn't know that [it] was my first year of teaching..." Knowing that teachers might "look at [her] a little different" she gave them just the pertinent details: "I didn't lie. I said that I worked with ESOL kids for nine years, which is true. Yeah, maybe not in a teaching position but I've been teaching them...so, I didn't come across like first year teacher."

Isabel, who now teaches at the same school where she was a paraeducator for sixteen years, feels she has always seen herself as a teacher although the teachers in her building may not have. Now, in her third year as a classroom teacher, she feels the other faculty members are beginning to change their views as they see the results of her teaching. She believes the change in perception is largely related to her role as an Advanced Prep Spanish teacher: "I [noticed the change] especially...since I started teaching AP Spanish and my kids scored the highest in the nation."

Oksana also teaches at the same school where she was a paraeducator. After becoming certified to teach, she was given a half-day, third grade overflow literacy class while maintaining her responsibilities as a paraeducator for the

other half of the day. This situation presented Oksana with some unique challenges in terms of how she was perceived by the other teachers. Operating in dual roles compelled Oksana to become more assertive with her colleagues who still saw her as the ever-efficient staff assistant. Scheduling issues in her half-time role presented her with opportunities to establish her new role:

There were a couple of incidents where I had to say, 'You know, I know there are things you need to do but so do I and you need to bring your kids at this time.' That was the hardest thing I had to do because I still respected them and I still wanted to be perceived as a team player.

After moving to a fulltime classroom teaching position, Oksana is still sometimes asked by teachers to perform tasks she did as a paraeducator with relation to family contacts: "Teachers do ask me to call parents sometimes. I don't mind calling but I am still carrying a teacher's load...I have to set boundaries."

Olga believes that her situation has prevented the confusion in roles for other teachers. Once completing her certification, she was not immediately hired as a classroom teacher. After remaining in the role of paraeducator for a year, Olga interviewed for and was offered a half-time intermediate grade teaching position at the Newcomers Center. Her transition with the other teachers in the building went smoothly: "The people on this staff are amazing...People have been really helpful...[they] made me feel welcome and appreciated, so it's really neat." She doesn't get asked to translate or contact families of students in other classes. "I think it's because when I came to this school, I came as a teacher. For

others, they were an assistant there and they moved to teaching. [The teachers] still don't see [them] as a teacher, they think [they] are still an assistant. I think that makes it a little harder.”

In contrast to the overall findings on this topic, one of the participants, while knowing she was prepared to teach, admitted she lacked confidence going into her first year of teaching. She struggled with her self perception as a teacher once she had her own classroom: “It took me several months to see myself as teacher...I felt that I had to do it all in the first year.” This frame of mind led her to feel like “a 60 year old starting all over again.” She attributed her increased confidence now to how much she has learned in the last three years and to a mentor she had during her first year of teaching: “The mentor was wonderful...I just needed the reassurance.”

Challenges

The main challenges indicated by participants resulting from their new positions as certified teachers appear to be rooted in the lack of available time they have as classroom teachers. While several participants had substantial experience working with students and an overall understanding of how schools worked, they found there was much more to learn as classroom teachers. Similar to findings of Monzó and Rueda (2001a), participants noted that greater demands on their time prevent them interacting with students as they had done as paraeducators. Although teachers admitted they are, in fact, able to establish close relationships with their students since they are with them for an entire day rather than for just a half and hour, they noted they are not able to interact with

as many students as before. In general, participants have felt challenged by how to provide the individual support, either instructionally or in locating resources, to all of their students in the same ways they felt they were able to as paraeducators.

Isabel pointed out, “I feel limited to a group of kids.” Because of her role as a classroom teacher, she doesn’t have the time to help as many of the ELL students find resources as she once did. Oksana also misses the time to build relationships with small groups of students and added that as a paraeducator she was able to “concentrate on the ELL kids.” She knows “how much support those kids need” and wishes she was able to “concentrate on one thing and not worry about a million other things.”

All of the participants also reported grappling with their increased responsibilities as classroom teachers. The new responsibilities are largely impacted by time management. They include activities such as attending a variety of staff and training meetings, completing administrative paperwork and other “busy work,” and tend to consume a large portion of the day outside of instructional time. Add to these demands the routine management of classroom activities and student behavior and it is easy to see how any new teacher, or veteran for that matter, could feel overwhelmed. Olga framed the situation simply, “You have to be learning new things all the time...how to deal with unexpected situations that come up...”

The one responsibility that all participants indicated as especially challenging is planning instruction for all content areas. As paraeducators,

participants were responsible for varying degrees of instructional planning to be delivered in 30 to 40 minute time blocks. Now, in addition to planning daily instructional activities, most of the teachers are responsible for planning entire instructional units for all of the content areas while taking care to attend to the *Grade Level Expectations* (GLEs) into their lessons. While these responsibilities are no different from those of any other classroom teacher, it is important to consider the added stress for these teachers as non-native speakers of English still negotiating the complex web of social, cultural and linguistic capital.

Motivators

According to other studies, role models and encouragers played a strong role in the success of paraeducator-to-teacher program participants (Bernal & Aragon, 2004; Sandoval-Lucero, 2006; Valenciana et al., 2006). The importance of these individuals in the lives of participants was clearly evident in this study as well. Many participants cited teachers with whom they worked as paraeducators or volunteers as sources of initial encouragement to pursue professions in teaching. Oksana remembered the kindergarten teacher for whom she was a T.A. in high school suggesting that she consider teaching. Later, her day care teaching supervisor reiterated this suggestion offering to write a letter of recommendation for Oksana should she ever decide to pursue a career in teaching. The teacher Mae first worked with in the Newcomers Center provided Mae with constant positive feedback moving Mae closer to her decision to become a teacher: "...what helped me was a teacher who complimented me a lot." Community college counselors were also cited by participants as constant

sources of encouragement, especially when the BETAP scholarships became available.

Participants who did not immediately find positions as classroom teachers and remained working as paraeducators were encouraged by the ELL department manager in their school district. She not only enjoined them to partner with classroom teachers to gain classroom experience and created opportunities for them to teach, she directly advocated for them with principals when classroom positions became available.

Finally, highlighting the importance of bilingual immigrant role models involved with teacher education and providing a clear illustration of what other researchers have found (Bernal & Aragon, 2004; Valenciana et al., 2006), a bilingual immigrant professor at the university, involved in BETAP, was identified by several participants as an inspiration in their dreams of becoming teachers. After hearing the professor speak during a presentation, Luda remembered thinking, “I can do this too.” She points out: “It’s good to have people like her, they motivate you.” Yelena was also significantly impacted by this woman. Her first encounter with the professor ultimately led to her decision to pursue the BETAP scholarship:

She was an *awesome* guest speaker – A very inspiring person! I just fell in love with [her] at first sight...I was so excited – here she is, she is bilingual; she [has] an accent; she is at the professor level; she’s not afraid to speak; she’s not afraid to work and to continue working in the field that she wants to change... She’s not afraid to talk about things that need to

be taken care of in this educational system...I was excited that she was bilingual herself; that she was not afraid to make mistakes. I was so inspired, I thought, 'okay, I'm going to do it.'

Summary

This chapter opened by articulating the relevance of this project in gaining new insight about bilingual immigrant teachers, particularly those who are native Eastern Europeans. After a brief overview on the development of emergent themes through the use of portraiture, three converging themes were identified: *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*, *Sociocultural Challenge*, and *Teacher Education*.

The remainder of the chapter consisted of a discussion of the themes and their relation to participant data as well as to existing research. Throughout the discussion, each of the emergent themes was shaped by supporting strands that were described and given form through an examination and comparison of the lived-experiences and the perspectives of the participants.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The primary purpose of this study was to closely examine the lived-experiences of a group of seven bilingual and bicultural ELL paraeducators as they transition from support positions in schools and classrooms to certified teaching positions. The emphasis of the study was to gain understanding about the ways in which the participants' own experiences as immigrants and English language learners specially equip them to be classroom teachers by informing and influencing their perspectives and roles. By exploring insights gleaned from the participants' lived-experiences and examining the qualities and strengths they bring to their work as teachers, this study sought to inform educational practice relating to teacher preparation and at the classroom level.

The general goal of this study was three-fold. First, in an area where there is a dearth of research on paraeducators transitioning into certified teaching positions, the understanding gleaned from the phenomenological components of this study provided a first-person perspective of the experiences of language and cultural minority paraeducators as they become certified teachers. Second, analysis of the observational and interview data provided a unique insight into how personal, cultural, and professional experiences contribute to the qualities these individuals bring into classrooms as certified teachers. Third, this study has contributed to the recognition of bilingual and bicultural paraeducators as viable candidates for teacher recruitment, not only in an effort to increase the number of

teachers specializing in ESL instructional practices, but also to increase the number of linguistically and culturally diverse teachers in the nation's classrooms.

A hermeneutic phenomenological perspective of the research served as the conceptual approach for considering the data collected on each of the participants. Qualitative in its design, this study employed portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1995) as the main method of inquiry. Life story interviews, reflective contributions from the participants, photographic portraits, and observations of their teaching provided the substance for the written portraits of the participants. Data collection took place in a variety of forms over a period of approximately one year (2006-2007). During this time, interviews overlapped with classroom observations of the teachers and the creation of their reflective narrative pieces. Other data-gathering techniques included informal e-mail and telephone conversations in addition to the examination of archived data from the subjects' participation in BETAP.

The remainder of this chapter is devoted to an overview of the major findings of this study followed by a discussion of the implications the findings hold for educational practice and teacher preparation.

Conclusions

The main findings emerging from the integration of the data in this study can be summarized as follows:

- Based on their personal experiences, bilingual immigrant teachers tend to approach the profession from a culturally responsive perspective that not

only positively influences their instructional practices but also their advocacy for students.

- Because of their vast experiences as immigrants, second language learners and paraeducators, educators such as the ones in this study have the potential to become leaders who can guide others – including preservice and inservice educators – in issues relating to culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families.
- As they transition into their new roles as teachers, certain sociocultural factors can present challenges for bilingual immigrant paraeducators that have the potential to hinder their inclusion into the staff or faculty.
- Linguistically and culturally diverse teacher candidates benefit from having additional support systems such as a cohort model and mentors who have experienced similar challenges, not only during their teacher preparation programs but also throughout their first years of teaching.

The Importance of Culturally Responsive Perspectives in Today's Classrooms

Teachers as well as students possess what Moll et al. refer to as “funds of knowledge” (1992, p. 133). Because of their own linguistic and cultural diversity, the participants in this study have an insider’s perspective of the social and academic needs of cultural and linguistic minority students. As Gay (2002) points out, it is important that teachers have more than a “mere awareness” (p. 107) of the diversity their students bring to the classroom. In this case, the participants bring a critical understanding of the challenges faced by culturally and

linguistically diverse students. This awareness paves the way for these teachers to use more effective instructional strategies as well as provide support to students through various forms of advocacy.

By drawing upon their experiences as non-native English speakers, educators such as the ones in this study are not only able to anticipate the special learning needs of ELL students, they are sensitive to the type of environment in which it is most conducive for minority students to feel safe taking risks both academically and socially. As evidenced in the stories shared in this study, bilingual teachers strive to create a respectful classroom environment and to use culturally responsive instructional strategies, even to the extent of intentionally integrating these elements into curricula inherently lacking them. It is also clear that previous schooling experiences construct a paradigm by which these teachers have shaped their educational philosophies. In turn, these philosophies have impacted the kind of teachers they have become.

Moreover, their own experiences as immigrants learning to negotiate the system specially qualify these teachers to support ELL students and their families. Because of their first-hand experiences with having learned to interpret and access the educational system, they are able to direct students to various kinds of resources including financial assistance and other types of support. Additionally, these teachers are sensitive to areas where, due to their unfamiliarity with the culture of schooling in the United States, students and parents benefit from extra assistance.

The Potential for Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Teachers in Leadership

Roles

The very nature of the transition from paraeducator to teacher provides an interesting circumstance. The paraeducator, a person often operating on the sidelines and behind the scenes, holds a position traditionally marginalized in the school setting. Additionally, many of these individuals are linguistically and culturally diverse, further separating them from the mainstream. In considering the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) held by the paraeducator, one might assume that it lacks the value of capital held by those who are certified as teachers. However, upon closer examination, it appears that paraeducators, especially those who are linguistically and culturally diverse, actually possess more extensive reservoirs of cultural capital, enabling them to be highly effective in their roles.

As bilingual immigrants, the teachers in this study share similar experiences with the growing numbers of minority and immigrant students. As paraeducators they were relegated to work with language learners in a narrowly defined arena – the ESL program. Now as certified teachers, their institutional capital (Bourdieu, 1986) broadens their range of influence, thus giving them access to more members of the educational community. Participants in this study have provided several examples of their leadership potential as they have begun to use their newly acquired institutional capital to integrate their multifaceted cultural awareness into their roles as certified teachers.

The leadership roles assumed by participants manifested predominantly in the area of teacher education. Through intentional modeling or simply by virtue of their daily actions, they have become teachers of their colleagues. Through informal interactions such as a cluster teacher support group or modeling by example during parent conferences, teachers in this study have helped instill a greater understanding of the learning and support needs of second language learners and their families. In more formal leadership or instructional roles such as university classes or district sanctioned trainings, participants have been in the position to potentially influence pedagogical practices on a much wider scale.

Finally, participants have also demonstrated the qualities of leadership to their students. Because these teachers are themselves bilingual immigrants they act as role models for their minority language students. Through their example of dedication and perseverance, the teachers in this study represent the hope of learning to use a new language and navigating an unfamiliar culture. For their students, participants represent the potential for setting and accomplishing goals they might otherwise not even consider.

Sociocultural Factors Present Challenges for Immigrant Bilingual Teachers

Participants' stories revealed that they face a variety of sociocultural challenges in their transition to teaching. In addition to the accents and language differences they possess as bilingual immigrants, participants bring differences in cultural perspectives as well. These cultural perspectives encompass their preexisting educational paradigms as well as their cultural communication styles; in turn, these directly impact how they are perceived by others.

Although participants have been present in schools as paraeducators, it is clear that some students, teachers and parents may not be ready to accept them as certified teachers. Because of their status as non-native English-speaking immigrants, the participants face certain biases and prejudices because of their diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In addition, this diversity has presented additional hurdles for participants in the form of increased scrutiny of their abilities. Based on the preexisting prejudices and preconceived stereotypes of some teachers, students and parents, the participants have had to invest considerable amounts of time and effort to gain respect and acceptance as teachers.

By creating possibilities for misunderstanding between them and their fellow teachers, differences in communication styles have also presented challenges for participants. Several situations shared by the Eastern European teachers illustrated that an assertive style of communicating with colleagues has the potential to be misinterpreted as pushy or aggressive. Through self-awareness about these differences and a strong desire to be effective in spite of them, participants have learned to be deliberate in their attempt to understand and be understood.

Finally, the teachers are influenced by their own previous educational experiences. In this case, their perspectives have been shaped by very different educational and social philosophies than those prevalent in mainstream American culture. Combining elements from their previous experiences, their teacher preparation, and their own philosophical perspectives of educational

practice, participants have formed new educational paradigms which they use to create a balance of freedom and discipline in their classrooms. However, as alluded to by participants, the school system in many parts of the United States may take for granted the importance of choice, discipline, and structure in schooling. Because of this, the infrastructure is not always present to support participants to the extent they would like, frustrating them as they seek greater administrative and parental support.

Teacher Preparation Program Enhancements Provide Valuable Support

Clearly, having worked in schools as paraeducators has been beneficial to participants as they have transitioned into teaching positions. Like many other paraeducators who have become teachers (Bernal & Aragon, 2004; Monzó & Rueda, 2001a; Valenciana et al., 2006), not only did the participants have an informed view of much of what teaching entails, they possessed valuable experiences working with students. However, their experiences, while beneficial, were not all-inclusive, leaving participants with much to learn as new teachers. Reflecting on their transition experiences, participants shared two distinct areas in which they have found a need for greater preparation: managing time and instructional planning, and negotiating the unfamiliar territory of school politics.

All participants mentioned struggling with effectively managing the increased demands on their time as classroom teachers. In addition, they also found the responsibility of planning for the instruction of all content areas “overwhelming.” While this is certainly the case for many new teachers, it is possible that due to their experience as paraeducators, participants had

preconceived notions or false expectations about the demands of teaching that ultimately proved to underestimate the reality.

The second area in which participants highlighted a need for additional preparation was in better understanding the culture and politics of school. Once again, while they had experience as paraeducators, as teachers they are exposed to different levels of educational politics. Reminiscent of the sociocultural challenges already mentioned, navigating the complex terrain of district and school level politics presents special challenges to those not native to the culture of American schooling. In both of these areas participants indicated the potential value of having sustained guidance through a mentoring relationship with an experienced teacher.

Lastly, all participants expressed the effectiveness of the cohort model. Having a group of linguistically and culturally diverse peers provided invaluable support and camaraderie on both academic and personal levels. In addition, as indicated in other studies (Bernal & Aragon, 2004; Valenciana et al., 2006), role models or leaders from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds served as an immense source of inspiration and motivation for participants.

Implications

There are several implications that can be drawn from the findings of this study. There are implications for instructional practice, district and school level administration, teacher preparation, and further research.

One of the main implications that can be drawn from this study is that bilingual immigrant teachers, especially those who previously worked as paraeducators, can be valuable initiators of culturally responsive pedagogy. In many ways, their own language learning experiences and heightened awareness of issues regarding diversity and marginality, equip them with expertise that can be an asset for students, parents, and teachers. Students can benefit from the educators' conscientious integration of language and culture into the curriculum as well as their acts of advocacy that help to provide greater equity. Because of the combination of their experience as paraeducators and as immigrants, the bilingual educators possess a keen sensitivity to the needs and concerns of ELL parents, and to the ways parents can be effectively encouraged to support their children's learning. Finally, bilingual immigrant teachers are a valuable resource to the schools in which they teach as well as to their colleagues. In their instructional planning and delivery they demonstrate how to use the students' funds of knowledge to engage them in learning. In doing so, they help to increase the overall awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity as a strength rather than a deficit.

A second implication relates to a greater integration of diversity at the district and school levels. This study indicates that those in the margins have a great deal to offer. Emphasizing and integrating the voices and perspectives of the diverse student population into curricula and school communities enriches the educational system. By tapping into the strengths of bilingual immigrant teachers and other diverse staff, predominantly monocultural school

environments become more diversified and reflective of their student populations (Nieto, 2002). Finally, by creating opportunities for these individuals to demonstrate and share their expertise, they not only validate their linguistic and cultural minority students, they increase the social capital of the school community as a whole.

A third implication deals with teacher preparation. Teacher preparation programs, especially those targeting linguistically and culturally diverse teacher candidates, present the ideal setting for meeting the specific learning needs of individuals who have not been educated in the mainstream American school system. Bilingual immigrant teacher candidates benefit from an awareness of “how the system works,” including the process involved in seeking and interviewing for available positions. Moreover, language learners can benefit significantly from exposure to and practice with the specific speech registers required for success in the academic and professional circumstances they encounter in their new roles.

As with all teacher candidates, experiential elements in teacher preparation are extremely helpful in strengthening practice. Broadening the experiences in which teacher candidates participate to include areas such as planning and time management enables new teachers to begin developing these much needed skills. Once again, this becomes particularly relevant when the teacher candidates’ educational experiences and backgrounds stem from very different educational systems from the one in this country. In addition to added experiential elements, a mentoring component for preservice teachers that

extends into their first years of teaching provides valuable professional and emotional support. The value of mentors in supporting new teacher success and improving teacher retention is well documented (Darling–Hammond, 1998). This assistance becomes particularly relevant for traditionally marginalized teachers as they learn to negotiate the educational system from a position in the mainstream.

A fourth implication bears relevance for the types of research methodology employed to develop greater understanding and gain insights from individuals holding diverse perspectives. In contrast to more traditional or positivist methods of research, portraiture and other phenomenological approaches allow researchers to look in-depth at important aspects of the lived-experiences of others. Life story narratives and research that is co-constructed with participants create a platform from which the voices of those in the margins can be heard, examined, and learned from.

A phenomenological research approach allows for a candid exploration of the experiences of one's life and provides valuable opportunities to extend our understanding beyond our familiar frames of reference. The stories of those from marginalized groups, offer valuable insights and much needed perspective in understanding of the complex attributes diversity brings to the fabric of society, and in bringing about social transformation.

Another implication, related to the latter, specifically involves research that is co-constructed and reflexive in nature. A phenomenological approach to research in which participants take an active role in creating and negotiating the

data, provides rich opportunities for them to reflect on their own experiences and affirm their own trajectories. Participants in this study frequently commented on the value of closely examining their own educational perspectives and philosophies. In addition, seeing themselves in the role of a teacher from another perspective allowed them to examine their practice from a more objective vantage point.

Because of their involvement in creating the reflective contributions and the dialogic nature of the interviews, participants were afforded the opportunity to closely examine how their personal and professional experiences have influenced their transition into teaching. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997), notes that “deepening and broadening the conversation” are not only acts of analysis, but also acts of intervention (p. 11). Dialogic and interactive analysis of data with participants allows for them to self-evaluate and examine how their motivations and philosophies contribute to their teaching practice and their involvement in the educational system.

A final implication involves considering further research of this nature to inform teacher preparation and practice. As indicated by other studies (Torres et al., 2004), there is more phenomenological research needed to examine the qualities minority teachers bring to the classroom. Providing a forum for previously marginalized individuals – such as bilingual paraeducators who have become teachers – allows for educators to gain important insight on how to more effectively support minority teachers in the nation’s schools. Moreover, research that highlights bilingual educators’ instructional styles and sociocultural

connections within the school, and with students and their families, has the potential to inform educational practice on a variety of levels ranging from the classroom to the university.

Findings from this study suggest there is more research needed on bilingual immigrant teachers in a variety of areas. For instance, while the present study provided new insights on the transition experiences, particularly those of bilingual Eastern European immigrants, there is clearly more research needed on a broader range of cultural groups. In addition, all of the teachers involved in this study, except one, are teaching in ESL program courses. Further research is needed to examine the potential for bilingual immigrant teachers to transition into mainstream classrooms. Specifically related to paraeducators transitioning into teaching positions, a closer examination of ways they can maintain the effective skills they possessed as paraeducators is needed. Participants in this study and others (Monzó & Rueda, 2001a) found that in their roles as classroom teachers, it was difficult to maintain the same types of relationships and levels of support for their students as they did when they were paraeducators. Since these are considered significant attributes of paraeducators transitioning into teaching positions, it is important to learn about how they can maintain those valuable skills.

Finally, since the participants in this study are relatively new in their positions as certified teachers, future research would help to determine how these bilingual teachers develop as educators. As Oksana so eloquently articulated: “This is my passion and now it’s just the beginning...Now I am

looking at myself as a new teacher and thinking about becoming a *good teacher*...using the things that I've learned and applying them, and figuring out my own teaching style." Clearly, educators and researchers alike have more to learn about these teachers. For instance, do they continue to use their strengths and qualities as bilingual immigrants and in what ways? As culturally and linguistically diverse members of the educational system do they continue to assume leadership roles in their buildings and in broader arenas to influence pedagogy? And, what impact does their transition have on other bilingual immigrant paraeducators?

This study sought to give voice to those who have traditionally been silenced. It highlighted the power of examining the lived-experiences of others; especially those who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Although it provided only a glimpse of the rich insights that can be gleaned from the stories of bilingual immigrant teachers, it has attempted to provide readers with a greater understanding about the challenges and successes these dedicated educators face as they move forward in their journeys as certified teachers.

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Appendix A

Potential Interview Questions

Possible interview questions:

Date Human Subjects Consent signed:

Personal descriptive information:

Name (pseudonym)

DOB

POB

Parents

Now: Spouse/Children:

- 1) What career aspirations did you have growing up?
- 2) Background – how did you come to be in the US?
- 3) Once in US - What experiences or personal reasons led you to become an ELL paraprofessional?
 - a) During this time, how did you see yourself?
 - b) How were you treated by others?
 - c) Biggest lessons learned about teaching?
- 4) What experiences or personal reasons led you to become a certified teacher?
 - a) How did you learn about BETAP?
 - b) What if any reservations?
 - c) What did family say – level of support?
 - d) What was your end-goal?
- 5) Describe some of the personal and professional challenges you have encountered as a paraprofessional transitioning to a certified teacher.
 - a) What were the biggest sources of support?

- b) What were the hurdles? Biggest Challenge
 - c) What would you do differently?
- 6) Describe your self-perception as a teacher as you transitioned from paraprofessional to certified teacher.
- a) Where are you today? What are you teaching?
 - b) What drives you in this quest?
 - c) Was/is it what you expected? Disappointments? Celebrations?
 - d) How can we effectively recruit minority teachers like yourself?

Appendix B

Post-observation Reflection Questions

Guiding Questions for Video Reflection

Directions:

- 👂 View the video of your teaching & reflect using the following questions.
- 👂 Respond either during or after the video: You can use your own paper or jot notes to in the space provided on this one.
- 👂 I will come and meet with you to briefly discuss your reflections. I will take both the video and your reflections (which will later be returned to you when the analysis is complete).
- 👂 When we meet I will also share with you your reflective piece and photos for your approval/input.

Reflective Questions:

1. Aside from pay and position, what are the major differences between your work as an ELL staff assistant and the work you are doing now?
2. How is your own classroom different from the ones you were in as a student in your native country?
 - a. In what ways are you a different teacher in the US than you might be in your native country?
3. How has your teacher preparation and practice influenced your views, opinions, and teaching?
4. What do you think and or believe you represent to your students?
 - a. What do you have to offer them (both immigrant and American students)?
5. What was the main thing you learned from viewing the video?

Any other comments?

Appendix C

Portrait Emergent Themes

Theme	Example: Observations	Example: Interviews/Reflections	Example: Questionnaire/Archived Data
Relationships			
Advocate			
CRP			
What she has to offer students			
What she represents to students			
School perspective Resulting from native country experiences			
Accent			
Best of BETAP			
Suggestions for BETAP			
Issues with other staff			
Differences as a teacher			

Appendix D

Participant Comparison Grid

Thread	Isabel	Oksana	Olga	Luda	Mae	Eva	Yelena
Advocacy							
CRP							
Leadership							
Sociocultural Factors – schooling							
Sociocultural Factors – staff relations							
Accent & Language							
Adjustments as teachers							
BETAP insights Positives Improvements							
Encouragers							
Resources							
Recruiting others							

Appendix E

Emergent Themes and Strands with Supporting Literature

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	Teacher Education	Challenges
<p data-bbox="310 532 604 565">Instructional practice</p> <p data-bbox="214 634 701 695">Related research or literature is listed for each strand.</p>	<p data-bbox="999 532 1100 565">BETAP</p>	<p data-bbox="1507 532 1787 565">Accent & Language</p>
<p data-bbox="386 802 520 834">Advocacy</p>	<p data-bbox="978 802 1121 834">Transition</p>	<p data-bbox="1493 802 1801 862">Sociocultural Factors Staff</p>
<p data-bbox="380 1039 527 1071">Leadership</p>	<p data-bbox="968 1039 1131 1071">Encourager</p>	<p data-bbox="1493 1039 1801 1099">Sociocultural Factors Previous schooling</p>

Appendix F

Where I Come From**By
Isabel**

I come from a veranda overlooking the Caribbean Sea, and from nights perfumed by the scent of jasmine while misted by salty ocean breeze.

I come from a night with two moons; One glowing in the sky, and the other reflecting on the ocean waves.

I come from the silvery foam of the waves, and the sensual songs that lulled me.

I come from a bustling wooden house filled with families and relatives and the aroma of *café recién colado*.

I come from happy times and sad times, from times of upheaval and revolt, and joyful times of *Navidad with lechón asado*.

I come from luggage, dusty and old that kept my Cuban traditions untouched.

I come from many countries where I moved, and from, “we must start all over again.”

I come from my father and mother, a mixture of pride and encouragement.

I come from a family of four sisters and from, “Let’s always be close to each other.”

I come from books and eyes that wonder through their pages in awe.

I come from learning and querying, and from wanting to teach those who after me, hopefully would say, “I come from her!”

Appendix G

Why Teach?



“The passion to teach is far more basic and primitive than the passion to learn”.

-Eric Hofer

I have always dreamed of becoming a teacher. Even being a young, five year old kid I had this “primitive passion” to teach-or maybe back then it was just to share. I loved sharing stories, both made up and those that I heard from adults and later on, those that I read in books. It was as though I couldn’t keep it all to myself. I had to share it with others. It’s like that even now. I love to teach because I can share with others something important and precious. I can share with them knowledge and open their horizons, which is so empowering. It is well said in Herbert Kohl’s quote:

“I believe the impulse to teach is fundamentally altruistic and represents a desire to share what you value and to empower others. I am not talking about the job of teaching so much as the calling to teach”.

I felt that calling when I was very young. And I believe that calling is what helped me to become a teacher despite a very challenging road of learning English and building a new life in America. My family and I moved to America in 1992 from Ukraine. At that time, I was a somewhat confused teenager and moving across the world was quite an experience. The hardest part, of course was that I didn't speak any English when we got here. At first I was very lonely and confused. New school system, new culture and so much of the new stuff really bewildered me. But with time, it got easier. I made some new friends, and my studies of English began to improve. Step by step, I grew in self-confidence and was able to pursue my life long dream of becoming a teacher.

The journey took seven long years. At times, I got frustrated and struggled trying to get through classes and work at the same time. But that calling is what made me determined to reach my goal. I graduated in May 2004 and got a teaching job at Pioneer Elementary School (the school where I previously worked as a staff assistant) in Evergreen School District. I've been teaching third grade for the past two years and will continue teaching the same grade level this year.

The first two years of teaching were very challenging. At first, it was pretty overwhelming. Often, I've stayed at school long after its closing hours working on lesson plans and grading papers. But despite all of the hard work, and long hours of planning and meetings, I love being a teacher. There are still many challenges that I encounter every day, and yet I love teaching more and more. The greatest satisfaction from teaching is the sense that I'm doing something important for society, and the impact that I can have on my students. They are so different, so

unique in their ways; my greatest goal as a teacher is to find the skills to reach all of them in a positive way. I want to teach them all the necessary skills as well as instill in them the love to learn. My greatest hope is that they become enthusiastic life long learners wherever their lives will take them...

Appendix H

A Poem About Me**By Eva**

Adventurous

Brave and bold - settled in the United States alone

Courage was what it took

Determined to make it

Eva Marie is my name

Focus is what I need to work often and hard in my profession and life

Gregarious - not as much as I should be

Hours of grading and lesson planning

Interested in new ideas and learning

Just as I was in college

Kind and unwavering in my values

Lacking sleep for years

Miserable when too much work accumulates

Not as firm in my classroom as I'd like to be

Often sad - a feeling I get more and more

Precious time in school is running out for my students

Questions that I always have: how to be more effective in my classroom

Responsible but procrastinating at times

Shy yet stubborn to get ideas implemented

Tremendously tired now

Unwavering in my goal to succeed and teach

Vase-like – shattered and glued back together

With and without family support at times

Exuberant about student success

Yes for yearning for students to grab a hold of learning

Z – When I get here, I'll finish this chapter of my life