

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

**Comparative Analysis of English Language Learners' Experiences in
Public School at the Third and Eighth Grade Levels**

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ABSTRACT (100-200 WORDS): The field of education is one that endeavors constant change of fluctuating degrees. Most recently and drastically, the educational field has experienced and responded to changes in the cultural and linguistic diversity that is rapidly increasing in classrooms across the United States. Congruently, current legislation holds both educators and students accountable for their standardized performance and accomplishments, although teachers of ethnically diverse students are not required to be certified in the teaching of these learners. As a result, it was the purpose of this study to identify and analyze the themes evident from a series of observations and interviews conducted on two culturally and linguistically diverse participants by two teacher candidates. Ultimately, the study unveiled themes of self-concept, cultural behavioral expectations, language brokering, and social interactions of the two culturally and linguistically diverse participants. A discussion of the results are included, as well as the inclusion of best practices in classrooms comprised of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Comparative Analysis of English Language Learners' Experiences in Public School at
the Third and Eighth Grade Levels

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Dr. Cohen

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Abstract

The field of education is one that endeavors constant change of fluctuating degrees. Most recently and drastically, the educational field has experienced and responded to changes in the cultural and linguistic diversity that is rapidly increasing in classrooms across the United States. Congruently, current legislation holds both educators and students accountable for their standardized performance and accomplishments, although teachers of ethnically diverse students are not required to be certified in the teaching of these learners. As a result, it was the purpose of this study to identify and analyze the themes evident from a series of observations and interviews conducted on two culturally and linguistically diverse participants by two teacher candidates. Ultimately, the study unveiled themes of self-concept, cultural behavioral expectations, language brokering, and social interactions of the two culturally and linguistically diverse participants. A discussion of the results are included, as well as the inclusion of best practices in classrooms comprised of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Introduction

Without hesitation, one may viably claim that the field of education thrives on the reciprocal successes and contributions of its many integral parts. Congruently, the entity of education is one that endeavors constant change, which is evident in degrees ranging from alterations in daily classroom procedures to paradigm shifts that permeate society. As a result, the effectiveness of education is directly related to its constituents' ability to recognize and adapt to the needs and demands of its learners. Of the previously mentioned changes, education has

most recently and drastically undergone changes in the ethnicities represented in schools across the United States.

According to Onchwari, Onchwari, and Keengwe (2008), "Immigrant children are the fastest growing segment in the US child population" (p. 267). Likewise, Echevarría, Vogt, and Short (2008) assert that each year the United States grows more "ethnically and linguistically diverse, with more than 90% of recent immigrants coming from non-English-speaking countries" (p.6). Additionally, approximately 180 native languages are now represented in classrooms across the United States, and these proportions continue to grow significantly (Echevarría et al., 2008, p.7). Resulting implications of diversified ethnic representations in classrooms exist even more dynamically than their numbers, however, as each culturally and linguistically diverse student brings with them unique funds of knowledge, identities, interests, values, and experiences. Additionally, Echevarría et al. (2008) offer that with ethnically and linguistically diverse students, "we also find diversity in their educational backgrounds, expectations of schooling, socioeconomic status, age of arrival, personal experiences while coming to and living in the United States, and parents' education levels and proficiency in English" (p.7). Indeed, each learner identifies with culture(s) that influence(s) their adaptation and learning experiences in United States classrooms. Helmer and Eddy (2003) articulate:

Culture is often viewed as the means of passing on values, perceptions, attitudes and behaviors, as well as reflection of tradition, lifestyle and patterned ways of dealing with the world. It includes unwritten rules for routine as well as rules for work and play. (p.17)

These diverse dynamics affect an individuals' self-concept, influencing their view of themselves and the world around them.

Additionally, a considerable amount of non-native English speaking children also come from poverty-stricken backgrounds. This factor contributes significantly to the educational accomplishments of culturally and linguistically diverse students, as “research has shown that poorer students, in general, are less academically successful” (Echevarria et al., 2008, p.9). Ultimately, these combined factors “make adjustments in the classroom harder for both the teacher and the children” (Onchwari et al., 2008, p.267). With the plethora of contextual factors that culturally and linguistically diverse students contribute to the learning environment established, it is crucial for one to denote that these cultural components are often unfamiliar to the rest of the learning community, especially teachers (Helmer & Eddy, 2003, p.13).

Needless to say, how an innumerable amount of factors of culture translate into the classroom is a complex concept, one which proves to be increasingly important as over forty percent of today’s school-age children are ethnic minorities (Bennett, 2011, p.15). Fry and Lopez (2012) cite the 2011 census report stating “overall, Hispanic students make up nearly one-quarter (23.9%) of the nation’s public school enrollment, up from one-fifth (19.9%) in 2005 and 16.7% in 2000” (p. 6). Congruently, increasing accountability has been placed on educators who are responsible for accommodating students that exhibit a wide spectrum of abilities and needs (Riehl, 2000, p. 59). The inclusion of ethnically and culturally diverse learners also places pressure on teachers who are held accountable as a result of high-stakes standardized testing. Echevarria et al. (2008) elaborate that “federal and state governments expect *all* students to meet high standards and have adjusted national and state assessments as well as graduation requirements to reflect new levels of achievement and to accommodate requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act” (p. 6). What is more, the No Child Left Behind Act does not require that

educators teaching ethnically and linguistically diverse students have certification or training “in ESL methodology or second language acquisition theory” (p.9).

The disequilibrium between teacher accountability and preparation for educating culturally and linguistically diverse learners may also result detrimentally for (perhaps all) students, as well. Indubitably, when educators are not familiar with, or misunderstand the behaviors and values related to students' cultural identities, they are more likely to misinterpret their students' capabilities and ultimately (and often without recognition) provide the students with educational experiences and tasks that are not reflective of the students' potential. As a result, these misinterpretations often put culturally and linguistically diverse students at an academic disadvantage (Bennett, 2011, p.224). Bennett (2011) eloquently claims that “when social conditions and school practices hinder the development of this brilliance among students outside the predominant culture...the waste of human potential affects us all” (p.14). Scholars in the field have proclaimed, however, that when educators strive to recognize and establish an understanding of students' funds of knowledge and ethnic identities, students are more likely to experience academic success (Helmer & Eddy, 2003, p.17).

Provided the importance of the previously established educational realities and correlating contextual components, it is the purpose of this study and comparative analysis to dissect and analyze the themes of self-concept and attribution of two culturally and linguistically diverse students in United States classrooms. This literature also intends to discuss related teaching implications and best educational practices in teaching from a multicultural educational approach. More finitely, the themes of experiences endeavored by two English Language Learners in public school will serve as the foundation of this analysis. At the time of the study, one participant was enrolled in third grade, while the other was enrolled in the eighth grade.

Given the developmental and age differences of the two participants, this study compares and discusses the themes and attributes evident in the students, as well as examines correlating best practices that may, or already have, effected these (and other) culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Methods

To begin, data collection for this study occurred over a span of several weeks during the third quarter of both participants' academic school year. The study was conducted by two Elementary Education majors during the second semester of their senior year, or student teaching experience. It is necessary to denote that both researchers endeavored their student teaching experiences in Professional Development Schools. As a part of the Professional Development School model, the researchers were present in their individual classrooms for the entirety of one academic school year, satisfying their final clinical and student teaching experiences with the same students and cooperating teacher(s). Each researcher was responsible in the study of one participant at their PDS school.

The participant in third grade was enrolled in the classroom in which their researcher was also the teacher candidate (student teacher). This participant (Allison) was recommended to the researcher by her cooperating teacher as an ideal candidate for this study.

Due to the lack of presence of English Language Learners in the classes of the teacher candidate at the middle school level, the researcher studied a participant that was recommended by the school's eighth grade ELL coordinator a few weeks prior to the initiation of the study. Therefore, this participant (Evanna) and their researcher did not maintain as seasoned of a

rapport as compared to Allison and their researcher, although the information that was obtained resulted equivocally. The studies took place in neighboring school districts.

This study was comprised of a series of observations of each participant by their researcher. A parent of each participant signed a consent form to allow their child to participate in the study. Field notes were recorded by the teacher candidates during each observation, which were later accompanied by journal entries that fueled interview questions and/or potential explanations of exhibited student behavior. Furthermore, both participants, as well as the educators teaching the classes in which the students were being observed, were interviewed by the researcher twice. The first of these interviews took place mid-study, after observations had initiated. The subsequent interview occurred towards the end of the study, just as the final observations were conducted. Allison was observed during multiple subject areas, specials, and times throughout the day in an all-inclusive third grade classroom. Evanna was observed during mathematics class, which took place during second period in a classroom comprised of only ELL students. The collected field notes and interview results were subsequently reviewed by the teacher candidates in attempt to identify themes exhibited by the individual participants. The themes that were identified by each of the teacher candidates were then compared to one another to identify consistencies and differences among the participants.

Participants

Allison is a female third grade student who was eight years old at the time of this study. Allison lives with her mother, father, and younger brother. Both of Allison's parents are employed outside the home in low wage/restaurant jobs. Her family's economic condition qualifies her for free and reduced lunch. Allison rides the bus to school each day and is not

involved in extracurricular activities. In her home, Allison's parents speak mainly Spanish and communication to the home needs to be presented in both Spanish and English. Due to a lack of transportation, Allison's family does not attend evening functions at school, such as open houses or family fun nights. Although her family is from a lower socio-economic situation, Allison is always well groomed, and her hair is clean and arranged attractively. Her clothes are clean and she possesses the necessary attire for the weather conditions (boots, snow-pants, winter jacket). Allison is averaged-sized for her age and she appears to have a good diet. She often brings her lunch from home, even though she qualifies for free/reduced lunch. Allison receives ESL services daily with the ESL resource teacher. Academically, her report card scores at this time are 3's (performing at grade level), indicating she is on par with the majority of her peers. Additionally, Allison's Developmental Reading Assessment level has improved from a twenty-four half a school year ago to a current score at the time of this study of thirty-four.

Evanna is a young Hispanic woman that was 14 years old (enrolled in eighth grade) at the time of this study. She is the oldest of four children in her family, and lives with her mother, father, and three siblings. Both of Evanna's parents work full time, low-income jobs. As a result, Evanna comes from a low socioeconomic background, and qualifies for free and reduced lunch at the school. However, Evanna consistently wears suitable attire to school, which usually consists of jean pants and a zip-up sweater and undershirt, and usually wears her hair neatly in a ponytail. Furthermore, Evanna possesses all of the necessary school supplies that she needs for her classes. Evanna identifies with the Latina ethnicity, and has been enrolled in the U.S. school system since the third grade, where she started ELL services and continued to do so into (and will following) eighth grade. At the time of this study, Evanna was endeavoring the "push-in" model, and was taught math, science, and social studies with other ELL students. Of these

classes, the science and social studies classes were co-taught by two ELL teachers. Overall, Evanna is an above-average student, as she earned straight A's for the first two quarters of the year, and was on her way to do the same for the third quarter.

Results

Theme: Self-Concept

Of the themes that resulted from the research of this study, ideas regarding self-concept surfaced powerfully and frequently for both participants. Onchwari, Onchwari, Keengwe (2008) assert that:

It is critical for teachers and school administrators to assess a child's level of emotional security and self-esteem and help the child, as necessary, feel a sense of belonging in the class. Children's development of initiative and industry is supported in environments that accept them for who they are. Acceptance helps children gain confidence in their abilities. Initially, many immigrant children may be quiet and withdrawn in the classrooms as they try to understand their environment and develop confidence to initiate activities and express ideas. (p 279)

Stanovich et al. (1998) claim that student self-concept is "particularly important because it is a predictor of future achievement, as well as an indicator of healthy personal development" (p.121). Therefore, aspects of each participant's self-concept are dissected in this study.

When asked about her first day at school during an interview, Allison stated that she was so nervous the first day of school that she did not want to get out of the car. When asked what she was nervous about, Allison explained, "Because I am different." Allison was asked how she

was different, and replied that she had different hair, eyes and skin. Allison then stated that “Some people have different hair and eyes, and that’s how they are different.” However, Allison was unambiguous in her assertion that she has never been treated differently because she was “different.” She stated that after she came to the classroom for the first time, she was not nervous anymore. She made fast friends with the girl who was seated next to her, and there were other girls in the class with whom she played last year and during the summer.

During the interviews, Allison stated that she has never felt excluded from play or other activities by other children, but conveyed that she sees herself as the person who includes others. She described an occurrence on the playground when she saw a classmate “by herself” she “asked her to come play with [another classmate] and me.” During this study, Allison was observed several times during various recess breaks. Her assertions of herself being the “includer” of others is a feasible conclusion based on her interactions with students on the playground. Whereas she does engage in play with students, it has been observed that Allison behaves more like a social butterfly, connecting with various students and seamlessly moving from one activity to another. The only time Allison was observed engaging in an activity for the majority of the recess time was when she was helping to build a snow fort with several other students. This supports her view of a good person as one who is nice and helpful, thereby inferring her choice and desire to be a good person.

Allison’s view of what is good behavior can be linked to the cultural stipulation of quiet, respectful behavior to adults and is clearly seen in her behavior in the classroom and on the playground. On the playground, Allison was not observed engaging in rule breaking behaviors (such as playing too roughly or using the equipment inappropriately). In the classroom during

instruction and independent work, she is rarely off task. In fact, she has on more than one occasion given another student, who was distracting with off task behavior, a “you better quit it” look or a polite “shush.” However, during group activities, Allison can be brought to a degree of silliness, but is quickly corrected and she easily brought back to the task at hand. These observations support her view of herself as a good or well behaved person.

When asked about her abilities as a student, Allison stated that she thought she was a good student. She acknowledges she does not understand English as well as she thinks she should (relative to her classmates), but stated that Reading is her favorite subject, because she “gets to read funny stories like Dork Diaries” and “reading makes me calm.” She also states she likes Math, but Science was her least favorite. When asked about Science she indicated the new words (vocabulary) made science less “fun” but she liked the hands-on activities. Overall, she indicated in the interviews that she enjoys school. Indeed, she is rarely absent and is engaged in the classroom activities presented. Her demeanor is generally happy and interested. When addressed, she responds with a smile with her answer or comment.

Just as the results indicated for Allison, Evanna also demonstrated that her schema of self-concept includes being a good student, friend, and person in general. To begin, Evanna provided evidence that she perceives herself to be different from others in the school. For one, Evanna shared that she feels more comfortable interacting with non-native English speakers (which will be further discussed later in this analysis), solidifying that she is aware of linguistic and cultural differences between herself and other learners in the school. Evanna also shared that she has not ever felt discriminated against, but her comparatively reverted tone and body language may prompt one to feel differently.

When encouraged to share during an interview, Evanna articulated that she believes she is a good person and friend because she is there for her friends when they need her. For example, Evanna has previously given advice to friends in need, as well as told peers that “everything will be okay” when they were crying. Evanna similarly believed that her peers would also describe her as a good friend, as she is nice and sometimes makes them laugh. Furthermore, Evanna views herself as a good person and friend because she is not dramatic about things, and does “not make a big deal about everything.” This vocalized contribution was comparatively exclusive to Evanna, and may be attributed to the pre-adolescent realities that Evanna endeavors. Likewise, Evanna was observed helping peers on a variety of occasions, and the students felt comfortable asking her for help. Evanna’s peers treated her just as she was—an integral part of the learning community. Some students initiated social discussions with Evanna in class during observations, but she often remained on task after a short response. When Evanna did respond to this stimuli, however, she frequently looked to see where the teacher was, and often smiled during her response.

Furthermore, Evanna articulated that she perceives herself to be a good student. In depth, Evanna explained that she thinks good students are always on time, get good grades (which she considers to be As) turn in their homework, and do not do “bad stuff,” which includes “skipping class or doing drugs.” However, when Participant two was asked if she thought she was smart, she chuckled and replied “not really,” because she “doesn’t know a lot of things.” One should denote that Evanna earned straight As for both first and second quarter, and was on her way to achieve the same for third quarter. Interestingly, Evanna shared that she perceives that her peers view her as smart, because they often ask her for help (especially in math), and explicitly tell her that she is smart. Evanna also believes that her peers would describe her as “really nice, shy, and

makes them laugh sometimes.” When encouraged to share why she thinks her fellow students would describe her that way, Evanna stated that “They know me, so they would say that.”

Theme: Cultural Behavioral Expectations

Another theme that surfaced as a result of this study pertained to cultural behavioral expectations that relate to the participants' native Hispanic culture. The ESL resource teacher was interviewed about his observations of Allison. He was asked if Allison's reserved demeanor was culturally influenced and if so, if her gender played a role in this influence. The resource teacher replied that Allison's reserved behavior is culturally influenced, but is more strongly influenced by the expectation that children are to be well behaved in Mexican culture than gender roles.

An example that the ESL resource teacher articulated was in his experience, when Mexican families come to a parent-teacher conferences, they are often more concerned about how their child behaves in class than the child's grades, activities, or academic performance. In fact, during a conference with another Latino family, the ESL Resource teacher observed a mother become progressively nervous and finally asked if the child was well behaved. The mother subsequently appeared more relieved when the teacher assured her that the child was well behaved in class. Likewise, according to Allison's general education teacher, when her father came to parent teacher conferences, he too was more concerned with her behavior than he was with her academics. In detail, Allison's father inquired if his child was listening to the classroom teacher, was being respectful, and following rules. Allison's father was pleased to hear that his daughter was performing as a model student in these areas.

It is apparent that family is important in Mexican culture, and this value is often transferred to Mexican immigrant homes in the United States. Both of Allison's parents work two low-paying jobs and often are unable to attend after school activities such as family fun fair nights or open houses because they have limited transportation and time. However, Allison does not lack the supplies and care she needs to be successful in school. She is always well groomed and dressed properly. She has the proper clothing for the weather and supplies she needs for school. In this observation, it can be proposed that her parents maintain much of their Mexican heritage by providing for their children their needs, although their socio-economic situation may make this difficult for them.

Evanna's parents both work in low income, manual labor employment. Her circumstances are similar to Allison, in that she is appropriately dressed every day, has the necessary supplies for school, and appears to have her daily material needs met. It is important to consider that the funds of knowledge students bring with them to the classroom includes their cultural standards. Evanna is also notably well-behaved and is rarely off task. Indeed, both Evanna and her teacher identified her as reserved, quiet, and well-behaved. When prompted to articulate what she thinks are characteristics of a good student, Evanna shared that being on time, being responsible, turning in homework on time, and not doing "bad stuff" were indicative of a person being a good student. Surely, one may claim that these descriptions relate to the aforementioned behavior expectations. When observed in class, Evanna remained consistently engaged in her work, and seldom made a disruption, let alone respond to the disruptions of her peers. Evanna also expressed in an interview that she thinks school is important, because "it is a tool that you use to become somebody in life," and "for a career." Evanna's parents also place a value on education, as Evanna shared that her parents tell her that she needs school "to be

successful in life.” Indubitably, this focus on the importance of education transfers into Evanna’s accomplishments and abilities in the classroom, provided the previously dissected attributes.

The term familism, the subordination of personal interests for the needs of the family, is suited to Mexican cultural values. Harris, Jamison, & Trujillo (2008) discuss research that suggests that familism “attitudes, behaviors, and family structures within an extended family system ... [are] believed to be one of the most important factors influencing the lives of Latinos. This strong sense of family orientation, obligation, and cohesion has noteworthy protective effects” (p.789). Both Allison and Evanna resemble a similar cultural heritage which has produced a strong family connection and quite possibly an improved academic performance.

Theme: Language Brokering

Often ESL’s broker language for parents and family members who are less proficient in the dominate culture’s language. This frequently results in a heightened sense of pride for these children to help their families. Both Allison and Evanna during initial interviews affirmed that they feel good about themselves when they are able to help their respective parents by translating for them. Both participants bear resemblance to research that states “positive feelings about language brokering are associated with higher self esteem, academic self efficacy and performance, ethnic identity development, and a strong parent-child bond.” However, if the child is put in a position where there are negative emotions attached to their inability to translate, research also indicates that these negative feelings can be problematic for families and has been related to youth depression (Corona, Stevens, Halford, Shaffer, Reid-Quinoens, & Gonzalez, p789).

The socio-economic background of Allison's family qualifies them for the food program at school. Each week, the community provides a backpack of food items which the students bring home. Last year, when Allison was in second grade, a survey was sent home with the backpack of provisions. The survey was in English and the level of English used in the questionnaire was beyond Allison's ability to translate into Spanish for her parents. Because Allison did not understand the survey, and therefore her parents did not understand, the family did not return the backpack to be refilled because they thought they needed to complete and return the survey in order to continue to receive the food. The resource teacher noticed that Allison was not taking the backpack home when offered, and asked her about this. Allison was able to explain the dilemma, and the resource teacher investigated the situation further. After translating the survey and checking with the office, the resource teacher was ultimately able to assure the family they did not need to complete the survey to receive the backpack of food supplies.

When Evanna was prompted to share if she had ever translated for her family members, she articulated that she brokers for her family frequently, as Spanish is the primary language spoken amongst her family at home. Evanna then elaborated that she translates for her parents the majority of the time, and that most of this translating occurs at the store when the family is shopping. When asked how she felt about translating for her parents, Evanna elaborated that she felt proud because she was being helpful to her parents.

In regards to the experience of Allison, it is easy to see that a survey sent home in English written to an adult could be difficult for a second grader to understand much less translate to another language. In reference to both participants, as educators it is important to be conscious

of the language we use to communicate home to immigrant families, and to be vigilant in our observations of the behaviors of these families so that non-verbal language can be interpreted. Recognizing non-verbal communication is necessary so that these families are not deprived of available community resources and their needs are not over-looked due to a misunderstanding and a reliance on children to perform a task that may be beyond their cognitive ability.

Theme: Social Interactions

The last theme that continuously re-surfaced throughout the study was related to the social interactions evident by both participants. Allison's social interactions will be the first to be dissected. When Allison named the students with whom she played during and after school, she listed 2 Latino/a peers (one boy and one girl), 3 ethnically mixed girls, and a Caucasian girl. It is interesting that among the class of twenty-five students, ten of which are blond haired and blue eyed, Allison only mentioned the girls who had darker hair. These are the students with whom she indicated she plays on the playground. The first few observations of the playgroup confirmed this, however, when the playground observation data is examined, it is clear that Allison does not discriminate in her choice of playmates. Her behavior is social, but not exclusive. Indubitably, Allison interacted with the students on the playground much like a social butterfly. She came to the playground with one student and then walked around, talking to others and playing for a short while, only to subsequently engage different students in conversation. In a fifteen minute recess, Allison can engage up to 5 different playmates or playgroups.

During the scope of this study's observations, Allison was teamed up with another student for a science project, and the students needed to work collaboratively for the entirety of the assignment. The project spanned over several days, and included the collection of information and learning a new program as the learners created a presentation. In the process of this activity, Allison and her partner had a disagreement about how to proceed. After the teacher intervened and helped Allison and her partner come to an agreement, they continued on with their project and were best friends. When asked why she had not complained about the partnership as her partner did, Allison replied that she did not think that the issue was not a significant problem. When prompted to share if she liked the group project, Allison smiled and stated that she very much liked working with the other student and would like to do more group projects. In fact, she indicated she would rather do a group project than work on it by herself.

This self-assessment is verified by Allison's general education teacher, who states that Allison is:

very social, always playing with other students, enjoys interacting in big group games on the playground. She will be louder with other kids than she is with adults... she loves working with other students in partnerships and helping others in math. ...Other students seem to enjoy interacting with her too.

Indeed, it has been observed that Allison is often smiling, and usually on task in the classroom and socially active in play during recess. She is well liked among her peers and is generally very well behaved.

Evanna exhibited a variety of similar social interaction behaviors as Allison. As previously dissected, Evanna was identified by herself, her teacher, and it was made evident during all observations that she is quiet, reserved, and mostly on task in class. It was explained by herself and her teacher, as well as confirmed in observations, that Allison prefers to work with non-native English speaking students. While Allison is willing to work with Caucasian students, she elaborated that she is more comfortable with native Spanish speakers, as she is able to use another language if there appears to be miscommunication.

Some differences in social interactions between the two participants did surface, however. As provided by the interviews and observations of this study, Evanna is not outwardly social with her peers. Rather, Evanna prefers to socialize with her two (native Spanish speaking) best friends outside of class. While Evanna was observed helping other students in class (such as lending a pencil or retrieving a calculator), she would only briefly and quietly talk to one of her best friends (as she sat near her in class) on a variety of occasions. Furthermore, Evanna articulated that she prefers to work independently on school work, unless the assignment is a large project. Rather, Evanna prefers to work collaboratively with peers on projects that comparatively require a large amount of work, information, and presentation. She views these projects as opportunities to "practice team work."

Research supports both participants' preferences (although this is more evident for Evanna) to work with non-native English speaking peers as non-native English speaking individuals. Feng, Foo, Kretschmer, Prendeville, and Elgas (2004) affirm that according to social networking theory, children are not only able to identify indicators of ethnicity (such as dress), but they also "tend to bond with peers from the same ethnic group" (p.18). Feng et al. (2004)

also validate this theme by contributing that non-native English speaking children might find relationships with peers that speak the same native language and maintain the same ethnic identity because these exchanges offer “emotional security.” Furthermore, learners of a second language are consistently under stress to acquire new language and cultural skills, fueling a need to feel socially and emotionally safe, as well as generate opportunities in which the students do not need to put great effort into their communication (p.18).

Best Practices

With the aforementioned shifts and themes evident in the education of culturally and linguistically diverse student established, it is essential to denote the correlating research-based best practices as to most optimally meet the needs of all learners in the classroom. Although no one method exists to single-handedly satisfy the needs of all learners, this idea in itself is has powerful implications for all students. Indeed, a pedagogically sound focus in education has been placed on equity in the classroom, especially those with culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Equity in education can be defined as “equal opportunities for all students to reach their fullest potential” (Bennett, 2011, p.5) Congruently, it is crucial for educators to differentiate between *equity* and *equality* in the classroom, as the needs and wants that learners maintain in order to be successful in their education can, and does, vary significantly. Bennett (2011) eloquently articulates that “potential of students may differ, and at times equity requires different treatment according to relevant differences” (p.13). Therefore, it is not in the best interest of one’s learners to be treated as though they maintain equivocal backgrounds, personalities, needs, and capabilities. The practice of assuming that all children can learn under uniform conditions

can prove detrimental for learners, particularly those whose funds of knowledge are not represented in their learning experiences. Rather, Bennett (2011) meritoriously defends:

Equity pedagogy envisions teachers who create positive classroom climates, use culturally responsive teaching to foster student achievement, and consider cultural styles and culturally based child socialization, as well as the conditions of poverty or wealth, in their approach to teaching and learning. (p.5)

In order to provide equitable learning opportunities for students, teachers must be knowledgeable of students' funds of knowledge, including contextual factors such as (but not limited to) socioeconomic status, learning styles and preferred learning modalities, interests, home life, ethnic identities, values, and academic and social-emotional strengths and weaknesses. Reinforcing this idea, Onchwari et al. assert that it is "critical that teachers understand and acknowledge immigrant children's culture and work around it as opposed to striving to assimilate them into the new culture" (p.269). As another powerful assertion, Bennett (2010) shares that "by focusing on how students learn, we assume that they can learn, a powerful mindset that all students should be afforded (p.214).

Once an educator becomes aware of students' funds of knowledge, it is best practice to subsequently design instruction so that these contextual factors permeate learning experiences. Echevarria et al. (2008) assert that teachers are to utilize the previously mentioned components "to create a nonthreatening environment where students feel comfortable taking risks with language" (p.17). Marcela de Souza (2010) articulates this idea beautifully when she states, "Just as many immigrant children develop as 'cultural brokers' (Vasquez et al., 1994) and act as interpreters for their parents, teachers should become cultural bridges that connect the American school culture to these students' school culture..." (p.10).

Just as educators are to be knowledgeable and accepting of the variety of cultures and ethnicities that are represented in the classroom, research suggests that establishing a classroom environment of acceptance is foundational in multicultural (any any) education. More finitely, no student should be viewed from a deficit perspective, but rather as an asset to the academic and social-emotional experiences of every learner in the classroom (including the teacher). Onchwari et al. (2008) assert that by sharing the knowledge of students' culture and teaching about acceptance, "both immigrant and non immigrant children learn cultural differences and similarities that will help them understand why they display different behaviors in different situations" (p. 271). Reciprocally, research indicates that when students feel accepted in their learning environment, their confidence in their abilities subsequently increases (Onchwari et al., 2008, p.269). Bennett (2011) offers that "studies have shown that a classroom climate of acceptance is related to increased student achievement, especially among minorities in the classroom" (p.22). This practice also places an emphasis on the recognition and incorporation of the deeper aspects of culture, which require higher-level and empathetic thinking skills. Affording all students the opportunities to develop skills necessary for intercultural competence "means building an understanding of how one is influenced by the values, priorities, language, and norms of one's culture" (Bennett, 2011, p.369).

While establishment of an atmosphere of acceptance in the classroom is essential in multicultural education, it is equivocally crucial that educators provide students with opportunities to practice behaviors of acceptance, work interdependently with others in efforts of reaching a common goal(s), and strengthen both academic and conversational language. While the groupings and strategies in which students collaborate may fluctuate, Echevarría et al. (2008) assert that these implementations and procedures should include meaningful interactions, in

which students are “asking and answering questions, negotiating meaning, clarifying ideas, giving and justifying opinions, and more” (p.121). Therefore, effective educators ensure that educational experiences encourage students to “make connections between their own knowledge and the new information being taught” (Echevarría et al., 2008, p.23). By sharing and articulating their experiences, students are connecting to content, allowing their peers to learn vicariously through their experiences, and experiencing a sense of validation in what they are sharing. As Herrera (2010) eloquently states, “When students are involved in making connections and experimenting with what is being taught, they are much more likely to become critical thinkers and use higher order thinking skills to learn new information” (p.126). As a result, multicultural education can result equitably, and therefore effectively, if teachers and their students reciprocally engage in active inquiry and critical thought that fosters “ethical insights based on core values such as acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity, respect for human dignity and universal rights, responsibility to a world community, and respect for the earth” (Bennett, 2011, p.322). Indeed, one may defend that the aforementioned skills are crucial for the growth of students into lifelong learners and active, responsible citizens. Indubitably, both teachers and students need to evolve as critical thinkers with the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors to develop into “citizens who are able to consider alternative viewpoints, are able to examine values and assumptions (one’s own as well as those of others), and are willing to learn to think critically” (pp.32-35).

Much of Allison’s confidence with a diverse population of students and academic success this year can in part be attributed to the care she receives from her parents, in that she has her basic needs met and appears to have a loving, wholesome home environment. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory tells us that students need sufficient food, security and shelter (basic,

biological needs) in order to progress cognitively, emotionally and socially. Observations of Allison indicate that she receives her biological needs consistently. Likewise, Maslow's third level in this theory states that children also need to feel a sense of love and belonging. Observations of the classroom interaction of the students with students and teachers with students demonstrate an accepting, positive atmosphere conducive to inclusive behavior of children of different backgrounds and racial composition. Onchwari, Onchwari and Keengwe (2008) write that immigrant children tend to be more disadvantaged due to low SES, language barriers, and "more often than not, these children have to struggle for love and attention from their peers and teachers" (p. 268). Observations of the educational environment Allison's teacher has created display an inclusive, accepting, and encouraging classroom that is favorable to the academic and social success of all students. This provides some insight into the way a teacher establishes and monitors the climate of their classroom significantly impacts the degree of student success not only academically, but socially as well.

Congruently, the observations and interviews involving Evanna suggest that her basic biological needs are sufficiently satisfied. As previously mentioned, Evanna is always adequately dressed for school, which was illuminated even further given the winter weather conditions at the time of the study. The study's results also suggest that Evanna experiences healthy relationships with her family members, and spends a considerable amount of time with her family outside of school. Just as with Allison, the classroom environment in which Evanna was observed maintained a welcoming, accepting atmosphere. The students in the class were readily able to communicate with each other freely when (frequently) encouraged, and appropriate humor was frequently incorporated to the learning experience. A classroom community was evident, as many of the students have been in the ELL program with each other for years. The students in

the classroom choose to associate with each other outside of the confines of the classroom as friends, just as Evanna socializes with her two best friends.

Summary

In summation, the field of education is one that endeavors constant change of varying degrees, from simple classroom implementations to entity-wide shifts. Of these shifts, the field of education has recently been experiencing and responding to changing dynamics in the cultural and linguistic makeup of students in classrooms across the United States. While these students and their educators are held accountable for their educational abilities and accomplishments, teachers are not explicitly required by law to be certified in the teaching of these diverse students, often resulting in a disconnect in the needs and wants of students and teachers.

Therefore, it was the purpose of this study to analyze the themes evident from a series of observations and interviews of two culturally and linguistically diverse participants by teacher candidates. The teachers of the classes in which the participants were observed were also interviewed twice. One participant was in third grade at the time of this study, while the second candidate was enrolled in eighth grade. Ultimately, this study found themes of self-concept, cultural behavioral expectations, language brokering, and social interactions between the two participants.

A variety of correlating best practices have been illuminated by research in regards to pedagogically sound procedures and implementations when teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. Above all, educators should strive to provide equitable educational experiences for all of their students, which includes providing each student what they need in order to be successful. As students' funds of knowledge vary considerably, teachers first need to be aware of

these contextual factors so that they may design instruction to best fit the needs, wants, and interests of their learners. Additionally, research has shown that classrooms maintaining atmospheres of acceptance benefit all learners, and that students should be afforded frequent opportunities to collaborate with one other. More finitely, these interactions are to be intercultural and meaningful, reflecting the deeper aspects of culture so that all learners in the classroom (including the educator) are able to strengthen critical higher level and empathetic thinking skills. Provided that it is the role of educators to facilitate the development and strengthening of all students to become lifelong learners and responsible, active citizens, Bennett's (2011) words exist powerfully, especially for culturally and linguistically diverse students: "If you show me how I can cling to that which is real to me, while teaching me a way into the larger society, then I will not only drop my defenses and my hostility, but I will sing your praises and help you to make the desert bear fruit" (as cited in Boutte, et al., p.4, 2010).

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