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EDITORIAL:
Aida A. Nevárez-La Torre: Bilingual Educators as Professionals: The Need for Standards

EXPLORATIONS:
Patricia Velasco: Integrating Content and Academic Language Using Balanced Literacy Structures: A Framework for Instruction of Emergent Bilinguals
Nancy Dubetz: Understanding the Language Choices of Novice Bilingual Teachers During Sheltered English Instruction
Áine Cregan: Empowering Teachers to Promote Oral Language in Culturally Diverse Classrooms in Ireland

PRACTITIONER’S EXPLORATIONS:
Yi-Fang Yeh: Teaching Language and Culture: The Importance of Prior Knowledge when Reading Chinese as a Second Language

BOOK REVIEWS:
Patricia Velasco: Immigrant Students in High Schools
Herlinda Cancino: Finding Their Way in a New Land
Mayra Zarnowsky: Hope in Immigrant Youth
The *Journal of Multilingual Education Research (JMER)* is a publication of the New York State Association for Bilingual Education. Its distinct orientation reflects what is most important to researchers, specialists, and educators in the field of multilingual education. JMER is a vehicle to respond to the changes and growth of knowledge in a variety of national language education issues that have local and regional relevance. It responds to the emerging needs and interests of teachers, administrators, teacher educators, researchers, counselors, psychologists, advocates, and community leaders whose work focuses on the successful education of multilingual students.

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# Journal of Multilingual Education Research

## Volume 3, Fall 2012

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### Publication Description & Guidelines for Submission

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About a year and a half ago I was approached by a colleague who chairs a committee on program evaluation at the institution where I teach. He wanted to know the names of professional organizations in the field of language education and if they had professional standards for language educators. I commented that there were professional standards in TESOL developed by the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages International Association and revised in 2010. He also inquired about professional educator (that is, teachers, as well as, administrators, counselors, psychologists) standards in bilingual education. I pondered before answering and then commented that to the best of my knowledge, there were no professional educator standards parallel to those developed by other professional organizations in the field of language education.

This interaction made me curious about the professionalization of bilingual teachers in New York State and across the nation. Are there professional teachers’ standards that guide the education of bilingual teachers? If so, what are they and where are they being implemented? If not, why not? I proceeded to investigate this query and decided through this editorial, to share with the JMER readership what I learned in the hopes that bilingual educators become more cognizant about the need to develop professional standards that shape our identity as experts and skilled in bilingual education.

There continues to be an increase in the number of students who are emergent bilinguals (García, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008) in the United States schools (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2008). Parallel to demographic changes, we are observing an expansion of school programs that use two or more languages as mediums of instruction (Freeman Field, 2011; García, 2008). This expansion is triggered by a variety of factors including: economic interdependency of nations across the world; federal government support for bilingual education; a constant influx of new immigrant students into our schools; and a desire of middle class parents in certain geographical areas to educate their children bilingually (de Jong, 2011).

From the historic presence of bilingual education in the United States and its current path of growth, it is important that attention is given to the education of teachers and administrators in this field. Of critical significance is to increase the number of programs that focus on the preparation of bilingual educators and to cultivate their relevance in envisioning and actualizing an education of excellence for multilingual students in schools. As argued by García (2010), the demands of the 21st century, require creative, rigorous, and multidimensional strategies to prepare bilingual educators with the knowledge and skills that can lead multilingual students through a
process of academic excellence. Poignantly, educators in the field of bilingual education must examine what constitutes the fundamental knowledge, skills, and dispositions bilingual educators should possess to master the art and science of teaching in bilingual classrooms.

Germane to teachers, for decades now, different national professional organizations have worked to identify criteria that define essential knowledge for teachers in specific disciplines (i.e., math, science, social studies). Several of these organizations, in addition to state education departments and accreditation agencies, have been successful in using these criteria to lead the education of teachers in higher education institutions as well as in school district lead professional development programs. Presented as professional teacher standards, these criteria then guides teacher education and credentialing in different fields.

This past summer I surveyed relevant literature on professional standards and found that such criteria do not exist at the national level in the field of Bilingual Education. I encountered that key national and international professional organizations in the area of language education (i.e., TESOL, ACTFL) have professional teachers standards, however, none specifically address the expertise needed by educators who teach in bilingual education programs. The review suggested that in the United States three states at the current time have professional standards for bilingual education teachers. These states, affiliates of the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE), are Louisiana, New Mexico, and Texas. In addition, regarding programs’ development, in 1992 NABE published a significant document entitled, Professional Standards for the Preparation of Bilingual/Multicultural Teachers, that identified five standards in the “design, implementation, and evaluation of programs for the preparation of bilingual/multicultural education teachers” (p. 3).

In my view more states with multilingual students should develop and enact professional standards for bilingual teachers. This can vitalize the professionalization (Shulman, 1987) of bilingual education, while at the same time build on the professionalism (Herbst, 1989) of bilingual teachers. Professional Teachers Standards in Bilingual Education may provide a reference point for use with pre-service teachers, in their education and supervision, and with in-service teachers in their coaching and mentoring. Moreover, they can channel teachers’ introspective efforts towards a process of self-assessment and self-guided development in their trajectory towards being knowledgeable, competent, and transformative practitioners. It is imperative, then, that professional standards are designed about the relevant knowledge, skills, and dispositions that teachers must possess to embody and actualize mastery in educating students bilingually.

Based on my synthesis of the scholarly literature I put forth some of the potential benefits for the field of bilingual education in designing and embracing professional teacher standards. Bilingual teachers professional standards may: (1) support the recognition of the work and contributions that these educators do and make as professionals (Nevárez-La Torre, 2010); (2) advance the specialized knowledge reflective of best practices and research in the field of bilingual instruction required for exemplary practice (Swinney & Velasco, 2011); (3) influence the
exploration of ways to expand and improve teacher education and professional development (Perrone, 1989) with a focus on bilingual education (Reyes & Kleyn, 2010); (4) guide school districts and school administrators in the design and implementation of school programs strongly aligned with research-based practices that can serve to support schools as professional learning communities in addressing the language, literacy, and learning needs of Emergent Bilinguals (Hamayan & Freeman, 2006); (5) position teachers in specific states to be compared favorably with their peers across the nation (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages/National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2012); (6) trace a path for bilingual educators towards professional growth that is self-inspired, self-lead, and self-monitored (Nevárez-La Torre, 2010); (7) support the collective responsibility for promoting excellence in education (Shulman, 1987); and (8) ensure that teachers have an ethical framework and an essential knowledge base to promote the success of all students in multilingual schools (de Jong, 2011).

I echo García’s view, in that the ultimate success in educating all students bilingually, resides, in part, in the professional knowledge that teachers in bilingual education programs hold (p. 2, 2008). With this intent a decisive step was taken by NYSABE in the fall of 2012, when its board approved the development of professional standards for bilingual teachers in New York. This project is in progress and during the 2013 year, Dr. Patricia Velasco, CUNY, and I will request practitioners and administrators as well as teachers and administrators in training, and university professors and researchers to review a draft of the standards and provide meaningful comments on ways to enhance it. My hope is that JMER readership add their voices to this review process. It is time to make the pursuit for Bilingual Teacher Professional Standards a top priority in New York state.

References


Teachers working with emergent bilinguals' face difficult dilemmas. Students who do not receive rigorous content instruction fail to acquire academic language. However, if students do not understand the content or cannot participate in content lessons, they cannot be expected to learn the academic information and the language associated with it. Confronting this challenge requires a sound knowledge of the multiple factors that play a role in developing academic language and its dependency on content area texts. Most importantly, this understanding has to be accompanied by instructional strategies that allow students to gain steady control over academic discourse. In this article, I seek to clarify the nature of academic language and describe different pedagogical approaches used to teach academic discourse to emergent bilinguals. Its focus though, is to introduce a description of how three Balanced Literacy (BL) structures: Interactive Read Aloud, Shared Reading, and Shared Writing can provide a framework where academic content and language are taught simultaneously. Using case study methodology, I document how a third grade teacher these structures in order to create a cycle of exposure, analysis, and implementation in content classes.

Investigations by Skutnabb-Kangas and Toukomaa (1976) and Cummins (1979, 2010), in exploring the process of second language learning, highlighted the importance of dissecting language into two main types, social and academic. It is clear that proficiency in a new language requires the development of both, but instructional input varies. Social language requires no explicit teaching; all children will develop it by interacting with family and friends. Yet, the development process for academic language, the type of language used in schools, presents some unique challenges for some emergent bilinguals. Within this population, students who are more at risk are those with interrupted schooling or who come from backgrounds where reading and writing practices have not been consistently present (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). These students will benefit greatly from having differentiated instruction that targets the development of academic language. The instructional strategies presented in this article are particularly well suited for emergent bilinguals who need to develop academic language skills. Before exploring ways to develop academic content and language, it is important to identify the multiple factors that define academic language.
Elements that Define Academic Language

Academic language is characterized by decontextualization, or the ability to convey information through words alone without the support of gestures, voice modulation, or a shared context (Cummins, 1979; Snow, 1987). This in turn has an impact on the vocabulary and sentence structures that are needed to convey precision and explicitness. The most salient characteristic of academic language, or at least the one that attracts the most attention, is vocabulary. Academic language demands using specialized words (i.e., divergent, delta, metabolize), but this is not its only characteristic. Academic language demands the construction of complex sentence structures with the purpose of packing as much information as possible into each one (Wong Fillmore, 1991).

Academic language is used in school for several purposes: to describe an event, to summarize an instructional or disciplinary text, to provide information, but most importantly, to persuade the listener or reader. From sharing an opinion about a book just read, supporting a political candidate, or writing an academic paper, the underlying purpose of the speaker (or writer) is to share well organized arguments, and/or to convince, or at least modify, the other person’s perspective. In most instances, oral and written academic language demand one take a position or stance. It requires providing evidence, evaluating, negotiating, and interpreting ideas (Hyland, 1998, 2008).

Understandably, the coalescence of the multiple factors that play a role in developing academic discourse, time constraints, and the testing demands that characterize today’s classrooms, make it difficult to focus on instructional practices that specifically target the development of academic language. This challenge usually results in teachers asking three questions.

1. What is the best way to teach academic vocabulary?
2. If academic language is more than words, what else is there?
3. How do I teach academic language in the course of a school day?

While teachers of emergent bilinguals find it easier to plan for developing their students’ knowledge and skills related to the content area being taught, they see the task of planning to teach language through that content as a more daunting task. Standards and curricular expectations are in place, and this facilitates the academic content expectations and lesson planning. However, outlining specific academic language goals that need to be integrated into the content lesson remains an elusive task for many teachers. Cregan (2010), in studying teachers’ perceptions and knowledge of academic language, found that: “...the specific characteristics of a literary or academic style of language needed to negotiate the school system successfully [are] not clearly articulated by many teachers” (p. 6).

Given the gap in teachers’ understanding between the existent research on academic discourse and its classroom application, I propose an instructional framework
that guides teachers to develop language and academic goals through the use of three Balanced Literacy (BL) structures: Interactive Read Aloud, Shared Reading, and Shared Writing. I contend that these structures create a cycle of exposure, analysis, and implementation that can support teaching and learning academic language. This practice could be particularly beneficial for bilingual students who are learning a language while also learning through that language.

In this article, I provide an overview of how educational researchers and linguists have contributed to our understanding of academic language as a complex, multifaceted construct. The discussion uncovers essential aspects of the nature of academic language that should not be absent from instruction. A critical examination of the different pedagogical approaches for teaching academic language specifically created for the instruction of emergent bilinguals is offered. The analysis identifies what each methodology has contributed to instruction and signals some significant areas of academic language that are omitted. To address the gaps, I outline the essential elements of a pedagogical framework that combines three structures of BL to teach academic language. My longitudinal documentation of the instructional practices of a third grade teacher exemplifies the application of the proposed framework. The conclusion poses that even though BL is not a methodology originally designed for bilingual students or to be used in the reading of nonfiction texts (Clay, 1991) by modifying the implementation of Interactive Read Aloud, Shared Reading and Shared Writing, a cycle of exposure, analysis, and implementation of academic language goals can be created. Implications for expanding the current research based knowledge by exploring the proposed instructional framework are considered.

The Nature of Academic Language

Initial Studies of Academic Language

The study of academic language (also known as school language, the language of education and language in academic contexts) did not start with a focus on schools; rather, it started with research about families. While there are a vast number of studies focusing on family interactions, research by Bernstein (1971), Heath (1983), Hart and Risley (1995), and Yoshikawa (2011) highlights the complex relationship between social class, oral language, and school performance.

Bernstein was the first to analyze oral language interactions in families. As an educator in London, Bernstein (1971) noticed the poor performance of some of his working-class students. He suggested that social class was correlated with what he termed the use of restricted and elaborated codes. The restricted code is characterized by short sentences, everyday vocabulary, and phrases that assume shared knowledge (e.g., “You know what I mean”). This code is suitable for insiders, family, and friends, and it creates a sense of inclusion based on shared background knowledge and information. The elaborated code does not assume that the listener shares information and assumptions with the speaker; as a result, it is more explicit and thorough. Although not necessarily better, the precision it demands is imperative so that a larger
audience can understand the message. Bernstein found that in the working-class families he studied, the use of the restricted code was prominent. Middle-class families used both a restricted and an elaborated code. For Bernstein, the differences in codes explained why many students coming from working-class backgrounds had trouble in approaching language-dependent subject areas in school. It should be noted that Bernstein was not implying a denigrating deficit account of working-class families; rather, he was drawing attention to an aspect of the sociology of education that had not been previously identified, that is, linguistic differentiation between the language used by students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds with little exposure to academic texts and the language used in school settings.

Heath (1983) took Bernstein’s work a step further by rejecting the claim that it was exclusively social class that caused differences in school performance. According to Heath, children learn language be it spoken or written, through interactions with different members in their specific society. She coined this process as ‘linguistic socialization’. These practices have implications for school success. Heath writes, "...the different ways children learned to use language were dependent on the ways in which [members of] each community structured their families, defined the roles that community members could assume, and played out their concepts of childhood that guided child socialization" (p. 11). This researcher observed the ways that three groups of children acquired and used language, and she discovered that children exhibited language behaviors in accordance with the linguistic and literacy practices of their respective families and communities.

Heath found that children from Trackton (an African American working class community) and Roadville (a white working class community) exhibited very different storytelling behaviors, for example. The Trackton children were encouraged to exaggerate and to fantasize when telling a story, whereas children from Roadville, who were expected to recount factual information, interpreted the fantasizing as lying. A third community, Maintown, exemplified a suburban, middle class white and African American enclave. Children in Maintown were engaged in parent-child reading and adult-child conversations. These practices were more compatible with school expectations than had ever been acknowledged before. The families in Trackton and Roadville differed from Maintown and from each other. All families respected teachers and believed in the value of an education, but they differed in the degree of correspondence between the language practices at home and those at school and how these exert an influence on students’ academic success.

Differences in linguistic socialization were also a key factor in the 42 families analyzed by Hart and Risley (1995), but they uncovered a further element in understanding family interactions. The key factor was the parents’ education, and the relative economic advantage associated with it. Hart and Risley made hour-long, monthly recordings for two-and-half years of parent-child interactions. The families were categorized as professional, working class, or welfare families.

In their study race, ethnicity, and birth-order did not have an impact on the results. Parents who work in professional occupations know the expectations that
All these studies compared interactions within families from different socioeconomic status, race, and professional backgrounds. The study by Yoshikawa (2011) departed from this comparative framework and concentrated on the child-rearing practices of a segment of society that is most at risk: immigrant families. He followed 380 families of undocumented, immigrant parents in New York City. His investigation is significant because it is the first one to examine parents’ immigration status on young children. Approximately four million children across the country are American citizens but were born to undocumented parents. Yoshikawa identified the parents’ fear of deportation as a key element that has negative repercussions in a child’s development. The families described by Yoshikawa lived in poverty and in isolated communities that had little interaction with educational and health institutions. The effects of this isolation and fear are dramatic. Yoshikawa found that by the time the children reached the age of two, they showed significant lower levels of language and cognitive development than those children of documented immigrants.

For all these researchers (Bernstein, Hart and Risley, Heath, and Yoshikawa), language development is colored by multiple considerations: economic factors, linguistic behaviors associated to parents’ education, and psychological stress imposed by political and economic pressures. However, as important as these findings are, they should not be interpreted as meaning that academic outcomes depend exclusively on what is learned in the early years of life and in family settings. Interestingly, the results provide evidence of the unique role that schools and teachers play in school success in all and for all students. After all, if academic language is the basic tool for communication in school, the best environment for learning it should be a classroom. But how is academic language learned in school? Linguists, reading specialists, and educational researchers have contributed their expertise to answer this apparently, simple question.

The Learning of Academic Language in School Settings

Critical knowledge about learning academic language in school came from studying bilingual students. By observing bilingual (Finnish/Swedish) immigrant children living in Sweden, Skutnaab Kangas and Toukomaa (1976) brought attention to the fact that these children showed fluency in both languages, but their verbal, academic language performance was below that of their peers. This observation prompted Cummins (1979) to draw attention to the time frame associated with
mastering social versus academic language. The BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) are terms rarely used in today's academic literature, but have had serious impact on the field of education. BICS has been replaced by social, conversational, or contextualized language and CALP by academic or decontextualized language (Cummins, 1991). Cummins further hypothesized that social language would take two or three years to master, with no explicit teaching involved, whereas academic language could take between five to seven years of continuous, quality schooling.

Snow (1987) studied bilingual and monolingual children in order to understand how the social and academic language learned in school interacts in a bilingual student. Snow's participants (grades 2-5) came from carefully selected bilingual schools that followed a demanding curriculum. This study showed that oral, social conversations were more language- and context-dependent and were not associated with academic language or literacy growth. Interestingly, these contextual language skills did not result in facilitating the learning of academic language. Providing formal definitions (i.e., "A bicycle is a mode of transport that has two wheels and a handle bar" vs. the more informal "A bicycle is a thing to ride") is a skill associated with schooling (Davidson, Kline, & Snow, 1986; Snow, Cancino, González, & Shiberg, 1989). The difference between these formal and informal definitions was characterized by more precise vocabulary (vehicle vs. thing) and the length and quality of the sentence pattern (a relative clause vs. a noun clause).

An additional task in this study was to ask the participants to engage in a picture-description task. To understand the implications of this assignment, it is necessary to clarify that the instructions for the children were to describe the picture to someone who could not look at it. The instructions were targeting decontextualization, or the skill to use language exclusively to form the same picture in the mind of the listener. Children were asked to convey the exact position and characteristics of objects and actions in the picture to a peer who had no access to the visual representation of the picture. These studies found that across their languages, bilingual children displayed similar skills. Two factors reflected the decontextualization skills of these children: vocabulary and the sentence structures employed in both the formal definitions and the picture description task. These skills did transfer from one language to another even though, as expected, children could be stronger in one language than in the other.

Decontextualization in oral language requires word and sentence choices that make the meaning clear and unambiguous for the listener. Interestingly, a separate and long line of research in reading comprehension identified vocabulary knowledge and sentence structures as key ingredients in successful reading comprehension (Chall, 1983; Chall & Dale, 1995; DuBay, 2007; Rex, 2010; Thorndike & Lorge, 1944). In essence, oral academic language is the language of literacy (Wong Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012). Word selection and densely packed sentences that convey information and concepts in a clear, explicit manner are common elements that characterize oral and
written academic language. The impact of vocabulary knowledge and sentence structures is of such magnitude, that each deserves to be analyzed separately.

**Vocabulary in oral and written language.** Vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are closely related, and this relationship is not one-directional, since vocabulary knowledge can help the learner to comprehend written texts, and reading can contribute to vocabulary growth (Chall, 1983; Nation, 2001). Laufer (2009) states that “...no text comprehension is possible, either in one’s native language or in a foreign language, without understanding the text’s vocabulary” (p. 20). Children who start on the path to literacy with large vocabularies understand that learning implies comprehending new concepts, which are stored in words. Children with limited vocabulary knowledge can “read” words and sentences, but can remain oblivious to the meaning that these words and sentences intend to convey. For teaching purposes, focusing on word meanings will help a student not only understand a specific text, but it will send the message that extracting the meaning of words (by analyzing the context, associating the target words with similar words, understanding that the target word is a cognate or even looking up its definition) is a strategy crucial for mastering oral academic language and literacy.

For teaching purposes, it is important to know that not all words were created equal; they fall into categories. While there are a variety of classifications (e.g., Coxhead, 2000; Nation, 2001), the one by Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) stresses which words are commonly found in oral language and which are learned primarily from exposure to print. For these authors, vocabulary can be divided into three tiers. Tier 1 consists of high-frequency words used in everyday interactions and prominent in oral language. They need little or no explicit instruction for native speakers, but emergent bilinguals might not know many of these ordinary words; consequently, in order to learn them they may need to make the connection with their first language or learn a new concept. Words such as *table, pencil,* and *milk* would fall under this category. Tier 2 words can be generalized to many different areas of study. Words such as *explicit, prominent,* and *sophisticated* are all words that appear in this article and that belong to this category. Tier 3 words are technical or content-specific words. Examples include *camouflage, delta, habitat,* and *predators.* Without these content-specific words, depth of understanding in a particular content area cannot be reached. Learning academic language requires drawing attention to Tier 2 and Tier 3 words, since these words are encountered mostly in print and rarely in oral language.

For Beck et al., (2002) vocabulary instruction in monolinguals demands that the target word be placed on a network of interrelated words. The word *prominent,* for example, can be clustered with Tier 1 or other Tier 2 words: *important or stand out,* for example. For Nation (2001), in describing emergent bilinguals’ vocabulary learning, it is crucial that the student in question knows the meaning of at least one of these interrelated words.

Words not only convey a particular meaning, but they can also reflect a particular way of thinking. Zarnowski (2006), in analyzing social studies texts in
elementary classrooms, has drawn attention to how historians approach their subject area by using particular words when they do not have enough factual information. In these instances, historians have to construct a possible scenario. In the following example, notice how Albert Marrin (as cited in Zarnowski, 2006) explains an uncertain but viable chain of events that led to the discovery of the smallpox vaccine:

Scientists believe that smallpox is a fairly young disease. About eight thousand years ago, they think, the ancestor of the small pox virus lived in an unknown farm somewhere in Asia or the Middle East. That virus probably made its host animal sick, but not sick enough to kill it. Then in some way, that is still unclear, the virus crossed over to a person. Perhaps the virus DNA mutated, or changed, in a chance way that allowed this to happen. (Emphasis in Zarnowski, 2006, p. 15)

The meaning of such words as perhaps, in a chance way, and believe have another dimension in this text. They are showing a thinking pattern, a supposition. A competent historian is compelled to do so when there is no concrete evidence to support a historical event.

In essence, words are fundamental for learning concepts presented in texts and for using them in oral, academic discourse. However, sentences are no less important in these learning and knowledge-application processes.

Sentence structures. One of the characteristics of oral and written language is sentence complexity (Rex, 2010; Scott, 2009; Snow, 1987). Vocabulary and sentence structure play an important part in conveying meanings. Sentence structures are associated with syntax (word order) and grammar (set of rules) and these are seldom addressed in today’s all English and bilingual classrooms. Sentences though, are not only packed with information, they convey specific thinking processes. Science texts, for example, rest on observing and quantifying cause and effect relationships between two apparently unrelated events. A construction that reflects this scientific way of thinking is a hypothesis or conditional sentence (e.g., “If I put fenders on a bicycle, then they will keep the rider dry when riding through puddles”).

Cummins (1979, 1999, 2010) posited that academic language was attached to higher-order thinking skills, such as hypothesizing, inferencing, or understanding cause and effect. He associated thinking skills to academic language, referring to reading and writing specifically. In the example, presented in Table 1, there are three different texts. Notice how thinking skills can be recognized by the sentence patterns employed.
Table 1
Comparison of Three Different Content Areas, Sentence Structures, and the Thinking Skills Associated With Them

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text sample</th>
<th>Thinking skills conveyed by the language used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Math</strong></td>
<td><strong>Comparison</strong>: The larger of the numbers is twice the smaller.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Two numbers have a sum of 87. The larger of the numbers is twice the smaller. What are the numbers?  
  (Compiled from a fifth-grade class) |                                                                                  |
| **Social Studies**                                                        | **Cause**: With the permission of King James of England...  
  **Effect**: (The colonists) started a new life, in a new land.  
  **Cause**: Named after King James I of England...  
  **Effect**: This village became Jamestown, the first successful English settlement, or colony, in North America. |
| Life in a New Land                                                         |                                                                                  |
| In 1607, a ship filled with people from England landed on the coast of the land we now call Virginia. With the permission of King James of England, they started a new life in a new land. With axes and spades, they cleared a spot in the forest. They built a tiny village of mud huts.  
  This village became Jamestown - the first successful English settlement, or colony, in North America. Named after King James I, this new village was a colony belonging to England and the King. The people who lived there where called colonists.  
  (Based on Chapter 1 of Colonial Life by B. January, 2000) |                                                                                  |
| **Science**                                                                | **Cause and effect**: The viruses or bacteria in the vaccine do not cause disease but instead activate the body’s natural defenses. In effect, the altered viruses or bacteria put the body on alert.  
  **Contrast**: The viruses or bacteria in the vaccine do not cause disease but instead activate the body’s natural defenses. |
| Vaccines                                                                   |                                                                                  |
| One important tool that helps prevent the spread of infectious diseases is vaccine. A vaccine is a substance that stimulates the body to produce chemicals that destroy viruses or bacteria. The vaccine may be made from dead or altered viruses or bacteria. The viruses or bacteria in the vaccine do not cause disease but instead activate the body’s natural defenses. In effect, the altered viruses or bacteria put the body on alert. If that virus or bacteria ever invades your body, it is destroyed before it can produce disease.  
  Preventing Infectious Diseases Science Explorer.  
  From Bacteria to Plants. Prentice Hall, 2000, p. 73. |                                                                                  |

The math word problem in the table above requires comparing and contrasting (**the larger of the numbers is twice the smaller**). This word problem uses very specific words to signal how the numbers have to be modified and transformed (**twice, times**). Failure to understand one of these words will result in an error in the final result. The
social studies and science texts portray cause and effect. However, the language employed by each text is different. In the social studies text, for example, cause and effect relations are presented in the following way:

**Cause:** Named after King James I

**Effect:** This village became Jamestown—the first successful English settlement, or colony, in North America.

However, in the text, the temporal order is reversed (Effect: This village became Jamestown—the first successful English settlement, or colony, in North America. Cause: Named after King James I). The reader needs to recover the meaning of the sentence by transforming it or translating it into the chronological order that will facilitate comprehension (McNeil, 1992). The teacher can model this transformation, and this type of modeling constitutes a teaching strategy.

Cause and effect is also used in the science text, but this time the text itself includes the words *cause* and *effect:*

*The viruses or bacteria in the vaccine do not cause disease but instead activate the body's natural defenses.* In effect, the altered viruses or bacteria put the body on alert.

The same thinking skill can be conveyed differently by using different words and sentence structures. Furthermore, by using *but instead,* a change of direction or an alternating possibility is indicated: *The viruses or bacteria in the vaccine do not cause disease but instead activate the body's natural defenses.*

By studying these sentences, we can recognize the thinking skills that are locked within them. Still, a text is much more than just a collection of words and isolated sentences. The samples presented in Table 1 demonstrate that these sentences form a unified whole, a cohesive text. We will now turn our attention to the cohesive elements that play a role in academic language.

**Written academic language and cohesive devices.** In understanding written academic language, the contribution of Halliday and Hasan (1976) has been fundamental. These linguists described how a text “holds together” by employing certain devices that avoid redundancy and give the text a unified sense. Using the social studies text presented in Table 1, four cohesive devices first described by Halliday and Hasan can be analyzed:

**Reference or pronoun substitutions.** A pronoun substituting for a noun.

*In 1607, a ship filled with people from England landed on the coast of the land we now call Virginia. With the permission of King James of England, they started a new life in a new land.*

The word *they* is substituting for *people from England.*
Substitution. A word substituted for another, more general word.

*This village became Jamestown*—*the first successful English settlement, or colony, in North America.*

The substituted words *English settlement, or colony* are referring to Jamestown.

Conjunctions. These words establish the relationship between sentences.

*The viruses or bacteria in the vaccine do not cause disease but instead activate the body’s natural defenses.*

The conjunctions *but instead* are signaling an alternative explanation.

Ellipsis. The deliberate omission, after an initial more specific mention, of one or more words that are not essential for understanding.

*Named after King James I, this new village was a colony belonging to England and the King.*

The word *King* in the last sentence is referring to *King James*.

Cohesive devices are characteristic of academic writing. Rarely are they taught as such, but they demand attention since lack of familiarity with them can be confused with lack of comprehension and this can result in misinterpreting a text.

As can be seen from the considerations presented here, academic language is not a monolithic construct, but a complex and multifaceted one. The interactions among vocabulary, sentence structures, cohesive devices, and decontextualization, recognizing how the language and thinking skills shift and adapt depending on the content area, are collectively referred to as “literate language features” (Pellegrini, 1985, p. 79).

So far, we have analyzed the characteristics of academic language. However, understanding and defining the characteristics of academic language invites the larger question: Why do we need or use academic language?

**Persuasion -- The purpose of academic language.** At its core, the point of using academic language is to persuade, to have an impact on someone else (Hyland, 1998, 2008). Taking a stance, understanding and providing reliable arguments, and negotiating ideas will very likely require the use of academic language. By doing so, the aim is to convince, modify, or even change that person’s – or even our own – point of view. Engaging in persuasive arguments entails deciding carefully about the words, sentences, and overall structure that can have the most impact on the intended audience.

To illustrate the close connection between academic language and persuasion, Gebhard, Harman, and Seger (2007) show how Julia, a fifth grader, wrote a letter intended to persuade her principal to change a decision that cancelled recess. Julia’s...
letter shows mastery of precise vocabulary (e.g., her use of the words “concerned” and “sincerely”) and complex sentence patterns (e.g., she writes, “when we came back in and got straight to work we’ve really gotten bored since we can not go outside”). By learning about the words and structures in the different texts she was reading, by having a particular audience in mind, and with a teacher who directed her attention to this kind of language, Julia reached her own conclusion. She had a purpose for writing a letter addressed to her principal, and she understood how to make it powerful.

Given the complexities of mastering the persuasive nature of academic language, the New York Common Core Standards, [http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/common_core_standards/] have embedded persuasion in oral and written discourse across different grades. Students in kindergarten will be encouraged to share and support their opinions. By second grade, students will be required to produce a persuasive written text. These ambitious goals require a conscious effort that starts with the teacher drawing students’ attention to how language works by getting students to notice the words, sentences, and purpose of the text, particularly in content- or subject-related texts.

The research discussed in the first section of the literature review, strongly suggests that the learning and teaching of academic language is too complex and too filled with subtleties to leave it to chance or to expect student families and communities to carry the burden of developing it. I contend that, all teachers need to be strategic in sharing the responsibility of extending students’ academic linguistic repertoire. My cumulative experience as a teacher and researcher positively suggests that having instructional language goals is the vehicle for drawing students’ attention to how language works. Language goals can be defined as the patterns of discourse (vocabulary, sentence structures, and cohesive devices), which support curriculum learning and academic language development.

Language goals have to be centered on teaching academic language across all disciplines and grade levels. The education of emergent bilinguals demands this teaching practice, since emergent bilinguals are both learning an additional language and learning through that language (see Cummins, 2010). Several practitioners and researchers have responded to this demand by creating different instructional procedures and approaches that specify language and content instructional goals, as well as, address scaffolding content and particular language features for emergent bilinguals. In the second section of the research review, these different approaches and their salient characteristics are analyzed.
Teaching Content and Academic Language to Emergent Bilinguals

All of the procedures and approaches that have been created to instruct emergent bilinguals place content at the center of language learning, but they emphasize different components of academic language. In Table 2 below, I summarize different procedures and approaches developed to accentuate the formal instruction of academic language in linguistically diverse classrooms. The discussion underlines the main components of each approach and how it supports the use of dual instructional goals, that is, the instruction of language and content. I explain how each responds to what research has shown about the nature of academic language and the important linguistic features to integrate in its teaching (see discussion in first section of synthesis). Attention is also given to key features that might not be covered by the procedures and approaches.

Table 2
Applying Conceptual Understanding of Academic Language when Instructing Emergent Bilinguals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s) and method</th>
<th>Theoretical principles</th>
<th>Specific aspects that the method addresses</th>
<th>Absent features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Snow, Met, &amp; Genessee (1989)</td>
<td>Differentiating between content-obligatory and content-compatible language</td>
<td>Content-Obligatory goals are the vocabulary and sentence structures that are intrinsically connected to the content being taught.</td>
<td>Cohesive devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibbons (1993, 2002)</td>
<td>Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1985), which analyzes language in all interactions. These interactions are analyzed using three parameters: Tenor (knowledge between the speaker and the listener); Mode (written or oral communication); and Field (the topic being discussed).</td>
<td>Gibbons uses the Tenor dimension to create exercises that emphasize decontextualization. Thinking skills (language functions), vocabulary, and sentence patterns are underscored.</td>
<td>Even though cohesive devices are explained in Learning to Learn in a Second Language, no specific exercises are offered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s) and method</td>
<td>Theoretical principles</td>
<td>Specific aspects that the method addresses</td>
<td>Absent features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamot &amp; O’Malley (1994); Chamot (2009)</td>
<td>Cummins’s Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency</td>
<td>Vocabulary is emphasized, particularly how words can shift their meaning from one content area to another (e.g., the word <em>mean</em> in math and in everyday language).</td>
<td>Sentence structures and cohesive devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echevarría, Vogt, &amp; Short (2008)</td>
<td>Scaffolding content and careful delivery of the lesson</td>
<td>Technical vocabulary is addressed in every unit.</td>
<td>Sentence structures and cohesive devices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Snow, Met, and Genessee (1989) were the first to draw a conceptual distinction between content-obligatory language and content-compatible language. Content-obligatory language refers to the language required for understanding and meeting content-area objectives. Selecting key words and sentence patterns that allow in-depth understanding of a unit would be one of the aspects to consider in selecting content-obligatory language. Content-compatible language complements and supports the content of the unit, as well as the linguistic and cultural objectives of the curriculum.

Numelin (1989) applied this conceptual distinction into her instruction of a first-grade class in a French-English immersion program. In the article, this teacher describes how her content lessons differentiated between content-obligatory and content-compatible language goals. For a unit she had to teach about time, Numelin would have as a final assessment project an individual booklet describing daily activities and the time of day when these took place. This project required that the students master reflexive verbs, (e.g., “I get up”). Reflexive verbs became her content-obligatory language goal in both English and French (which uses them more extensively). Numelin’s compatible language goal was using the words *before* and *after* and *half past* and *o’clock* to talk about time and routines (e.g., “I brush my teeth after I have breakfast”). Focusing on these aspects of language enabled her students to develop an in-depth understanding of the content goal. In turn, the content goal supported the language-development goal.
Pauline Gibbons’s (1993, 2002) contribution to helping educators develop academic language-instruction procedures remains one of the most comprehensive and detailed examples of how to implement language goals. Gibbons’s work is deeply influenced by Michael Halliday’s (1985) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). SFL argues that interactions depend on language and these are present in almost everything we do. SFL analyzes the discourse patterns and the pragmatics (or purpose) of the message by using three parameters: tenor (who the audience is for the message and how well we know the audience); field (what the message is about); and mode (whether the message is written or oral). Tenor is the aspect that addresses contextualized or decontextualized language (familiarity or distance from the audience has an impact on decontextualized or contextualized language choices). Gibbons incorporates this aspect in her lesson planning.

For Gibbons, language goals require planning for how language is going to be used in a specific school task. She differentiates between language functions (thinking reflected in language), sentence structures, as well as vocabulary. The following planning chart (see Table 3) shows Gibbons approach in working with classification of different geometrical figures by shape and size. Her language goal is the language of classification: *These are all blue; These are triangles*. Gibbons takes this activity one step further by incorporating what she calls a barrier game. A barrier game is an exercise in decontextualization. She sits two students back to back and one student draws a pattern of geometrical figures. This student has to describe it to her partner, who cannot see it. For this exercise to be successful, it is imperative that both students know the meaning of position words or prepositions. For Gibbons, every lesson (even a math lesson) is an academic language lesson.

### Table 3

**Planning Chart According to Gibbons (1993, p. 19)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Language Functions</th>
<th>Language Structures</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shape, size, color</td>
<td>Arranging attribute blocks</td>
<td>Classifying</td>
<td>They are all blue</td>
<td>Triangle, square, circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barrier game:</td>
<td></td>
<td>These are triangles</td>
<td>Red, green, blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giving partner instructions</td>
<td>Giving instructions and describing position</td>
<td>Draw a triangle under the ___</td>
<td>Under, beside, between</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stemming from Cummins’s description of CALP, The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach or CALLA (Chamot, 2009; Chamot & O’Malley, 1994)
stresses the language for thinking across different content areas. There are three different thinking strategies:

1. Metacognitive: includes planning, self-monitoring, and classification.
3. Social-Affective: entails cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and asking questions.

The CALLA method stresses oral, decontextualized discourse through these different strategies. Students are required to share experiences and explain how they learned and understood different concepts. CALLA is unique in that it accentuates the importance of paying attention to vocabulary, particularly as to how words can shift their meaning depending on the content area. Think of the word *solution*, for example. It means *result* in math, *clarification* in everyday language, and *mixture of substances* in science.

CALLA stresses the importance of connecting background knowledge to new information, attention to word meanings as well as the emphasis on thinking skills. These components are also present in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol, or SIOP (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2008). This instructional approach was first published in 1999. SIOP targets the new vocabulary that is an intrinsic part of the content area being developed. SIOP, like CALLA, focuses on questioning strategies that target higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) such as creating and analyzing. The questions are not only modeled and directed to the students; the students are required to create their own questions (Echevarría et al., 2008). These focused questions are the platform on which conversations grow.

SIOP is unique in that it follows a careful planning cycle that starts with assessing and building the student’s background knowledge (by using manipulatives, providing non-verbal cues, and extensive use of graphic organizers) and comprehensible input (the teacher’s pace of speech and explanation style). Every SIOP lesson includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Since its first publication, SIOP has expanded and has published specific books that target different content areas such as math (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2009), and social studies and history (Short, Vogt, & Echevarría, 2010). For SIOP, the main concern is scaffolding content; vocabulary is the only specific language goal addressed.

The contributions of all these researchers emphasize the relationship between content and language, although they differ in their individual approaches. All the researchers target thinking skills and vocabulary but syntactic structures for instance, are only addressed by Numelin (1989). In all of the procedures and approaches discussed, the absence of cohesive devices as language goals needs to be underscored. The lack of attention given to cohesive devices is curious since these elements have a great impact on written academic language.
Accordingly, I propose that language goals should target features of academic language, namely: vocabulary knowledge, sentence structures, and cohesive devices (Pellegrini, 1985). Language goals should stem from the content area being studied. Effective teaching, in this view, would have language goals and content goals support and scaffold each other. As Swain (1996) and García (2009) contend, language and content function as mutually supportive scaffolds.

In the next section, I identify the main objectives and components of Balanced Literacy (BL). The research exploring its use with multilingual students is discussed.

**Balanced Literacy Structures and Teaching Academic Language**

A prevalent methodology for literacy instruction used in most New York City (NYC) schools is Balanced Literacy, a methodology that infuses oral language, listening, reading, and writing within the language arts instructional block (Calkins, 2001). Balanced Literacy though, was not designed with emergent bilinguals in mind and it was not developed for content area instruction (Clay, 1991). However, as described later in this article, my research raises the possibility that a strategic adaptation of BL, offers a promising path for the effective integration of language and content goals into the academic instruction of emergent bilinguals.

According to these researchers, BL is a framework for teaching reading and writing. It provides students with specific instructional structures for the development of their language and literacy skills. Listening and speaking lie at the core of all the different structures, as there is constant instruction, talk between partners, and collaborative work. The reading curriculum is built around modeling and practicing comprehension strategies (i.e., summarizing, getting the main idea, inferring, predicting, or visualizing). The writing curriculum revolves around understanding the characteristics of different genres (i.e., poetry, nonfiction texts, persuasive essays). Usually, students’ writing reflects their own life events. Its main instructional structures are described in the Appendix.

As discussed in the scholarly literature, BL does offer a comprehensive framework for developing reading and writing, but it was initially created for children who are English speaking and who have extensive background knowledge (McGregor, 2007). Significantly, the implementation of BL with emergent bilinguals demands specific scaffolding, which is absent from its original descriptions and practice.

Two researchers investigated the use of BL with emergent bilinguals and considered how best to adapt its use with this student population. O’Day (2009) explored the performance of emergent bilinguals in balanced literacy classrooms in San Diego public schools. O’Day found that there was a lack of “focus on academic language development” (p. 115). Specifically, O’Day reports that emergent bilinguals need more explicit language instruction, and teachers must have enough knowledge of second language acquisition to anticipate potential barriers to emergent bilingual students’ comprehension.
Cappellini (2005), in implementing a balanced literacy program for reading development with emergent bilinguals, describes how modifications to existing instructional structures are the key to success. Guided reading, for instance, is a structure that Cappellini implements with emergent bilinguals on a daily basis. Guided reading in classrooms where students are learning to read in their native language is implemented exclusively when students are ready to move to more difficult texts. The work by Cappellini shows that modifications and flexibility are key aspects in successfully implementing balanced literacy with emergent bilinguals.

Building on the available research literature and the current work on teaching academic language to emergent bilinguals, a colleague and I collaborated with a group of teachers in NYC to tailor the BL structures they used to better serve the emergent bilinguals in their classrooms (Swinney & Velasco, 2011). That work revealed that teachers can make content accessible to emergent bilinguals by adapting the use of three BL structures: (a) Interactive Read Aloud; (b) Shared Reading; and (c) Shared Writing (see Appendix, for a description of these structures).

As my understanding of integrating language and content goals and adapting these structures evolved, I later designed a framework for targeting instruction on vocabulary, sentence structure, and cohesive devices when working with emergent bilinguals. I conducted a qualitative study to explore the application of the framework in a bilingual education classroom. The inquiry was guided by the following research question: How does a teacher in a bilingual third grade class implement the framework to design instructional goals, connecting content and academic language when teaching emergent bilinguals?

The Study

This section highlights how Ms. Vélez, a third grade teacher working in a transitional bilingual classroom designed and implemented language goals in instruction using Interactive Read Aloud, Shared Reading, and Shared Writing. These Balanced Literacy structures allowed her to create a cycle of exposure, analysis, and implementation where content and language support and define each other. I begin by describing the proposed framework and then include details of the qualitative exploratory study conducted.
Framework for the Design and Implementation of Language and Content Goals

As Figure 1 illustrates, the Framework is a cycle where language and content goals lead instruction interconnecting and supporting the components of: (a) Exposure through Interactive Read Aloud, (b) Analysis through Shared Reading, and (c) Implementation through Shared Writing. Below each cycle component is described in detail.

Planning for content and language goals.

Curricular or content area objectives are based on developmental characteristics, student needs, and interests. Content goals are usually predetermined by city and state departments of education and they are measured in learning...
outcomes. These outcomes are statements that describe the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that learners should have after successfully completing a learning experience or program. Teachers are familiar with the curricular objectives and the learning outcomes expected for the different units and lessons. However, less confidence is displayed when targeting language goals for emergent bilinguals.

Many teachers believe that reading, engaging in conversations, and discussing should lead to mastering academic discourse in their second language. While this is true for many bilingual students, there are those who do not understand the content or cannot participate in the lessons, these students need someone who can help them pay attention, to focus on the language of the texts. Instruction for these students needs to be shaped by language goals.

Language goals are the implementation of linguistic features associated with academic language such as vocabulary, sentence structures, and cohesive devices. The teacher needs to analyze the texts that will support a particular unit, select particular words and structures that lie at the core of the unit and that represent a learning opportunity. Planning becomes intentional and student progress can be assessed.

**Exposure to academic language through Interactive Read Aloud.**

Read Aloud is a BL structure that benefits the learning of emergent bilinguals. It allows the teacher to anchor a unit of study, to provide background knowledge, and to expose and scaffold vocabulary, concepts, and structures that are an intrinsic part of the linguistic data employed within a particular content area (Swinney & Velasco, 2011). The language goals guiding reading aloud interactively may focus on these linguistic features to expose emergent bilinguals to academic language and content.

**Analysis of language goals through Shared Reading.**

Once the emergent bilinguals have been exposed to the content text, they have to be given the space and time to analyze the forms and structures of the academic language employed in the specific text. Language goals in Shared Reading may offer students the chance of unpacking the meaning from sections of the text by relating words, phrases, clauses, and cohesive devices to its overall meaning. Interacting with text in this manner increases the support for understanding the content area and for reading comprehension.

**Implementation of language goals through Shared Writing.**

This is the culminating, assessing activity. By producing text collaboratively, the teacher can see if the students have integrated the language goals that she has pursued through Interactive Read Aloud and Shared Reading.

The cyclical quality of the Framework allows for the continuous work on the same language goals through a recursive use of the structures with the same or a new text.
The Context and Participant

Ms. Vélez teaches in an urban school in NYC. The school has a bilingual transitional and an English only program. There are 826 students and 80% are entitled to free lunch. Latinos are the highest group represented in the student body (80%), followed by African Americans (17%) and Asian (3%). Ms. Vélez’ third grade class has 25 students, including three newcomers and nine other emergent bilinguals. The first language of all her 25 students is Spanish but several of her students are English dominant and struggling learners (they have academic or emotional issues that interfere with their academic success).

The teacher instructs all content areas in English except for Social Studies. This is in response to the school requirements of transitioning students into an all English program by fourth grade. Additionally, an ESL teacher works with the emergent bilingual students three times a week as a push in teacher (teaching inside the classroom) during the literacy period in particular. The ESL teacher uses her time with the children to reinforce and individualize the language goals that Ms. Vélez is addressing to the whole class.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

I observed this classroom over an academic year. The number of observations per week varied from initially one day per week observing 2 or 3 different content subjects being taught, to 4 days a week later in the year, specifically during the period allocated for science. I increased the number of observation days when the teacher was implementing a science thematic unit which modified the BL structures.

The observations were carefully documented through copious field notes. I also took photos of instructional materials produced by the teacher and photocopied student work. Before beginning data collection, I obtained permission from the NYC DOE, school principal, the teacher, and students’ parents.

Data analysis began at the same time that data was collected. The field notes were continuously read to identify any instructional behavior related to teaching content knowledge and the academic language associated with it. The behaviors were then identified as instructional episodes and analyzed to answer three questions: (1) What part of academic knowledge and language is being taught?; (2) How is the teacher instructing it?; and (3) How is the teacher adapting the BL structure to allow students to analyze and produce the academic language intrinsic to the text?

Any instructional episode that did not answer any of the questions was set aside. Only those events that provided information relevant to the three analytic questions were further scrutinized, by writing analytic memos and discussing them with the teacher. The fact that I was in the classroom several days a week facilitated ongoing interaction with Ms. Vélez which served to triangulate the data analysis.
Findings

To exemplify how Interactive Read Aloud, Shared Reading, and Shared Writing Structures target content and language goals, we followed Ms. Vélez, as she developed a thematic unit on the rain forest with a focus on science subject area. The specific concept that she addressed was camouflage.

Establishing Language Goals

Ms. Vélez planned for three language goals. These stem from the required content area vocabulary and students academic and language needs:

- **Mastery of technical vocabulary**: such as camouflage, survive, and habitat. Without knowing the meaning of these words, her students would not be able to gain an in-depth understanding of this unit.

- **Sentence structures**: analyzing the structure of relative clauses that appear in the text. Ms. Vélez wanted to focus on this specific aspect because she had noticed that the sentences her students produced were short and stilted. By focusing on a longer, more sophisticated sentence pattern, she aimed at having her students produce them in their writing.

- **Cohesive devices**: pronoun substitution. Ms. Vélez noticed that some of her students, when they read a pronoun, did not know the object or person to which the pronoun is referring.

In addressing these language goals, Ms. Vélez targeted different aspects of academic language from words, to sentences, to how a paragraph is put together (cohesion). She also “recycled” the language through listening (Interactive Read Aloud), reading (Shared Reading) and writing (Shared Writing). In her planning chart, Ms. Vélez included the language goals, strategies, and materials she used within each of the structures.
**Table 4**

*Language Goals and BL Structures for Instruction in Ms. Vélez’ Class*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planned Language Goals</th>
<th>Exposure through Interactive Read Aloud</th>
<th>Analysis through Shared Reading</th>
<th>Implementation through Shared Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Book: <em>Camouflage and Mimicry</em>, by Bobbie Kalman</td>
<td>Analyze a paragraph from the Read Aloud that incorporates all the language goals</td>
<td>Through the creation of a collective, written text, students will use the new words, sentences and pronouns that have been the language goals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Vocabulary**

(Technical vocabulary specific to the unit):

- camouflage
- survive

**Sentence Structures**

(Relative clauses)

1. Camouflage is a color or pattern in an animal’s body.

2. (Camouflage is a color or pattern) that allows it to blend with a certain background.

**Cohesive devices**

(Pronoun substitution)

- Using associated nouns and pronouns when reading aloud.

- Associating the pronoun *it* with *the animal* in the text taken from the Read Aloud.

**Exposure to academic language within the Interactive Read Aloud Structure**

The book that Ms. Vélez read is *Camouflage and Mimicry* (Kalman, 2001). The section she read aloud to her class was the following:
In order to survive, many animals use camouflage to find food or hide from their natural enemies. Camouflage is a color or pattern on an animal's body that allows it to blend with a certain background. The type of camouflage an animal uses depends on the environment in which it is hiding (p. 4).

She used different instructional strategies to scaffold meaning for her students (association of technical words; definitions on the run; paraphrase to clarify sentences; sentence repetition providing a noun and its corresponding pronoun). During the Interactive Read Aloud, Ms. Vélez associated technical words (Tier 3) with words that are Tier 2 or 1. She provided a "definition on the run" by providing a similar word after she read the word camouflage:

Teacher (reading): "Many animals use camouflage... [T]his means disguise, hide; many animals use camouflage or disguise...."

Ms. Vélez transformed complex sentence structures to make them accessible to her students:

Teacher (reading): "Camouflage is a color or pattern on an animal's body that allows it to blend with a certain background."

Teacher (clarifying the sentence): "Camouflage is a color or pattern on the body of an animal. The color or pattern helps the animal blend with a certain background."

The third language goal that the teacher targeted is pronoun substitutions. As she read, the teacher selected the pronouns that she wanted to focus on so that the meaning would not be lost. As a result, she occasionally repeated a sentence, presenting it once with the pronoun and once with the corresponding noun:

Teacher (reading): "The type of camouflage an animal uses depends on the environment in which it is hiding."

Teacher (substituting the pronoun with the noun): "The type of camouflage an animal uses depends on the environment in which the animal is hiding."

Even though this might sound redundant, the teacher prefers that the meaning is clear and her students are aware of the information they are receiving. Ms. Vélez followed the same procedures for subsequent pages as she read the book. By taking care of scaffolding the academic language that the text presents, the content became accessible.

Analysis of Language Goals through Shared Reading Structure

During the Shared Reading, Ms. Vélez was able to associate Tier 3 words with equivalent terms in Tier 2; to model how to understand and construct challenging structures such as relative clauses; and to confirm that pronouns were always connected with the appropriate reference. The paragraph selection for analyzing the
language goals in Shared Reading was taken from the book used in the Interactive Read Aloud. For purposes of clarity, the same paragraph that was used in the Interactive Read Aloud to illustrate scaffolding strategies above will be used in this section.

Ms. Vélez placed Post-it notes to cover her target words. On the Post-it, she wrote a similar, Tier 2 word that created a link with the more technical target word: *survive/live, camouflage/disguise*. Ms. Vélez employed a similar strategy with pronouns. She covered the pronoun *it* with a Post-it that said *the animal*. When the students first read the paragraph, they read it with the Post-its covering these language goals. Ms. Vélez gave her students a chance to think about what word could be under the Post-it. The students thought and shared their ideas with their peers. Several students came to the front and, after sharing their prediction, took the Post-it away:

![Figure 2: Shared Reading text focusing on technical words and pronoun substitution during Shared Reading](image)

Relative clauses are used to give additional information about something without constructing an additional sentence. A relative clause requires the use of *which, that, whom, whose*. To address the specific construction of the relative clause that this short passage presents, she broke it into two sentences:
Camouflage is a color or pattern on an animal’s body. The color or pattern allows it to blend with a certain background.

Then, the two sentences were put back together, substituting the color or pattern for that.

Camouflage is a color or pattern on an animal’s body. The color or pattern allows it to blend with a certain background.

A second strategy that the teacher used was to place a connecting arrow between that and camouflage is a color or pattern:

Camouflage is a color or pattern on an animal’s body that allows it to blend with a certain background.

On another day, a second relative clause and a pronoun substitution were analyzed:

The type of camouflage an animal uses depends on the environment in which it (the animal) is hiding.

The relative clauses were deconstructed and constructed again. It gave the students an opportunity to understand the role of that and which in constructing a longer, more sophisticated sentence. Notice how these structures were not taught using grammatical rules or explanations. Their pedagogical strength comes from being taught through the use of visual devices.

Implementation of Content and Language Goals in Shared Writing Structure

In Shared Writing, Ms. Vélez was able to assess what content and language structures her students integrated into a collectively written text, written by the teacher with students input. As students contributed to the Shared Writing, she noted what vocabulary and linguistic structures they spontaneously used allowing her to determine if the lesson’s language goals were achieved.

Ms. Vélez introduced Shared Writing by prompting her students to create a summary of what they had learned so far about camouflage:

Teacher: How do we start writing what we have learned about camouflage?

Student 1: The animals hide...

Teacher: That is something that we have to say, but should we start by writing: the animals hide?

Several students: No!

Teacher: Who wants to suggest something else?
Student 3: We start with camouflage

Student 4: Camouflage is the way the skin...

Student 5: The way the skin of some animals looks...

Student 1: Yes, like that.

The students created this introductory paragraph. It summarized what they had learned so far:

Camouflage is the way the skin of some animals looks. Some animals have patterns, like the cheetah. Other animals have the same color as their habitat. They blend with it, like green frogs. An animal’s camouflage blends with the place in which the animal lives.

As Ms. Vélez wrote this text, she could see that her students had incorporated the language goals that she had initially planned: vocabulary (camouflage, habitat); sentence structures (i.e., An animal’s camouflage blends with the place in which the animal lives.) and pronoun substitution (i.e., it, they).

The findings confirmed that writing an academic text is an exercise in decontextualization. It requires that the information presented is explicit and precise so that the audience can easily understand the text. Shared Writing facilitates this decontextualization process by allowing students to reword and revise concepts and to hear similar ideas presented in a variety of ways. Engaging in Shared Writing requires that students organize, sequence, and evaluate the importance of the information being presented.

**Analysis**

The analysis of Ms. Vélez teaching a thematic unit revealed that the cycle of planning, exposure, analysis, and implementation is one of transformation. Having specific language goals that targeted different aspects of academic language gave clarity and purpose to her teaching. She chose words that were at the center of understanding the science lessons that she was undertaking. The sentence structure and cohesive device she selected stemmed from the observed needs in most of her students and that the texts portrayed.

During the Interactive Read Aloud, the exposure to listening to rich language and concepts, together with the scaffolds that Ms. Vélez implemented, gave her students the opportunity to understand new linguistic forms that the unit conveyed. The strategies she implemented within the Interactive Read Aloud acted as a first step- scaffold that prepared the students to read and analyze the text in Shared Reading. This subsequent analysis provided the opportunity for the students to play with and understand words and sentences before engaging in the collective creation of the Shared Writing piece.
The cycle took them from listening to text, to reading and speaking it, and finally to experiencing the decisions that writing demands.

For Ms. Vélez, these Balanced Literacy structures acted as gradual scaffolds that allowed her and her students to focus on language and in the process, the content was scaffolded. In essence, there was a double transformation in this third grade, transitional bilingual class. From Ms. Vélez’s point of view, she gained confidence in knowing what to teach and how to teach it. From her students’ perspective, they experienced the rewarding effects that come from being able to understand and use sophisticated words and structures.

Conclusions

Understanding all the elements embodied in academic language has been a long, and often winding, road. The research reviewed in this paper revealed that linguistic socialization in early childhood, densely packed information in sentences and words, considerations of the immediacy of the audience, understanding how texts are put together, as well as how texts are cohesive units, are all elements of academic language (Chamot, 2009; Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2009; Gibbons, 1993, 2002, 2006; Numelin, 1989; Snow, Met, & Genesee, 1989). All these researchers place content at the heart of academic language learning, requiring teachers to place a dual emphasis on language and content in their daily pedagogical practices. I contend that, the task of teaching academic language is less daunting if the focus is on its different aspects which clarify academic content for students.

The instructional framework proposed in this article responds to two issues, (1) the lack of practical information provided for teachers on how best to plan for the integration of academic language and content, and (2) consideration of how best to deconstruct the linguistic features of academic text when teaching emergent bilinguals. The depiction of how a teacher worked at designing language and content goals and in modifying BL structures to make academic content comprehensible for students navigating two linguistic repertoires, suggests provocative possibilities for other practitioners with similar educational demands. The strategies that Ms. Vélez implemented in planning for language and content goals and in instructing through modified Interactive Read Aloud, Shared Reading, and Shared Writing, can be emulated by ESL, mainstream, and bilingual education teachers working in multilingual schools. The cycle of planning, exposure (through Interactive Read Aloud), analysis (through Shared Reading), and implementation (through Shared Writing) affords opportunities for learning about language in the context of using language to learn academic content.

To understand the impact of this approach, more research is needed on how specific attention to language can benefit the learning of emergent bilinguals by focusing on particular words, sentence structures, and cohesive devices that are characteristic of texts at different grade levels and content areas. The refining of this research should include different types of emergent bilinguals (i.e., SIFE or long-term English Learners) and bilingual programs where attention is given to academic language in a language other than English (i.e., Mandarin, Spanish, Russian, Bengali).
Within this line of research, the modifications that other Balanced Literacy structures offer should also be analyzed. For instance, SIFE students in upper elementary grades or even middle school, who often have a weak command of the alphabetic principles of English, may benefit from Interactive Writing. This process though, needs to be documented and described for the benefit of other emergent bilinguals and their teachers.

The research discussed in this paper contributes to the existing literature on instruction for emergent bilinguals that rely on the integration of language and content goals, through literacy in the content areas. By modifying and adapting three Balanced Literacy structures: Interactive Read Aloud, Shared Reading and Shared Writing, emergent bilinguals can achieve a deeper understanding of the content and the academic language associated with it.

References


Notes

1 In this article, I use the term “emergent bilinguals” (García & Kleifgen, 2010), instead of the more common one “English language learners.” The term “emergent bilinguals” encompasses students who are learning two languages simultaneously as well as students who are in the process of acquiring the majority language, English. Since weaving together content and language is an educational practice mainly targeted to these populations, it seems appropriate to use the term that emphasizes their uniqueness.

2 Not her real name

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Appendix

Balanced Literacy Structures (Swinney & Velasco, 2011)

1. The teacher models by reading or writing to the students using the following structures:

   **Interactive Read Aloud:** The teacher reads to the whole class or to a small group of students, exposing them to a variety of literary genres. As the teacher reads, she is modeling the array of reading comprehension strategies previously mentioned. At different points, the teacher will ask the students to turn and talk to their partners and share their thoughts, make a prediction or summarize.

   **Shared Writing:** In this component, the teacher and students collaborate to write a text together. The teacher writes what the students dictate. The purpose is to demonstrate the decision making that takes place while constructing an academic text.

   **Interactive Writing:** The teacher and students write a short text and the teacher guides the students' attention to specific aspects of the mechanics of writing (i.e., spelling of familiar words, capitalization, spacing between words). The expectation is to work on one or two sentences at a time so students are able to focus their development of these technical aspects.

2. The teacher reads with the students using the following structures:

   **Shared Reading:** An enlarged text is presented to the whole class. The students read the text collectively, and the teacher can focus on specific aspects: punctuation or vocabulary, for example. Although shared reading and shared writing are a structure associated with the lower elementary grades, their use in the upper elementary grades (fourth and fifth grade) and middle school can be very effective (Swinney & Velasco, 2011).

   **Guided Reading:** The teacher scaffolds reading strategies with a small group of students who are reading at the same level.

3. The students work independently using the following structures:

   **Independent reading (with the teacher observing and conferring):** Students read on their own for extensive periods of time.

   **Writing process (with teacher observing and conferring):** Students write mostly about their life experiences for extensive periods of time.
The theories of practice of four novice bilingual teachers regarding their language choices during sheltered English instruction are presented. The investigation followed participants through their preservice program in an urban public university and their first year of teaching in bilingual classrooms. Findings from this study illustrate how theories of practice regarding the use of the native (Spanish) and second (English) languages during sheltered instruction vary among novices and how they change at different points in their individual journeys to becoming bilingual teachers. The novice bilingual teachers in this study used both languages during their sheltered English instruction in different ways, and these language choices are explored in light of existing research on code-switching and hybrid language practices. Implications of the findings for teacher education programs are discussed.

Current educational policies in the United States emphasize the teaching of academic content in English as soon as language minority children enter the school system. The hegemony of English in schools and the pressure to have emergent bilingual learners (EBLs) meet content standards in English poses unique challenges for bilingual teachers committed to promoting academic success by providing both native language and second language instruction. Despite decades of research demonstrating that the most effective way to promote learning in a second language is by building upon deep conceptual knowledge in a child’s native language (Cummins, 1986; García, 2009), national and state educational policies are promoting programs and practices that focus on English instruction and either limit or eliminate native language instruction. In New York, where bilingual programs have been recommended as one of two approaches to meet the needs of EBLs, testing policies requiring that EBLs take standardized English Language Arts tests after one year have led schools to emphasize English instruction in their bilingual programs. As a result, bilingual teachers are spending significant amounts of instructional time teaching content in English using sheltered instructional practices.

Sheltered instruction generally refers to pedagogy that: (1) makes grade-level academic content accessible for students who do not speak the target language while at the same time promoting target language development; and, (2) highlights key language features and incorporates strategies that make content comprehensible in the target language (Short, Hudec, & Echevarría, 2002). Sheltered instruction is an important component of bilingual program models. Bilingual programs are designed to separate
the native and target languages during instruction either by subject, teacher, or time, and models of sheltered instruction. However, studies of student/teacher interactions in bilingual classrooms have demonstrated that, similar to bilingual communities outside of schools where linguistic norms are established by the members, bilingual classrooms are characterized by code-switching, translanguaging, and multilingual practices (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011; Ferguson, 2009; García, 2009; Lin, 2008; Manyak, 2002; Probyn, 2009). The findings of the study reported in this article contribute to this literature by offering insights into the language choices of novice bilingual teachers during their sheltered English instruction.

The settings for this investigation were a preservice program in an urban public university and the bilingual classrooms where participants completed student teaching and their first year of teaching. The teacher education program included exposure to a particular model of sheltered instruction and support through conversations around classroom observations and participation in a teacher support group during student teaching and the first year of teaching. The classrooms were in bilingual programs in urban public school districts where the hegemony of English was reinforced through loosely established or poorly defined school policies about native language instruction, proportionately more instructional time allocated to English than to the native language, and a lack of quality instructional materials in the native language. Understanding novice teachers’ language choices while learning to teach in these contexts has important implications for teacher education programs that endorse particular models of teacher and student language use during instruction.

A Teacher’s Theory of Practice

Novice teachers’ language choices during sheltered instruction are revealed through their theories of practice. Johnson (2006) emphasizes that it is critically important for language teacher educators to recognize that teachers are theory builders. The term theory of practice is used in this study to describe the relationship between the beliefs and vision a teacher holds about teaching and learning and her enacted practice (Dubetz, 2002). A theory of practice characterizes teacher decision making as context-specific, activist, adaptive, nonlinear, and holistic (Clandinin, 1985; Elbaz, 1991; Genishi, Dubetz, & Foccarino, 1995; Paris, 1993; Rios, 1996). Because classroom teaching is a continuous stream of emergent situations that are problematic, ill defined, and multidimensional (Windschitl, 2002), teachers’ theories of practice often reflect contradictions between reported beliefs and enacted teaching practice. They reflect a negotiation of personal beliefs, new knowledge, and influences from within the teaching context such as school administrator expectations and characteristics of the students. In the study reported here, this negotiation process was evident in the teachers’ theories of practice.

Language Choices in the Bilingual Classroom

The theories of practice of bilingual teachers encompass views and practices that reveal particular language choices unique to bilingual classrooms. Although popular models of sheltered instruction like the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) do not promote the use of the native language by the classroom teacher4, both teachers and their students naturally engage in code-switching, hybrid language
practices, or translanguaging when classroom members share a language other than the target language.

Code-switching is a mode of communication first documented by linguists in early ethnographic studies of bilingual communities and is defined as “an alteration of two languages within a single discourse, sentence, or constituent” (Poplack, 2000, p. 224). Code-switching can be inter-sentential and/or intra-sentential, and is governed by phonological, morphological, and syntactic rules. The term has been used in a number of studies to describe the social and pragmatic functions of code-switching in classroom interactions in bilingual settings (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011; Ferguson, 2009; Lin, 2008; Probyn, 2009).

Code-switching is an element of hybrid language and literacy practices, which involve the strategic use of the multiple language resources by bilingual teachers and students within and outside the classroom community to build relationships with one another that advance literacy knowledge (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Álvarez, & Chiu, 1999; Manyak, 2002). Although code-switching serves a variety of social and pragmatic functions, code-switching as part of hybrid language practice is pedagogically strategic; a teacher’s choice to code switch is consciously driven by her goal of ensuring student participation and learning. Examples of teachers’ strategic use of the native language to advance student understanding can be found in studies of bilingual classrooms (Flores-Dueñas, 2005; Manyak, 2002; Shannon, 1995).

Even when teachers refrain from code-switching, bilingual learners will engage in code-switching. The term “translanguaging” has emerged as a construct used to explain the blending of language integration and language separation in bilingual classrooms, where children “translanguage to co-construct meaning, to include others, and to mediate understandings” (García, 2009, p. 304), even during times when the two languages have been separated by the teacher for instruction. García refers to the appropriation of language choice by children as “transglossic.” Some researchers have used translanguaging to refer to code-switching between teacher and students as well as code-switching among students (Hornberger & Link, 2012). The current study uses the constructs of code-switching and hybrid language practice to explain the language choices of novice bilingual teachers.

**Teacher Learning Communities and Teacher Theorizing**

Participants in the study met regularly in a teacher support group designed to provide a space for ongoing conversation about practice during their student teaching and through their first year of teaching in bilingual classrooms. One of the assumptions embedded in the current study is that bilingual teachers’ conversations around their practice are important locations for both influencing and investigating their theories of practice. Research focused on monolingual and bilingual teacher learning illustrates that new knowledge about teaching is filtered through an existing frame of reference grounded in personal and professional experiences (Bos & Reyes, 1996; Britzman, 1991; Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1991; Florio-Ruane, 2001; Galindo & Olguín, 1996; Holt-Reynolds, 1991; Lemberger, 1997). Inviting novices to participate in teacher learning communities can serve as a powerful form of professional socialization in which participants examine their existing theories of practice in relation to new
experiences and new knowledge (Craig, 2004; Dubetz, 2005; Florio-Ruane, 2001; Freeman, 1993; Holt-Reynolds, 2001; Rust & Orland, 2001). These communities share two characteristics: (1) the discourse within these communities focuses on practice and is situated in the day to day work of teachers; and, (2) these communities are structured to be ongoing so that participants have repeated opportunities to consider how new practices compare to existing ones.

**Description of the Study**

The investigation of novice bilingual teachers’ language choices reported in this article is part of a larger study of novice educators’ theories of practice during sheltered instruction. The findings reported in this article address the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between a pedagogical preparation that emphasizes the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol and bilingual teacher candidates’ theories of practice regarding teacher language choice during sheltered instruction?

2. How do theories of practice regarding language choice during sheltered instruction evolve for novice bilingual educators as they transition from candidates in a preservice teacher preparation program to first year teachers?

For the larger study, data on participants’ use of all SIOP categories (e.g., developing content and language objectives, providing comprehensible input, promoting interaction, etc.) were collected. The findings reported in this article focus on the data collected on one element of the SIOP: providing opportunities for students to clarify key concepts in the native language as needed with aide, peer, or text in the native language (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2010). As the researcher, I was particularly interested in this element because, as noted earlier, teachers and learners in bilingual classroom communities frequently blend the two languages even though models of sheltered instruction like the SIOP do not advocate teacher’s use of the native language during second language instruction. An investigation of the teachers’ theories of practice would offer insights into whether they were adhering to the model of language choice advocated during their teacher preparation, or constructing their own theories about language choice.

The study was conducted using a descriptive, case study design (Merriam, 1988). The study’s time frame included participants’ preservice and early career teaching experiences because there is evidence that these may be a single developmental period in learning to teach (Kagan, 1992).

**Participants**

Participants were members of a cohort of teacher candidates in an undergraduate preservice program that was supported by federal funds to address the shortages of certified bilingual teachers in New York City public schools. Data are presented in this article for four of the participants, Diana, Fernanda, Lucia, and Ana (all pseudonyms), who were Latina women between the ages of 20 and 29 when they entered the preservice program. Additional information regarding their language
Preparing for Language Instruction in the Teacher Preparation Program

The bilingual teacher preparation program in which the participants were enrolled included coursework to develop pedagogy to teach in the native language (Spanish) and in a second language (English) through content teaching methods courses. In these courses, participants studied additive models of bilingual education that promoted a separation of languages to ensure a balanced approach to native language and second language instruction. To prepare the candidates to teach sheltered instruction, candidates completed a course in English as a second language (ESL) methods. In this course, they were introduced to the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), which was used as a framework for planning for and reflecting on sheltered teaching practice. As part of the ESL methods course, participants used the SIOP to plan and implement lessons in bilingual classrooms during a summer internship.

Following methods coursework, participants completed two seven week student teaching placements, one in a transitional bilingual program and one in a dual language program in two urban public elementary schools. Candidates taught lessons in Spanish and English, and the SIOP was used as a framework for discussing their sheltered English instruction with the researcher. After each observation, the participant and I completed the protocol independently from each other. The rating scales in the SIOP were used to encourage dialogue around participants’ perceptions of their teaching abilities in sheltered instruction.

In addition, the student teachers participated in a teacher support group that met monthly. The support group was a place for sharing experiences and critical analysis of teaching. The conversations were guided by whatever stories or concerns the participants chose to discuss, and as a result, differed for each meeting. As the researcher, my role in support group meetings was to listen to participants, raise questions to further their thinking or clarify their ideas, and offer support, such as access to additional resources or instructional materials they needed, e.g., information on leveling books in English and Spanish and basic school supplies.

Supporting Instruction During the First Year of Teaching

During the first year of teaching, the support group meetings continued, meeting monthly during the first half of the year and bi-monthly during the second half. These were structured like those held during student teaching. In addition, each participant was observed once in the first two months of the school year and once in the final two months of the year. Again the teacher and I completed the SIOP instrument independently and used results to frame the conversations that followed the observed lessons.

Data Collection and Analysis

One of the theoretical assumptions framing this investigation is that language is a tool for constructing reality (Spradley, 1979) and can provide insights that cannot otherwise be observed (Merriam, 1988). To study the evolution of the theories of
practiced by the participants, the researcher collected both spoken discourse data (audiotaped support group meetings, post observation conversations between individual participants and the researcher, and field notes of classroom observations) and written discourse data (student teaching journals). Wilson and Berne (1999) note that undertaking research into teacher learning in collaborative forms of professional development such as teacher learning communities is difficult because “the location of the knowledge is unclear” (p. 186). To address this difficulty and investigate the unique theories of practice of each participant, a data set was created for each novice teacher. Each data set was coded for analysis using: (1) the instructional elements of the SIOP; (2) teacher generated practices that were not part of the SIOP but that the teachers used to support student learning; and, (3) sources of knowledge in teachers theorizing and practice, a preliminary set of which included influences from the teaching context (e.g., characteristics of children, school policies) and personal characteristics (e.g., prior experience, prior education). Data were triangulated by: (1) comparing field notes of observations with transcripts of the conversations that followed the observations and support group meetings over a two year period, and (2) representational and presentational readings of the language data, i.e., comparing what was said with how and when it was said in order to move beyond interpreting participants’ comments as direct representations of their thinking (Freeman, 1996).

During the coding process, memos were created to capture emerging patterns or themes, and tensions between different data sources (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Memos were then used to develop propositions, or “connected sets of statements” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 75). Evidence for each proposition was collected and used in developing the individual teacher profiles. Preliminary findings for each profile were then subjected to negative-case analysis (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998), meaning that whenever the data contradicted an initial finding, the finding was modified to accommodate the data.

Findings

The profiles of the theories of practice of the four novice bilingual teachers provided insights into their language choices during sheltered English instruction. The following section is divided into two parts. First, a description of the teaching contexts for all of the participants is provided. This is followed by profiles of the theories of practice for each participant regarding her language choices during her student teaching and first year of teaching.

The Bilingual Teaching Contexts

The hegemony of English was apparent in both bilingual programs where the participants completed student teaching. The participants believed that the schools supported using the native language in instruction, yet only one cooperating teacher allocated more instructional time in Spanish (children’s native language) than in English, and neither program had the same amount and quality of instructional materials in Spanish as were available in English. In the transitional program, the majority of children in the classrooms were at beginning levels of English proficiency whereas in the dual language program, most of the children were at intermediate and advanced levels of English proficiency.
The bilingual programs where all but one of the participants were hired for their first year of teaching also awarded higher status to English than to Spanish as evidenced by the schools’ language allocation policies. Ana taught only two periods daily in Spanish in her dual language third grade class, and was only required to assess children’s literacy development in English. Lucia taught all core subjects except math in English in her transitional third/fourth grade class, and Fernanda taught all core subjects in English in her transitional fifth grade class. Only Diana, who was hired to teach first grade in a transitional program, was teaching all core subjects in Spanish and one period of English as a second language. In the second half of her first year, there was a shift to include more instruction in English to prepare children for the state standardized exam assessing English language proficiency.

Profiles of Teacher’s Language Choices during Sheltered English Instruction

In this section, the teacher profiles are presented separately to illustrate the unique characteristics of each teacher’s theory of practice regarding language choice during sheltered English instruction.

Lucia.

When Lucia entered the preservice program, she identified herself as a native/native like speaker, reader and writer of Spanish, a native/native like reader and writer of English, and a proficient speaker of English. During student teaching, Lucia’s early preference for separating the native and second languages during instruction was evident in her comments in the support group meetings as well as her enacted practice. In both student teaching placements, the transitional kindergarten class, where most of the children were Spanish dominant, and in the dual language second grade classroom, where all of the children were proficient in English, Lucia spoke only English during her sheltered English lessons. Even when children asked Lucia questions in Spanish during sheltered lessons, she responded to them in English.

Although Lucia entered her first year of teaching holding the belief that a bilingual teacher should separate languages during instruction, her theory of practice changed in response to her school’s policy for language allocation. In the school where Lucia was hired, the principal and bilingual coordinator asked her to translate or paraphrase content in Spanish during her English instruction to assist children in learning. Lucia complained about this policy, explaining, “I don’t know about giving the lesson in English and then translating it...that’s not what I was taught. I don’t feel comfortable doing it.” To negotiate the contradictions between her existing views on language allocation and those espoused in the school, Lucia developed an approach to her sheltered instruction that included both Spanish and English during sheltered instruction, but did not adhere strictly to the recommendations made by her administrators. During whole class lessons, Lucia began by soliciting children’s prior knowledge related to the topic of the lesson in English. Following this, she continued to ask questions and present content in English, but switched to Spanish when she wanted to ensure student understanding of important content, as is illustrated in the following interaction at the end of a mini-lesson during literacy.
Lucia: When you keep a reading log, it will actually be an incentive for you. I read two pages today. Maybe tomorrow I’ll even want to read more. I’m going to give each of you a copy of the log and I want [you to use it with] the book that [you are reading...]

Child: ¿Vamos a hacerlo todos los días? (Are we going to do this every day?)

Lucia: Yes, I want you to keep a log of everything you do in the classroom. I’ll give you one to do at home also.

Child: ¿Lo va [unrecorded] para qué estamos leyendo en la casa? (We're going to ...so that we're reading at home?)

Lucia: Sí, porque Uds., se acuerdan que tienen la responsabilidad de leer media hora en casa todos los días. . . (Yes, because you need to remember that you are responsible for reading a half hour at home every day.) [to the class] ¿Por que? ¿Por qué van utilizar? (Why, why are you going to use them [the logs]?)

Child: So you can put the pages...

Lucia: ¿Sí, pero por qué? ¿Por qué? ¿Por qué? (Yes, but why? Why?)

Child: Para que Ud. sepa cuantas páginas estamos leyendo. (So you know how many pages we are reading.)

Lucia: Esto... Esto es para Uds. No es un exámen. (Right. . . This is for you. It is not a test.)

Lucia did not use translation or paraphrasing during her whole class sheltered instruction; however, once the whole class portion of a sheltered lesson was completed and children were sent to their seats to work on assignments, Lucia met with individual or small groups of Spanish dominant children, and in Spanish, summarized the content and clarified assignments.

Ana.

Ana entered the program with native/native like proficiency in English and Spanish in speaking, reading, and writing. Ana was an advocate for bilingual programs that separated the two languages for instruction before she began student teaching. At support group meetings, she spoke positively about the model of the dual language program being implemented in her daughter’s school, where an equal amount of instruction time was allocated to both languages, and languages were separated by teacher, location, and time. Her beliefs were reflected in her practice in her first student teaching placement, where she spoke only English during whole group sheltered instruction. As recommended in the SIOP, she placed beginning English speakers with bilingual speakers who could support them by translating content and procedures. Once children began working on their assignment, she used Spanish to clarify the assignment for a Spanish speaking newcomer and invited the child to complete the assignment in Spanish.

Ana’s theory of practice changed, however, when she was placed in a first grade class in a transitional program for her second student teaching placement. In this classroom, there were many Spanish speaking newcomers, and the classroom teacher
used Spanish for all content instruction to build children’s knowledge and skills in their native language. In this context, Ana engaged in inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching during her sheltered English instruction, switching to Spanish to reinforce content vocabulary, translate directions, or manage behavior, as is illustrated in the following interaction.

Child: I’m going to take this one. The gray.
Ana: That’s silver.
Child: Silver.
Ana: *Este no se llama gray; este se llama silver.* (This is not called gray, this is called silver.)

Ana: [to the group of children] In the corner you write your name [points to corner of paper]. *En esta esquina, su nombre. Tienen que trabajar calladitas porque* [pointing to the other students] *tienen un examen.* (In this corner, you name. You have to work quietly because they have a test.)

[Child asks in Spanish for clarification of directions about labeling the butterfly cycles.]

Ana [to one child]: *Quiero que lo aprendas en inglés.* (I want you to learn it in English.) *Sí quieres*, I have crayons. (If you want, I have crayons.) But you first have to write your name, then write each cycle of the butterfly. [to the group] *Tienen qué trabajar calladitas.* (You have to work quietly.)

Ana justified her decision to code switch by explaining that, “in Spanish, I felt more comfortable because I thought they were going to understand me better, and that was my main concern, the fact that they didn’t understand the second language.” Evidence from her journals and comments during meetings demonstrated that there was a tension between Ana’s belief that language allocation should include equal amounts of instructional time in both languages and the language allocation practices in this first grade classroom, where most class instruction was in Spanish. To negotiate this tension, Ana incorporated code-switching in her theory of practice while in this classroom.

When Ana assumed responsibility for her own classroom as a first year teacher in a dual language program that awarded higher status to English, she returned to separating Spanish and English during instruction. She used only English in her sheltered English lessons, which was consistent with her early commitment to separating languages during instruction. Although she did not code switch during her whole group instruction, she did continue to use Spanish to clarify English content or tasks for a Spanish speaking newcomer after the whole group lesson ended.

**Fernanda.**

Fernanda entered the preservice program with native/native like proficiency in English and Spanish in all skills but writing. She believed she was proficient in writing in Spanish, but could not write like a native. Despite her proficiency in Spanish, Fernanda expressed concern when entering her first student teaching placement that she did not have enough academic Spanish to be able to teach in Spanish. She also
stated in an early support group meeting that she was confused about how to use the two languages in her sheltered lessons and wondered whether she should be “translating” during her lessons. She seemed to be unclear about how she could teach in English and at the same time ensure that her children could understand the content she was teaching.

Early in her first student teaching placement, Fernanda was observed engaging in frequent code-switching in both her sheltered English and Native Language Arts instruction. During her sheltered English lesson, she engaged in inter-sentential code-switching to present content, and also inserted key content vocabulary words in English in the middle of a Spanish sentence, as is illustrated in the following exchange during a math lesson.

[Fernanda has introduced the attributes of quadrilateral, and she takes a block shaped like a rhombus and shows the class.]

Fernanda: This is called a trapezoid. Y éste ya lo saben. Dejame hacer un dibujo de un trapezoid para que lo vean. (And this you already know. Let me draw a trapezoid so you can see it.) [She draws a house with a square at the base and a triangle for a roof.] Casi como un triángulo pero le falta algo. (It’s almost like a triangle but it [the triangle] is missing something.)

[She now draws a new shape on the white board: a circle with a diamond shape on it like a ring]

Fernanda: Es un shape que Uds. lo ven todos los días. Un anillo. Un diamante. (It is a shape you see every day. A ring. A diamond.)

Fernanda: Everyone together, say diamond.

Children: Diamond.

Fernanda: ¿Y? [pauses and points to a triangle she drew earlier]. It has another name. What’s the other name?

Child: Triangle.

Fernanda: A triangle has three sides. Quiero que Uds. lo dibujen. Les voy a dar un papel (I want you to draw. I’m going to give you a piece of paper), and I want you to draw a picture with it.

In their conversation following the lesson, the researcher recommended that Fernanda try staying in the language of instruction as described in the SIOP during her next sheltered lesson. When Fernanda was observed teaching the same group of children two weeks later, she spoke in English during whole group instruction, and when children began working on an assigned task at their tables, she spoke in both English or Spanish when asking comprehension questions or clarifying the directions for individual students. Her choice seemed to be based on the language dominance of the student, i.e., she spoke Spanish with beginning English speakers. She told the researcher after the lesson that she thought she did “a better job staying in English.” She explained that “sticking to the one language...makes it less confusing for me also.”

This change in her theory of practice remained consistent during her first year of teaching in a transitional fifth grade classroom, where Fernanda continued to speak
only English during her whole class sheltered English instruction and only switched to Spanish to clarify tasks for individual students who were newcomers during independent practice following the whole group lesson.

Diana.

When Diana began the preservice program, she reported having native/native like proficiency in all skill areas in Spanish, native/native like speaking abilities in English, and proficient skills in English in reading and writing. During her first student teaching placement, Diana’s perceptions of children’s English proficiency levels guided the language choices she made in her sheltered instruction. In her first student teaching placement, where the children were Spanish dominant, Diana expressed a concern about the level of participation of beginning English speakers in lessons taught in English; “I feel like I am leaving them behind,” she explained.

In her sheltered English instruction, Diana code switched to clarify or reinforce content to the class as a whole and to individual children, and to manage instructional transitions, as illustrated in the following exchange during a math lesson in her first student teaching placement.

Diana: So we can group by color. Now let’s group by shape. Can we put these together? [Diana shows the children two attribute blocks of the same shape but different colors.]

Students: No.

Diana: Yes, they are the same colors. Podemos ponerlos juntos porque son cuadrados. Recuerden este también [showing red and blue triangle blocks]. Están juntando mucho. Move back. Now, ahora los niños de la mesa uno, a la mesa. De la mesa tres, a la mesa tres. Los niños a la mesa cuatro. (We can put them together because they are squares. Remember this also. You are too close together. Move back. Now, the children from table one, to the table. Table three, go to table three. The children to table four.)

[Children move to their seats.]

Diana: Tienen que poner sus nombres. [She is distributing work sheet.] (You have to put your names [on your paper].)

[During the next few minutes as children are working on their worksheets, Diana goes to each table and interacts with individual children in English or Spanish, clarifying or commenting on their work, e.g., “¿Cuáles son iguales? (Which ones are equal?) Is there another shape?” “Draw a line. Okay, that’s good. Show me more;” and “En este número, (in this number) can you show me two that are alike?”]

Perceptions about students’ ability to understand her again informed Diana’s language choices during sheltered English instruction in her second student teaching placement in a fourth grade dual language class. In this new setting, Diana chose to speak only in English during her sheltered instruction because “everybody’s talking in English and even amongst each other, it’s in English.” Interestingly, she noted after her first observed sheltered lesson that she had forgotten to provide immediate individual attention to a Spanish speaking newcomer in the class to ensure he was able to
undertake the task. Reflections from her student teaching journal illustrate that she worked with the student in subsequent weeks to help him complete his writing piece in Spanish while the others students were writing in English.

When Diana entered her first year of teaching, she was hired to teach first grade in a transitional bilingual program where all of the children were Spanish dominant and where all but one period of instruction each day was taught in Spanish. In this setting, Diana returned to code-switching during her sheltered English lessons. She used Spanish to clarify content for particular students as illustrated at the beginning of a read aloud, where she said to a Spanish dominant child seated on the floor in front of her, "Jaime, cuando estoy leyendo un libro y no sabes una palabra, puedes mirar la foto para entender que está pasando. ¿Verdad? (Jaime, when I am reading a book and you don’t know a word, you can look at the picture to see what is happening, right?) She also switched from English to Spanish to elaborate on children’s comments in Spanish as illustrated in the following exchange in a sheltered English lesson about differences between the past and the present.

[Diana displays pictures of a modern stove and a coal burning stove.]
Diana: [pointing to the picture of a coal burning stove] What is this?
José: Estufa. (Stove)
Diana: How do we say estufa in English?
José: Estufa vieja. (Old stove.)
Diana: Raise your hand. Levante su mano. ¿Por qué? (Raise your hand. Why?) . . .
Child: Fire comes out.
Diana: Bien caliente como brasas que usan en la playa. (Very hot, like the coals that they use on the beach.)
[One of the children explains in Spanish they have a coal stove in his house in the Dominican Republic.]
Diana: Pero depende. Puede ser que en el campo. (But it depends. It can be [true] in the country.) Do you remember how we say charcoal in Spanish?
Child: Carbón. (Charcoal.)

Diana’s theory of practice reveals that her language choices during sheltered instruction were guided by the language proficiency of her students. She code-switched during her sheltered English instruction when she was teaching children whose preference for Spanish was reflected in their choice of Spanish during the lesson to respond to Diana’s questions or to elaborate on an idea being discussed.

In the profiles of Lucia, Ana, Fernanda, and Diana, similarities and differences emerge in their theories of practice about a teacher’s language choices during sheltered instruction. These comparisons are explored in the following section.

**Discussion**

The investigation described in this article had two purposes. The first was to explore the relationship between pedagogical preparation in a particular sheltered
instructional model, i.e., the SIOP, which discourages teachers from using the native language during sheltered English instruction, and the theories of practice of novice bilingual teachers during their student teaching and in their first year of teaching. The second purpose of this investigation was to explore how their theories of practice regarding language choice during sheltered instruction evolved as they transitioned from teacher candidates in a preservice teacher preparation program to first year teachers. Each question is discussed separately.

The Impact of Preparation in the SIOP on Theories of Practice

During the early stages of their entry into the teaching profession (student teaching and first year of teaching), the participants in this study did not adhere to a strict interpretation of the use of the native language during sheltered instruction as recommended in the SIOP even though it was the model endorsed by their preservice program. During student teaching, Ana, Fernanda, and Diana code-switched between Spanish and English during sheltered instruction. Only Lucia chose to speak only in English during her sheltered instruction. In their first year of teaching, Lucia and Diana code-switched in Spanish and English during whole class sheltered English lessons, and although Ana and Fernanda did not use Spanish during their whole class sheltered English lessons, both used Spanish when clarifying content one-on-one with individual students during independent practice following the lesson.

Despite the SIOP’s recommendation that the native language be used as a resource by peers or bilingual aides to clarify content, all four novice teachers in this study drew upon their knowledge of the two languages and used code-switching as an instructional resource and communication medium in their classrooms. Linguistically, all four novice teachers exhibited an extensive knowledge of both Spanish and English language systems, engaging in inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching that were syntactically correct (Poplak, 2000). Functionally, their use of Spanish during their sheltered English served multiple pedagogical purposes: to verbally scaffold academic content, promote student participation, signal transitions, manage student behavior, explain learning tasks, and gather evidence of student understanding. These purposes add to an existing set of purposes identified in earlier research on code-switching in bilingual and foreign language contexts, where teachers have used code-switching to give rhetorical emphasis, offer parenthetical comment, gain learners’ approval, communicate solidarity, contextualize academic English terminology, and relate new learning to students’ everyday experiences (Ferguson, 2009).

The analysis of the four teachers’ profiles reveals some subtle but important differences among their theories of practice regarding code-switching. Even though her administrators had recommended she “translate” and “paraphrase” to support student understanding, Lucia’s enacted language practices illustrate a theory of practice where “translation” was limited to summarizing content at the end of the lessons for some students, and “paraphrasing” was substituted with strategic shifts to Spanish for an extended interaction with the students when she wanted to ensure their understanding. Her language choices are similar to those of the teacher who engaged in the hybrid literacy practices described by Manyak (2002) because they were purposely focused on increasing comprehension.
In contrast, much of the code-switching of Fernanda, Ana, and Diana appeared less pedagogically strategic. Although they offered a general rationale for using Spanish during their sheltered English instruction as a way to ensure that children understood the content, the specific choices they made were somewhat random and sometimes unnecessary, which is characteristic of teachers who do not consciously control the language choices they make (García, 2009). Fernanda, who was initially confused about whether or how to use both languages when teaching in English, engaged in random code-switching even though the children responded to her in English, until she found an approach to language separation that was less confusing for her. Ana’s code-switching in her second student teaching placement was not a practice she personally endorsed, but convinced that her students would not understand her without translation, she code-switched without critically examining whether her specific choices, particularly her intra-sentential code-switching, were effective or necessary. Finally, while some of Diana’s code-switching was purposeful, e.g., extending an explanation in Spanish of a child’s response, her simultaneous translation of routine directions for managing behavior (e.g., Levante su mano. Raise your hand.) was unnecessary because children appeared to comprehend these kinds of commands in either language since they were repeated daily across lessons.

Changes in Theories of Practice

The profiles of the participants’ theories of practice reveal compromises in their language choices that grew out of their attempts to negotiate tensions between their existing beliefs and the demands of their teaching contexts. During their journey from student teacher to first year teacher, changes in theories of practice occurred for three of the novice teachers. Ana’s early commitment to language separation in her enacted practice shifted to include code-switching, when she began student teaching in a classroom where Spanish had high status among teachers and students. However, in her first year of teaching, once she returned to a program where English had higher status, she resumed her practice of keeping the languages separate. Lucia’s theory of practice changed during the transition from student teacher to first year teacher to conform to the expectations of her school administrators. Whereas she entered her first year having demonstrated during student teaching that her theory of practice demonstrated a complete separation of the two languages during her instruction, she engaged in strategic code-switching during lessons to ensure her students understand the task she was presenting. Finally, Fernanda started out the student teaching experience by code-switching because she was unclear about how to ensure that her students could access academic content if she stayed in one language. Her theory of practice shifted, however, after her first lesson, and she began teaching in English during whole group instruction and then clarified information for individual students during independent work. This revised theory of practice remained constant throughout her first year of teaching.

Of the four participants, only Diana’s theory of practice regarding language choice remained consistent from student teaching through the first year of teaching. Her theory of practice was not grounded in a particular model of language allocation but rather her knowledge of the children she was teaching, and so she made her
language choices based on what she perceived to be her students’ needs. Furthermore, unlike Lucia or Ana, Diana’s theory of practice was never challenged by a contradictory policy on language use from more powerful individuals in the teaching context, e.g., cooperating teacher or school administrator, and thus allowed her to maintain her theory of practice even when the teaching context changed.

Cenoz and Gorter (2011) noted that even though most schools officially endorse the separation of languages for instruction in bilingual programs, classroom practice does not match official policy. The findings from this study of novice teachers’ theories of practice as reflected in their language choices during sheltered instruction support this claim and offer insights for teacher educators and educational researchers regarding the preparation of effective bilingual teachers.

**Implications**

In a recent description of effective teacher education for bilingual teachers, Flores, Sheets and Clark (2011) suggest that teacher education programs be designed so that aspirantes⁵ “experience a personal evolution that questions existing beliefs, enhances ethnic identity, initiates teacher identity, and promotes efficacy” (p. 15), which they refer to as iluminación. The participants in the current study were characteristic of most aspiring teachers in that they entered the preservice program with differing set of beliefs about the role of language in educating emergent bilingual learners, and these became evident in their theories of practice when they were in a classroom. In preparing bilingual teachers for sheltered instruction, teacher educators who want to influence the theories of practice of novice teachers need to create opportunities in the preservice program and in the first years of teaching for them to investigate the factors that are influencing their language choices and to examine critically how their choices are affecting their students’ learning. Opportunities to observe and critique practice are built into preservice teacher education, but most induction programs for first year teachers are detached from preservice preparation. The opportunities for the participants to discuss their practice, including the use of the SIOP, during their first year of teaching helped them determine how to adjust their existing understanding of sheltered instructional pedagogy to changes in their roles and teaching contexts.

Preservice programs for bilingual teachers must be guided by a clear vision about language choice and must offer strategies for helping its candidates enact that vision. The findings of this study led to changes in the local preservice curriculum. The preservice program continues to encourage its candidates to separate languages in bilingual programs to ensure that children receive adequate exposure to the native language, but candidates now engage in a critical examination of the SIOP’s recommendation about native language support in their ESL methods course. They now learn ways to adapt the model to benefit their bilingual learners. Preservice teachers analyze examples of teachers’ use of Spanish and English during sheltered instruction to identify pedagogically strategic applications of code-switching that can promote student learning.
Finally, there is the popular assumption among individuals outside bilingual communities that code-switching reflects a limited knowledge of two languages and is detrimental to learning. Evidence demonstrating the positive impact of code-switching on student learning is, at present, limited to anecdotal evidence from descriptive studies. Building a case for the value of pedagogically strategic code-switching will require more systematic investigations of the relationship between classroom discourse and student learning in bilingual classrooms.

Conclusion

This article began by making a case for investigating bilingual teacher’s language choices during sheltered English instruction because of the emphasis being placed on English instruction in bilingual programs in response to pressures from state and national policies. However, teacher educators and novice teachers must engage in a critical examination of the larger issue of the language status in schools. Though this study suggests that teachers can (and do) use code-switching in pedagogically strategic ways, Manyak (2002) warns that simply endorsing hybrid practices as the way to address the low status of the native language in bilingual programs will not serve all EBLs, especially those who have limited prior academic experience. Teacher educators, then, must assume the additional responsibility of helping novice bilingual teachers develop strategies for improving the status of native language instruction in their programs and schools.

References


# Appendix

## Participant Characteristics

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Place of Birth</th>
<th>Self Reported Language Proficiency</th>
<th>K-12 Education</th>
<th>Student Teaching Placements</th>
<th>First Year of Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>Native/native like speaker and reader/writer of English and Spanish</td>
<td>Entered US public school in 2nd grade</td>
<td>1. Transitional Kindergarten 2. Dual Language, Fourth Grade</td>
<td>Transitional First Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucia</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Native speaker of Spanish. Proficient speaker of English Native reader and writer of English and Spanish</td>
<td>Entered US public schools in high school at age 15</td>
<td>1. Transitional Kindergarten 2. Dual Language, Second Grade</td>
<td>Transitional third/fourth grades bridge class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes

1 The author has adopted the term emergent bilingual learners as opposed to English Language Learners to emphasize that the goal of bilingual educators is to promote academic success and fluency in more than one language (García, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008).

2 Examples include the federal policy No Child Left Behind, which emphasizes high stakes testing in academic subjects in English after one year of schooling (United States Department of Education, 2001, Title III, 2002, 115 STAT. 1690), and state initiatives like Proposition 227 in California, Proposition 203 in Arizona, and Question 2 in Massachusetts.

3 New York State has developed a Language Allocation Policy that outlines two program approaches to meet the needs of EBLs: bilingual or English as a second language programs. EBLs who do not pass the state language proficiency tests must be serviced in one of these two program options.

4 Even though the SIOP recommends the teacher stay in the target language during sheltered instruction, the model recognizes the value of using the native language during sheltered instruction by an aide, peers, or the use of bilingual resources.

5 The term used by the authors to refer to individuals preparing to become bilingual teachers.
Empowering Teachers to Promote Oral Language in Culturally Diverse Classrooms in Ireland

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The importance of oral language development among elementary school students is widely acknowledged, both in the research and in policy documents worldwide. Facility with one particular style of language, decontextualized language, is critical for success in the school context. This style of language is not readily accessible to all students. This study reviews literature findings which indicate that teacher knowledge is imperative for successful teaching of English and reports on an intervention case study in three schools in Ireland in designated disadvantaged contexts. The case study examined the impact of enhanced teacher knowledge on the oral language skills of students in elementary classrooms. Findings suggest that, when teachers are empowered with knowledge of the requisite content of language teaching, appropriate pedagogical approaches for students' oral language development, awareness of the style of language necessary for success in school, and the potential of parents to support their children's oral language development, students' facility with decontextualized language style is improved at all levels of the elementary school. The study concludes with recommendations for policy-makers underscoring the significance of improved teacher knowledge for effective oral language teaching among students in disadvantaged contexts.

In recent decades, a clear and unambiguous recognition has emerged of the importance of oral language development for learning, acquisition of literacy skills, and ability to access the curriculum effectively (Riley, Burrell, & McCallum, 2004). This has resulted in a focus on oral language development which is manifest in the policy documents of education systems worldwide (Alexander, 2003; Department of Education and Skills, 2011b). There is mounting evidence that socio-economic disadvantage can result in differences in children's spoken language (Cregan, 2007; Schleppegrell, 2004). These differences may impact on children's educational success, and may in fact "be a major factor in the tail of underachievement that is currently the cause of so much concern" (Locke, 2007, p. 217). The Irish Education system is one in which the overwhelming majority of students are natives of Ireland and L1 English speakers. Elementary schools in that system in which the majority of students come from contexts designated as disadvantaged continue to struggle with the successful implementation of policy in relation to the development of oral language skills among their students (Department of Education and Skills, 2011b).

This study examines the impact of teacher empowerment through enhanced knowledge of children's oral language skills in English-speaking contexts designated as disadvantaged where English is L1. This article will begin with an outline of
findings from the literature review in relation to teacher knowledge for the successful development of oral language skills in young children. It will go on to present findings from a case study which explored the impact of enhanced teacher knowledge on the oral language skills of students in schools participating in a program called Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS). This is an integrated school support programme for schools in Ireland where the majority of students are socioeconomically disadvantaged. While some of the students in these schools are speakers of English-as-an-additional language (EAL) learners, the majority of the students speak English as their only language (EL). Since the majority of the students in these schools are disadvantaged socioeconomically, important implications for supporting teachers who teach EL learners from socioeconomically disadvantaged will be drawn.

**Teachers Can Make a Difference**

It is widely acknowledged that “of those variables which are potentially open to policy influence, factors involving teachers and teaching are the most important influences on student learning” (McKenzie & Santiago, 2005, p. 28). Reviews by Santiago (2002); Schacter and Thum (2004); and Eide, Goldhaber, and Brewer, (2004) all suggest that the most important school variable affecting student achievement is teacher quality. That teachers can make a difference is undisputed (Alexander, 2010; Coolahan, 2002; Fullan, 1993; Mortimer, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis, & Ecob, 1988; Tizard, Blatchford, Burke, Farquar, & Plewis, 1988). The work of researchers such as Tough (1977), Wasik, Bond, and Hindman (2006), and Wells and Mejia-Arauz (2006) have demonstrated that teachers can make a dramatic difference to the language development of children. Several studies have found that when oral activities involving the use of literate style language have been emphasised for children for whom this type of language knowledge is not well developed, literacy standards have improved (Galda, Shockley, & Pelligrini, 1995; LeFevre & Senechal, 1999). Significant impacts such as these do not occur by chance, however. Fundamental to successful practice is teacher knowledge, an important factor influencing teacher quality and effective practice. The following sections will focus on findings in the literature about specific knowledge elementary school teachers need in order to equip English L1 students in designated disadvantaged contexts with those language skills necessary for success in school.

**Teacher Knowledge for Language Development**

Early studies of teacher knowledge for the teaching of English tended to focus on teachers’ knowledge about language - subject knowledge (Bearne, Dombey, & Grainger, 2003) and in the case of elementary teachers highlighted what these teachers appeared not to know, concluding that increasing teachers’ subject knowledge would improve the effectiveness of their teaching (Poulson, 2003). However, the pedagogical transformation of subject knowledge is a complex task in the case of elementary school teachers (Shulman, 1987) and “there appears to be little evidence of a clear relationship between well-developed formal academic knowledge of particular subject content and effective teaching in the primary phase of schooling” (Poulson, 2003, p. 56). The work of Shulman (1987) refers to the importance of “pedagogical content knowledge”, that is, knowledge of the content and additionally an ability to present it meaningfully to children (Poulson, 2003,
Section 1: Teacher Knowledge of the Content of Language Learning

It is widely acknowledged that having appropriate content knowledge may not necessarily result in successfully teaching such content to students. However, it is accepted that a teacher needs to have subject knowledge in order to teach effectively, and where high standards of teaching are reached teachers display considerable levels of content knowledge in the subject they are teaching (Corden, 2007). In the absence of such knowledge Corden warns that “without a fundamental grasp of those elements of language study that are expected to be taught in primary schools, there is a real danger of teachers relying on ‘off the shelf’ textbook activities and returning to ... arid decontextualised exercises” (p. 117).

Invoking the prevailing situation where there are “tremendous pressures on children to become skilled users of language in school” (Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2003, p. 9), these researchers argue that teachers need “a thorough understanding of how language figures in education” (p. 9). The multiplicity of functions in which a teacher engages which are mediated through language underpin the rationale for their argument. The teacher as a communicator needs to know that patterns of discourse are culturally determined and that all patterns of discourse are equally valid. The teacher as an educator needs to know about and understand the basics of language and child language development so that appropriate language content and relevant activities and resources are selected to promote language development in the classroom. The teacher as an evaluator needs to be aware that all assessment is ultimately an assessment of language and so must realise how sources of variation in language use may impact children’s assessments. The teacher as an educated human being needs to have a personal facility with language. The teacher as an agent of socialisation must facilitate successful interaction with the system of school for all children regardless of linguistic or cultural background (Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2003).

Much attention is given in this argument to the significance of teacher knowledge in relation to oral language proposing that ‘despite its importance for learning, many teachers know much less about oral language than they need to
know’ (Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2003, p. 20). Specific aspects of language knowledge required include:

- knowledge of the basic units of language (phonemes, morphemes, words, sentences, discourse);
- knowledge of processes of vocabulary acquisition and the importance of accurate definitions and explanations when introducing vocabulary;
- awareness of dialects and an appreciation of their validity and complexity;
- understanding of academic style of language – its existence, its significance, and its characteristics (Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2003, pp. 20-33).

Snow (2003) clarifies that such knowledge is necessary to enable teachers to understand and support students as learners and readers.

One specific type of language knowledge, knowledge of academic style of language, has been found to be particularly important for students to succeed when engaging with the system of school. Much research points to the link between poor achievement in literacy and difficulties with this academic style of language (Pilgreen, 2006; Schleppegrell & Columbi, 2002). In spite of this, however, relatively little research attention has been given to the “challenges faced by native speakers in learning the rules, the structures and the content of academic English” (Snow & Uccelli, 2009, p. 113).

Given the importance attaching to a clear articulation of expectations for language use in the classroom, particularly expectations for formal, academic or literate style of language use by students (Schleppegrell, 2001), it would seem critical that teachers would have knowledge of the specific characteristics of this style of language. The academic style of language expected in the classroom context is one which involves an authoritative presentation of ideas heaving with new information. This authoritative style uses apt vocabulary and complex grammatical structures which are expanded appropriately with a high degree of organization. The ideas must also be presented from an impersonal stance with regard to both the speaker and listener (Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Michaels, 1981; Schleppegrell, 2001, 2004). Snow and Uccelli (2009) condense the features of academic language style revealed by linguists and educational researchers as:

- **Interpersonal stance**: characterised in academic language by being detached and authoritative in the style of language used
- **Information load**: characterised by conciseness and density of language
- **Syntactic organisation of information**: characterised by the use of embedded clauses
- **Organising of information** such that information is presented coherently and logically
- **Lexicon** characterised by vocabulary choice which is diverse, precise and formal
(Snow & Uccelli, 2009, pp. 118-121).

In order to facilitate successful oral language development, in particular in contexts designated as disadvantaged, it is imperative that knowledge of the characteristics of academic language is available to all elementary school teachers.
Snow (2003) acknowledges the enormity and complexity of knowledge required by teachers of language, which is accessible since all teachers can speak a language, but is complicated by the level of technical knowledge required in what is an intuitive process (p. 129). She recommends that all teachers need to develop a curiosity about words and suggests that “the first benchmark en route to mastery of the domain of language for teachers should perhaps be defined as familiarity with the dimensions on which words and language might vary and an unrelenting willingness to learn more” (p. 130).

**Teacher Knowledge of Pedagogy**

The role of the teacher in successfully empowering students in the construction of meaning as active agents in their own learning is a feature of the work of Cummins (1986), cited in Au (1998). Empowered students are described as “confident in their own cultural identity, as well as knowledgeable of school structures and interactional patterns” (Au, 1998, p. 304) thus enabling them to participate successfully in learning activities in school. Students from diverse backgrounds may be disempowered in the school context by virtue of a lack of connection between schooled knowledge and their personal experience (Demie & Lewis, 2011; Schleppegrell, 2004).

The poor academic achievement of students of diverse backgrounds has been attributed in part to the low status accorded to the home language of such students (Au, 1998) which may be ignored or denigrated or used as a basis for negative judgements of cognitive ability (Hoff, 2006; Michaels, 1991; Roth, 1986). Cummins (1986) argues that this can best be countered where teachers incorporate the language and culture of such students into the school programme, reach out to their communities, and engage in pedagogy which encourages them to use language to construct their own knowledge (in Au, 1998; also see McIntyre, Rosebery, & González, 2001). This viewpoint is reiterated by Poplin and Phillips (1993) arguing that “an appropriate education must respect who children are, their communities, their language, and their histories and help them become the best they can be rather than simply requiring them to become like the rest of us” (p. 253). This is best realised through a social constructivist approach to teaching and learning.

**Social Constructivist Pedagogy**

The pedagogy deriving from the socio-cultural nature of learning is that of social constructivism – “Because reality is seen to be created through processes of social exchange, historically situated, social constructivists are interested in the collective generation of meaning among people” (Au, 1998, p. 299). This paradigm is consistent with Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory of development (Pantalco, 2007).

The interrelationship between spoken language and learning has led psychologists and educationalists to advocate pedagogy in which discourse is centrally involved in the search for meaning (Barnes, 1992; Bruner, 1986; Wood, 1988). Influenced by the work of Vygotsky who argued that thought is not just expressed in words but comes into existence through words, these researchers see talk as central for learning in the context of school. Having discourse as a central pillar in teaching and learning, is the lynchpin of social constructivist pedagogy.

Barnes (1976) reported on two major pedagogical styles in classrooms: transmission and interpretation. In the transmission model, teachers emphasise
information transfer, determining what is to be taught, transmitting information, and testing children to ensure that it has been learned. In the interpretation model teachers are concerned more with open-ended, interactive discourse, involving exploratory and reflective learning, pupils taking risks, and sharing thoughts and ideas. The transmission model of teaching is characterised by the teacher initiating the discourse with a question to which the pupil responds, followed by feedback in the form of an evaluation from the teacher (Mehan, 1979). This model, known also as a "recitation script: (Wells & Mejía-Arauz, 2006), has been found to disadvantage those children whose out-of-school culture does not expose them to this pattern of interaction (Heath, 1983; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), provides no link between the patterns of everyday language use and those more formal patterns required in the school context (Lemke, 1990), and gives children minimal opportunity to voice their own ideas or to respond to the ideas of others (Wood, 1992; also see Freeman & Freeman, 2004).

In their survey of teacher-pupil discourse Galton, Simon, and Croll (1980) found that in classrooms, pupils gave limited responses to predominantly closed questions and rarely initiated exchanges or explored issues. Student work was found to take place largely independently and individually and teacher intervention was usually restricted to giving information or correcting that student work. A repeat of their 1980 survey in 1999 (Galton, Hargreaves, Comber, Wall, & Pell, 1999) found that at this time there was even less emphasis on active learning and more time was spent on direct instruction. This corroborates findings from other studies that the transmission mode of instruction, where an asymmetrical discourse sequence predominates and which, therefore, of necessity minimises interaction, continues to prevail in many classrooms (Alexander, 2010; Cole, 1996; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991).

The transmission model of teaching is, according to Wells (1992, p. 289) completely incompatible with the concept of constructivist learning. According to Corden (2007) the essence of constructivist learning is that pupils will gain through social interaction with others, where they share perceptions, extend their knowledge base, and develop conceptual understanding through being exposed to other, sometimes conflicting, views of the world.

This model of learning, which is essential if an oral language perspective is to be promoted in the classroom, requires a re-balancing of the traditional model involving the triadic dialogue of Initiation-Response-Evaluation to a context where knowledge is also dialogically co-constructed (Wells & Mejía-Arauz, 2006). This context requires students to explore content in dialogue which has greater symmetry between participants. Alexander (2003, p. 33) identifies four criteria or conditions of dialogic teaching as:

- **Collective**: pupils and teachers address learning tasks together, whether as a group or as a class, rather than in isolation;
- **Reciprocal**: pupils and teachers listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints;
- **Cumulative**: pupils and teachers build on their own and each other’s ideas and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and inquiry;
• **Supportive**: students articulate their ideas freely, without fear of embarrassment over ‘wrong’ answers; and they help each other to reach common understandings.

In such a context the teacher is required to take on a range of roles – facilitator, manager, instructor, and assessor (Fisher, 1992); to use a range of strategies – modelling, demonstrating, supporting, and scaffolding (Bruner, 1986); and to engage in an interactive process of teaching and learning focussed on collaborative learning and the joint construction of knowledge (Corden, 2007). The pedagogical implications of such an approach include increased emphasis on group work and exploratory learning through talk, exemplified in discussion opportunities, exchange of ideas, sharing information, and problem-solving. This is supported by scaffolded dialogue premised on structured questioning designed to guide the learner. An encounter with literature and poetry, along with increased participation in play and drama activities are among the strategies recommended (Alexander, 2003; Corden, 2007; Grainger, 2004; Mercer, 2004; Wyse & Jones, 2007).

### Teacher Knowledge of Learners

Teachers’ perceptions of their students’ capacity for learning and achievement may be affected by issues of social class, gender, and ethnicity (Filer & Pollard, 2000; Roth, 1986). In the classroom context, some children, experience “synchronous interaction with the teacher” (Schleppegrell, 2001, p. 433). Others, however, whose variety of language, although equally complex and valid, is not the standard variety, encounter discontinuity of experience by virtue of a mismatch between the spoken language of the home and that expected and demanded by the school (Edwards, 1997; Irish National Teachers Organisation, 1994; Mac Ruairc, 1997).

This in turn may contribute to the underachievement experienced by these children in the context of school and in the development of literacy skills. Children may come to school as competent speakers and listeners in their home environments, but, because of the pre-eminence of one variety of language, both spoken and written, as the medium of all educational exchange these children may be judged negatively in terms of both their linguistic and cognitive abilities (Cook-Gumperz, 2006, p. 9).

A study by Riley and Burrell (2007) found that for effective early language teaching, teachers need to have knowledge of the particular skills of children, most especially those children from diverse backgrounds (p. 183). The study suggested that the extent to which teachers enabled children to progress varies considerably due to a lack of knowledge of the variety of language skills children bring with them into the school context. A compelling case was made in that study for the use of an oral narrative assessment tool by teachers to improve teacher knowledge of learners with a view to enhancing teacher impact on children’s oral language development.

In a previous study (Cregan, 2007) findings from teacher focus group discussions revealed perceptions of children’s language skills as ‘poor’, ‘weak’ or ‘very weak’ (teacher comments, Cregan, p. 156), and extended to deficit perceptions
of children’s general cognitive ability which was often characterised as not as well
developed as it would be if the students were raised in a middle-class context –
they’re not as able because they don’t get the same opportunity – if these
children were compared with children in a similar class in a middle-class
school they would be way behind – lots of important development takes
place before the child starts school – that’s all happened before they even
come to school so they’ve missed out already (Teacher comment, Cregan,

Such perceptions of children may result in teachers having lower than
appropriate expectations for some children, which may lead to lower than
appropriate levels of achievement on the part of such children (Archer & Weir,
2005; Kennedy, 2009). In terms of knowledge of learners, critical knowledge for
teachers to acquire includes an awareness of the existence of variation in language
style among children, the complexity and validity of all varieties of patterns of
language use, and the implications of children’s language variety for achieving
success in the school context (Cregan, 2007).

**Teacher Knowledge of the Curriculum**

In the elementary school context in Ireland, evidence of difficulty for teachers
in successfully implementing the Revised Primary Curriculum (English)
(Department of Education and Science, 1999) is presented in the Primary
This review found that “teachers reported difficulty in understanding the English
strands and using them to plan for and to teach the English curriculum” (p. 2). One
of the main recommendations arising from this finding was that “the organisational
framework (strands and strand units) for the English curriculum should be revised
to ensure the English curriculum is presented in a manner that is accessible to
teachers and that enables them to plan for, and to support children’s learning in the
primary school” (p. 3). Numerous recent reports have highlighted problems for
teachers in planning, target-setting, and curriculum implementation in relation to
the teaching of language and literacy in elementary classrooms (Department of
Education and Science, 2002, 2005b; Department of Education and Skills, 2010,
2011a). This suggests that some teachers are experiencing difficulty with
implementing the English curriculum and using the curriculum for effective
planning. Teacher knowledge of the curriculum is central to effective
implementation of policy. Consequently, the English Curriculum for early childhood
education in Ireland is currently under review.

The scholarly sources surveyed in this first section of the article underscore
the role of teacher knowledge in promoting the language proficiency of students, in
particular of those with fragile access to academic language. First, permeating all of
the teacher knowledge outlined above is a belief system through which various
kinds of teacher knowledge related to language learning is accessed and developed.
Clearly, this belief system is as important as the knowledge itself (Twiselton, 2003).
Teachers’ sense of professional identity, explained as “how teachers define
themselves to themselves and others” was found to be fundamental to their
effectiveness, influencing such factors as motivation, job fulfilment, commitment
and self-efficacy (Sammons, Day, Kington, Gu, Stobart, & Smees, 2007, p. 687). This
study found that the pupils of teachers with a positive sense of professional identity
had levels of attainment which exceeded those of teachers who did not (p. 699). Thus, how teachers view their role in the context of the classroom impacts fundamentally on the content they teach and the actions they take. Reflection on the goals of education and the role of the teacher in achieving them must be central in the development of a teacher’s sense of identity such that “teachers need to see their primary role in the classroom as a catalyst for learning – the link between pupil, curriculum and subject, task and learning, classroom and the world beyond it” (Twiselton, 2003, p. 73).

Second, competence in developing student proficiency in language at elementary school level requires an abundance of knowledge on the part of the teacher. This is not confined to knowledge of language itself, but also, knowledge of the particular style of language required in the context of school. Also required is knowledge of the extent to which this style of language is available to a range of students from diverse backgrounds, and knowledge of how best to realise this learning in the classroom, with a clear understanding of curriculum targets. In the next section, findings from a case study undertaken to explore the impact of supporting teachers in acquiring this knowledge are presented.

**Research Design and Methodology**

Given the importance of the teacher in enhancing students’ learning, this study sought to explore the impact of empowering elementary teachers through enhanced knowledge, on developing students’ oral language ability in DEIS schools in Ireland. The focus of the investigation was on the following questions:

1. What is the impact of teacher support on oral language teaching and learning in a DEIS context?
2. What are the messages for policy makers that can be derived from the experience in this research?

Specifically the study focussed on the following sub-questions:

- What supports do teachers need in the classroom context to facilitate the development of students’ oral language skills?
- What impact, if any, does teacher support have on the teachers, and the community of learners and their parents being served by the school?
- What has been learned in this process that can be disseminated more widely and how can this be done most effectively?

This study used a mixed methods approach, involving both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in order to expand understanding of the research questions (Creswell, 2003). A context for the qualitative case study was established through quantitative data gathered from a previous nationwide survey of elementary teachers in DEIS schools (urban and rural), which was designed to uncover prevailing perceptions and practice. The purpose of this survey was to elicit teacher perceptions of students’ oral language skills and to document broadly teacher knowledge of the content of language teaching and the types of pedagogical
approaches used by elementary teachers in response to the perceived needs of the students in their classrooms.

The understanding derived from this quantitative survey was then expanded by means of a qualitative case study method of generating data. The baseline data from the survey revealed the challenges of oral language teaching and learning in DEIS schools as perceived by teachers, and significantly, provided a context in relation to teachers’ practice, forming an important backdrop for the case study which followed. The focus of the case study was on the delivery of an intensive programme of support for oral language teaching and learning in three DEIS elementary schools in Ireland with a view to learning more about improving practice in oral language teaching and learning in the context of these schools. This paper will present details of the case study undertaken and its findings.

**Case Study**

The goal in this study was to explore more extensively the support needed by elementary teachers in designated disadvantaged schools for the development of the oral language skills of the students in their classes and to investigate the effects such support might have on the whole school community – teachers, students, and parents. The study used an intervention case study design, where the researcher adopted the role of a non-participant observer (observing self-reported teacher practice through professional support sessions) and intervened as appropriate to enhance classroom practice (Cohen & Manion, 1998). This support was realised through a series of professional development sessions with the teachers. Teachers reported their practice and identified areas of support required.

Findings from the review of the literature and the survey informed the focus and approach taken in the case study. Three schools were selected on the basis of membership of the DEIS school support programme (two urban schools, and one rural school) and a willingness to participate in the study. The study was conducted over a period of one school year (academic year 2008/2009). Nine elementary classroom teachers were involved actively over the period of the school year in emphasising oral language development in their classrooms: three kindergarten teachers, three third class teachers, and three sixth class teachers (the use of the term *class* in the Irish context is equivalent to *grade* in the United States). The focus of the intervention throughout the study was to empower the teachers in the schools through enhanced knowledge, and in this way, to improve oral language provision in their classrooms. This empowerment was realised through a series of professional development sessions led by me, as the researcher, and responding to the needs, concerns, and issues raised by the teachers in an interactive, organic, and evolving process. Six focussed professional development sessions were planned and delivered to the teachers in the three schools over a period of eight months. Each professional development session took place in the school during the school day. Teachers’ classes were supervised by other teachers and sessions often ran into lunch-time. Sessions lasted approximately one to one-and-a-half hours and involved a combination of researcher-led topics and responses by the researcher to teachers’ areas of concern. The content of these sessions focussed on expanding teacher knowledge of language, pedagogy, and outreach to parents, with the goal of empowering teachers to engage in a form of practice designed to maximise the development of students’ oral language proficiency.
For the duration of the study, teachers were required to:

- Commit to having regular dedicated, discrete teaching time for oral language development in their classrooms (two 30 minute sessions per week at third and sixth class levels, and one daily ten minute session in kindergarten),
- Plan systematically and in a structured way so that it would be clear to them what their targets were and whether they had been achieved,
- Prioritise oral language so that opportunities throughout the day would be seized to develop oral language skills was required,
- Regularly engage students in oral tasks as part of the learning experience,
- Emphasise broadening students’ experiences (real and vicarious) on which talk could be based,
- Include a strong focus on the development specifically of that language style - academic style of language use - found to be important for success in the school context and particularly necessary for students coming from non-mainstream backgrounds was recommended,
- Ensure that students encountered and engaged with literature, poetry, and drama, on a regular basis, and
- Use interactive pair and group-work as an approach whenever possible.

To monitor the impact of changes in teacher knowledge on the students and their language development over the course of the project, teachers completed a reflective journal throughout the period of intervention. Entries in the journal were made at the discretion of the teachers. Teachers were encouraged to focus in their entries on challenges and successes they experienced over the period of the study, with particular reference to changes in their knowledge of the content and pedagogy of language teaching, changes in their perceptions of the students’ language skills, and their awareness of the potential of parental involvement in the process of oral language development. In addition, data were derived from a full-day seminar involving all the teachers, designed to elicit feedback on perceived changes at the end of the intervention.

At the outset of the study, four students from each class, representing a range of ability, were randomly selected by the teachers. Developments in the language skills of these students were the focus of particular attention by the teachers and relevant observations were noted in teacher journals as the year progressed. These observations were at the discretion of the teachers.

These students, with parental consent, also took part in pre-/post-testing to establish whether their language skills, in particular their decontextualised language skills, had changed in any observable way. The pre-/post-testing of the students took the form of elicited production techniques as developed by Underhill (1987). The students were taken in pairs from their classroom to a quiet room and presented with some fun games to play which involved talking. The focus of the talking tasks, designed to elicit oral responses, was on those oral language skills thought to be important for success in the school context and related to the development of literacy skills. The types of tasks selected were similar to those in the SHELL test battery (Snow, Tabors, Nicholson, & Kurland, 1995) which explore children’s ability to produce oral decontextualised language. One of the tasks in the
SHELL test battery involves children producing oral narratives, an oral language skill linked with later literacy development (Bowyer-Crane et al., 2008; Riley & Burrell, 2007; Tabors, Snow, & Dickinson, 2001) because “the ability to narrate orally encompasses a range of complex language skills and is an important predictor of later language and literacy achievements” (Riley & Burrell, 2007, p. 183).

Tabors et al. (2001) also argue for the important connection between ability to produce formal definitions and later literacy achievement. For the purposes of robust comparison, a definition task was included in this study as it was in the SHELL test battery. The final task in the SHELL test battery is a picture description task which is also included in this study. Students completed the same tasks in the pre-test and the post-test for comparative purposes. (See Appendix A for sample materials used to elicit oral responses from the students).

Students’ Oral Narratives were analysed for evidence of change in terms of those features of language identified as characteristic of academic/decontextualized style of language necessary for success in the school context (Snow & Uccelli, 2009). Word Definitions were analysed for change in the level of formality of the definition: characterised by the presence and the quality of superordinate used in the definition, as well as the use of a relative clause structure and the extent of elaboration presented. The linguistic features of interest in the Picture Description task focussed on a comparison of the total number of words used, the number of adjectives, verbs and locatives used, appropriate use of definite and indefinite articles and pronouns, and the ability of the children to include “specificity markers” (Snow et al., 1995, p. 40).

Case Study Findings

The focus of the intervention in the case study was driven by (1) findings from the literature around the importance of knowledge for effective implementation of policy in a meaningful and effective manner, and (2) data generated from an analysis of teacher responses to the nationwide survey. This analysis revealed (a) overwhelmingly negative perceptions of the language ability of many of the children, often presented from a deficit perspective, (b) inadequate setting of appropriate targets for language learning, (c) poor frequency of use of those pedagogies most facilitative of oral language development, and (d) very little parental involvement in the development of children’s oral language skills.

Case study data generated insights on the impact of support on teachers in relation to their:

- Knowledge about language
- Perceptions of the language skills and ability of the children, and
- Pedagogy knowledge about approaches and strategies, planning, resources, co-operation.

Case study data also explored the impact which the teacher support had on the community served by the school and the teachers, i.e. the students in terms of learning and their parents in terms of involvement with children’s learning.
**Teacher Knowledge about Language**

Teachers agreed that as a result of support given, they are clearer than before on the primacy of oral language in the classroom. They recognised that oral language needs time to be adequately developed in a DEIS context and do not resent giving this time because they can see the effects of improved oral language skills on children.

From taking part in this project I can clearly see how valuable oral language is and how undervalued it is in the average classroom ... It is no good speaking to/"talking at" the class for 20 minutes and calling it oral language. ... Successful oral language lessons should be well planned (Kindergarten Teacher, School A).

All of the case study teachers increased time dedicated to oral language development, frequently used clear, appropriate teaching and learning strategies, and demonstrated a high level of awareness of the desired language outcomes.

I am teaching for 20 years and ... up to this year I felt slightly out of my depth as to what I should be doing in my oral language classes .... Now I know how to structure the lesson and am more willing to do group work and paired work (Third Class Teacher, School B).

Teachers acknowledged their importance in this process as a role model for the students, and through scaffolding the students with appropriate structures, direction, and support in oral tasks. None of these teachers simplified language for the students because they realised that students can engage with more complex language than would have been thought previously.

I have had to change my attitude and thoughts about oral language drastically ... I would have been guilty of dumbing down language and vocabulary for the children ... I could never have imagined how language could have been developed in such a systematic way (Kindergarten Teacher, School B).

One teacher remarked during the seminar discussion – “I think it's probably the teachers that actually learned the most!” (Sixth Class Teacher, School C).

**Teacher Knowledge about Learners**

At the outset of the intervention, teachers acknowledged that the students have needs in relation to language development.

(The children) find it very difficult to tell a story – continue to talk ... elaborate – very poor; describe (poor); sequence stories; show good manners/refined language/speak in low, calm voices – often very loud; poor to make eye-contact or maintain eye contact (Sixth Class Teacher, School C).

However, following the intervention, instead of judging the children negatively and perceiving children as deficient in some way, teachers recognised the needs specifically, and showed an awareness of their responsibility as teachers to respond appropriately to these needs.

The empowerment of understanding students’ needs, identifying precisely what these needs are in the context of language development, and being in a
position to respond meaningfully to the needs had the effect of reducing negative perceptions teachers may otherwise have of these students arising from their language skills.

With very little skill-teaching we expect children to be good at communicating with others (this will change!!!); ... these children are as good as any child their own age and they have to believe that. You do that by believing it yourself! (Kindergarten Teacher, School C).

Teachers expressed surprise at the ability of the students when scaffolded in their language skills, e.g., “Children have a huge capacity for language.” (Third Class Teacher, School A); “Children said many words.” (Kindergarten Teacher, School B); “Children amazed me in how they described it.” (Third Class Teacher, School C).

**Teacher Knowledge of Pedagogy**

Teacher knowledge of appropriate pedagogy for the successful development of students’ oral language skills was informed by two basic tenets – that students must encounter high quality language from a range of sources, and that students must have increased opportunity to use oral language in the classroom accompanied by appropriate feedback.

Teachers reported that their standard of language use when interacting with the students during the project was more challenging than before. Additionally, all teachers increased the degree of exposure to literature and poetry and involved students in engagement tasks requiring a response to the literary experience through talk. As well as supporting and facilitating independent reading which was already in place in these classrooms, teachers at all levels read stories/novels aloud in their classrooms, and presented children with a wide range of poetry on a regular basis.

Teachers consistently indicated throughout the project that talking tasks were an integral part of the learning that was taking place in their classrooms. This occurred most frequently through increased use of collaborative interaction in the form of pair and group work. One teacher commented that the “teacher's role is not to own the discussion or to love the sound of their own voice.” (Sixth Class Teacher, School A). This teacher reported that “the children really enjoyed working in groups for debating, drama activities, brainstorming but the problem was at my level – handing over control to the children, letting them take control of the talk.” (Sixth Class Teacher, School A). This difficulty on the part of all teachers was reiterated during the plenary discussion – all found what they represented as handing over of control to the students difficult and found it challenging that students were talking more and teacher was talking less. However, teachers acknowledged that students welcomed opportunities to talk in the classroom and all found that pair and group work went well for the most part.

I have found that pupils need to be taught how to work in pairs, to take turns and to listen to each other. As time progresses I have found that the pupils are gaining in confidence and more willing to listen to each other (Kindergarten Teacher, School A).
Impact of Teacher Knowledge on Parental Involvement

Given the critical importance in the literature attributed to parental support for oral language development, the case study sought to investigate the challenges and effects of reaching out to parents and empowering them to become involved in their students’ oral language development. This initiative took the form of assigning oral language tasks for homework, e.g., “Tell your parents in ten interesting sentences what you did in school today.” (Reaction from parents – excellent!) (Third Class Teacher, School C).

General views expressed by the teachers indicated a very positive reaction to this initiative. Teachers were very supportive of the process, surprised at the level of response from parents, and pleased at the impact this experience had on many of the students, in particular, weaker performing students. However, there was agreement among the teachers that such initiatives involved a significant amount of work on the part of the teacher (preparing tasks and materials, communicating with parents, following up with students during school) and could only be sustained for short periods of time. Parents responded very positively to the invitation demonstrating, as the literature has identified, a concern for their children’s achievement and a willingness to collaborate with the school when school directs them on how best to support their children’s learning.

Impact of Teacher Knowledge on Students’ Oral Language Skills

All of the teachers involved in the case study agreed that the students had improved oral language skills as a result of participation in this study. This was manifested particularly in students’ levels of confidence and awareness of oral language as a legitimate and important part of the learning process. Teachers reported that students enjoy the experience of talking and having their voices heard. Teachers commented that students love to talk, e.g., “I noticed that the children love talking and being listened to.” (Kindergarten Teacher, School A); “Children also recognise the importance of talking. They love to impress you.” (Sixth Class Teacher, School B).

Teachers indicated that they noticed an improvement in students’ clarity of expression and sentence structure, reporting evidence of increased range of vocabulary knowledge, expansion of ideas, and use of increasingly complex sentences. “I have noticed a big improvement in the children’s vocabulary and sentence building. When describing something there is much more order to their sentences and I am more likely to receive more than one sentence.” (Third Class Teacher, School C).

Teachers noted a marked improvement in students’ self-confidence. “Sixth class got more confident in their questioning and moved from lower order questions to higher order questions.” (Sixth Class Teacher, School A). Children who would normally be reticent to express themselves were noted by teachers to ask questions, to participate in discussions, to seek help when needed. “Student A has improved in asking for help ...she has the structures learned to be able to come up and ask as questioning was emphasised.” (Third Class Teacher, School C).
Impact on Students: Comparative Test Results

Close comparative scrutiny of the pre-and post-test results produced compelling evidence to the effect that an emerging facility with academic/decontextualised style of language use was being developed among the students in the intervention classes. This was shown through analysis of students’ Oral Narratives (e.g. Kindergarten: Doggy Story, see Figure 1) where it was found that in the post-test narratives (see Table 1) of the students there was

• greater elaboration
• more clarity of lexicon
• increased coherence
• less vagueness of reference
• more complex syntax
• better organisation of information

Figure 1: Kindergarten Doggy Story
Table 1

*Angela’s Oral Narrative*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Angela – Pre-Test</th>
<th>Angela – Post-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angela’s suggested story title: <em>Puppy Spilling</em></td>
<td>Angela’s suggested story title: <em>A Dog Puts Footprints</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>there’s a dog and there’s paint and am there’s some ... and at the other picture it’s spilling cos the dog is ... is going to run there and the dog is running there and it tumbled over (it tumbled over ...and then ...?) am and then the thing is all the way over and am when ... when it was over it all went on the ground and the puppy stepped into it am and then the puppy went over there and then the paint am came out on one of the paws</td>
<td>am a dog came out ... a dog ran to a bucket of paint and he looked at it and he was going ... and he put his foot on it and he tumbled it over and ... and it was spilled on the ground and he stepped in and then when he came out he was all full of footprints</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instead of an opening which describes what she sees in the picture, Angela begins the post-test sample with a stance which is clear and confident, setting the context for the story, and displaying considerably less hesitance than is evident in the pre-test version of the story. The story contains greater elaboration than the initial sample and more clarity of lexicon, greater coherence and considerably less vagueness of reference (a dog ran to a bucket of paint and he looked at it). There is evidence also of greater syntactic organisation of information (it was spilled on the ground). No intervention was required to complete the post-test version of the story which contained story elements in the form of a clear statement of a problem (ran to a bucket of paint ...he tumbled it over,) a climax (it was spilled on the ground), and coda material (he was all full of footprints).

Analysis of the students’ Picture Descriptions also presented evidence of a developing facility with academic/decontextualised style of language in terms of the quality of lexicon, complexity of syntax, degree of expansion, number and quality of locatives used at senior infant level. At third class level there was, in addition, an increased ability to take an interpersonal stance, greater density of information, increased cohesion and organisation in children’s oral presentations (3rd Class Picture Description, see Table 2).
Table 2

Anthony’s Picture Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anthony – Pre-Test</th>
<th>Anthony – Post-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Circus Picture</td>
<td>Circus Picture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| I see a lad on a ... I see a lad on a trampoline bouncing, doing tricks | There’s an *acrobat* on the ropes and there’s a man on the trampoline *doing flips* and there’s a monkey *playing a pipe while* the snakes are coming out of the bag. There’s a tiger jumping through circles and there’s an *elephant carrying a bird* and a man on the trunk and a clown and there’s a clown on a horse and a horse is doing the horse is galloping around and there’s a *woman with a pink dress* and a hat with two feathers sticking out and she’s on these massive sticks and there’s a man in a black and white suit with a green bow and a black cat and there’s a man on a rope doing all tricks and there’s a *lion in a big box* looking up at the man on the rope that’s all
| I see am a lad on a piece of string walking             |                                                          |
| I see a clown on a horse with... with a man in a suit    |                                                          |
| and I see a woman on big sticks                         |                                                          |
| and I see I see a monkey playing in a ... a trumpet     |                                                          |
| a snake coming out of a ... a pot                       |                                                          |
| and I see tigers ... a tiger jumping through hoops      |                                                          |
| and I see a lion on top of a box and a elephant in a suit |                                                          |

In the Word Definition task, differences emerged at sixth class level in the quality and clarity of definitions given between pre- and post-test definitions. These differences were manifest in the increased use of superordinates and greater expansion of descriptive detail included in the definition.

6th Class Word Definition

1) **John – Cutlery**
   - **Pre-Test** - *you use it to eat, like a knife or fork or a spoon*
   - **Post-Test** - *cutlery is such *utensils* as forks, knifes and spoons and am you can find em in restaurants and the kitchen*

2) **Bob – Conditioner/Shampoo**
   - **Pre-test (conditioner)** - *You ah... it’s like shampoo but it makes your hair more soft*
   - **Post-Test (shampoo)** - *am shampoo is something a *type of liquid* what you’d use to am put in your hair to make it smell nice in your hair when you’re having a shower and a bath and it also helps your hair from smelling very bad and looking bad am it is made up of all different*
Policy Implications

In an effort to translate existing policy around the importance of oral language development into meaningful, and effective practice in primary classrooms in DEIS contexts in Ireland, it is apparent from the findings in this study that new policy implementation structures need to be set by the Department of Education and Skills. These structures fall broadly into two categories:

- Teacher Professional Development
- Enhanced Home-School Partnership

Teachers’ acquisition of the requisite knowledge for oral language development in DEIS classrooms should not be discretionary. Teacher continuing professional development is central in this process. It is recommended that professional development for teachers in relation to the content of language for teaching and learning, with particular focus on the development of academic/decontextualized language style, should be prioritised. Further research on the challenge of developing these language skills among students in our classrooms for whom English is an Additional Language is recommended.

No meaningful difference in students’ oral language skills can be accomplished without the support of parents working in tandem with teachers in the classroom. Policy from the Department of Education and Skills must support schools in reaching out meaningfully to those parents who wish and are able to become more involved in their children’s education. Parents must know what the classroom teacher is trying to accomplish, why it is important, that they have a vital role to play, and what they can do to fulfil this role. Parents of students for whom English is an Additional Language will require particular support which needs to be the focus of further research. Supporting parents will require considerable planning on the part of teachers. Strengthening the role of the Home-School-Community Liaison teacher in the school is vital in this regard, as is the importance of supporting schools to dedicate at least one post of responsibility to the development of English language skills throughout the school.

Conclusion

The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it (Michaelangelo).

This study was exploratory in nature and small in scale. However, its findings were unambiguous and incontrovertible. The impact of facility with oral language in the context of school is unquantifiable. To scaffold the development of requisite oral language skills in students for whom they may not be immediately accessible is mandatory. Enhanced teacher knowledge is key in this process. The knowledge required is complex and multi-faceted, but developing this knowledge among our teachers is imperative. The rewards deriving from such knowledge are far-reaching.
into the future lives of many of our students – we owe it to them to aim high. This project took a first tentative step on that road and found that it is possible.

References


Appendix A

Oral Narrative Task

Students were shown a series of pictures (4 pictures for kindergarten, 8 pictures for 3rd class) which told a story and asked to narrate the story orally.

Students in 6th class were shown a picture accompanied by a story title and the first line of the story (Just Desert: *She lowered the knife and it grew even brighter*) from *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*. (Chris Van Allsburg, 1984. Boston: Houghton Mifflin) and asked to narrate the story orally.

Word Definition Task

Explain the following words:
Furniture, city, farm (kindergarten)
Orchestra, vehicle, city, farm, family (3rd class)
Cutlery, conditioner/shampoo, stylist, family, city, farm (6th class)

Picture Description Task

Children were shown a large picture and asked to describe what they saw in the picture.
At the Park/On the Farm/In the Garden (Kindergarten)
The Circus/Hallowe’en (3rd Class)
In the Café/In the Kitchen (6th Class)
Teaching Language and Culture: The Importance of Prior Knowledge when Reading Chinese as a Second Language

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In this article, the author explores the idea that reading proficiency in a second language involves comprehending the second culture and using it to interpret the world view of the second language. Using cognitive theory, the author examined the relevance of prior knowledge of Chinese language and idioms to understanding text written in Chinese. The nature of Chinese as a second language (CSL) students’ and Chinese as a foreign language students’ (CFL) surface and deep knowledge of Chinese idioms as reflected in their responses to journal questions were examined. The author also looked at how the levels of students’ prior knowledge and reading achievement related to the generation of surface and deep knowledge of Chinese idioms stories. Two groups of 5th- and 6th-grade students totaling thirty participated in this study. The median score on the composite SAT II Chinese Subject Test with Listening was used to classify students as low or high prior knowledge students. Findings from content analysis of students’ journal responses showed that students tended to attain a deep level of knowledge when interpreting and personalizing the Chinese idioms. A t test indicated a significant difference in level of deep over surface knowledge between the low and high prior knowledge groups of students, favoring the high knowledge group. Parallel to previous studies performed in reading English and Spanish as a first language (L1), as well as English as a second language (L2), my investigation supported that prior knowledge also plays an important role comprehending text in Chinese as a heritage language.

With a global population of 7 billion (West, 2011), China is home to more than 1.2 billion (1,200,000,000) people (Rosenberg, 2011). Using data from the 2010 US Census, Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, and Shahid (2012) point out that within the United States, the Chinese have come to represent the largest Asian ethnic group, including 3,535,382 of the general population and the distribution is bicoastal. More than three fourths, or approximately 75.4%, of Chinese Americans live on or near the east or the west seacoasts (Hoeffel et. al, 2012). Interestingly, the Chinese American community has become the fourth largest ethnic group in the United States (Terrazas & Batalova, 2010).

While the population of Chinese is increasing, so is the number of Chinese as a second-language (CSL) learners and/or Chinese as a foreign-language (CFL) learners, indicating a need for them to better understand their Chinese heritage and contemporary community (Hann, 2007). CSLs are students who were exposed to the Chinese language and culture at home growing up but lost speaking fluency, replacing their first language (L1) with the English language. CFLs are those, whom despite their
Chinese heritage, they never developed a solid understanding of the Chinese language growing up, making English their only language.

Both groups of students participate in heritage language schools and can be identified as Chinese heritage language students (CHLs). Some of the characteristics of heritage language students suggested by the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning Education Project (1999) are the ability to “converse in the language in home and community situations but lacking the abilities to interact comfortably in more formal settings” as well as possessing limited literacy skills in reading and writing in their second language (p. 29). Typically, a community is associated with a language heritage and cultural traditions different from those of the mainstream culture. Within the Chinese community, preserving the language skills and cultural knowledge of CSL/CFL learners is an important educational priority (Campbell & Peyton, 1998).

In a typical Chinese family, there often exists a strong sense of Chinese identity, a conscious desire to maintain this identity, and various elements of the Chinese culture (Xiao, 2006). As a result, Chinese heritage schools have proliferated (Chao, 1997) emphasizing the understanding, maintenance, and development of the Chinese language and culture. Generally, classes are offered on the weekends, afterschool, and during the summer. Most of the schools are non-profit with limited financial resources. The schools lease classrooms from churches and/or local public schools, and the teachers are volunteers from parent groups. Primarily, in these classes, teachers emphasize basic Chinese language and linguistic concepts important to developing reading comprehension along with knowledge of the culture and history of their ancestral nation (Chao, 1997). Since Mandarin Chinese is the official language in Taiwan, Mainland China, and Hong Kong (Moore, Walton, & Lambert, 1992), the reading texts used in heritage schools are written in this language and all oral and written communication between the teachers and their students use this language. Speaking, reading, and writing in Mandarin Chinese as well as understanding the Chinese culture are the foci of the curriculum in these schools. The program design includes integrating reading, writing, and spelling into a holistic literacy-learning curriculum for proficiency in Mandarin Chinese speaking and reading comprehension.

Given the increasing numbers of Chinese heritage schools and the important role that reading instruction assumes in teaching the Chinese language and culture to CHLs, I designed a qualitative study to explore the role of background knowledge on the development of reading comprehension in Chinese and, in particular, comprehension of Chinese culture as represented in the text. In this article, I review the scholarly literature to provide the reader with an understanding of the reading process in Chinese highlighting some of the difficulties that Chinese heritage language speakers may face when reading Chinese. The accumulated scholarly knowledge about the role of prior knowledge in supporting the development of reading comprehension in a first and second language (English and Spanish) and in terms of surface and deep knowledge levels are also discussed. Building on the knowledge gaps with respect to reading in Chinese as a heritage language identified through the synthesis of the research, I describe the study’s content analysis design and its main findings. Finally, a discussion

interpreting the results and identifying important implications to improve instruction of language and culture in Chinese heritage schools is offered.

Reading Chinese Texts

Since reading comprehension is a key component of the heritage school curriculum, it is important to understand the process used to decode Chinese characters to achieve meaning. In reading Chinese texts, Chinese English-speaking students analytically decode each character and also combine characters into words or phrases, ultimately synthesizing them into deeper meaning. Hsieh (1994), in exploring this process identified three stages. Stage 1 is represented by literal translation, character by character. Stage 2 involves deeper decoding of characters yet limited to surface meaning interpretation, whereas stage 3 requires the interpretation of an amalgam of characters representing the actual meaning in English, which conforms to the language forms used by native English speakers. For example, when a less proficient student reads the Chinese writing 購物中心, the equivalent for the English phrase “a shopping mall”, he or she will first decode this phrase as “purchase object middle heart”, representing stage 1. Then the student needs to combine “purchase” and “object” into the word “shopping”, and “middle” and “heart” into the word “center”, representing stage 2. Upon the second translation stage, the student may enter stage 3, translating “the shopping center” into the more common language form “a shopping mall”, used by native speakers of English.

No doubt, this reading process is laborious and complicated, because elements of students’ linguistic schemas are in English. Since linguistic schemas are those mental structures containing cognitive elements necessary to using and understanding language (Aebersold & Field, 1997), the challenges of teaching Chinese to English-speaking students are substantial. As Wang, Perfetti, and Liu (2003) state, for English-speaking Chinese language learners, learning to read Chinese clearly involves new concepts and a distinct writing system. Unlike an alphabetic language system such as English, Chinese is often labeled as a logographic or morphosyllabic writing system. In this writing system, Chinese characters consist of interwoven strokes. In its reading system, the Chinese language often involves a sequence of clauses or phrases not having coordinating or subordinating connectives (Wang, Perfetti, & Liu, 2003). Other characteristics are reflected in the relative grammatical simplicity of Chinese. For instance, the syntax is not tightly organized, the meaning of a word is largely conveyed through context, and there is no linguistic distinction between singular and plural words (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001). All these linguistic features add to the complexity of learning to read in Chinese by English-speaking Chinese students (Lin, 2004).

The Role and Assessment of Background Knowledge in L2 Reading Comprehension

Cognitive theory explains how prior knowledge or schema impacts reading comprehension in a second language. As early as 1972, Piaget suggested that prior knowledge played an important role in learning new knowledge, arguing that children
are born with schema, tendencies to organize their thinking/cognition processes. These schemata are basic operative building processes constituting organized systems of cognitive actions or thoughts (Stott, 2001). Specifically, Rumelhart’s (1977) schema theory provides a theoretical basis for the interactive model of the reading process. As people read, they actively incorporate new knowledge into a previously existing schema or create a new schema to accommodate it (Stott, 2001). In this process comprehension is achieved.

The work of Jiménez, García, and Pearson (1996) suggest positive effects of prior knowledge on second language reading comprehension. Landary (2002) validates one’s prior knowledge as a potential contributor to reading comprehension in a second language. Concurring, Chan’s (2003) work shows the role of prior knowledge affecting language proficiency on second-language reading comprehension. A useful construct for my inquiry is that prior knowledge associated with the first language acts as a bridge in transferring linguistic and cultural knowledge to the second language, facilitating the acquisition of the second language and culture (Cummins, 2000; Littlewood, 1984).

Some scholarly sources have examined prior knowledge, in terms of surface and deep levels of knowledge, and considered some theoretical constructs that support their inclusion into the design and delivery of reading comprehension instruction and assessment. Specifically, several studies (Bond, Smith, Baker, & Hattie, 2000; Carrolí, 2001; Lehman & Schraw, 2002) have investigated the importance of surface and deep level of understanding as measures of reading comprehension. Carrolí (2001) and Lehman and Schraw (2002) point out that the depth to which readers understand a text is directly connected to their prior knowledge and their ability to relate minimal external information to basic concepts and principles in the cognitive process.

Of significance is the earlier work of Biggs and Collis (1982) and de Jong and Ferguson-Hessler (1996). These researchers argued for exploring the nature of surface and deep levels of knowledge and both developed practical categorization instruments that could be used by practitioners in diagnosing students’ learning across different content. Biggs and Collis created a classification tool known as the Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome (SOLO) Taxonomy, to assess outcomes of learning and represent understanding in terms of surface and deep levels of knowledge. This taxonomy, is a unique attempt to evaluate prior knowledge as levels of knowledge connected to instruction of reading comprehension, thus it can be used as an assessment tool in classrooms.

De Jong and Ferguson-Hessler (1996) proposed a conceptual approach to exploring prior knowledge using a matrix representing different types and qualities of knowledge. These researchers applied their approach to instruction by linking the different types and qualities of knowledge to specific learning outcomes within the matrix. They characterize deep knowledge as external knowledge that has been cognitively processed to translate it into basic concepts, principles, or procedures before it is stored into a person’s database or schema. In contrast, surface knowledge, stored relatively unprocessed, is more or less an internal copy of external information.
The Importance of Chinese Idioms in Developing Cultural Understanding through Reading

Reading comprehension in any language requires knowledge of the cultural world view ingrained in the text. In the specific case of reading Chinese, some researchers have examined the critical role of Chinese idioms in the construction of text meaning. Wu (1995) refers to Chinese idioms, as the “the heart of Chinese language” (p. 61). They are a means through which native speakers learn about and relate to their culture. They are aphorisms intended to transcend a surface meaning and obtain a deep level of understanding a story, as well as related aspects of the Chinese culture found within the text (Wang & Yu, 2010). Chinese idioms are very prevalent across different genres of Chinese literature. Thus, their understanding is critical to comprehending the text meaning and appreciating the cultural message ingrained within that text. The rich Chinese culture has a host of colorful and insightful idioms embedded with moral and ethical values (Peng, 1985). The Chinese use the term chengyu for an idiomatic expression which is associated with a traditional illustrative story. The origins of the idioms are traced to traditional parables, myths, a historical event, or famous works of literature. The stories used to illustrate the idioms were developed long ago and have been passed from generation to generation throughout Chinese history and are used in both oral and written language. Wu (1992) states that Chinese idioms, or chengyu, are a special category of lexical items which not only distinguish themselves by their constituent relations but also show singular types of intrinsic grammatical structure. An idiom is different from a common saying or proverb in that its meaning comes from the whole entity of characters—four-character words, independent of the meanings of the individual character. Tsai and Chen (1993) state that Chinese idioms are, by definition, phrases made up of four words (actually, four Chinese characters) having a deep meaning that is not easily comprehended. Their prevalence and importance is underscored by the fact that today there are idiom dictionaries available for readers to use in interpreting Chinese text. In Chinese, character refers to a unified symbolic cluster of strokes having an associated meaning and sound. A combination of two or three characters can represent a word since most Chinese words are formed of two separate characters (e.g. “明天-tomorrow” are formed of “明天-bright” and “天-day”).

The four word rule for Chinese idioms contrasts with the lack of a specific number of words characterizing an English idiom. A further distinction in the case of Chinese idioms is the necessity for a unique story to be associated with the idiomatic expression, whereas English idioms may or may not be associated with such a story. Thus, one finds by comparison that the definitions of the idiom in English and chengyu in Chinese are quite distinct. The only fundamental element in common is that speakers of both languages will use idioms to communicate ideas. However, the nature of the idiom and how it is communicated differs. Another unique quality of the use of idioms in Chinese is that the more educated the speaker, the more idioms that person will use in its speech, writing, and ability to interpret Chinese text.

Chinese idioms or chengyu represent an endemic way of communicating among Chinese people, since they bound together elements of language and culture. Idiom
stories serve a dual purpose in Chinese heritage language schools. For example, the expression "kill two birds with one stone" exists in the Chinese written language as “一石二鳥” — one stone, two birds. This idiom can be and is used for two purposes—to teach components of the Chinese language and culture and to teach the moral of the idiom story. In Chinese heritage schools, Chinese idioms are introduced to students by first reading the idiomatic phrase and then explaining its meaning. After that the teacher presents the story associated with the idiom to introduce the related moral value implied in the idiom. In effect, this tends to make the teaching of reading comprehension in the case of Chinese idioms more complex and difficult. The difficulty in understanding Chinese idiom stories is rooted in their dual nature, one literal and the other symbolic. In this sense, the stories are represented at two levels of meaning, surface and deep. Characteristically, the surface level consists of simple events and facts sufficient unto themselves to carry meaning. At the deep level, there are relationships, causes and effects, and connection to a more profound meaning (Peng, 1985; Wu, 1992).

In sum, cognitive theory fosters the notion that learning is an active on-going process that enables students to construct their own knowledge based upon their prior knowledge (Cummins, 2000; Jiménez, García, & Pearson, 1996; Landary, 2002; Littlewood, 1984; Piaget, 1972; Rumelhart, 1977; Stott, 2001). Since students’ prior knowledge influences their understanding, cognitive theorists believe that collaborative types of instructional models can support students’ prior knowledge and improve reading comprehension by developing both surface and deep knowledge (Bakhtin, 1986; Calderón, Hertz-Lazarowitz, & Slavin, 1998; Johnson & Johnson, 1987; Koschmann, 1999; Slavin, 1990; Vygostky, 1978). Also, attention to Chinese idioms when reading text in Chinese is necessary for the construction of meaning as well as the development of Chinese language and culture (Peng, 1985; Tsai & Chen, 1993; Wu, 1992).

This synthesis of the research supports Lau and Chan’s (2003) contention that despite the proliferation of studies on reading comprehension in a first language (English) and in a second language (English and Spanish), there are relatively few studies on reading comprehension in Chinese. More specifically, an unexplored area in the reading research highlights the importance of Chinese idioms to understand Chinese text. With this in mind, the purpose of this study was to explore the role of cultural and linguistic background knowledge in understanding text read in Chinese. Specifically, two research questions guided the exploration: (a) What is the role of CHLs’ prior knowledge in comprehending Mandarin Chinese idiom stories?; and (b) What is the role of CHLs’ prior knowledge in interpreting the cultural message embedded in Mandarin Chinese idiom stories?

Research Methods

This study was part of a larger investigation that focused on issues related to type of instruction and its effects on reading comprehension of Chinese text using a single-group pretest-posttest design (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003; Semel & Wiig, 1981). This article describes a smaller qualitative study that employs content analysis of students’
writing samples to explore the role of linguistic and cultural background knowledge on students’ understanding of Chinese text. In addition to being the researcher, I also served as one of two Chinese teachers in the study. The following section describes the inquiry’s participants, methods for data collection, and analysis.

The school. A nonprofit Chinese school established in 1972, located in Bergen County, New Jersey was the site for this study. The school operates on Sundays providing Chinese as a heritage language program for students from kindergarten through grade 12. There is one class per grade. The entire student body of the school includes approximately 130 students ranging in age from 4 to 18. The majority of the student population consists of U.S. born Chinese (CSL/CFL) along with a few non-Chinese native speakers of English (CFL). Students attend school for three hours of classes over 15 weeks in a given semester. Every year the school holds a cultural knowledge contest that focuses on Chinese idioms.

The students. A sample of convenience was used. Since I was a teacher at the school, I sought and obtained permission from the school administration, students, and their parents to work with one fifth grade and one sixth grade class. Students in the fifth- and sixth-grade classes totaled 30, with 16 females and 14 males, taught by the researcher and a teacher colleague. A description of the sample in terms of gender, age, and school attendance is included in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Demographic Information on Students (N=30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total Number of Students</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Mean Age</th>
<th>Number of Years Attended School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Grade</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth Grade</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 30 students, 12 were fifth graders and 18 were the sixth graders and all were classified as either CSLs or CFLs. The combined mean age for both groups was 10.86. All students were of Chinese heritage, and all of their parents were well-educated. Of the 60 parents, 2 held bachelor’s degrees, 56 held masters, and 2 had PhDs. Most of the participating students were born and have resided exclusively in the United States. One student was born in Taiwan and she has resided in the U.S. for most of her life. However, she is considered a transnational student, since she moves back and forth from Taiwan to the U.S. as a result of her father’s work responsibilities. For consistency in this paper I identify the CSL and CFL students as CHLs since all of them attended the Chinese heritage language school.
The teachers. The fifth grade teacher and I, the sixth grade teacher, are native Mandarin Chinese speakers from Taiwan. At the time of the study, I had been teaching Chinese for more than five years. Ms. Chu (pseudonym) had four years of Chinese language teaching. She has a Master’s degree in Multilingual Education. Both of us had experience teaching second languages, English as a second language, and Chinese as a second language, in numerous schools in Taiwan and the United States. I also hold a Master’s degree in Multilingual Education –TESOL; in addition, to a PhD in Language, Learning, and Literacy completed at a university in the US.

Data Collection

The implementation of the study was done over a 15-week period. Table 2 below specifies the schedule for study activities. Two main instruments were used to collect data: a standardized test and a Student Writing Journal. A brief description of each instrument follows.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administer Pre-test</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score Pre-test and create students’ groups</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction of Idiom Lessons; collection of</td>
<td>3-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>written journals; coding of written journals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final analysis of coded data</td>
<td>15-16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standardized Test: The SAT II Chinese Subject Test with Listening. The purpose of this test was to assess students’ understanding and proficiency of spoken contemporary Mandarin Chinese, written language usage (using 4 different ways to represent written Chinese); and reading comprehension in Chinese; thus indicating their prior knowledge of the Chinese language at the onset of the study. The relationship between reading comprehension and listening comprehension has been well established in the literature (Bell & Perfetti, 1994; Gernsbacher, Varner, & Faust, 1990; Stanovich, Cunningham, & Freeman, 1984). As Rayner, Foorman, Perfetti, Pesetsky, and Seidenberg (2001, p. 42) put it, 'It can be reasonably argued that learning to read enables a person to comprehend written language to the same level that he or she comprehends spoken language” (cited in Nation, 2005, p. 251).

The test scores also helped classify the students by their level of previous knowledge on Chinese language and culture. Since cultural knowledge was embedded within the test questions, a second purpose in using this instrument was to evaluate the prior knowledge that students had of both Chinese culture and language. The study design called for determining the degree of prior knowledge students have of what is to be taught. The usefulness of such a design is explained by Dick and Carey (1990). They stated that, a pretest attempts to measure the extent of entry knowledge needed to benefit from instruction, and the behaviors and skills that need to be taught during the
unit of instruction. Its purpose is to show growth as well as provide useful information about the learner (p. 149).

Form A of this test was used to initially determine Chinese language proficiency of students and their level of cultural knowledge before instruction of Chinese idiom reading stories was done. Table 3 below describes in detail each of the language components covered, as described in the test manual.

Table 3

*SAT II Chinese Subject Test with Listening Manual*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening Comprehension</td>
<td>These questions tested the ability to understand the spoken language and were based on short, spoken dialogues and narratives primarily about everyday topics. There were two different kinds of listening comprehension questions (A) a spoken statement, question, or exchange, followed by a choice of three possible responses (also spoken); (B) a spoken dialogue or monologue with a printed question or questions (in English) about what was said.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usage</td>
<td>These questions asked one to select the answer that best completed a Chinese sentence in a way that was structurally and logically correct. Questions were written to reflect instructional practices of the curriculum. This section of the test was therefore presented in four columns across two pages of the test book to allow each question and its answer choices to be shown in four different ways of representing Chinese: traditional and simplified Chinese characters on the left page, and phonetic transcriptions (Bopomofo) on the right page. One chose the writing form with which one was most familiar and read only from that column.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>Reading comprehension questions tested one’s understanding of such points as main and supporting ideas, themes and the setting of passages. Some of the passages were based on real-life materials such as timetables, forms, advertisements, notes, letters, diaries and newspaper articles. All passages were written in both traditional and simplified Chinese characters. Most questions dealt with understanding of literal meaning although some inference questions were included. All reading comprehension questions were in English.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(College Board, 2010, p. 34).

*Students’ Writing Journals.* I designed a set of open-ended critical journal questions to determine students’ surface and deep level of knowledge of Mandarin Chinese idioms. The use of journal questions, specifically open-ended type of questions, is supported by Johnson and Christensen (2000), Kerlinger (1973), and Tuckman (1999). Kerlinger describes a specific type of more open-ended question as the funnel, representing a set of questions directed toward getting information on a single
important topic. The form of a funnel starts with an open-ended question followed up with a more specific one, characterizing the nature of questions used in this research.

The students were asked to answer two sets of questions in their writing journals immediately after the reading lesson was done. They could write in either Chinese or English. The questions were as follows:

1. a) What is your interpretation of this idiom?
   b) Have you experienced a similar situation that represents the moral within this idiom? Explain.

2. a) What have you learned from this idiom that helps you better understand your Chinese culture?
   b) How may it relate to your life?

Responses to question 1a) were meant to indicate the students’ understanding of the idiom and their ability to interpret the idiom in their own words. The responses to question 1b) explored if students had previous knowledge of an idiom or expression in English similar to the Chinese idiom presented in the story. Responses to question 2a) inquired about students’ appreciation of the idiom as related to the Chinese culture and the extent to which the students understood the moral within the idiom. Question 2b) inquired about how the moral related to their personal lives. In essence, analyzing student responses to both set of critical questions could enable me to determine whether or not they understood the idiom stories; whether that understanding was at a surface or a deep level, and whether it was connected to prior Chinese cultural understanding.

**Data collection procedures.**

The SAT II Chinese Subject Test with Listening (Form A) took 60 minutes to complete; 20 minutes for listening comprehension, 20 minutes for usage, and 20 minutes for reading comprehension. Each part of the test represented approximately 33% of the total test. All of the 85 questions were based on typical real-life experiences and situations in any Chinese community (e.g., how to read an advertisement or a sale sign) along with familiarity with the appropriate usage of idioms and phrases embedded in oral and written language (College Board, 1998).

The scoring procedures of this test yield a raw score. Following the test guidelines for scoring, the raw score was the number of points students earned, based on the number of questions that they answered correctly minus a fraction of the number they answered incorrectly. Students received one point for each correct answer and subtracted one third of a point for each wrong answer to a 4-choice question, and half of a point for a 3-choice question. If students skipped a question, that question would not be counted, and no points would be subtracted.

Subscores for each section of the test were determined and used to compute the total score, but their individual contributions differed as they were based on different skills. Both listening comprehension and reading comprehension consisted of 30
questions whereas the usage section had only 25 questions. The listening comprehension, usage, and reading comprehension subscores were weighted equally.

The test was administered to students on the first day of week 1 of the study. Upon analyses of the pre-test scores, students were classified as low or high prior knowledge groups. The administered raw scores indicated a range 0 to 80 out of a potential range of 0 to 85 with a median score of 37. Students below the median were considered to be in the low prior knowledge group, and students equal or above the median were considered to be in the high prior knowledge group. Both groups consisted of 15 students. Within these classifications, students were randomly assigned to receive reading comprehension instruction in Chinese as a second language.

Subsequent to the administration of the pre-test (Form A), heterogeneous groups of students were created following the procedures described above. Each teacher then conducted the reading comprehension lessons to teach 12 idioms by implementing the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) model (Stevens, Maden, Slavin, & Farnish, 1987). While an exploration of CIRC and its impact on comprehension is beyond the scope of this study, a general description of the instructional model is offered here to contextualize the reading lessons and journal writing for the reader. CIRC is a comprehensive approach to literacy learning involving students working in collaborative heterogeneous groups and engaging in story-related activities with partners along with teachers’ direct instruction. Each lesson included the instructional format established by CIRC: story-related activities, direct instruction in comprehension strategies, and integrated writing and language arts within a collaborative setting (Stevens & Slavin, 1995). A more detailed description of this instructional model is found in Appendix A and an example of a scripted lesson is included in Appendix B. An example of a lesson worksheet illustrating the activities is found in Appendix C.

Each lesson was presented in a 50 minute session every week for a total of 12 weeks. Each week a different idiom was introduced (See Appendix D for a list of the idioms introduced over this time period). In both fifth- and sixth-grade classes, the teacher followed identical lesson scripts, guiding students to understand the text and the moral within each idiom lesson: the title of the idiom, the lesson objectives, the content of the lesson, and student’s worksheet and activities associated with that particular lesson.

Subsequent to each lesson, the teachers had students write in their journals. Students recorded responses to the same two sets of questions (see previous section for the specific questions asked) in their writing journals for all twelve lessons. Students were encouraged to use Mandarin Chinese to write their responses but they were allowed to use any language they preferred to avoid any communication barriers. The students’ journals were collected by the two teachers at the end of each idiom lesson. The responses within journals were reviewed and discussed by both teachers and scored using a rubric and coding scheme (both are described below) following each lesson. Reliability in scoring was achieved since we reviewed, discussed, and scored each journal response together. In this way we discuss any differences to reach an agreement on each given score (Serafino, 1998).
The following section explains the procedures for the analysis of the journal responses to explore the influence of cultural prior knowledge on understanding Chinese text.

**Data analysis procedures.**

Data analysis was done concurrently with data collection. Content analysis (Berelson, 1952; Kondracki, Wellman, & Amundson, 2002; Krippendorff, 1980; U.S. General Accounting Office, 1996; Weber, 1990 as cited in Stemler, 2001) involved the use of coding and categorization, discerning and describing key patterns, explaining important similarities, and pointing out important relationships in the content studied.

Content analysis of students’ journal entries explored students’ comprehension of Chinese idiom stories and their understanding of the Chinese cultural aspects within the idioms and the level of that understanding. Five types of analyses were conducted relative to students’ responses to journal questions.

**First analysis.** Journal Writing Questions 1a) and 1b): What is your interpretation of this idiom? Have you experienced a similar situation that represents the moral within this idiom? Explain. The content of journal responses was analyzed using the Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome (SOLO) Taxonomy rubric (Biggs, 1999; Biggs & Collis, 1982). This coding rubric was useful to determine if students understood the meaning of each Chinese idiom reading story.

The SOLO taxonomy (Biggs, 1999; Biggs & Collis, 1982) consists of five hierarchical levels that reflected students’ understanding of the learning tasks: prestructural, unistructural, multistructural, relational, and extended abstract. The prestructural level (level 1) refers to students not showing any evidence of comprehension. The term unistructural (level 2) refers to students who responded with only one relevant item or one aspect of the task. The multistructural level (level 3) shows that students picked up several aspects of the task, but did not integrate them. The relational level (level 4) indicates that the students integrated elements of the task into a coherent whole. The abstract (level 5), which is the deepest level, refers to students who were able to generalize the whole task beyond the immediate context.

For example, the Chinese idiom “掩耳盗鈴 — to plug one’s ears while stealing a bell” boils down to “fooling yourself.” Briefly stated, the idiom story tells of a man who steals a bell and when he runs away with it, he plugs his ears. He thinks that if he cannot hear the bell, no one else can either. A student response which stated that the story involved a man plugging his ears indicated that students recognize and name the characters, details and events in the text. Using the SOLO rubric, the response would be judged as a surface level answer. It picks up several aspects of the story but does not interrelate or integrate them into an overall story. If a student mentioned a bell and the man stealing it and also stated that the man deceived himself into believing that because he could not hear the bell neither could other people, then he had fooled himself. The student’s response then would generalize beyond the immediate context and would be judged as showing a deep level of knowledge. Levels 1–3 were categorized as surface level of understanding of the meaning of the idiom stories whereas levels 4–5 represented a deep level of understanding.
**Second analysis.** A second type of analysis was performed based on the responses to questions 1a) and 1b). I wanted to explore why the students achieved either surface level or a deep level of understanding of the idiom stories. This second analysis was done using only the five stories where students achieved the highest scores of surface level knowledge and the five stories where students achieved the highest deep level of knowledge. For every student I compared the answers to journal questions 1a) and 1b). In other words, I examined if there was a connection between being able to explain the moral of the story and knowledge of a similar expression or proverb in English. When a connection was identified, I then checked if a similar pattern was found in the responses for the other 11 idiom reading stories that the student gave. This analysis helped determine if achieving a deep level of understanding was related to having prior knowledge of a similar expression in English.

**Third analysis.** The last analysis of Journal Questions 1a) and 1b) was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference between students with low and high prior knowledge of Chinese language and culture and those with surface and deep levels of knowledge of Chinese idiom stories. A t test was applied to examine whether the students with high prior knowledge scored at deep levels of knowledge of Chinese idiom stories and students with low prior knowledge scored at surface levels of knowledge at the .01 level of significance.

**Fourth analysis.** An analysis of content using the SOLO rubric was also done for students’ responses to Writing Journal questions 2a) and 2b): What have you learned from this idiom that helps you better understand your Chinese culture? How it may relate to your life? (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). The purpose of the fourth analysis was to determine the level of understanding students had of Chinese culture embedded in the idiom or reflected in their own lives. The analysis of questions 2a) and 2b) followed the same procedure using the SOLO rubric as done with questions 1a) and 1b). SOLO levels 1–3 were categorized as surface level of understanding Chinese culture whereas levels 4–5 represented a deep level of understanding.

**Fifth analysis.** An additional analysis was performed to triangulate the data on identification of surface or deep level of understanding of Chinese culture. Each journal entry was coded using a schema based on the five virtues that, “Confucius believed fundamental for harmonious hierarchical societies. The five virtues are ren (仁 – benevolence), yi (義 – righteousness), li (禮 – propriety), zhi (智 – intelligence), xin (信 - honesty).” (Hui, 2005, p. 19). The use of these virtues in a coding scheme to assess students’ understanding of Chinese culture is appropriate since Confucius philosophy is very embedded in the Chinese way of life and beliefs systems. Hui (2005) validates the use of the virtues when he states “the cultural knowledge embodied in the Chinese cultural schema of education exerts profound influence on teachers, students (regardless of their ages) and their parents” (p. 17). This author adds that, “persistence and prevalence of Confucianism reinforces the cultural understanding that moral virtues are the prerequisite of social harmony” (p. 19). Researchers in other disciplines (i.e., leadership; business) have also used the virtues to interpret Chinese cultural understanding (Kirby & Fan, 1995; Yuan, 2012).
Student journal responses that indicated at least one virtue were coded as deep level of knowledge. The classification using the virtues coding scheme was then compared to the classification of understanding Chinese culture using the SOLO rubric. The comparison was useful in verifying which students had surface or deep level understanding of Chinese culture.

**Findings and Discussion**

Table 4 shows the percentage of responses classified as surface or deep understanding for each of the twelve class sessions and their associated idiom stories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idioms</th>
<th>Surface (%)</th>
<th>Deep (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>69.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>59.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>62.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**M** 40.35 59.65

**SD** 13.84 13.84

With respect to exploring if the students understood the idiom stories [Journal Questions 1a) and 1b)], results indicated that for all 12 idiom stories a range between 10% and 57% of the students (N=30) had a surface knowledge level, with a mean of 40.35%. Table 4 also shows that a range between 43% and 90% of the students (N=30) had a deep knowledge level, with a mean of 50.65%. The results suggest that a majority of students (mean of 59.65) gained a deep level of understanding after each of the lessons. The wide ranges for each of the levels suggest great variability of understanding across the different idiom stories. The variability might be a result of differences in the type of idiom (i.e., parables; historical events; myths or famous literary works); however, they could also reflect different levels of students’ prior knowledge of Chinese idioms. To investigate this finding, I conducted a second analysis which focused on determining if prior knowledge of a familiar expression in English influenced their level of understanding the Chinese idiom stories.
Table 5  
*Comparison between Idiom Stories for which Students had Surface Level of Understanding and Students Answers to Questions 1a) and 1b)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idiom</th>
<th>Main Idea</th>
<th>Students’ Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A prime minister displayed a set of books, entitled “Lûshì Chūnqiū” on the city gate and asked if anyone could add or subtract one character to or from the book, he would give that person a thousand pieces of gold.</td>
<td>A person offered a thousand pieces of gold.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The snipe and the clam had a quarrel and both of them refused to give in. A fisherman came by and saw both of them and snatched up both of them.</td>
<td>The snipe and the clam had a quarrel then a fisherman came by and snatched up both of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>There was a man selling spears and shield out in the street. He said that his spears can pierce anything. He also said that nothing can pierce any of his shields. The seller was completely lost for a response when someone questioned his words.</td>
<td>There was a man selling spears and shield out in the street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The general led an army to fight a war. They marched into the mountains for days and drank all of the water. They all felt thirsty and tired. The general thought of an idea to comfort his soldiers by telling them there was a plum tree forest ahead. As the soldiers thought of the plums, their mouths began to water and their energy was restored and they marched forward quickly.</td>
<td>The general was smart. He comforted his soldiers with little white lie by telling them there was a plum tree ahead</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 4     | A man invited his friend over to his house for a drink. When his friend was drinking wine he noticed a snake in the glass. Ever since, he had been sick. The host looked carefully around his house and found out that the bow hanging on the wall where they had drinks had been reflected in the glass of wine of his friend. He then invited his friend over for a drink at the same place again and pointed to the bow on the wall. His friend now understood that it was the reflection of the bow in the glass. He was relieved and his illness disappeared. | Student 1: Chinese bows look like snakes.  
Student 2: The guest saw a snake in the glass of wine but he still finished that glass of wine. Ever since, he had been sick. |
The second analysis of questions 1a) and 1b), identified the 5 idiom stories for which most students had deep level knowledge: 11th (90%), 8th (75%), 5th (69%), 9th (65%), and 12th (62.3%). It was noted that 90% of the students, the highest percentage, indicated a deep knowledge level of the 11th idiom, 熟能生巧, the equivalent of the English proverb Practice makes perfect. Perhaps the English idiom Practice makes perfect was the most familiar one to the students among the total set of twelve idiom stories which enable them to more easily relate this particular idiom to their own experiences or prior understandings. To assess if familiarity with the idiom in English was a valid explanation, I proceeded to check if students' responses to the other 4 idiom stories with high deep knowledge levels reflected similar familiarity with English expressions.

In general, this analysis revealed that similar to idiom 11, the Chinese idioms # 8, 5, 9, and 12 were closely related to English expressions and were referenced as such in students' responses. For example, in idiom 8, 援苗助长 — to try to help the shoots grow by pulling them upward, it was found that approximately 75% of the students indicated a deep level of understanding. Some common English expressions equivalent to this Chinese idiom would be “Let well enough alone”, “Don't do more harm than good”, and “Haste makes waste”. Idiom 5 or 畫蛇添足 — add legs to a snake, was similar to the English expressions, “Don't overdo something” and “gild the lily.” Idiom 9, 有志竟成 — where there is a will, there is a way and Idiom 12, 半途而廢 — to quit halfway down the road, were similar to the English expression “Don’t quit half way down the road”. An assumption was made that when students were familiar with the equivalent idiom in English and had reached a deep level of comprehension, they referenced the connection in their journal responses. If a student did not indicate the deep level of knowledge on a question or was not familiar with the English equivalent, connections were not made.

Further, the answers of students with the highest five percentages of surface level knowledge were examined. It was found that students had surface level knowledge for idiom stories 1, 10, 2, 6, and 4, respectively, at 57%, 55%, 54%, 50%, and 47%. Table 5 specifies the main idea of these idiom stories with students' answers to questions 1a) and 1b).

The content analysis suggested that the lower scores may have been due to the students' unfamiliarity with the English equivalent. As it can be seen in Table 5, in most cases, students' responses provided surface details of the story events, but their answers lacked any engagement with the basic idiom story or main idea.

A comparison between students' responses to journal questions 1a) and 1b) with the level of students' prior knowledge was also performed. Table 6 presents students' responses to the journal questions 1a) and 1b) based on levels of students' prior knowledge.
Table 6.
The t Test Summary of Students’ Responses to the Journal Questions for Prior Knowledge Level Differences (N = 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High (n = 15)</td>
<td>43.73</td>
<td>8.754</td>
<td>3.182</td>
<td>0.004**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (n = 15)</td>
<td>34.07</td>
<td>7.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < .01, two-tailed.

Table 6 shows a significant difference between the two levels of students, t(28) = 3.182, p < .01, revealing that students with high prior knowledge (M = 43.73, SD = 8.754) scored considerably higher than students with low prior knowledge (M = 34.07, SD = 7.860). An effect-size analysis, Cohen’s d, was also performed (Cohen, 1988). The result of the effect-size analysis confirmed that there was a significant difference between the two levels of students, (d = .82). The result of the t test indicated that students with high prior knowledge scored significantly higher than students with low prior knowledge. This finding suggests that students’ prior knowledge (of English expressions equivalent to Chinese idioms) contribute to their success in comprehending Chinese idiom stories. The reader then, is able to relate appropriately what they know with the message they encounter in the text being read (Carroli, 2001; Lehman & Schraw, 2002). Thus, the depth to which a reader understands a text is directly connected to his/her prior knowledge.

Overall, the above findings suggest a pattern that the idiom stories for which students achieved deep levels of understanding had similar expressions in English familiar to the students. The analysis seems to indicate that the degree of prior knowledge with a similar expression in English influence their level of understanding of Chinese idiom stories.

Different from the initial set of journal questions, the purpose of Journal Questions 2a) and 2b) explored students’ comprehension of Chinese culture embedded in the stories. The content analysis using the SOLO rubric of responses to Journal Questions 2a) and 2b), revealed that for all 12 idiom stories a range of 4% to 50% of the students (N = 30) had deep knowledge level of cultural understanding, resulting in a mean of 22%. As Table 7 suggests, in most cases, however, a range of 50% to 96% of the students (N = 30) showed only a surface knowledge, a mean of 78%.

The results suggest that a majority of students (mean of 78%) possessed a surface level of understanding Chinese culture. It was found that most of the students were able to recognize surface features of the Chinese culture. For instance, they were able to write about idioms which were related to historical events and moral lessons important to the Chinese culture. These features although significant to Chinese education, failed to reveal if and how students related the stories to their personal lives.
To confirm this finding, I performed a second content analysis of Journal Questions 2a and 2b. This analysis, using Confucius five virtues coding scheme, was conducted for all the questions. This analysis verified that the students who achieved a surface level of understanding of Chinese culture in the SOLO rubric were not able to write about any of the virtues. A surprising finding was that not all of the students who achieved a deep level of understanding of Chinese culture using the SOLO rubric were able to write about the virtues. I expected that these students would discuss at least one of the virtues. However, the findings showed that only a range of 3% to 33% of the students (N = 30) indicated deep knowledge level of cultural understanding over the 12 idiom story responses, with a mean of 9.2%. For example, in their responses to idiom 4 “杯弓蛇影 — to mistake the reflection of the bow for a snake”, students indicated that it is rude for the guest to refuse something the host gives which is a cultural understanding embedded in the story representing the virtue propriety, yet peripheral to the main theme (not to worry about an imaginary thing).

It was reasoned that fewer students appeared to have cultural understanding, when the analysis was done using the five Confucius virtues rather than the SOLO rubric, because the virtues demand a more comprehensive and in-depth appreciation of Chinese cultural beliefs. The findings confirm that when students relate the moral of a story to their personal lives (in terms of knowledge and experience), they achieve a deeper understanding and appreciation of what they read in Chinese. In a parallel manner, cultural understanding of Chinese text is enhanced when personalized.

### Conclusions and Implications

This study illustrated how prior knowledge can influence students’ achieving a deep level of understanding. Students with high prior knowledge were better able to achieve a deeper level of understanding, in contrast to surface level, than students with low prior knowledge. Specifically, prior linguistic knowledge, prior cultural knowledge,
and personal prior experience contributed to second language learners’ success in understanding Chinese idiom stories and Chinese culture embedded in the stories. The current study corroborates findings from previous investigations (Landary, 2002; Stott, 2001) on the importance of prior knowledge, both sociocultural and personal experience (Chan, 2003; Lin, 2004) to understand L2 text.

Given the above conclusions, an instructional implication of this study underscores the notion that teachers should provide direct guidance to activate students’ schemas relative to the reading of L2 texts, in particular reading Chinese as a second language text. A second pedagogical proposition is the use of Chinese idiom stories as reading text in the teaching of Chinese language and culture. The use of Chinese idioms and their associated stories showed to be instrumental as a text that exposes students to the moral of the idiom while portraying aspects of Chinese culture. In other words, the type of text that students are presented to read is critical to achieving the goal of teaching language and culture. For instance, rather than presenting students with Chinese translations of English written text, my study stressed that by using Chinese idiom stories, instruction may be better equipped to achieve this goal. Since the idiom stories are unique to the Chinese culture, reading text that includes them will deepen students learning more than a text that just exposes them to the Chinese language. This is an important goal of Chinese heritage schools, which were created to instruct U.S. born English-speaking students in the Chinese language and Chinese culture.

While the current scholarly literature provides a wealth of information on reading comprehension and prior knowledge in English and Spanish as L1 and in English as L2, much needs to be explored about reading in Chinese as a second and heritage language. One area derived from this study suggest inquiry about what types of vicarious experiences teachers may facilitate to accentuate necessary schemata for acquiring new language and cultural knowledge.

References


NOTES

1. Psychometric properties of the instrument indicated that experts in a given performance domain generally judge content validity. For example, the content of the SAT II: Subject Tests is evaluated by committees made up of experts who ensure that the test covers content that matches all relevant subject matter in each of the academic disciplines. Both face validity and a curricular validity study have been used to establish the content validity of a test (College Board, 2005a). The reliability coefficient of the SAT II Chinese subject test with Listening was indicated in the .93 to .95 range, attesting to the reliability of the test (College Board, 2005b). The coefficient data suggested that the reliability of the SAT II Chinese Subject Test with Listening would be adequate for use in the study.
Appendix A
The CIRC Model

Acknowledging a student’s prior knowledge of the second language and combining it with an appropriate teaching model may be a way to increase students’ reading comprehension in L2. Parallel to understanding the role of prior knowledge, cognitive theory is also used to support teaching models that impact reading comprehension employing cooperative learning strategies (Johnson & Johnson, 1987; Slavin, 1990). One such model is the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) model (Stevens, Madden, Slavin, & Farnish, 1987), whereby the model integrates oral language and written language development, for reading comprehension (Calderón, Hertz-Lazarowitz, & Slavin, 1998). It enables teachers to manage effectively the combination of the primary language (English) and target language (Chinese) at the intermediate level of reading comprehension (Calderón, Hertz-Lazarowitz, Ivory, & Slavin, 1997).

Both Bakhtin (1986) and Vygotsky (1978) stressed the centrality of dialogicality to human thought. The CIRC instructional model applies this notion by fostering the activation of prior knowledge through social interaction between and among teacher and students (Stevens, et al., 1987). A prominent characteristic of the CIRC model is the pervasive role of schema or prior knowledge activation through constructive dialogue between teacher and students, and students among themselves. In other words, it uses collaboration as a strategy to promote learning, more specifically reading comprehension. Here, again, the active role of the learner collaborating and interacting to create meaning is underscored.

Further support for this application is found in the work of Koschmann (1999). This researcher linked Bakhtin’s (1986) theoretical dialogicality to pedagogy, using collaborative learning as the specific bridge. He even proposed that collaborative learning could be considered as a theory of pedagogy, whereby learning is enhanced when it takes place in an environment of social interactions. Koschmann portrayed collaboration as the requisite setting for and execution of learning. He noted that subjects could be seen as using utterances as thinking devices, indicating that language and speech were intimately associated with cognition and reading comprehension, including the understanding of levels of knowledge.

In implementing CIRC, each lesson is scripted, applying specific guidelines to be followed (see Appendix B for an example of a scripted lesson). The teacher begins with a concise statement of the main objective of the lesson. Then she presents a quotation of a Chinese idiom and read aloud the text of the idiom story. After the read aloud the students read the Chinese text in concert with the teacher. The lesson scripts specify four types of activities that teachers guide students to complete during the lesson. The first type is called Treasure Hunts, consisting of details embedded in the idiom story which the team members had to hunt for. Collaboration of students as part of the hunt was not only permitted but encouraged. The second type of activity involved vocabulary development. In cooperation with a partner or team members, each student pronounced
the word, and then demonstrated his/her ability to use the word correctly by putting it into a meaningful sentence. The third type of activity required students to retell the story in pairs. Each student used a checklist to score his or her partner’s retelling of the story. The final type of activity consisted of several open-ended questions to which the students responded in writing Mandarin Chinese. Students were encouraged to discuss the questions and their answers in small groups and with the teacher. The questions were oriented towards helping the student relate to the story in a personal way, permitting imagination and creativity. In discussions, both teachers and students could use the language of their choice, Chinese or English (See Appendix C for an example of a lesson worksheet illustrating the activities).
Appendix B

Sample Lesson Script

Lesson 1: One Character Is Worth A Thousand Pieces Of Gold

Lesson Objectives

1-1 Students will learn to comprehend the concept of the “One character is worth a thousand pieces of gold” idiom story.
1-2 Students will understand the meaning and moral of the idiom through its associated story.
1-3 Students will be able to use the idiom as part of a sentence.
1-4 Students will expand their Chinese vocabulary.
1-5 Students will practice and possibly increase their knowledge of Chinese structure (grammar) through answering/asking the questions and discussion (see questions for treasure hunts).
1-6 Students will enhance their Chinese reading comprehension strategies (i.e., how they create meaning from text, such as identifying main ideas).

Content

Title/Idiom: One Character Is Worth A Thousand Pieces Of Gold

Translation of idiom story. Around three thousand B.C., there was a Prime Minister of the state of Chin named Lǚ Bùwéi. He wrote a set of books, entitled “Lǚshì Chūnqiū.” He had them put on the city gate of the capital. He announced that if anyone thought these books were not well-written and could add or subtract one character to or from these books, he would give that person a thousand pieces of gold. At that time, there was no one who dared to change a character in the books. Yet, everybody knew there was the set of books, “Lǚshì Chūnqiū.” Afterwards, the idiom, “one character is worth a thousand pieces of gold,” is used to describe texts which are exceptionally well-written (Su, 2004).

Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition Script (Lesson 1)

The teacher will give the class an introduction to the story, providing the main theme and establishing context and background information necessary or helpful to reading comprehension. For example, the teacher will explain the main idea of this idiom story (that well-written works are very valuable). This idea is expressed in the idiom, “One character is worth a thousand pieces of gold.” The teacher will ask the students to explain the meaning of the term “prime minister.” If necessary, the teacher would state the meaning of the term. Then the teacher will relate the term to the story. The teacher will point out to the students that people in general are afraid to challenge authority. That is why no one dared to change a character. However, the story’s main point is text that is well-written is very valuable. The teacher may ask the students “Does everyone understand or does anyone have a problem?” If so, the teacher addresses any issues raised. The teacher may also ask the students, “Does anyone wish...
to ask a question or want to make a comment?” If so, the teacher will engage in
discussion with the students, to which the teacher provides closure.

Throughout the lesson, the teacher will set the structure of the lesson by
following step-by-step the CIRC procedures to provide direct instruction in reading
activities to the whole class or to each team separately. Teacher will assign students to
reading groups based on their levels. The teacher will ask the students to read the story
of “one character is worth a thousand pieces of gold” silently and orally with a partner.
The teacher will then provide the students with questions related to the idiom story,
which is called “Treasure Hunts.” After checking the results of the Treasure Hunts, the
teacher will give students a list of new vocabulary used in the story (see the Lesson 1
worksheet for CIRC). The students will have to practice saying the words out loud with
their partners. The teacher will also ask the students to look up the new words in the
dictionary and use them appropriately by creating meaningful sentences. After the
reading of the story and the accomplishment of Treasure Hunts and vocabulary tasks,
the teacher will ask the students to retell the main idea for their partners, who must
evaluate the retelling using a checklist provided by the teacher. Next, the teacher will
ask the students to write open-ended responses to questions on the worksheet based
on what they have read. The teacher will have the students engage in mutual
assessment and help with respect to story related skills/knowledge, covering
vocabulary, writing, usage, and comprehension. While the students are engaging in
these team/partner tasks, the teacher will visit each group. The teacher will monitor
their progress, and give hints or other help as necessary.

When all partners and teams have completed all of the above tasks, the teacher
will recombine all of the students into a single unified class group. The teacher will lead
them in a final closure session consisting of a wrap-up discussion of the idea, the idiom
story, and all things that they have, or should have learned. For example, the idiom “one
color is worth a thousand pieces of gold” is used to describe texts which are
exceptionally well-written, in terms of content and style, and are valuable.
Appendix C

Lesson 1: Worksheet for CIRC (Objective 1-1)

Activity 1: Treasure Hunts (課文尋寶):

1. When did this happen? (這個故事是什麼時候發生的?)
2. Who wrote the books, “Lǔshì Chūnqiū”? (“呂氏春秋”這部書是誰寫的?)
3. Where did the Prime Minister put the books? (宰相把書放在哪裡?)
4. Why does everyone know about the books, “Lǔshì Chūnqiū”? (為什麼大家都知道“呂氏春秋”這部書?)
5. What does the idiom “one character is worth a thousand pieces of gold” represent? (“一字千金”是用來表示什麼的?)

Activity 2: Vocabulary List (本課生字、新詞):

秦 qín (Chin); 呂 lǚ (Lu); 氏 shì (a surname); 稱讚 chēngzàn (to praise); 成語 chéngyǔ (idiom); 宰相 zāixiàng (prime minister); 敢 gǎn (dare)
Activity 3: Story Retelling Checklist (Objective 1-2)

Teller’s Name : __________    Date:_______

Task: Please evaluate if your partner retells the story correctly with respect to following elements. If so, please make a check mark in each box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Detail elements within the idiom story</th>
<th>Check</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title of the idiom</td>
<td>One character is worth a thousand pieces of gold</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of the character(s)</td>
<td>Lǚ Bùwéi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting and plots of the story</td>
<td>Lǚ Bùwéi wrote a set of books, entitled “Lǚshì Chūnqiū”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He had the books put on the city gate of the capital.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He announced that if anyone thought these books were not well-written and could add or subtract one character to or from these books, he would give that person a thousand pieces of gold.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climax</td>
<td>There was no one who dared to change a character in the books. Everybody knew there was a set of books, “Lǚshì Chūnqiū”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The representation of the idiom</td>
<td>“One character is worth a thousand pieces of gold” is used to describe texts which are exceptionally well-written.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Signature of the scorer: ______________
Activity 4: Open-ended Questions (Objective 1-3):

1. What was the real purpose of the Prime Minister displaying his set of books on the city gate and asking people to add or subtract one character to or from the books, offering a generous reward? (請問宰相把呂氏春秋放在城門上，並且說只要有人修改其中一個字，就給他很大的獎賞的真正目的是什麼？)

2. What would happen if people did add or subtract one character to or from the books, “Lūshì Chūnqiū”? (假如真的有人修改呂氏春秋的一個字，會有什麼事情發生？)
Appendix D

Description of the Idioms Presented in each Lesson. A series of traditional Chinese idioms and their associated stories were taken from Su's (2004) New-Edition Chinese Textbooks including student workbooks, which the Chinese heritage language school assigned for teaching. The content of a typical lesson in the textbook consisted of an illustration related to the idiom story and a fairly brief (100 to 200 words) text detailing the idiom story. The 12 idioms and stories were selected and assigned by the curriculum committee of the school as part of the fifth- and sixth-grade Chinese cultural knowledge curriculum. A description of the 12 idiom follows:

1. 一字千金 — One character is worth a thousand pieces of gold.
2. 自相矛盾 — To contradict oneself.
3. 掩耳盗铃 — To plug one's ears while stealing a bell.
4. 杯弓蛇影 — To mistake the reflection of the bow for a snake.
5. 畫蛇添足 — Add legs to a snake.
6. 望梅止渴 — To quench one's thirst by thinking of plums.
7. 守株待兔 — To stand by a stump for hares.
8. 揠苗助长 — To try to help the shoots grow by pulling them upward.
9. 有志竟成 — Where there is a will, there is a way.
10. 鷸蚌相爭 — The snipe and the clam have a quarrel.
11. 熟能生巧 — Practice makes perfect.
12. 半途而廢 — To quit halfway down the road.
Book Reviews’ Theme: Immigrant Students in High Schools

Patricia Velasco
Queens College, City University of New York

Socially relevant issues always find their way into the classroom, one way or another. This is particularly the case with the theme that concerns the two books that are reviewed in this issue of JMER: Immigrant Students in High Schools. The books The New Kids. Big Dreams and Brave Journeys at a High School for Immigrant Teens by Brooke Hauser (2011) and Tatyana Kleyn’s (2011) Immigration: The Ultimate Teen Guide. It Happened to Me highlight the talents, hopes and resilience of recently arrived immigrant students in classrooms across the United States.

The books by Hauser and Kleyn are not scholarly books aimed at creating “airtight” arguments. These are books that can enable students and teachers to “breathe, create spaces and find voices” (Pinar, 2008, p. 493). Kleyn and Hauser present vignettes that bring to life the stories, circumstances and educational challenges that undocumented immigrant students face. These books convey the enormous optimism and courage that these students deploy as they learn and adapt to a new society. Both books can be used by prospective and practicing teachers to question present immigration policies, the uncertain future of these policies as well as our relation to them. In so doing, students and teachers create a collective understanding of what it means to analyze a socially relevant issue. These discussions are indispensable not only for creating advocates for improving educational opportunities for all students; they form the basis for becoming a truly educated individual.

Reference

Finding Their Way in a New Land

Herlinda Cancino
San Francisco State University

Book Reviewed:

Brooke Hauser’s 2011 book, The New Kids. Big Dreams and Brave Journeys at a High School for Immigrant Teens, invites the reader to share in the experiences of recent immigrants who attend a high school whose student body is a visual and aural rainbow of 45 countries and 28 languages. Hauser brings to her work the eye and writing style of a journalist – she has written for The New York Times and Los Angeles Times.

This volume has been acclaimed for its information and insights. The New Kids received one of the ten “Alex Awards” given in 2012 by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), a division of the American Library Association. YALSA’s website states that Alex Awards are given annually “to ten books written for adults that have special appeal to young adults, ages 12 through 18.” Hauser’s book also earned a listing in People magazine’s “Picks and Pans” section (November 21, 2011 issue).

In 20 chapters and an epilogue, Hauser describes the students, their classrooms, their teachers, and their aspirations. Her views emerge from spending a year interacting with students attending International High School at Prospect Heights, in Brooklyn, New York. In order to maintain narrative cohesion, the author focuses on just a few of those students, all who are recent immigrants, learning English: Mohamed from Sierra Leone, Yasmeen from Yemen, Ngawang from Tibet, Jessica from China, and Chit Su from Burma. Hauser gently and invitingly immerses her readers in the lives of these five students, with notable depth and texture in her descriptions. Her writing shows patience, warmth, and incisive (but not intrusive) probing into their lives as newcomers to the United States. The vivid and provocative flavor of this book is illustrated in the following excerpt about one of her subject’s school lunchroom encounters:

Inching forward, Chit Su looks at the pictures of different foods on the bulletin board. To many new students, lunchroom staples like chicken nuggets and meat loaf are unfamiliar. So are the utensils that come wrapped in plastic on their trays. Some of the African girls, who grew up eating a cassava porridge called fufu with their hands and never learned how to use a fork, have been asking for etiquette lessons. Unglamorous as it is, the cafeteria is the first step to dining in public, one reason why the girls sit in the back of the room, near the wall of Snapple vending machines.

“Next!” the lunch lady barks.
Somewhere, the pop of a plastic sandwich bag shatters the air like a gunshot, and Chit Su jumps. Clutching the straps of her backpack, she keeps her eyes trained on Chhoki’s pink shirt. At the head of the line, Chhoki says something to the lunch lady, who hands Chit Su a white Styrofoam tray with pizza and a carton of milk. Inside a clear wrapper is a folded napkin and a white plastic spork that Chit Su examines with interest. When she looks up, the pink shirt is gone.

Standing at the front of the cafeteria, Chit Su grips her tray. It is only the fourth day of school, but already cliques have formed (pp. 18-19).

Most of the students faced unimaginable difficulties reaching the United States from their native lands. Once in New York, they found life perplexing and confusing. This was the result of their lack of English language skills, and in some other instances, poverty. The joke among the faculty is that prospective students must fail testing—especially English language proficiency—to obtain admission into the school. However, negotiating the academic and social barriers while learning English promises daily peril for these students. Highlighting the complexities they face, throughout the book and particularly in the epilogue, the author dares to suggest which of the students will walk through open doors to the American Dream, and which will find the door slammed shut.

Hauser wisely does not limit herself to relying on the students as sources. By integrating the views of the teachers, parents, siblings, guardians, and social workers involved in the lives of the students, her description is rich, authentic, and comprehensive.

*The New Kids* is a tasty and nourishing look – a close, caring look – into the lives of these five students inside and outside their school. Hauser’s book is one that beckons, not compels, the reader. “I couldn’t put this book down until I finished it!” is not something the reader will say about *The New Kids.* Rather, it can be skimmed, scanned, or savored – and the book’s structure allows one to experience it in small or large blocks of time. This is a book to be enjoyed on the beach or at home in a comfortable easy chair. Hauser lets her reader tag along as she moves with these students through a year of high school. For her readers, *The New Kids* makes an informative and memorable companion.

Hauser’s book is for everyone to read. It does not require specialized knowledge on immigration nor education. As the country embarks on important decisions regarding immigration in the United States, the author personalizes the discussion. She gives names, places, descriptions of the everyday encounters and challenges that provide a face, a human dimension to the discussion. Immigration is not a just an empty, political issue. Hauser’s message is that the political crevices of immigration are populated by youngsters who want to become members in this society and reach their full potential.
Hope in Immigrant Youth

Myra Zarnowski
Queens College, City University of New York

Book Reviewed:


For teen readers looking for current information about immigration in a readable, informative style, Tatyana Kleyn’s Immigration: The Ultimate Teen Guide is the answer. Kleyn maintains a delicate balance between providing her readers with information they need to think about immigration issues while at the same time asking them to develop informed opinions based on these facts. In the process, readers reexamine their thoughts and possible misconceptions while reading about the actual experiences of teen immigrants and immigrant communities throughout the United States. Kleyn’s long range goal is an ambitious one—to help teen readers make informed decisions.

The book consists of twelve chapters addressing various issues related to immigration. For example, separate chapters deal with immigration myths and realities, undocumented immigrants, and a multilingual United States. These are all significant issues for everyone, and teens will frequently hear about them on the news. Within each chapter, readers will find an abundance of quotes from teens, maps, graphs, charts, photographs, sidebars, and lists of recommended books and websites for further study. These features add interest and work together with the main text to support student learning.

In addition, Aragón, Bittencourt, and Johnson (2011) created a Curriculum Companion for Immigration: The Ultimate Teen Guide as a tool for high school teachers across the nation. Although not part of the present book review, it is worth mentioning that this companion curriculum offers lessons related to national Common Core Standards from the Reading and Writing for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6–12 sections.

In order to provide background information for teens, the book provides a rich mix of historical information, clear explanations of the vocabulary words needed to discuss immigration, and stories of immigrant teens facing a mix of experiences. For example, readers learn about the waves of immigration in this country and the push-pull factors that propelled immigrants to come to the U.S. They learn to distinguish between immigration, emigration, migration, and involuntary immigration as well as the difference between refugees and asylees. The larger issues of immigration—how to deal with the approximately 12 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S., the use of immigration quotas, and whether English should be our official language—are made more understandable and immediate through the stories of immigrant teens. Their
stories comprise a mix of experiences involved in learning a new language, adapting to a new culture, upholding traditional customs or abandoning them, and feeling homesick and different. Above all, their stories show immigrant teens hoping for a better future.

The author consistently asks: What do you think? Why? A sampling of critical questions to promote evaluative reflection found within this book includes the following:

• “Do you think that Puerto Ricans should be considered immigrants in the United States?” (p. 7)

• “What did you learn from the immigrant stories presented here (and others you may be aware of)? What were the major similarities and differences?” (p. 33)

• “Do you think the refugee label was used accurately to describe the people who were displaced due to Hurricane Katrina? Why or why not?” (p. 82)

• “In your school experience, do teachers allow bilingual students to use their native languages in the classroom? Do you feel this is a positive or negative practice?” (p. 141)

• “How does limiting people’s right to speak languages [other than English] impact their civil rights, such as freedom of speech?” (p. 141)

• “How do you feel about the DREAM Act [Development, Relief and Education of Alien Minors Act]?” (p. 187)

When using this book in the classroom, a teacher could have students do additional research about these questions and then write about them. In fact, the book ends with the author encouraging readers to do this. She provides a useful list of blogs and forums where teens can share their views.

Within the book, Kleyn models how to share experiences and ideas. She provides information about her family’s arrival in the United States as religious refugees from the Soviet Union. Arriving in Columbus, Ohio, she began to learn English and stopped speaking her native Russian. Only later, when she was in college, did she see the importance of being bilingual. As she concludes:

As I look back on my history as a bilingual person, I feel fortunate that I have not completely lost my native language, but I also believe that society pushed me to assimilate toward English monolingualism through hidden messages about the superiority of English. Now I see that true superiority lies in speaking many languages as well as developing an understanding of the cultures they come from (p. 129).

It is both refreshing and interesting to have an author “weigh in” on the topic under consideration. As an immigrant and current associate professor of Bilingual Education and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages at The City College of New York, Kleyn is clearly well qualified to do this.

Immigration is a crucial issue for all of us. In Immigration: The Ultimate Teen Guide, Tatyana Kleyn has given teens an introduction to its complexity and provided examples of how immigration policies affect individuals, families, states, and nations. By
encouraging teens to become knowledgeable and express their ideas, Kleyn has provided a useful way for them to participate in the dialogue about this significant social issue. While this book is clearly designed for teens, I also recommend it to social studies teachers as a clear, up-to-date guide for promoting informed decision making.

**Reference**

Notes on Contributors to This Issue

Herlinda Cancino is an Associate Professor of Secondary Education at San Francisco State University. She has written extensively on different aspects of language acquisition in bilingual students: From morpheme acquisition to the development of academic language. Her articles have appeared in the Harvard Educational Review, TESOL, and the International Review of Education.

Áine Cregan is a Senior Lecturer in English in the Faculty of Education in Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Ireland, a Teacher Education College. She was a Fullbright Scholar in the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where she completed a doctoral program in Reading, Language and Learning Disabilities in 1989. She was a consultant to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) primary committee on English in the Revised Primary Curriculum and currently she is involved with the NCCA (Dublin) as an advisor on an Early Years and Primary Language Committee. Her research interests are in the areas of Oral Language development and Educational Disadvantage. She has recently secured funding awards from the Combat Poverty Agency and the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland to complete research on the challenges of oral language development in contexts designated as disadvantaged in Irish primary schools.

Nancy E. Dubetz is Associate Professor of Childhood Education in the Department of Early Childhood and Childhood Education at Lehman College, City University of New York, where she teaches courses in social studies, bilingual education, and ESL. She earned her doctorate at Teachers College, Columbia University in Curriculum and Teaching, and her Masters in Foreign Language Education/ESOL at the Ohio State University. Her research interests include the study of teachers’ theories of practice in urban bilingual settings, teacher advocacy, school/university partnerships in the preparation of teachers of ELLs, and English instruction in public school contexts in Latin America. She has published several book chapters on preparing teachers of English language learners and emergent bilingual learners, and Professional Development School partnerships, and has published articles in Action in Teacher Education, Bilingual Research Journal, The Journal of Research in Education, and Issues in Teacher Education.

Patricia Velasco started her career as a speech pathologist in Mexico City. After finishing her EdD in Harvard’s Graduate School of Education, she established a Staff Development Institute (Casa de la Ciencia) that works with indigenous bilingual children and their teachers in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico. She later moved to New York City to be a staff developer and instructor for the Reading and Writing Project at Teachers College, Columbia University. In that capacity she supported teachers all across New York City in addressing the literacy and language needs of English language learners. Currently she is Assistant Professor of Education at Queens College, City University of New York, where she coordinates the Bilingual Education Program.

Yi-Fang Yeh received her Ph.D. in Language, Literacy, and Learning from Fordham University. She has been teaching Chinese language and culture classes at Bergen Chinese School for ten years. She also serves on BCS's academic committee which reviews, evaluates, and recommends new academic initiatives for the school. She received Teachers Merit Award from Association of Chinese Schools (ACS) in 2003, Best Paper Award from NCACLS (National Council of Associations of Chinese Language School Symposium) in 2010, and Chinese Curriculum Development Award from The ASI Yang Wei Jinli Foundation in 2012. Before she came to the United States she was the Chair of English Department of Evening Division at Eternal-Life Christ College in Taiwan. She taught ESL in college and vocational high schools in Taiwan. Her research interests are in Second Language Acquisition, English as a Second Language, and Chinese Teaching and Pedagogy as a Foreign Language.

Myra Zarnowski is a Professor in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education at Queens College, City University of New York. She is particularly interested in motivating and promoting in depth analysis of historical events and people by students and teachers. Her books Making Sense of History (2006) and History Makers: A Questioning Approach to Reading & Writing Biographies (2003) are based on her work with children as they interpret history for themselves.
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- Have an abstract no longer than 200 words on a separate sheet, typed/word processed, one-inch margins all around, and double-spaced in each copy.
- Have title page, without the author’s name, address, or institutional affiliation.
- Be accompanied by a cover letter that includes the name of author(s), full mailing address, and e-mail address, both day and evening phone numbers, and fax number.
- Include the author’s name on the cover letter only.
- Include no more than two half-page size illustrations, table or figures or one full-page size illustration, table or figure.

Papers accepted for publication will need to incorporate the reviewers’ feedback. They must be submitted and reviewed in Microsoft Word format, preferably in .docx or .doc format.

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