Chapter 65

School Home Interactive Curriculum Development:
Teachers and Families in Partnership

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ABSTRACT

The chapter describes School Home Interactive Curriculum Development, a process of structured collaboration between educators and families used to cyclically co-construct thematic, interdisciplinary curriculum units in first grade classrooms of a Spanish/English Dual Language Immersion bilingual program. While not a formal case study, the chapter describes the case of the authentic situation where classroom teachers partnered with families of historically disenfranchised communities (linguistic, immigrant, economic) to develop culturally responsive pedagogy and practice in public school classrooms. The process was sustained and refined over a six-year period. A primary aim of this process was to legitimize the knowledge and perspectives of the families and communities within the public school institution and to support students to develop a sense of agency as owners and creators of valuable knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Societal power relations play themselves out in the choices that every teacher in every classroom in every school makes on a daily basis. Teachers have the power to promote identities of competence among their students or to remain complicit with policies that devalue the identities of students. (Cummins, 2015)

This chapter is presented from the point of view of a first grade classroom teacher working as part of a committed team of six first grade teachers to provide the best possible educational opportunity for their students. Working with students from traditionally disenfranchised student groups, in a clearly inequitable society at large, this group of teachers felt an imperative to counteract the inequities to the greatest degree possible and to prepare students to create a more just future society. They needed to find pedagogies and curriculums that could counteract traditional relations of power and privilege. Their work was guided

by conceptual frameworks from Bilingual and Multicultural Education, Social Constructivist Learning Theory and Transformative Pedagogy.

Specifically, the chapter describes how teachers and parents collaboratively engaged with first grade Dual Language Learner students in *School Home Interactive Curriculum Development.* The thematic interdisciplinary units created served as the primary curriculum for first grade classrooms in the full-school Spanish/English Dual Language Immersion Bilingual program. Through this pedagogical process, new knowledge and skills are built on prior knowledge and contextualized in the students' lives and cultures, and family and community knowledge are valued and incorporated into the academic curriculum. A model emerged of collaborative empowerment of educators and families to create a community of learners working towards the Dual Language Immersion program goals of bilingualism and biliteracy, academic excellence, and multicultural and diversity-responsive sensibilities and skills, and towards a broader vision of social justice advocacy through Transformative Pedagogy.

The chapter aims to connect theory and practice in a way that will make theory relevant for practitioners. Conceptual frameworks provide a bigger picture in which to make sense of the impact of actions during practice, and conceptual platforms can support teachers to imagine alternative curriculums and pedagogies.

For researchers, theorists and teacher educators, the chapter provides one example of how theoretical and conceptual frameworks related to classroom practice and ways of partnering with parents were operationalized or made concrete.

BACKGROUND

The school is located in an agricultural town on California's central coast. Most of the students are from first generation Mexican immigrant families, speak Spanish as their home language, and are in the process of English language acquisition. The minority of students for whom English is the dominant language is mostly from Mexican-origin families and speak English most of the time at home but also may hear or use Spanish outside of school. Many of the students' parents have limited formal schooling and work as farmworkers. Other families work in blue-collar jobs and small proportions work in white-collar jobs or professional jobs or are unemployed. Most of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. As in many Spanish/English Dual Language Immersion programs in California, socioeconomic status differences between the families of students who are native speakers of Spanish and of English may seem extreme and must be addressed proactively as part of the process of fostering school community. The team of six bilingual first grade teachers was composed of three veteran teachers, two European-American and one Mexican-American, and three younger teachers, two Mexican-American and one European-American. For the teachers involved, shared commitment to social justice was the deep motivation driving the work.

A unique feature of the Dual Language Immersion program model is that native speakers of each of the two languages study together throughout the school day, rather than being separated for core instruction in their stronger language as in historical bilingual program models. The school's Spanish/English Dual Language Immersion Bilingual program uses a 90/10 model. This means that Spanish is the language of instruction for ninety percent of the instructional time in kindergarten and English is the language of instruction for ten percent of the instructional time. In first grade, the percentage moves to 80% Spanish instructional time and 20% English instructional time; students spend four hours a day in Spanish and one hour in English. The proportion of instructional time in each language gradually

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