

Second Language Learners in the Northfield Elementary Schools

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Abstract

This project describes the research on second language programs offered in the Northfield School District. I focused on Bridgewater, Sibley and Longfellow elementary schools. I observed in ESL classrooms, English only classrooms and an immersion program of Spanish and English. Four research questions address the issues of culture, diversity and language in the classroom. Exploring these issues shows the positive and negative impacts that language has on the learning environment.

The Problem

It is estimated that by the year 2025, the Latin American population will grow to nearly 50 million people (Baker & Jones, 1998, p.30). Most immigrant students know little English and fall into the category of Limited English Proficiency or LEP students. Sadly, in some cases the marking of LEP holds students back. Some school districts may look at it as a limitation and see it not for the opportunity for a student to develop a proficiency in two languages (Baker & Jones, 1998, 481). It is important while developing and understanding the purpose of bilingual education we also take into account the growing population of LEP students.

As a double major in Sociology/Anthropology and American Racial and Multicultural Studies, I am also pursuing a license in Elementary Education. It is important that I continue to understand the diverse student population that is present today's schools. As the classroom and language expands into many multicultural dimensions it is the priority of educators to develop programs that address the issues of diversity and language in public schools.

This paper presents research of programs offered to second language learners in the Northfield, Minnesota School District. The research looks at successful programs that equip students with the skills, the confidence, and the language to succeed in the new culture. Additionally, it identifies factors in the curriculum that address the issues of cultural diversity and aid in the transition of LEP students into an English classroom environment. Through observations of an ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom, an all-English classroom and a class from the immersion program *Companeros*, I will present the implications of an un-supportive curriculum and the best learning environment

for LEP and native English speaking students.

According to Rossell and Baker in their 1996 article “The Educational Effectiveness of Bilingual Education,” the purpose of bilingual education in the United States is to teach LEP students subject content in their home language while “gradually transitioning them to English over a period of several years” (7). In deciding the appropriate definition and purpose of bilingual education it is necessary to examine the skills that make a person bilingual. Kobler and Gjerlow reason, “a balanced bilingual is a person who is equally fluent and accent free in both languages” (1999: 126).

In the United States disagreement is over whether or not to allow a child to develop skills in both languages. However, not allowing a child to become bilingual would undermine the purpose of bilingual education. Most of the controversy lies in the beliefs that English is not learned through bilingual programs and bilingual students have not learned enough English to be mainstreamed into an English-only classroom (Gonzalez, 1999: 55). During a hearing on the reauthorization of the Bilingual Education Act, Dr. Gonzalez stated that the basis of a successful bilingual education program involves students who are able “to study subject matter in their first language while their weaker language skills catch up” (1999: 53). This allows the LEP student “to keep up in subject matter while acquiring English as a second language” (Gonzalez, 1999: 53).

Through exploring the definition of bilingual education, observation, and interviews there are many positives and negatives in the handling of LEP students in the Northfield elementary schools. The following four questions guided my data collection and my process of analysis:

1. Are culture and diversity addressed in the classroom curriculum? ESL curriculum? How are they presented?
2. What is addressed when mainstreaming LEP students?
3. What roles do culture and language play in the classroom, friendships, peer interaction, schoolwork, school effort and participation?
4. How do the classroom environment and curriculum aid in LEP students’ learning and adjustment?

Types of bilingual education programs

Through the bilingual education program of submersion, the LEP student is placed in an English- only classroom. The student is given no special help with developing English skills and is expected to learn in this environment as well as English-speaking classmates (Baker & Rossell, 1996: 10). The ideal of the submersion program is to have students learn English as soon as possible (Baker & Jones, 1998: 476). Historically, submersion programs have been challenged on the basis of the “schools’ failure to address their (parents of LEP) children’s language needs.” Submersion does not give LEP children the

chance to succeed, thus, creating higher dropout rates among language minorities and fewer opportunities for school success (Crawford, 1989: 34). A slight change from the submersion technique was the bilingual education program, structured immersion. In this case, the teacher is proficient in the minority language. However, the main goal is to learn English as quickly as possible. Thus, the minority language is only used when the student is having difficulty completing the work in the majority language (Baker & Rossell, 1996: 10). In the early stages, the student will be allowed to answer or ask questions in her home language yet she will be encouraged to use English (Baker & Jones, 1998: 476). According to Baker and Rossell, the school day may “include at least 30-60 minutes a day of native tongue language arts” (1996: 10). In some cases there was success, however, students were easily frustrated with translation. Thus, students continued to be more likely to drop out, have low self-esteem and feel alienated (Baker & Jones, 1998: 477).

Another alternative is bilingual withdrawal programs or English as a Second Language (ESL). The idea behind ESL is to allow the LEP students to learn in the mainstream classroom yet allow them to keep up with work by using a withdrawal program in the home language (Baker & Jones, 1998: 483). Although instructors do not have to have proficiency in the home language, there is a curriculum that is set up to teach the LEP student English. An ESL class would meet one or two times a day and at least a couple times a week (Baker & Rossell, 1996: 10). There are some negative aspects to ESL. Since the student is pulled out of class, it is easy to fall behind in class work. Now, not only is the student trying to learn the language but also trying to keep up with her English-only classroom assignments. In addition, ESL students may get made fun of for being pulled out of the regular classroom (Baker & Jones, 1998: 484).

Another approach is called Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE). Like the other alternative bilingual education programs, TBE’s goal is to create a student proficient in English. The LEP student is taught in her home language for two to three years, gradually incorporating English skills and using less and less of the minority language. After the two to three years, the student is expected to succeed in the mainstream English-only classroom. However, the transition is sometimes not that smooth and obstacles such as limited fluency or problems fitting in with classmates stand in their way (Baker & Jones, 1998: 479). According to Baker and Rossell, TBE allows younger children to develop skills in the home language while keeping up in the subject areas. They state, “learning to read in the native tongue first is considered a necessary condition for optimal reading ability in the second language.” In addition, Baker and Rossell argue that “learning a second language takes time and children should not lose ground in other subject matters” (1998: 10).

Like TBE, bilingual maintenance programs use the home language in the first stages of the program. However, the goal of bilingual maintenance is to create bilingual students. Although, LEP students start out in classes that use both the minority and majority languages, they are not transferred into English-only classrooms (Baker & Rossell, 1996: 11). The home language is used to develop skills in both languages. Thus, most of the curriculum is taught in the home language (Baker & Jones, 1998: 505).

Students of bilingual maintenance programs have found success in the classroom, with their self-image, with the majority language, and have been able to keep aspects of their culture. Most importantly, bilingual maintenance allows the student to stay proficient in her home language. Maintenance programs create a positive self-image by respecting the minority language. This allows the student to be motivated in the classroom rather than being discouraged for lacking in English speaking skills. Additionally, students perform in subjects such as math, science and history as well as majority language peers. Also, the students' majority language skills are well developed and are comparable to English-only students (Baker & Jones, 1998: 505). However, there is controversy over the different approaches to developing proficiency in both languages. Proponents of maintenance programs argue, "that children easily transfer ideas, concepts, skills, attitudes, and knowledge in the majority language." Thus, once a LEP student learns a concept in math or science it can still be transferred into the new language that they are learning. Also, students are surrounded by the majority language through television, music, and movies. As a result, the home language is easily lost and it is important to establish the skills for the student to become bilingual. Opponents argue that maintenance programs are not cost effective. Bilingual maintenance programs are costly and require bilingual teachers and resources. Since there is a lack of political backing, most maintenance programs are found in private and ethnic schools (Baker & Jones, 1998: 505).

Most successful are dual language schools where the minority and majority languages are used equally throughout the curriculum. The goals of the schools are to develop bilingualism in the whole student body. Thus, majority language students would learn the minority language while minority language students develop skills in the majority language. In addition to creating biliterate students, dual language schools create "positive cross cultural attitudes" and also give the minority language students an equal opportunity to the same education. In order to achieve success in the dual language school there must be a balance of the languages. The division of language can be done in many different ways. As long as the teacher enforces the division, switching between languages every other day, half days, alternating between weeks and alternating teaching subjects in different languages are successful approaches. Usually,

teachers are bilingual or they may work in pairs, team teaching as they switch languages. Also, both languages are equally used in displays, extracurricular activities, cultural events, announcements and curriculum resources. Usually, students attend dual language school for four years. The longer the student attends the more there is a “fuller and deeper development of language skills and biliteracy” (Baker & Jones, 1998: 519).

In a 1999 hearing before the subcommittee on early childhood, youth, and families, Dr. Ellen M. Gonzalez and Dr. Josefina Villamil Tinajero presented statements in support of the reauthorization of the Bilingual Education Act. Both recommended that dual language schools would be the most successful programs in the United States. Tinajero presented research from the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE) that supported dual language programs as a successful way to create students that are proficient in English and the minority language (Spanish).

First, it was found that students not only benefit from instruction in their home language but that the dual language program “enhances the acquisition of a second language” (Tinajero, 1999: 80). In addition, students develop better skills when they are in the dual language program for four to seven years (Tinajero, 1999: 77). Also, it was found that three-year programs do not allow the student to “reap the academic benefits of bilingualism or the social and cognitive benefits of high levels of proficiency in two languages” (Tinajero, 1999: 82). Students learn better when they are allowed to become bilingual and are not rushed to develop skills but given time to become students of both languages. In addition, helpful approaches include “students and teachers working together in discovery process” and by “making school meaningful by connecting instruction to students’ strengths and everyday experiences in their homes and communities” (Tinajero, 1999: 78)

For these reasons, Tinajero and Gonzalez recommend a dual language program for schools in the United States. Tinajero states “Bilingualism is an asset, an intellectual accomplishment, a national treasure. This dream is open to all students, regardless of their native language – including English” (1999: 60). Gonzalez realizes this same dream. She comments on what needs to be added to the Bilingual Education Act “Establishment of two-way bilingual programs that benefit both majority and minority language speakers, and value intercultural relationships and cultural pluralism” (1999: 65).

However, these ideals of a successful bilingual program may not yet be fulfilled. In President George W. Bush’s educational plan “No Child Left Behind” he proposes that each school district be able to choose their own approach to educating LEP students. In order to receive funds, districts must “set performance objectives to ensure LEP children achieve English fluency within three years” (2001). Unfortunately, Bush’s plan falls short of the hopes

of Tinajero and Gonzalez. It is clear that the goals of government are not to create bilingual children. Instead of celebrating America's diversity, we are creating programs that not only teach English skills using an unsuccessful hurried approach but also devaluing "intercultural relationships and cultural pluralism" (Gonzalez, 1999: 65).

Cultural Identity

Whatever bilingual program is chosen within a school district, it is the basis of LEP students' growth and assimilation into the United States. However, many would argue that the educational institutions are not helping them make the transition between their lives before and after immigrating to the United States. It is here that LEP students' cultural identities are mixed up in the fast process of acceptance and assimilation into American society. In the article "Some Conceptual Considerations of the Interdisciplinary Study of Immigrant Children" by Marcelo and Carola Suarez-Orozco, they highlight the scholarly arguments about important tools in the success of children of immigrant families. An argument is made that the success depends on the "cultural, economic, and social capital immigrants are able to deploy in the new land" (2000: 19). This depends on the resources that immigrant families are able to bring from their homelands and are able to use in the United States. This transition may be made more difficult with language as a barrier.

Second, some scholars believe that it is the values of the immigrant family and what they instill in their children that establish school success (2000: 19). The third argument, they write is that, "immigrant families succeed by developing culturally specific strategies that inoculate their children against the hostilities and negative attitudes they encounter in the new culture" (2000: 19). This suggests that it is important for families to have a strong central and cultural base within the family home where clear lines are made between appropriate and inappropriate behavior. This guidance creates students with the ability to make healthy decisions in their new setting while still keeping their cultural base.

However, these arguments do not explain many of the LEP students that the school systems have failed. The Suarez-Orozcos state that a pattern has been found between length of residence of immigrant families in America and "declining health, school achievement, and aspirations" (2000: 19-20). According to a study of the National Research Council (NRC) "the more 'Americanized' they become, the more likely they were to engage in risky behaviors such as substance abuse, violence, and delinquency" (2000: 20).

The Setting

The Northfield School District in Minnesota has four public elementary schools: Sibley, Longfellow, Greenvale and Bridgewater. My research was done at Sibley, Longfellow and Bridgewater. I sat in on many different classes

and grade levels during my research process. I have used pseudonyms for the teachers and students that have participated in my study.

Sibley Elementary has 287 students in first through fifth grade. 271 students are White, 4 students are Asian, 2 students are Black and 10 students are Hispanic (terminology used in the National Education Data). Approximately 14 students at Sibley qualify for the ESL district program. At Longfellow Elementary there are 251 kindergarten students. All kindergarten students that attend public school in Northfield attend Longfellow. There are 2 Black students, 6 Hispanic students and 234 White students. Lastly, Bridgewater has 556 students in first through fifth grade. The ethnicity of the student population includes 1 American Indian/Alaskan student, 10 Asian students, 6 Black students, 37 Hispanic students and 502 White students. Although there is still a small minority population at Bridgewater, it is the most ethnically diverse of the elementary public schools in Northfield.

Time spent at the school involved interviews and participant observations. There were four teachers I interviewed and in whose classes I spent my time observing. Barbara Clay is a fourth grade teacher at Sibley. She has been with the district for almost twenty years. The time I observed in her classroom was a rotational period where her class rotated between the other fourth grade teachers. The teachers trade off units in science, social studies, health and language. For example, for three weeks Mrs. Clay will have her own students and will be teaching a lesson on weather, while the other teachers cover a unit in social studies, health or language arts. After three weeks the classes switch and Mrs. Clay will teach the weather unit to another class until all the classes have rotated. At the time I was in her classroom she was teaching another class on healthy choices. At this time she had two LEP students in her classroom.

At Bridgewater I observed Patty Noah's ESL classes and Mary Clark's first grade Spanish math class that is part of the Companeros Program. Patty has been working as an ESL instructor for 20 years and this is Mary Clark's first year teaching in Northfield. ESL classes take place in a small classroom off the Media Center. I observed during two afternoon classes. The first class had four first grade students and the second class had a mix of six third, fourth and fifth grade students. The ESL is a thirty-minute pullout program five days a week. Students are taken out of their classrooms for this time. All the students I observed at Bridgewater were also enrolled in the Companeros Program. Companeros is a dual language program teaching both Spanish and English starting at the first grade level. Students are immersed in English and Spanish for half-day sections.

The Methodology

As part of my education work, I have spent many hours in off-campus

observation in elementary schools in Northfield. From this experience, I was familiar with the classroom setting and had an idea where to begin my research. Additionally, I have worked in many diverse settings such as a summer school program with second language learners and spent four weeks working in public and private schools in Hawai'i. However, from this research I gained a new perspective on multicultural education and successful language programs. Thus, I had the benefits of being in a familiar situation yet discovering new aspects of the learning environment and curriculum. In my study, I used interviews and participant observation.

My observations spanned between five different classroom settings and class levels. During a three week period, I conducted eight 60 to 90 minutes of observations. Participant observation allowed me to observe and understand what learning was going on, what students were like and how curriculum and language influenced learning. Additionally other data came from four teacher interviews, math and ESL textbooks, a computer program, and notes on classroom environment such as seating charts, student participation and classroom decorations. Interviews offered a different perspective of classroom and interactions, more background on students, curriculum and programs. Teachers offered a different perspective than me by having the opportunity to work with students everyday. Refer to Appendix A for list of interview questions.

Having different types of data allowed me to see a connection between what is presented in class and how students respond to it. Also, it allowed me to compare aspects on different approaches to language learning and multicultural education. Throughout the three-week period, field notes were composed and reviewed daily. Reviewing my notes allowed me to identify themes and connections made between observational experiences and teacher interviews. Additionally, as my research intensified I developed more questions that led my research into different aspects.

As a first timer in the process of conducting ethnographic research my weaknesses overshadowed by strengths. Although I felt that I was very familiar with the elementary school setting, my research should have been expanded to more classrooms, students, and teachers. I also should have spent more time in each classroom. Realistically this research could have a more profound result if it had been a year-long study followed up by finding out the academic achievement of the language learners that were studied.

Other weaknesses included question development, comfortability during interviews, and direction. I really did not know what to expect when developing questions. I felt that the easiest approach would be to develop some questions and let a conversation start from there. However, that was an unrealistic concept because teachers were expecting me to have specific

questions. Also, it was hard to listen, write and prepare the next question. I felt that my pausing and reviewing my question sheet would make the interviewee uncomfortable and make me seem unprepared. I also felt that I was taking up important time of the teacher.

As far as strengths, I felt I had a good background on ESL and bilingual programs. This helped me understand the philosophy behind the ESL classroom and compare it to other programs I had learned about. It also was beneficial when I was formulating my questions and deciding what questions I wanted to ask. It also gave me credibility when I was talking to teachers because it showed that I had an interest in the topic and I also had done research on it before starting my project.

Findings

ESL

The English as a Second Language (ESL) program is implemented in the Northfield School District to develop English language skills in non-native speakers. The program is offered throughout the district at the elementary and secondary levels. The mission statement of the program is as follows:

Our ESL Program, in accordance with the Minnesota state requirements empowers Limited English Proficient (LEP) students to be successful by assisting them in the acquisition of English proficiency, cultural orientation, and content area skills necessary for successful participation in the mainstream curriculum. (ESL Program Handbook, 2001 p.2)

It is the program's belief that through ESL the student will be able to learn English and succeed in the classroom environment. However, the program states that it may take seven to ten years for the ESL student to catch up academically with his English-speaking peers. At the elementary level, ESL is a twenty-five minute, five days a week pullout program consisting of four to six students. In other words, the students miss regular classroom time each day; however, instructors schedule around specials such as music, art and physical education. The class groups are formed by proficiency level (ESL Program Handbook, 2001: 15).

Language proficiency is based on scores from the Oral Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Proficiency Test. The test can be taken "in English and/or Spanish on an as needed basis." Additionally, students can be referred to the program by an instructor's, parent's or administrator's request or by academic problems in the classroom. As a student continues through the program she will be assessed by taking the IDEA Proficiency Test. When a student has been tested as fluent then she will only meet once a week with an ESL instructor to keep up their proficiency level in English (ESL Program Handbook, 2001: 8).

At the elementary level a student's progress in the ESL classroom and the

regular classroom are handled differently. In the ESL program the student does not receive a grade but is updated on their progress through conferences where the ESL instructor meets with the teacher and the parents. In the classroom the students receive a grade like native speaking students. However, the handbook states “Teachers grade them (ESL students) subjectively keeping in mind that they are still English language learners” (ESL Program Handbook, 2001: 16). Refer to Appendix B for examples of level 1 objectives of the ESL program.

A separate curriculum is used in the ESL classroom. Since Mrs. Noah handles the ESL program at two schools it is very difficult to meet with the teachers and coordinate the curriculum of the regular classroom to the ESL classroom. Thus, a separate curriculum is used. LEP students work on the text *Amazing English* by Addison-Wesley Publishing, Co. In the handbook it is described as “a whole language, thematic-based curriculum with five levels of skill building in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.” Additionally, outside resources such as literature and a computer program are offered (ESL Program Handbook, 2001: 14). The text includes multicultural stories, language lessons, writing lessons, and chapter review questions. The computer program *Discover English* by Computer Curriculum Corporation involves listening and recall techniques for language learning. It provides choices and then gives the word, then the student must choose from the selection of pictures.

Amazing English is the 1996 edition from Addison-Wesley Publishing Company. The topics include literature, math, science, social studies, and linguistic skills. Within these topics the book incorporates reading, writing, listening, and verb usage. Additionally, it teaches the student learning strategies, study skills and uses holistic assessment. It also addresses culture and diversity through literature. Such stories included are *Liu-Always-In-A-Hurry*, a folktale from China, *The Toltecs*, a poem from ancient Mexico and *Family Pictures* by Carmen Lomas Garza. *Family Pictures* includes excerpts about life from the perspective of a Mexican American family living in Texas. The excerpts are first written in English and then written in Spanish. *Discover English* is the 1996 edition from Computer Curriculum Corporation. It is a language learning program for non- English speaking students. It offers the student several ten-minute levels to help increase her English vocabulary. For example, the first level deals with such words as stop, school, entrance, done, slow, and soap. The program gives two to four examples of different words along with a picture. The student is told to “Mark the word . . .” and is given the option to select ‘help,’ ‘repeat’ or ‘dictionary.’ If the student selects ‘help’ the student is given the answer. ‘Repeat’ will repeat the statement again.

The 'dictionary' allows the student to look through an alphabetical list of words. Additionally, it gives the picture of the word, the pronunciation, the definition, and then uses the word in a sentence. For example, the word adventure is pronounced "ad-ven-ture." The definition that is given "and exciting or dangerous trip" and the sentence given is "The children are going on an adventure". After choosing an option or not choosing one, the student clicks on the word they believe is the right answer. If the answer selected is wrong the student will be able to select again or the correct answer will be given. The student also can select the button for the score. The score gives the number tried, the number correct, the number of helps and the percent correct that the student has gotten.

ESL Class-time

In my observations of ESL class-time, direction on the class was focused on the English language learning. Activities were based on building vocabulary skills, reading, listening comprehension and conversational English. The two ESL sections I observed were at different levels but followed the same schedule. First students would come in to find a seat around the circular table and one student that day would point to the calendar and recite the following: Today is Monday, April 26. Tomorrow is Tuesday, April 27. Yesterday was Sunday, April 25. The students all say the appropriate day, month and date together at the same time. Then Mrs. Noah or her student teacher would begin the lesson.

The 2:00 P.M. class consisted of two girls and two boys. The two girls and the two boys would sit next to each other and depending on the day the two girls or the two boys would be able to sit at the two chairs closest to the door. It seemed that sitting closest to the door really meant sitting farthest away from the teacher. Although the classroom and the table were very small, no seat was actually very far from where the teacher sat. During the times I observed in the 2:00 P.M. class the Amazing English text was never used. Instead the student teacher developed activities around a large easy-to-read-book about the weather in North America and South America and one about The Itsy Bitsy Spider. The weather unit consisted of understanding the idea that when it is summer in North America it is a different season in another part of the world. It expanded the student's vocabulary about the seasons and different types of weather.

Additionally, the student teacher used an illustrated book version of The Itsy Bitsy Spider to introduce verbs in the past tense. First the teacher and students read the story aloud together. She introduced vocabulary from the illustrations such as 'waterspout,' 'itsy' and 'bitsy.' Then she picked verbs from the story for examples. Then she asked the students to come up with some examples, too. Before examples could be given, the students were able to verbalize any

confusion or questions class-time was over.

The 2:30 P.M. class ran in a similar way. Students would come in at different times because these students were from 3rd, 4th and 5th grade. The girls would come in to take the three chairs on one side of the table and the three boys would take the three chairs on the other side. The boys or girls would never mix up this arrangement. Class again would start with reciting the day, month and date. Then from the Amazing English level five text they would begin the lesson. Mrs. Noah would lead this lesson from the book. One class consisted of reading a story about pioneers and answering a worksheet. The worksheet was fill-in-the-blanks using vocabulary from the story. The fill in the blanks consisted of picking that right verb form or past tense form to fit into a sentence or paragraph.

One class period it consisted of a review session of the last chapter the students had finished. Mrs. Noah turned the review questions that the book offered into a game. The students went around the class saying the question aloud and then answering it. If they gave a wrong answer or did not answer it then they would not receive any points and the question would move on to the next student. Manny and George were the only two to answer the questions. Manny had a score of 15 and George a score of 5. Many of the questions went unanswered. The girls struggled with each question and had a hard time remembering the past lessons they had learned. Additionally, Luis had just been diagnosed with a learning disability and had been struggling in reading. When he was to read a question it would take him longer than the other students and he had difficulty sounding out the words. At the end of the class, Mrs. Noah made a comment that the girls were 'out of it' today. This suggested that the performance on the review was not what was to be expected. It seemed that the girls' did not have a good basic understanding of the lessons that were being reviewed. Since one lesson is quickly covered in the 30 minute time period it seems that not enough time is given for the actual learning of the lesson.

Although the class size is small, the students' attentions were sometimes elsewhere. The two girls were easily distracted with each other by a daily game of footsie and/or kicking their feet underneath the table. When the second class had gym or recess right before, ESL class began a little slower. It took longer for the students to settle down and there ended up being more disruptions during the class period. Like any classroom the more disruptions you have the less you accomplish during the class time. This has much more of an impact on the ESL classroom since the teachers already have a limited amount of time with the students.

In both classes when the period was over the students quickly conversed with each other about their plans for after school in Spanish. These ESL students at

Bridgewater are also in the Companeros Program and they continue to learn to read, write, and speak in Spanish. However, other ESL students in the district that do not attend the Companeros Program depend mainly on outside resources to keep up their Spanish. Mrs. Noah, who does not speak Spanish, said that their Spanish proficiency depends on their families. If the family is concerned about the student losing her native language they will enroll the student in Companeros or provide Spanish language education at home. Additionally when a student is falling behind in the course work of the regular classroom, the ESL classroom does not provide support to help the student to catch up. Rather, the student must be provided a college student or volunteer as a tutor.

Companeros

At Bridgewater Elementary, the Companeros Program incorporates Spanish into the first through fifth grade curriculum. The program is offered to any student in the Northfield School District. Students begin the program at the first grade level and begin the Spanish and English immersion program. The program is split between two teachers, one teaches the English and the other covers the Spanish. The English half of the day includes work on writing, reading, listening, and spelling skills. Math, science and social studies are covered in Spanish. Through these subjects Spanish vocabulary is developed. The curriculum uses texts that are written in Spanish and the teacher speaks in Spanish the whole time. By the third grade the student is expected to only speak Spanish during the Spanish classes. At the first and second grade level, the students incorporate Spanish and English vocabulary to help convey their ideas.

Mary Clark teaches the Spanish section to first and second grade students. In her first grade math class she has 20 students including four that are native Spanish speakers and 16 that are native English speakers. Students sit in pods of four. On each pod there is a box of Spanish books that they can look at when they have free time. Additionally, each box contains four folders that give the number table, shapes, colors and phrases in Spanish. The room contains bulletin boards of Spanish math and science vocabulary. Additionally, the classroom uses Spanish months and has a poster for a student's Cumpleanos. There is an Estampos Creativos section of the wall where students put up art projects that they have done in class.

Math class is an hour long and Clark instructs using only Spanish. When a concept is difficult she will say it in Spanish and then English. The math curriculum is drawn from the text *Matematicas Diarias* by The University of Chicago School Mathematics Project. The text, math problems, shapes, numbers and directions are all in Spanish. With this text, Clark uses activities that through action help teach the math concepts presented while she uses

Spanish to develop the students' language. She also incorporates weekly vocabulary words into the math class. For example, this week students were working on family vocabulary. She asked students to identify how many siblings they had. Then she was asked to add one family to another. This activity worked on addition but also included language practice.

Students are encouraged to ask questions using as much Spanish that they know as possible. They ask to go to the bathroom and to go to their locker using Spanish. Clark uses Spanish songs such as a form of "La Cucaracha" when the students are cleaning up or transition between different subjects. This again introduces students to vocabulary and is a way to their practice accents. All students are encouraged equally to participate. Native Spanish speakers do not dominate the participation, however they will correct the teacher's grammar on occasion. Clark felt that native English speakers see native Spanish speakers as their model for their language learning. All students help each other with problems and vocabulary.

Comparison

The Companeros' classroom atmosphere is uplifting and energizing. It seems as if adding the concept of a new language intensifies listening and increases the excitement of learning. From the constant participation and use of Spanish many of the students were excited about what they were learning and how they could communicate it in a different language. In comparison to Mrs. Clay's fourth grade classroom and the Longfellow kindergarten class, it equalizes the learning environment. Since all the students are becoming bilingual it is a shared interest and new concept that everyone is dealing with.

At Longfellow the two ESL girls spend most of their free time together drawing pictures and speaking Spanish. Kindergarten is set up as a time to explore different learning styles, interests and to meet new friends. However, the ESL girls always tend to find each other and use Spanish to communicate. Although, many of the students perceive their 'other' language as special. For instance, during a group game all of the students sat in a circle and passed a clothespin around the circle. The point of the game is to practice counting skills. As the clothespin passes a student, they say their number aloud until someone says seven and then that student must give a compliment to the student that had just passed the clothespin. One of the ESL students passed it on to a native English speaker and her compliments included, "Karen (ESL student) is smart. She likes to draw pictures. Karen is special because she can speak Spanish."

Much of the kindergarten curriculum focuses on social interactions and accepting differences. Since the classroom is one of the first social scenes that students take part in without their parents' presence, interaction with others and accepting differences are important topics to cover. Also in the classroom there

was much effort to understand the ESL students' culture and language. In the classroom library there were books in Spanish such as *In My Family* by Carmen Lomas Garza. Additionally, the teacher was teaching how to count in English and Spanish. These additions to the curriculum are up to the teacher's doing and not through the *Companeros* program.

In the fourth grade classroom at Sibley there were two ESL students and Mrs. Clay was teaching health. Mrs. Clay felt that the students interacted well together. The ESL students sat together in a pod of desks. That lesson involved going around the room and taking turns reading a paragraph. One of the ESL students had difficulty getting through the paragraph and Mrs. Clay helped him with the few words he stumbled on. Although Mrs. Clay felt the participation and interaction of ESL was the same, the two students were quieter and participated less than the other students during the lesson.

The district does not include a multicultural curriculum in the classroom. Diversity and culture are taught through social studies and reading anthologies. Countries are covered through social studies and consist of students doing individual reports. Stories in their reading books consist of students from different backgrounds, and one story on the Gold Rush also has a Spanish version. Mrs. Clay has a bulletin board filled with post cards from around the world and one with figures of international students. Students are dressed in their native costumes and represent countries such as China, Egypt, Japan, Germany, and India.

Summary/Conclusion

As one of the kindergartners put it, "Karen is special because she speaks Spanish." Karen is special and it is important that we provide the best education to LEP students and native English speaking students. In concluding my findings, I felt the best learning environment for all students was found within the classes of the *Companeros* Program. It offered a respondent environment to the students. It allowed the LEP students to use Spanish in some academic areas while beginning their English acquisition. Support was given to the LEP student and their parents by having a teacher that speaks the native language. I felt that in comparison to the English-only classroom much could be learned from the *Companeros* learning environment, the curriculum and the students.

Many of the English-only elementary classrooms were missing a multicultural curriculum. This would provide class time that would create an understanding of diversity in the United States. It gives students activities that help them understand intolerance and the difficulties that many LEP students have in schools. It offers a look at culture in a more real and hands-on approach than what may be offered in the social studies and reading textbooks. With the *Companeros* Program tolerance was an experience. Each

student began school equally by starting a new language. The experience of learning a new language is a first step in understanding the importance of culture in relation to the world.

Much like other classrooms, in the ESL classroom culture and diversity, specifically the home culture of the ESL student, depended on the text *Amazing English*. Although, the authors' offered literature as a viewpoint into different cultures the text never addressed the process of living in a new culture. Instead a new curriculum is taught and resources to provide academic support are placed upon tutoring programs or the parents. The way the ESL program is designed the home culture and language is placed on the parents to be taught. Thus, if parents would like their child to continue their Spanish language learning then it must be taught at home or they must be enrolled in the *Companeros* program. It is obvious that ESL is designed for a quick approach to language learning and it often fails to create a transition between the two cultures that the ESL student is dealing with.

In addition it fails to address the affects of mainstreaming on the LEP student. Since students do not catch up academically to their peers until high school not enough is being done to close this gap. Since the curriculums between the classrooms are not the same, the ESL instructor is spread between two schools, and is given limited time with the students and contact with the classroom teacher, it can be assumed that this gap will only increase. Although tutors and volunteers are provided in after-school mentor programs, there still is not enough support in the English language learning process. The ESL instructor is not required to speak the student's native language so the very beginning of the learning process is started in English. If a student must learn English but still keep up in the academic subjects they will fall behind.

The language process also affects school relationships. When observing the English-only classrooms, language was a barrier in participation. It was a demeaning task to read in front of their peers because their reading skills were not at the same level. Additionally, it affects peer relationships as well. In the English-only classes the language may have been seen as a special characteristic of the student but yet the LEP students stayed together in the classroom. Like the students after ESL class they use their native language to communicate between each other. In the kindergarten class this caused a division between other students because the girls would interact with each other using Spanish. In contrast *Companeros* offers a challenge to the division by giving all students equal access to language.

Companeros is an innovative and successful resource for not only LEP students but native English-speaking students as well. It provides all students with a resource of language that will be used throughout their academic careers and hopefully will begin to create bilingual citizens. *Companeros* places an

importance on language and culture. It allows the student to understand the world through another language. It creates equality in the classroom between all students and an energy and excitement for learning and helping each other.

Through the comparison of the Companeros classroom and the English only classrooms language was addressed in a whole new way. In the kindergarten class it was seen as a fun way to incorporate Spanish into counting and include their Spanish-speaking peers. In the fourth grade class it seemed as a division and separation between the LEP students and the English-speaking students. The LEP students may struggle with what other students have no problem with. This is counteracted in the Companeros Program because all students are learning a new language and understand the difficulties in learning a language. Companeros creates a respect for language and bilingualism that an English-only classroom may not.

The study can be used as a starting point for the Northfield District to evaluate the successfulness of ESL and look into a multicultural curriculum that addresses issues of tolerance and diversity. Additionally, more research can be done on the success of the Companeros Program by following students throughout their academic careers. Does bilingualism aid in academic success? Or does it influence their choices of careers? Do LEP students catch up academically with their peers more quickly through the Companeros Program than through an ESL class and an English-only classroom? Many more studies of this nature are important to the education of America's students. It is important that we learn about and recognize the diverse populations of our schools and incorporate programs that will benefit our students as citizens of the United States but also of the World.

Appendix A

Questions for classroom and ESL teachers

- Ø How do LEP students perceive English language learning?
- Ø What is addressed when mainstreaming LEP students? (mental well being, self esteem, achievement, adaptation)
- Ø How is the transition between the 'home' school and the 'new' school made?
- Ø What is the teacher's role in LEP students learning and adjustment?
- Ø What role do culture and language play in the classroom, friendships or peer interaction, school work, school effort and participation?
- Ø Does the LEP student act differently in the ESL classroom than the mainstream classroom? Why or why not?
- Ø Are culture and diversity addressed in the mainstream curriculum? How are they presented? How do the classroom environment and curriculum aid in

LEP students learning and adjustment?

Appendix B

ESL Outcomes by Levels

Level 1

1. The student will be able to follow oral directions in a daily situation
2. The student will use a functional vocabulary for school, daily living and survival.
3. The student will demonstrate understanding of basic English sentence structure.
4. The student will understand and use questions and answers for specific communication purposes.
5. The student will practice auditory and visual discrimination to distinguish and produce language sounds.
6. The student will decode and comprehend written basic sight vocabulary.
7. The student will decode and comprehend written material using simple sentence structure.
8. The student will write alphabet letters, basic sight vocabulary and simple sentences.
9. The student will be able to interact with students and peers and show acceptable behavior in a school environment.
10. The student will develop a positive self image and retain cultural pride.
11. The student will be introduced to social skills needed to function in a multicultural society.

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