



## Welcome from the Senior Editor

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### The Pen is Mightier than the Sword – Countering Deficit

#### Perspectives in Theory and Practice

**During our presentation** at the annual GATESOL conference this past October, our webmaster, Elizabeth (Beth) Wallace and I spoke on the theme of countering deficits in our work as bi/multilingual educators. We chose the title, *“The Pen is Mightier than the Sword - Countering Deficit Perspectives in Theory and Practice,”* and I recycle that title for this editorial because I wanted to reiterate its importance and centrality to our work as critical educators and because our three papers for this edition directly address the countering of deficit perspectives. Bravo to our writers for being bold and audacious in describing the ways they counter deficit perspectives in their teaching and research projects!

In the abstract for our conference session, we had proposed the following:

... When everywhere in the news it is reported that in general children of color and English language learners are less than, not as good as, need this/need that, and are impoverished, what is your response? In this session we will talk and write about responses to deficit perspectives and how those responses can be published in *GATESOL in Action* along with tips on writing for publication that gives voice to informed, research-based, and theoretical perspectives and practices ...

During our two sessions we used the following example of deficit and countering - *the repression and destruction of language and culture in schools and the need for the conspicuous promotion of pride in being bi/multilingual particularly for black and brown children* – to spur discussion. Our attendees were wonderfully engaged and excited to talk as we elicited from them the many strategies and activities that teachers could and do employ. After talking, we allowed them time to write. It is such a precious art, the capacity to write and portray our thoughts. Recognizing that time is also such a rare commodity for teachers to reflect on their work, we allowed at least fifteen to twenty minutes during our allotted sessions for attendees to craft an opening response to the theme. We targeted Pk-12 teachers for our session in particular because we are eager to tap into the rich reservoir of teacher knowledge, skills and experiences to report to a wider audience precisely

those activities that they are doing at the ground level to counter deficit perspectives. We do not expect this task to be accomplished by those solely in the universities sometimes referred to as “the ivory tower.” Therefore, we pushed for attendees to be engaged in writing during our session. After attendees had crafted their initial ideas, they shared a few pieces of their writing and then we went on to talk about the challenges of writing as PK-12 educators. We also considered the necessity of writing as PK-12 educators because indeed, sometimes, **the Pen is Mightier than the Sword** to uplift ourselves out of some of the prevailing negativity that surrounds the educational endeavor! But, fellow educators, we need to write!

As part of our work to encourage writing about important topics and themes, in our session we used an exemplar article written by Ana Maria Villegas and Tamara Lucas in *Educational Leadership* (2007). The university professors discussed in very clear and comprehensible terms in a few pages how we need to see students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds as capable learners. They elaborate on the qualities that teachers need to exhibit and the strategies teachers need to embrace to affirm those language learners particularly those historically marginalized.

In our own papers for this edition, Aubrey Southall, a former PK-12 social studies teacher and current doctoral student, describes how she used historically-based children's literature in the high school ESOL social studies classroom. Southall describes some of the strategies that she used and provides us with a listing of some of the texts. Maria Montalvo Balbed and Bernadette McCormack Musetti help us to understand the often unspoken aspects of "capital" through analyses of the lives of four immigrant women from the Dominican Republic. We learn from their lived experiences how to counter some of the prevailing deficit perspectives that abound in the community and in educational settings. Writers, Pedro Portes, Rolf Straubhaar and Paula Mellom describe work that is being done at the Center for Latino Achievement and Success in Education at the University of Georgia. The authors describe their research project and the practices that teachers can adopt to provide the support that is needed to bridge the divide in U.S. schools that serves to hamper the success of language learners.

All the writers in this edition emphasize the need for the preparation of all educators to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Failure to do so will only serve to increase the educational gap. At *GATESOL in Action*, we encourage all educators to use the pen (aka keyboard) to tell the stories of

successful teaching and research that serve to promote pride in bi/multilingualism and draw on the deep funds of knowledge that reside within the our learners' language and culture. Pick up the pen and let us know about the good work you are doing!

*Gertrude Tinker Sachs, Senior Editor*

#### Reference

Villegas, A. M. & Lucas, T. (March, 2007). The culturally responsive teacher. *Educational Leadership*, 28-33. Retrieved from:  
<http://worldview2.web.unc.edu/files/2014/02/Required-reading1-The-Culturally-Responsive-Teacher.pdf>