TESOL in Action

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Dear GATESOL,

I've enjoyed serving as Editor of TESOL in Action these past three years, but this will be the last issue I will edit. I want to express my sincere thanks to all those who submitted their work for publication. I am also deeply grateful to the members who responded to my requests to submit articles to fill out issues. I cannot express how much Rosemary Goodrum and Jackie Saindon contributed to the effort by reviewing and editing submissions. I could not have done it without them.

I urge you all to consider writing for *TESOL in Action*, to share your experience and knowledge with other GATESOL members. I suggest that classroom teachers collaborate with their student teachers or each other to compose articles and college faculty encourage their students to write on topics such as their ESOL students and families. In-service teachers and teachers-in-training have knowledge about teaching English learner students that can benefit all of us, so let's share it!

Sincerely,

Harriett

Chinese Interference to English Learning: Cultural and Linguistic Differences

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The 2000 Census reported 11.9 million Asian Americans living in the United States. This population increased by 5 million, or 72 percent, from 1990. Such a trend indicates that by 2010, the Asian population is expected to reach 17 million, nearly 6 percent of the total population of the United States (Rong & Preissle, 1997). Among the Asian group, Chinese is the largest group in the United States. In Georgia, Asian population is listed with Hispanic population as the fastest-growing minorities (State & County QuickFacts, 2005). Due to the rapid influx of Asian immigrants, particularly the Chinese students, into Georgia's educational system, much attention has been given to academic success of this group of students.

Not only do most Chinese students who enter Georgia's educational system bring with them the beliefs and expectations about schooling they have experienced from their native cultures, but they also bring their language and concepts about language based on their native tongue. A teacher who is aware of these students' cultural and linguistic background is more likely to meet their needs in the classroom. To help teachers gain such understanding, this paper intends to display some typical cultural and linguistic differences between Chinese and English, which influence the academic performance of Chinese students.

Cultural differences

As Chinese students enter American schools, they encounter many cultural differences that confound not only them but also their American teachers. While some issues are less serious, (e.g., classroom decoration and seating arrangement), the more serious cultural differences associated with the concept of the self and social relationships require greater understanding.

In contrast to American cultures that reflect an individualist orientation and place a high value on self-reliance, Chinese cultures emphasize what social scientists call “collectivism” and emphasize group cooperation and individual modesty. This is believed an excellent way to preserve social harmony (Hessler, 2001). The desire to maintain group spirit and harmony can interfere with Chinese students’ participation in class discussions. Chinese students, who are generally taught to avoid direct confrontation, open criticism, and controversial topics, may not want to express a different opinion from others’ or challenge others’ view points. Due to their sensitivity to external comments, Chinese students who lack English proficiency are afraid of making mistakes (or losing face) in front of group and thus keep silent in class discussions, while those with good English proficiency also remain reticent so as not to outshine others.

While Americans prefer social relationships that are informal and egalitarian, social relationships in Chinese cultures tend to be more formal and hierarchical than those in the United States. Influenced by Confucian ideas with social order, hierarchy, and harmonious interpersonal relationships, Chinese students respect teacher authority and look at teachers as a fountain of wisdom. It can be a shock for them to view that American students, in some circumstances, befriend teachers and correct teachers’ mistakes during class.

Linguistic differences

As English is classified as an Indo-European language, Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family (Fromkin et al., 2007). The two languages have much more differences than similarities in sound pattern, word structure, and sentence structure.

The Chinese language has 37 vowels and 21 consonants. Each consonant is voiced and followed by a vowel, except when a syllable is unto itself. Other than this, there are no consonants at the end of syllables. These present problems to Chinese speakers when consonants are introduced. Voiceless consonants may be pronounced as voiced ones; a consonant at the end of a syllable may be added with a vowel to form a separate syllable or be dropped completely (e.g., *sleep* → "*sleepa*" or "*slee*").

As Chinese lacks interdental fricative /θ/ and /ð/, these sounds are typically replaced by alveolar plosives /t/ and /d/ (e.g., *thank* → *tank* or *dank*; *this* → *tis* or *dis*) or /ð/ sometimes by alveolar liquid /l/ (e.g., *that* → *lat*). Chinese has no initial [r] sound, though there is a voiced retroflex fricative as written in Pinyin as r, which sounds similar to English [r], so Chinese speakers may be confused with [r] and pronounced [r] as a complete or partial non-rhotic accent. Due to the fact that Chinese is a tonal language, meaning that different tones, or intonations, distinguish words which are pronounced identically, this makes it hard for Chinese speakers to learn English as a syllabic, stress-based language. Chinese speakers sometimes apply tonal attributes into English; stressed syllables may be given higher and falling tones over unstressed syllables. This leads to a singsong accent, a feature usually shared by speakers of tonal, pitch-stressed, languages (Wikipedia, 2007).

As to the word structure, Chinese has no word inflection and derivation to indicate tense, plural nouns, parts of speech as those in English. Therefore, Chinese speakers tend to omit inflectional morphemes and ignore the change of words for different functions in their spoken

and written English (e.g., *he walks* → *he walk*; *many cats* → *many cat*; *Tom cooked* → *Tom cook; give me an explanation* → *give me an explain*). To Chinese speakers, words such as *argue, argues, arguing, argument,* and *argumentative* do not differ in form.

Chinese sentence structure also differs radically from English structure. While English is a language of hypotaxis in which the basic structure of sentence is subject and verb and all other elements are added through conjunctions, Chinese possesses characteristic of parataxis that favors short and simple sentences and tends not to use conjunctions for organization. Even used, paired conjunctions, such as "*although*…*but*" and "*because*…*so*" are preferred. As a result, Chinese speakers may construct sentences that sound logical in Chinese but are fragmented, run-on, and conjunction-overused in English (e.g., "*Those who arrived late did not see the famous singer because she left on time*." → "*Because the famous singer left on time, so late people did not see her.*" or "The *famous singer left on time, late people did not see her*.").

Conclusion

The above discussion illustrates some cultural and linguistic differences Chinese student commonly face when attending America schools. If teachers take time to understand these differences and take the differences into account when teaching Chinese students (e.g., a need to raise Chinese students' awareness of distinguishing what is expected in class participation as well as the benefits of discussions in idea development and self-expression), teachers will have a greater chance to succeed these students socially and academically. I hope this paper helps both ESOL and mainstream teachers in Georgia gain certain understanding of cultural and linguistic challenges Chinese students may encounter so that teachers can better connect with these students and instruct these students successfully.

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Interviewing Families of English Language Learners:

Teachers' Preconceived Notions and Intercultural Norms

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The concepts of effective teaching are predicated on teachers taking into consideration students' needs, framed by factors such as culture and socio-economic status, reminding teachers they primarily teach students, not the subject (Cruickshank, Jenkins & Metcalf, 2006). Culturally appropriate pedagogy, in turn, is predicated on the differences between the profiles of the teachers and the changing face of the student population. Ninety percent of the teachers are White and monolingual, most of them attending college and eventually teaching less than 100 miles from where they were born with limited experience of minority cultures (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2000; Teacher demographics, 2004).

The rapidly changing demographics in the country, with a remarkable 300% increase in ELL population in Georgia, requires teachers to teach students who are increasingly unlike themselves, challenging existing teacher assumptions about their students. Effective teachers

have to make a special effort to understand the family culture, backgrounds and lifestyles of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse.

A majority of the activities in teacher education programs aimed at acquainting teacher education students (TES) with the characteristics of diverse populations are cognitively based. The affective component of teaching is often difficult to address and frequently overlooked. The assignment of interviewing English Language Learners (ELLs) and their families is designed to help teachers better understand the familial, cultural and social influences in the lives of the linguistically different students, connecting the TES with the wider community of the ELLs, specifically the parents.

This was a required assignment in teacher education programs at two institutions and was offered at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, with a total of 53 students participating in it. This paper describes the activity with the response of students, both undergraduates and graduates, illustrating the perceived difficulties and benefits.

Description of Activity

Instructions

- Identify an immigrant family that has been in the US for less than five years.
- The family must have at least one child who is in a K-12 school in the US.
- Interview the family in their setting, preferably at their home when all the members of the family are present.
- The interview must last between 60 and 90 minutes.
- Take notes during and immediately after the interview. It is not necessary to tape it in any way.

- The interview paper should be 6-8 pages long. Briefly summarize the interview (2 pages) and critically analyze the issues (4-6 pages).

Rationale

The purpose of this activity is for TESs to understand the whole child who is an immigrant. The experiences, lifestyles and values of the TESs, who are most likely to be native-born, are likely to be very different from those of immigrants. The interview is designed to further TES' investigation of schools in the U.S. and how particular sociocultural and political climates may impact upon schooling experiences, perhaps contrasting this with beliefs and practices in the immigrant's country of origin. Most TES may not have the experience of being an immigrant; they can, however, do the next best thing: look, listen and learn from someone who has lived that life. The immigrant experience is an extraordinary one and interacting with immigrants personally on their own ground, where TES will be an invited guest is an essential learning experience. For the most part, immigrants encounter school authorities in circumstances not of their choice and where they do not have power. If TESs were to go on the home ground of immigrants, rather than a neutral ground like a restaurant, it will empower the immigrants while at the same time making TESs experience, however, briefly, of the effects of disempowerment.

Student Response – Pre-Interview

A few students recognized the effect of personal interaction and had a positive response to the activity. They looked forward to meeting the ELLs and learning more about them and their culture. As one student said,

> *To me, I think a great way to get a better picture of what is really going on for ELL students and families is to simply talk to them. We can read information in a book, but I don't think*

that's going to have the same impact as actually going out and talking to families about what's going on.

However, not everyone agreed with this student. Most TES had grave reservations about the assignments. They were apprehensive about conducting interviews with strangers and put forward objections ranging from personal safety to misgivings based on culture. Their initial response was to try to negotiate the parameters of the assignment.

Many students were unaware of the stereotype they projected when they objected to risking their safety by going into neighborhood they deemed unsafe and dangerous. Since many of them did not live in neighborhoods that were contiguous to predominantly minority communities, going beyond their physical comfort zone to meet immigrants was a challenge not all of them relished. They were unconscious of buying into the prevalent stereotype by characterizing all immigrants as poor, probably illegal, and living in dangerous neighborhoods. This was reinforced by some schools that explicitly discouraged them from making home visits for the same reasons.

The first step of identifying ELLs highlighted how unaware TES were of the society they lived in. If they did not have an ELL in their class, they had limited ideas of the resources they could call upon to get in touch with immigrants. Local associations and ethnic community centers were not ready resources while walking into a local ethnic grocery store was a revolutionary idea.

Students thought it was rude and impolite to seek an invitation to an ELL's home, a practice alien to their own cultures. The rationale presented referring to this cross-cultural point did not convince them. They did not believe that in some cultures guests have a different profile and it may not be considered an intrusion to invite you into someone's house. They did not expect immigrants to be willing to share their stories with strangers.

Student Response – Post-Interview

On completing the assignment, TES acknowledged its efficacy, even declaring it the most significant learning experience in the course. One student wrote,

> *Personally, I really enjoyed the interview and thought it was most likely the most meaningful activity that we have done in this class. I got the impression that the rest of the class felt that the interview was very educational.*

Organizing the meetings and setting up the interviews were themselves learning experiences. Many of them had difficulty scheduling a time for the interview. It brought home to them how busy the parents were. They realized that if parents did not show up for a PTA meeting in school, it was not because they were uncaring about their child's academic progress or ignorant of the role of a parent in this educational system. Rather, they learnt sympathy for parents who perhaps worked at two jobs.

In cases where interviews were initially scheduled and subsequently canceled. TES were initially irritated and unimpressed by the lack of politeness and professionalism, as they perceived it. However, making a connection with their readings, they recognize that this perhaps sprang from fear of being exposed to 'authority' of any kind; illegal immigrants' fears of being identified and perhaps deported became much more valid to TES.

This process of interacting with the ELLs bridged the theory-practice gap on many points. The sharing of information in the ensuing class discussion helped them see the wide range of socio-economic levels, languages and professions among immigrants rather than the monolithic stereotype of illegal, poor immigrants who batten on welfare. As a student noted,

> *The family we interviewed seemed to totally understand that they were stereotyped and it made them mad because they are no less a part of this nation than all of us. We need to*

push for positive stereotypes in our classrooms in order to combat the awful problems of negative stereotyping that some immigrant families must endure.

The warm welcome the TES received dispelled their uneasiness in 'forcing' their way, demonstrating how proud the immigrants were of their 'vibrant and pulsating culture, definitely worthy of note,' and that they 'love it and want to share it,' underscoring their emotional need to maintain ties with their 'home' country. It caused the TES to raise significant questions such as the cost of assimilation and the place of the heritage languages in classrooms.

The meeting illustrated for the TES concepts they had encountered in their readings. Seeing ELLs act as interpreters reminded them of the added complexity of the roles ELLs play. They were particularly struck by the value most interviewees placed on education and the respect the interviewees had for the position of teacher. The families were particularly appreciative that (prospective) teachers had made the effort to learn about their culture.

Many TES experienced a frustration common among immigrants – the language barrier. In the process of interviewing families with whom they did not share a language, TES had to locate an interpreter or to communicate using signs or basic language items, mirroring the immigrants' struggle of negotiating life in a world unintelligible to them.

Final Thoughts

The obstacles to teachers making home visits are numerous. Schools and school districts discourage them for legal reasons. Potential lawsuits, by either the teacher or the students, loom large, prompting administrators to take the easy way out by either ignoring the option or by actively dissuading teachers from making these visits. Finite teacher time and energy are further considerations.

As an aspect of professional development, schools could organize a day before school opens when teachers go into the immigrant communities. This will open the eyes of the teachers to the students they can expect in their classroom while alerting students to the start of school. Teachers could venture out in pairs through the year, when they feel the need for it. If teachers do not want to make school bastions against the home cultures of the immigrant students, they need to step out from behind those walls and meet the students on their own turf, in their own homes.

We need to create and build advocates for ELLs. The profound and deep understandings engendered by a home visit in both the affective and cognitive domains should make it a required activity in all teacher education programs. Teachers with a deep understanding of the range of issues immigrants face may help to lower the affective filter and make learning more effective and enjoyable. We may even see a decrease of ELLs mistakenly recommended for placement in Special Education classes!

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Creating Classrooms That Welcome and Involve ELL Parents

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"These families don't value education." "My students have no literacy in their homes." "Parents don't care about coming to meetings." "Even if they want to help their kids with their homework, they don't have enough education to be productive." "They think their child's education is only my responsibility; I can't do anything without their involvement." Teachers we had worked with who were predominately serving immigrant Latino and Hispanic families, made comments such as these. As concerned teachers of English language learners (ELL's) we begin talking with the families of our students to learn about their educational beliefs and to explore the validity of such comments.

The parents offered insights that contrasted with what we heard from many of our coworkers. One mother stated, "We moved here (from Mexico) so my girls could learn here and have opportunities." Clearly she valued her daughters' education enough to make life-changing decisions and move her entire family to the United States. Another mother revealed that she wanted her daughter to learn "How to go back and forth between Spanish and English and how to translate for us," obviously expressing the value she placed on her daughter's bilingual and biliterate learning. Parents explained that they wanted to be more available during the school day but that work schedules made it impossible. Another mother emphasized her own role in her daughters' education by stating "parents are the first teacher and the most important example for their children. Even though they are with you at school, it is the parents' job to teach respect and responsibility." Another mother said, "My son was bringing home papers that I couldn't understand and I didn't know how to help him with his homework, so I bought an English language program

and I am teaching myself." This mother's statement refuted the assertions that parents don't have literacy, don't want to be involved, and don't work to participate in their child's learning process.

Equipped with the information our parents offered us and determined to involve them in their children's education, we worked to create classrooms that were inviting, accommodating, and celebratory, and that utilized first languages and literacies. Our intent is to provide recommendations for how classroom teachers can draw parents into the official classroom worlds of their children.

Invite Parents to Share their Funds of Knowledge

As we learned more about our students and their family histories, we were able to invite parents to talk about their areas of expertise, bringing their funds of knowledge. (Gonzalez & Moll, 2005). In these ways, we made our classroom a welcoming place for families and we honored and celebrated the cultures of our students. For example,

- To demonstrate the concept and intricacies of woodcarving during our Native American unit, Eurbiel's father came in to show some of his work and to teach the class how to carve arrowheads using plastic knives and soap.
- During our discussion of the Roaring Twenties in US History, Michelle's father came in and played the saxophone.
- While we were discussing farms, Luis and his father showed us pictures from their farm in Mexico and told us how to care for baby animals.
- After we read, *Fernando's Gift, El Regale de Fernando*, by Douglas Keister, Julio's mom came and shared music, food, artifacts, pictures, and stories from the rain forests of Costa Rico.

- Saul's mom came into the classroom to read in Spanish to our children and to build our students' first language literacy.
- After a unit on folk tales, a few of our parents came in and shared folk tales and stories. We compiled the tales and published a class book that had stories from around the world.

Utilize First Language Literacy and Background Knowledge

Another way we created a welcoming classroom was to utilize our students' first language and their background knowledge. Sending home Spanish language texts for shared home reading builds comprehension and scaffolds content area learning. As teachers, we found Readinga-z.com to be a tremendous resource, providing leveled informational and narrative texts in both Spanish and English. We were able to download these materials to build home libraries for students. We sent home books in Spanish the day before we introduced a new concept in class, so that our students had the opportunity to read with their parents at home and activate the background knowledge and vocabulary that would help them succeed with the content in English.

Accommodate Parents' Schedules and Language Needs

Another way to make school a welcoming place for ELL parents is to consider their schedules when organizing parent meetings. Parent meetings have tremendous power and value. As teachers, we worked not only to schedule meetings at times that were convenient for parents, but also to include a translator in every appointment.

Through learning more about the Mexican Educational System, we discovered that families were more comfortable calling a "conference" a "junta." That word was less threatening to parents than "conference," since "conferencia" denoted a problem, whereas a "junta" (Spanish for "together") was a discussion. Though a small semantic difference, it made an impact on the comfort level of our parents when we began to invite them to "juntas."

Celebrate Classroom Diversity

Finally, a classroom international festival was a wonderful time for parents and students to bring in food, music, artifacts, and pictures to share with us. It was a celebration of our families and their diverse cultures. When we, as teachers, learn more about the cultures, the value systems, and the social and family worlds of our students, we are able to form culturally relevant curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1997) that engages children where they are and allows them to construct their place in both the official world of school and the essential world of their family and community culture (Dyson, 1993). We gained invaluable insight into the funds of knowledge and the literacies that our students brought to school.

In summary, parents are the most important teachers of our students. It is through their nurturing and answering, challenging and guiding that our students have become who they are. Therefore, it is imperative that parents' voices be heard in the classroom and that their insights and abilities be recognized and utilized. By taking the time to talk with our parents and to invite them into our classrooms, we saw that Latino and Hispanic parents are interested. They do care. They have much to contribute to our classrooms and to the education of all of our children.

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Neither Tree Dwellers nor Rap Stars:

A Study of Senegalese in America

By

Brad A. Hodges

Introduction

On the night of September 29, 2005, hundreds of Senegalese, Malians and other West Africans stormed razor-wire fences in an attempt to cross into two Spanish enclaves in Morocco. Their ultimate goal: to push northward into Europe in search of better lives.

They did not succeed. At least fourteen were crushed or shot to death. According to wire services such as the Associated Press and Agence France Presse, more than 1,600 Senegalese and Malians had been sent back to their home countries by October 14 in a deportation that cost two million dollars. To confound the situation, few of the immigrants had passports or other identification to confirm their nationality. Many of those who could not be confirmed to be Senegalese or Malian were bussed off and left in the desert of southern Morocco.

The plight of West Africans is not new. In Senegal alone, more than half of its eleven million people live below the dollar-a-day poverty line, economic figures show. Unemployment—about forty-eight percent of the overall population—has left few options for the nation's youth. Diouf (2005) sums up Senegal's economy:

> The country has few resources and an agriculture economy based primarily on peanuts. Nearly two-thirds of its population is illiterate. Hospitals and roads need repair. Vast numbers of people do not have access to adequate shelter, water or

> sanitation. The misery has been exacerbated by consecutive years of drought and a devastating locust invasion last year. (p. 1)

Most of us are familiar with such cases of crushing poverty; our media provides us constant, ample news of poverty, disease, war and famine in Africa. Yet we in developed countries know so little about the people and cultures of this large and diverse continent. From personal experience, this researcher also knows that Americans often harbor the false and largely media-induced notions of Africa as a land of endless jungle and savannah, exotic animals, and painted spear hunters and breast-feeding women living in mud huts. This is an incomplete picture. In large capitals such as Dakar, the capital of Senegal, many people work and live in tall, air-conditioned buildings. Youths are more tuned into Michael Jackson and R. Kelly than their own traditional music.

Similarly, Africans have little aside from a barrage of videos and films from which to learn about Americans, their culture and many sub-cultures. In this article, we meet several members of a particular group of African people—the Senegalese—who have settled and adjusted to life in Atlanta. It also will show why most of these immigrants are not refugees with a story of desperate escape. Based on interviews, most are in fact proud of their origins, and desire to return. Finally, we will consider courses in schools, organizations that target immigrants, and other ways Americans and Africans can better understand each other.

Review of Relevant Literature

We have ample information about the cultures of Latino, Asian and other immigrants in the United States and the challenges they face in society and in the classroom setting (Hoffman, 1989; Leki, 1997; Liu, 2001; Rodriguez, 1992; Shen, 1989;

Tsai, 2001; Zongren, 1984). During the course of preliminary research on Senegalese and other African immigrants, however, I found precious little information about their experiences—a fact that underscores how little we know about this population. Most of what is known about how and why Africans immigrate is found in occasional newspaper articles. Furthermore, the majority of the articles found during the research were published by European media and wire services, meaning they were less likely to be published in the United States or in English.

There have been few books published on the subject; among those that are genuinely concerned with African immigrants' lives after their arrival are Arthur (2000), Bixler (2005), Obiakor & Grant (2002), and Okafor (2003). None of these talks much, if any, about the Senegalese. Instead, they focus on refugees from Sudan (Bixler, 2005) or experiences of the larger group of immigrants from Nigeria and other English-speaking African countries. Still others emphasize immigrants' prior lives, recounting war and famine and the usual gamut of problems on the African continent, which do not help Americans gain a better understanding of their experiences in the United States.

Likewise, articles in academic journals on the subject are nearly nonexistent in major fields such as sociology, anthropology and history. "African immigrants have been largely excluded from research on issues confronting immigrants," Kamya (1997, p. 154) wrote, in an article largely about spirituality among this population. This lack of data is particularly unfortunate as we have no shortage of African scholars and researchers in the United States. (One African colleague now studying in the United States said that in sub-Saharan Africa, the oral tradition of teaching proverbs, stories, history and languages has not facilitated the documentation of African cultures, either.

History and Context

As in nearly every part of the African continent, European countries struggled through many centuries for control of Senegal, and at times one wrested control from another. The struggle was largely over resources. As in other regions of West and Central Africa, Portuguese arrived on the shores of Senegal even before the French—during the mid-1400s. They established trading stations along rivers in the interior. The French gained control during the mid-seventeenth century. By 1677, the French had established a naval base and had begun exporting slaves, ivory and Arabic gum from the interior.

The British dominated this region during the Seven Years War (1756-1763) and the Napoleonic Wars, but returned power to France by 1815. In the following decades and beyond 1895, when Senegal became a colony, the French began a policy of political, educational and cultural assimilation. This placed Senegal in a unique position among French colonies (Gellar, 1995). Senegal gained independence in 1960, the same year as many other African countries that had been colonized by the French. More recently, President Abdoulaye Wade, elected in a runoff in 2000, ended forty years of Socialist rule in this country of eleven million people.

Similar to many other African countries, Senegal continues to rely on France for aid, trade and military support, though less heavily than in decades past. “The nature and extent of France’s African policy have been fundamentally revised in recent years” (Utley, 2002, p. 129). By 1997, “France would no longer take the primary role in ensuring relative stability and security in Africa, even on behalf of its former colonies. Troop numbers would fall, and bases would close” (p. 136). As recently as December, 2005, French President Jacque Chirac said in a Franco-African summit that France no

longer wants the role of Africa's "policeman" (Bommenel, 2005). Resentment sometimes runs high in African countries where France has backed long-running authoritarian regimes. In Gabon, for example, Omar Bongo has been president for thirty-eight years. Though he was reelected in November 2005, many observers say that the French government has ensured his position and power through financing and military support.

Simultaneously, the United States has taken an interest in Senegal and other predominately Muslim, former French colonies, and these countries have begun to react more and more favorably. Joachim (2005) explained U.S. motives:

> In its 2002 National Security Strategy, the Bush administration committed itself to strengthening the internal security of African states in support of America's strategic interests. The connection between African security and U.S. interests has become increasingly clear: weak and failed states in sub-Saharan Africa are a breeding ground for terrorism. (p. 155)

Similarly, Sengupta (2004) wrote:

> With the advent of the campaign against terrorism…things began to change. Africa once again figured in Washington's strategic thinking, and there was something to be gained for an overwhelmingly Muslim country by cozying up to the Americans and, not coincidentally, threatening the French with a loss of influence. (p. A4)

A New Wave of Immigrants

These increased diplomatic relations with sub-Saharan Africa may partly explain the surge in U.S. immigration from this region since the 1970s. "For the first time, more blacks are coming to the United States from Africa than during the slave trade" (Roberts,

2005, p. A1). Nationwide, the percentage of foreign-born blacks rose from 4.9% to 7.3% in the 1990s. Atlanta, home to the many Senegalese interviewed for this paper, had the third highest population of African immigrants in the United States (Appendix A). Overall, the number of Senegalese who entered the United States between 1990 and 2000 was more than ten times the number who entered before 1980 (Appendix B).

Another factor may be increasing hostility from Europeans, who frequently attribute crime, unemployment, inflation and other problems to immigrants from Africa and the Middle East. In October and November 2005, groups of mostly young, Muslim immigrants set fire to more than nine thousand automobiles in the suburbs of French cities within three weeks. In many personal conversations in Africa, this writer noted their frustrations with the colonizers' desire only to exploit, rather than invest, in the continent. This seems particularly true in France's former colonies, where Africans compare their relative lack of industry and infrastructure with the more developed countries of the continent such as Nigeria and South Africa, which had been colonized by other European countries.

Despite America's own history of slavery, segregation and racial discrimination, many Africans are turning to the United States as the place to rebuild their lives. Roberts (2005) wrote:

> With Europe increasingly inhospitable and much of Africa still suffering from the ravages of drought and the AIDS epidemic and the vagaries of economic mismanagement, the number migrating to the United States is growing—despite the reluctance of some Africans to come face to face with the effects of centuries of enduring discrimination. (p. A1)

Finally, it is important to note the influence of the American media. The American government broadcasts Voice of America on radio throughout most of the African continent, and in many languages. (Despite the availability of VOA in French, however, Senegalese I encountered in Gabon listen almost exclusively to RFI, a French radio station that broadcasts news and soccer games.) Television has become increasingly accessible in Senegal. In 1980 there were only eight thousand sets in the country; a decade later Senegalese owned more than two hundred fifty thousand sets (Arthur, 2000). African youths embrace the culture of American rappers in videos. Hollywood films are shown in cinemas in Africa within weeks of their release in the United States, and are sold cheaply in markets as pirated video CDs. Nawotka (2004) wrote: "Hip-hop is something Americans take for granted. It is not so elsewhere, especially in the developing world, where it has come to represent the empowerment of the disenfranchised and a slice of the American dream" (p. 12E).

Poverty and lack of opportunities are often what push Africans to move elsewhere. But for Senegalese and other African immigrants in the United States, life does not so often turn out like in the rap videos and Hollywood films that their families and friends watch back at home on small televisions. The brief history of Senegal and immigration of Africans to the United States described above can now serve as a foundation for better understanding the personal experiences of the observers interviewed for this paper.

Interviewing Methodology

Corbett (2003) states that "reliable ethnographic research should clearly state… the relationship of the researcher to the community being described" (p. 99). Atlanta

holds one of the largest populations of African immigrants in the United States (Appendix A). I already had met many Senegalese before choosing this immigrant population as the subject for this paper. However, it is equally important to note that I recently lived in another French-speaking African country, Gabon, for three years. My wife is Gabonese. I point all of this out because these experiences have permitted me to see Africans and Americans, both here and abroad, from several perspectives. I hope for a clearer cultural understanding and awareness on the part of both groups.

Additionally, Corbett (2003) suggests that ethnographers should explain why certain informants were chosen. Among the criteria of this paper was to select one to three immigrants from one foreign culture. I purposefully chose more to illustrate the varied lifestyles of Senegalese immigrants and students in the United States. As Corbett stresses as important, multiple interviewees were used here to avoid individual subjectivity. Many are in the United States only for a short duration to pursue studies. Others work in skilled trades or professional fields and return annually to their families in Senegal. Thus, it is important to note that there is no clear-cut definition of an "immigrant" within this population.

Despite my own experiences in Africa, questions for the observers used in this paper were construed to be as open-ended as possible. "The conclusions drawn from data collected in interviews are not unproblematic facts. The questions are asked in particular ways and construct and constrain the answers. A different question would produce a different response and so different data" (Roberts et al, 2001, p. 142-143).

Finally, the purpose of the paper was explained before any questions were asked. Several observers were interviewed more than once to gain clarification. Mood and

boundary issues can change from one interviewing session to the next (Holliday et al, 2004). Other observers were discarded entirely as a result of insufficient information. As Corbett (2003) states, “People respond to interviews in different ways” (p. 123).

Case Studies: Perceptions of America

Abdoulaye (the names of interviewees have been changed) won a fellowship to study at Emory University in Atlanta. He grew up in Dakar and studied English in high school. After studying at the university in Dakar, he traveled to Philadelphia in 1998 as a visiting scientist in an exchange program. His experience—part of the migratory phenomenon frequently referred to as Africa’s “brain drain”—is not uncommon. African leaders often lament the flight of one of the continent’s greatest resources—the highly educated—to Western countries, even as many African countries must cope with having less than one doctor per 100,000 inhabitants. In the United States, 58% of African immigrants have a college degree, compared with 13% of African Americans and 15% of Caribbean blacks (Williams, 2001). This may also explain why African immigrants consistently earn more than African Americans and black Caribbean Americans (Dodoo, 1997).

The first time Abdoulaye arrived in the United States, he called a taxi and immediately discovered that the accent here was different than that of the British accent to which he had been accustomed to hearing in Senegal. There was another surprise: “As I took the (taxi) van to the apartment, I did not see skyscrapers. I asked myself, ‘Is this America?’” In Dakar, people tend to think that everything in America is big, Abdoulaye explained.

Back in the United States a second time since August, Abdoulaye said that if more people are willing to take the complicated and expensive steps to secure a visa, book a flight to the United States, and start their lives over, it is because they have bought into "the American dream." Many believe that they can realize the lifestyles they watch on television. "The way they learn about America is through movies."

Mustafa, daytime concierge of a residential high-rise in downtown Atlanta, has a big, toothy grin and wears shirts that always look like they were just pressed. He first moved to the United States seven years ago. He plans to stay, but he has saved up enough to return to Senegal in February 2006—the first time since his arrival.

"When they come here for the first time," Mustafa said of newly-arrived Senegalese, "they're very depressed for about six months because of what they've seen in Hollywood. They think they can come here and just pick up a key and have the easy life." His advice: "Get a skill and be ready to work hard."

Mustafa was amazed at how "loving and generous" Americans were to him once they found out he was from Africa. "They are loving, loving people. There are a lot of misperceptions that Americans are bullies" that he says are generated by the French media's slant against the U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in recent years. (In French-speaking Africa, almost all international news is found in French newspapers, magazines and on the international French radio and television stations.) Mustafa first came to study in Memphis as part of a Sister City exchange with the Senegalese city of Kaolack. Later, an American doctor he had met while still in Senegal would return home to Atlanta, and invite Mustafa to stay.

Asked what the hardest aspect of America to adapt to was, Mustafa speaking with a faintly British accent he may have acquired while living in Nigeria, said, “The food was difficult.” Then there was what he describes as waste: the day after his arrival, someone told him to throw out his breakfast leftovers. In Senegal, throwing away unspoiled food is almost unheard of, he said.

Mustafa also shared some advice for American embassies in African countries: do more to promote awareness of the “true” America, in all its complex diversity. Aside from Peace Corps, which sends volunteers to twenty-five of Africa’s fifty-three countries, and occasional American Cultural Centers, Africans have few ways to learn about Americans.

Adioua, twenty-two, shared a quite different story—though hers is not unusual among Africa’s wealthier, ruling families. As early as twelve years old, she began visiting the United States with her family. She studied at the Boston Language Institute. Now studying finance at Georgia State University, she never really dreamed of going to college in the United States. “I didn’t really care if it was the U.S. I just wanted to be free, not dependent on my parents.”

Adioua likes Atlanta because the pace, at least as she sees it, is different than in New York or Boston. In the North, “time is money,” she said. “I didn’t know Americans could be so warm” as she has found in Atlanta. Like Mustafa, Adioua said, “People think that life here is beautiful and very easy, that it’s easy to find jobs.”

After three years, Adioua has almost earned her degree. She most often eats French fries and pasta dishes here, but has not forgotten the *tcheb* of her home country. The cold winters were the most difficult adjustment, although she said she is used to them

by now. She seems well adapted, but her long-term goal is clear: she plans to return home. She is homesick and misses her friends. “It’s like I’m not really in the U.S. I’m just here studying.” Her one piece of advice for other Senegalese in America is to “never, ever forget your culture back at home.”

Ama studied the art of cooking in an *école d’hôtellerie* in Dakar, where she was born. But professional jobs are scarce there. In 1990, twenty-five thousand secondary and university graduates were seeking full-time employment, but only four to five thousand jobs were available in the modern sector (Gellar, 1995).

Her husband came to Atlanta six years ago as a football player. She had the chance to follow him a year later. Like a large number of African women in the United States, Ama took advantage of a talent handed down through generations that is taken for granted back home: hair braiding. (In Africa, it is not uncommon for sisters, cousins and friends to pass an entire day braiding each other’s hair.) Today, Ama stands outside her salon in downtown Atlanta distributing cards, her baby boy bundled on her back in a sheet. Competition is fierce: many other Senegalese and other West African women also have opened salons downtown—all within a three-block radius of the Five Points train station. “I was thinking the life here was beautiful,” she said. “Having papers is difficult. English was difficult.”

Unlike the Senegalese men interviewed, many Senegalese hair braiders briefly interviewed in downtown Atlanta appear to have integrated very little. They congregate mostly among themselves, speaking French or Wolof, a language of Senegal. When they are not braiding corn rows or tree locks, they prepare traditional dishes of their home

country, eat with their right hand (only here, with a fork), and share from a large bowl of a rice- or plantain-based dish, just like at home.

While others interviewed repeatedly described Americans as "warmer" and "more friendly" than they had expected, Abdoulaye noted what might at first seem like the opposite in his encounters. He said they are "*moins chaleureux*," French for less warm or cordial, than Africans. However, he quickly clarified this comment: personal time and keeping a strict schedule are more important for Americans. Thus, when an American invites someone into his or her home, the visit might be for a short time and a specific reason—unlike in Senegal, Abdoulaye explained.

Abdoulaye also had some advice for African immigrants seeking to improve conversational skills. Look others in the eyes during conversation, for example. Eye contact is a very important part of conversation in America, Abdoulaye noted. "The youngest generation of Senegalese wasn't yet born when colonizers still held power. They are more likely to look a French expatriate in the eyes." Never overestimate a smile, Abdoulaye added. "Americans smile at you easily. For me, this shows friendship. If someone smiles at me, I might expect them to be close. Sometimes, this is not the case. The next day they might not like to see you." Smiling in the United States often only means, "I'm not hostile toward you," Abdoulaye explained. Finally, the importance of personal space can be confusing for Africans, who are accustomed to the cheek-kissing of the French colonizers and their own hugs and hand-holding between friends.

Case Studies: Perceptions of Africa

As a recently returned American who spent a long time in Central Africa, I felt prepared for most questions an American might ask me of this experience upon my

return. One of the most repeated questions that Senegalese immigrants said Americans asked them, however, was whether they had lived in trees. To date, no one has ever asked me this of Africans.

When Mamadou first came to the United States twenty years ago, he left his wife and two sons. He peddles straw baskets, masks and sculptures at street festivals and to stores, and returns as often as once or twice a year. (I have found in Africa and in America that many Senegalese have a strong enterprise ethic, and often start small businesses.) He said he would bring his wife and children here, but immigration visas are hard to acquire. “They see the television and they believe it’s poor,” Mamadou said of Americans. “It’s not that everywhere it’s poor. They think people live in trees. But we have beautiful houses there.”

Many Senegalese like Mamadou who find jobs and spend several years in America tend to live humbly and send a portion of the money they earn back home. This may give the false impression that they are poor. Diouf (2005), citing a Senegalese government official, reported that in 2004 alone, Senegalese expatriates sent home $565.58 million through official channels. That is more than thirty times the country’s gross domestic product, or approximately $50 for each of the country’s eleven million residents. “Some migrants support up to 15 relatives at home…Others manage to invest, usually in housing” (Diouf, 2005, p. 1).

Mamadou hopes to return to Senegal “for good” someday. For now, he continues selling his inexpensive crafts from West Africa at street festivals and to stores. “In America, everyone is equal. But I’m not at ease because I think about my family.”

Mustafa also received questions about people living in trees, and whether Africa had roads. “It’s what’s on Discovery Channel, so that’s what they expect.” Even Adioua, the student at Georgia State, said of her conversations here about Africa: “Sometimes they will be interested in it. But they think we live in trees, especially the black Americans.”

Such limited scope of contemporary Africa in the media may harm immigrants’ possibilities of employment, though little research has been done in this field. Dodoo (1997) wrote:

> It is clear that the media transmits devaluing messages, signaling the remote geographic and cultural chasm between African and American society, to prospective employers of Africans. The idea that the media influences behavior is not new; however, it is unclear whether the relative portrayal of Africa as an impoverished and backward continent in academic, political, media and other circles manifests itself in a different receptivity towards Africans, relative to other blacks in America. (p. 530)

While others interviewed commonly described Americans as ill-informed about contemporary Africa, Abdoulaye has had quite different experiences. This may simply be because, as a busy medical student without a car on Emory University’s suburban campus, he is more secluded than others. Most of his American friends and colleagues, if they ask questions at all, want to know about his family, health care in his country, and health policies of the Senegalese government. He does not hesitate before talking about his family: though he left them in Senegal only four months ago, Abdoulaye misses his wife and two daughters.

African Immigrants and African Americans

Whether it involves food, music, clothing, sports or lifestyle, many Americans—blacks included—often expect African immigrants to embrace the culture of African Americans and fit their stereotypes. However, these two populations share little in common culturally. For this reason, the immigration wave described earlier is redefining what it means to be African American. (I appreciate that black Americans have espoused the term "African American" to identify with the heritage that was stolen from them, but it is ironic that those to whom they usually refer are so many generations removed and so culturally detached from that continent. There are also a large number of black Americans from the Caribbean.) In one respect, being an African immigrant here is quite different than in France or Germany. Roberts (2005) quotes Agba Mangalabou, a Togolese who moved from Europe in 2002: "In Germany, everyone knew I was African. Here, nobody knows if I'm African or American" (p. A1).

As a result of the stereotyping and expectations to be similar, many African immigrants may even try to distance themselves from African Americans. Obiakar & Grant (2002) wrote:

> Our Black and brown skins did not open the doors wide for us in the African American community either. We were, and remain to many African Americans, outsiders or beneficiaries of their struggle against a racist enemy…Our accent is foreign to Black as well as White America and our religions are not limited to the dominant religion of Black America. (p. xiii)

Arthur (2000), in a summary of findings by Kasinitz (1992), had the following to say:

> Black immigrants…see black Americans as lazy, disorganized, obsessed with racial images, and having a laissez-faire attitude toward family life and child-raising. On their part, native-born American blacks view black immigrants as arrogant and oblivious to the racial tensions between blacks and whites. (p. 78)

In my own interviews with and observations of Senegalese in Atlanta, however, I found no evidence of any division between them and African Americans. Although the interviewees had little if anything to say about the subject, their behavior did not confirm the same findings as Obiakar and Grant (2002). Ama, for example, works in a salon with several African American barbers who joked with her during visits there.

Conclusion

While I had personally observed Americans and Africans in Africa interact over the course of three years, research for this paper helped me to see this interaction on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, when Africans come to the United States. Some of their observations I would have naturally expected: that earning a living as an immigrant is not as easy as they would have expected, for example, or that certain skills (English, reading, typing) are often taken for granted here. However, other observations—particularly that many Americans believe Africans live in trees—truly surprised me.

As I stated earlier, the lack of research about African immigrants' experiences is unfortunate, and more so given the generally narrow, essentialist media coverage of Africa. This type of research could aid teachers of English as a second language in understanding cultural challenges in the classroom, as well as churches and relief organizations that work with immigrant and refugee populations from Africa.

In West Africa, for example, a student would likely be considered rude for asking too many questions in class, as O'Grady et al (2005) noted:

> …in the United States it is not considered particularly face-threatening for a student to ask questions of her professor in class. Such behavior in some West African cultures, however, is considered extremely rude, since the less powerful student is imposing on the more powerful professor by requiring a response on a topic of the student's choosing; furthermore, the student's question implies that the professor has not been clear in his explanation. (p. 493)

Organizations such as the Refugee Women's Network in Decatur, Georgia help immigrants start and run businesses. The African Immigrant and Refugee Foundation in Washington, D.C. provides diversity training, a multilingual counseling hotline, cultural competence training, survival skills programs, translation and interpretation services, youth mentoring and cultural exchanges to Africa.

Generally speaking, Senegalese are a very sociable people who rely on networking to meet needs and resolve problems. Gellar (1995) noted, "The Senegalese, like the Americans, are a nation of joiners. Nearly every Senegalese is a member of several organizations" (p. 119). However, interviews and observations suggest that they are more likely to network among themselves than rely on outside organizations. Although such research is outside the scope of this paper, it would be interesting to interview Africans who contact such groups as the Refugee Women's Network to find out who they are and what attracts them.

During the discussion about the interviews, I also spoke of how African women interviewed generally did not seem to have integrated when compared with the men

interviewed. Based on interviews and observation, however, Senegalese women tended to socialize among themselves and other Africans, whereas men had more contact with Americans. (Adioua had largely integrated, but she also was more educated as a university student about to graduate.) This may be attributable to the influence of Islam in Senegal; the Senegalese are 94 percent Muslim. In Africa, men are also more encouraged to migrate (Arthur, 2000). It would be interesting nonetheless to see more research about whether traditional gender roles in other societies prevent or discourage female immigrants in the United States from integrating.

Aside from research, African culture continues to seek its place in schools. As curricula in America's elementary and secondary schools are loosely written by the U.S. Department of Education and refined by state governments and local school boards, the process can become very political. This year, Philadelphia public schools, where a majority of students are black, made mandatory a year-long course in African and African American history. In 2002, amid much controversy, Massachusetts officials voted to make Africa a larger component of high-school history courses in that state. In Georgia schools, students study Africa even earlier: as part of their seventh-grade history courses. In yet other states and school systems such as North Carolina, students study Africa in February, as part of Black History Month.

We can continue to argue for inclusion of Africa in history courses. But whether such education and secondary sources enrich or oversimplify other cultures remains unclear. This is particularly problematic when we continue the essentialist practice of teaching only about history and traditions. Students need exposure to contemporary issues and culture in Africa. Through its World Wise Schools program, the Peace Corps

has done a good job of allowing its volunteers to share experiences between African and American students through written and electronic correspondence.

Compounding the difficulties of teaching cultural awareness, from what I have witnessed in schools in greater Atlanta, is how segregated public schools are currently, and in so many ways. Much of Atlanta's enormous Latino population is segregated throughout much of the day in ESL classes, and entire schools and neighborhoods are largely segregated by skin color. More generally speaking, this segregation does little to facilitate the teaching of intercultural communication in our schools.

The question, then, remains how we can teach children (and adults) that Africans do not live in trees, that they are not all desperately climbing barb-wire fences to escape their continent, that they are quite proud of their cultures and peoples, and that a large number of those who come to the United States hope to return to Africa one day. The land that has been called "the Dark Continent" in literature for so long may be precisely that, only metaphorically—not because of the skin color of its inhabitants, but because of our own ignorance of its cultures.

Appendix A

Blacks born in America	1990 28,034,275
	2000 33,048,095
Percent of black population	1990: 96%
	2000: 94%
	1990-2000 growth: +18%
Blacks born in the Caribbean	1990 924,693
	2000 1,542,895
Percent of black population	1990: 3%
	2000: 4%
	1990-2000 growth: +67
Blacks born in Africa	1990 229,488
	2000 612,548
Percent of black population	1990: 1%
	2000: 2%
	1990-2000 growth: +167

U.S. metropolitan areas with the largest black African-born populations

Washington	1990: 32,248
	2000: 80,281
	1990-2000 growth: +149
New York	1990: 31,532
	2000: 73,851
	1990-2000 growth: +134
Atlanta	1990: 8,919
	2000: 34,302
	1990-2000 growth: +285

(Figures from Roberts (2005), based on 2000 census data.)

Appendix B

Total number of documented Senegalese living in the United States	**10,535**
Total number entered 1990 to 2000	**7,395**
Total number entered 1980 to 1989	**2,425**
Total number entered before 1980	**715**
Not a U.S. citizen	8,415
Entered 1990 to 2000	6,775
Entered 1980 to 1989	1,415
Entered before 1980	230
Naturalized U.S. citizen	2,120
Entered 1990 to 2000	620
Entered 1980 to 1989	1,010
Entered before 1980	485

(Figures from 2000 census data.)

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Class Dictation Activity for a Rainy Day

By Liz Bigler

Beginning and intermediate students can benefit in a variety of ways from seeing spoken words in writing. I use an activity with both adult and child learners that helps strengthen the ties between spoken and written language. I find this often helps not just with literacy skills, but with pronunciation and speech itself, since students are seeing and identifying the actual words and sounds made, rather than just producing what they think they hear others say. Here is how I implement (and adapt) this 'no prep' activity. In this case, I'll use a hypothetical class of adult immigrants. Just change the details to match your class' maturity and level.

Let's build a story …

I get one or several of the students to tell me something they did over the week or something that is of interest or importance in their life lately. If no one can come up with anything, even with much prompting/probing, you can tell them about something you did. It can be as easy as them going shopping and buying X, Y and Z and the Something Mart, or can be as complex as that a daughter is hanging around some girls the mom doesn't like....or whatever.

Get them to tell you the story a little bit at a time, and write it on the board as they tell it. While some teaching pedagogies recommend writing just exactly what they say as they say it....I myself prompt the students to do error correction. I might write it wrong and get them to correct it before I go on. For example, I write, "I buy two box diaper,"

and say, “Class (or the individual student’s name), who can see a problem with this sentence?” And then correct the errors before moving on to the next sentence.

Let us read the story …

Once I have a paragraph sized narration of somebody's event (or a compilation of one sentence each of several members' events ("Dora went shopping at Publix. Evelyn got a new job at a school. Paula's daughter fell down when she was skating."), then I will have them read the board as a class or taking turns individually. I like to use a pointer and ask them to read the words as I point to them. That way, “showoffy” students don’t try to read a lot faster than the other students, and I can isolate words that might be problematic.

Q&A based on the story

Then I ask the class Q and A about the narrative, including both factual questions and questions that are directed towards members of the class and their own experiences and lives. For example, with the above scenario, my questions might include, “Where did Dora go shopping? What did Paula do at Publix? Did Paula get a new job, or did Evelyn? The difficulty of the question can be adjusted according to individual students. For example, “Did Paula go to Publix or to Kroger?” is a much more easily answered question for someone of limited ability, than “Why did Paula need to go to Publix?” Challenge individual students with the right level question, giving harder questions to higher level students, and helping them if they get stuck. For example, if the “Why” question is too difficult, you can modify it by saying, “Did she need to do some shopping or did she want to get a job there?”

If students can’t remember or produce the answers, help them read the appropriate sentences to find the answers. Personalize the writing to other students. For example,

“How about you Horacio, how long have you had your job? Marcia, where do you go shopping? Luz, do you shop at Publix or Kroger? Felicia, does your daughter like skating, too? Has she ever hurt herself falling down? How about you, do you have skates?” Etc.

In classes of any more than six or so students, I use cards with each student's name on a separate card, and ask questions to individuals using the cards. This makes sure I check in with each student so they know I know they are there, makes me sure to check comprehension with each student, and, if attendance must be taken, it can be done at the same time as this type activity. Make sure to ask the question first before you call the name; this encourages them to pay attention since they know their turn might be next. Sometimes, I ask the whole class some questions just to mix it up.

Creating a Cloze

As the next part of the lesson, once the class is familiar with the information on the board, I take my eraser and erase key words in the paragraph, putting a number in where the word was, and creating a “cloze” test. For example, the board might read, “Dora went _____1_____ at Publix. Evelyn got a ____2__job. Paula's daughter fell ____3___when __4__was skating.” Then, I have everybody who is literate enough get out a paper and pencil, and number the paper from one to ....whatever your highest number is....probably 7 or 8. They look at the board, read the sentences to themselves, and write in the missing word next to the letter. So this paper would look like this:

1. shopping
2. new
3. down
4. she

Folks who are not as literate can work with more literate partners who can read the sentences to them, or they can work as a group with me, while the others work independently. Spelling and so on doesn't have to be "right," but as an option you can use this method to improve on those kinds of things. As an exercise for more advanced or "fast" students, have them copy the whole paragraph, or, without looking at the board, try to recreate the whole passage by writing it.

Spot my silly errors …

One more variation of this final step is to have students close their eyes while you erase certain words and write a silly word in its place. Then, they open their eyes and read the passage and try to find the "mistakes" (i.e., silly words). For example, the new sentences might read, "Evelyn ate a new job. Paula's daughter fell up when she was skipping." Did you find the mistakes? Students often enjoy this activity and are very intent on reading carefully once they open their eyes! You can let them go up and correct the wrong word, writing the"right" one (or one that makes just as good sense). Even adults like to go to the board and use the marker or chalk! Especially when you have already confirmed for them orally that they have the right solution!

The above (and occasionally the variation) is a lesson I often use to work on "everyday" language...language of the students' own lives...hearing it, responding to it, and also reading and some writing of it. This activity requires no preparation and no materials besides a chalkboard and chalk and paper and pencils. It's good for a day when your other plan fell through, or you have a much different class than you thought you were going to have (adult ed open enrollment class teachers know what I'm talking about!), or when people forgot their books, or when something significant happened (or

will happen) that you want to acknowledge. It's also a good activity to do if you have a class where people straggle in (again, adult ed classes often have this scenario). You can start the class right on time, rewarding the people who are there, yet latecomers can join right in as the passage gets written.

Please direct any questions or ideas to me, Liz Bigler, at bigmura@juno.com.

Integrating Funds of Knowledge in the ESOL Practicum: The Missing Element

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Introduction

What does it mean to teacher learners and teacher educators to learn to teach English to speakers of other languages (ESOL)? Depending on one's location, such as in a school or in a college of education, automatically, a certain content and subject specific knowledge, behaviors and attitudes might come to mind: the need for professional development, increasing numbers of immigrant children in the state of Georgia, impact of testing and No Child Left Behind, applied linguistics, English language teaching (ELT) methods and approaches, learning about culture, smaller classes, teaching the content area, working with other professionals who support the teaching of English language learners (ELLs) and concerns about parents who cannot speak English and those who do not come to school functions.

Few of us would think of including working with parents as part of the preparation of teachers in our discussion. Our emphasis as teacher learners and teacher educators may well be on the number of courses to be taken and how quickly the add-on program can be completed. Given the brevity of the ESOL endorsement program, most of us are concerned with the product – the end result rather than the process. If we were to stop for a moment and truly consider the full import of the first question, what does it

mean to teacher learners and teacher educators to teach English to speakers of other languages, we might consider how differently our responses might be shaped had we started out with the recipients of our work being given priority over ourselves such as "*what does it really mean to work with children for whom English is not their mother tongue*?" A lot is at stake here. While it is important to address the status of teachers' content knowledge and skills in working with ELLs, those teaching skills and content knowledge would amount to nothing if we do not give equal attention to our attitudes and mindsets in working with learners whom we might know very little about. Addressing this aspect in a hands-off distant manner as in discussions in a university teacher education classroom about an academic paper one has read is of a very different tenor from participating in a discussion as a result of having worked directly with families that week.

To propel our methods and approaches, applied linguistics and cultural aspects of teaching ELLs along an important sociopolitical and anthropological path in developing empathetic as well as knowledgeable and skilled professionals, the ESOL endorsement program at Georgia State anchors the practicum in working with refugee families in their homes. Working with families is an important element that is missing from the traditional courses of the ESOL endorsement and it is one that yields significant insights to teacher learners and teacher educators as they work together to explore the complexities of our work with ESOL learners in the classroom.

Working with Families – The Missing Element

Ethnographic researchers Norma González, Luis Moll, and Cathy Amanti (2005) are some of the early pioneers of a "funds of knowledge" approach to learning that

advocates linking instruction to students' home lives by drawing upon the rich resources that are available in our communities. The work of their team takes place in the homes of students and changes the role of teacher from director of the learning process to participant in it. This approach is especially salient in public education today, when, as the authors note, that national educational discourses swirl around accountability through testing (González, Moll and Amanti, 2005). While not downplaying the importance of accountability for quality in education, the authors advocate a shift to a more community-centered paradigm for the educational enterprise. The term 'funds of knowledge" refers to these "historically developed and accumulated strategies (skills, abilities, ideas, practices) or bodies of knowledge that are essential to a household's functioning and well-being (González, Moll, Floyd Tenery, Rivera, Rendón, Gonzales, Amanti, 2005; p. 91-92).

In her article *Which Way for Family Literacy: Intervention or Empowerment?* Elsa Roberts Auerbach examines current underpinnings of family literacy programs that are seemingly based on common sense and are almost universally accepted by the education community. She calls these assumptions, the combination of which creates what she terms the "transmission of school practices model" (Auerbach, 1989), into question, citing ethnographic research that refutes them. In Auerbach's opinion, this model is the basis for misguided and ineffective approaches in improving the literacy skills of immigrant and refugee children and their families. She challenges the educational community to create a model that is more empowering and considers both the needs and existing strengths of these families.

Auerbach lists five assumptions that underlie the transmission of school practices model and seem to be present in a majority of current family literacy programs. These assumptions are: (1) that language minority students are products of homes that do not value education; (2) that literacy skills are transferred unilaterally from parents to children; (3) that modeling school activities in the home is the only avenue for children to become more literate; (4) that language minority students are limited by their home lives and not by the quality of education they receive in school; (5) that parents' social and economic problems are barriers in the way of children's success in school (Auerbach, 1995). She examines each one of these assumptions, and reviews sound ethnographic research that challenges them. The current task, then, is for literacy program creators to re-evaluate the ideas and pre-conceived notions that guide their work.

Challenging our Mind Sets through Funds of Knowledge Explorations

The ESOL endorsement program consists of four courses at Georgia State University. The program includes Methods and Approaches, Applied Linguistics, Culture and the Practicum. The Practicum and the Methods and Approaches courses are paired together and taught by the same instructor so that attention can be paid to the application and transfer of skills and knowledge through the design and interrelatedness of the assignments. The pairing of the courses also allows for rich discussions as the course participants work together as a community of learners to complete the required tasks.

The main textbook for the practicum is *Funds of knowledge* edited by González, Moll and Amanti (2005). The chapters are read along with other selected course papers[1]. The course meeting times are divided between the field experience and the university

[1] For a copy of the course syllabus, please contact the first author.

based meetings. The family literacy program lasts for approximately 1.5 hours a week and the university class meets for debriefing and class discussion on the readings for one hour a week. Teacher learners are assigned to families through the Family Refugee Services. The Family Refugee liaison meets with the entire class before teachers are assigned to discuss the Center's work with refugee families. During the first family home visit, the Refugee Center liaison, a social worker and/or a translator accompany the teacher to assess the family's English literacy goals and to introduce the teacher. A minimum of ten instructional sessions are required for the family literacy program. Indeed, most of the teachers have exceeded this time due to their commitment to the families. The course instructor also visits each family group twice to participate in the family literacy sessions. In addition to the course readings, teachers are required to develop a unit of work that responds to the literacy goals of the family, to develop lesson plans and to keep a journal of their reflections. This paper reports on the work of the two classes that have participated in the Funds of Knowledge family literacy work from Fall 2006 – Fall 2007. Thus far, the teacher learners have worked with families from Bosnia, Ethiopia, Iraq, Somalia, and Sudan. The following sections summarize the main challenges and understandings that have evolved from the teachers' work with the family literacy project.

Funds of Knowledge in Action

Countering our Fears Eduardo's Piece

Many of the teacher learners felt fear when they heard about and first experienced the practicum. In this section Eduardo confronts his fears.

I still remember the first meeting of our class when we were told that we were going to be making home visits. The first thing that crossed my mind was: “this lady is crazy.” What about all the legal issues? What about my security; what about my fears? I did not want to be involved in something like this. Why can’t I work with my own ESOL students in my classroom I thought? It would be easier, more convenient and safe!

However, all my fears were unnecessary. I think sometimes fear is the typical response when you face something new. Today I am glad I crossed that threshold of fear and unnecessary nervousness. Also, the opportunity to read the book edited by González, Moll and Amanti (2005) helped too. Reading this book and learning about funds of knowledge helped to set the stage for approaching home visits positively.

Being able to work with my student in another neighborhood and try to learn a little bit about her life changed my philosophy of teaching in many ways. It helps me to question my own perspectives about inner city urban communities that are different from mine. It challenged me as a white immigrant middle age Chilean man to see different realities and not to panic about all the legal issues. Also, it presented a challenge to see myself working with somebody so different and yet similar in many ways. It was different because of her background and education, but similar in the fact that we are both human beings with many things in common. I think one of the main advantages is that as a teacher you so many times see students as lazy or sometimes you think …hey so and so did not do the homework. The opportunity to see first hand different communities, of maybe different class, gender and race and how in many ways they are not so different was a plus. It dismantled my own deficit thinking.

As the demographic make up of this country continues changing it is necessary that teachers get trained in order to deal with these changes. Fear of the unknown could be overcome. Through engaging in visits to the homes of immigrants, the teacher can learn about the strength and the expertise the family has. Establishing relationships with the families is not only beneficial for the teacher, but also for the school. There is and always will be a connection between school and home. Building rapport and relationships of trust in both scenarios benefits not only you as a teacher, but also your students and their families; therefore, the social processes of teaching and learning can only be improved.

Getting to Know the Family - Beth's Experience

The first meetings are important for establishing a foundation for the literacy sessions. In this excerpt Beth describes what took place.

Today I visited the family and met the children for the first time. There are five children in the family with whom I will be working. Abdullahi is 13, Ali is 10, Adan is 9, Dahir is 7 and Madobe is 5. The children were very excited to meet me and very curious about why I was there. The first thing we did was to straighten out a few scheduling conflicts. Abdullahi helped me to come to an agreement on days and times with Khadija (mother). We decided on 3:30 pm each Friday. I noticed that mom had a hard time following and reading the calendar so I will focus on teaching calendar skills with the family. One of my classmates came up with a great idea about making a message center in the home for the children and mom and dad to communicate. I will include a calendar here. The children asked lots of questions and we talked about how we were all going to

learn new things together. I told the kids that they were going to help each other and mom with English. We sat in a circle and told a story using a picture book. We used the pictures to infer what the story would be if the author had written one. Each family member took a turn describing the pictures. I used this activity to assess the English proficiency level for each of the family members. Our session was a lot of fun and I really enjoyed our time.

Pine and Drachman (2005) state that immigrant families have many challenges to face once they enter the United States. It is important to take into consideration the reasons why Khadija's family is here. I can only speculate that it has to do with the political unrest in Mogadishu, which is where Khadija and her husband lived with Abdullahi before coming to the US. In designing my instructional unit I will work to focus upon the strengths of the family rather than viewing them as having deficits as Capse (2003) writes about in her article on family literacy.

Getting to Know the Family's Literacy Needs - Mary Louise's Experiences

Teachers needed to evaluate the literacy goals for each family to establish teaching directions and an organizing framework. Mary Louise reports on what she did.

In reflecting on my previous experiences with refugee families, I viewed their survival here in the United States as a process of assimilation into mainstream American culture. Indeed, their needs have often resulted in a lack of proper services, institutions, and professions available upon their arrival (Pine and Drachman, 2005). However, I have come to realize the importance of family contributions that can be made in society and to the overall learning which takes place through this unique type of interaction. Within the

family literacy framework, the relationship between teacher and family must be one of understanding and openness in order for learning to take place. I hope to achieve this openness and desire to learn from the refugee family with whom I work. This particular family is from Kurdistan (modern day Iraq). It includes a husband, wife, and five children, ages seven, six, four, two, and nine months. The mother and father grew up in Kurdistan (speak Kurdish fluently, the husband can read and write in Arabic) and fled to the United States in their early twenties. All five children were born in the United States.

The oldest two children are in school and speak English and their native Kurdish language fluently, as well as read and write in English only (a little below grade level). As Mandel Morrow (1995) states, "school success begins in the home" (p. 11). These "funds of knowledge," which are unique to each household, reveal a competence and knowledge that can be used in the mainstream classroom to "generate new forms of literacy instruction in the[ir] classrooms (González, Moll, and Amanti, 2005, p. 5). One of my goals is to identify and utilize these unique funds of knowledge of the family in my teaching so as to enable the school-age children to be successful in school.

Another goal in utilizing the family's funds of knowledge is to empower the mother with her own established skills that she can use to teach her children. As a non-native English speaker, not able to read and write, she is confined to the home for most of the day and has little practice with English. Instead of viewing this situation as a deficit (see deficit model in Caspe, 2003), I choose to acknowledge her strengths in childrearing, cooking, and budgeting. She has skills in many areas which are "ripe with potential for children's formation of knowledge" (González, et al., 2005, p. 13). If her children can see her progress and the practical value of her knowledge, they will appreciate her more.

I chose to teach the concept of community and community-building because I believe it to be a relevant topic which will both benefit and empower the lives of this refugee family. Dalton and Tharp (2002) view social collaboration as an effective tool in learning and development. They state that "knowledge emerges through social and cultural activity during community participation" (p. 181). By learning what it means to be a part of a community will not only provide more opportunities to be involved in community affairs but to gain knowledge and specialized terminology helpful for everyday life. Another motivation for choosing the community theme relates to the mother's desire to take the citizenship test to become a citizen of the United States. In order for her to achieve this goal, she must learn what it means to be a citizen of the United States, in other words a member of a larger community.

By the end of the unit, the family as a whole will complete a community bulletin board which will display their work from various sessions. This goal adheres to Dalton and Tharp's (2002) first standard for pedagogy; a "joint productive activity (JPA)" whereby instructional activities call for student cooperation in completing a joint product (p. 183). By working in an open social setting within the family network to complete a common goal, a better understanding of community will be identified by all members.

Developing Trust – From Mimi's Journal

Teaching is very different from the traditional classroom when it takes place in the homes of families. In this excerpt, Mimi describes how she developed and built trust.

Although having a good relationship with the family will greatly enhance our work, it is something that takes time and understanding on both sides to develop.

According to Segal and Mayadas (2005), the experiences of immigrants and refugees result in them being suspicious, untrusting of authority and closely guarding their personal information. I did detect a sense of reservation during the first visit when I enquired about their family dynamics. Mildred was not so forthcoming on her responses. Segal and Mayadas (2005) point out that to establish good rapport and gain their trust; we need to prove our expert authority and ability to help. I find that sincerity on our part is equally important if not more important. The family needs to sense our genuine desire to support them and not to perceive them as another number for the statistics in the social register. During subsequent visits, I can sense that Mildred is more comfortable in sharing about the family and even gives me a hug when I arrive and leave each time. Segal and Mayadas (2005) also state that the immigrant does not regard the relationship between the social worker and the immigrant as an equal one. The social worker is regarded as one who has the authority, status and knowledge to help. I find this very evident as Mildred will listen very carefully each time I tell her something about her children Brian and Terese. Whatever I say to her seems to be correct and she will take my advice regarding the children very seriously. An example is the house phone. When I told her that the school might be trying to call her regarding the children, she understood the importance of the matter. When I went back the next time, she had gone to pay the bill and had the line reconnected.

In building trust, we have to be prudent in sharing our personal experiences of struggle and frustration. Episodes that require empathy may lead to jeopardy of the trust and confidence that the family originally has in us. They may thus think that we are not in the best position to help since we are also in a similar position as them. Although I find

this information to be enlightening, I do have a different viewpoint. As a matter of fact, I experience many of the same frustrations as the refugee family I work with. However, I believe that sharing with them the fact that I, like them, also miss my home and my country will not in any way belittle my position as a teacher of their children. On the contrary, I think the sense of a common suffering might bring us closer. If they know that I, like them, also face discrimination at some points, might enable them to feel better that they are not the only ones who are facing such unpleasant situations. Besides sharing my own experiences, more importantly, I need to be able to empower them to overcome this sense of loneliness and any acts of unfair practices. I must be able to help them make constructive decisions and to fight and stand up for their rights. The children were very surprised and curious that I also face unpleasant situations some days of my life. But more importantly, I showed them that we need to use our education to make our stand and not to be marginalized and being trampled upon because we kept quiet.

Recognizing the Wealth of Funds of Knowledge in the Home

A very important part of our work was ensuring the documentation and discussion of the observed funds of knowledge that were evident in the homes of our refugee families. In this section Mimi describes her observations.

Each time I step into the house, Brian who gets home earlier than Terese, will either be carrying Maria, the 2 year old girl or sweeping the floor. He said that it was his turn to take care of the baby when he comes home from school. His step father will then go to work. As I worked with the kids, the younger brother, Eric kept coming into the room asking for supplies like pencils, markers or paper. The little girl too will totter her

way into the room. It is very interesting to observe the responses of the older children. Instead of chasing them out of the room, they tried to accommodate whatever the younger siblings wanted. The observation of these behaviors, voluntary or involuntary, the emotions of the family, interpersonal relationships, the thoughts and beliefs; all these factors can be effectively established when we work in the home. The interruptions during my lessons with the children allow me to understand better their personalities and also the dynamics of the family. For instance, as we were working on a piece of writing, the little brother came into the room asking for a pencil. There was no extra pencil but the older girl went to great lengths hunting for one while the older boy offered his pencil and said he could use his pen instead. This little episode speaks volume about the sense of responsibility of the older children and also the type of relationship among the siblings.

Floyd Tenery (2005) writes about the interactional and dependent roles played by different family members in sustaining the household. Children play an important role as well. The children in the family visits performed adult-like roles of cooking, cleaning, babysitting and translating. In the example given previously we can see this truth being displayed. The strategies of survival are present all the time in the lives of these households. The need to sustain the household economically is exhibited in household behaviors such as sharing household chores. More often than not, this may result in the less than desirable behavior in school when these children come to school. Sometimes they appear tired and listless, they fall asleep and for some, homework is not completed. As teachers we are guilty of jumping to erroneous conclusions regarding such children. To better understand their students, teachers need to visit the families and observe what goes on in the homes of these families. They will then realize that the student might be

doing his homework while balancing a baby on his hip, or another student trying to write a composition while she kept having her train of thoughts interrupted by a 3 year old sibling.

As I was about to leave the house, Terese took some food and walked to the neighbor's house. I asked her why and she answered that the microwave in the house was not working and they had not had it fixed for a while. She was going to warm up dinner for the family. "They don't mind you doing that?" I asked. "No, they (the neighbors) come over to use our washing machine," she answered.

Such patterns of interaction within immigrant communities are commonplace (González, Moll and Amanti, 2005). The families depend heavily on their social networks, extended families and communities to cope with the consequences of unemployment, economic difficulties and even discrimination. Children are exposed to this intricate network at a young age and learn to relate at a variety of levels with adults as well as children in their lives. Sometimes, this social network also provides moral support especially when the parents are out working for long periods of time.

Instead of my going to help the family and teach the children, I learn something new with each visit. These visits are precious lessons which I will never be able to learn had I stayed in the classroom. As I make my visits, I am a teacher and a learner, an insider and outsider. Only by experiencing the same living conditions and constraints of these families can a teacher truly understand the daily struggles faced by our students and their families. In this learning process, I hope to be able to transfer what I learned to the classroom, as a teacher who does not perceive my students with prejudiced social and cultural perspectives, but one who is empathetic, resourceful and truly effective.

Connections to the Classroom – Excerpts from Christina's Journal

Because our work took us into the homes of the refugee families, our debriefing sessions constantly drew us to discussions about relevance and practical applications to the classroom. In the next sections, Christina and Sara dwell on classroom connections.

In my last journal entry I wrote about my enlightenment on teaching literacy in the appropriate context for learners. This is something that my classmates and I have discussed at great length during our EDCI 7660 classroom discussions. We also have read several articles about the significance of the interaction between the teacher and learner. It is clear to see how this type of instruction comprises good teaching practices to use in the family literacy sessions. But it is important to me, as an ELL educator in a public school, to transfer this knowledge to my regular teaching activities. Currently I am not teaching students, but I am reflecting on my teaching practices for the past few years. It is rare that I have shifted my instruction from the curriculum model that our school has in place, to meet the needs of my students individually. I can see the challenge and the effort that would take place to do this on a consistent basis. This is why I am thankful for the experience that I have had with this family literacy project. I believe that if I had read these articles and participated in EDCI 7660 discussions without being truly engaged in this type of work, I may have been skeptical of the results. I believe my experience with the Vandas family helped contribute to my understanding of Dalton and Tharp's (2002) article, *Standards for Pedagogy: Research, Theory, and Practice*. The teaching and learning principles that are explained in the five standards are very helpful in designing instruction to meet the needs of all learners.

As I planned my "Shopping" lesson for Mildred, I can see the influence of the principles explained by Dalton and Tharp. During this shopping activity, Mildred was to look through grocery store sales papers and circle the pictures of the items that she would like to buy. In this activity Mildred was pretending that she had a limitless amount of money to spend. After she identified the items, Mildred was to read the word or name the item, and write the item on her shopping list.

This activity was designed to teach literacy in a familiar context for Mildred. As the mother and manager of the household, she does most of the shopping for the family. This activity follows Standard 2: Developing Language and Literacy across the Curriculum and the indicators for this standard. Throughout the lesson, Mildred was able to use vocabulary that she recognized and she used this vocabulary both in oral and written form. The activity also followed Standard 3: Making Meaning: Connection School to Students' Lives. This lesson very practical and real life for Mildred. Even though she shops weekly, she has much vocabulary to build in the context of grocery shopping. Mildred was very motivated to participate in this activity, for it was designed for her specific needs.

Dalton and Tharp (2002) explain, "When teachers draw on the real-life experiences of their students, the explicit connections between students' experiences and language, literacy and academic knowledge are made clear" (p. 186). The shopping lesson is an example of this teaching principle and has direct applications for our work in the school classroom.

From Sara’s Journal

As I read this article by Quintero (1994), I am reminded again of the importance of using students' culture and home values as a foundation for teaching in an ESOL classroom. Students, especially ESOL students, come from backgrounds very different from our own. When we do not have knowledge of a family's culture it is hard to accommodate to the needs of or be sensitive to different values and ways of learning. As I've progressed through my first semester in the ESOL program I have become increasingly aware of my need to become more familiar with and aware of each of my individual students' cultures and families.

Working with the Assadis family has been an eye opening experience. I will admittedly confess to being guilty of criticizing families for not "being involved" in their child's education as indicated by failure to turn in homework, read at home, or come to school functions. But what I've realized, is how complex these processes can be for families of ESOL students. The Assadis family lacks many resources needed to facilitate school involvement as defined by many teachers in the classroom setting. When parents are not able to read homework or fill out forms, don't have a car to transport them to their child's school, and don't have resources readily available to help students to read on a daily basis certain expectations can not be met. Even as an educator fluent in English, it was difficult for me to ensure that the needs of all five of the Assadis children were met every night I visited. Children many times were not well prepared in the classroom to complete homework without lots of support from me. Letters from school piled up in the children's bookbags knowing that the mother Sofia could not understand what was said. In addition, both the mother and father are not familiar with the idea of continuing the educational process at home through homework and additional reading. They had

assumed for years that all of these things were taken care of either during the school day or within the after school program. As a result the students' needs slipped through the cracks and nothing was addressed until I came to the house and gained a better understanding of what was happening in the home.

The Assadis family have needed many things outside of simple literacy and language instruction. They have needed transportation assistance, help finding jobs, help understanding bills and other letters in the mail, and many other types of advocacy that requires that I go beyond the expectations of this class in order to ensure that all the family members are taken care of. Until educators can have experiences that help them understand all these needs, they cannot be optimally effective in the classroom. Understanding a family, their culture, and their funds of knowledge can be a long process. When a teacher has a classroom of 18 or more students, it can take days and days to make a complete round of home visits. This becomes increasingly difficult knowing that such visits aren't always accommodated by the school itself. Sometimes it becomes the responsibility of each individual teacher to make the decision to do so. Until it becomes public knowledge that cultural differences dramatically affect student learning, and major steps are made to understand these things that affect the learning, a wave of change cannot happen. Although I plan to take many more steps to help make this happen, I am glad that I have had the opportunity to improve the education of one family through awareness and understanding.

Post Practicum Reflections – Applications in the Classroom

One of our teachers was being interviewed for a job and was questioned about her practicum work. The teacher was advised to engage in something that had more direct applications to the classroom if she wanted to be hired in the field of ESOL. The comments of the teachers that follow elucidate the important applications of our work to their current teaching contexts one year after thy had completed their practicum.

Beth

It has been about a year since our Funds of Knowledge Project was completed. Since then I have had the opportunity to use my research in various and unexpected ways. My teaching style, planning style, and overall approach to teaching have changed. I have had the opportunity to offer my professional expertise in staff development and peer settings as well as help a friend who has been working with a refugee family.

The most important aspect of the Funds of Knowledge project is the impact on learning. In most cases as teacher researchers we are looking for an impact on learning within the family unit. In this case the impact was not only measurable in the family with whom I worked, but also there was a tremendous impact on me. I have learned that every person brings with them a wealth of knowledge into the learning environment. As teachers we must tap into that knowledge in order to personalize the learning experience as well as provide motivation. In my classroom my teaching perspective has changed from one in which I planned lessons according to GPS standards based on what my children *need* to master to one that builds on the GPS standards they have already mastered. My efforts have proven to be successful. My students are able to approach a task with a sense of know how rather than a 'What are we supposed to be doing?' stance.

I have also had the opportunity to share the Funds of Knowledge research with my peers and it has truly been an empowering experience for me. People are interested in what I know, and they respect my Funds of Knowledge. This experience has solidified the positive influence that Funds of Knowledge pedagogy has on a learner. When learners feel validated they are able to participate in the learning environment freely and without fear.

Sara

I've always believed myself to be a compassionate and understanding individual. But no matter how empathetic I wanted to be toward the families I worked with, I never truly understood. I come from a middle class home. My mother was a middle school teacher and my father was a business owner. Although I was never the smartest in my class, school certainly wasn't a huge challenge for me. My parents went to every conference night, checked our report cards each time they came home, helped us with homework, and escorted us to sports and music practices every week. So as much as I wanted to understand why my students' parents weren't as involved as I wanted them to be, I didn't. Because each time I would encounter these situations I would become frustrated, wonder why ***they*** were making things so difficult for ***me***, and then go about my routine without a change.

What I should have been asking myself was why ***I*** was making things so difficult for ***them***. The Bosnian refugee family I worked with came home from school around 5:00. The mother was ill and had a difficult time taking care of herself, let alone her 5 children. She could read very little English and relied heavily upon her children for

support. We would spend hours trying to resolve problems with bills, rent, or medical appointments. All the while trying to make sure the children were fed and completed their homework- which quite often I struggled to understand. There were a couple instances during my time with the family when one of the children didn't come home on the bus because they went to an after school activity that the mother had signed for her to do- but didn't remember or understand exactly what or when it was happening. These parents loved their children. They did all they could to protect them and keep them safe. The mother often expressed fear and concern about allowing her teenage daughter to attend school functions. Her only connection to the outside world was often news reports which displayed violence and crime throughout the city. All of these issues were things that got in the way of the traditional culture of school that I'd been accustomed to for so long, and never thought twice about. However, I myself, who did know exactly what each school letter meant, and could help the children with their homework, felt overwhelmed many times when I walked into their home for my weekly visits.

I'd find myself getting frustrated with the children's teachers, wondering why they couldn't give the family more support and understanding. How could s/he go through half a year and not go out of the way to contact the parents? Then I'd go back to my own classroom, collect homework early in the morning, notice again that the same little girl hadn't completed hers, and realize I had yet to meet her parents. So the question then was no longer what the family can do for me, but what I can do for the family.

This year, after I'd gotten my class roster, I spent time making sure that my welcome letter was translated so that all parents could read and understand the classroom procedures. I also had generic behavior and homework notices translated and made sure

every parent scheduled a conference with me- even if that meant my coming into school at 6:30 a.m. or staying until 6:00 p.m. Children are now allowed to check out books from my classroom on a nightly basis, each have a CD with a collection of stories, and CD players they can check out as well. This year, 2 months into school, I can guarantee that I have not only met every parent, but have done so at least 3 times, and was sure that at least one of those meetings was 30 minutes or longer. I am sure to let my parents know that I am there for them and that I need them and their expertise as parents to help their children. I receive letters or get visits from at least one child's parent almost daily asking a question or explaining a situation. The letters are not usually written in English and I have to work to figure out what it says, but it feels so good to know that a trust has been built that allows the parents to feel comfortable enough to reach out. We learn from each other, and I truly believe that the families I work with have a lot to teach me and I think that attitude makes all the difference.

Mimi

Instead of trying to educate the family to fulfill the requirements of the school, I have learnt that I ought to influence the school to better understand and respond to the needs of the family. My role as a teacher will be to connect what happens inside the classroom to what happens in the home. Instead of trying to "fix" the family, I need to strengthen the "fit" between home and school.

I tutor some inner city kids, most of whom come from impoverished or broken homes. Work with the refugee family had given me the courage to venture into these neighborhoods I once never imagined stepping into. Secondly, I have learnt to look out

for any signs of the "funds of knowledge" that the families may have. To capitalize on the knowledge and resources that the student and the family already have, allows me to help them achieve literacy success. A simple task like picking the appropriate books to read to them and making meaningful connections from the stories to their life help them focus better and maintain their interest in the program. To be able to make the connection to their lives beyond the classroom makes these children want to come back week after week.

Participation in the family literacy project helped me make powerful connections between my academic readings and the harsh realities of the lives of refugee families. My first lesson was the unlearning of my stereotypical prejudices of minority groups like refugees and immigrants. I learned not to view the language minority students I work with as deficient or in need of "fixing". My physical presence in the home opened my eyes to the abundance of the "funds of knowledge" that I should capitalize to achieve literacy success in a multiracial classroom. The twelve weeks that I worked with the children reaffirmed the fact that literacy teaching and social politics are not and never could be mutually exclusive (Pennycook, 1999).

Concluding Remarks

Working in homes is a very different setting from teaching in the classroom where we are the leaders. At home the family is in control and the parents are the authorities, we are guests. As educators, we had to learn how to traverse this new terrain where the rules are different from the classroom. The family life and family needs take precedence over the lesson. The curriculum is not necessarily based on standards that all

must attain but is derived from the families' identified goals. We often have to sit while family events take over from a lesson. We learn to be humble as we sit on the floor to teach, help with the baby, entertain a toddler or participate in the family meal. We learn to respect families for what they are and who they are. We learn to value them as people. In return, we grow as people and as educators as we understand that the children who sit in front of us every day, come from homes like these. These homes are after all, very much like ours.

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