

HW 4.3: Article - The World Outside and Inside Schools: Language and Immigrant Children

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I was honored to have been selected as the DeWitt Wallace–Reader’s Digest Lecturer for the 1998 AERA Annual Meeting. I was particularly grateful for the opportunity to talk and write at some length about a subject that greatly concerns me. As you will note from the title of my article, my topic is the education of immigrant children. It is a topic that is very much a part of our national conversations as we seek to come to terms with the challenges facing our educational institutions at the end of the 20th century and as we observe that the school population in this country has become increasingly diverse.

In coming to this country and adjusting to American schools, immigrant students and their families travel very long distances. These distances are physical, emotional, and psychological. And for many of these individuals, the journey from where they came from to becoming “American” will take a very long time indeed. What has become increasingly clear in recent years, however, is that newly arrived immigrants from non-English-speaking countries encounter serious problems within our educational system. The dilemma facing schools is a difficult one. Students who arrive in this country must learn English. They cannot be truly accommodated by the schools until they are able to profit from instruction conducted solely in this language. At the same time, there is much confusion in educational circles and in the public mind about how students can best acquire the academic English skills required to succeed in school.

The purpose of my article is to try to bring to you not only a notion of what some of the distances between homes and schools, countries and cultures involve but what it means for youngsters to arrive at school with-out knowing English. I will describe two middle school students—Lilian and Elisa—who arrived in this country in the summer of 1991 and enrolled in a school in the greater Bay Area. I will talk about who they were and what they expected when they came to school, and I will describe their English class and their subject matter classes and tell you about their successes, their frustrations, and their failures. I will also talk about the community in which these girls lived, about their homes, and most especially about their mothers. Finally, I will use their lives and their experiences as a lens through which I will examine both the policy and the instructional dilemmas that now surround the education of immigrant children in this country.

Immigrant Children Inside and Outside Schools

Lilian and Elisa were two of four children who took part in a study that I began in 1991. The larger study focused on two males and two females. It took place during a two-year period and involved three middle schools, four newly arrived Latino focal children and their classmates, four different English language teaching specialists (ESL teachers), and numerous subject matter teachers who had the focal children in class. It also involved interviews with school personnel, with students themselves, and with their parents.

The study's purpose was to examine how children who arrive in this country with what I call "zero" English acquire English in schools. What I wanted to know is: Why is it that so many non-English-background students fail to learn English well enough to succeed in school? To answer this question, I selected a middle school undergoing rapid population shift and students who—at the ages of 12, 13, and 14— were no longer little children. I had been concerned that all too often discussions of newly arrived immigrant students tended to focus on young children and did not take into account the fact that very large numbers of students arrive in schools in early adolescence. In this article, given the limitations of space, I will talk only about the two young females who were involved in the investigation.

The Setting for the Study

I call the town in which the study took place Mission Vista. It is located in California, in the greater Bay Area. Beginning in the late 80s, Mission Vista schools experienced a rapid population change. Large numbers of Latino immigrants of largely Mexican background moved into the community primarily because of the availability of apartment rentals. The arrival of Mexican immigrants from a largely rural background was felt in many ways by the community. Large sections of the town suddenly took on a different character. An area of apartment buildings that were built as luxury rentals 20 or 30 years ago became the heart of the immigrant community. Blocks and blocks of two-story apartment complexes were slowly neglected by their owners. Swimming pools were emptied or boarded over. Buildings were not repainted. Two or three families often occupied a single two-bedroom apartment, and dozens of young children played in the dirt and mud surrounding the rundown buildings. Old cars lined the streets, and mothers pushing strollers—with three and four young children in tow—could be seen walking many blocks to the grocery store. On weekends, very large extended families invaded the city parks and took over the picnic grounds and the grassy areas for noisy games of soccer. Togo's and Safeway found themselves competing with hole-in-the-wall Mexican restaurants and tiny grocery stores. Permanent residents were not prepared for the changes when they happened. What had once been a largely middle-class community saw itself slowly sliding into an identity that it did not want. Very few things appeared to be sacred.

As compared to the area of Mission Vista where the immigrants have settled, the part of the city where the middle school is located is made up of pretty, tree-lined streets and well-

cared-for parks. The area is zoned exclusively for single-family homes, and there is evidence everywhere of comfort and affluence. Homes are surrounded by large yards and neat lawns. Late-model cars are parked in driveways, and children ride expensive bicycles to school.

The school that I refer to as Garden School is a pretty school. The buildings, while not new, have been recently painted. The grounds are clean, and the playing fields surrounding the school are well maintained.

As is also the case at other schools in which population shifts have rapidly changed the composition of the student body, there were tensions at Garden School. In the three-year period immediately preceding my study, the increasing number of non-English-background children had made demands on the staff and on the curriculum that had not been anticipated. Because of the increased enrollment of non-English-speaking children, for example, the single ESL (English-as-a-second-language) teacher had been joined by a colleague. Together, the two ESL teachers served every child in the school who was not yet fully fluent in English. Their classes generally enrolled 35 to 40 students.

Overall, the administration had worked hard to try to provide a program in which beginning and inter-mediate English learners could have at least some access to the curriculum. They had designed an English-learning core, and they had made an effort to provide other “real” subject matter courses for these students. While many of the teachers who had never worked with English language learners still refused to work with such children, it is noteworthy that a number of subject matter teachers in science, math, and computers offered “sheltered” content classes at different levels—that is, subject matter classes that were especially designed to meet the needs of non-English-background students. At Garden, then, beginning English learners, who could understand almost no English, could take classes in science, math, and introductory computers. As might be imagined, given the fact that such “sheltered” instruction is recommended only for intermediate learners of English, the challenges faced by these content teachers were many.

During the years in which I carried out research at Garden School, it was very much a school in transition. It was in the process of changing from a main-stream community’s sole public middle school to a multi-ethnic, diverse institution. White children, who until a few short years before had felt comfortable and safe at Garden, suddenly shared a campus with students very different from themselves. White parents became worried. They were afraid of lowered academic standards, of the problems that might accompany non-English-background students, of gangs, of violence, and of interethnic romance.

In a very significant way, Garden School is representative of schools all over the country that are changing as a result of the dramatic increase of diverse populations in many communities. Its almost all-White faculty had little experience with diversity.

According to one teacher who worked closely with the Latino community, most teachers at Garden could predict few of the problems their new students would encounter. Most knew little about poverty.

They had little notion of why working parents might not be able to make midday appointments with their children's teachers. They suspected disinterest, apathy, and even antagonism and were baffled and troubled by the failure of these parents to "care" about their children.

The new students, on the other hand, did not quite yet know how to be American middle school students. They knew little about school spirit. They were not sure why being in bad or in chorus or in the computer club might be important. They frequently confused teachers' friendly demeanor with permissiveness, and they quickly found themselves in trouble. They understood little of what went on around them and often they became discouraged and disinterested.

Lilian and Elisa

Lilian and Elisa are now young women of 18 and 19 with whom I have kept in close touch over a period of almost seven years. I have grown very fond of them and of their families. Some of this fondness will show though in this article. I do not claim detached objectivity. Rather, I claim to have had the opportunity to go beyond what most children show to adults in their schools and, for that reason, to be able to bring to you some special insights about how other young people like them may make the transition into our world.

Lilian

When I first saw Lilian, I must admit that I had to look twice. The new sixth grader was very blonde and very blue eyed, and if I had seen her walking in the corridor and not in the beginning ESL classroom, I would have assumed that she was a local youngster of European-American extraction. Lilian was then 12, big for her age, and quite aware of her effect on the young male students in the class. She was from a small village in the state of Jalisco, close to the city of Guadalajara. The village from which Lilian came is a small one, and Lilian had never traveled to even the county seat a few miles away. She knew about Guadalajara because many of the villagers went there to work for periods of time. But in general, in Mexico, this 12-year-old had been a little girl. She played and ran and went to school. She did not consider herself to be a newly budding adolescent. She was very homesick when we first talked, and she missed the smells of her village as well as her friends.

Lilian was the third in a family that included a brother, 17, a sister, 14, and twin brothers who were then 10 years old. Since their arrival in the United States, Lilian's mother Sonia had just given birth to a new baby girl.

When I assessed Lilian's English abilities, they were indeed close to zero. She knew a few

words of English—"dog," "cat," "ice cream"—but it was apparent that she understood very little. Her reading and writing abilities in Spanish were, however, much better than I expected. Lilian had been in fifth grade in Mexico, and she read aloud quite completely in the singsong style typical of some rural schools. But she did read, and she did understand what she read.

She also wrote quite competently—that is, words were properly segmented (a major problem for young people learning to write in Spanish), and what she wrote expressed real meaning. When I gave her an English young people's magazine and a science text with lots of pictures, Lilian tried to apply her word attack skills in Spanish in order to read in English, and of course the words made no sense.

But when instructed to do so, Lilian was also able to hypothesize about what the articles were about and about what they probably said on the basis of her real-world knowledge. She could also (when taught how to do that) skim for cognates and also make hypotheses about meanings based on the use of such familiar words. In sum, Lilian brought with her important reading and writing abilities. She commented, however, that she had not been a very good student in Mexico and that she did not like her last teacher because she punished the students often.

Elisa

In comparison to Lilian, 13-year-old Elisa was small and dark complected. Her high cheekbones and very straight black hair reflected her Indian heritage. Elisa was from Honduras, also from a small village and also newly arrived. She and her sister Elvia (12) had been living with their grandmother for the past eight years. Their mother, Magda, who had been living in this country for the same period of time, had finally been able to send for the two girls.

Elisa, like Lilian, was also homesick. She missed her grandmother, her school, and the places that they went to in Honduras. Like Lilian, in Honduras, Elisa was not aware that she was an emergent teen. She was a child and treated like a child by her grand-mother and the rest of the family as well as by teachers at school. Elisa recalled that she liked school in Honduras and that what she missed most was not being able to go home at noon, have lunch, and then return at 2:00 p.m. for the afternoon session that ended at 5:00 p.m. In her new American school, the days seemed incredibly short. When school ended, both Elisa and her sister would walk home, where they would spend the rest of the afternoon and evening alone, waiting for their mother who worked a late night shift. Both girls were very lonely, and often days would pass before they really saw their mother.

In Honduras, Elisa had completed sixth grade. Elisa's reading skills were noticeably stronger than Lilian's, but her writing abilities appeared to be much the same. This is not surprising, given the fact that the new emphasis on writing is only now beginning to be

discussed among the scholarly community in Mexico and Central America. For Elisa and Lilian, writing had been used primarily for copying assignments, copying texts, and perhaps for taking dictations.

Original writing was very rarely done.

Like Lilian, Elisa knew very little English when I first assessed her proficiency. She could say more words in English than could Lilian, and she could respond to questions like “what is your name?,” “What is your mother’s name?,” et cetera. She could not, of course, produce those same questions herself. Elisa commented that her learning English was very important to her mother. By now, her mother spoke English quite well and insisted that both children watch only English language television when they were at home. Often she would speak to the children in English, telling them to close the door, to go to bed, to wash the dishes, and so on. Elisa was eager to learn English and to please her mother.

The ESL Program at Garden School

Considering the fact that until two years before, non-English-background students who enrolled at Garden School were sent home at noon because appropriate instruction was not available, administrators were rightfully proud of the program that they had implemented. In talking about their efforts to serve non-English-background students, the very knowledgeable assistant principal commented, “What we have is not perfect. We know that. But it is so much better than what we had before. We are taking only small steps.”

The English-as-a-second-language (ESL) program at Garden was divided into four levels. These levels were beginning ESL, intermediate ESL, advanced ESL, and transition-to-mainstream. All ESL courses intended for non-English-speaking students enrolled youngsters who were in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. There were no single-grade ESL or sheltered courses at Garden School. Moreover, there was little mobility between levels. As far as I could determine, a previous all-English instructional background (i.e., five years of all-English schooling) was not considered sufficient for entry into “main-stream” or non-ESL levels at Garden School. Main-stream English teachers, I was told, were especially reluctant to have even highly proficient English-speaking immigrant students in their classes and preferred them to be placed in the ESL sequence. They worried particularly about the “errors” that were still present in these students’ English language production and about their own ability to work with such youngsters effectively.

Placement in the ESL program at Garden School depended on a number of factors. However, most students who stated on the home-survey instrument that they came from homes where a language other than English was spoken were generally placed in the ESL sequence. In theory, the school used both home language surveys and an approved instrument to assess language proficiency and to place students in an appropriate program. Because of the large number of students entering the school and because there was little

time available between the time that students registered for school and the time that school began, most students were placed in courses at Garden School before their English-language proficiency was formally assessed. In general, all students whose English had not been assessed by the school or district before, who were newly arrived, and who indicated that a non-English language was spoken at home were placed in the beginning sequence. If it was later determined by the student's performance in the classroom or by the test—when it was finally administered—that a student belonged at a higher level, he or she was then moved to the appropriate classes in the sequence.

To be fair, however, Garden School was struggling to implement both ESL and subject matter instruction. A number of important steps had been taken. A new ESL teacher had been hired. Sympathetic subject matter teachers had been identified, and attempts were being made to reach out to other “main-stream” teachers to convince them to work with less-than-perfect speakers of English.

In general, the ESL program itself was traditional. In class, students used a standard set of grammar-based texts that nevertheless included a number of activities intended to be used in developing communicative competence. Overall, however, students worked primarily on language structure: sentences, vocabulary, verb forms, and the like. Activities carried out in the classroom were generally not communicative in nature and work focused almost exclusively around copying vocabulary lists and copying sentences.

Two Schools in One

Over the two-year period in which I visited the school on a biweekly basis, what struck me, in particular, was that non-English-background students generally stayed together. Elisa and Lilian, for example, had three periods of beginning ESL core, followed by sheltered math, by P.E., by lunch, by sheltered science, and by cooking. As might be imagined, the only other children enrolled in these classes were other English-language learners. In practice, what this meant was that there were two schools in one.

English-language learners interacted only with each other and with teachers who taught their courses.

They did not know or interact with students of whatever background who were already speaking English.

While understandable and justifiable, the result of this two-school division was that children like Lilian and Elisa had few opportunities to hear English from peers. Moreover, if their subject matter classes put them into working groups with other English learners who often spoke Spanish to one another, they had little opportunity even to listen to the teacher's English for a sustained period of time. It was possible for Lilian and Elisa to be at school all day, to be enrolled in an all-English program, and to hear very little English indeed.

In many ways, the program that Garden School administrators had designed for new immigrant students was frustrating for both teachers and students.

This was especially the case for the teachers who attempted to teach subject matter to the students who were newly arrived. Armed with a summer's training in "sheltered English"—that is, in tailoring their English to a level that learners might understand—they were both optimistic and enthusiastic. They truly hoped that they would be able to give these students access to academic content. It was especially discouraging, then, for these teachers to discover that the pedagogies that they used in teaching science or social studies—which encouraged questioning, critical thinking, and collaboration—often fell flat in "sheltered" courses. Because students understood so little English, much energy was dedicated to trying to communicate such trivial instructions as how to fold a paper to prepare for an activity or in explaining what book to open, where to sit, and whom to work with. At the end of the period, it was frequently the case that these very brave and noble teachers were totally exhausted.

For children who could not yet understand English and whose ESL classes did not focus on quickly building their comprehension skills, the experience was often baffling. Latino children, who were used to teachers who are strict and who demand both silence and respect, had trouble reading the signals of those teachers who seemed nice, who wanted to be liked, and who wanted to make learning fun. In some classes, students refused to be quiet, traded insults in Spanish with each other, and simply ignored the monolingual English teacher as she sought to "shelter" instruction. They wrongly assumed that the teacher was weak rather than kindly.

It was not uncommon for the ESL teachers to have 35 or 38 students in the classroom. Frequently, new children came in the middle of the year. These children had often just arrived in the country and did not have even the little exposure to English that the other students in the class had. The problem was made even more serious when children who had never attended school before needed to be placed with children who had regularly attended schools in their home countries.

The teachers cared deeply about the students, but there were too many students, not enough support, and not enough previous training. It was easy for children to get lost in the group and for teachers to have little sense of how much English they actually knew. All that they could consistently see was their students' performance on structured text materials or on the proficiency tests required by the district. Teachers had no mechanism for determining how well students could use English in the school context to obtain and process subject matter information in English because there was little communication between themselves and the regular-content teachers.

As a result, there was little opportunity for ESL teachers to evaluate how well their instruction was preparing their students to succeed in school. Immigrant students were seen by regular or mainstream teachers as the exclusive concern of the ESL teachers and the handful of other teachers who had agreed to work with them.

The ESL Classroom

The students who were part of the beginning ESL core in which Elisa and Lilian were involved were tall and short, fat and thin, neat and disheveled, and as young as 11 and as old as 14. The core consisted of three consecutive periods in which students worked with the ESL teacher on both English and social studies and included youngsters in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Some boys had clearly grown to their full height and were typical adolescents in orientation.

They paid much attention to the well-developed, sophisticated girls in the room who constantly fiddled with their hair and nails. Other boys and girls were still children. Twenty-eight out of the 30 students in the beginning ESL core were Latino and Spanish speaking. One was Japanese, and one was Taiwanese. All students sat four to a table for most of the activities during the three periods.

There were many similarities and many differences among the students enrolled in the beginning ESL classroom. Some students had just arrived from Mexico or Central America during the summer. These students were, in general, more well behaved than others, a bit more quiet and attentive, and overall still somewhat unsettled. Many of these students were extremely homesick and eagerly talked about their old schools, their old neighborhoods, and the grandparents and other relatives that they had left behind. Some sat in their seats woodenly, not participating. Others watched the more established students carefully and often imitated their behavior closely. The newly arrived students were almost without exception at "zero" English.

Other students in the beginning ESL classroom, on the other hand, seemed to function to some degree in English. They clearly understood what the teacher said and could respond in a chorus to the questions asked of the entire class. From my observations of these latter students over the course of the year, I concluded that these "not-at-zero" students included two major groups of students: (a) students who were considered behavior problems and who were placed in the beginning ESL class as a punitive measure in spite of their proficiency in English and (b) students whose English still showed many limitations but who varied immensely in terms of their varying Proficiencies. Many students in this latter group had been in this country since the elementary school years, while others had been in this country only a year or two.

Many of the seventh and eighth graders in this group had been in the beginning ESL class at Garden School the previous year. We later learned that the "normal" path at Garden for all but the most out-standing students was to spend two years in the beginning class (with a different teacher each year) and a final year in the intermediate class. Few students moved to the advanced ESL class, and even fewer were ever exited from the ESL program.

Federico and Sergio, for example, were typical "punitive" ESL students. Federico wore dark

baggy clothes and rarely spoke. When told to do something, he sat still and did not respond. The teacher usually repeated her request several times. I was told that he was a habitual truant of about 15, a gang member or gang wannabe, and a student whom other youngsters feared or respected. No one appeared to know how long he had been in the United States, but it was clear—even from his studied lack of response—that he understood English well. Sergio, on the other hand, was a mischievous, outgoing troublemaker who was constantly talking. In order to control his behavior, the teacher had isolated him in the back of the room. Nevertheless, he insisted on responding to all questions asked of the entire class in a very loud voice. It was clear that he could function quite well in English and that he could use this language both to annoy and even to ridicule the teacher.

I was never able to determine exactly why the other students who had some English proficiency were retained at the beginning level. It could be that the testing instruments that were used in the school were not sensitive to particular kinds of growth and development. It could also be that, because the teacher wanted to conduct the class entirely in English, she depended on students who already understood the language to translate and interpret for newly arrived youngsters.

Elisa and Lilian at School

Both Elisa and Lilian made friends at school. After the initial culture shock, they appeared to adjust nicely. Both girls liked their teachers very much. Elisa, especially, grew angry when other students were disrespectful. She could not understand why other children behaved that way. She paid careful attention in class, worked hard on her projects— whatever they were—and was very serious about making a good impression.

Lilian, on the other hand, seemed to enjoy social interactions with her peers more than making a good impression on her teachers. She was frequently late for school in the morning, and in class she often seemed distracted and a little bored. Elisa was placed in the middle group early in the year, while Lilian remained with the lowest group the entire nine months of the first year.

On any given day, observations of Elisa and Lilian in their classes revealed two very different ways of responding to school and to the classroom experience. Elisa, for example, sat quietly in her place and occasionally looked up shyly at the teacher. During the first year of the study, she would rarely raise her hand or volunteer an answer. She seldom talked to the other students at her table but worked carefully and deliberately on her assignments. Inevitably, she would be the last in the class to turn in her maps, her copied sentences, and her other work.

As compared to Elisa, who could go unnoticed in the classroom for days at a time, Lilian found every excuse to get up from her seat. She sharpened her pencil, walked to the waste basket, and took detours around the room. During whole-class activities, for example, when

the teacher read picture books aloud to the class, she folded her hands and looked out the window. During group work, she dawdled, day-dreamed, and finally got to work. Often she would be confused about the instructions and would loudly ask students at other tables to explain what to do.

Frequently, she engaged in angry quarrels with other girls in the room. The teacher was convinced that Lilian had a learning problem and hinted that she should be put in special education.

Teaching English

For the greater part of the year, during the beginning of the first period, the ESL teacher would “work” with the entire class. She spoke exclusively in English about general activities coming up (e.g., parent-teacher conferences, school games, books that could be ordered through the Weekly Reader program, contributions to the Thanksgiving food drive). These remarks were generally aimed at the mid- and high-level beginning students in the class who had some comprehension abilities in English. No attempt was made to adjust the level of English, to provide some type of advance organizer that would allow the very beginning students to have a sense of what to listen for, or to use these presentations to have students develop strategies in listening comprehension. Elisa seldom looked up when the teacher was talking. Lilian made signs to her friends across the room, whispered until reprimanded, or fidgeted. From time to time, one of the beginning students would whisper a question in Spanish to more fluent students about the teacher’s remarks.

The teacher would stop her presentation and remark, “I do not hear silence.”

“Hearing silence” appeared to be very important to the teacher. For example, she did not encourage the volunteering of answers when she asked a question of the entire class. Each student was expected to respond only when called on. Most responded with single-word utterances. Talking was also discouraged between activities, when students moved from their seats to work with the teacher aide at her work station or at the table with the teacher. Interaction was also discouraged for students who remained at their seats. Even though the desks were set up to form working tables of four students, no group activities involving collaboration took place. Students were expected to work silently in completing their assignments.

Very little practice of oral English went on in the classroom. The students were not taught basic expressions for giving and asking for personal information, for carrying out interactions with teachers and classmates, or for getting along in the surrounding community. Many hours were spent with students filling out work sheets that had pictures of objects. Students would examine a picture, fill in the blank in each sentence (e.g., “This is a boy”), and color the picture of the boy. The teacher considered it valuable for newly arrived students to color many small pictures with crayons. She was under the impression

that most of these students had missed an important developmental step because they had not colored as children.

Direct language instruction consisted of six or seven students working with the teacher or the teacher aide at a table as they pointed to objects in the book and called out words or sentences. The rest of the students remained at their seats and completed even more work sheets. No instruction in reading was provided, and the only reading materials available to students were story books for very young children and the Barnell-Loft series of readers designed for special education students who are native speakers of English. Only a few of these class texts were available; more advanced students used them to read the texts' brief passages. They entered their answers to the multiple-choice questions after each passage using specially prepared answer sheets.

Lilian usually daydreamed at her seat, copied work from the students around her, and colored pictures with very little interest. Elisa, on the other hand, carefully copied sentences down in her notebook, looked ahead in the textbook, and asked to be allowed to hear the tape that accompanied the textbook. She often repeated new vocabulary words to herself as others worked with the teacher in the front of the class.

During the segment of the beginning ESL core dedicated to social studies, an attempt was made by the teacher to cover some of the content covered by the regular sixth grade. In order to cover the topic of communities, for example, the teachers had students draw maps of their communities and neighborhoods. Because the very complex explanations for drawing maps were given in English, the newly arrived students were seriously confused. Whispered explanations were given by the more proficient students who understood the teacher's directions. To me, it was evident that the English-only rule was possible in this classroom because half of the students already spoke some English. Without the presence of ad hoc interpreters in the room, the teacher would have had to work very hard indeed to communicate even simple directions exclusively in English.

The policy of placing beginning students in subject matter classes (e.g., math, science) in which teachers attempted to simplify their English also did not appear to be successful. For example, all beginning ESL students (regardless of previous math ability) were placed in a math class taught by a special education teacher. A loving and dedicated woman, the math teacher was constantly overwhelmed by six, seventh, and eighth graders with sophisticated math backgrounds who mocked students who were barely beginning to learn their multiplication tables.

Students called out humorous remarks in Spanish, laughed, and were otherwise disruptive. Used to teachers who demanded respect and discipline, the young adolescent males could make little sense of a kind and permissive teacher who attempted to bribe them with popcorn parties.

Sessions involving the use of manipulables, which the teacher designed to explore mathematical concepts, deteriorated into noisy games.

The earth science class was no better. The teacher, who had arrived in this country from Taiwan without speaking English, struggled valiantly to explain concepts using line drawings on overheads and repeating definitions many times. The students I questioned understood little. They were confused by the hands-on activities and could not make sense of the textbook from which they were expected to draw their answers. As in the math class, the students were bored and disruptive. The boys especially enjoyed making slightly off-color remarks intended to embarrass the girls.

During the course of the year, the eagerness of the newly arrived youngsters gave way to vacant expressions. The students who had looked forward eagerly to school in the United States were disappointed. Even they knew that they were not making much progress.

During the two years of the study, the students that I shadowed developed very different levels of English-language proficiency. Elisa—who was pushed by her mother—attempted to speak English whenever she could. She battled the ESL teachers, arguing that she was ready for regular classes and enlisted my help. I attempted to help her as much as I could and provided her teacher with samples of Elisa's written English, recordings of her language assessments, and other evidence of her very strong progress. The ESL teacher was not impressed. Elisa had not finished the text materials in her beginning ESL class—and, English proficiency notwithstanding, she could not be placed in the transition-to-mainstream core or even in advanced ESL.

Fortunately for Elisa, the school enrolled even more immigrant students during her second year at Garden.

As a result, she was placed in a regular math class, where at least she had the opportunity of interacting with regular English-speaking students. The work—especially after the multi-level math class of the year before—was incredibly challenging for Elisa. Writing long prose answers to “problems of the week,” in which she had to explain her reasoning in English, was an almost impossible challenge. The teacher offered very little help. Like many other mainstream teachers forced to take English-language learners, she simply directed her class at the ability levels of her mainstream students.

By comparison with Elisa, Lilian learned little English.

Her sense of identity and her presentation of self to her peers required that she not accept the judgment of her teachers about who she was and what she could do. Becoming even more rebellious and out-spoken, she joined a gang, started fights, and angrily moved about the school.

At the end of Lilian's first year at Garden, the family moved to another neighborhood, and the feisty youngster transferred to a new middle school, where she was once again placed in a beginning ESL program. At the new school, which I call Crenshaw, she was placed in a self-contained program in which 28 English-language-learner students, age 10-14, remained in the same classroom for the entire day. They had no contact with the other children or

with other teachers. At the end of seventh grade, Lilian had not made much progress in English. She understood very little and appeared to have much less interest in trying to understand than she did the first months that she was here.

The Communities and the Homes

Lilian and her family lived in a particularly crowded apartment complex on a short dead-end street. The street was full of dilapidated cars, and on most afternoons clusters of men stood outside one or another of the buildings and talked and laughed. These were the men who didn't have jobs and who every morning would walk several miles to congregate on the corner of a busy street, hoping that they would be hired for a day's labor. When they were unsuccessful, they returned to their apartments and attempted to pass the empty hours talking to each other and hoping that the next day would bring them better luck.

Lilian lived in a three-bedroom apartment that was shared by two families and other relatives. These included Lilian's family of eight, her dad's brother, his wife, their child, and two adult male cousins who were single. Thirteen people shared a single bathroom. Lilian's father, Tito, had been in the United States for almost 10 years. He was here legally and worked for a service. He had lived the life of a cyclical migrant—that is, over a number of years, he had gone back and forth to Mexico, spending seasons there and then returning. In 1991, Tito was finally able to reunite his family. A new baby was born, and the children were enrolled in school. The children, however, had not lived with their father in a very long time. They struggled to get used to him again, and he, in turn, struggled to learn how to be a parent in this country. Needless to say, there were many tensions and problems in the family.

Sonia, Lilian's mother, is a pretty woman who after only a few short months here began to understand how different life was from how she had lived in Mexico. She knew well that her husband's salary could not stretch to pay the \$800 rent for the apartment. She understood that they had to share the space with other people, and she tried desperately to find work. But Sonia knew little English. There was not much that she could do. Through a neighbor, she found work with a woman that had a house-cleaning service. During the period of the study, she cleaned houses whenever she could get her sister-in-law to keep her baby. For each house that she cleaned along with a team of two other women, she was paid \$5.

Sonia understood very little about how American schools worked. In her mind, schools were like the schools in her village. Because of her own life, because she came from a world in which poor village people do not have much social mobility, it was hard for her to understand how going to school might really make a difference in her children's lives. At the very most, she could imagine that by staying in school, her daughters could work in jobs in which they might have a better chance of finding good husbands. Lamenting her own problems, especially her husband's drinking, she wanted both of her daughters to find good men.

Sonia also knew very little about the dangers her children faced on an everyday basis. When her oldest son Juan became involved with a gang and was shot in the shoulder, she did not know what the gangs really were. She did not suspect that Lilian would become involved with one of her son's new friends and that soon she, too, would see herself as a gang member. But Lilian—whose neighborhood and the school became her real world— did indeed become deeply involved in gang activities. In school, she dressed in gang colors, attacked other girls, had fights, pulled hair, and sat sullenly in class. In a very few months, the angelic little girl with blonde hair wore bright-red lipstick, puffed-up bangs, and a lot of anger. It was as though she simply tuned school out. Her head was with the group of kids known as sureños (southerners or newly arrived Latinos), who reject the norteros (the Americanized Latinos), who, among things, speak English well.

Sonia was called about Lilian's fights, she was visited by a counselor, and she tried her best. She knew that her daughter should not be fighting in school and that she should not be using bad language. Tito was not much help. The tensions in the marriage grew stronger. Living in close quarters with other adults was hard. Tito and his brother would often leave the house on the weekend and return after they had too much to drink. The children were frightened, and Sonia fought with her husband frequently.

The demands on Sonia were extraordinary. She worked and took care of most of the household jobs. She had to worry about Lilian's older sister, who was seeing a young man, about her twins, and about her oldest son, who was in frequent fights. Life in Mexico did not prepare her to deal with the problems that she was facing. She felt guilty because she was letting her children down, because she did not know how to help them, and because she did not have time to go to school and learn English.

Magda, Elisa' mother, also wanted good husbands for her daughters. But she had been in this country a long time, and she was beginning to understand how things worked here. She had come initially to the New York area, where her father lived, and there enrolled in English classes at night. When she moved to Los Angeles two years later, she could make her-self understood in English very well. Six years after that, Magda could negotiate almost every inter-action in flawed but functional English. She was determined that her daughters would learn to speak the language well and that they would not have heavy Spanish accents.

As a single parent, Magda had to work at several jobs. Once her daughters got here, the pressures on her became enormous. She worked the late shift in a factory, took care of a sick old man on the weekends, and cleaned houses most weekend mornings. Often she would leave before the children woke up and return long after they had gone to sleep.

Elisa and her sister Elvia lived their lives by very strict rules. They went home immediately after school, could not have friends over, and could not go out-side at all. They could sit in their apartment, watch television, and do their homework. Magda called from work whenever she had a free moment.

At school, Magda was well known. From one of her employers, Magda heard that it was

important to go to school often, to meet the girls' teachers, and to be present for all open houses and special meetings. All the teachers, then, had met Magda and treated her cordially. The fact that she spoke English and that she volunteered occasionally in one class or another made her very different from other Latino mothers. One teacher was so impressed with Magda that she had convinced herself that this struggling immigrant woman was a very educated professional who worked in the computer industry.

The fact was that Magda tried as hard as she could to get every piece of information that could help her children. When we met, she soon deluged me with questions. It was obvious that she knew little about what the ESL program was, what "sheltered" classes were, and how her children were doing. At the beginning of the second year of the study, she happily shared with me the fact that Elisa was now in all "regular" classes. Unfortunately, this was not true. Elisa had been mainstreamed in math, and she was taking choir, but she was still in intermediate ESL, and her science class was also a non mainstream, sheltered science class. She was not even close to being mainstreamed.

I explained the difference between mainstream instruction and her daughter's placement to Magda several times and shared with her details about how Elisa was doing in class. It was not easy, however, for Magda to understand the subtle labels of the classes that designated very different school realities.

For a while, Elisa called me almost daily and to ask for my help. Magda drove her to my house when she could, but she disapproved of Elisa's dependency and did not want her to become used to always getting help. I could not persuade her that my own son, who was a sophisticated English speaker and also in middle school, needed help from us every day. I tried to explain that, in many cases, assignments are made that children will not be able to do without adult help. Magda looked at me incredulously; she could not imagine that teachers would expect that all children had families that could help them.

Sophisticated as Magda was, it was a superficial sophistication. She knew only a little about how American life worked and was, for example, deeply in debt. She applied for several credit cards, and— before she realized it— she spent much more money than she could afford. Like other immigrants, Magda did not quite understand a lot of things that seem straightforward to those of us who have been in this country since birth. She understood only enough to get by sometimes and not others. For example, she was offered a job as a teachers' aide in a neighboring elementary school by school personnel who had been impressed by seeing her at Garden School. She took the job five mornings a week and soon found out that to keep the job she would need to get her GED. But she did not know what a GED was and how and where she would go to get one. She had smiled during the interview and said that indeed she had begun to take community college classes and would soon get her GED. But it took me many hours to explain how high schools work in this country, what a high school diploma is, and how people can work on their GEDs. When she finally understood, Magda seemed quite positive that she could do well on whatever test was required. She felt that her only problem was writing in English—writing defined as spelling and vocabulary.

As it turned out, Magda worked as a teachers' aide for only a few months. It became evident to the teachers that she lacked many essential skills and abilities in academic English and Spanish and that she had trouble helping the children with even beginning reading and writing. Magda was somewhat upset but determined to move forward. By then, she had bought a GED book and had begun attending the self-paced program at the local adult education center. Soon, however, she felt over-whelmed and could barely make it through a page or two at a time. She felt embarrassed that Elisa appeared to know much more than she did. Telling herself and all of us that she would return after she took some more ESL classes, she dropped out of the program and enrolled in an ESL grammar class at a local community college. Several weeks into the quarter, Magda had dropped out again. The teacher found much fault with her spoken English, and Magda could make little sense of the principal parts of the English verbs.

Today, almost seven years after the study began, a lot has happened in the lives of both Elisa and Lilian and their mothers. Sonia is still working cleaning houses, but the family has moved away to another side of town, away from the intense gang activity. They have purchased a small house, and the family now includes Lilian's older sister, her three-year-old child, Lilian and her baby; the older brother, the twins, and the little sister.

Lilian did not finish high school. Like Garden School, the high school that she attended was carefully divided into two schools. Lilian was in the ESL track, where she once again had several periods of instruction focusing on English vocabulary, English structure, and English reading. Her subject matter classes were remedial, taught in slow and simplified English, and aimed at students who, like her, had very little exposure to academic content in the middle years. Lilian was bored, frequently absent, and, while less rebellious, still completely uninterested in school. Her quinceañera party was the highlight of her sophomore year. Soon afterwards, she dropped out to live with a 28-year-old man and his family. She considered herself married and often called me to tell me about her life. Two years ago, the couple separated. Lilian's new baby is the product of another relationship. Unfortunately, the baby's father returned to Mexico before the baby was born.

Lilian is not defeated. The strong fighting spirit is still there. She loves her baby son and is determined to make it. At the moment, her English, though limited, is good enough for her to work at a fast food rest au-rant. Attractive and outgoing, she had told me that she had many opportunities to hear English. Her long-term plans include going back to school and perhaps becoming a beautician.

In comparison to Lilian, Elisa has learned a lot of English. Nevertheless, she has had to struggle to escape what I have come to call "the ESL ghetto." Fortunately for Elisa, she is both strong and deter- mined. For example, when the Garden School ESL teacher did not recommend her for mainstream placement at the high school level, Elisa enlisted my help to register her in another area school where her ESL record would not follow. Interestingly enough, we were successful in registering her in a new school, and Elisa entered a college-bound program in which she was considered to be a regular student. After two years of high school in the Bay Area during which she was enrolled in all mainstream classes, the family

moved to the Miami area where, once again, she was enrolled exclusively in mainstream classes. While in school, she worked as a cashier and as a baby-sitter and struggled to keep her grades up. During her senior year, Elisa took ACTs and SATs and prepared for college. In June of last year, having decided to attend school in California, she moved back to the area, rented a room from a former teacher, and started work at several different jobs including baby-sitting, tutoring Spanish, and working for a software company.

In September, she took the regular English placement test at a local community college, intending to enroll in a few courses at a time. Unfortunately, Elisa was not permitted to register for classes. Apparently, non-English-background students cannot be placed in the writing sequence using the regular-English placement test. Because Elisa's test revealed that she is not "really" a native English speaker, she was told that, in order to enroll, she will need to take the ESL placement test and register for ESL writing instead. The tiny flaws in English that did not prevent her from maintaining a "C+" average in high school were nevertheless unacceptable to community college teachers. Elisa was told that until the time that she finished the sequence of ESL courses, she will not be eligible for enrollment in credit-bearing, college-level instruction in the regular English sequence. Not surprisingly, Elisa was devastated by the recommendation.

When Elisa shared her experience with me, I must confess that I felt outraged. Like middle schools and high schools that isolate students in ESL tracks, the community college level also appears to have created an ESL sequence where the mainstream faculty can once again put non-English-background students in the care of language specialists. It does not matter that these non-English-background students are fluent English speakers who have already demonstrated their ability to do academic work in English. Regular teachers still do not want to be made uncomfortable by these students' slightly flawed English.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The school experiences of Elisa and Lilian, their successes and their failures, have much to tell us about the lives that immigrant children live. They also have much to offer us as we debate policies about the design of educational programs, about teacher preparation, about testing, and most important, about the role of English in the education of newly arrived children.

The school that I have described to you here was coping with a sudden change in student population, with tenured teachers who did not want to deal with immigrant students, and with angry White parents who worried about standards and safety. The problems faced by the school in serving two very different populations of students were not simple. It is certainly tempting to place blame. The students are the wrong students, and the teachers simply do not care.

Rather than placing blame, however, I would like to situate the questions and problems

surrounding the education of immigrant children in a much wider context. It is my position that in order to appreciate the complexity of these issues and to evaluate the different available approaches to resolving existing problems, we must examine the ways in which the same or similar problems are present elsewhere in the world. In this particular case, the issue in its broadest sense has to do with educating children who arrive at school speaking a language other than that used in school to impart instruction. From a worldwide perspective, the problem is a common one. Few nations are either monolingual or mono-ethnic.

With few exceptions, each of the world's nations has groups of individuals living within its borders who do not speak the societal language or who may speak it with limitations and who use other languages in addition to, or instead of, the societal or majority language to function in their everyday lives.

Within the last decade and a half, numerous countries around the world have grappled with questions surrounding the choice of language to be used in the education of what have been termed "linguistic-minority children." Publications focusing on language policies in education number in the hundreds and include examinations of language and education issues in Africa (Bokamba, 1991), India (Dua, 1991; Srivastava, 1988), the Philippines (Smolicz, 1986), Spain (Siguan, 1983), Australia (Kalantzis, Cope, & Slade, 1989), Germany (Raoufi, 1981), Belgium (Roosens, 1989), Jamaica (Craig, 1988), and Switzerland (Kolde, 1988). Additionally, a number of publications have examined specific aspects of education and language policies affecting linguistic minorities. Tosi (1984), for example, examined the entire issue of immigration and bilingual education in the European context. Churchill (1986) focused on the education of both indigenous and immigrant linguistic minorities. Spolsky (1986) focused on language barriers to education in multilingual settings, and Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) and Skutnabb-Kangas and Cummins (1988) examined minority education and community struggles for educational rights around the world. More recently, Glenn and de Jong (1996) have investigated policies and practices used to educate immigrant children in 12 different countries including Canada, Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, the United States, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Norway.

What is clear from this research is that in countries all over the world, children who do not speak the societal language face many difficulties in schools. It does not matter whether these youngsters are the children of indigenous minorities whose presence in a particular area of the world predates the formation of given nation-states or whether these youngsters are the children of newly arrived and often unwelcome immigrants. At school, Maori children in New Zealand, Lappish or Sami youngsters in Finland and Sweden, Turkish children in Germany, Algerian children in France, Pakistani children in England, and Mexican children in the United States all face similar difficulties. They do not speak the language spoken by their teachers at school.

The problem is not simple. Indeed as Churchill (1986, p. 4) has pointed out, linguistic and cultural minorities have recently emerged as a central concern for educational policy for almost all OECD member countries. What is evident from the examination of changing and shifting policies surrounding the education of immigrant children around the world is that policy development has often been the result of acrimonious national debates concerning the capacity of countries to assimilate very different people, the place of noncitizens and alien residents in a particular society, and the role of education in socializing new immigrants. In spite of important differences in specific circumstances, the questions surrounding the education of immigrant children are generally the same in many different parts of the world (Glenn & de Jong, 1996; Herriman, 1996; Lambert, 1994; Paulston, 1988; Thompson, Fleming, & Byram, 1996).

Questions about appropriate or effective educational practices are necessarily embedded in larger questions concerning national identity and the responsibility of governments in educating immigrants.

In the United States, the same questions have surfaced in debates surrounding the education of the children of immigrants. Beginning during the times of increased immigration from southern and eastern Europe at the turn of the century, we have been concerned about these new Americans. In the early part of the century, for example, we worried about immigrants' ability to understand and embrace the principles of democracy. Language, however, did not move to the foreground as a single central element but was seen rather as part of the process of Americanization (Bodnar, 1982; Dinnerstein, 1982; Fass, 1988; Handlin, 1951/1973, 1979, 1982; Olneck & Lazerson, 1988; Perlmann, 1988; Spolsky, 1986).

More recently, English itself has taken on greater importance in discussions surrounding the education of immigrant students. As Paulston (1986) has argued, at different points in time, groups in multi-ethnic societies can mobilize around symbols such as language or religion for particular purposes.

Language can thus emerge as an important rallying point in boundary maintenance, as a way of defining "us" in comparison to "them." According to a number of scholars (e.g., Adams & Brink, 1990; Barron, 1990; Crawford, 1992; Daniels, 1990), efforts surrounding the establishment of English as the official language of the United States involve such a mobilization around language and reflect a concern— similar to that seen in Europe— about the ability of the United States to assimilate large numbers of very different groups of people.

Given this national climate, the teaching and learning of English has emerged as a central topic in conversations regarding the education of immigrant children. Indeed, "teaching" and "learning" English are very much a part of our current national conversations surrounding the education of immigrant students. Newspaper reports (e.g., Asimov, 1998,

Bazelev & Aratani, 1998), for example, often quote individuals who argue that children should simply be “taught” English or who claim that they as young children “learned” English easily. What is not very clear is exactly what the public understands by “to teach” and “to learn” English.

Part of the difficulty is that most policy makers and members of the public have little information about what actually happens in schools. In spite of that fact, however, far-reaching decisions are often made about immigrant children, about how they should be educated and about which language should be used in their education. In the current context in which anti-immigrant sentiment is at an all-time high, newly arrived children are routinely accused by the general public of not wanting to learn English and of failing to profit from the education that the state is giving them at great cost. Among policy makers and administrators, debates center around ideologies concerning the English language and its place in educational institutions.

There are many things, however, that these legislators do not know. They do not know, for example, that—as was the case for Lilian and Elisa—in many all-English programs, children have very little access to English. Because members of the public have no sense of the fact that, in many schools, English language learners are segregated from their English-speaking peers, they imagine that non-English-speaking students have the opportunity of interacting with English speakers, of working collaboratively with such youngsters, or even of hearing large segments of connected discourse in English. Policy makers do not know that the English that newly arrived students hear often consists exclusively of bits and pieces of artificial-sounding language used in drills in their ESL classes or of the somewhat distorted language of the content teachers attempting to use “simplified” English to give students access to the curriculum.

As the experiences of Lilian and Elisa make evident, moreover, the relationship between teaching and learning a language is not straightforward. Lilian and Elisa and their classmates were, in fact, engaged in the process of acquiring English as a second language. However, this process, rather than simple and well understood, is considered by researchers to be extraordinarily complex. Equally complex is the question of what kinds of classroom and school conditions can bring about the most rapid and most effective development of a second language.

Recent summaries of research on second-language acquisition (August & Hakuta, 1997; Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994; Ellis, 1990; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Pica, 1994; Skehan, 1989; Spolsky, 1989) conclude that there is much that we do not currently know about the process of teaching and learning another language. We do know, however, that unlike the learning of a first language—which is accomplished successfully by all normal human beings—there are many individual differences in the learning of a second language. For reasons that researchers do not well understand, many, if not most, second-language learners do not acquire native-like proficiency in a second language. This is true both for learners who attempt to study a foreign language primarily in a classroom setting as well as for learners who use their second language in their daily lives for many years.

Interestingly, however, members of the public— even those who have been relatively unsuccessful as language learners—often have strong ideas about what language learning means. Many believe, for example, that drill and practice or grammar instruction are essential for language learning in older children and adults. Many even believe that the process of acquiring a second language can take place in a very short time.

Not surprisingly, given that these are complicated questions, there is little consensus about these issues within the research community (August & Hakuta, 1997; Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994; Skehan, 1989; Spolsky, 1989). Indeed, there are many disagreements about factors that are thought to result in variability in outcomes in second-language acquisition, such as age of acquisition, language aptitude, intelligence, attitude toward the target language and its speakers, extroversion/introversion, risk taking, field independence, and anxiety.

As might be expected given the existing uncertainties about the process of second-language acquisition, there is also little consensus about methods, materials, and approaches to the teaching of second languages. Both foreign language professionals and English-as-a-second-language specialists have many questions about the kinds of classroom climates that can best support language learning as well as about the appropriate goals of language teaching. These questions, according to Pica (1994) and Ellis (1990) include the role of drill and practice in second-language teaching, the effects of error correction, the benefits of explicit grammar instruction, the benefit of group work, and the importance of genuine communication and interaction in the language classroom.

For non-English-background students like Elisa and Lilian, whose future depends on the teaching of English, these questions are crucial. How well this teaching is done and how successful schools are in creating a context in which students have access to English during the school day will determine to a very large extent whether these youngsters acquire English at all.

As we saw in the case of Elisa and Lilian, in spite of their three-period-a-day ESL class, they had very few opportunities to interact in English with native English speakers. Most interactions took place at a ratio of 1 to 30 or 35. The rest of the time, they were engaged in seat work focusing on vocabulary. Little went on in the classroom that could prepare the students to develop the kinds of proficiencies they would need to succeed in other classes. The teacher's goals and objectives for her class involved following the textbook, teaching English-language forms, and sometimes merely keeping the children quiet.

What is evident from observations of Lilian and Elisa is that simply presenting English forms and having students memorize vocabulary may not result in the outcomes that the children themselves, their families, or the public is expecting. Elisa worked as hard as she could and, in essence, taught herself. Lilian sat in class, heard English, and learned little. What I am suggesting is that, in order to prepare these students to succeed in school in subject matter courses that are taught in English, a clear and unambiguous set of language learning

objectives must be put forward in spite of existing uncertainties about the process of second-language acquisition and in spite of debates about best methods and practices.

In mandating English-language courses for immigrant students, policy makers must move beyond the simple assumption that any ESL course is, by definition, a good course. There is much that we already know about the kinds of English language proficiencies that students must develop in order to succeed in school. Over the course of the last 15 years, a number of researchers have examined the language demands of all-English classrooms and the effect of particular language teaching practices on academic achievement. From Wong Fillmore (1982), for example, we learned that in order to participate in the life and work of schools and to learn academic subject matter, immigrant students must develop two fundamental skills in English: (a) They must be able to comprehend the spoken language of their teachers as they explain and present instruction; and (b) they must comprehend the language of textbooks from which they are expected to read. As we saw in the case of the sheltered subject matter classes at Garden, Lilian and Elisa and their classmates could not make sense of earth science or math because they could not comprehend either the language of the teacher or the language of the textbook.

English-language instruction, then, must build on existing research and on current thinking within the ESL profession about what immigrant students need.

The current ESL standards for pre-K-12 students, for example, directly address the confusion surrounding the goals of English study by delineating progress indicators of English-language development for ESL teachers and administrators. These standards specify the language skills that English-language learners need in order to have “unrestricted access to grade-appropriate instruction in challenging academic subjects” (TESOL, 1997, p. 1-2) and stress that learners need to develop English proficiency in order to participate in social interactions as well as to achieve academically in all content areas. Specifically, the three goals of English-language learning involve (a) using English to communicate in social settings, (b) using English to achieve academically in all content areas, and (c) using English in socially and culturally appropriate ways. The standards stress that English-language learners must develop abilities to request and provide information, to paraphrase a teacher’s directions, to work successfully with partners, to negotiate and reach consensus, to compare and contrast information, to read and get meaning from texts, to gather evidence, to prepare and participate in debates, and to edit and revise written assignments. They must, moreover, be able to choose language variety, register, and genre as appropriate to the interaction, interlocutors, and setting. They must respond to humor, express anger, make polite requests, carry on small talk, and recognize and use idiomatic speech.

The Politics of Teaching English

Setting out a clear and unambiguous set of learning objectives for English-language

learners is an important first step. However, there is much more to consider in implementing programs designed to teach the English language to immigrant students. Within recent years, for example, a number of scholar-practitioners who are part of the ESL and English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) professions (e.g., Bhatt & Martin-Jones, 1992; Corson, 1997; Fairclough, 1989; Kaplan, 1997; Penneycook, 1994; Tollefson, 1991; Wallace, 1992) have attempted to point out to their colleagues around the world that the teaching of English is not neutral. They have argued strongly that the key tenet of the discourse of ESL teaching—that it is possible to just teach language—is untenable because it is impossible to separate English from its many contexts.

Working within the framework of critical pedagogy and critical language awareness, these scholars view schools not as “sites where a neutral body of curricular knowledge is passed on to students,” but rather as “cultural and political arenas within which various political, cultural, and social forms are engaged in constant struggle” (Penneycook, 1994, p. 297).

Fairclough (1989), for example, points out that these struggles are often obscured. Individuals of good will are not aware that they have become instruments of dominant interests. They are seldom conscious of the fact that power is exercised both through coercion and through consent and that, in many cases, people “consent” to preserving the status quo and to maintaining existing power relationships simply by accepting established practices without question.

In examining the politics of English-language teaching, a number of individuals (e.g., Penneycook, 1994, p. 14) have argued that in both English-speaking and non-English speaking countries, English is one of the “most powerful means of inclusion into or exclusion from further education, employment or social position.” For immigrants to English-speaking countries, then, access to English becomes essential. Unfortunately, according to Tollefson (1995), many English-language educational programs, such as those aimed at Southeast Asian refugees, frequently offer instruction primarily focused on “survival” English that directly channels such immigrants into low-paying jobs. Similarly, school programs aimed at immigrant students—as we saw in the case of Elisa and Lilian—while they may make use of a rhetoric of equality and opportunity and claim to prepare students for academic success, are seldom based on an ethical understanding of how education is related to broader social and cultural relations.

In spite of the complexity of the problem of school failure for nonmain-stream children, those concerned about its remediation have focused on attempting to change particular aspects of the institutional and instructional contexts—as I myself have done in proposing precise learning objectives—in the hope that such changes will bring about increased school success. While aware of the structural factors that frame the problem, these researchers and practitioners represent the tension that Carnoy and Levin (1985, p. 4) have described as existing between “the unequal hierarchies associated with the capitalist workplace” and the democratic values and expectations associated with equality of access to citizen rights and opportunities.”

ESL teachers in schools. therefore, frequently promise what they cannot deliver. They suggest that academic success is possible for large numbers of children who are poor and disadvantaged and who do not have access to the kinds of cultural capital valued by schools. Critiquing the notion of language acquisition as a predominantly psycholinguistic phenomenon, Penneycook (1994), for example, argues that language—rather than isolated from social, cultural, and educational contexts—is at the center of questions concerning education and inequality. Unfortunately, as Tollefson (1995) has pointed out, most teacher education programs in ESL have focused on second-language acquisition, teaching methods, and linguistics without placing these fields in their social, political, and economic contexts. For many scholars (e.g., Tollefson, 1995), applied linguistics and language teaching must undergo a critical self-examination. They argue that central concepts in applied linguistics reflect a particular ideological perspective about power relationships. As a result, English-language educators adopt uncritical positions about the value of English and about the place of ESL teaching in the schooling of language-minority students. They often view language as a formal system for study rather than something that is located in social action. They do not see that language is always situated within larger discursive frameworks and, as Penneycook (1994, p. 34) put it, is “part of the cultural and political moments of the day.”

From the perspective of theorists working from a critical perspective, ESL classrooms, like all classrooms, are sites of struggle. Auerbach (1995, p.12), for example, maintains that if classrooms are seen through an ideological lens, the “dynamics of power and inequality show up in every aspect of classroom life, from physical setting to needs assessment, participant structures, curriculum development, lesson content, materials, instructional processes, discourse patterns, language use and evaluation.” Textbooks, for example, often become the curriculum itself, and the teacher’s goal is to cover the material, not to uncover what students want to say or what is important to them. Problems are seen to reside in students and not in text materials or in the decision made by the teacher to focus on rehearsing correct forms as opposed to generating new meaning, sharing information, opinions, and experiences. Much classroom activity is limited to a focus on the basics—i.e., pronunciation of isolated forms, memorization of vocabulary items, practice of grammatical structures. The mastery of basics is seen as a prerequisite to creative communication, and there is no acknowledgment that forms and expressions rehearsed in class actually inculcate norms and social relations.

Equally important and equally political is the fundamental question of which language to use in the teaching of English. As Auerbach (1993, 1995) has argued, little research has been done on the effects of using English exclusively in ESL contexts. Nevertheless, most practitioners view it as a natural and common sense practice. Indeed, as Phillipson (1988) points out, the ELT (English-language teaching) profession is currently guided by the views adopted at the Commonwealth Conference on the Teaching of English As a Second Language held in Makerere, Uganda, in 1961. Phillipson (1988, p. 249) formulates these views as follows:

English is best taught monolingually.

- The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker.
- The earlier English is introduced, the better the results.
- The more English is taught, the better the results.
- If other languages are used in classroom, the standards of English will drop.

Auerbach (1993) further maintains that while there is no evidence that the exclusive use of English results in greater or more complete acquisition, there is significant evidence against the use of English only in the classroom. Citing studies by a number of researchers (D'Annunzio, 1991; Garcia, 1991, Klassen, 1991; Rivera, 1988, Shamash, 1990), Auerbach maintains that the exclusive use of English in the classroom results in nonparticipation by students, language shock, dropping out, frustration, and inability to build on existing native-language (L1) literacy skills. The use of some of the students' native languages in the teaching of ESL, on the other hand, has been found to serve as a natural bridge for overcoming problems of vocabulary, for validating learners' lived experiences, for increasing the level of trust between teachers and students, for making rapid gains in English-language development, for monitoring comprehension, and for obtaining information on about the metacognitive aspects of language.

Auerbach (1995) concludes by saying:

Despite the fact that use or prohibition of the L1 is often framed in purely pedagogical terms, clearly it is also an ideological issue. Ironically, often the very people who argue vehemently against the English-Only movement on a societal level insist on the exclusive use of English at the classroom level. My point here is that there are two sides of the same coin: Insistence on English in the classroom may result in slower acquisition of English, a focus on child-like and disempowering approaches to language instruction, and ultimately a replication of relations of inequality outside the classroom, reproducing a stratum of people who can do only the least skilled and least language/ literacy dependent jobs. (p. 27)

Issues surrounding the choice of standards of selection for ESL teachers have also been examined by a number of scholars. Kaplan (1997), for example, points out that many individuals who are currently working as ESL or EFL teachers have received little or no training. In many areas of the world, the mere fact that they are native speakers of English qualifies them for employment as language instructors. He stresses the fact that "Some graduates of training programs have not been taught much, and even some teachers have penetrated the field without any training at all" (p. xx).

Toward A Critical Pedagogy in ESL

In imagining the teaching of English for the Elisas and the Lilians of the world, I envision a critical pedagogy that, as Simon (1986) has pointed out, does not merely involve helping students to "make it," but rather involves trying to change the ways students understand their lives and the possibilities with which they are presented. Critical language study,

according to Fairclough (1992, p. 7), is “an orientation towards language” that “highlights how language conventions and language practices are invested with power relations and ideological processes which people are often unaware of.” It would be important, for example, for Elisa to examine exactly why ESL ghettos exist and to find a voice with which to name the very powerful and real barriers that stand in the way of her dreams.

Penneycook (1994, p. 299) points out that in order for ESL teachers to move beyond where they are now, they must ask themselves “what sort of vision of society” they are teaching toward. Moreover, they must have an ethical understanding of how education is related to broader social and cultural relations.

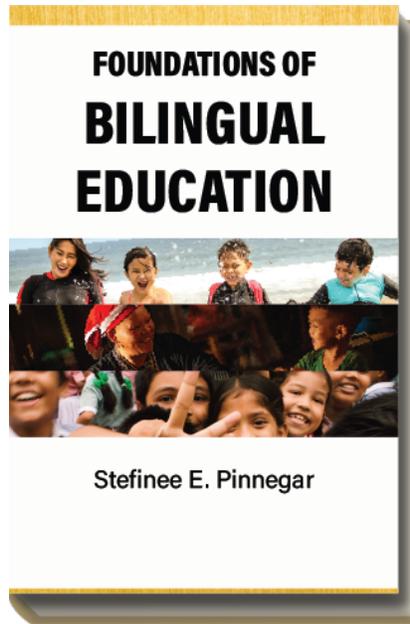
He argues that a critical practice of English-language teaching must begin by critically examining and exploring students’ knowledges, histories, and cultures in ways that are both affirming and supportive.

Teachers must work to help students develop their own voices—not what has been termed the “babble” of communicative language teaching, but voices that are tied to a vision of possibilities. In sum, they must help students find and create insurgent voices, voices that question the reality that surrounds them.

According to Kaplan (1997, p. xxi), teachers must begin by refusing to use intellectually impoverished materials, to teach syllabi based on irrelevant assumptions, and to teach in programs that intentionally mislead their clients, promising more than they can possibly deliver. Kaplan’s indictment includes a criticism of teachers who do not read, who make no sustained effort to learn, and who do not grasp the place of language in the total curriculum.

Final Words

The teaching of English to immigrant students, rather than a straightforward and unproblematic practice, is a contested site in which there is a struggle about the role and the future of immigrants in our society. As Americans, we can decide not to address these larger issues and to proceed with our discussions about how many years to teach English. We can pretend that programs, methodologies, and pedagogies are entirely neutral, and we can refuse to examine ESL ghettos, poor teaching, and the isolation on of English-language learners in our educational institutions. Schools like Garden will continue to be effective in separating the new- comers from the regular students, in keeping them out of trouble, and in helping them to accept their place in society. If what we want, on the other hand, is to develop the full intellectual potential of all of our citizens and future citizens, the challenge before us is enormous. We must plan carefully, and we must work quickly. There are many Lilians and many Elisas in today’s schools who deserve a chance to contribute fully to our society and who still believe in the American dream.



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