To Build a Culturally Sensitive Educator: A Clinical Model Highlighting the Importance of Innovative ESL Strategies in Early Field Placement Classes Teaching ELL Middle Level Students

Patricia Walsh Coates
Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, Kutztown, Pennsylvania, United States

Abstract—With the growth of diversity in twenty first century classrooms, teachers increasingly need to demonstrate and understanding of cultural dimensions, particularly language diversity, from a variety of perspectives to be effective in classrooms. Pre-service educators in particular need to understand the importance of language when providing high quality educational experiences for our nation's children and must be able to articulate the relationship between critical pedagogy and educational curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. By modelling various strategies in the college classroom, teacher candidates gain a better understanding of the socio-cultural and academic instructional needs of English Language Learners in content area classrooms.

Index Terms—second language pedagogy, teacher preparation, second language teaching and learning strategies, clinical field experiences, curriculum

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2010, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education released a policy brief outlining the importance of a strong clinical experience for pre-service teachers. Arguing that knowing content knowledge is important yet not sufficient enough for effective teaching, the brief points to the need for a solid, diverse clinical experience for teaching candidates early in their program. Three critical features of this type of preparation consist of: (1) a tight integration between course work and clinical work in schools, (2) an extensive and intensive supervision of the clinical field placement, and (3) close, proactive relationships with schools that serve diverse learners effectively and develop and model good teaching. In addition, teacher candidates should strive to "contribute to the development of classrooms and schools that value diversity and civic-mindedness." ("American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education Policy Brief," 2010)

This paper outlines the following: program design, cultural considerations, various socio-cultural strategies in the college classroom, and ELL strategies in the middle level classroom.

II. DESIGN MODEL

Program Design

The Secondary Education Department at Kutztown University of PA, one of the fourteen universities in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, recognized the need for an earlier, and more diverse, clinical experience. Realizing that secondary education teaching candidates did not get consistent supervision until student teaching, we created a new model which would provide a supervised clinical experience starting with their acceptance into the education program through their capstone student teaching placement. The reason for the restructuring of courses was twofold; first, it created a seamless, less repetitive program that provided teaching candidates with the ability to reflect about student learning early in their coursework, and also allowed pre-service educators, the majority whom were Caucasian, to be exposed to the diverse cultures which enrich in Pennsylvania public schools. Research has indicated that programs offering short-term cultural immersions have raised the cultural awareness of pre-service educators. Such experiences (Willard-Holt, 2001) enhance the candidate's knowledge of other cultures and heighten their conceptual awareness of student academic and personal growth and interpersonal connections. Similar, shorter programs had proven successful in the past. (Stachowski & Mahan, 1998; Wiest, 1998). Our goal was to provide a sustained experience of observation and classroom interaction.

The restructuring of the program resulted in the creation of two new courses, Principles of Learning and Principles of Teaching. Both courses are six credit clinically-based classes that examine various aspects of education theory and

practice. Principles of Learning is a six credit clinically based course that examines how aspects of learner language, culture, prior knowledge, and experience influence the learning process in the school setting. This course provides a bridge between theories of learning and current practice by placing teaching candidates in a weekly, supervised experience. Teaching candidates meet for 6 hours each week, in two three-hour blocks. During the first block, candidates meet on campus with their professor, providing the theory-based component of the course. The second block takes place in a secondary school setting. Students in this course observe in one of four middle schools chosen for their diverse population. Harrison Morton Middle School & South Mountain Middle School, in the Allentown Area School District, has a student population consisting of 63% Hispanic with 80% eligible for free or reduced lunch. The two middle schools in Reading School District, Northeast and Northwest, consist of 76% Hispanic students with 80% eligible for free or reduced priced lunches. The University community partnership is mutually beneficial; pre-service candidates receive an early immersion experience with diverse populations while middle school students spend time with college students who often serve as role models and mentors. This proves to be an important collaboration since studies have shown Latino students often do not seek or complete college programs because they lack an understanding of how to prepare for college or remain goal oriented. (Gandara, 2010)

Principles of Teaching, taken second semester junior year, provides teaching candidates with a common language to talk about teaching and clear, concrete levels of performance for teaching candidates to use in reflecting upon the work of the classroom teacher. The goals of the Principles of Teaching course include having candidates develop lesson and unit plans aligned to state and national standards, utilizing techniques of grading and evaluation appropriate for an inclusive classroom, analyzing data to make instructional decisions, and identifying instructional research-validated literacy interventions to identified student needs. Once again, candidates spend three hours on campus discussing general methodology and then an additional three hours in one of four rural or suburban high schools.

Lesson Design

While pre-service candidates are not working directly with English language learner populations in these placements, they are required to create lesson plans that take language acquisition into consideration. The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model, designed by the Center for Applied Linguistics, is a research-based instructional model that requires pre-service candidates to consider language and culture when planning instruction. The SIOP Model for lesson creation consists of eight components: lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice/application, lesson delivery, and review & assessment. By incorporating and connecting each of these components, pre-service educators are able to "design and deliver lessons that address the academic and linguistic needs of English learners." (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2015) The course requires the creation of lesson plans based on a modified SIOP template. (Appendix 1)

Curricular Considerations

All Secondary Education teaching candidates are required to take one to two history courses as part of their general education requirements. In addition, Secondary Education students studying to become social studies teachers are required to take additional history courses focusing on various regions of the world. All Secondary Education pre-service candidates are encouraged to take one of two courses offered in Latin American history at the University – History of Colonial Latin America or History of Modern Latin America. In addition, various topics courses are offered in the field of Latin American history. The rationale in the course syllabi states that, "In contemporary politics, economics, and international affairs Latin America plays a prominent role. It is impossible to appreciate this without an understanding of the area's past. While these courses are beneficial to all students in terms of general education, those in teacher education and Liberal Arts, especially Spanish language majors, will find it helpful as part of their professional preparation. The Modern Latin American course is particularly beneficial for pre-service candidates, with a focus on the "search for historical explanations of problems of underdevelopment, and examine the stages of modernization in different Latin American countries. Culture and society are as important as economy and politics in this course. Not only does the course appraise the development of Latin American historiography, but also utilizes to non-traditional methods and sources, such as analysis of poetry, music, films in an open discussions format.

Working closely with the History department, Secondary Education professors have created assignments in the class that draw upon the content of these history courses to better prepare pre-service candidates for the field. During their field experience in Reading and Allentown, students need to complete ethnographic field studies, keep journal entries, and complete a case study of a student in one of their observed classes. Another important aspect of the course is the need to outline to candidates what "being Latino" constitutes. Identity formation among youth is essential, particularly in the middle grades.

III. Socio-cultural Strategies in the College Classroom Setting

A. Introducing Culture

The first challenge undertaken in Principles of Learning course is to address the teacher candidate's understanding and expectation of Hispanic students. In 2014, the study body of Kutztown University's College of Education was 92% white, with a majority of those students coming from Pennsylvania suburban areas with low Hispanic populations. Only 3% of teacher candidates identify as Spanish speakers. ("Kuztown Institutional Research," 2011) This demographic for the College of Education is representative of the larger U.S. teaching workforce, with the majority of teachers coming

from white, middle class backgrounds. (Sleeter, 2001) From information gathered in a journal entry assigned in of Principle of Learning students, only three of sixty seven students surveyed said they had experience with Hispanic population. Jeffrey Wayman states in a 2002 study examining student perceptions of teacher ethnic bias that although the perception of teacher bias is not overtly prevalent, there is a heightened degree of prejudice towards students who are Mexican American and male. (Wayman, 2002) Both districts visited by teacher candidates have a Mexican American population, with Reading's Mexican American population at 8% (http://proximityone.com/pa_sdc.htm, 2012) Further studies show that school age children, particularly in middle school, are aware of teacher practice towards them in relation to ethnic groups. (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986) Armed with this information, KU faculty were cognizant entering the course of the immediate need to familiarize teacher candidates with the challenges and concerns facing Hispanic students in the schools in which they would be observing.

B. Journaling

The first classroom assignment candidates need to complete is a journal entry outlining their perceptions of the school neighborhood and population. Prior to the first field assignment, teacher candidates are told to visit their school neighborhood and conduct an ethnographic field study. First, candidates are required to research the current demographic statistics of both the community and the school district, focusing on levels of poverty, ethnicity, and language preference. They are asked to analyze the district website and review school policies and procedures. In addition, they need to discuss student performance on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSAs), the standards-based, criterion-referenced assessment used to measure a student's attainment of the academic standards required under the Revised Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Candidates then spend an afternoon in the school's neighborhood observing the community and visiting local businesses and restaurants. Based on their research and observations, they must draw conclusions on what they think will be the largest challenges facing their middle school students and examine how ethnicity and class possibly affect student learning. After findings are reviewed by the instructor, students discuss their findings and thoughts in a whole class "check in" session. The check in begins with students setting the rules for engagement for the activity, including length of discussion by each person sharing. Students are to share their experiences completing the ethnographic field study and their overall impressions of the community. After discussing the experience they "check out" by sharing something they learnt from the session, or suggest an application of the new knowledge. Discussing early perceptions of the neighborhood and student body is a crucial first step in introducing candidates to the Latino culture and having them face their own possible prejudices based on ethnicity and socio- economic status.

The goal of this first assignment is more than just raising awareness of the differences between the teacher candidate and Hispanic students. Paul Gorski (2009) argues that a conservative approach towards multicultural teacher education prepares teacher candidates to recognize differences in culture without altering the basic curricular structure which generally benefits the dominant culture. Instead, teacher candidates are asked to reflect on their own communities and neighborhoods in relation to those of their observation schools and reflect on the institutional structures (i.e., high stakes testing, school facilities, and district policies) that might contribute towards the success or failure of students. Throughout the course, candidates are then asked to refer this ethnographic study when designing culturally relevant teaching strategies and culturally responsive classroom management plans.

Throughout the course of the semester, candidates are required to keep a journal that reflects what they are observing in the classroom and how it relates to the theory presented in class. According to Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), reflecting on diversity is an integral part of any early field experience. The purpose of journaling their observations in the classroom is multifaceted; they need to relate theory to practice, reflect on their own emerging philosophies in regards to teaching and learning, and voice their perceptions on how students learn in a classroom setting. Thirteen journal entries are required throughout the course of the semester, with four of the journal entries directly relating to ethnicity and language. Candidates are asked to reflect on their understanding of how children/adolescents acquire language and describe the language acquisition observed in their classroom. They need to outline how their classroom supports language and promote literacy, and how student diversity is recognized in this school and in this classroom. All journal entries conclude with a reflection discussing how does this understanding of language acquisition and ethnicity contribute to their overall understanding of how children/adolescents learn.

Sharing their journal reflections in the classroom is another important part of the process towards developing an understanding of Hispanic culture and language. When pre-service candidates are able to share their observations, it gives them the opportunity to engage in critical conversations often surrounding the issues of privilege and oppression. It also allows them to verbally formulate ideas on the connection between curricular policy and classroom performance based on culture. (Pewewardy, 2005) The hope is that these journal reflections allow candidates to explore a deeper understanding of their own educational context, reflect on possible privileges they received being of the dominant culture, and gain a greater appreciation of the challenges facing Hispanic students.

C. Identify Formation

Another important aspect of the course is the need to outline to candidates what "being Hispanic" constitutes. Identity formation among youth is essential, particularly in the middle grades. Theories formulated by Steinberg, Bonfenbrenner, Rowe, and Marcia stress this period of adolescence as a critical developmental period in which self-

understanding emerge to form a more solid individual identity. (Steinberg & Bonfenbrenner, 1989; Rowe & Marcia, 1980). However, ethnicity also plays a significant role in how adolescents define themselves. Ethnic identity influences how one views themselves in the larger context of school and society. Furthermore, when one is assured of their ethnic heritage and identifies with others who share their cultural background, they exhibit a stronger confidence in their abilities. (Martin & Chiodo, 2004) In the Reading School District, 43,935 students identify as Hispanic, with the largest majority (23,490) being Puerto Rican, 7,203 Mexican American, 535 Cuban, and 11,707 identifying as "other." In Allentown School District, 39,396 are Hispanic, with 23,989 Puerto Rican, 1,733 Mexican American, 385 Cuban, and 13,289 considering themselves "other." (United States Census Bureau, 2010) Both districts have a large percentage of Dominican students who might account for the "other" category. Walking the halls of the schools, there is an outward demonstration of ethnic pride among students who proudly display flags and other ethnic symbols to show unity.

However, too often this ethnic pride serves as a deterrent to academic success. La Roche and Shriberg (2004) argue that Latino students often experience a "mismatch" between their cultural heritage and the prevalent school culture and policy. Furthermore, this contention between ethnic pride and class practice and policy, which is often founded in dominant culture ideals, is reflected in their poor performance on high stakes testing. Both Northwest and South Mountain Middle schools are in their second year of corrective action, with the poorest tests score of the PSSAs (Pennsylvania State System of Assessment) being among ELL populations. If pre-service educators are made aware of the importance of individual Latino cultures and values; particularly respect towards authority figures, family loyalty and attachments, and a tendency to work best collaboratively, they can best gear instruction to be more culturally sensitive and respectful of ethnic pride. (Comas-Diaz & Griffth 1988; Trent, Pernell & Stephens, 1995)

D. Ethnographic Case Study

To assure that candidates have a strong understanding of the ethnic differences between Hispanic students, they are required to complete a case study of a student in their middle school classroom. Students conduct descriptive qualitative field research in the form of a Case Study. Candidates need to select a student from one of the micro-cultural Hispanic groups. Upon attaining permission of the subject and guardian if the subject is under 18, they need to set up an interview schedule. Candidates are encouraged to use open-ended questions that cannot be answered with a "yes" or a "no." They are required to use reflective listening and probing follow-up questions when the subject does not offer enough information. The Case Study interview questions must have the student reflect on the unique nature of their ethnic heritage as well as their school involvement and adolescent experiences. The narrative Case Study Report must demonstrate the candidate's ability to conduct a positive interview and an understanding of both culture and learning theory.

The case study proves to be an effective tool in analyzing the importance of ethnic heritage among the middle school students observed. As an instructional strategy, the case study can "bridge the gap between theory and practice and between the academy and the workplace." (Barkley, Cross, & Major, 2005) They also give students practice identifying the parameters of a problem, recognizing and articulating positions, evaluating courses of action, and arguing different points of view. Ultimately, the case studies provide narratives that present realistic and often complex situations which aid a candidate's understanding of the importance of social identity and ethnic pride among their students. Students cease being seem as Hispanic and are respected for their unique cultural identity.

IV. ELL STRATEGIES IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOM

Armed with a working knowledge of the struggles their students face in both the community and school, teacher candidates are encouraged to approach students in the classroom with a critical eye towards language and culture. Both Reading and Allentown School District's student populations have a high percentage of English language learners. This increasing population of ELLs bring with them unique and diverse educational challenges and cultural needs. It is important that these challenges and needs are recognized and addressed in order for ELLs to attain significant progress in the classroom so they are able to participate meaningfully and productively in their educational opportunity. Furthermore, it is important for teachers to have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to meet the needs of the students in their diverse classrooms. (Farrell 2006) Candidates are offered an introduction to understanding and addressing the socio-cultural and academic instructional needs of English Language Learners in content area classrooms. Additionally language acquisition and development, lesson design and adaptation, use of English Language Proficiency Standards, need for multiple/authentic formative and summative assessments, and legal responsibilities related to serving English Language Learners in the content area classroom are explored.

The first step in exploring effective ELL strategies for middle school students is to reflect on what strategies work best for each individual discipline. Students approach this task through analysis and discussion. Strategies are introduced in class organized around their usefulness in regards to testing, drawing upon prior knowledge, scaffolding, and word retention. Peer groups are formed based on content area to discuss the individual strategies and then each peer group comes to a consensus on what strategies would work best for their particular discipline (Rodriquez, 2012) The groups must then model a lesson for their content using the most effective strategy. This review of effective strategies takes place throughout the course of the semester and proves invaluable in demonstrating how various strategies work best for each discipline. According to journal entries, students find the demonstration of various strategies in class

beneficial when actually using the strategy in the field. The wrote they were more comfortable with the strategy and have a better understanding of its use.

A. Literacy Development

One particularly useful strategy for all disciplines centers on reinforcing literacy development. The implementation of nonverbal visual cues and graphic organizers strengthens an ELLs understanding of the relationship between language and concepts. (Lambert & Carpenter, 2005) At the beginning of the semester, candidates are asked to create a name using symbols instead of letters. They must draw an image of something that best represents their character based on the letters found in their name. Candidates then introduce themselves to one another, trying to figure out other names based on the illustrations. The activity highlights the importance of non-verbal clues in adding students who struggle with language acquisition and might be in the early stages of language development. From this activity, candidates are then encouraged to create a picture dictionary for the rest of the semester for words and concepts introduced in class that they find particularly difficult to remember or understand. Both activities focus on the importance of developing a connection for their students between content material, personal relevance, and key terms used in class. (Vacca-Rizopoulus & Nicoletti, 2009)

B. Levels of Language Acquisition

Candidates also learn the significance of recognizing levels of language acquisition. Although an ELL students might converse in English successfully, it can take anywhere from four to seven years to acquire a proficient rate of academic English to succeed in class. (Cummins, 2000) One of the largest challenges facing candidates in the field is assessing the level of language acquisition among their middle school students. Often, low-income Latino students enter secondary school with gaps in their school experience. There is little continuity between the grade levels and they often suffer from lack of technology literacy at home or in previous schools. Candidates must be aware that a student's academic IQ, country of origin, and culture does not determine the rate at which a student acquires academic English. (Rubinstein-Avila, 2006) Candidates are encouraged to employ strategies which determine levels of academic English and to tailor lessons to the student's individual needs. To best meet the needs of students and accurately assess language proficiency, candidates are encouraged to create Sheltered Instruction Operation Protocol, or SIOP, lesson plans. A SIOP plan scaffolds instruction and allows for a variety of instruction in class based on student need.

V. CONCLUSION

"A vital first step," according to La Roche and Shriberg, "for all who care about improving the quality and appropriateness of the instruction that Latino children receive at schools is a knowledge of common Latino values … [and] an urgent need to develop more sophisticated education models that are responsive to Latino's cultural characteristics." (La Roche & Shriberg, 2004) The restructuring of the clinical experience for pre-service candidates has been a successful endeavor. The early clinical field model immersing pre-service educators into Latino culture and language is the first step towards preparing culturally sensitive and effective classroom teachers. The continuation of the model to allow candidates to explore instructional strategies in Principles of Teaching strengthens their pedagogical knowledge base, ultimately preparing pre-service candidates for student teaching. Coordinating cohort groups during student teaching, a practice that has proved successful for our graduate students, allows for an exchange of dialogue and provides fluency to the program.

Giving pre-service candidates the opportunity to explore ethnic diversity and language acquisition through weekly classroom observations strengthens their understanding of culture and allows them to build a strong knowledge base prior to their final clinical teaching assignment. The early clinical field model immersing pre-service educators into Latino culture and language is the first step towards preparing culturally sensitive and effective classroom teachers.

APPENDIX

TABLE 1
KUTZTOWN UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
SIOP LESSON PLAN FORMAT

> **Subject:**
> **Grade Level:**
> **Duration:**
> **Essential Question:**
>   o   Must be stated as a question
>   o   Also include where and how this lesson fits in relation to the entire unit
> **Standards**
>   o   Include PA Core Standards
>   o   Learned Society Standards
> **Instructional Objectives:** (Use Bloom's Verbs)
>   o   Needs to include:
>   > Content Objections
>   > Language Objectives
> **Content-specific Vocabulary:**
>   o   All vocabulary must include definitions with student friendly language
> **Materials / Resources / Equipment:**
>   o   Generally, materials are items that will be used up whereas equipment refers to things that
>   are reusable. Resources refer to things that are needed to support the learning, typically a
>   textbook, video, website, etc.
> **Instructional Procedures:**
>   o   This section must begin with 'Content Information' or "hook" that describes the
>   background knowledge the teacher must have in order to successfully teach the lesson.
>   Hook must include:
>   > Links to experience
>   > Links to learning
>   o   The procedures section should be written in sequence and in sufficient depth as to allow the
>   reader to fully understand what the teacher is thinking, what the students are expected to be
>   doing, and what the teacher's next steps are. Each instructional procedure must also
>   include the amount of time allotted to it and modeling of the procedure must be clearly
>   outlined.
>   o   Higher-order questions that will be asked of students should be documented.
>   o   Methods of instructional supports and differentiation should also be documented.
> **Student Activities** (**Check all that apply for activities throughout lesson**)
>   o   Scaffolding: ☐ Modeling   ☐ Guided   ☐ Independent
>   o   Grouping: ☐ Whole Class ☐ Small Group ☐ Partners   ☐
>   Independent
>   o   Processes: ☐ Reading   ☐ Writing   ☐ Listening   ☐
>   Speaking
>   o   Strategies: ☐ Hands-on   ☐ Meaningful ☐ Links to
>   Objectives
> **Formative Assessment:**
>   o   Including: individual, group, written, oral
>   o   Includes a review of key vocabulary
> **Summative Assessments/Assignments:**
>   o   Homework, graded classwork
> **Self Evaluation:**
>   o   Completed by the student at the completion of lesson

*When submitting a lesson plan, be sure to also submit any supplemental materials, i.e. PowerPoint slides, student
worksheets, etc.

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Patricia Walsh Coates holds a Masters in Arts and PhD from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in twentieth century feminist and trans- Atlantic history, a Masters in Education from Widener University in Chester, Pennsylvania in social studies education, and a Bachelor of Arts from West Chester University of PA in West Chester, Pennsylvania in history.

She is an Associate Professor in the Secondary Education Department at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania where she teaches both graduate and undergraduate courses in secondary education, with a current focus on Latino student success in Pennsylvania's secondary public schools. She is published in the fields of history and education.

Dr. Walsh Coates is a member of the American Education Research Association, the National Council for the Social Studies, and serves as treasurer for Chapter 1116 of Phi Delta Kappa.