

Chapter 2

Reclaiming the Multilingual Narrative of Children in the Borderlands Using a Critical Integration Approach: A Case Study Highlighting Multilingual Capital in the Curriculum and Classroom

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ABSTRACT

By joining together different methods and curriculum delivery in an elementary school setting, the author defined a unique critical integration approach to address questions of inclusive multilingual literacy practices. The author encouraged students to build upon their prior knowledge, ways in which to show that knowledge, and specifically, their linguistic cultural wealth, which generated a respect for the linguistic diversity of all students. The author created a collaborative pedagogical space in which the students constructed an innovative curriculum by co-mingling student experiences, their cultural and linguistic resources, and their interpretive frameworks. The teacher-research project involved a Funds of Knowledge orientation, the use of a variety of pedagogical tools influenced by the theory of Multiple Intelligences, gifted strategies, community cultural wealth, emancipatory education, critical and culturally responsive pedagogy, and visual arts aesthetics.

POSITIONALITY

In writing this chapter, I feel it is critical to acknowledge my positionality as an educator. My lived experiences and history form who I am and shape the lens through which I see and act in the world and approach my teaching practice. My teaching, my inquisitive nature, and my research interests are

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profoundly shaped by my life experiences, not just by who I am at the juncture of various categorical labels. I am a White Mexican-American female married to a Mayan Mexican national, with male bicultural children. I am middle-class, bilingual (English-Spanish), bicultural, and transnational. I teach in a gifted program in an urban public school district in the borderlands of the United States. My identity is formed in relation to the contexts in which I participate, the places I have lived in and outside of the United States, the cultures I have encountered, and the languages I use and negotiate throughout the day. I gain insight from the life experiences and relationships I have cultivated along the way.

My movements from place to place, not only geographically but culturally and psychologically, have had a profound effect on my understanding of and empathy for all children, and especially for the students that I encounter. My translocations and binational, bicultural family life have offered a foundation of experience and a capacity for empathizing with my students. These life experiences resonate with the uneasiness and, at times, the pain in the voices of students dealing with family who have been left behind or are not living with the student, as well as in the doubting of self that my students sometimes express when stating that he or she is not “gifted enough.”

Over my several years of reflective practice in the field of teaching, I have come to understand that the act of teaching and the subsequent art of teaching -- including decisions about what to teach, what not to teach, and how to teach -- are all thoughtful actions that have consequences, both intended and unintended. Teaching is both a philosophical approach and a political stance the practitioner takes, where curricular and pedagogical choices, as well as the ways of and time spent interacting with students, are made every day in the classroom. As the renowned scholar Paulo Freire (1970) and others have pointed out, teaching is never neutral.

My ongoing interrogation of teaching and graduate study in education has led to a transformation of self. Engaging in teacher research has improved my teaching practice in small, practical ways, such as how I structure questions and discussions, the languages I choose to use, the assignments I give, and my interaction with students. Becoming a teacher-researcher has also strongly influenced my view of my pedagogical approaches, my perspectives on curriculum, and my role as a teacher-educator and as a leader in education. I continue to examine my responses to structural and systemic limitations and inequities, while recapturing a scholarly voice in exploring the art of teaching. As a master teacher who trains other teachers, I encourage educators to critically examine their own positionality, philosophy, and practice in the urban school district in which I work.

INTRODUCTION

When I first started teaching I felt pretty alone, like a strange bird. Some of my early teaching decisions were based on little more than a general sense of social justice and my tendency to reject conformity and standardization of the curriculum and teaching practices. Sometimes I would go with my gut and my rationale would evolve as I observed the results of my decisions. My ability to articulate this rationale also developed over time. Over the course of a decade of teaching and documenting my classroom, I noticed that by combining a variety of pedagogical approaches and methods, opportunities emerged, expanding spaces for classroom dialogue and reflection (Paris & Winn, 2014; Souto-Manning, 2012). These spaces empowered student voice, increased self-efficacy, and led to deeper learning. This chapter will present an approach that I developed out of this classroom experience of combining a diversity of pedagogical and theoretical approaches and methods, which I have called a Critical Integration Approach

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