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EL Case Study:

Profile of an English Learner

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ELD STUDENT PROFILE

To cover the identity of the interviewee I will use the name of Sandy for this case study. Sandy is eighteen year of age and is a senior at Hamilton Union High School. Hamilton High is the first and only school she has attended since she arrived from Mexico. Sandy was born in Jalpa, Zacatecas but raised in San Miguel, Apozol, Zacatecas, Mexico. Sandy resides with her mother, father, twin sister and older brother. Sandy has lived in the United States for a bit over a year; she arrived to the United States on September 5, 2008. Sandy is proficient in her native language which is Spanish. Her dream is to become a nurse first then a doctor. Sandy finished high school in her native country that included three years of first aid and baby care courses. Her school offered courses of five different professions, nursing was one of them. The program she was enrolled in was called CETIS (Centro de Estudios Technologicos Industrial y Servicios Social). The CETIS program is equivalent to the ROP (Regional Occupational Program) program that is offered at most high schools here in California. ROP provides students with the opportunity to acquire career training and technical skills that prepare them for success. Unfortunately, Sandy's high school diploma is not valid in the United States. Therefore she got retained two years due to her poor English skills and need of required credits that the state demands. Sandy is currently enrolled in the ELD class and has the same ELD teacher from last year. According to her CELDT scores from last year (2008), Sandy's performance level in reading and speaking were at beginning level in and early intermediate in listening and writing. Her first ELD experience was with a student teacher who was there throughout the whole year. She explained to me that at first she felt discriminated and frustrated at her school like an outsider because she did not know English. She also felt she did not have the support from her teachers or the principle. Her most difficult experience was being aware that she should be

attending college but is not able to due to her poor English and missing of credits that are required to enter a college. Sandy's parents do not speak English, her father went to school up to fifth grade and her mother attended up to sixth grade. Her father is currently a farm laborer and her mother is a house wife. Even though they cannot help sandy with her homework they try to help out as much as possible by providing resources, supporting her, motivating her and giving her good advice.

As previously stated, Sandy resides with both of her parents. Her father had been migrating seasonally from Mexico to the United States for the past twenty years, while she waited with her mother and siblings for their residency. Sandy and her family decided to migrate to the United States for better economic opportunities. Luckily, Sandy's experience migrating to the United States was not as stressful as other immigrants who migrate illegally to the United States. Fortunately Sandy was able to travel with her mother and siblings by plane. Sandy and her family decided to settle in Hamilton City because her father was well established in the town. Sandy explained that she feels the support of the community because they have family and friends that also migrated there from her native country. As freeman stated, "the way that students interact with one another and with teachers, the attitudes, expectations, and goals people have, as well as the attitudes and values of the community, all shape the outcomes for students living between worlds" (Freeman & Freeman, 2001, p. 19). It seems like Sandy is doing well and her parents seem very proud of her. I believe she will have a successful outcome!

ELD STANDARDS

As an educator it is extremely important to maintain sensitive to each individual in your classroom especially if they are English Language Learners. For that reason teachers of English Language Learners should acquire special skills to better provide for their students needs

(Schwarger, 2003). Given this profile of Sandy, I will identify two ELD standards that I believe will be beneficial in guiding effective instruction for her. After speaking with my cooperative teacher she has commented to me that Sandy is considered as early intermediate level this year due to her CAHSEE exam scores that she passed as a requirement to graduate next year in 2010.

The first ELD standard, which I felt was most suitable for building upon Sandy's strengths as a reader are the following:

Grade Level: 9-12

Proficiency Level: Early Intermediate

Domain: Reading

Strand: Use correct grammar

Identifies main ideas: Demonstrate internalization of English grammar, usage, and word choice by recognizing and correcting some errors when speaking or reading aloud.

Decodes for automaticity: read own writing of narrative and expository text aloud with appropriate pacing, intonation, and expression.

Grade Level: 9-12

Proficiency Level: Early Intermediate

Domain: Writing

Strand: Uses the writing process

Identifies main ideas: From a given topic, use the writing process to write sentences and short paragraphs with supporting details about a given topic. There may be some inconsistent use of standard grammatical forms.

Rationale

Sandy is proficient in reading and writing in her native language and is acquiring English at a fast pace. “ELLs who already know and understand a concept in their first language have a far simpler task to develop language for the concept in English than those who lack knowledge of the concept in either language” (Echevarria 2010, p.35). She lacks oral grammatical structure and intonation when reading in English. Like Zehler stated, “errors can indicate progress usually when the learner is trying out new grammatical structures (Zehler, 1994). In addition, comprehension in other content areas is another area that she struggles with. Sandy also has poor order of words when she is speaking and tends to rely on cognates for comprehension; which is a good strategy for English learners to develop. For these reasons, I believe the first standard is appropriate for her because it sustains Sandy’s good reading habits that will allow her to develop her comprehension and oral language skills. This standard will also guide her into recognizing new words and being able to pronounce them correctly. As Vaca & Vaca stated, “students need many experiences, real and vicarious, to develop word meaning in concepts” (Vaca & Vaca 2008, p.165). There are several approaches that could be implemented in this standard that allows students to build vocabulary strategies. For example, using context to approximate meaning is one of the most useful strategies for English language learners. “Using context involves using information surrounding a difficult word to help reveal meaning” (Vaca & Vaca 2008, p.172). According to Vaca (2008, p.173), there are a couple steps to this approach: First, the student needs to use deliberate contexts to construct meaning; this may vary depending on the EL’s experience and reading level. Second, the reader needs to make inferences with the unfamiliar word. Once the students get in the habit of making these connections students will begin to improve on their reading. It is suggested that if teachers have

students that continue to struggle. Providing them with typographic, syntactic and semantic clues can become very useful. In addition, concept of definition word maps and graphic organizers are also good strategies to build upon their strengths and weakness in reading. In addition, Zehler made clear that “teachers should provide non-linguistic example that can help explain or clarify the content that is presented (Zehler, 1994). Therefore plenty of visuals are always good ways to instruct in any content area because it will assist the English language learners with comprehension and answering more complex questions on reading.

The second ELD standard is important because it allows the EL students to develop the use of standard grammatical forms when writing. In accordance with Schwarger (2003), “ELs must learn English, learn it well and meet rigorous standards”. Therefore, becoming familiar with English Language Learners prior knowledge of the target language use, form, and mechanics is extremely important when teaching diverse learners. Although “every student is at a different level and the curriculum is not well designed to meet everyone’s needs,” (Schwarger, 2003) teachers should maintain enthusiastic and acquire special skills that will provide better instruction to the English Learners that will meet their needs. For example, “providing opportunities for language use to the max by formulating questions and applying input plus one supports their development of higher order thinking skills” (Zehler, 1994). Overall, Sandy is very motivated and optimistic about her dreams and goals. Even though it has been challenging for her she continues to work hard and is dedicated in her studies. Sandy shared with me that her parents strongly believe that Sandy and her siblings should get an education so they can be successful in life and have an opportunity to obtain a high paying job.

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