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BACKGROUND

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 City is located ten miles West of Chico. The estimated population is 2,500; Hispanic being the biggest population there.

Sandy (EL student) lives about four blocks away from Hamilton High School. She lives in an apartment complex, which is surrounded by other apartments and neighborhood homes. Sandy lives with both of her parents, and her twin sister; she also has an older brother that visits very often. The apartment consists of two bedrooms, one bathroom, a kitchen and a living room which is divided by a counter that would be considered as the dining table. There is no front yard or drive way so I am assuming they park their car on the street because there are no parking lots or garages near their apartments. The street she lives on is one of the busiest streets in Hamilton City due to the two mini-markets, post office, and a laundry mat that are all located on that street.

Recreational activities and community resources are very limited in this neighborhood. Sandy lives about two blocks away from the Catholic Church which offers Spanish mass only; Sandy and her family attend mass every Sunday morning. There is also a Christian church three houses down from the Catholic Church this one offers English mass only and begins after the Catholic mass is over. There is a community library and two parks in Hamilton City; one park is mainly for the children because it has swings, a playground, a basketball court, and a couple picnic tables. The second park mostly caters to young adults it is used mainly for sports like baseball, softball, and soccer. Moreover, there is a total of three mini markets, three gas stations, a Mexican restaurant, a pizza shop, a coffee drive-thru, two taco trucks, an Elementary School

pre-k through eighth grade and a high school. Even though the town is small it seems like the people who do not own a vehicle do not struggle to get around if they need to buy groceries, school materials, medicine etc... In addition, there is also a First Five Program building across the Glenn Ride bus stop (public transportation). The First Five Program is a new building in Hamilton City that provides resources to help families to develop skills in particular areas as well as providing support and information to the community. The Glenn Ride is a way of transportation for those families who do not own a vehicle and need to travel to the bigger cities. Hamilton also has a small fire station in case of emergencies and to help the community with first aid. Last but not least there is a Migrant Education office behind the Elementary School that provides migrant families with resources and specials services that helps families that work mainly in agriculture. Overall the community appears to be clean and safe environment with a low noise level. In the mornings you see children walking to school either alone, with a parent or friends. Sometimes you might even see older people outside sweeping or watering their plants. Late in the afternoon you will see teenagers walking around town, riding their bicycles and people sitting outside on their porches. Sometimes you will see people running on the side of the street exercising because there is not enough neighborhood space to run or walk on because only some streets have sidewalks; people usually just park their cars on the street or drive way if they have one.

Sandy's school is located across highway 32; therefore the students need to use the stop light to cross the street. Hamilton High School is a one story building with a tennis court, baseball field, and football field. In front of the school you will see a cement path that leads you to two benches that are sitting in front of the main office. Inside the main office you will find the secretaries, superintendent, principal, and the migrant clerk's office. As well as the staff

restrooms and staff room. When you exit the main office and turn left you will see the school gym. The school gym is where you can find the Physical Education class, rallies, school dances, basketball, and volleyball games; sometimes they will have wrestling matches too. The gym includes two locker rooms one for the boys and one for the girls. If you get out through the girls locker room it will lead you to the school parking lot, cafeteria (which is across from the parking lot) and the basketball courts (they are behind the cafeteria). You will also find the Special Education Classroom and the Art classroom which is about twenty feet away from of the girl's locker room. If you exit the boys locker room to your right you will come across a water vending machine and the Algebra 1 classroom. If you take an exit to the left a cement path will lead you to the school library. Next to the library is the Spanish class; in front of the Spanish class you will see a water fountain, trash cans, two English classes, a math class, and a History class. On the right side of the Spanish class you will see a center blacktop with three benches and a couple trees; this is where most of the students hang out. From the center of the blacktop you can see the following classrooms: Agriculture class (behind the agriculture class are the animals' students' take to the fair and next to the animals is the baseball field), Woodshop/Welding class, a Math class, a history class, a Science Class and a Home Ec. class. The lockers are scattered around all of these classrooms not all the students own a locker. Behind the Spanish class you will see the football field and a cement path that leads you to a pre-school, an infant toddler center and the Ella Barkley (building for those students who are at risk of failing). At Hamilton High School you can say that eighty percent of the students are Hispanic, fifteen percent Caucasian, three percent Hmong and two percent Black. Most of the students from this school know each other pretty well because it is fairly small. There aren't any particular groups that hang out in any particular space at this school. I have seen Sandy at the library many times and usually goes to

the cafeteria during lunch time with her friends. One thing I did notice was that most of Sandy's friends are EL's and I got the impression that maybe most of the EL's stay together as a group.

If you walk into Sandy's ELD classroom you will see about 26 desks in rows, a white board, the teachers desk facing the students desks, a cabinet with the teachers personal belongings, three shelves with dictionaries, encyclopedias, binders, reading books and workbooks. There are also two computers in the classroom, an electric sharpener, a projector to watch movies, a CD player and a table in front of the white board with turned in assignments and more books. On the walls you will see some maps, drawings from students, and a couple posters. As well as bell schedule, daily bull and other school paper work. There is only one ELD class in the school and it is offered in one period only. Therefore the students only get to be in the ELD classroom twice a week because Fridays alternate periods due to block schedule so sometimes they have it 3 times a week. There are a total of ten students; eight of the students are early intermediate and the other two are beginners. Sandy likes to participate in class and uses both her native language and the target language to communicate with her classmates. She likes to help her classmates by spelling out words for them or translating them in Spanish. Her teacher is an English speaker only therefore Sandy has to communicate in English with her all the time. Sandy likes to volunteer to answer questions out loud and seems to enjoy using classroom time to practice her English. However outside of class I have heard Sandy speak in her primary language with her friends.

TEACHER PERSPECTIVE

In 2008 Sandy's reading and speaking performance level were at begging level and early intermediate in listening and writing. Sandy is currently considered as early intermediate level in reading and writing this year due to her CAHSEE exam scores that she passed as a requirement

to graduate next year (in 2010); she has shown major improvements (September 24, 2009). Even though she still continues to struggle in speaking Sandy is very optimistic and has a great personality. She is always smiling and is not afraid to ask questions. Sandy comes prepared to class daily, and her level of participation is very good. I often see her trying to help some of her classmates by translating some of the assignments. Unfortunately her parents are not very involved in the classroom. Overall I believe Sandy's motivation and desire to acquire English as a second language will help her succeed academically.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

I like school a lot especially if I understand what is going on in the class, but sometimes it is hard for me because I do not understand some of the content in my text books (September 26, 2009). My favorite subjects are Anatomy and Spanish. My experience when I first came to the school was not so great. I felt discriminated and frustrated I also felt like an outsider because I did not know any English. I did not feel like I had much support from some of my teachers or the principle. I think it is because there are not a lot of foreign students here even though there is a lot of Hispanics; which is the only reason why I felt a little accepted in the school it did not really make me feel respected. Overall the most difficult part for me was to accept that I should be attending college now but I am not able to do that because of my poor English and because I need a certain number of credits that are required by the state to obtain a high school diploma. I got my high school diploma from Mexico in July 2008 but apparently it was not valid here in the United States. I try to do my best because I want to graduate from high school and because I would like to higher my education by going to a college someday. My dream is to become a doctor some day but first I would like to be a nurse (September 26, 2009). I think it is going to be hard for me to do that here in the United States because I do not speak good English. If it

becomes a problem I decided I would go back to Mexico to pursue the career of my dreams. I have been here for bit over a year and I need to practice my English more but it is hard for me to do that here because the only time I can speak English is at school. Now that I know more English than when I first arrived I feel a bit more confident in myself so I feel comfortable enough to ask questions in class and read out loud. Whenever I need help in my homework I ask my friends or I go to tutoring at the library. Some of the strategies I use to figure out words to help me with my homework are looking for cognates even though there are many words that I don't understand or have never seen before. Sometimes there are other tutors that help us in the class like the MINICORPS program. If there is no tutoring I wake up early and ask the teacher, I stay afterschool or I just try my best. I have a couple friends and family members that speak both languages so sometimes I ask them for help too. My parents do not speak English but they help me by motivating me and giving me good advice because I know they want the best for me.

ANALYSIS

There are many factors that contribute to the Sandy's academic success and failure based on my observations. I feel that Sandy is very limited in the resources available to her in the neighborhood as well as in her school and classroom environment. For example, in the school setting, one can see that the high school culture is somewhat complex for the arriving English Language Learners because most of the students in Sandy's school did not quiet accept her during her first year. She stated that even though the biggest population was made up of Hispanics many of them did not talk to her or tried to help her out. As she stated earlier she felt like an outsider and discriminated at time by the teachers, principle, and students. I feel like she felt discriminated because it appeared that Sandy's teachers did not have the necessary tools, and skills to fully meet the needs for Sandy which will be the biggest challenge for her because she

would like to be a doctor someday. To be able to pursue her dreams Sandy needs to receive the appropriate type of instruction to learn English if not she will struggle in becoming a doctor; here in the United States. 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). Sandy's ELD teacher is a veteran teacher who focuses on teaching English 10 and History only; this will be her second year teaching ELD (not by choice). Even though she has taught English for many years she lacks on activating prior knowledge and applying strategies that can help the students with the target language. In accordance with Bartolome (1993), "Learning only occurs when prior knowledge is accessed and linked to new information". During my observations there was no group interaction or engaging activities. According to Gibbons, (2002) Johnson, (1994) & McGroarty (1993), "Small-group learning is advantageous to English learners because it provides access to practices that lead to successful second-language acquisition" (Faltis 2006, pg.25). Unfortunately there was silence and the students working on a packet that was printed out for the students to complete because there is no curriculum for her ELD classroom; sometimes she uses last year's materials she had ordered workbooks and other material that contain vocabulary and grammar. Luckily Sandy is proficient in reading and writing in her native language and for that reason she is acquiring English at a faster pace. Echevarria stated, "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). Overall, Sandy is a great student and is very proud of herself she is extremely motivated and optimistic about the future and has set a goal of attending college and becoming a doctor someday. Even though she

has limited time in acquiring English fluently at her school because she is a senior this year. With extra help and the appropriate resources, I am confident that she can make her dreams come true.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Dear ELD Teacher,

After thorough research into Sandy's background, neighborhood community, the school and classroom community, I have come to the conclusion that I can offer a few suggestions that can help Sandy succeed academically. Sandy seems to lack support from the school and the classroom which might impede her from pursuing her dreams of becoming a doctor. Therefore I have come up with several strategies that I think will help Sandy acquire English as a second language. According to Brooks, (1993) "Educators must invite students to experience the world's richness and empower them to ask questions and seek their own answers and challenge them to understand the world's complexities". Therefore if Sandy had a constructivist teacher Sandy will be able to internalize and transform new information because constructivist teachers focus on what the student can generate, demonstrate and exhibit (Brooks & Brooks 1993, pg. 13). For example, Sandy would definitely benefit from a classroom that offers various strategies that will allow her to accomplish tasks or pass exams in other content areas. Graphic organizers, scaffolding and more concrete examples can facilitate learning for Sandy and many English Learners (Robinson, Retrieved on 2009). In addition, "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 a classroom setting that can allow Sandy 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). It is important

to get the students in the habit of making connections when they learn new words to improve on their reading. Therefore modeling how to use typographic, syntactic and semantic clues can become very useful strategies that can help Sandy understand what she is reading. Moreover, concepts of definition word maps are also good strategies to build upon their strengths and weakness in reading. Zehler made clear that “teachers should provide non-linguistic example that can help explain or clarify the content that is presented (Zehler, 1994). For that reason, 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. These strategies would really help Sandy with her oral grammatical structure and intonation when reading in English as well as comprehension in other content areas. Sandy lacks 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. Sandy needs to develop good reading habits that will allow her to develop her comprehension and oral language skills. 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 very dedicated in her studies. Sandy shared with me

that she not giving up and will try her best to become a nurse then a doctor. I know Sandy is capable and would really appreciate the extra help.

As you can see, there are many factors that can contribute to the success or failure for Sandy's dream. It is my hope that changes are made in the curriculum and in the classroom to help make learning comprehensible for Sandy and other English Learners so they won't be left behind. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Claudia Cruz

REFLECTION

This assignment has made me realize how important it is to be aware of every English Language Learners needs. English Learners strongly depend on teachers to acquire the target language. Therefore, as a future educator I will pay close attention to my students' strengths and weaknesses to better provide for them academically. I am a big advocate of cooperative learning, applying Gardner's multiple intelligences and using scaffolding to better meet my students' needs. I strongly believe that group work allows students to practice the language as well as building confidence in them when learning a new language. In addition, applying different teaching styles and providing lots of visuals and repetition in my classroom can facilitate learning for EL's.

Overall the seminars have taught me that activating as well as building prior knowledge is extremely important. For that reason I have taken into consideration getting to know my students' and their family background and creating a teacher to student relationship can allow me to better plan and provide for my students.

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